



Orders and Obsessions

Author: *Spooky*

Category: Mafia, Martial

Description: After narrowly escaping prison thanks to her cop uncle, rebellious Riley Rivers is sent to a military bootcamp designed to break the worst young offenders. She's not interested in structure or submission—until she meets Lieutenant Mason, the cold, inflexible officer whose voice commands a room and whose eyes burn like wildfire.

But beneath Mason's emotionless facade lies a man caught between duty and desire. As Riley tests every boundary of the camp, the rules, and Mason's patience, tension ignites in a way that could ruin them both.

Thrown into relentless drills, cold showers, and brutal punishments, Riley must decide what's more dangerous: the system that wants to crush her... or the man who might consume her.

One is sentenced to serve. The other swore never to touch. And neither of them can follow orders.

Total Pages (Source): 37

Page 1

Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 7:21 am

I pressed my nose against the cold glass and watched as the fields that used to be full of life and colour, with fresh green grass and huge sunflowers, turned into open brown spaces with nothing but mud hills and trenches.

We were miles away from civilisation, but the car's wheels kept turning, taking us deeper and deeper into the void.

“Should we come in, Riley?”

I looked away from the window and into my uncle's rearview mirror, where I saw him.

There was a hint of amusement on his face; he was enjoying my pain. I squinted and kept my lips straight so he wouldn't be happy with my reaction.

But he thought my silence meant yes.

In just a few seconds, his finger had flipped the switch on his dashboard, and the car came to life, making loud siren sounds that shook my eardrums.

I looked away from his vibrating laughter and back at the road. This time, a steady blue light reflected off the dark tarmac floor. It followed us all the way to Bootcamp.

We saw a group of soldiers marching in a straight line as my uncle drove down a dirt road. There was not a single body out of place, not even a little bit. The pack stayed together and in line. I hid in the back seat of the patrol car, but my uncle slowed down on purpose so he could see me better.

“Jesus Riley, you really messed up this time. There’s no way you’re going to get out of this. You’ll be in jail in no time.” My uncle had no problem sharing his thoughts and doubts.

He pulled up next to two men. One of them was older, but you could tell that he was still in good shape.

The other person looked about my age, maybe a little older, but his whole body screamed that he was fit.

Both men wore the same thing: green camouflage pants, a tight green T-shirt and tan boots.

My uncle unlocked the door and opened it so I could go outside. I got up and stood there, staring at the older man who looked strong enough to be in charge.

“Riley Rivers, the newest member.” My uncle shook hands with both men.

The older man walked around me, looked me up and down, and then went back to the front.

His hair was short and grey, and he combed it back so that it stayed in place. His features were sharp, and his scowl looked like it would never go away.

His dark eyes made him look like he was in charge and powerful. His behaviour alone was likely enough to make grown men cry.

The younger guy didn’t move at all.

His eyes were looking straight ahead, and his hands were still tightly behind his back.

He was like a robot, and he was the most beautiful robot I had ever seen.

His jawline was sharp and his hair was light brown, almost blonde. The style was short and tight, with no hair out of place.

“Lieutenant Commander.” The older man pointed at the younger man, who didn’t move a muscle or even blink.

“Commander.” He pushed his strong, hard thumbs into his own chest.

His voice was deep and loud.

“Look down Rivers,” he yelled, spitting saliva as he spoke because he was so angry.

I looked down at my white trainers and saw that they had already picked up some dry dirt from the floor. I was annoyed and my mouth twitched. I sighed quietly so that neither man could hear me.

“Un-cuff her.” He spoke directly to my uncle, who finally turned the small key in the lock that held my wrists together and let go of my hand.

Of course, I held onto each of my wrists to get rid of the numbness that the heavy handcuffs caused and pulled my eyes back up to look at the commander.

“Eyes down Rivers!” he yelled, making my whole body jump.

I looked down right away.

“You must not look directly at any ranking officer unless you are told to do so.” He blew on a whistle, which made me want to look up again, but I fought the urge.

“Lieutenant will show you to your home.”

“Okay,” I said to my shoes.

The commander let out a long sigh.

“Look at me, Rivers!” he yelled. I looked him in the eye. He had his four fingers on his forehead, like a salute. “Sir, yes, sir. Do you understand?”

“Yes.”

I spoke without confidence, and his face got angrier with every second that passed. I swear the other guy had the tiniest twitch of amusement on his lips, but it went away just as quickly as it came.

“Sir,” I said nervously.

My uncle laughed next to me, and I shook my head.

“Yes, sir,” I said to myself.

The commander shook his head at me in frustration.

“Move out!” he yelled as he stepped back.

The younger guy, who I had convinced myself was a statue by this point, relaxed his stance a little and started walking away from the commander in a straight line.

I jogged a little to keep up with him as he walked ahead of me. I kept my head down, but that didn’t stop me from stealing glances at the beautiful statue.

His outside was very hard, and everything about him seemed impossible to get through and off limits. His eyes didn’t show any emotion, and his face was always

blank and cold. His back was stiff and out of reach. There was no doubt that he was a robot.

He took me to a big wooden shed, but before we went inside, he turned over some charts that were stuck to a clipboard on the front of the building.

“Shower block,” he said softly, pointing with two strong fingers at a small brick building across the street.

“Your allocated time is at four hundred hours. You must only shower at the time your schedule allows because showers are shared on a rotation of living quarters.”

“Okay.” I said, not really paying attention. I’ve never been good at following the rules, which is why I went to boot camp. He hit the floor with his heavy tan boot and looked at me with eyes that made me feel like I was going to fall in love.

“Rivers, you just earned yourself five more laps around the track tomorrow. Stand up straight, look down, and show your Lieutenant some respect.”

His voice made me act right away. I remembered the dumb phrase I had to use to respond to the higher-ups.

“Yes, sir.”

“Cafeteria.” He pointed to a bigger brick building that wasn’t too far from the shower block.

I looked at it for a few seconds before lowering my eyes again.

Page 2

Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 7:21 am

“Ladies toilet block.” I looked again to see where he was pointing.

“And last but not least, the staff quarters, which are completely off-limits to criminals.”

“Criminals?” I asked, looking up at him with a smile on my face. Yes, that’s exactly what we were, but I never thought he would say it so openly, especially since he had been so professional up to that point.

“Soldiers.” He corrected himself, and then his face hardened again. “You just earned yourself ten more laps tomorrow for looking at me and questioning me. Eyes down, soldier.”

I hated him so much.

He opened the door to the shed and walked in. The room was long and empty. There were eight single beds in a row, two on each side wall. There was a brown fibre blanket on each bed that looked like it would be uncomfortable and itchy.

There was a girl at the foot of each bed. They all wore the same clothes: camouflage pants, a green T-shirt, heavy black boots and a thick belt. They stood still and straight, staring blankly at the space in front of them. None of them looked at us with their eyes. They put their hands on their foreheads to show respect.

The lieutenant came into the room and stopped in front of each girl for a second to look her body up and down before moving on to the next. Not a single girl moved or looked him in the eye. Not a single one of them stood up to him.

He yelled at the last girl, “Your boots need to shine more, Rodgers.”

“Yes, sir,” she said right away.

He then stood at the back of the room, raised his own hand in a salute, and yelled, “At ease, soldiers.” The girls dropped their arms and relaxed, but just barely. They still kept their eyes on the front.

The Lieutenant told them in a loud voice, “Riley Rivers, the newest recruit.” He took a stack of freshly folded uniforms off the bed and gave them to me. “Uniform. Bed. See you at five hundred hours.”

I saw him almost march out the door and slam it shut behind him.

At that point, everyone looked at me.

“Um, hi.” I waved awkwardly at the room.

As soon as I was alone with these girls, their postures changed completely. Some took off their boots, others untucked their T-shirts, and some took off their bras. They all relaxed.

A few of them flopped back down on their beds and started talking again, showing no interest in my arrival.

“Riley, I’m Sierra. Do you need help unpacking your things?” asked the girl in the next bed. She had small features and dark hair that made her look cute. I was about to say something when another girl cut me off.

“Don’t let her help; she’s a known thief. I’m Raven.” She reached out to shake my hand. Her shake was strong, and her hand and fingers were covered in tattoos. “What

are you doing here?" she asked as she flopped down on the bed next to me.

I thought about not telling anyone my story, but then I decided to do it anyway because everyone, like me, had to go to this bootcamp by law. They probably understood better than anyone else because we had all done something wrong.

"I was sort of involved with a gang, narrowly escaped jail because my uncle is a cop and was friends with the judge. Instead, I got sentenced to two years of bootcamp followed by two years of community service." I didn't say much and just shrugged as I unpacked my things into a big trunk next to my bed. I didn't have a lot because I wasn't allowed to bring a lot.

"So this is your first time at boot camp?" Sierra asked as she looked over my things. I nodded. "You can tell by what you've brought." She admitted with a small laugh.

I brought a lot of clothes, including makeup and different outfits. In short, I packed for a vacation camp, not a boot camp for people who are in trouble.

Raven said, "For future reference, bring one pair of pyjamas or comfortable clothes and a whole suitcase of snacks. The food here is awful, and the activities will make you wish you were in jail." Sierra nodded in agreement.

I sighed as I remembered that the good-looking Lieutenant had added fifteen more laps to the track, whatever that meant.

I didn't go to the gym or eat healthy, on the other hand. I would watch a lot of Netflix and eat way too much food.

I was sure that this bootcamp was going to be the last nail in my coffin.

"I already got fifteen extra laps from that robot," I said through gritted teeth.

Sierra asked in a high-pitched voice with a flirty smile, “Mason? The Lieutenant?” I nodded again.

“He is so f*****g hot. It’s such a shame,” she said with a sigh.

“Why is it such a shame?” I asked, now that I was interested.

“Too bad he’s such a jerk. He doesn’t like people in general, and they made him promise not to f**k any of the recruits,” another girl yelled from across the room.

“Wait, have people tried to f**k him?” I sat down on my bed, which felt like spring. I knew I would feel every lump and bump in the thin mattress.

“Many. They get sent to prison, three times, and you’re taken away. Maddie is right; Mason is so far off the radar that it’s almost not worth wanting him,” Sierra told me.

“Name one girl who doesn’t want him. He’s hot and scary, and that authority makes me wetter than the Great Barrier Reef.” Another girl joined in on our conversation in a rude way.

“I don’t,” Raven said in her defence.

“Yeah, because you’re as gay as they come,” the same girl yelled. Raven just nodded in agreement.

“Sometimes, when we’re on the pitch and he’s yelling at us like that, I like to picture him naked. I bet he has a really long one, skinny and long,” Sierra said. I tried not to smile as the girl from the Great Barrier Reef came over to our bed.

“No, long and thick. Who wants skinny? It’s all about the girth,” the girl said, making a wide circle shape with her hand. Raven shook her head in disbelief.

“I think of him naked too,” she said. “When he’s really mad and making you do extra because he says you didn’t try hard enough, I picture him with a small p***s.” She wiggled her little finger at us.

There was laughter all around the room, even from the girls who didn’t want to talk to us.

“Seriously, Riley, there are a lot of bad boys here in bootcamp who would love to sneak around with you. Some of the lower-ranking privates will even fight you if you want to. But the Lieutenant won’t let you get close, and don’t even try. You’ll be taken away in a police car before you can say ‘guilty.’ By the way, I’m Amber.”

“I wouldn’t dream of it,” I said softly.

A bell rang outside our shed, and everyone got up.

“It’s time for dinner. Get dressed quickly.” Sierra fluffed her hair in a blurry mirror and walked to the door.

I quickly put on the army trousers that were given to me. I couldn’t make them look nice or even a little bit better, but I put on my black tank top and ran to the cafeteria before the dinner bell rang.

There wasn’t much in the big hall.

There were blue tables all over the floor, and men and women were sitting at them eating white slop off of plastic plates. I quietly sat down next to Sierra and picked up my spoon.

I asked, “What is this?” as I let the thick paste fall from my spoon a few times before I was brave enough to take a bite.

Page 3

Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 7:21 am

“Don’t ask; I’m not sure,” she said.

I looked around the room, and everyone was eating without any problems.

I saw the Lieutenant leaning against the wall with his arms crossed over his muscular torso and his foot bent at the knee behind him. His dark eyes slowly looked around the room to make sure everything was in order.

Until they found mine.

I felt a flutter in my heart. I don’t know if I was nervous because I had been caught looking at him or because he was so hot but out of my league. I swallowed and kept my blue eyes on his.

His eyes got sharper, and from across the room, they told me to look away, but I didn’t. I looked into his sad eyes. His eyes were a beautiful shade of mahogany brown, even from across the room. Almost amber-colored, especially when the sun shone on them. His eyes looked kind, but his personality was full of danger.

He had a sly smile on his lips that made me feel like I was going to die. It was a smile that told me he was going to make me pay for standing up to him. But I still couldn’t stop looking.

I was used to breaking all the rules. I never did well with people in charge, but for some reason he made me want to test him. I would act up to make him angry and show him who was really in charge.

A lowly lieutenant in charge of hundreds of training army recruits or a girl from a small town who held up a convenience store with her gang leader ex-boyfriend.

I couldn't help but smile slowly, just like he did. He noticed because his beautiful eyes narrowed into a frown.

Lieutenant Mason, it's game time.

I wish I could say I was very warm and comfortable, but that would be a big lie.

My bed made my body itch and the springs of my mattress hurt my back. But when the alarms went off like an air raid siren, my eyes opened wide and I jumped out of bed.

"Are we being attacked?" I screamed in a panic.

Raven laughed and rubbed her tired eyes. "It's four in the morning, the first light of day, and it's our turn to shower. You better hurry up; you only have five minutes to wash and shower before we have to leave and go to the field." She grabbed her shower caddy from the side and walked to the door.

Four in the morning! What is going on? Why would anyone want to get up at this time?

I got out of bed, picked up my clothes, towel, and shower caddy, and put them all in one place. I'm slowly walking to the shower block.

A queue of my roommates was outside, and I dragged myself to the back of the queue, where I waited patiently for my turn.

There were three small brick cubicles in the shower room, each with a mouldy blue

shower curtain hanging in front of it.

I stepped inside and was very aware of how dirty the floor probably was because I was barefoot. Then I turned the silver shower knob to let the water flow.

“F**k!” I yelled, moving out of the way of the running water and falling back into the curtain.

“Yeah, it’s cold,” Raven said with a laugh.

“Cold? It’s freaking ice water!” I stepped back behind the curtain to hide my nakedness from the other girls. It took me a few seconds to get the courage to go back under the water.

I chanted to myself, “Oh my god, oh my god, oh my god,” as I quickly washed my body. I chose not to wash my hair. It didn’t need it, and I couldn’t stand the water on my skin.

I went outside and wrapped the towel around myself. After me, another girl took a shower, and I got dressed with my teeth chattering and my body shaking.

It didn’t take long for me to eat one apple and then wait in a muddy field with the other recruits.

There were hundreds of them, all standing in a queue and looking straight ahead. Some of the guys were checking me out, but I can’t say my own eyes didn’t wander either. It was a group of people of both sexes.

“Attention!” Lieutenant Hotty yelled from the front. The people in queue stood up straighter and raised their arms in a salute.

I copied them, but I probably didn't do it as well as they did. He walked between the rows and stopped at each person to look at their uniform.

Then he came to me, and I slowly raised my eyes to meet his. He almost missed it, but his whole body froze and his eyes opened up a little bit.

They were alive with a burning flame, but it wasn't like the warmth of a hearth; it was more like a wildfire that was getting bigger and more out of control. Mason blinked slowly and then moved on to the next person.

I thought he would call me out for not being respectful, so it surprised me when he didn't. I didn't expect him to make up for me going too far.

He yelled orders at us from all sides in the hot August sun. Making us go through a very hard obstacle course. We climbed over, under, and through mud. We lifted heavy things, climbed ropes, and ran the track over and over.

I literally went beyond the feeling of dying and just landed dead. The sun began to set, and my body hurt in places I didn't even know were there. I swear I lost at least five stone from working out today.

"I need a long soak in a hot bubble bath," I said to Sierra, who was lying on her back and breathing heavily to calm down.

"Attention!" Lieutenant Demon yelled.

She got up right away, as if it were no big deal. I climbed up to mine, having trouble finding my balance and swaying from side to side.

Standing up straight hurt.

It hurt to raise my hand to say hello.

Being alive hurt.

“Get out of here,” he said.

The recruits let out sighs of relief and marched away right away. I marched along, eager for my bed, using up all the energy I had left.

“Not you Rivers,” he yelled. “Fall out of line,” he said, pointing to his side.

He waited until the pitch was empty and it was just me and him. His eyes searched my body with kindness, and I could barely stand up.

He laughed to himself, which was so unlike him that I was interested.

He straightened up and cleared his throat, as if he remembered who he was. The smile left his face completely. He was back to being both stern and in charge.

“I would tell you to be ‘at ease’ right now, but you’re not standing at attention,” he said in a stern but quieter voice.

Page 4

Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 7:21 am

I said, “You have my full attention; what do you want?” I was too tired for his bullshit.

I wasn’t following the rules; I was looking right at him and my attitude was anything but obeying. He didn’t like it.

“You owe me fifteen laps.” His usual loud voice was back.

“Are you kidding? You almost killed me out there today. I can’t do fifteen more laps; you can kiss my a*s.”

He raised his eyebrows in surprise, then stepped closer, towering over me with his height and closing me in with his abs.

“That’s enough, Rivers.”

Neil Armstrong would be able to hear Mason’s voice without having to strain his ears if he were on the moon right now.

“Because it’s your first day, I’m going easy on you. But you disrespected me, so you need to finish your fifteen laps or you’ll get in trouble.”

I looked at the track, which was very long and scary. I would definitely be out here for another hour.

“I can’t do it. I’m too sore and dirty. I need to take a shower and go to bed.”

My voice sounded desperate when I spoke. I begged, thinking that he was definitely going to win this “I’ll show him who’s boss” game.

“You can only shower at four hundred hours. You have to finish the laps; I can’t back out of a punishment.”

I really didn’t think I could do it; my legs felt like they weren’t connected to my body. He was asking for the impossible.

“I’ll run with you,” he said, and for some reason, I thought that would be even worse. I nodded, letting him take control of me.

I ran, but my legs didn’t move much. People watching me right now would think I was moving in slow motion.

Mason yelled from a few yards ahead, “Pick up the pace, Rivers.”

“I can’t do it,” I said, taking a break on my third lap. He walked back to me.

“It needs to be finished. We’ll walk.” He motioned for me to start again, and it hurt to move my feet against the ground.

He walked right next to me for a whole lap, and we didn’t say a word to each other.

“Ten more to go,” he said with a smile. I groaned, and I swear I saw him smile somewhere in there.

“Bootcamp isn’t that hard, you know. It’ll be easier when you’re in better shape, but for the love of God, learn the rules or you’ll always get punished.”

I didn’t answer him because his voice bothered me.

I wanted to go to bed.

“Don’t look at anyone. Always keep your head down unless you’re standing at attention, in which case you should look straight ahead.”

I instinctively looked at him, and he shook his head in disbelief.

It’s just human instinct to look at someone, so I can’t be taught.

“Don’t answer back,” he said again. “Say “Sir, yes Sir” to everything. Always wear your full uniform when you’re around ranked officers. Don’t break the rules. Do you have any questions?”

I looked up at him again, and his eyes glowed with anger because I couldn’t just do what he told me to do. But I had a question on the tip of my tongue, and I wanted to see how he looked when I asked it.

“Is it true that you can’t f**k the new guys?”

“W-what?” He backed down, clearly not expecting my question. He turned red all the way up to his ears.

I asked again, “Did you really promise not to sleep with the recruits?” He ran his finger along his short stubble and then straightened his face to show no expression.

“I’m not talking about my personal life with one of the soldiers,” he finally said, keeping his voice steady. He acted bored, which was a reaction in and of itself, especially since he was blushing.

“With one of the criminals you mean?” My lip curled up into half a smile and his eyes narrowed at me.

“Seven laps left. You can run the rest and clear out when you’re done. I’m signing off now.” I saw him cross the track, and his heavy boots made a thudding sound with every step. I left the track and went back to the living quarters without finishing my last laps. I waited until he was far away before I left.

“I heard the private talking to the general about the bar a mile west of here. I thought this was a rural area, civilization ceased for miles around.” Amber was telling Maddie.

“I could really use a drink after today,” I said as I flopped down on my bed, which didn’t feel good at all.

The girls laughed like I had told them a joke, and I propped myself up on my elbows to look at them.

Maddie said, “We can’t leave campus, Riley.”

“Yeah, but we’re criminals. When have we ever followed the rules?” They looked at each other in shock, as if they’d never thought of that before.

Amber asked, “What would we wear?” I smiled because I knew I had brought a whole suitcase full of useless clothes.

“Pick one,” I said, pointing to my trunk. “I’m going to check out the staff showers. I have a feeling they’ll be a lot better than ours.” I grabbed my shower stuff and left.

A security guard was sitting in a small office next to a fence. It kept the criminals and the officers apart, but when I was limping back from the track earlier, I saw a hole in the hedge that would let me sneak through.

They didn’t have sheds; instead, they had small cabins. There was a main shower and

toilet block, which made me think that the small cabins were just for sleeping. I quietly made my way to the shower block and slipped inside without anyone seeing me.

There were real doors instead of curtains, and it was much cleaner than ours. There was only one shower room. It had a shower cubicle and a nice dressing area with a big mirror, a sink, a hair dryer and a unit. I opened the door to the left of the showers because I was curious, but all I found was a toilet, so nothing too interesting.

I stepped into the shower and looked at the lever. It had a choice of hot or cold, and when I turned it on, the warm water bounced off my skin and relaxed all of my sore muscles. It was like heaven.

I took my time washing my hair with the shampoo and rubbing the soap on my body. I liked the little bit of pampering I had found at this terrible Bootcamp.

After that, I got out of the shower and blow-dried my hair, which straightened out and shone beautifully.

I opened the door and stuck my head out to see what was going on before I really left. It was dark outside now, and everything was quiet, so I quickly left, ran through the bushes, and got to my own place in no time.

When I opened the door to my shed, girls were throwing clothes around, standing in their bras, and putting on makeup. They were excited, and we had more than just Maddie and Amber on our one-bar crawl.

Page 5

Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 7:21 am

We split up into small groups so we could walk around the grounds without being seen. But we did leave the Bootcamp and turn left down the dirt road until we reached a small country house pub.

It was a cute little building with white walls and potted flowers out front that weren't very easy to see at night. We opened the door and were surprised to see that it was very busy. This was probably because it was the only pub in the area. We pushed through the crowds and went outside to the beer garden, where we sat because it was such a nice night.

I quickly noticed that it looked like the workers were all gathered there. There were farmers who worked in the fields, lower-ranking people from our Bootcamp, people from the small houses next door, and of course, the store owners from the tiny village thirty minutes away. There was a live band playing inside, but we could hear them from outside. They sounded pretty good, but not good enough to play a game.

"Hey little lady, can I buy you a drink?" A man in a lumberjack shirt came over to our table and put his arm around me. He spun a piece of wheat around his mouth. I sat down and talked to him for a while about farming and taking care of animals. He seemed really into it, and I didn't want to hurt his feelings by telling him I wasn't interested.

"Get your coat; you've pulled," Sierra joked.

"I have to go to the toilet," I said.

I got up and pushed the door open to go back into the bar. It didn't seem any less

busy than before, and maybe it was even busier now. I went into the bathroom to fix my hair and eat a few Tic Tacs to freshen my breath. Then I left, pushing the door right into someone's arm.

"Sorry," I said politely, looking up and seeing those cinnamon colours.

Damn.

I winced all over my face, as if I was in pain, and my features were almost screwing together. He, on the other hand, looked really angry, but he looked great. I looked down, not out of respect, but because it was so strange that he wasn't wearing his army clothes.

He wore jeans. Jeans! And a grey Hilfigure hoodie made my mouth water.

"Am I in trouble?" I asked with a hint of shame.

He grabbed my arm tightly and pulled me through the crowd leaving the bar. "Oh, you are in so much trouble." I thought he would take me back to boot camp, but instead he threw me across the parking lot.

"Are you f*****g stupid? This is a court-ordered boot camp. You can't just leave whenever you want. When the commander finds out about this, you're going to jail."

I could tell he was holding on to that anger for a while. It must be really tiring to keep your feelings hidden for so long, bury them deep so you don't get any frown lines or look angry.

"So don't brown-nose your commander by telling him." I shrugged and tried to get away from him, but he pulled me back hard.

“Jesus! You’re getting on my nerves so much! I tell you not to do simple things, but you do them anyway. Do you like making me mad?” He was so angry that steam was coming out of his ears.

“Is this guy bothering you, little lady?” The lumberjack from earlier came back, and I turned to face him before looking back at Mason, who completely ignored him.

“Yeah, he’s really bothering me,” I said quietly.

The lumberjack hit Mason’s jaw before I could think or do anything. He didn’t even blink, but he hit him back right away. The lumberjack fell to the ground and was knocked out. I couldn’t believe it when I saw him. I fell to the ground to make sure he was still breathing.

“What the f**k, Mason?” I yelled.

“Mason?” His voice was slow, and he sounded out his own name. It tasted like something I hadn’t had before. “Since when did we know each other by name?”

And that’s when I remembered that I had used his real name. The name I think of him by.

“We’re not.” I stood up and held my arm out so he could take it. “Bring me back to Bootcamp, back to your boss.”

Of course, I only let him take me back because I knew there were seven other escaped Bootcamp recruits sitting in the back of the beer garden, completely unaware of what was going on.

He looked at my arm, and my heart sank when he grabbed it and pulled us away from the bar and back towards the bootcamp.

As we drove down the dirt road, I said, “I don’t get it.” He huffed, but then he looked at me.

He said in a bored voice, “I would ask what, but I know you’re going to tell me anyway, so why bother?”

“We’re alone, and no one knows I’m out. I haven’t done anything wrong or hurt anyone tonight. Why does it matter if I don’t get caught?” He stopped in the street and let go of my arm.

“You criminals think it’s okay to do bad things as long as you don’t get caught.” He was so angry that his teeth were gritted.

“If you hate criminals so much, why do you work to make them better? You seem to think that there’s no redemption and that we all belong in jail.” He ran his finger over his stubble and a strange, never-before-seen look crossed his face.

He finally said, “I’m not going to talk about my personal life with you.” “You’re too outspoken for your own good,” he said, raising my eyebrows in question. “From now on, you will be the perfect soldier. Stand up straight, work hard in the field, shine your boots, don’t look anyone in the eye and most importantly, don’t talk back.” He stood up straight and became more stiff, just like he did today on the field. Full of professionalism, with no sign of anger anywhere.

“Your commander will have me arrested tonight, so you won’t have to worry about that.” I said quietly.

I saw his eyes quickly look at me from the side, but only for a second.

“Unless, of course, you don’t tell him,” I said, taking a chance.

“God, why do you think I’ll treat you differently? You’re not a diamond in the rough.”

The rage had come back. He couldn’t hide how he felt about me, so it was clear he didn’t like me.

Everyone else thought he was a brick wall, a robot with no feelings, but when I was around, he would either explode or leave in a huff.

Page 6

Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 7:21 am

I didn't answer him because the thunder was so loud that it broke through the sky.

"Great," he said in a sarcastic tone as the rain fell hard on us. "This is your fault."

I really did laugh.

"How is the rain my fault?" He must have known how silly he sounded by now.

"It's not your fault that it's raining; it's your fault that we're stuck in it." He stopped yelling and turned his head all the way around to look away from me. He coughed. "your... um... the rain and your top." He said this in a low, almost shy voice.

I looked down at my white top. It was completely see-through because it was wet, and this was the one night I chose not to wear a bra.

The fabric stuck to my skin, making everything very clear. My nipples were stiff from the cold, and the small metal bars that went through each one rubbed against the wet material.

Mason let me see his back, but he wouldn't look at me at all. He acted like the devil was going to kill him for accidentally seeing my boobs through my T-shirt.

I said to him, "You're a grown man; they're just nipples." He took off his jumper and held his arm back for me to take it.

"Put this on; I can't take you back like that. People will see." I smirked and didn't take his hoodie.

“Maybe I shouldn’t put it on at all. Then you’ll come back without me, and I could go back to the bar and your favourite commander will never know.” He shook his hoodie at me, but he still kept his whole body facing away.

“Put it on now, Rivers,” he said in a commanding voice, as if we were back on the pitch.

“I was going to take your hoodie because you were trying to be a gentleman, but now that you’re basically telling me to do it, I really don’t think I will.” I bit down on the side of my gum to keep from laughing.

He turned around, and his whole face showed how much he didn’t like it. He didn’t look at me; he kept his eyes straight ahead like a soldier. I think I heard him say “so help me God” in a low voice, but I’m not sure.

“Rivers,” he growled, sounding like a warning. He waved the hoodie at me again when I stuck out my chest. “Put it on,” he said through clenched teeth.

This time I laughed but didn’t try to move.

“Okay, fine. If you say please, I’ll do it.” His temples moved as his jaw muscles tightened.

He said, “Riley,” in an annoyed tone. I guess we can call each other by our first names again. He took a deep breath and said, “Put it on... please,” with great reluctance.

And that’s how Lieutenant Mason died: he asked me nicely. He died from it.

“Well, since you asked me so nicely,” I said, “Nah.”

He ran up to me, lifted one of my arms into the air, and pulled the sleeve down it. Then he did the same thing with the other arm, getting me dressed.

I couldn't stop smiling at him, but he wouldn't look at me because he was trying to keep his eyes away from my breasts.

He looked more at ease once my breasts were covered, and I wondered if his fear of my body came from his promise.

We walked onto the bootcamp grounds, and he kept going past the staff quarters, where I thought the commander would be.

“Because it's your first real day, I'm going to assume you didn't know not to leave campus. Instead of taking you to the commander, I'll just give you ten extra laps tomorrow and tell you never to leave the grounds again. But I'm serious, Riley, get your act together or you'll be thrown out.”

I nodded my head. I really didn't want to do extra laps tomorrow, but at least I was happy that I wasn't going to jail for another day.

He walked me to my room and then stopped outside and hovered. “Oh right, your hoodie.” I remembered while he stood there awkwardly. I grabbed the bottom of his hoodie and started to pull it up.

“No!” he yelled. “Not here,” he said in a panic. “Just keep it,” he said more calmly now.

I laughed and said, “I'm not keeping it.” “Come in and I'll change into something else.” He looked at the wooden door of the shed and then back at me.

“Without warning and for no good reason, I shouldn't go into the soldiers' quarters.”

“Oh, it’s fine. No one is here,” I said without thinking.

“What?!” he yelled as he ran past me and pushed through the door.

I went inside after him, feeling bad for being so dumb. He quietly looked around the room, as if he thought everyone would jump out and yell “surprise.”

“Where are they all?” he asked, turning to me, but he knew as well as I did where they were.

I made my face look like it was hurting again. “Is this going to get me in a lot of trouble?”

“Twenty more laps,” he said coldly.

“Twenty!” I yelled.

“Thirty!” he yelled.

I took off his hoodie right in front of him, and his eyes got big as he saw everything that was available. He turned away, red-faced, after a moment.

“I think you should go now before I lose my legs.” He took the hoodie and turned around, keeping his eyes straight ahead.

“You have no idea how bad this is getting. I’ve never seen anything like this before. I won’t let it go on like this; there needs to be a line drawn.”

I nodded to show that I understood, but I really didn’t know what he was talking about.

People must have snuck out, talked back, and refused to follow the dumb bootcamp rules. We are criminals, after all.

Mason walked to the door without looking back. I lay down on my bed, closed my eyes, and let the silence of the room take me away.

The scariest sound ever made my ears hurt and burned me from the inside. I pulled my head under the itchy blanket and grumbled into my sheets.

“Get up or you’ll miss your shower time,” Amber said under her breath. I waved her away with one arm out from under the blanket.

“I’ll shower later, when the water is warm and the blow dryer works.” She laughed.

“You’ll get caught,” she said as she left. But I wasn’t going to get caught. I’m careful, and why would the staff shower at night when they can do it during the day when they have hot water all day? I closed my eyes and enjoyed the extra hour of sleep.

At five in the morning, I heard the sirens again. I didn’t want to get out of bed, but I did and put on my camouflage pants, green T-shirt and combat boots. I walked to the field while still fixing my belt.

Everyone was already doing a drill for marching. Before I looked up at the soldiers, I spent a few seconds messing with my belt.

Page 7

Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 7:21 am

“Halt!” Mason yelled, and everyone stopped in a straight line. He turned to me, and I remembered my manners. I stood up straight and looked ahead, with my four fingers on my forehead in a salute. Damn, I’m doing great today.

Mason said in a deep voice that was loud enough for all seven continents to hear, “You’re late Rivers.”

I noticed that he was calling me by my last name again instead of my first name, like he did last night.

“Sir, yes sir?” I said, but it sounded more like a question than an answer.

“Drop and give me twenty.” I laughed out loud, and people behind him looked at me in shock.

“Wait, you’re not kidding?” He leaned in close to my face. Nose to nose. Eye to eye. Lips to—I’d like that.

“Does it look like I’m joking, Rivers? Drop and give me twenty right here, right now.” He yelled at me so loudly that it scared me. I got down on my knees.

One. Two. Three. Four. Five.

I pushed my body up and down like a baby. I had no strength in my arms and could barely do a push-up. He watched me struggle, my face getting redder and redder, my arms shaking, and I was having trouble breathing.

Six. Seven. Eight. Nine. Ten.

I could feel my body getting heavier and heavier because I wasn't fit. The push-ups I did started to look like belly flops. Every time I did a push-up, I fell to the ground. He made me keep going, though, and it was very embarrassing for me.

Eleven. 12. Thirteen. Fourteen. Fifteen.

My hands hurt because of the pressure of the grass underneath, and my wrists hurt because of how hard I was holding my body. I gritted my teeth and clenched my jaw as I tried to get through the last obstacle.

Sixteen. Seventeen. Eighteen. Nineteen. Twenty.

I jumped up and looked at the piles of people who had stopped. Luckily, their eyes were forced to stay looking ahead. Thank goodness they didn't see me try to do push-ups badly. Mason, on the other hand, looked as serious as always.

"That was pathetic. Get in line," he said in a mean way. I tightened my belt and fell in line, marching to the sound of his constant call.

He led us to a lake that looked like a swamp and smelt like dirty water. There were two ropes over the water, one high and one low.

"Cross the lake," he yelled.

Mason told us to go across based on where we lived. We watched as people slowly crossed the lake, holding onto the top rope and keeping their feet steady on the lower rope. The ropes moved, but it was all about controlling your mind and working together as a team to keep the ropes as steady as possible. Most people were able to cross the lake without falling in.

“Good job,” Mason said.

Then it was our turn.

Maddie was the first to step on the rope, and she only moved a little to the left. After that, Sierra went up, then Amber, and finally Raven. I joined in the middle, and Zoila and Elise came after me. It was very hard, but we were doing well and got halfway there pretty quickly.

Mason stomped on the lower rope with his foot, which made the rope move all over the place.

“What’s wrong, ladies? Are we feeling a little weak today?” he joked.

Amber grabbed Raven, who grabbed me, and before I knew it, we all fell like a stack of dominoes. Jumping into the dirty water below.

“Climb out, you failed,” Mason yelled, his voice full of anger but his face showing that he was having fun.

“It’s no surprise we failed! What the hell? You did that on purpose,” I yelled as I pushed my way through the wreckage to get to him. There were a few gasps from the groups, and Amber put her hand on my arm to try to stop me.

Mason yelled, “Rivers, drop and give me twenty.”

“No!” I said back.

He took his walkie-talkie out of his pants and spoke into it. “Red dog is calling for black sparrow.”

A response came right away. “This is a black sparrow answering a red dog’s call.”

“General, I need a disciplinary for Rivers right away,” Mason said in a calm and professional tone. He looked down at the floor and told me again to drop and give him twenty. “Do I need to write two disciplinary slips for Rivers?” I shook my head. “Then drop and give me twenty.” I looked down and didn’t look him in the eye.

“Sir, yes sir.” I said, and then I dropped to the floor and gave him twenty. I was miserable because my body hurt, I was wet with smelly water, and I was generally miserable.

But what really bothered me was that he had actually punished me. That was something the judge gave me, and if I got three of them, I would go to jail right away.

He let all of us go home after another long day in the field.

“Rivers, thirty laps.” I stood at the starting line and didn’t look up to see his face. And in a matter of seconds, I was running, and with each step, I could hear the squelch of my sock inside my boot.

I wanted to cry, but I didn’t want to give him the satisfaction. He didn’t walk or run with me today; he just stood back and clicked a dumb thing to count how many laps I did.

My thighs hurt from the wetness of my trousers, and my body felt heavier because of the wet clothes I was wearing, but I wasn’t going to let Lieutenant Arsehole see me fail. I ran away from him without looking at him or trying to talk to him. I just pushed through my laps, quietly and painfully.

“Riley,” he said, and hearing my name on his lips made me so angry that I could feel my blood boiling.

I said sharply, “You don’t get to call me that.” I think he was a little surprised by my outburst, but his face stayed the same as always.

“Rivers,” he said, standing up straight. I looked down at him and treated him like my Lieutenant because that’s all he was. He let out a big breath. “I’m just doing my job.” He tried to smile a little, but it didn’t reach his eyes.

“I’ve done my thirty. Can I go?” He nodded his head quietly, so I turned away from him and walked across the track. I felt his hand on my arm as I reached the door.

“Wait.” I turned back to him, but then I remembered I wasn’t supposed to look at him, so I looked down. “I—” I waited for him to say something, but there was only the sound of the wind blowing in the quiet. He sighed again and said, “Never mind.”

I turned my back on him and went to the living quarters, where I really needed a shower.

The assault course was really the devil’s playground, and you don’t want to mess with the devil at six in the morning when you haven’t been up long.

Page 8

Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 7:21 am

“Come on, John, my ninety-year-old grandma can do better than that!” Mason yelled at one of the men who couldn’t army crawl through thick mud while stuck under a giant net that he couldn’t touch with his back fast enough.

“Get out of the way!” his loud mouth yelled. He spoke from his chest, and his voice was so loud that it could move the sun around the earth faster than a day with just a push from his strong sound waves.

It was very hard for me to climb a huge fence, and then I stayed at the top.

“I hate this man,” I told Amber, trying to catch my breath. “This whole f*****g bootcamp is just some sexist shit where the men can oppress the women and he’s the worst.” I pointed down at Mason, who was at least ten feet below us.

He yelled at us, “What are you two women talking about? This isn’t a social event. Get down on the other side.” Amber smiled at me and said she was sorry before climbing down.

I looked down at the ground. There was a thick mud pit under the fence I was sitting on. There was soft, clay-like mud there on purpose to break our fall. I bet it was deep enough to cushion a ten-foot drop. If I threw myself into it, it would probably splatter everywhere.

“Lieutenant, Sir, may I speak?” I asked in a sweet voice. He looked up at me, put his hands on his hips, and made a scowl.

“Okay, Rivers, you can go. What do you want?” He sounded annoyed, as usual.

“I can’t climb down, sir.” He closed his eyes for a moment and took a deep breath to calm down his growing anger. I sucked in my lips so I wouldn’t smile. He moved closer and tilted his head back to look up at me.

“Why can’t you climb down Rivers? Either start climbing or I’ll call in another disciplinary.” He crossed his arms over his chest. People climbed up the ten-foot fence, gave me a warning look, and then climbed down the other side, as they were supposed to. I sat on top, still, and held on to the fence for dear life.

“I don’t like heights, Sir,” I said.

“Jesus Christ Rivers!” He rubbed his stubble and moved closer. “You got up there, you can climb down.” I looked over the edge to see how close he was to the mud pit. He had to get a little closer.

“I can’t!” I yelled. He moved closer. Bingo! I let go of the railing and jumped. My feet hit the mud pit first. I was right to think that mud was everywhere. He ran his hands over the Lieutenant’s dirty face and flicked thick, wet mud out of his eyes. I heard a few people laugh around the assault course. Mason stared at me and breathed in and out slowly.

“Am I going to get in trouble for this?” I asked, feeling bad. “I lied because it was an accident.”

“Five extra laps of the assault course, Rivers. Don’t insult my intelligence by pretending that wasn’t done on purpose. Now get out of the pit and get moving.” He said this through gritted teeth, making it clear that he didn’t like me. I fought my way through the mud and then shook myself off on the grass.

I think it was a bad idea because now I’m dirty and wet, but seeing him dirty too made it all worth it. I saw him flick dirt off of himself or give his clothes dirty looks

every once in a while. I laughed at how uncomfortable he was.

He kept me back for five more rounds of the assault course after boot camp. I rolled my eyes because I just wanted to get them over with. I crawled through the mud, climbed over fences, shimmied up a rope, and ran through tires, and it wore me out. I was dying by the third round.

“Come on, Rivers, speed it up,” Mason yelled out of boredom.

“Hey! F**k you!” I stopped next to him and poked my finger into his iron-like chest. He looked down at it slowly, but other than that, he didn’t react to what I said.

“I swear to god, Riley.” He shook his head and took a deep breath through his nose.

“You’re out here every day telling us what to do. I bet you couldn’t or wouldn’t do this yourself!” I pushed him with both hands into his chest, trying to knock him back, but he didn’t even move.

So I tried again, but this time he stopped me by grabbing my small wrists with his two huge hands.

“What the f**k don’t you get?” he said in a low voice. “Do you want to go to jail?” he asked me, really wanting to know.

“No.”

“You know this is what I do for a living, right?”

I didn’t say anything.

“I literally get paid to keep you in line and make you do all of this. You need to be

ready for the fitness test or they'll send you away."

He kept a tight grip on my wrists and pointed his head towards the assault course.

"If you step out of line, it's my job to tell the judge. You're here because you avoided jail, so now you have to behave. If you don't, I'll have to tell the judge that your boot camp isn't working." He let go of my wrist, and I let my arms drop to my sides. "You have two more rounds to finish."

"Yeah, two more rounds of an assault course that you don't have the guts to do yourself," I said under my breath.

"F**k sake Riley!" He clearly heard me, oops.

"Hold this." He took off his walkie-talkie belt thing and gave it to me. It was surprisingly heavy.

"Don't do anything stupid with it, just hold it." I looked down at it and wondered what he wanted me to do with it.

Page 9

Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 7:21 am

He ran towards the ten-foot wall and jumped almost halfway up. Then he used his hands to pull his body the rest of the way up. He didn't have to use the hand and foot holes like everyone else.

Okay, I'm not going to lie, that was kind of hot.

He climbed down on the other side and expertly ran between the tires, never missing a step. He crawled through the mud on his stomach, not letting his back or torso touch the ground or the net. Wow, he did everything so quickly. Most of the time, it took me half an hour to finish the whole course.

Then he climbed up a single rope that was hanging down like Spider-Man. He fell to the floor and slid down the rope like a firefighter on his pole. I wanted to have s*x with him right then and there.

He finished the whole assault course in less than a minute and didn't break a sweat. Damn, he was like a god. He came back to me, took his walkie-talkie back, and put it back where it belonged: around his waist.

"Finish your two rounds," he said, and that was all he said. My mouth was slightly open in shock that I had just seen what had happened. "Riley!" he pointed to the assault course.

"Okay," I said slowly, but I didn't move. My feet stayed where they were.

After that short workout, it looked like his muscles had gotten even bigger. His green shirt fit him perfectly, and his arms were like glutes.

It was a beautiful sound when Mason laughed. He looked younger when he laughed, which wasn't very often.

"Riley, all punishments must be done. I can't change my mind about that. If I give you a punishment, you have to do it." I nodded. "Go!" he said with a grin, pointing at the obstacle course again.

"Okay." I said it again, but this time I moved. It was embarrassing to put on the display after his, but at least I got it done.

"Okay Rivers, get out of here." He said this after my second round, going back to his Lieutenant voice.

He gave me a salute, and I gave him one back.

Thankful to leave the field and wash off all this mud.

I was able to get into the staff quarters without getting hurt again. I ran straight to the shower block because I really needed to get out of these wet clothes and clean my hair and body.

I took off all my clothes right away, put them in a plastic bag, tied the top in a knot, and threw it on the floor.

After that, I opened the shower door and turned on the water to warm it up for a few seconds while I used the bathroom.

I looked at the palms of my hands while I was sitting on the toilet. They still hurt from lifting my body up and down the ten-foot fence.

Blisters were starting to form on the friction burns that were covering my skin.

When I was done in the bathroom, I opened the door to the toilet and felt the warm steam from the shower. I smiled to myself, knowing how nice and warm this would feel after the terrible day I had.

I heard the commander's voice talking to someone on the other side of the door as I walked to the shower. The door handle started to move. I stood still, not knowing what to do.

I was completely naked in a shower block that was off-limits. I was already on my first punishment, and if I got caught in here, I would definitely be sent away.

I looked at the door to the shower. I could hide in there.

The commander would probably see and hear that it was busy and then leave.

The door handle shook again, this time it was pulled down, and I opened the shower door and stepped inside as quickly as my sore legs would let me.

“What the fu—” I put my hand over his mouth.

He looked like he had seen a ghost: shocked, pale, confused, and angry. It was really the most human I had seen him yet.

We looked at each other in silence as the water fell on us. I could feel his frantic breaths hitting my hand through his flaring nostrils. He must have gotten in the shower while I was on the toilet.

It was hard, but I was able to keep my eyes on his face. I did notice that he still had his dog tags on a chain around his neck.

The commander yelled from behind the shower door, “Mason, are you in here?”

I closed my eyes and made my face really tight because I knew I had just messed up so badly. I knew I was going to die, but I had to let go of his lips and wait for him to tell on me.

He didn't want to answer right away and looked at me with scared eyes, as if my face alone could explain things. Instead, it begged him in silence to keep me safe.

"Yes, Sir," Mason said, sounding a little surprised.

"Okay son, let me know when you're done," the commander yelled. Then the door opened and the sound of it filled the room again.

Mason looked at me, but only at my eyes, and I looked back at him. I could tell he was trying to figure out what had just happened, or what was happening right now, but he wasn't getting anywhere.

The warm water fell all over us, and it dripped from his hair and into his eyelashes. The water soaked his lips and fell on his skin.

His skin was bare and covered in tattoos.

"Um..." I started, and he blinked at me with a blank look.

"Riley, I swear to god, if you ask me if you're in trouble for this, just save yourself the trouble because the answer is always yes. F**k yes." I sucked in my lips and took a deep breath through my nose.

"Actually, I was going to ask..." he said, clenching his jaw in anger. "Should I be looking down right now?" I had to hold back a smile at how scared he looked.

He turned off the water by grabbing the knob with his hand. Reaching out and

grabbing his towel. He was going to wrap the towel around his own waist at first, but then he sighed and gave it to me.

“Cover yourself,” he said in an annoyed tone before leaving the cubicle.

I couldn't decide whether to follow him out and listen to him yell at me or turn the water back on and finish the shower I came here for.

I was already in trouble, so what was a few extra laps or push-ups? My hand hovered over the water lever.

I turned the water back on.

Page 10

Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 7:21 am

I heard him yell, “What are you doing?” from behind the door. I didn’t pay attention to him and just put the shampoo in my hair. “Rivers, get your a*s out here now, or I’ll give you another punishment.”

I bent my back and let the warm water flow down my body as I dipped my head back into it. Then I took the conditioner and did the same thing again.

“Riley!” he said in protest. “Get out of the shower right now or I’ll come in and drag you out myself.”

I leaned my head back to get rid of all the conditioner. It smelt like lavender and made me think of my grandma’s garden in the early spring when all the flowers were in bloom. The soapy bubbles surrounded my body and gathered under my feet. It gave my skin a slight shine.

“Riley!”

I picked up the shower gel and squirted a good amount into my hand. Then I slowly moved my fingers over my body, rubbing my skin in circles.

“I swear to God, Riley, I’m calling the commander back.”

I turned off the water and stood under the shower until my body had absorbed every last drop. I twisted my hair in my hands and waited for the flow of drops to slow down. After that, I opened the door, reached for my own towel, and wrapped it around my body.

“I’m sorry, did you say something? I couldn’t hear you over the shower water.” I blinked at him like I didn’t know what he was talking about.

He looked like he was possessed; his veins popped out of his forearms because he was holding his fists so tightly. I really thought he was going to hit me at any moment, and I don’t think he would have stopped there. Maybe murder.

He was now fully dressed, with Nike sweats and a plain T-shirt on. I combed my hair in front of the mirror, ignoring his glare.

“Are you f*****g serious?” he yelled. I looked back at him in the mirror. His face was very red, but I’m not sure if it was because he was angry or because we had just been naked and showering together.

“For once,” I said with a sigh, “can’t you just act like a nice guy?” His eyebrows shot up in surprise, and then his eyes softened.

“Tomorrow I’ll do your extra laps and push-ups. Whatever you think is fair punishment. Just let me take a shower, change, and dry my hair.” He looked into my eyes, and I waited for him to let me go on.

“I could lose my rank for this,” he finally said, sounding unsure of himself. Then he nodded, which meant he had made up his mind. “Under one condition.”

I patiently waited for him to go on.

“You always show me the most respect, especially when we’re out in the field in front of everyone else. Don’t talk back, don’t refuse, and don’t argue. You do what I say and do the drill to the best of your abilities. No questions asked. I don’t want to hear a peep out of you; you fall in line instead of standing out from the crowd.”

“I promise,” I said with a smile of thanks. He sighed and rolled his eyes. “Yes, sir,” he said, pointing his head at the hair dryer to tell me to keep going.

I looked at him a few times in the mirror. He looked like he was deep in thought and probably full of regrets. He turned away while I got dressed after I was done with my hair.

He asked with interest, “You can get back without being seen?”

“Sir, yes sir.” He let me see a small smile on his lips, which made my heart race.

I made him happy.

He asked, “You don’t want to tell me how?” but I didn’t want to tell him that because I knew he would stop it right away.

“Um... sir, no sir?” He laughed, and I felt like I was jumping up and down and clapping my hands inside. His laugh was so sexy.

“You go first, and Riley?” I turned back to him and said, “You tell no one about this.” I just nodded in response.

It’s time to be the model soldier, or at least try.

I want to say that I’m getting used to getting up early, but I’m not. Being out on the pitch at five in the morning has to be a worse crime than most of these criminals even did. But today was different; I was on my best behaviour.

I can’t say for sure how long that will last, but I’m going to give it my all.

“We’re splitting up into smaller groups today, going into the woods, and building a

raft. It has to be strong enough to hold four people, and you'll be testing it out on the lake. Check your groups with Private Nolan," Mason said with the least amount of interest.

So far today I've been good enough to not get in trouble. It hasn't been that hard, which is surprising. I just stay out of his sight.

Amber shouted with joy, "You're with me, Riley!" Just a few minutes later, two male recruits named Seth and Jake came over to talk to us.

Jake made me feel better right away. He laughed at everything and was easy to talk to. On the other hand, Seth made me think of a hillbilly serial killer, which made me very wary.

Jake was one of those guys who always had a silly smile on his face. I guess people would have called him the class clown in high school. He could have been ugly, but boot camp made even the nerdiest people look good. All of this exercise shapes our bodies into what a bodybuilder would love.

Seth, on the other hand, looked darker. His eyes were empty and showed no compassion, like a psychopath. He was quiet and kept to himself, but the few things he said seemed well thought out and were said in a sly way.

Jake pointed to some heavy logs on the ground and said, "We'll pick these up and put them together."

"I think they might sink. Won't they be too heavy?" I tried to lift one, but I couldn't even get it halfway off the ground. Jake made fun of me.

"The worst that could happen is that we all go for a swim. Boats are heavy and they float, so it's all about spreading the weight out on the surface so the water is heavier

than the raft.”

He picked up the log and threw it over his shoulder. I walked right behind him, worried that he might drop it and hurt himself, but to be honest, he looked like he was carrying it easily.

Seth also took one and came with us to the river, but Amber didn’t even try to help.

“Okay, fine, but I don’t want to swim, so you better be right.” He dropped the log and smiled a big, naughty smile. I slowly backed away from him, knowing what he wanted.

“Jake, no.” I laughed and ran away.

He chased me, but I hid behind a tree and looked out from the side. He stood in front of the tree, trying to figure out which way I would run next.

Then I ran to the left, and he jumped on me and tickled me by the waist. I was laughing so hard that I couldn’t breathe and tears were streaming down my face.

“Maybe I should throw you in the lake,” he said. “You don’t want to go for a swim, huh?”

“Jake, what are you up to?”

Jake stopped and let me go, standing at attention. I looked at Mason and then back at Jake. I decided it was best to stand up straight as well.

“Talk,” Mason said.

Jake looked down.

“Sorry, Lieutenant sir, we were just having some fun.” The carefree tone Jake had been using for the past hour was gone, and he was now nervous and maybe even a little scared.

Mason said angrily, “This is boot camp; there’s no time for fun. You’ve earned twenty laps around the assault course. Keep your hands to yourself.”

“Yes, sir!” Jake remembered.

Mason walked away, standing tall and straight. “Twenty around the assault course, that’s a bit much, isn’t it?” Jake relaxed his posture, and I agreed with him. The course of attack was deadly.

By the time we got back to the riverbank, Seth had tied two logs together with some rope. The guys did the heavy work while Amber and I tied the knots. We all sat on the edge of the river and took a break when the raft was big enough.

I asked them, “What made you both go to bootcamp?” I already knew Amber’s story: she broke into the homes of famous people and stole from them.

“I ran a drug empire,” Seth said in a casual way.

Jake told us, “I hot wired cars, changed the license plates, and sold them.”

“I wish I knew how to hot wire a car,” I thought as I stared off into space. It always

looked so cool in the movies, and even though I probably wouldn't use it, it would still be useful to have.

Jake put his arm around my shoulder and said, "I'll teach you."

"Attention!" Mason yelled from behind us. We all jumped in fear, but we quickly got to our feet and stood at attention.

"You're just sitting there," he said, pointing. I was about to say something, but then I thought better of it and closed my mouth.

I couldn't see Mason because I wasn't allowed to turn my head, but I knew there would still be disapproval in his eyes.

"Did you tie these knots, Jake? They're awful." I shut my eyes in anger.

Don't say anything back.

Don't say anything back.

Don't say anything back.

Mason walked in front of Jake and looked him up and down. His eyes were far away and cold, with no warmth at all. I think Mason didn't like Jake personally, but let's be honest, he doesn't like anyone.

"Drop and give me fifty!" he yelled, and we could all feel how strong his words were. Jake fell to the ground and began doing push-ups. He seemed to do them easily, which was not the case for me two days ago.

He stood back at attention after finishing all fifty, which didn't take long, and he

didn't seem to have broken a sweat.

"Twenty on the assault course, twenty on the track, and I want one hundred more push-ups from you. Your team can finish the raft."

Don't say anything back.

Don't say anything back.

Don't talk back.

"Lieutenant Sir, may I speak?" Jake asked.

"Permission denied," Mason said coldly before walking away.

"That guy is such a jerk. What did I do?" Jake said. He asked, "You know what?" and linked his arm with mine. I shrugged in sympathy. "I'm going to teach you how to hot wire a car tonight. His car." He pointed his chin at Mason. "Meet me outside shed thirty at nine o'clock. We'll take his Lamborghini for a late-night drive."

He gave me a sly smile, and I felt a fire inside of me. It was the same fire that gets my adrenaline pumping when I break the rules. But I was torn between keeping my promise to Mason to be good and having fun with Jake.

"Okay, Jake, that's enough!" Mason yelled. "I'm calling for a disciplinary slip." Jake let go of my shoulder right away.

He asked in a harsh voice, "For what?"

"Did I let you talk?" Mason yelled as he stormed over to us, standing tall and looking scary.

“Sorry, Lieutenant,” Jake said, looking down.

That was when I knew what I wanted to do. Mason was a jerk who was on a power trip, and I didn’t have to keep my promises to him. Jake and I were stealing his car tonight and going for a ride.

That idea made me very excited.

It was dark outside, and the solar panel lights on the sheds lit up the numbers. I followed the lights to shed number thirty.

“I was beginning to think you wouldn’t come,” Jake whispered. He was already outside his shed. He waved for me to follow him, and we quietly went through the hedge and around the staff buildings.

“Stop,” I said as we looked out from behind the shower block. We saw the commander walk down the path and into a group of offices. We couldn’t help but giggle like two bad school kids.

We drove into a small gravel parking lot. The back row was full of army tanks, and the next two rows were full of staff cars. Jake walked past all of them and stopped in front of a gold Lamborghini.

He moved his eyebrows up and down at me in a fun way, and then he looked at every square inch of the car. Jake did this out of spite. I ran my hand over the smooth, metal surface of Mason’s car.

I liked the Lamborghini and the colour that went with it.

“Is he rich?” I said, admiring the car.

Jake said, “He’s the Lieutenant,” as if that explained everything. Honestly, I had no idea how much these people made.

Jake slid a thin, black piece of metal into the window frame, and the car unlocked. He grinned at me in a playful way before opening the door.

I was already impressed that the doors opened up like butterfly wings instead of out.

“Easy! Now you try it on the other side,” he told me.

I walked around the car with the metal, copying Jake’s every move, but the car didn’t unlock.

“Keep it straighter and firmer,” he said in a whisper from the driver’s seat.

The car unlocked when I did what he said. I felt a rush of excitement go through my body. This adrenaline made my blood heat up. I got in the passenger seat and put on my seatbelt.

Jake pushed some buttons on the dashboard, and the roof started to move away, leaving us both exposed to the warm night air.

Page 12

Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 7:21 am

“Watch and learn. If you feel for this wire, it will feel about three millimetres thicker than the others. Pull it down and expose the copper inside. Then feel to the left; there’s one wire set aside from the others. Just put them together, twist them up, and—”

The engine roared to life, and Jake winked at me in a fun way. “Wallah!” he said as he stepped on the gas and the car started to move. My smile got bigger and bigger until it covered my whole face.

He drove out of the bootcamp through two big metal gates at the back entrance, and we drove down the country roads at a normal speed. I messed with the radio to find a good station at this hour.

“This car would sell for a lot of money,” Jake said with a smirk.

“Jake, we’re not selling his car. We need it to get back.” I stopped him right away.

I looked through his driving licence in the glove compartment.

“Mason Quinn. He’s twenty-two,” I said to myself. He was just two years older than me.

There were a lot of papers on the table, and I looked down at them out of curiosity.

“They drug test him at random times, and of course he passed all of them.” I said again as I looked over the negative drug sheets.

Jake told me, “They test us all for drugs at random.”

That’s good to know.

“What’s this?”

I took out a small black velvet box from the back and opened it. The prettiest ring looked back at me. It had small diamonds around the edge and a bigger round cut diamond in the middle. It shone even when it was dark.

“Wow,” I said softly.

I took it out of the box and put it on my finger, admiring how it looked on my hand.

I said to Jake, who was looking at me out of the corner of his eye, “It fits perfectly.”

“He’s engaged?” Jake asked in disbelief. I could see how shocked he was. It was hard to see Mason as a real person who had a life outside of giving orders and punishing people.

“He’s not engaged; the ring would be on someone’s finger instead of in his car. But maybe he plans to ask her to marry him.”

The thought made me sad for some reason, but I pushed it out of my mind.

“Maybe she turned him down, and that’s why he’s so cold. He was so hurt that he couldn’t be around people.”

I looked at my finger again. It was a really pretty ring. It looked like it cost a lot of money and shone like it was brand new. He obviously loved the person he bought this ring for very much.

“Let me drive,” I told Jake.

He smiled at me, and his baby face made me think of a bad schoolboy all the time. It was hard not to love his bubbly, fun personality. He had dark hair, grey eyes, and a smile that never left his face.

He stopped the car and we switched sides. I loved how the ring looked on my finger, so I gripped the steering wheel and hit the gas.

The car sped away, and I pressed harder, sending it to the floor. It sounded like a freaking race car! I could feel something pulling me back against the leather chair because we were going so fast. The wind hit our faces and blew my hair all over the place. I couldn't help but laugh because I was so scared, excited, and full of adrenaline.

Jake laughed and threw his hands up in the air like he was on a rollercoaster. “You're crazy, Riley!” he said.

I pushed down harder on the gas pedal and saw the small arrow dial of speed reach the end of the meter. The shape of the Lamborghini made us feel like we were going faster than we probably were.

I slowed down and brought the car back to normal speeds when we turned onto the narrower roads. I parked next to an empty field and got out of the car. I opened his trunk to see what was inside. Jake was curious and followed me outside.

“What is in there?” he asked.

“Nothing, just an extra uniform and boots.” I moved his clothes out of the way and grabbed a black briefcase, which I opened by pushing the clasp.

I said, “A gun?” in shock.

Jake walked quickly over to me and looked in the back of his car. A small black gun was in a small briefcase with foam padding around it. He looked at me like he didn’t understand, but then I closed the lid and put everything back where I found it.

“Before we go back to bootcamp, let’s find a fast food place.” He said, and honestly, it was the best thing I had heard since I got here.

This time he drove and cut through the roads like a blunt knife through butter. The car was a dream come true, but the person who owned it was a total nightmare.

We ended up at a McDonald’s drive-through on the side of the road. It was on the outskirts of town and was made for truckers and travellers passing through. I was practically bouncing in my seat after eating slop for the last few days.

“Riley, what do you want? A Big Mac and a Coke?”

“Large fries, a box of cheddar cheese bites to share, and a coke with no ice. Don’t forget the sweet and sour sauce,” I said into the intercom.

“No burger?” He looked at me like I was crazy.

I told him, “I don’t do burgers.”

“You are strange,” he said with a laugh.

We ate our food and then threw all the wrappers in the back seat of his car. Then we drove back and quietly put his car back where it was without getting caught.

He looked at the trash on the back seat.

“Should we throw it away?” Jake asked, and I smiled wickedly.

“Don’t do it. He’ll be confused and angry.” We both laughed and then got out of the car and went back to our own sleeping quarters without being seen.

Maddie woke me up and said, “The dogs are here.”

I sat up and looked around the room. The girls were getting ready in a hurry. The shed was still dark, and the sun hadn’t even come up yet.

I rubbed the sleepiness away from my face and said, “What?” A sparkle caught my eye right away on my hand.

Damn.

I took the ring off my finger and put it in my bra. How could I have forgotten to take the ring off?

“The dogs, get dressed.” Maddie threw my clothes at me, and I got dressed very slowly.

My roommates and I didn’t have to wait long before we were made to stand outside our shed in a queue. We weren’t the only ones standing at attention outside; every shed on the boot camp was doing it.

I kept my eyes on the road ahead and breathed in the cold night air as a group of guys with flashlights and sniffer dogs came up to me.

A man stood in front of Sierra and waved an electric wand over her body from her head to her toes. She didn’t move and stared straight ahead.

“Clear,” he said to Mason, who looked tired and was standing on the sidelines.

The guard did the same thing to Raven. “Clear.” He yelled again before coming to me.

He waved his wand over my body, but when it got to my breasts, a small red light came on and the wand made a loud noise. The guard turned to Mason and asked.

Damn it. Damn. Crap.

Page 13

Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 7:21 am

Mason said, “It’s okay, I know what those are,” without thinking. Everyone, including me, looked at him, and he looked scared when he realised what was going on.

“Eyes out front soldiers,” he said, and everyone instantly snapped back to attention.

“Go on,” he told the guard without needing to explain why.

I took shallow breaths and knew that my n****e piercings had saved me from going to jail. I have never been more grateful for my breasts in my whole life. But then the dogs showed up, pulling men behind them.

Damn.

“Hey buddy! You’re so cute, look at your little nose.” I bent down and rubbed the German shepherd’s head.

He was a little too into sniffing my breasts, but I think he mostly liked how playful my hands were and how happy they made him.

Mason yelled, “Rivers! Stand up straight right away and don’t talk to the sniffer dogs.” I stood up straight and backed up.

The dog put his two paws on my thighs and tried to jump to my breasts again. The guards exchanged glances.

“Get moving,” Mason said, and they did.

They obviously didn't find anything after checking every bootcamp recruit for hours.

I sat in the cafeteria with a bowl of slop in front of me. Jake sat down at my table and leaned in close.

He whispered, "You didn't put the ring back. What happened? Did they catch you?"

I looked up at Mason, who was standing to the side of the cafeteria and looking around the whole room.

There was something off about him today; his whiskey-colored eyes looked sad. But as always, he stood up straight and strict, with a deep frown on his forehead and a scary aura around him.

"No, I put it in my bra, and when the metal detector beeped, I thought it was my n****e piercings," I said.

He opened his eyes wide and then a smug smile pulled at one side of his mouth.

"And they didn't search you?" he asked.

"No. They know I have piercings in my nipples," I said quickly.

"How?" His eyebrows went up, and he was completely focused on what I was saying. He kept glancing down at my breasts.

"They just do." I didn't have a better answer without telling the whole shower story.

I looked back at Mason, and he was looking right at us. My heart raced. He looked sad, but he was also wearing a mask that kept his true feelings from showing.

“Can I see?” Jake asked, and he was able to get my attention away from Mason. My eyebrows knitted together in confusion until I figured out what he was asking.

“No,” I laughed and pushed his hand away.

He said with a smile, “You’re no fun.”

I looked at Mason again in secret, and he was still looking our way. His eyes were different today, which was the only sign of how he was feeling.

I had never really looked at them before. I had only seen him for the tough exterior he always wears. But at this moment, something about him seemed softer, almost weak.

The professional man is gone, and in his place is a person who is suffering inside and needs to come together.

I asked Jake, “Do you think the ring might have meant something to you?” He shoved a spoonful of slop into his mouth and swallowed it without chewing.

“It’s just a ring, Riley. I don’t think he’d want to remember that if his girl said no,” Jake said in a calm voice.

“But what if he was married or engaged and his girlfriend died or something?” I bit down on my lower lip and pulled it between my teeth as I thought of ideas.

“I guess they did make a big deal out of it this morning. It’s either very valuable or impossible to replace,” Jake said.

I made up my mind: “I have to give it back.” He dropped his spoon, and some food that couldn’t be eaten spread out across the table.

“Don’t you dare!” he yelled, not caring that his voice was loud. Jake said, “They’ll send you away. He’ll kill you. He has a gun in his car.”

“I have to do the right thing. I think he is sad,” I said with a sigh.

“Riley, he doesn’t get sad! He doesn’t have feelings. He’s not a person.” Jake looked worried and slowly turned his head towards Mason, then quickly turned it back to me, eyes wide. “Shit, he’s staring right at us. Do you think he knows?”

I asked, “How could he know?” in a calm voice. He let out a sigh.

“Okay, you want to give it back. Do it in secret. Go to his block when you know he’s not there and leave it somewhere where he can see it. He lives on block A, which is the third one along. I trust you can pick locks?”

I nodded. That was a good idea. It shouldn’t be too hard to sneak into his room, and that will stop me from getting any more punishments or doing his pointless punishments.

“I’ve made up my mind to leave now that he’s in here.” Jake looked at the food I hadn’t eaten yet.

He asked with a sly smile, “Can I eat that?” I stood up and pushed the plastic plate towards him.

He told me, “Don’t get caught.”

I took one look at Mason, whose eyes seemed to follow me as I left the cafeteria and went back to my room to get the ring from my trunk.

“Rivers!” I stopped in my tracks and stood still for one of the privates.

“There’s a phone call for you.” I rolled my eyes but went to the office anyway.

I wasted fifteen minutes of my valuable time telling my uncle about everything that happened at bootcamp and talking about the legal issues in my co-defendant’s case. I was finally able to finish my mission after that.

Sierra asked me, “Where are you going so fast?”

“I have to do something, and I’m running out of time.” I searched through my trunk for the loose piece of metal I had thrown in there with some clothes.

“Oh my god, is that what they were looking for? Whose ring is that?” she said as she came closer and took it from my hand to look at it.

I told her, “Shh. Don’t tell anyone.” I didn’t answer her questions.

“Of course they sent out a whole search party. The diamonds on this are amazing! The person who owns this ring must really like diamonds,” she said.

I put the ring back on and slipped it into my bra.

His annoying words came back to me.

“You’re not a diamond in the rough.”

“You don’t say,” I said quietly as I stood up before my own mind could make him feel bad enough to not want to give his ring back.

I told Sierra, “I’ll be back soon,” and then I left the shed and ducked through the hedge to get to the staff quarters.

Page 14

Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 7:21 am

I looked at the lock on his shed and kept an eye out for anyone who might be walking by. It was dangerous because it was the first time I had been on this side of the hedge during the day.

I pulled on the handle without thinking and saw that the door was unlocked. I pushed it open, stepped inside quickly, and closed the door behind me.

Mason's voice yelled from behind me, "What the f**k?" I closed my eyes and let the regret wash over me. Then I slowly turned to look at him.

He was sitting on a brown leather couch in front of a TV with a remote control in his hand.

I blinked at what I saw. It was strange because it looked so normal.

He got up and walked to the window. He looked out and turned his head to the left and right to see all the ways his street went. Then he took my hand and led me to the centre of the room.

His living space was small, but it looked like a palace compared to mine. There was a double bed against the back wall. It had a pine frame and a powder blue buffalo check duvet on it. To the left, he had three kitchen units that held a sink, a microwave, a coffee maker and a small fridge and freezer. In front of an old box TV was a three-person couch.

"You were in the cafeteria," I weakly pointed out.

His eyebrows shot up, and his face lit up with rage.

“I haven’t been in the cafeteria for half an hour. But you obviously wanted my spot empty, so what the hell are you doing here, Riley?”

He crossed his arms over his strong chest and squinted at me. I looked down at his boots and straightened up.

“Sorry, Lieutenant Sir. I messed up,” I said with confidence, just how he likes it.

“This is a huge mistake.”

Damn.

“Can I speak to the Lieutenant?”

He laughed.

His laughter echoed off the wooden walls of his home. They moved through my body, wrapping around me like a hug and squeezing me tightly.

He then remembered who he was and stopped laughing, bringing back all of his professionalism.

I kept my head down and stood up straight like a soldier. I’m going to get in a lot of trouble for this. I can only avoid being sent away so many times. This time, I was definitely gone.

“Why are you acting strange?” he asked. I looked up at him. His eyes were the same colour as the perfect snack, with hints of caramel and cocoa. I wondered if he was just as sweet under the tough exterior he wears.

“Isn’t that how you like to be called?” I asked in a confused way.

“No,” he said in a sharp voice. “Yes,” he said in response. “Since when have you ever followed the rules?” he finally said.

“I promised you I would because you didn’t tell your precious commander about me,” I said in a low voice.

He slowly looked around his living space, a smile on his face.

“And how are you keeping that promise so far?” he asked, a smile almost hidden on his lips.

I looked down again, feeling a little worse for breaking my promise to him. I promised to be the best soldier, but I took his car for a joy ride, stole his diamond ring, and broke into his private space.

I could feel his strong fingers gently grip my chin, and he slowly pushed my face up to look at him.

I felt butterflies in my stomach, and my lips parted slightly. I had never felt that way before.

“What are you doing here, Riley?” he asked in a serious voice that made my head hurt.

I slowly closed my eyes, took a deep breath, and then opened them again. Putting my hand down my T-shirt and grabbing the ring. Then I held my arm out and saw the diamonds sparkle on my hand.

Mason looked at my hand and took a few steps back. Then he blinked and blinked

again, as if he was trying to understand what his eyes were telling him.

“I didn’t mean to take it. I tried it on and then forgot to take it off. It was only this morning—”

“Shut up!” he yelled, and my whole body jumped in fear.

There was no sign of his rare kindness from a moment ago. The Lieutenant’s voice was back, strong and sharp.

He turned away from me and walked a few steps with his hands on his head. He was very angry.

“Do you have a personal grudge against me?” he asked, turning back to face me with his thick brow furrowing. He looked mad, and maybe even a little hurt.

“No, what?” I said in my defence.

“Is it because I treat you differently?” He ran his fingers through his short hair and walked around the room again.

“You do?” I said in a low voice.

“You take advantage of that,” he said, and I frowned. “I’m so dumb,” he said quietly to himself.

He stopped walking around and angrily took the ring from my hand. He stood up straight and took a deep, calming breath.

“Rivers, straighten up and look down.”

He yelled, and the force of his words sent thick gusts of air hitting my face.

I did what he told me to do.

He looked at my body. He told me to “tuck in your shirt.”

“Yes, sir,” I said, tucking my shirt into my waist.

He looked at me like he was sick of me; to him, I was just a dirty criminal.

“You stole my car. Who helped you?” He said through clenched teeth.

“Nobody,” I said quickly. “I did it by myself, Lieutenant Sir.” I remembered my manners.

He asked with a lot of anger, “Jake didn’t have anything to do with this?” I could tell from the way he spoke that he already knew Jake was involved. I would never say it out loud.

“I swear it was just me, Lieutenant.” I said without thinking.

He said in a cold voice, “I need you gone.”

“Okay, I can leave.” I turned towards the door, really grateful that he was letting me get away from him.

“No,” he said, stopping me. “I need you gone.” He said it again, this time in a more serious tone, and I knew he meant he needed me to leave the bootcamp.

I asked him quietly, “Are you going to tell the commander?” His eyes looked sad and full of regret.

“Do you leave me much choice, Riley? You s**k at drills, you always look at me, and you talk back.” A few lines of frown appeared on my forehead. I wanted to roll my eyes at his scolding, but for some reason I didn’t. I looked down instead. “When I punish you, I feel bad, but I don’t know why.” My head shot up right away, and my eyebrows went up.

“You left the bootcamp and got seven other girls to go with you. I couldn’t help but cover for you. You disrespect me on the pitch all the time, but I let it slide. You f*****g jumped in my shower. Do you know how off-limits that is? Do you know what I would lose if the commander found out?” My mouth fell open and I shook my head very slowly.

Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 7:21 am

“F**k! I almost gave up everything I had been working so hard to suppress. You know the level of control, the years of training it’s taken for my body to not be affected by that shit? Jesus! Then you come along in one moment I almost break it all. I nearly lost control.” I blinked at him, not fully understanding what he was talking about but my hunch was that it had something to do with his vow.

“I cover for you again, stupidly, and how do you repay me? By stealing my car and taking my ring. Jesus, if you were anyone else, you would have been gone by now and never thought of again.”

“I’m sorry, Mason.” I reached for his arm, but he pulled away.

“I’m giving you forty-eight hours to say goodbye while I make the arrangements and talk to the judge. I’m sorry, Riley, but I have to stay professional, and it seems that I can’t do that around you. You can’t be a diamond among the rocks.”

“I get it,” I said sadly. I turned back towards the door, but my fingers were still wrapped around the handle. I told him, “She’s lucky, your fiancé,” and pointed to the ring he was holding. He raised his eyebrows and looked at the ring.

“It’s not—” he stopped, not sure if he wanted to tell me what was on his mind. “It was my mom’s ring. She died when I was young.”

“I’m sorry,” I said quietly before leaving his house.

I chose not to tell anyone I was leaving and instead went back, lay down in bed, and fell asleep until morning.

I took a cold shower because I didn't want to take a warm one in the staff quarters again, and I ate a banana that looked pretty brown. It was actually one of the better meals on the whole bootcamp campus.

At exactly five hundred hours, my boots were digging into the ground in the field, and Mason was checking out my uniform like he does every morning. It was strange to know that tomorrow morning would be different. I would probably be sitting in the back of my uncle's police car, handcuffed, and scared out of my mind about what was going to happen next.

I was being judged by the one thing that had gotten me sent away in the first place on my last day of freedom. But I couldn't be angry because he had given me many chances and I had messed up every single one of them.

He made us march for half an hour, chanting to us as we walked on wet dirt and bumpy ground. I saw Jake looking at me from across the street and wanted to go tell him what happened with the ring, but he was on a different queue because he was taller than me.

Mason started yelling orders for the obstacle course pretty quickly.

I climbed over a ten-foot fence using my arm strength and then dropped to the other side. I ran, dodging used car tires, crawled under barbed wire that tore at my clothes, rolled around in wet mud like a pig, and climbed up a single thread of rope, ringing a bell at the top before jumping back down.

I was cold and sweaty, my lungs were gasping for air, and the ropes had burned my palms. Mason yelled for everyone to run forty laps of the track just when I thought it was over.

"What's going on?" Jake ran slower on purpose so he could jog next to me.

“I’m being sent away tomorrow morning,” I told him with a sad tone.

“Shit Riley, that sucks,” he said in a low voice.

“Jake, Rivers, you both just got ten more laps,” Mason yelled. I rolled my eyes, wiping the sweat off my forehead but continued running. “Gibbins ten extra laps. Pick up the pace Michaels.” Mason shouted again.

“Damn he’s in a bad mood today.” Amber whispered to Jake and I.

“Seems pretty normal to me.” Jake replied.

Amber joked, “He needs a good f**k.” We all started laughing, and Mason ran over to us.

“Drop and give me twenty!” We fell to the ground, having trouble doing the push-ups after the obstacle course and running on the track. The bootcamp today was terrible.

“So guys, I’m leaving tomorrow. I broke too many rules, and this is my last night of freedom.” Everyone in my dorm stopped what they were doing and looked at me.

“Riley, you can’t go!” Raven said.

“I don’t really have a choice.” I laughed, even though it wasn’t funny at all.

“Well, if this is your last night of freedom, we should go out and celebrate it by getting really drunk and forgetting everything.” I could feel my eyes lighting up with mischief.

“Let’s do it!” I said.

I had six beers and four shots of vodka. The little pub down the road was just as busy as it had been the last time. Since it was the only pub for miles around, it seemed like it would never go out of business.

“I’ll really miss this place,” I said to Maddie, who was sleeping next to me at the table.

Sierra laughed and said, “You’ve been here twice.”

“No, Sierra, shh.” I put my index finger over her lips, and she turned her eyes inward to look at it. “Why did he have to go to his stupid commander? I hate him for sending me away.”

“You did take his ring,” Sierra said behind my finger.

“Shhh. We don’t want to hear the facts. We were friends.” I took another shot. Amber and Sierra both laughed.

“Nobody is friends with the Lieutenant,” Amber said quietly. I shrugged.

“Maybe we weren’t, but we could have been. If he hadn’t been so scared of breaking the rules.” They all laughed again.

“Yeah, we could all be friends with him ... in a different life,” Sierra said.

“I know what,” I said, and then I burped. “No” isn’t going to work for me. Mason is going to be my friend.

“Hey, Mason!” they yelled with joy and laughter.

“No. More than friends. I—” I slurred and burped again. “I am going to—” I held my finger up in the air. “Seduce him.” I put my finger down on the table. The girls started to laugh.

“I’m only behind this plan because I know you’re leaving tomorrow anyway, so what harm can come of it?” Amber said in a funny voice. I agreed and nodded.

“Let’s go.” I stood up and swayed back and forth on the spot. Sierra put her hands on my body to keep me steady. But as soon as I got my balance, I left the bar. I was a girl on a mission and couldn’t be stopped.

I could hear the girls behind me talking and laughing, but I ran ahead down the dark dirt road back to boot camp.

I pulled on the door handle to get into our shed, and everyone else followed me in a few seconds later.

As Raven lay on the bed, she asked me, “Riley, you can’t be serious. What are you going to do?”

“I—” I took off my shirt and bra and threw them across the room.

“Am going to—” I took off my trainers and slid down my jeans and knickers. I stepped out of them and pushed them aside with my bare foot.

“Take off all your clothes.” Raven looked at my body and nodded.

“Girl, you’ve already done that,” she said with a laugh.

Page 16

Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 7:21 am

I sat down on the bed, but I almost missed it and fell to the floor. Sierra pushed my shoulder to get me to sit up straight.

I put on my combat boots and tied the laces.

“I would have liked heels better, but I don’t have any, so combat boots will have to do.” For the state I was in, I was able to say something that made sense. I hit my two booted feet together. “Are they shiny enough?” I asked.

Amber teased, “I don’t think he’s going to look at your shoes.”

I stood up straight again, or at least I thought I did. The whole room wasn’t, though; it swayed and spun.

“I’ll walk in there and tell him he’s earned twenty laps around my body.” Everyone laughed, even me.

“Riley, go to bed,” Amber said.

“No, I’m going to Mason. I’ll give you all a full report on his genitals tomorrow.” I nodded sternly and walked towards the door.

Sierra yelled, “Wait!”

She took a camouflage jacket off a hook on the wall and gave it to me.

“You can take it off in front of him for a big reveal. You’re going to need something

to keep you warm when they send you away in the middle of the night.”

I put on the jacket, which came down to just below my b**t, and tied it closed in front.

“We love you, Riley, and we’re going to miss you. Stay safe in prison.” They shouted their goodbyes, and I opened the door, letting the cold night air hit my almost bare body.

I slowly made my way through the hedge, not caring too much about sneaking around the staff quarters. Then I found his small living space.

I grabbed the door handle and pulled it open with all my strength.

I walked in and saw that the whole room was dimly lit. I saw a few candles here and there.

He was sitting on his couch watching TV and wearing only sweatpants. His chest tattoo was clearly visible. I held back a smile.

“Riley what—” he started to say, but I found the edges of my jacket and very slowly pulled it open and dropped it to the floor.

He looked at my whole body really slowly, and his eyes sparkled. I could hear him gulp from across the room, and he tightened his grip on the remote. His eyes glazed over with desire, and I walked over to him, got his full attention, and sat on his lap with my legs spread out on either side of his.

He put his hands on my waist, and his dark brown eyes moved between my lips and mine. I put my mouth on his, and he hesitated for a moment before fully committing.

He tasted like everything that was off-limits, which made it even sweeter. In the candlelight, his hand moved up my back, gripping my skin. I thought his kiss would be demanding, but he let me take the lead. It was almost like he wasn't sure if he wanted to go through with it, but he couldn't help himself.

He pulled away and looked at me with scared eyes.

"You're drunk," he said in a flat voice.

"Shh." I put my index finger on his lips. They felt warmer and fuller than Sierra's had earlier. He raised his eyebrows and gave me his best scary look, but it didn't work. He was at his most vulnerable right now, and no amount of fake emotions was going to make me forget that.

"God Riley!" He picked me up and put me down on the sofa, then stood up and looked through his drawers. "Why do you put me in these situations? You drive me crazy." He threw me one of his T-shirts, and I just looked down at it with disapproval.

"You're sending me away tomorrow. Can't we just have tonight?" I looked at the bed, and he followed my gaze.

"No, you're drunk. Put on the T-shirt. That's an order." I sighed and tightened my lips.

"So you'd f**k me if I weren't drunk?" I asked, not following his order.

He simply said, "No."

I got up, threw the T-shirt away, and walked over to him. I ran my hand down his chest and over his tattoo. It was an eagle flying with its wings spread wide, and it

looked really cool. I could feel his heart rate go up and his chest move faster under my hand.

“Why?” I whispered, and the heat between us grew. He swallowed and looked straight ahead, not looking at me and keeping his eyes straight as if he were talking to someone of higher rank.

“Riley, please don’t do this. I can’t.” He whispered, and the desire in his voice was louder than most of his orders.

“Because of the vow?” I laughed and said no to the silly idea.

“Because you’re a recruit and I’m the lieutenant, it’s wrong. I can’t abuse my position of power.”

“Because you promised not to?”

“Whoever told you that, it’s not true unless you hear it from me.”

He stepped back and opened the fridge. The bright light shattered the illusion of calm that had been in the room. He took a sip from a bottle of water.

“I can’t get involved with the recruits. I never have and I never will. I’m flattered; you’re beautiful, but I can’t go there.” He took another sip.

I took the T-shirt and put it on, then lay down on his couch. I looked at the TV, which was now off, and thought about when he had done that.

“You watch TV?” He laughed at my random question.

“Of course I do.” He came over to me and sat down on the arm of the couch,

probably to keep his distance from me.

I really wanted to know, so I asked, “What else do you do that normal people do?”
“Do you eat?” He laughed again.

“I eat. I shower. I shit. I shave.” His whole face looked softer. I had never noticed how tense his shoulders were before, but now they were relaxed.

“Do you feel things that other people do?” I asked, and he frowned. “Are you sad?”

“Yes.”

“Are you jealous?”

“Yes.”

“Do you get turned on?”

Pause.

“Yes.”

“You hesitated,” I said with a smile.

“I don’t do anything about it when it happens, but I’ve learnt to keep it under control.”

“What—”

“God, why am I telling you this? You need to leave.” I laughed so hard that my stomach hurt. He just looked at me with a blank look. I got up and walked to his bed,

and he watched me carefully the whole time.

There wasn't a single wrinkle in his sheets, and each edge was tucked in tightly.

I asked, "Is it okay if I take a short nap?" as I kicked off my boots and pulled back the duvet. He walked back and forth in the room.

He said, "No, it's not," but I had already gotten under the covers.

His bed was a lot more comfortable than mine. He had a mattress, but I only had springs. He had cotton sheets, but I had scratchy fibre. His bed smelt like him, fresh. I moved around to make my body comfortable and closed my eyes.

Page 17

Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 7:21 am

“Riley, I said no.” He fought back and tried to take the blankets from me.

“Riley, you can’t be here. You have to go back.” He yelled again, and I kept my eyes shut tight.

“Are you listening to me?” The longer I kept my eyes closed, the more distant his voice became. “Rivers?” It was just a distant whisper now. “Will—”

My mouth was so dry it felt like cardboard or sandpaper. I squirmed down in the mattress. I haven’t slept this well in weeks. I slowly opened my eyes so that they could get used to the dark around me.

Then I saw his face. The angry look on his face. Two eyes that looked like wet dirt blinked at me. His nostrils flared and his jaw clenched. It was really creepy. He pulled a chair over, put it at the foot of the bed, and sat there staring at me while I slept.

“Hi?” I said quietly, and my throat sounded very rough.

I could hear him breathing, but he didn’t say anything. I thought for a second that I was dreaming.

I whispered again, “What are you doing?”

“Thinking about killing you in a lot of different ways and at a lot of different times,” he said calmly.

“Come to bed.” I reached out from under the covers and clasped my hands a couple of times. He looked at my hands and then his forehead furrowed.

“Riley, you shouldn’t even be here. You need to go back to your room, and I’m not getting in bed with you.” He leaned back in his chair and ran his finger over his stubble.

“Mason, it’s the middle of the night. Please stop being so standoffish and get in bed. The wake-up siren will be playing soon, and you need some sleep. How else are you going to have the energy to beat us on the pitch?” I pulled back the covers, and he looked at the empty space next to me. I waited for him to decide what to do.

“In bed... with you?” he asked, sounding unsure. I nodded.

I promised, “You won’t even know I’m here.” He stood up from the chair and walked to the bed after thinking about it for a few more seconds. Just as he was about to get in, I threw the blanket back down in front of him. He stopped moving. “Could you please get me some water first?” I asked with a smile.

“Ugh, Riley!” he groaned. I tried not to smile, but the good Lieutenant did what I said and got his water bottle from earlier. I took a small sip and then lay back down next to him under the covers.

“I shouldn’t be doing this.”

I snuggled up to him and held my hand over his strong chest. I could only hear him sighing loudly before I fell back asleep.

My eyes flew open when an alarm clock went off.

I yelled at Mason, who was lying next to me and staring at me, “What the f**k!” I

quickly backed away, and a slow, sexy smile spread across his face.

“You look so innocent when you sleep. It’s strange,” he said.

“Who stares at someone while they sleep?” I sat up in his bed, my long dark hair falling loosely around my shoulders and his big T-shirt hugging my body.

“You know you talk in your sleep?”

He got out of bed and grabbed onto one of the wooden beams that hung from the roof. He started to pull his body weight up and down, and I couldn’t look away. I bit down on the soft flesh of my lips to keep my feelings in check as I watched his torso muscles tighten and relax.

I mumbled, “What did I say?” as if I were talking to his abs. He got off the bar and I could see his eyes again.

“We need to get you out of here before anyone finds out you spent the night.” He didn’t answer my question. He made himself a cup of coffee while I rubbed my eyes.

“I’ll have one of those,” I said, but he shook his head and only filled one cup. “Or not,” I said under my breath as he drank his black coffee with no sugar.

“Do you remember what happened last night?” He lay down on the bed and put his head on his elbow. I looked around the room with my eyes.

I was wearing one of his old blue T-shirts, but I knew I was completely naked underneath it. I could see my boots next to the bed, but I couldn’t see any other clothes.

“I went to the bar and drank too much.” I started to explain what had happened that

night.

“You went back to the bar!” he yelled, sitting up and holding the cup tighter. I didn’t pay any attention to his outburst.

“We were making fun of you because you were such a tough guy and needed to get laid. So I said I’d take one for the team. I guess that’s what happened here?” I pointed to what I was wearing.

“Wait,” he said in a threatening way. “Are you saying that someone knows you came here last night?” He stood up, moving slowly and carefully. I lay down in his bed.

“Just my roommates,” I said without thinking.

His eyes got bigger, and he whistled in a strange way through his lips. Then came some fast breathing.

“Don’t worry; I’m not going to see any of them again. You’re sending me away this morning, so they’ll just think I left last night.”

He looked at me with worry in his beautiful eyes and his jaw was tight.

“Riley,” he said with a sigh, “I never asked for you to be moved.” My mouth dropped open and I sat there in silence.

“You didn’t?” He shook his head and sat on the end of the bed, taking it all in. I crawled up to him and put one hand on each of his cheeks.

“Hey, it’s okay. Stop worrying.” His amber eyes blinked back at me with concern, and I leaned down to kiss his soft lips. He pulled away from me, saying no.

“Riley,” he said with a grunt. I took a chance and smiled.

“So you can f**k me last night but not kiss me this morning?” I said in a sarcastic tone.

“Nothing happened last night,” he said, standing up and moving away. He went to the washbasin and began to brush his teeth.

“Can I use your toothbrush?” he said, and then he turned to me with a look that said, “Are you serious?”

“No,” he said firmly.

He looked in his drawer and found some sweatpants, which he threw at me.

“Here’s what we’re going to do.” He looked at the watch on his wrist and then back at me. “You’re going to go pretend to sleep behind the cafeteria, and I’ll send one of the generals to find you and bring you to the bootcamp field. You’ll tell your roommates you never even made it to my quarters. I’ll have to punish you to make it look real.”

I sucked in my lips and breathed through my nose. I said, “Or we could just say nothing happened.”

“You don’t know what he’s like,” Mason said quietly as he shook his head.

“Who?” My whole face twisted in confusion.

“My father,” he said in a flat voice.

“Who is your father?” I didn’t get it at all.

He raised his eyebrows and looked at me like I should already know the answer.

“The boss.”

At that moment, everything made sense. The likeness was scary. They were both tall, had sharp features, brown eyes, and bodies that were very muscular. They both looked powerful. Mason was just like his dad when he was younger.

Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 7:21 am

“Is all of this just a way to impress your dad, or do you really care about your job?”

His face got hard and his shoulders straightened. He quickly raised his guard and pulled all of his feelings out of his eyes. He coughed.

“Stand to attention, soldier,” he yelled. I stared at him with no expression. “Now Rivers.” I didn’t want to, but I got out of bed and stood up straight, putting my hand on my head. “Um... the T-shirt rises up,” he said, his voice shaking and his face turning red. I let go of my arm and pulled on his big sweatpants.

I changed the subject and asked, “Behind the cafeteria?” He nodded. “Be quick sending the general.” I tucked the bottom of his trousers into my boots and left, avoiding the many staff members who were walking around the quarters this morning. I was lucky enough to get behind the cafeteria without anyone seeing me. I lay down in the foetal position and closed my eyes.

“Rivers! Wake up.” I jumped up and said something that didn’t make sense. “Have you been drinking? He’s really going to have your tits for this,” the general said in a low voice.

“No, I passed out. I think I’m sick. I need medical.” The general looked down at what I was wearing and stayed quiet for a few seconds while he took it all in. “Did you sleepwalk?” he asked.

“Uh, I can’t remember. I’m so confused. I think I’m going to pass out again.” I sucked in my lips so I wouldn’t smile at how stupid he was. He used his walkie-talkie.

“This is yellow swan calling for red dog.” Mason answered right away.

“This is red dog answering yellow swans call, what’s up general?” My desire to smile only grew stronger.

“Sir, I’ve found Rivers. She looks a little weak. She was passed out and is asking for medical help. May I be so bold as to say that she doesn’t seem to be in good spirits at all?”

“She’s fine, general. Take her to the field.” I grumbled and fell to the floor again, closing my eyes.

“Sir, she has passed out again. She needs medical help.” Mason actually sighed into his walkie-talkie. I could picture how angry he would look. I had to bite my cheek to keep from laughing out loud.

“Okay, general. Send her back to bed and call a doctor to check on her. Let all the recruits know that I will be stopping by their quarters at 1700 hours. Over and out.”

The dumb general helped me back to my dorm and put me in bed. It felt even worse now that I had slept in Masons’ bed, which was a luxury. A nurse came in a little while later and checked my temperature, blood pressure, and pulse rate. Everything was fine.

“I’ll tell the Lieutenant that your body crashed because you worked too hard.” She smiled sweetly at me.

“I know he’ll love that,” I said in a croaky voice.

“Get some sleep; you’ll be fine by tomorrow.”

I closed my eyes and enjoyed the rare quietness of my room. I also felt smart for coming up with this clever plan.

“Rivers!” He yelled right next to my ear, making my heart drop out of my mouth.

I yelled in a high-pitched voice, “You f*****g idiot!” while holding my heart.

He began to laugh.

I got out of bed and looked around. The sun was setting behind the thin glass windows, and my room was empty.

“That’s not how you should talk to your Lieutenant,” he said quietly.

He pulled over a chair and sat down next to my bed, putting his feet up on the frame.

“How was your day of nursing your hangover all by yourself in bed?” I yawned and stretched.

“Yes,” I said with a proud smile.

“That was smart; you got away with everything. You do know you’re going to really make up for that tomorrow?” My smile faded, but his smile grew.

I said, “Do you like hurting people?”

“It’s my favourite thing to do,” he said with a laugh.

When the door opened, you could hear muffled laughter and voices coming through the wooden walls. Mason jumped up from his chair right away and stood up straight. He acted like he was doing something wrong and was going to get caught. Sierra,

Raven, and Amber walked in, saw Mason, and then stopped talking.

They stood at attention.

“At ease, soldiers,” Mason said in a stern voice.

His voice was back to being authoritative, his posture was tense, and his face was completely straight.

“It looks like Rivers is feeling a little sick. Make sure she doesn’t cause any more trouble tonight.” He saluted the room and left.

The girls calmed down right away and ran over to my bed.

They asked me a lot of questions, like, “Oh my god! What the f**k happened? Why are you still here?”

I shrugged. “I woke up this morning at the back of the cafeteria and told the general I fainted. He gave me a day in bed to get better.” I hoped they couldn’t see through my lie.

Sierra said, “You lucky bitch! The Lieutenant went so hard on us today. It’s like he knew we were all hungover or something.”

I picked up a bottle of water from the floor and started drinking it to keep my lips busy. I was so happy that I had a break from the awful bootcamp.

Amber said, “Let’s toast some s’mores tonight.” They’re giving some away in the cafeteria right now, and the guys are loading up on them to give away later.

“Sounds nice,” I said quietly as I got up and grabbed my shower caddy. “I’m going to

take a shower,” I said. The girls laughed and shook their heads.

It took me about an hour to wash and blow dry my hair. It had become my safe place here. It made me realise how much I’ve missed taking hot showers in the last few days.

I folded Mason’s clothes neatly and put them in a bag. Then I opened the door to make sure no one was around before I walked through the staff quarters and stopped at Mason’s shed on the way back to my own.

“Wow!” He yelled when I opened the door and walked in.

“Sorry, I can’t just knock and wait for you to answer.” I said, looking away from his almost naked body. I’m sure he was still getting dressed, but at a faster pace.

“Your hair looks freshly washed and blow dried.” The way he said it made it sound like he was accusing her of something.

“Do you want me to answer that or just say thank you?” He shook his head and rolled his eyes.

He cleverly decided to say, “Don’t answer that.”

I gave him the plastic bag, and he took it and looked inside with interest. “Your clothes,” I awkwardly pointed out.

He threw the bag on the floor and sat on the end of his bed, rubbing lotion into his hands. I held back a smile at this tough, professional, man’s man who was proud of how he looked.

“You know you’re going to get caught sneaking around here, there, and everywhere.”

I put my hands up to protect myself.

“I promise this is the last time I’ll come here.” He straightened his lips into a thin line and nodded.

I was about to leave when I looked back at him. “Tonight the recruits are making s’mores around a campfire. Why don’t you join us?” His brows knitted together and his eyes narrowed.

“Riley, you can’t make open fires without supervision,” he said to me suddenly.

“Oh.” That was all I could say in response.

Page 19

Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 7:21 am

My lips made a perfect “O” shape, and there was only silence after that as I realised I had ruined the camp’s plans.

“Then that is definitely not what we are going to do,” I said, and I didn’t sound like I meant it at all.

I could see him trying not to smile, but his lips were twitching.

“I’ll keep an eye on things,” he said.

“I suggested, “Or you could join in.”

“I will supervise,” he said again, making his role clear.

This was a big bonfire in the middle of a field made by two arsonists. I thought it was a small campfire. Mason had pulled out at least forty generals and privates to keep an eye on things, and they all stood at attention all over the pitch.

“I can’t believe he said yes to this,” Sierra said. I looked over at Mason, who was standing close by and looked very stiff and on guard. “How did he know?” I shrugged.

“Rumours spread quickly,” I said in response.

“He’s so freaking hot.”

She looked at him from head to toe and bit her lips like she was looking at a chocolate cake. I laughed.

“I bet he would make you call him Lieutenant in bed, look down, and say you’re a bad girl and give you all the punishments.”

I laughed even harder and looked at him again. He still didn’t look comfortable at all.

Maddie came over and licked around her s’more. “What are we talking about?”

“How dominating the Lieutenant is,” I said right away.

“Yes, I would love for him to spank my a*s and bend me over.” I shook my head in disbelief. “I wish he was easier to talk to,” she said.

“Well, have you tried talking to him? He’s totally open to talking.” They laughed at me, like my idea was the dumbest thing they’d ever heard.

“No way, he’s scary. I might get extra laps just for saying hello,” Sierra said under her breath.

“Watch and learn, ladies.” I stood up and walked to the bonfire, where I made a s’more with graham crackers, chocolate, and a marshmallow. I warmed it up by the bonfire until it was gooey and tasty, and then I walked over to Mason, feeling like my friends were watching me.

Mason kept his eyes open and looked at everything that was going on. As I got closer, his body twitched a little, but he didn’t move.

“I made you a s’more,” I said, but my voice sounded small and quiet.

“I don’t want it, Rivers.” He said this loudly and kept his eyes on the road.

“Rivers?” I asked in a low voice.

He didn’t move, so I held the S’more up to his nose and waved it around. He kept his eyes on the road and his body stiff.

“Are you sure? It’s really good.”

I could hear Sierra and Maddie laughing from far away. I turned to look at them and laughed too. Mason’s jaw was tight with anger.

“Fine, your loss,” I said, and then I ate the dripping marshmallow.

He only moved his eyes to look at me for a second before pointing them back out front.

“I heard you,” he said in a stiff voice, as if he was trying not to move his lips as he spoke. “Talking with them about... me.” He spoke so softly now that it sounded like a mumble.

I asked, “Oh. Are you mad at me for that or something?” His eyes got a little bigger, but in the end he didn’t do anything.

“No,” he said. “But it’s an odd choice of conversation.” I laughed without thinking.

“Mason, your d**k and what you do with it take up at least 90% of our conversations. They think you’re hot.”

I licked more sticky marshmallow. He looked at me for a split second before going back to what he was doing.

“And you?” I asked, my brows furrowing in confusion.

I asked quietly, “What?”

“Do you?” he asked again.

I sucked my lips in to stop my smile from getting bigger.

“No, don’t answer that. That was... uh... too much.”

I could have answered him right away, but now that I knew he wanted to know, I wanted to keep it from him and let him stew.

“Stop bothering me, Rivers, or I’ll put out this bonfire and call for lights out.” He was back to his normal loud, bossy voice.

“Keeping your reputation, I see,” I said under my breath before walking away and joining my friends.

I stood in line with the other recruits while Mason and the other privates paired up the troops based on their size and/or skill level.

I was getting impatient and couldn’t help but let out a few sighs here and there. People around me disappeared in pairs until I was the only one left.

“Ahh, Rivers,” Mason said, looking over his charts. God only knows why, since it was clear that I was the only one left without a partner. “We seem to have an odd number of people. That’s a puzzle.”

One of the privates said, “I could partner with her Lieutenant Sir.” Mason looked at him.

“There’s no need, Private. I guess this is a good chance for me to help her improve her skills. She has a lot of work to do.”

I put my lips together.

Don’t say anything back.

Don’t say anything back.

Don’t say anything back.

I didn’t miss the smile that made Mason’s lips twitch.

“Left, right left, left, right left!” Mason yelled, telling me to march. I stepped in queue next to him and marched straight to the lake. As soon as the privates couldn’t see us anymore, I stopped marching and walked next to him. He asked in his normal voice, “Did I tell you to stop marching?”

I said, “No, but I guess I need a lot of work.”

He laughed out loud, but it was a splutter. “Get in the raft, dummy.” He pointed to a small orange boat for two people that was floating on the river. I wasn’t very sure about it, but I stepped in and carefully sat down on one of the seats. He got in on the other side of me.

“I can’t believe I’m stuck with you. Everyone else is probably just lying on the bank and getting some sun. You’re making me get into this death trap and float up the river.”

“You will be rewarded with better health and skill.” He said this with a shy smile, and his neck turned red with embarrassment until it reached the tips of his ears.

“I’d rather get a golden tan.” He picked up the ore and gave me one as we rowed up the river. It hurt my arm a little at first, but thanks to his strength, we were able to move at a decent speed.

“Uh, Mason?” He turned to me, looking calm and relaxed. His dark blonde hair blew in the wind, and in the sun, his eyes looked almost golden.

“Shouldn’t the water be outside the boat?” I asked as I splashed in the puddle that was getting bigger around my feet. He looked down at the floor, and all of a sudden he wasn’t so carefree anymore.

“Shit,” he said quietly, looking around for the source of the hole.

Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 7:21 am

As more and more water filled the raft, I could feel it sinking deeper and deeper into the water. The force of the water then pushed the boat over, tipping us all the way into the lake. I came up and coughed out the water that had gotten into my lungs.

Mason asked, looking as serious as ever, “Are you okay?” I nodded and held on to a rock so I wouldn’t be swept away. “We’ll have to swim with the current; there’s a cave up ahead. Someone will come looking for us sooner or later.”

It was looking really nice to lay out in the sun on the riverbank right now.

We got to the cave quickly, and the swim wasn’t too hard because we were going with the current instead of against it.

I climbed up on the rocky bank and took off my wet, cold clothes. I laid them out in the sun to dry. He stood there awkwardly, not knowing where to look.

“There is room for yours,” I said.

“I can’t take my clothes off in front of you.” I rolled my eyes at how shy he was.

“Mason, we’ve really showered together.” He took off his boots and T-shirt and put them out in the sun.

“Not by choice, and I’m on duty.” He sat down on the floor and leaned against a big rock to try to get the water out of his army trousers.

“Where did you get that?” He ran his thumb over a scar just above my ankle. I took

my foot away.

“Please don’t look at my body. It makes me feel bad about myself.” His eyebrows shot up and a smile spread across his face.

He asked, “You feel bad about your body?”

“Is that really so hard to believe?” I raised one eyebrow, daring him to answer carefully.

“Uhm, yes. You literally take off your clothes any chance you get. I’ve seen you naked more times than I’ve seen myself naked.” I started laughing at how much he was overdoing it.

“I don’t!” I said in my defence. “I didn’t know you took my shower while I was naked. I wouldn’t have done that if I wasn’t drunk the other day.”

“And now?” He moved his fingers over my body.

“Now I’m wet! I kept my pants on!” I said, pulling at the waistband of my pants. He looked at the entrance to the cave and asked, “How long do you think it will be before someone finds us?”

“Could take a while; boot camp doesn’t end until five.” I sighed and took the hair tie out of my hair to let the wet strands fall free.

“Can’t you just get on your walkie-talkie thing?” I pointed to his pants, where he usually kept it. I didn’t know if it would work after being in water, but it was worth a shot. But there was nothing in the slot, which made me look confused.

“I left it on the bank,” he said in a casual way.

I asked slowly, “You left it on the bank?” My lips curled at the edges.

“Well, I... uh... set it down and forgot to pick it back up before getting into the raft.” I bit my lip to keep from smiling too much. This was on purpose.

I stood up, walked over to him, and sat down on his lap. His eyes moved around my face, and they stayed on my lips longer than usual.

“What are you—” he started to say, but I kissed him softly on the lips, feeling the soft warmth of his two beautiful pink pillows. He sat perfectly still, not moving his lips or trying to kiss me back.

I pulled back to look at him. “I don’t get it,” I said. “You planned all of this: me not having a partner, the boat sinking at the exact time and place that the current would bring us to this cave, and you forgetting your walkie-talkie so you couldn’t call for help. You wanted us to be alone, why else would you want to f**k?”

“Riley—” I got off of him and moved to the other side of the cave. “I can’t,” he said in a sad voice.

“Then why?” He stood up, and his trousers were dripping water all over the floor.

He said, “I don’t know why,” and I sighed and sat down on a rock nearby.

“I just... like you,” he said quietly, looking like he was confused about what he was saying.

“I like talking to you and being around you. I made a mistake. It won’t happen again,” he said, as if he was explaining it to himself and not me.

And then I couldn’t stop thinking about how lonely Mason was.

I asked quietly, “You don’t have any other friends?”

He shook his head.

“Do you not talk to any of the other high-ranking officers?”

He shook his head again and ran his index finger over his stubble.

He said, “You can’t be their friend and their boss at the same time.” “But I can’t be your friend and your Lieutenant at the same time, so I messed up. I’m sorry.”

“You didn’t have to do all of this to hang out with me. You could have just asked me.” He smiled nervously at me.

“Don’t you get it? I’m not allowed to spend time with you, Riley. I’m supposed to give you orders and deal with your punishments. I’m supposed to train you to be a soldier. I’m not allowed to be distracted or show human emotions. I took an oath. The commander sees it this way: I’m up here,” he said, holding his hand above his head, “and you’re down there.” He lowered his hand to just below his knees. “You’re a criminal because you held up a store at gunpoint. You’ve broken the rules over and over since you got here. Why would I want to be friends with someone like that?”

“Nobody is asking you to be.” I said, crossing my arms over my chest in defiance.

“I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to,” he said as he walked over to me. “Maybe I did,” he added. “No,” he said to himself. “I don’t know why I would want to be friends with someone like that, but I do. I really do.”

“That’s not much better,” I said coldly, and he looked down. “But it’s a start,” I said.

I lay on my back and looked up at the concrete roof. Mason had gotten a fire going,

and things weren't going well between us. We haven't talked much in the last half hour.

"So you know everything about me, huh? Tell me something about yourself." I finally got the guts to start talking. He turned his head away from the flames, which had been mesmerising him, and I rolled onto my side, using my elbow to support myself.

He said in a straight voice, "I can't talk about my private life." I let out a loud, angry grumble. I sat up, crossed my legs, and moved closer to the fire.

"What was it like to have the commander as your dad?" A brief flash of emotion crossed his face, but then the soldier in him came back out. He straightened up, tensed his shoulders, and looked away.

"Riley," he said in a stern voice.

Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 7:21 am

“Is it really that bad to let me in? We’re stuck in a cave in the middle of nowhere, and no one else is here. Who will know what we talk about?”

I got up and walked to the cave entrance, looking up and down the river for a boat to rescue me. I couldn’t see one, so I just felt my clothes to see if they were dry. I put on my T-shirt and went back to my spot in front of the fire.

“It was...hard,” he said, taking a break for effect or to get the courage to keep going. “I was born here, into this. My mum was a medic and my dad was a private. He worked his way up the ranks over the years and by the time I was born he was the Lieutenant.”

I nodded along and listened closely to what he had to say. He clearly loved his mother very much because I could see the passion in his eyes when he talked about her.

“My mum didn’t like how he treated me. She wanted me to go to school and hang out with kids my own age. She didn’t want me to train. But she got sick and died when I was five, so my dad had to make all the choices on his own.

“I apologise,” I said softly.

“I never went to school. I lived at the camp and never left it. They treated me like a criminal here, like one of the soldiers. I trained on the assault course for twelve hours a day, starting when I was five.

It was hard for me as a kid because there were no toys, games, or kids my age here. I

was raised in the military, and I think my dad forgot that I didn't actually do anything wrong.

I ate slop, just like everyone else. I couldn't leave, I couldn't live in the staff quarters, and I couldn't use the hot showers. I got in trouble, and he was really hard on me. He might have been even harder on him than on anyone else.

"That's awful," I said. He shrugged.

He said, "It's all I knew." "When I turned sixteen, I was a major, and it was the first time we started getting recruits my age." I couldn't hang out with them or make friends because I was now a rank. Not that they wanted to.

They saw me as an officer whose job it was to keep them on the straight and narrow. They made my life hell, and I couldn't get away from them because I had to eat, sleep, and shower with them.

I stayed professional and gave them punishments and discipline, which made them hate me even more. But I wanted to make my father proud. The more he treated me like a criminal, the more I wanted to show him I wasn't one. But to this day, nothing I do is enough.

"It sounds like your life has been very lonely, Mason." The staff here didn't accept you; they thought you were a criminal. The criminals only saw you as staff.

"Yeah, I guess."

"Who did you trust?"

He shuffled around awkwardly and didn't say anything.

“Where was your help?””

Be quiet.

“Did you have any friends at all?”

“I’m not here for that.” When I turned twenty, I became a lieutenant. When my father retires, I will be in charge. I can’t have friends.

“But do you want to take over, or do you have to?””I asked gently, and he paused for a few quiet minutes to think about everything before he answered.

“It’s hard to say. I don’t know anything else. This is what I was meant to do, and it’s who I am. I can’t picture living any other way. Like my father and his father before him, I was born into the military. I will die in the military, but the difference is that I won’t have any kids along the way. I will be the last one in the cycle.

“I’m sorry you don’t think you’re good enough for your dad, but I can tell you from experience that you are. “You don’t talk to people, you’re good at giving orders, and don’t get me started on the punishments.” He smiled proudly, but his eyes didn’t show it.

“My dad is hard to make happy. I mean, look at me now; I’m talking to you. Letting you see me, call me by my first name, and ignore my orders. “You’re right, Dad. I do s**k at my job.”

“You can let someone in. “I just wish you would open up completely.” He smiled at me.

I lay on my back and looked at the ceiling again. We had some quiet time together. I threw a ball of socks into the air and caught it, and he poked the fire.

“So you didn’t promise not to f**k the recruits?”

He laughed and showed me his perfect teeth.

“Riley,” he said in a warning tone.

“Come on, what else do we need to do here besides talk?” I got on my knees and moved around. “You ask me questions, I ask you questions, and our answers get lost in this echoey cave. Deal?”

He thought about it for a while and then sighed.

“When I became a lieutenant, I had to swear that I wouldn’t have any kind of relationship with any of the recruits, even s****l ones.” I put my hand on a Bible and swore.

“Do you believe in God?” I asked.

“...no,” he said, as if he was questioning his own choices. “But that’s not the point.” It’s not right for me to get involved with the recruits.

“So you just have random one-night stands with people you meet at the bar?”

“Not really,” he said, making a face that showed he wasn’t sure. “I shared a bunker with seven other guys when I was a teenager, so I had to learn a lot of self-control.”

“Now I just hold it back.”

“Suppress the feeling of being turned on?”

“We shouldn’t be talking about this because these questions are very personal.”

“Wait, so you’ve never been with any of the new people? – like in secret?”

“No, Riley, never.” “I can’t show them my o****m face one day and then make them run track the next. It just wouldn’t work.” He laughed and dismissed the craziness right away. I laughed too, because the word “o****m” on his lips sounded so strange.

“Lieutenant, do you have an ugly o****m face?” “I was joking.”

“I can honestly say I’ve never seen it, but I can’t imagine it looks good.”

“Right now, show me how to fake an o****m.”

“What? No! You’re so weird!” He laughed.

“Go on, you coward. I’ll show you mine. Watch.” I squinted my eyes and crinkled my eyebrows, biting my lip and letting out a small moan from the back of my throat.

Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 7:21 am

He stopped smiling right away and looked at my face with great interest, his eyes full of desire.

“Now you,” I said, and then I laughed again.

“F**k Riley, I can’t do that.” The fire’s light made his cheeks turn pink.

“Go on,” I said as I poked him.

He closed his eyes, took a deep breath, and then let it out without opening his mouth. He still made a noise with the back of his throat that you couldn’t hear.

I laughed out loud. “Good thing you’re not a woman; you could never get away with faking it.”

“You often pretend?” He asked, and then his eyes grew wide with fear as he realised what he had said. “I’m sorry, don’t answer that.” That was a bad question.

“I’ve been with a lot of men who didn’t have a clue what they were doing.” I believe that every woman has learnt how to fake it over time.

“Oh.” He went back to poking the fire in an awkward way.

We heard a boat’s horn not too far away, and we both got up and ran to the door.

“Stay inside and get dressed,” he said, putting on his wet T-shirt. He left the cave and waved his hands in the distance as he threw me my trousers.

He pushed me back when I tried to follow him.

“Put on some clothes before you come out here. They’ll see.”

“Does it really matter?” I could just tell them they were wet, I said to myself as I stepped into the wet trousers.

He looked at me for a second, frowned, and then looked back at the boat.

As I zipped up the crotch, he said, “You don’t want those pervs looking at your panties.”

The boat dropped anchor next to the cave, and I could see Mason’s posture change right in front of me.

The carefree, relaxed attitude was gone.

The Lieutenant had returned.

“I can’t believe you brought p**n magazines here instead of clothes or food.” I lay on Jake’s bed and flipped through his magazines while he sat down next to me and looked down at the page.

“I have a whole stash; my roommates and I trade them off.” I turned to look at him and made my best “what the heck?” face.

“How do you do it when there are a lot of people around?” I asked, remembering my earlier conversation with Mason.

“I don’t. We have to go to the toilet to do it. It’s not very nice. I know how to have a quiet one in the middle of the night, but it’s not easy and I can’t really get my

magazines out. So we mostly just go to the toilet. “She’s my favourite,” he said, pointing to the middle page spread. “Spread” was the right word to describe the picture.

I made a joke and said, “She looks mad.”

He lay down next to me, squeezing into his single bed while I flipped through more pages of naked women. I took my time reading the short paragraphs and descriptions on each page.

We looked up when the door opened, thinking that one of Jake’s roommates had come back from the cafeteria earlier than expected. But when a general walked in, we were both shocked into silence.

He looked around the room until he found us, and then a dangerous look crossed his face. At first, neither of us did anything, but after a few minutes, Jake jumped to his feet and stood at attention.

“What’s going on here?” He asked coldly.

I sat up in Jake’s bed and looked at the general, then at Jake, and finally at the p**n that was lying out in the open.

“Rivers, when I walk into the room, you stand up straight.” He yelled angrily.

I got up and stood at attention.

“Can I talk to you, General Sir?” Jake asked.

“Permission granted.” The general walked over to him and stood right in front of his face.

“I’m sorry, General Sir, but your visit is very unexpected.” He looked at me and then back at Jake.

“Yes, I can see that,” he said with a sneer. “You know that male and female recruits can’t mix in private quarters.” I rolled my eyes and waited for him to give me more laps or go cry to Mason. “Did you just roll your eyes at me, Rivers?” “Shit.”

I said, “No, sir.” I kept my eyes completely still, even though I wanted to roll them again.

“This is black pigeon calling for red dog,” he said over the walkie-talkie. I turned to look at him, but his eyes stayed on Jakes. The general sounded arrogant, like he was on a serious power trip.

“This is red dog answering black pigeons call.” I knew right away that it was Mason’s voice.

“Lieutenant Sir, I am asking you to write a disciplinary for Rivers.”

“What the hell! A punishment! That is so messed up! This is my second one, and what for? Are you trying to get me to leave?”

Jake slowly turned to look at me, his mouth wide open.

“Eyes to the front soldier,” the general yelled, making Jake look away. I was furious, and my whole body was pumping blood around with anger and shame.

“I can hear her.” What has she done in general?” Mason didn’t seem happy; I could picture his disapproving look as clearly as day, since I’ve memorised it so well.

“Caught her alone in shed thirty with Jake.” He looked down at the p**n and said,

“Their position was compromisable.” After that, she started to back talk.

There was a buzz from the radio around us, but Mason didn’t try to respond.

“Sir?The general asked, looking at the walkie-talkie to see if the connection was still there.

“I’ll write it down,” he said quietly. “General, you have my permission to punish them however you see fit.”

The general gave us a wicked grin and put his walkie-talkie back in his pants.

“Tomorrow Rivers.” He said the words slowly, promising death. “You have to do ten extra laps of the assault course, twenty extra laps of the track, and then finish the day with one hundred push-ups. I can’t wait to see you in pain. Now get out of here. If I catch you two mixing again, I won’t think twice about sending you away.

I waited until it was dark to clean up the mess I made with the general. He was a hairy, upper-lipped jerk who let the power go to his head, and I was really angry.

I stomped through the staff quarters a little harder than usual and yanked open his door as if I were trying to take it off the hinges.

He was sitting on the couch with his legs up, eating from a noodle box and other food boxes that were scattered around. He stopped using his chopsticks and looked up from his food, rolling his eyes.

“I had no choice, Riley.” He said this without swallowing his dinner.

“Who does he think he is, that slimy little weasel?” I threw my arms around to make my points clear and almost yelled at him.

Mason kept eating and watching TV.

“Are you paying attention to me?” I yelled.

“It’s hard not to hear you,” he said in a bored, dry voice before shoving a dumpling into his mouth.

“You gave me a punishment.” Another one.

“Can you calm down? You’re not going to be sent away. I won’t let that happen, but you need to be good. I can’t help you when you’re clearly doing something wrong.

Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 7:21 am

I pushed his feet out of the way and sat down on his couch, looking at the Chinese takeaway box he was holding with love. He sighed and gave me the box before picking up another one.

“What are we going to watch?” “George Clooney was on the TV when I looked at it.

“We’re not watching anything. “I am watching Oceans Eleven.” I put my bare legs over his and lay down next to him, making sure to try all of his food.

He held my legs without thinking, and every time he moved his hand to get more food, I would feel a cold spot where his hand had just been. He always put it back in the same spot.

“What’s going on between you and Jake?” He asked after thinking about it for a long time. Even when I turned to look at him, he kept his eyes on the TV.

“Nothing,” I said simply.

“The general said you were in a bad spot.” He still wouldn’t look at me.

“Yeah, well, general douche talks shit.” I could feel myself getting angry again.

“You can’t have relationships with the other recruits; it’s against the rules.” They’ll move one of you.

I put a chicken ball in my mouth and chewed on it to get rid of my anger.

“Okay, I know you won’t tell me because I’m the Lieutenant and you don’t want to get in trouble, but I hope you would because—”

I grabbed his face and made him look at me.

“Your general is a perv who has to make up fantasies about us because he can’t get any.”

“Rivers, don’t talk about my generals like that.”

“Well, it’s true. Nothing is going on. We were just lying on his bed and reading a p**n magazine. His eyes lit up and he looked down at my lips.

“Good,” he said suddenly, and I let go of his face.

“Okay?”

“Yeah, because it’s off-limits and I don’t want to keep covering for you.” So get your act together.

I snuggled up to him, and to my surprise, he put his arm around my shoulder to protect me. It felt nice, warm, and safe.

I finished his noodles and kept watching Oceans Eleven while lying against his chest in a comfortable silence, listening to his calm breathing.

He was a different person here than he was on the pitch, and I smiled to myself because I was the only one who got to see him so calm and relaxed.

I was hot and comfortable, and I could feel myself smiling like an idiot. I slowly opened my heavy eyelids and blinked at what was around me.

Mason slept next to me, and his long eyelashes fluttered as he dreamed. I poked his cheek, and he made a cute pout, so I poked it again, and he slapped himself and opened his eyes wide.

“Ow,” he said, looking at me like I was the one who hit him.

“I am in your bed,” I said, which was clear.

“Shh, the alarm hasn’t gone off.” He turned me over and put his arm around me, pulling my body close to his. I couldn’t help but smile as I closed my eyes.

There was a knock at his door, and I could tell that his whole body froze. He took his arm off and sat up. I rolled over to face him, and he gave me a worried look.

He put his thin finger over his lips to shush me, then he took my hand and pulled me out of bed, dragging me to the door without saying a word.

I was shivering from the cold because I was only wearing grey sweat shorts and a T-shirt from the night before. He opened the door after putting me behind it.

“Sir, Commander?” Mason asked. I didn’t say anything, but my heart was pounding.

He even calls his dad “sir” when they are alone.

“Come here for a progress report on your recruits.” His voice was harsh and scary, and it made my blood run cold.

“Right now, sir?” I could hear Mason’s voice shaking; I could almost hear the fear.

“We’re halfway through the fitness test. Are they ready for it?” His father asked in a stern, professional voice.

“I think most of them are,” Mason said.

“Most?He yelled angrily, and even though I was behind the door, it made me flinch.

“If I were in charge of this field, they would all be ready to do it three times without complaining. This just won’t work. Pay attention to the stronger ones. We’re going to take the weaker ones to the judge. They aren’t going to make fun of my boot camp just because the lieutenant is a loser.

“Sir, I have hundreds of recruits under my care, and no one has given me a good enough reason to send them away. I would have to follow the rules and go through three disciplinary actions.

“Then you make them act up, which gives us a reason to take them away.”

Wow, that’s pretty mean.

“Excuse me, commander, but some of the new recruits have young kids or sick family members. Bootcamp may not be complete freedom, but they can call their family whenever they want, choose their own lawyers, and meet with them whenever they want. For some of the new recruits, boot camp is a better mental fit.

Are you asking me to put them in a tough spot and make the least fit of them act up enough to get in trouble?”

“I’m happy you finally figured out how to do things around here, Mason.” It took you a long time.

“Do you want me to lead in a dishonest way?”

The commander got closer, and Mason’s grip on the door got stronger, stopping it

from being pushed open.

“Don’t make our boot camp look bad,” I’m telling you. I’m telling you not to make your leaders look bad. My boy. You don’t want to do that because it will make me look bad.

He said what he was going to do.

“Got it?”

“Yes, sir,” Mason said quietly. I heard his father tut loudly.

I know we’re all criminals, but at least at boot camp we can meet the generals. We can sneak out and go to the pub. It was the better deal, and Mason was smart enough to know that, but it looks like making his father happy was still the most important thing for him.

“Mason, you are a disgrace. Get your uniform on and comb your hair. I can see that your bed isn’t made either. “Don’t be late to the pitch; let’s see if you can do something right and set an example.”

“Sir, yes sir.” Mason slammed the door shut and went to the fridge. He took out a bottle of water and sipped it without saying anything about what had just happened. I watched him closely. He wiped his mouth and put the lid back on the bottle.

Finally, he said, “I think you should go.”

I took a second to think about what I wanted to do and then I did it.

“Come on.”

I took his hand and led him back to bed. I climbed in with him and pulled him with me. Then I threw the covers over us both and snuggled into him.

“We’re not going to let him ruin our morning.”

He relaxed in just a few seconds, and then he completely melted into me. Then, to our surprise, he brought my hand to his lips and kissed the back of it softly.

His body stopped moving.

“Uh... I don’t know... I didn’t... “I don’t know why I just did that,” he said, stuttering and looking a little embarrassed.

“Stop thinking too much,” I said.

For fifteen minutes, we lay in each other’s arms in pure bliss before the alarm went off and we had to get up and start the day.

Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 7:21 am

Mason rolled over and did push-ups on the floor. I lay on his bed and watched him.

After he finished working out, he made two bowls of cereal and gave me one. He then lay down on the bottom of his bed.

“I hope it’s okay that I let you stay here last night. You fell asleep on the couch, so I put you to bed.” He said this while shovelling cornflakes into his mouth. I nodded eagerly.

“Good food. Bed is good. Business? “Debatable.” I got him to laugh. “You’re not going to make me do the generals’ stupid punishments, are you?””

He tipped the bowl to his mouth and drank the milk. Then he looked over the porcelain and smiled. “You need to learn to behave, Rivers, and you’re not ready for the fitness test yet. You can’t lose. “You fail, and you’re done.”

“I don’t think I’ll ever learn how to act,” I said. He stood up and grabbed his toothbrush from the sink, putting a blob of toothpaste on it.

“You’re right,” he said before brushing his teeth.

I got out of bed and put my bowl in the washbasin. Then I watched him make his teeth shine.

I bumped him out of the way with my hip after he was done and took his toothbrush. I put more toothpaste on it and brushed my own teeth.

This time he looked at me and I could tell he was having fun, but he tried to look mad about it.

“I need to take a shower, and you need to get dressed. What will you say to your roommates when they ask where you are?” He began to make his bed, pulling it so tight that there was no room for error.

“I’ll tell them I’m sleeping with the Lieutenant and that I spent the night at his place making mad passionate love.” He dropped his pillow.

“What?” He screamed with all his might. As soon as I started laughing, he calmed down.

“I’ll tell them I’m messing around with one of the generals.” They’ll believe it; it happens all the time. I walked over to the bed and watched his face screw up in annoyance because he couldn’t quite get the sheet straight on the right hand corner.

“It does? Which ones? Who?” He asked in disbelief.

I laughed and said, “I’m not a nark.”

He kept pulling the bedsheet straight because he wanted to make his dad happy, even though he wasn’t there. He ran his hand over the flat surface to get rid of any bumps in the material.

“Mason?” He looked up from the sheets on the bed.

I pulled the whole duvet back by the edge, ruining all of his work. He stared at me, not understanding what had just happened. I sucked in my lips to hide my smile. The look of pure confusion on his face made me laugh so hard.

“It doesn’t have to be perfect just because he says it does. Just do something wrong for once in your life; you’ll feel good about it. “Leave it a mess.” He immediately started to straighten the sheets again.

“Riley, get out of here! You’re a bad influence!” He joked and waved me away with his hands. He watched me walk across his living space and out the door.

“Oh, and by the way, you’re doing the generals’ extra punishments,” he told me. I groaned and gave him the middle finger without turning around.

“Now you’ve added three more!” He yelled at me, and I left him with just the sound of his door slamming.

My arms hurt, my fingers were stiff, my legs didn’t feel like they were part of my body anymore, I had bruises and cuts, my clothes were dirty, and I’m pretty sure some of my bones were broken.

Yes, Lieutenant Arsehole made me do the generals’ punishments, and I think he liked it.

I stood in line for my plate of slop. I will never understand how everyone eats this junk. The kitchen staff filled my plate, and I moved on, looking for my friends in the cafeteria.

“That looks really good. I think I’ll get a pizza for myself tonight. Two pepperonis and extra cheese. “Maybe I’ll get a cake on the side,” Mason’s voice teased from behind me.

“I hate you,” I said quietly as I looked down at my unappetising plate. “Did you make your bed this morning?” He straightened his lips to keep from smiling.

“I’m not going to talk to you about my personal business, Rivers,” he said in his Lieutenant voice.

“Oh, you coward!” He laughed, but then he quickly remembered himself and stopped.

I sat down next to Amber, Maddie, Sierra, Raven, and Jake. They talked about s*x, which is what they always talk about, and I just played with the mush in front of me.

I looked over at Mason and my heart skipped a beat when I saw that he was looking right at me. I shook my head at him in amusement and smiled. He bit his lip to stop himself from smiling, because God forbid he show any real happiness on his face.

The kitchen alarm went off, and within seconds, the sprinklers in the ceiling began to pour cold water.

At first, everyone in the room was quiet for a moment, and then there was movement and even some loud screams. I looked up at the sprinkler above my head and smiled.

“Yeahhhh!” I yelled, throwing my arms up in the air.

I took a cup that was full of water and poured it over Jake’s head.

He got up and grabbed an empty tray. He pulled it back at the top and let it go, which made it ping in my direction and spray water all over me. Within seconds, the whole cafeteria was in a water fight.

The officers who stood at attention around the room looked at each other with blank stares, not knowing what to do. It was clear that they were waiting for Mason to give them orders. He watched me closely, weighing whether to end this or let it go on.

I picked up my tray and waved it around in the air, splashing Jake with all the water.

Then, as he tried to throw another cup of water over my head, I ran away.

I picked up the closest cup, held it under the sprinkler for a few seconds to fill it, and then threw it right in Mason's face.

I thought the room had stopped fighting and was now waiting to see how he would react. Everyone who was paying attention held their breath and prayed to God for forgiveness.

Mason stood still while the water dripped down his skin. Then he slowly wiped his face. His eyes were dangerously hooked into mine. The irises of his eyes darkened, a million shades of brown mixing together, with the threat and promise of grave danger.

There was more silence in the room, and most of the people who were fighting stopped to see how he would react. I slowly backed away from his intimidation, never taking my eyes off of his.

But then he suddenly moved and grabbed a full salad bowl and tipped it over my head. I screamed as cold water ran down my back and stuck to my skin. Mason laughed loudly, so I picked up a tray and sprayed him with the water.

Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 7:21 am

Not only the recruits were laughing in the cafeteria, but also the officers. Mason's joining in gave the staff the go-ahead to keep going. People were standing on tables, sliding across the floor, and holding other people hostage right under the sprinklers. It was honestly the most fun I've had since I got here.

The alarm stopped ringing, and the water from the sprinklers stopped completely.

Mason took my hand and pulled me out the back door of the kitchen. He ran through the camp, through the bushes, and back to his room.

I took off my squelching boots and pants. He took off his T-shirt and turned to face me, his amber eyes burning with a certain fire.

I was out of breath from the water fight and the running, so I stood there staring at him. He bit his lip and practically jumped towards me, picking me up and wrapping my legs around his waist for extra support. He was so strong that I couldn't move.

He walked to the wall, held me against it, and pressed his forehead against mine so that our faces were very close together.

"How does this feel for doing the wrong thing?" His voice was rough, which was sexy and went straight to my lower body. He found my hair and pulled the hair tie out, letting dark, wet strands fall freely around my shoulders.

I looked up at him, and his face was full of desire and seduction. He was so beautiful that my stomach started to flutter when he got closer. His lips were slightly parted and wet, and my stomach started to flutter.

I closed my eyes just as our lips met. I thought his rough hands would move over my body and his kiss would take everything quickly and hungrily, as if he wanted to destroy my face because Mason liked control and power. But instead, his kiss was sensual.

You think about the perfect kiss in your mind: how gently he presses his lips against yours, how fast his tongue moves against yours, and the taste that stays in your dreams for weeks.

Mason was all of that. He kissed me exactly how I wanted to be kissed. He kissed me in a way I had never been kissed before. He tasted sweet, like pear drops, and his movements were slow and precise, as if he had practiced them until they were perfect.

There was no soldier in him. There were no fights, competitions, or battles between us. There were only two people sharing one feeling, one passion, in one heated moment. We were close and united.

I ran my hands over the tight dips and mounds of his back muscles. He was the strongest man I had ever been with so close. His body was sculpted by the Gods, and he put all of my past relationships to shame.

He carried me to the bed without breaking a sweat, straining a muscle, or breaking our kiss.

His body hovered over mine, and as our lips stayed locked, his strong hands slipped under my long T-shirt, grabbed the elastic of my panties, and pulled them down my thighs.

He stood back and looked down at me like a man who was filled with every good feeling you could think of.

It was strange to see my delicate pants in his big, strong hands, but it still felt right.

He held his belt with both hands and quickly pulled it off, slipping it through all of the belt loops in a quick and skilled way.

He held the whole thing in both hands and pulled hard, making the belt make a loud noise as it got tighter. I smiled with excitement and appreciation for what was to come.

He found the button and zipper on his trousers while looking at me. He pulled on both of them, dropping everything else to the floor and showing me his naked body completely.

I was wetter now than I was during the water fight.

I sat on the bed and looked at his whole body, taking in all of its beauty. His biceps, abs, stomach muscles, thigh muscles, tattoo, and so on...

It was just like Amber said it would be, but better. He was eight inches long and thick, with veins that made even the most private part of his body look strong and lean.

I sat up and put my hand around his m*****d so that we were face to face.

He clenched his jaw and let out a breath, but then he took off my T-shirt and threw it across the room. Next, he reached around and unclasped my bra. I wiggled free while keeping my hand on him, which made his p***s feel even softer.

“I want you right now.” He touched my hand to stop me from moving. I looked into his blue eyes and suddenly felt nervous.

What if he doesn't want me to see him?

Maybe he gets turned on when I don't. Will he want the same punishments and control in bed as he does on the pitch?

"Yes, sir." I looked down.

"What are you doing?"

He stopped for a second and then laughed, but he put his hand on my chin and pulled my face up to look at him.

"With you, I'm just Mason." It's the only place where I can be myself without pretending, being torn between two sides, or living up to anyone's expectations. Only Mason."

He came up to me, and I backed up on the bed. He pushed his knee between my legs, making them wider and stopping me from closing them.

I bent my back and tilted my head so his tongue could touch mine. He kissed, nibbled, and sucked on all of my nerve endings as he moved his lips down my neck.

He held my b****t in his hands and lightly squeezed my n****e between his two fingers. As he put the other one in his mouth and pulled on the sensitive pinkness between his lips, the pressure grew.

I lay back and enjoyed the way his mouth and hands felt. My body was on fire, sizzling high in the flames. I was tingling, throbbing, and aching. I needed more.

He moved his knee away from my legs and spread his legs wide on the outside of my body. Then he held my hip bones tightly with his strong hands.

He flipped my whole body over so I was face down on the bed and pulled me up so my a*s was in the air. He slapped it once, and my eyes got bigger.

I could feel the warmth of his length pressing against my back, but he didn't try to enter me. Instead, he held me from behind.

He ran two of his fingers up and down my centre, sometimes dipping in to spread the wetness. I turned around to look at him, but he was looking down, mesmerised by my body.

“Riley, I've wanted to do this to you since the first day I met you.” He teased my entrance with two fingers, making me breathe faster and rock on his fingers, which made them go deep and slow.

As he touched my g-spot, I started to shake and my knees got weak, but he was strong enough to hold me up with just one hand.

“Why do I want to feel you c*m on my fingers so much? This is so wrong.” Why do I want to feel you shake on my damn d**k? Why do I want to put my tongue inside of you and taste you?”

I groaned.

Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 7:21 am

He held me steady, and I looked back at him over my shoulder. He looked down at his own d**k to make sure he was doing it right, and then he slowly pushed it into me, joining our two bodies in the most amazing way.

I gasped and closed my eyes as I felt him fill me. One hand on my hips held me to him, while the other hand roamed over every inch of my body, cupping my breasts and rubbing my clit in circles as he pushed himself in and out of me.

He grunted in a s*****l way and held on to me more tightly.

It was a building of pleasure that I had never felt before, and I was sure that I would eventually explode and send small pieces of myself into space with the stars, without needing a rocket.

He was hitting my sweet spot from two different sides, and it felt amazing.

My body tightened around him, begging for a release. A flood of feelings rushed through me, and I stayed stiff as he thrust deeper and faster. Seductive sounds came from deep in his throat, and soon my own followed, loud enough to knock down the walls.

He pulled on my hair, and without thinking, my body followed. I rose until I was sitting on his knee, my back against his front, and he was still inside of me.

“Move.” He whispered in my ear, brushing against my lobe. He lifted me up and down with my hips, making me feel like I was weightless.

It felt like everything between us was wetter, with him and me mixed together. It poured out, leaving a wet spot on the bed sheets that we didn't care about. He pulled my hair back, and my head fell back, resting on his shoulder.

He lowered his mouth to mine as his hands grabbed the fullness of my breasts. This time, the taste was less like pear drops, but it was still there in the background. My second climax was faster than my first, but it was just as strong.

It rushed through me, taking over my body as my s****l cries echoed through the walls.

“Shit, Riley.” His eyes fluttered and he looked so damn sexy as he slammed into me, stopped somewhere deep, and moaned in my ear. “That was f*****g amazing. I never thought it would be that good.”

I got off of him and fell onto the bed, breathing hard. He fell right next to me, his body shining with sweat like someone had rubbed oil into it.

We were quiet and I wondered if he was sorry. I turned to look at him, and his chest rose and fell with his breathing.

I said, “You taste like pear drops.” He turned to look at me and smiled shyly, then bit his lip so his smile didn't get any bigger.

“I always keep them in my pocket. When no one is looking, I pop one in my mouth and s**k on it until it disappears.” He moved closer to me, put his arm around me, and pulled my body into his. I melted, safe in his arms.

“That was hard work for you; you're so strong. The way you lifted my body up and down, Jesus. His skills were way better than I thought they would be.

That was unlike anything I've ever done, and I only thought he was good at sports because of how fit he is.

"You were loud; I hope we weren't heard. The shed walls are only thin." I laughed, and he did too. But then he stopped laughing and pulled back to look at me with a serious face. "Did you really not fake it?"

"Really? I'm not that good at acting." I ran my fingers along the lines of his tattoo, making it myself.

"Because I've never done that before," I said. I stopped drawing with my finger and looked at him. His whole body was relaxed and satisfied, which is very different from the Lieutenant front he usually wears.

"What do you mean?"

"I grew up in the military, so I didn't learn how to make friends and build relationships. What do you think that means?"

"I think it means a twenty-two-year-old virgin has been kicking my a*s." I stopped.

"Jesus, I think it means I just took the virginity of a twenty-two-year-old." He laughed and I snuggled up to him.

"How did you get so good?"

"Please don't go tell your roommates what happened between us. I've had a long time to think about it."

My lips turned up into a smile.

If I told them, they would want to know everything, even how many veins were in his p***s.

“I thought I couldn’t tell anyone,” I joked.

“I really don’t want you to. But I made this choice, and I lost control. It had been building up inside me every time I was around you, and I couldn’t fight it anymore. I can’t ask you to keep that to yourself just because I messed up. I’m ready to face the consequences of my actions.”

I lay down on his comfortable bed and yawned. I said, “You’re so dramatic.” “I’m not going to tell anyone. Did you say something about pizza with pepperoni and extra cheese? Because that’s all I could think about when you had me bent over.”

He pushed my shoulder and made a “tut” sound with his tongue. I laughed at how fake angry he was and got up to get one of his clean, dry T-shirts from his drawer. He watched me from his bed, where the sheets were just below his waist.

He was the most attractive person I had ever seen, and now that I had a taste of him, I secretly wanted to make him mine.

Things moved slowly after we met once, but I became unhealthily obsessed with him.

During bootcamp, I found myself watching him more than usual on the pitch. His shirt hid his body, but I could picture all of his muscles as if the shirt wasn’t there.

I looked at his lips. Most of the time, they stayed straight, with no emotion behind them. But sometimes I would see them twitch with laughter, usually at someone else’s expense. But he would cough or put his hand over his mouth to hide his secret smile. I thought about kissing them almost every second of every day because they were so soft and pink.

I would take deep breaths of his breath when he yelled at me to keep a part of him inside me for longer.

He always smelt like pear drops, and his eyes were like a golden, warm sunrise that promised something new and exciting would come next.

He was in all of my thoughts, dreams, and wishes. So why wasn't he making the next move?

We were back to normal, but worse than normal, after a week. We disappeared. I was the criminal, and he was the lieutenant. Only on the pitch do they coexist.

Maddie asked me, "Why didn't you come to dinner, Riley?" as I put on my army trousers.

I didn't go to dinner because I didn't want to see his face, to be honest. I was too addicted to him, so I had to stay away from him as much as I could to protect my heart.

"Jake gave me his metal stick thing, so I'm going to take one of the cars out for a drive and get some food somewhere else. Do you want to come?" Maddie started laughing, like rolling around on her bed laughing.

"Riley, you're crazy. That's too much for me; you're going to get kicked out. I'm surprised you've lasted this long." I just shrugged. I couldn't stay inside like a caged animal, which is funny because if I get caught, I'll be put in a cage. I put on my jacket and waved goodbye to her, then slid the metal rod up my sleeve.

There wasn't much light in the parking lot. I walked around looking for the car that looked the cheapest to steal. I thought that the cheaper it was, the more likely it was to belong to a lower-ranking officer. I saw a little Nissan that looked like it came

from the 1990s.

As soon as I put my hand on the glass, a whistle nearby made me stop. I looked around and didn't see anyone.

Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 7:21 am

“Riley.”

“F**k!” I yelled when Mason snuck up behind me. “You scared me half to death!” I put my hand over my heart to calm it down.

“What are you doing here, Riley?” His eyes went down to my hands, but the metal rod was still hidden in my sleeve.

“Nothing I could tell my Lieutenant.” I turned around on the gravel and planned to walk away to avoid punishment or, even worse, an awkward conversation. But when he grabbed my arm and turned me around, I could see the sadness in his eyes.

“Is that all I am to you now? Your Lieutenant?” I pulled my arm away because he was pushing the metal rod into my skin.

“Are you?” I asked him again, and he frowned.

He shook his car keys in his hands and then looked at his car. “We can’t talk about this here.” He sighed and said, “Get in.”

I felt weird sitting in the passenger seat of his car, but I couldn’t help but look at him. Maybe it was the way he held the steering wheel with his hands or the way he relaxed his legs that did it for me. Like driving really calmed him down. Is that strange?

“You didn’t come to my room to see me after,” he said after about twenty minutes of silence.

“You didn’t ask me to. You didn’t talk to me on the pitch. You didn’t give me secret smiles in the cafeteria. I thought you were sorry.” I said, not being able to look at him.

“I can’t say I didn’t have regrets because I did. I do.” My heart sank. It hurt so much that it felt like it was squeezing my stomach. “I’ve always tried to prove to myself that I’m good enough and that I can make my father proud. But I broke the rules, broke my oath, and let myself down.”

I paid close attention to what he was saying, trying not to let him know that I was upset by what he was saying.

“You know how many recruits have tried to seduce me over the years? I refused to let myself feel any s****l urges so I could stay in complete control. I never thought about s*x, ever. I didn’t feel turned on. I didn’t watch p**n. I didn’t jerk off. I didn’t even feel attracted to people.”

“That can’t be good for you.” He lifted one shoulder.

He moved his finger over his short stubble after taking one hand off the wheel.

“And then you showed up. At first, I was attracted to you because you were beautiful, Riley, but then I looked at you and felt nervous around you. My palms were always sweaty, my heart raced, and I was aware of every word I said because I didn’t want to sound dumb.

Your smart mouth made my d**k twitch, and your complete inability to do even the simplest things made my insides burst. I looked forward to seeing you every day and prayed you would step out of queue so I could spend more time with you in the only way I could.

I was in trouble because I was so drawn to you. I stopped watching the other recruits just to look at you. You had power over me like I've never known before. You're my diamond among the rocks.

But that's exactly why it can't happen again."

I let out a quiet breath. I wasn't ready for that.

"I liked your speech, but is that really what you want? I can think of a more fun way to do it."

I put my hand on his inner thigh, and his body stiffened under my touch. I moved it up towards his crotch.

"Riley—f**k!—I'm driving," he gasped as I grabbed him through his jeans.

I unbuckled my belt, unzipped his jeans, and pulled out his d**k. "So you drive, I'll eat."

The car swerved a little, but the roads were mostly empty, so I don't think we were in any real danger.

"Are you going to say no?"

He moved around in his seat, and his cheeks got a little pink. Not because they were embarrassed, but because they were flustered. He was given a plate of temptation. Would he say no?

"No," he said firmly, and I smiled back at him as he tightened his grip on the steering wheel with both hands.

“No, don’t do it,” or “No, you’re not going to tell me no?”

I moved my thumb over the head of his p***s, spreading the pre-c*m to all of his nerve endings. He gasped and blinked his eyes shut, but then he remembered that he needed to see the road.

“Lieutenant, what do you want? Do you want my tongue all over your shaft or not?”

I rubbed more pre-c*m into the soft head of his p***s, then I held his length and started a very slow hand job.

“F**k, Riley!” he hissed, grinding his teeth together and swaying the car even more.

“Yes, Jesus Christ yes! I want to feel the back of your throat with the head of my d**k.” He took one hand off the steering wheel and grabbed my hair, pushing my head down in anger.

Mason moaned and tilted his head back as my mouth wrapped around it like a blanket. The car moved slowly up the dirt road.

While I milked his d**k with my mouth, he pushed all of my hair back out of the way. He took charge and moved my head up and down his shaft roughly by the grip of my hair. I couldn’t fight back.

He made them worship him while he sat back and moaned and cursed and gasped. He thrust his hips up and down, deep-throating me. I couldn’t breathe, but I didn’t want to. I’d rather have Masons’ d**k than air any day.

He pulled my mouth away completely and then back on it, and each time I touched it again, he practically screamed.

“F**k Riley, I’m going to f*****g explode.” He pulled my face out again and held me still, not letting me get back on his d**k.

He pumped a few times, and then, just like he said he would, he blew up all over my face like I was a dirty little whore.

He breathed heavily and looked at me, worried about how I would react to the c*m shot that was dripping all over my face. I put my thumb in it and then seductively dipped it into my mouth and sucked.

“Jesus Riley, get on me right now. I need to f**k you senseless,” he said. I didn’t think twice about doing what he wanted.

Mason sent us back to boot camp after a lot of pointless f*****g sessions. He worked my body the same way he worked that field. I was in so much pain that I could barely walk, but I was in ecstasy remembering how his strong hands held my small body and teased my clit as he pounded me over and over again.

My o*****m shook not only the car but also the whole world, or at least it felt that way. As we got to the dark part of my flat, he said, “I wish you could stay with me.”

“That’s nice. Did you want to cuddle?” I teased, my voice breaking out in laughter. For a moment, he looked a little awkward.

Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 7:21 am

“Yeah?” he said, sounding unsure.

I couldn’t help but laugh.

“I didn’t think you were a cuddler. Night Mason.” But that made me smile more. He wanted to snuggle. How f*****g nice is that?

“Wait, Riley.” He took off his dog tags and put them on over mine, moving my hair out of the way. “I want you to wear them. I want you to carry a piece of me with you all the time.” I put them inside my T-shirt and felt the warm metal press against my skin. It was still warm from his body.

I went back to my own shed. Luckily, the lights were off and soft snoring could be heard from all sides. I climbed into my awful bed, closed my eyes, and smiled as I held his dog tags.

I threw the itchy blanket over my head to block out the loud siren that was waking me up early in the morning.

I yelled at the noise, “F**k off!” My body was too sore for this. I put the thin, cheap pillow over my head to try to block out the noise.

“Riley, come on. He’ll only make you do more work if you’re late,” Amber said. She took the duvet off of me and tried to pull the pillow away. “Riley, we’re leaving without you. Don’t say I didn’t warn you.”

The shed was quiet except for the stupid siren. I stayed in bed until the sirens stopped, and then I got up and quickly looked for my clothes.

“What the f**k?” I yelled as I threw everything out of my trunk looking for the stupid army pants they make you wear. Then I remembered that I had taken them off in his car and left them there because my T-shirt was long enough to be a dress anyway.

I looked for my spare parts, but they were all with the laundry department.

“Shit.” I put on the long T-shirt from yesterday and my boots and ran to the pitch, where I was fifteen minutes late.

Mason was yelling orders at all the new recruits when he saw me and stopped in the middle of one. I stood up straight and saluted.

“What is this Rivers?” he yelled. “Why aren’t you wearing the right uniform?” I fought the urge to look him in the eye and kept my stance facing forward.

“Sorry, Lieutenant, my uniform is... um... not compliant.” I bit my lip to keep from laughing nervously.

Mason was furious, and it didn’t seem like it was part of the act he had to keep up.

He yelled, “What?” His voice was so loud that it could be heard in an empty forest. He tightened his jaw.

“You get a disciplinary if you don’t show up in the right clothes.” I broke the blank stare and looked at him. His eyes were full of warning as they burned into me.

“I’ll give you five minutes to go back and put on the right uniform, or you’ll get in trouble for the third time, I think.”

“I can’t,” I tried to say with my eyes, but he clearly didn’t get the hint. “It’s not possible right now.”

“Take over while I deal with Rivers,” he told one of the generals in a voice that made it clear he didn’t like him.

“March on, soldier.” I went into the office with him, and he slammed the door behind us. He was really cranky today.

“I left my army trousers in your—” He pushed me against the wall of the shed and held my hands up over my head. I took a deep breath and filled my chest with air.

“I can see your panties; everyone can see your panties.” His voice was low and rough, and it was dangerously sexy.

“Right here.” He moved his finger up my inner thigh and along the middle of my pants. I gasped, and right away I was turned on. He leaned in and bit my lower lip, pulling on it softly. I groaned into his mouth.

“I don’t think you really get Riley.”

He held me in place with one hand on my back against the wall and the other on my inner thigh, moving it up and slipping his hand into my pants. He squeezed my whole area tightly, and I moaned softly.

“This is mine,” he said, easily slipping one of his fingers in. “Do you think I want anyone to see what is mine?” I said as I moved on his fingers, pushing them deeper and deeper into me.

“No,” he said quickly and pulled his whole hand away. I stopped right away because I missed the way he touched me. I felt empty and frustrated after my wetness left.

I begged, “Mason,” my needy voice sounding strange to my own ears. He looked out the window at all the recruits doing the drill and then looked back at me. They were only a few yards away, so they were his problem.

Lieutenant goody-two-shoes didn’t want to have s*x with me while he was on duty. He didn’t want anyone to see or hear us or the shed shaking. He wasn’t made to break the rules. He—

“F**k it.” He pulled me away from the wall and pushed me down on the desk, making me bend over. He pulled down my ivory lace panties from behind me, and I stepped out of them. He then balled them up in his hand and pushed them into my mouth.

He whispered in my ear, “If you make a sound, they’ll hear you.”

He held me up with one hand and ran a firm finger down the length of my crease before spanking my behind. I bit down on the panties, and a muffled groan came out of my mouth.

“It’s going to have to be quick; anyone can come in at any time.” I looked back at him over my shoulder, and he quickly unzipped his trousers.

He slowly slid in. He seemed to really enjoy how every inch of him disappeared into me, filling me up and stretching me out. He made noises, but they weren’t loud enough to be heard.

He hummed, “So f*****g perfect,” and then slammed into me hard and deep. I chewed on the lace and felt it break under my teeth. I held on to the edges of the desk.

He used his strong hands to pull my b**t cheeks apart, and he watched as his length slid in and out of me, slick and shiny from my wetness. My eyes got big when his

thumb went around my buttohole.

It was strange. It was mean and possessive, but it made me really excited.

He kept his word. It was quick. And tough. And deep down. And really, really great. After that, he grabbed my chin roughly and made me kiss him. A kiss that lasted a long time and was full of passion.

I pulled my panties back up, and just as we were done, someone burst into the office and stared at us like a deer in headlights.

“Sorry, Lieutenant Sir, I didn’t know this office was busy.” Mason stayed calm, even though his fly was down and his cheeks were red.

“Rivers, I’ll let you off with a warning this time. Don’t let this happen again. Go get some spare sweatpants and leave.”

“Yes, sir,” I said, and then I left.

The nurse gave me a bundle of “spare clothes,” and I went back to my room to change. I pulled down my panties and looked at how much I had torn the lace with my teeth, but I didn’t focus on the tears; instead, I focused on the small spots of blood at the bottom.

Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 7:21 am

He wasn't too rough with me, was he?

I took a tissue and wiped up more small blood spots. "What's going on?" I said, confused, in the quiet of our empty bedroom.

I bit my nails down to the quick. Like real stumps, blood had formed around the edges, and it hurt. I was scared.

The bleeding stopped after a day. It wasn't my period, even though it was due, and I was sure Mason didn't hit me that hard. I've had worse and never bled before.

After that, I only wore white pants, and I couldn't stop checking for blood every time I went to the bathroom.

Days went by, days of running on the track and climbing assault courses. Days of doing drills and getting yelled at by Mason.

But then the nights would come, and I'd lie under the stars with Jake while he smoked his illegal cigarettes, or I'd gossip with the girls at the bar, or I'd cuddle up on the couch with Mason and eat takeaway and have s*x. And damn. And f**k again.

I never bled again.

I thought it was just a mistake with the c****x. Is it normal to spot after s*x? I didn't have a phone, so I couldn't Google it, but let's be honest, that would only tell me I was dying anyway.

Even though I didn't bleed again, I still went to the bathroom and wiped extra hard or checked my pants for red. In the end, I began to wait for blood and pray for it. I was scared because my period was late.

"Jake, have you ever hurt a girl during s*x?"

He blew smoke up towards the stars and turned to look at me. "I don't know, is that something I should know?" he said.

"I don't know, maybe." Probably not, since I didn't tell Mason he hurt me. Do girls really say things like that to guys?

"Are you f*****g someone?" he asked, his face full of curiosity and amusement. Under the clear moon, his eyes shone.

"No," I said quickly, and he laughed so hard that his chest shook. He smoked another cigarette. "But what if I were and my period was late? What would they do about that here?" He sat up quickly and looked at me with wide eyes.

"Shit Riley, who?" I shook my head.

"Not a big deal."

"Do you know for sure that you're—"

"No." He put out his half-smoked cigarette on the muddy ground. His face was so serious that it made me feel even worse. All the worry and stress made me feel sick to my stomach. I hope it was just from all the stress and worry.

"You have to find out." He pulled the car rod out of his pocket and gave it to me. "The store thirty minutes away will sell tests." I sighed in disappointment but agreed

because I didn't have any other choice.

I wanted Mason's car, but I needed him to come with me on this trip. His car smelt clean and neat, just like he did. It made me feel better. He liked things to be in order and under control. If I were pregnant, I would have crashed into him like a f*****g whirlwind, and I don't even know what would happen.

Starlight was a small business that was open all the time. The woman at the counter looked older than my grandfathers ballsack, but she had a hunting rifle next to her, so she wasn't going to mess around.

She gave me a wrinkled smile, and I took a pregnancy test off the shelf and, as an afterthought, some condoms.

"Are you from that army recruitment camp?" she asked, looking at what I was wearing. Her words got stuck in her gums, and she lost track of how to say them.

"Yep," I said, tapping nervously on the counter while she rang up my two items on her old register.

"Must be nice to be around all those men." She gave my things a flirty look, and I pursed my lips.

"Yep," I said again, letting her know I didn't want to talk.

"I've seen them walking around town with their muscles. I'd lick their nipples." She gave me the bag of things and a gummy smile. I smiled at her in a strange way. "Have a good night."

I threw the bag on the passenger seat of Mason's car and drove straight back to camp.

When I got to the parking lot, things seemed different. The floodlights were always on, but tonight there were more lights, like walking around lights and people.

“Shit!” I turned off his headlights and the engine stopped rumbling. I crouched down lower in the seat so they wouldn’t see me. As soon as a torch shone through the glass, I quickly bent my head down, which set off his car alarm. “F**k! Shit! Shit! Shit!”

There were security guards all around the car, so I had to give myself up. I carefully got out of the car, and one of the guys put handcuffs on me and called the commander on his walkie-talkie.

“Bring her in,” he said.

The staff quarters had the commander’s office. I had never been there before, but it wasn’t a shed or a cabin. It was a real office made of bricks. The security guy who was holding my arm tightly looked very pleased with himself. I could almost see the shit hanging off his nose from being so far up the commander’s a*s.

“Rivers, Sir,” the security guard said as he pushed me down into the leather chair across from the commander.

The commander, Mason’s senior, made a face at me from behind a dark oak desk. He clasped his hands together and rested them upon the table.

“Riley Rivers held a convenience store up at gunpoint. Scared a lot of people that day.” He worded in a strict, stern tone. “My security officers tell me you’re now dabbling in grand theft auto.”

“What a game,” I said with a laugh.

He took a deep breath, which made his chest rise, and then he pressed a button on a

small machine that was attached to his desk.

“Red Dog, this is your commander. Please come into my office.” I swallowed hard; red dog was Mason’s name.

“Yes, sir. I’m on my way,” Mason said.

While we waited, the commander didn’t say anything. Nothing at all. He looked at me with cold, hard eyes. I looked at him. I looked at him in a way that showed him I wasn’t scared.

He was a lot like Mason, with a hard stare and a tight mouth. His eyes were the same amber brown as Masons’, but the commander’s were cold and Masons’ were hot enough to start a fire in me.

The door knocked, and at that moment, I was scared. Mason walked in and straightened his clothes before looking up and seeing me.

He frowned and looked disappointed for a split second before shaking off any expression and keeping his face blank. He stood up straight.

“At ease, Lieutenant.” Mason stopped saluting and stood straight, with his hands at his sides and his eyes straight ahead. “Rivers decided to hotwire your car tonight and drive it off campus. What do you think is a fair punishment for what she did?”

He only looked at me, then his dad, and then back to me again. He was quiet and his skin had gotten pale. I put my head down because I was embarrassed that I got caught. I was ashamed to put him through this. I was embarrassed that I had to go buy a pregnancy test in the first place.

He made a noise in his throat. “I don’t think there is a good punishment, Sir.”

Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 7:21 am

“So we’re in agreement, her third and last punishment?” His dad said, eager to get me out of the way because I was one less recruit to worry about failing the fitness test.

“Sir, yes sir.” Mason said this with confidence, as if he had no doubts. I can’t blame him; he did warn me.

“And you’ll file charges for the theft?” Mason looked at me again, his eyes narrowing and his jaw tightening. He was really, really angry.

“Yes, sir.” I squinted at him. Did he really need to charge me extra?

“Okay, I’ll have an officer pick her up tonight.” The commander picked up the phone and started dialling.

“Sir, tonight? It’s late. Wouldn’t it be better tomorrow?” The commander was about to speak when there was another knock at the door. He hung up the phone and told the person who was knocking to come in.

“Sorry to bother you, commander, sir, but we found these in his car. We have a strong feeling they belong to her.”

The security guard dumped the stuff from my white plastic bag onto the table. The small box with big pink letters that said “PREGNANCY TEST” was on full display.

Mason’s eyes got as big as golf balls, and his head shot in my direction, breaking all the rules.

I couldn't look at him, so I focused on the green spots that made the camouflage pattern on my trousers. I tried to blend in so well that I would disappear completely.

There was a lot of silence in the commander's office, but my ears still hurt.

"Lieutenant, is this yours?" The commander's voice was less stern and more curious.

"No, Sir." Mason's voice was full of fear.

"A pregnancy test," the commander said. I slowly raised my eyes to meet his. "And why would you need a pregnancy test in a bootcamp detention where you can't have visitors?"

"Maybe you should tell your officers that," I said back. The commander stood up, leaned over the table, and looked down at me.

"Are you saying that my officers are to blame for that?" He looked at the pregnancy test and I smiled.

"No, the road is to blame for that. But this baby," I patted my stomach, "is from one of your officers."

"Rivers!" Mason yelled in his Lieutenant voice. We all looked at him right away. "Don't throw accusations around; that's a direct order."

"I bet it is," I said. My smile grew.

The commander opened the box and took it out. He looked at the instruction manual for a while before giving me the stick.

"Through there," he said, pointing to a door with two strong fingers. "There's no

point in thinking there's a problem if there isn't one. Lieutenant, watch her do it."

"Shouldn't I have a female nurse instead of a male one? I'm not peeing in front of him."

"This problem stays in this room, Rivers. Test now." I held the test stick tightly in my hand and slowly walked to the bathroom with Mason behind me. "Leave the door open!" the commander yelled.

I sat down on the toilet seat and looked at Mason. He crossed his arms over his chest and looked like he didn't want to talk to me. It was like he didn't care.

He had emotionally distanced himself from the situation, and if I was pregnant, it was a problem. My issue. A problem, as his father said. That wasn't his fault; it was mine.

I peed on the stick and then gave it to him with the pee side up. He grimaced, switched it, and then washed his hands.

The commander yelled, "What does it say?"

"It needs time," Mason said as he looked at the test like he was about to defuse a bomb.

I muttered, "Dumbass."

Mason took the stick outside and put it on the desk. The two men stood over it, watching closely, while I stayed back in the bathroom doorway.

"Pregnant," said the commander in a clear voice.

"Pregnant," Mason said again, this time more slowly and quietly, not believing it.

The commander narrowed his eyes at me, but Mason stayed focused on the test, hoping it would change.

“I know a guy. I’ll set up your appointment for tomorrow,” the commander said as he looked through a directory on his desk.

“You’re getting me a doctor?” I asked, not expecting that at all.

“An abortion.” He kept flipping through the directory, not even looking at me.

But Mason’s attention was drawn to his father, and then it turned to me, softening.

“What? I don’t think I am. I just found out. I need time to think about it.”

“What’s there to think about, Rivers? You broke the law and got yourself pregnant. You brought shame on our leadership.” He looked at Mason. “That wasn’t too hard,” Mason said, lowering his head. “We’re not keeping you here pregnant. You’ll go to jail pregnant. Is that what you want? Your baby will be born and go straight to foster care because you’re in jail.”

I turned to Mason for help, support, or something.

“Maybe the dad could—”

“No. Not my officers.” He cut in. “You’ve done enough to ruin my bootcamp. You’ve seduced my men. The only thing you can do is end the pregnancy. You’re selfish for even thinking you could keep it.”

I didn’t let my tears fall. Mason didn’t say anything. He didn’t stand up for me or our baby. He didn’t say anything and just stood there, staring at the dumb pee stick.

I asked him straight out, “What do you think?”

He started with “I think—” and then stopped for a moment to look at his father’s face, my face, and the positive pregnancy test again. “I believe you should have an abortion.”

I wanted to say something like, “Well, I think you should have wrapped up your d**k,” but I didn’t.

Instead, I just cried. My tears kept coming, and I put my hand over my mouth to stop the sobs. It was a mess, and it broke my heart, but neither of them made me feel better. Mason didn’t help me when I needed him the most.

“Take her to the disease centre. We’ll keep her there away from everyone else until her appointment. You can get better there, Rivers, and then we’ll tell the judge that boot camp isn’t working out for you. The charges depend mostly on how quietly the abortion goes.”

“Are you blackmailing me?” I whined.

“I’m giving you a free abortion and aftercare. I’m just strongly suggesting that you take me up on that offer, Rivers. You wouldn’t want the judge to find out about all the crimes you’ve committed while you’ve been here. Car theft. Theft of personal belongings. Anger and aggression. I’ll check on you tomorrow to make sure you’ve made the right choice. Keep her away from all the generals and recruits,” the commander said.

Mason walked me to the quarantine building, and it was an awkward silence the whole way there. I still cried, but I wouldn’t talk to him, look at him, or breathe the same air as him. I despised him.

He tried, nervously, “Riley—”

Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 7:21 am

I took off his dog tags and threw them at him. “You said nothing! I hate you!”

“I told you what I really thought, Riley.” I pushed him, but he didn’t even flinch.

“Still, you shouldn’t have done that. You shouldn’t have trapped me like that. That was something we needed to talk about in private, not you and your f*****g dad teaming up against me.”

“God, how did you think I’d react? You dropped this bombshell on me in the worst way possible. I need time to think. To process. You asked what I thought, and I told you.” I stopped, and my combat boots made a pile of dirt. I took his hand and put it on my stomach.

“Do you not want our baby?” He looked at my stomach and then at my face.

“That’s not a baby; it’s just a bunch of cells.” The tears came harder, and my heart felt like it was breaking. I didn’t want to end our baby’s life.

“I’m really hurt,” I said softly. “You’re really f*****g hurting and disappointing me.”

“Riley.” He grabbed my arm and now wanted to give me the comfort he should have given me five minutes ago. I took it back harshly.

“No, I’m done with you,” I said as I walked ahead and heard him walk faster behind me. “You’re an asshole!”

“Riley, you’re being too emotional about this. My dad is right: what kind of life would it have? You’ll be in jail and I’ll be here. It can’t live here. It can’t be raised like me. The cycle ends with me.”

I stopped and turned around, making patterns in the dirt with my combat boots. “Don’t tell me I’m being too emotional about a pregnancy that I have to end.” I poked his rock-hard chest with my finger.

“Don’t tell me I’m being too emotional about a f*****g jerk Lieutenant who thinks I’m good enough to f**k without a condom but doesn’t stand by me when I get pregnant.” I hit him again with my finger.

“Don’t tell me I’m being too emotional when you let your dad blackmail me and you don’t have the guts to stand up to him.”

I was falling apart in front of him, crying, scared, and alone. He let out a sad sigh. “Riley,” he whispered softly and pulled me into his chest. I cried on him, and my tears soaked his T-shirt.

“I’m sorry, I’m so sorry.” He ran his fingers through my hair. “You’re right.” He held me close with his strong, long arms, right in the middle of boot camp. Not caring who could see it. Not caring if it was against the rules. He kissed my forehead gently and then pulled away.

“I support you one hundred percent. It’s your choice, and I won’t let him blackmail you. I will support whatever you decide, but my opinion hasn’t changed. I still think it’s best if you end the pregnancy.”

The quarantine building looked like a hospital, with all the white sheets, antibacterial smells and plastic shields. My eyes hurt from the bright light and the crying as I looked around the room.

“Rivers is here for infection control. Give her the best room and leave her alone. Only let me in to see her every day, no one else.” He told the nurse, who was dressed like I was an alien with a deadly poison. She gave me a hospital gown, and I smiled at her awkwardly, showing my thanks.

She took me to a bedroom, which was a lot nicer than my shed. I also had my own bathroom with a tub. It’s been a long time since I took a bath.

I asked him, “Are you really going to keep me here like a prisoner?” He opened the curtains, which let in more light, but the view was still the same. Mud, trenches, and depression.

“You have a warm bed, food, and a TV. This is heaven compared to what you’ve been through.” He walked over to me and put his cold hand on my cheek. “I could go to jail for this, Riley. I abused my position. You know that, right?” I swallowed.

I thought he might get in trouble, but jail?

“Riley, I’ll fight for you. If you want to keep this baby, I’ll make sure they give you that choice, but I’m putting everything on the line to do that, and I need you to be sure.”

“Okay, I’ll be sure.” I cut him off quickly because I was too tired to talk about it right now. I didn’t want to feel even more guilty if I decided to go through with the pregnancy. What would that even look like? He made it clear that he didn’t want to be involved.

“I need you to think about everything. If you’re in jail, you can’t take care of the baby. If I say the baby is mine, I could go to jail too. I can’t take care of the baby. It will end up in foster care. What kind of life is that?”

“I said okay,” I said, this time more forcefully. “You made your thoughts on this whole thing very clear.”

I had to think about this for a while. My own thoughts, not what other people think, are what I think. I felt like I had to have an abortion because of the pressure. I rubbed my temples because I had an emotional stress headache and wanted to sleep.

“I’ll bring you your clothes,” he said, looking at the hospital gown.

“This is fine; I just want to sleep.” He nodded sadly.

“I’ll come by tomorrow and bring you breakfast and your things.” I turned my back on him and began to take off my clothes so I could put on the hospital gown.

He stayed in my room for a while, and I could tell he wanted to say more, but I didn’t want to hear it right now.

“I’m sorry, Riley,” he said. I just nodded at him again and didn’t look back to see him leave.

I curled up in bed and covered myself with the blankets to stay warm and comfortable. I felt like I was full of emotions, fears, and worries. I knew what was best for this baby, but I felt bad and guilty even though it hadn’t happened yet.

I would have kept him in a different life. Yes, I had made up my mind that it was a boy. A pretty boy with blonde hair who didn’t always let people in but had a big heart.

He would be loud, curious, and crazy. He would be fun, tough, and demanding, but he would always be nice. He was my baby, and even though Mason didn’t want him, he was still made with love. I really cared about his father.

I loved my son very much, and that's why I had to do what was best for him. I had to end this pregnancy.

I closed my eyes because everything hurt and felt swollen from all the crying. Then I cried some more. I cried a lot into my pillow. I thought I would never stop crying.

I was in pain and my heart was broken. Where was I? Taken away to a quarantine house in the back of a building, all by myself.

I put my hands on my stomach.

"I'm not alone; I'm with you. Baby, when your daddy leaves me, you're here for me. Just me and you." I wiped my tears. "For a while," I said, crying more and more. "I'm so sorry, Baby. It's for the best. Please forgive me. Please forgive me."

Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 7:21 am

“Riley.” He poked me softly, and I opened my eyes. “Hey, how are you?” He spoke softly, as if I were a child.

It was strange because he usually yelled his words and barked his orders, but today he treated me like I was a piece of fragile glass. I moved around on the bed and pushed my tangled hair back.

“I’m going to have the abortion.” I took a shaky breath and watched how he reacted. He didn’t say anything; he just ran his finger over his stubble and thought.

“Is that what you want?” he asked after a while.

“No, but that’s for the best. We can’t have a baby Mason; it’s not fair to him.”

“Him?” He asked, looking down at my stomach. “You know it’s a boy?” I almost smiled because he was so naive about this. How could I possibly know that?

“No, I just think it’s a boy.” He smiled a little.

“Huh, I think it’s a girl.” My eyes got big because I was surprised he even thought about the baby’s gender. It wasn’t a baby at all last night; it was “just a bunch of cells.”

“You do?” I asked, my voice full of disbelief.

“Yeah, she was cute and caused trouble and stuff, but her big blue eyes made me melt, so I could never really be mad at her. I even gave her a name.”

“You did?” My voice was now high-pitched with shock. He named our child?

“Yeah, Melody.” I laughed sadly because I couldn’t picture myself calling my daughter Melody. He said, “It was my mom’s name.” “And I thought, I don’t know.” He started to blush.

“What?”

“It’s sort of a nod to you because you’re a diamond—”

I finished his sentence with “Among the rocks,” and he smiled.

“Yeah.” He took my hand and looked at me with a lot of intensity. “Riley, I’m sorry. What I did yesterday was wrong. You needed me and I wasn’t there. It was a lot; I never wanted kids and I never even thought about the possibility of getting you pregnant. I just— I don’t know— I panicked. I had just found out and that wasn’t fair because you had just found out too.”

“What are you trying to say, Mason?”

“I’m saying,” he said, stopping to think and biting his lower lip. “I mean, I want you to keep the baby. I want us to keep the baby.”

He sighed and said, “How?”

“I don’t know; I haven’t figured it out yet, but it starts with not getting an abortion. I have nine months to figure out the rest.” He moved up next to me on the bed and wrapped his arms around me.

“Are you really in this one hundred percent? Because if you change your mind again, my heart won’t be able to take it.”

His hands touched my stomach, and I felt butterflies in my stomach. His eyes were so warm, protective, and safe.

“That’s my baby in there. My little, defenceless baby. I’m not going to let anything happen to you, Riley. I’m going to protect you, our baby, and our family.”

“Daddy,” I whispered.

His eyes sparkled with such strong feelings that they might have even gotten a little watery. Mason, the robot cried. It was beautiful how his humanity came through.

“Daddy.” He said it again, this time with thought. “I like it.”

I kissed him sweetly with my head tilted up. His warmth wrapped around my body, his chest rose and fell slowly, and his big hands cradled my face. It made me feel less alone in this.

The static from Mason’s walkie-talkie filled the room, and he rolled his eyes, unhooked it from his belt, and held it to his lips.

“Come in, Red Dog. This is your commander. Is the girl ready?” His eyes floated to mine, almost see-through like the sap on a tree’s bark.

“Trust me, okay?” I nodded, but I was scared.

“Sir, Miss Rivers and I seem to have different opinions. She really wants to move forward with her situation.”

“Wow,” I said quietly after he took his thumb off the button to talk. “God, I thought you were this strong, brave man, but you’re just going to sit back and let me take the blame for not wanting to kill our baby.”

He said softly, “Trust me,” and his eyes were so sure. “I’ve got this. Nothing is going to happen to you or our baby.”

“Bring her in, red dog. I want to talk to her.”

“On our way, Sir.”

The commander was pacing the floor of his office with the door wide open, waiting for us. He told us to close the door and sit down. He stopped walking and looked straight into my soul, burning away what was left of my innocence.

“So you’ve changed your mind? Tell me, how do you think that will help your child?” His voice was sharp and hurtful.

“Well, first of all, he or she would be alive.” I bit back, feeling the sharpness of my own tongue.

“Riley,” Mason said, cutting me off because he didn’t like how snarky I sounded. The commander raised his eyebrows and looked at Mason.

“Riley?” he asked. “Lieutenant, do you talk to all of the recruits like this?”

“No, sir,” Mason said politely. There was a pause before he dropped the bombshell. “Only the ones I get pregnant, Sir.”

My mouth dropped open, and I couldn’t help but look at Mason, who kept his eyes on his father with unwavering strength.

The commander’s voice changed from a harsh tone to a higher pitch, showing how shocked he was.

“I have to admit, Sir, that Riley and I have been very close and she is having my child. Your grandchild, Sir.”

The room went quiet, and I slowly turned to the commander to see how he would react. He just looked at his son with no expression. Understanding.

It was like two strangers talking to each other.

The commander finally shook his head and laughed to himself in a dark way. “You idiot.” Mason stiffened, getting ready for more of his father’s abuse and bullying.

“I don’t think you’re that dumb.”

He looked down at me with shame, like he had just found out that his son had slept with a hooker and gotten her pregnant.

Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 7:21 am

“No, not the man I raised.” He stood up right away and said no to the claims. “That’s enough. Take her back to quarantine. We’re done here for now.”

“Sir, the baby is mine and we both want it very much.” The commander hit the table with his fists in anger, and I flinched.

“How could you let this happen, Mason? How could you bring shame on me like this? You got one of the criminals pregnant! Do you know what you’ve done? Do you know what you’re risking by not getting rid of that thing?” He pointed at my stomach. “You! The Lieutenant, my son! You’ll go to jail for this. They’ll shut this whole place down. This is serious.”

“I know, I understand Sir.” Mason looked down.

“You seduced him,” the commander said, pointing a finger at me. “This is your fault.”

“No, I started it,” Mason said in his defence.

The commander sat down and pressed his nose bridge together. “Stop talking, Mason. Not until we’re alone. This is going to make us look really bad. I knew you were incompetent, but this is even worse than I thought. You should never have taken the Lieutenant job; you were always one of them.”

“No way!” I yelled as I stood up. “He’s an amazing Lieutenant. He’s actually too good. He manages all of the generals and recruits, and I can see how stressed he is to make sure they’re up to your standards. He gives out punishments and is very

professional.”

“Yes, a real pro knocking up a whore!”

“Don’t call her that!” Mason’s fists were clenched at his sides, and I grabbed his arm and squeezed his bicep to let him know I was okay.

“This might not have happened if you had been a real father to him and put his best interests first instead of locking him up and making him feel like he had done something wrong in your eyes. You made him live alone for the rest of his life. He had no friends, no family, and no father to lean on. Mason has been alone his whole life, so forgive him for finally wanting to be close to someone.”

The commander raised an eyebrow at me.

“You’re not going to make her kill that thing, Mason. You’re so stupid. You’re not good at anything in your life. Do you really think you can be a father?”

I could see the doubts rolling into his face and through everything he believed. I took his hand and said, “Don’t listen to him, Mason.”

“I’m disappointed in you, Mason. Do you really want your legacy to be part criminal? Look at the woman you chose to be the mother of your child. How do you know she’s not lying?

How do you know she’s not sleeping with every recruit and officer who will drop their pants for her? Wake up, dumb boy. They’re criminals. They lie, cheat, and sleep around. You can’t trust anything she says or does.

“Stop,” Mason said in a way that was dangerous.

“Your mother was the same. You couldn’t believe a word that came out of her whorish mouth either. I was stupid to get her pregnant. I was young and stupid. I was a general, and you’re a lieutenant. You should have known better. Don’t make my mistakes, son. Make her get the abortion.”

Mason looked at me and held my gaze with a lot of feeling in his eyes. Telling me something without saying a word that I didn’t get. He turned back to his dad.

“You’re right,” he said to the commander.

I took a deep breath and held it.

“I don’t know if the baby is mine, but Riley says she’s only slept with two people, and I’m one of them.”

I tried to ask, “What are you?” but he cut me off.

“You’re the other.”

The commander laughed and shook his head, but Mason sat up straight and serious.

“That’s crazy.” His dad sounded scared, and I was confused.

“That’s exactly what I was thinking, Sir. Once the baby is born, the DNA test will probably not be useful because you and I have very similar DNA. So, who is likely to get more time in jail?”

“I’ve never slept with her and I never will.”

“Riley, did you sleep with my dad?”

I smiled. “I remember very well how alike you two are, how you both grab—”

“That’s too much,” Mason said, and I closed my lips. The commander sighed and looked like he had lost.

“What do you want, Mason?” he asked in a stubborn way.

“She’ll live with me in my living quarters, where she can get the best medical care. She’ll serve out the rest of her sentence here, where she won’t be sent away. We’ll keep the pregnancy a secret from as many people as possible for as long as possible, and we’ll tell the recruits that she’s gone.”

“Are you going to keep her locked up in your room?” The commander seemed to find this funny.

Mason looked at me out of the corner of his eye to see how I would react. “Not locked, just careful.”

“And when the baby is born?”

“When the baby is born, we’ll take care of him or her here until Riley’s sentence is over, and then I’m leaving.”

“Leaving?” My father and I both asked at the same time.

“Yes. I’m leaving the military. By the time Riley’s sentence is over, the child will be two years old. I never wanted to raise a child here, and I don’t even want kids. At two, my son or daughter would just be starting to make friends, and I’d rather encourage that than scream at people all day to march.”

The commander clearly didn’t like what his son did.

“I have a small fortune. I’ve worked almost my whole life and spent almost none of it. Two years, Sir, and I’m out. I never want to hear from you again.”

“You’re making a big mistake, son. You’re going to start a life with her and have a family. She’s a criminal.”

“Still, she’s been more caring than my real do-gooder father. Let’s go, Riley.”

I didn’t just feel bad.

I was the picture of sickness.

I looked like I had thrown up.

I smelt like vomit.

I was, in fact, vomit.

Mason’s lap was where my head was. He gently played with my hair, brushing it with his fingers and sending shivers down my spine. There was a terrible cartoon on his TV, and I was completely captivated by it.

“He really is perfect,” he said, holding the scan pictures up with the other hand.

Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 7:21 am

“You know the pictures don’t change every time you look at them?” He put them in front of my face, and I stopped watching TV and looked at the pictures instead.

“Look at his toes, though.” I smiled because they were cute toes. “And his nose.” The nose was also cute. Mason said, “I want to kiss his nose.” “Shit, he’s just so f*****g perfect.”

I got up and fixed my hair, which freed Mason’s lap. He got up and went to the fridge, where he took out a bottle of water and drank from it.

He wiped the wetness off his lips, and my eyes moved over his perfect body. He was a big, strong man. With a nice face and a strong eight-pack. His sweatpants even hung from his waist in a sexy way.

I was a nervous whale, and I was more than halfway through my pregnancy with no way to hide the basketball under my shirt. Most of the time, I felt heavy and uncomfortable, and none of my clothes fit me anymore.

“Why do you have that look on your face?”

“Because you’re a s*x god and I’m a frump.”

He came back to the couch and put my swollen legs on his lap.

“What are you talking about? You’re beautiful, and your body is perfect.” He held my rock-hard stomach and the baby kicked, which made his eyes light up like they do every time.

He laughed and said, “Those little toes are strong.”

“I’m losing myself more and more. My individuality is going away like my waistband. I want my body back, Mason.”

The nurse said, “It’s too soon; we have to get to forty weeks.”

At first, I liked being pregnant. I was very tired, and while Mason worked out on the pitch, I could sleep in until late.

Mason would come back in the evening and we would laugh about how bad the recruits were that day.

And even though it was nice to have him all to myself in a little secret safety bubble shed, I was starting to miss being out on the pitch, where I felt like myself and normal.

Mason would take me out on really boring days, always at night so no one would see us. He would take me for a drive on the dirt roads or to get bad food from the side of the road. For a long time, we had s*x all the time, and my hormones were making my s*x drive go crazy. But now, this big—having s*x was the last thing on my mind.

I got used to the routine of being awake at night and sleeping during the day. But it just made me realise that seeing sunlight through a dirty window wasn’t enough.

I felt like I was in a small space.

I don’t know if it was the hormones that made me feel so bad or if I was just unhappy in general.

But I hated having those thoughts because this baby, our son, was such a gift to me. I

was thankful for him and his health because I loved him so much.

I just wanted my body back, which Mason did get but couldn't understand.

"I just want things to go back to normal," I said. "Why don't you ask some of my friends to come back? I miss them, and I know they won't tell anyone."

"Riley." He said it softly, as if he were already letting me down with that word. "We can't get caught."

"But my friends—"

"Would probably do anything to get me to ship. They hate me because I'm their lieutenant, remember? I punish them every day, act like I'm better than them, and am in charge of their sentence."

"Okay, but—"

"And some of them might hurt you just to get back at me. They might hurt our baby. I'm not going to take that chance." He put his warm hand on my stomach. "I will do everything I can to keep him safe."

"Mason." I pushed his hand away and stood up. "I get it, but I'm sad and lonely. I want to see the girls I shared a bunker with and Jake. That's all. They could come here, and we could—"

"No."

"Not?"

"No."

I didn't like it when people said no. I had a big problem with people in charge, and Mason should have known that. But I know him, and he cares a lot about authority. We're two different people who don't get along.

I walked over to him and sat down on his lap. He put his hands on my belly again right away, with the big ball stuck between us.

I asked again, "No?"

"No," he said again.

I kissed him softly all over his neck, and his hands moved from my belly to my hips.

"But you're always so nice to me." I whispered into his ear, and I could feel his body shiver from the sound.

"You get me what I want when I want it, like when I want spicy peppers and you go to the 24-hour mart to get them."

I kissed him along his jawline, and he tightened his lips.

"When I want you, you give me what I need, f*****g me as many times as I want and letting me use you for my pleasure."

I kissed his lips softly, and even though he tried to make things more passionate, I pulled away, teasing him.

"You give me strength, make me believe I'll be a good mom, and make me feel beautiful when I'm feeling down. You make me feel like a diamond among rocks, and right now, you're the only one who can stop me from feeling so sad."

I pulled on his lip with my teeth, and he let out a small whimper.

“I really don’t like this,” he said, sounding a bit doubtful. I held back a smile because I knew I had won him over.

“But whatever you’re feeling, he’s feeling too, right?”

“Damn, I should have started with that. I would have gotten my way a lot faster.” He looked at me with narrow hickory eyes in disgust.

“Okay, Riley.” He said yes, but he didn’t want to. “But only a few, and they have to come to my shed. I want to be here. I want to watch them.” I laughed at first, but then I realised he wasn’t joking.

“Okay, but don’t be weird. They will feel very uncomfortable around you. Don’t punish them or be rude to them.”

“I never rude, and I wouldn’t punish them in their free time, but if they tell anyone about this, I’ll give them a punishment right away.”

I told them, “Just be normal.” “Are you able to do that?”

“Yes,” he said through gritted teeth.

Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 7:21 am

“Okay, you can stay.” I said yes.

“I told you, Riley, I’m staying. That was non-negotiable.” I rolled my eyes at how pushy he was, and then none of us said anything for a while.

He was probably thinking too much about the whole thing. I was curious if he would let my friends and me order a pizza, or would that be too much luck?

Forget it, I’ll ask.

“Can we get a pizza?”

I guess that’s my answer because he glared at me in a dangerous way.

“No,” he said coldly.

The sound of the Masons’ shed door opening woke me up. I got up and rubbed my eyes to get rid of the tiredness.

Mason said he would tell Jake, Sierra, Raven, and Amber that I didn’t really leave after boot camp today. He said I’ve been here all along and that I’m pregnant with his baby.

That was going to be a hard pill for them to swallow, but I wasn’t scared; I was excited.

Jake was the first to come in. He looked around Mason’s shed in awe before seeing

me.

When Amber, Raven, and Sierra walked in, they screamed and then ran over to hug me.

“Wow!” Mason said in his stern Lieutenant voice. “Back up.” Their mouths and feet stopped moving.

Amber squealed with joy from a distance, “I can’t believe you’re here! You’re really here!”

Mason yelled, “Soldiers, stand up straight!”

The four of them stood in a straight line, with their heads held high and their hands at their sides.

“Mason—” I stood up and let go of the blanket that was covering me. The four of them stopped what they were doing and looked down at my stomach.

They were in shock, completely and totally.

“Wow! You’re pregnant,” Sierra said slowly.

Jake yelled, “What?!” in shock.

Raven asked, “With him?”

“What?!” Jake yelled again.

“You didn’t tell them?” I asked, but Mason stood tall and in charge. He looked ahead and didn’t show any emotion or reaction on his face.

Amber asked, “Is it a girl or a boy?”

“Boy,” I said.

She looked at Mason to see what he was up to.

“Wow, that boy is going to be really hot.”

“Wh—” Jake began.

I told them, “Don’t say it again.”

Jake began to walk towards me.

“Back the hell up, Jake!” Mason yelled, and I put my hand on my face.

He whispered to me, “You have the demon spawn inside of you?” and it was clear that he wasn’t trying to hide it. I looked at Mason and could tell he was a little hurt by what I said, but he stayed in his Lieutenant stance.

I waddled over to the fridge and got out a few bottles. “Do you guys want a beer?” My friends all looked at Mason, as if they were waiting for him to say yes.

“Did I tell you that you could break attention soldiers?” They all stood up straight and put their hands on their heads again.

Mason looked them over one by one, checking their uniforms and how they were standing. I could feel myself blushing because he was being so professional when I just wanted him to be friendly.

“Is this really necessary, I mean—”

“Be careful when you get close to Rivers. Only take slow, careful steps. Don’t touch the stomach. Don’t hurt the mother or the child in any way. Do you understand, soldiers?”

“Yes, sir!” they all said at once.

“At ease.” He went to the side of the room so he could see everything that was going on but not really be a part of it.

My friends, who were all feeling really awkward, sat down around me and looked at each other, unsure of how to start a conversation.

“So... how have you been?” I asked, glancing at Mason, who was watching us like he was in charge of the cafeteria. I gave them all a beer, but no one drank it.

I knew they wanted to talk to me and ask me things. They wanted to talk about Mason and how we were doing as a couple. They wanted to drink the beer and hear the gossip, but they couldn’t. It was awkward.

We talked about how hot it’s been lately and how much they missed the taste of chocolate.

“It’s okay!” I said when Jake started talking about the cafeteria slop for the third time. “We can talk normally. He won’t care.” They were too scared of getting in trouble to even look at him.

“Jake, have you driven any cars lately?”

“Riley, no.” He gave me a look that said, “Shut the f**k up.”

“Have you girls gone back to the pub? Does the band still play there? I miss that

place; we should go there sometime.”

“Riley!” Raven gasped, and Sierra shook her head at me. Amber was brave enough to look at Mason for a second.

I called out to him, “Mason, come here,” but he didn’t move an inch. He just stood still and looked straight ahead.

Jake stood up and said, “I think I’m going to go. It was nice to see you again, Riley.”

“Don’t go,” she said.

“Yeah, it’s getting late,” Raven said, yawning.

“Please stay, guys.”

“Sorry Riley, but I can’t risk my life on this. I have kids and can’t go to jail.” Sierra stood up to join Raven, and then Amber followed them.

“This is your fault,” I said, pointing a thin finger at Mason. He stopped paying attention to look at me. “I told you to be normal, so why did you bring your weird?”

“This is my normal. I told you I didn’t want this to happen. It’s making things awkward for me and for them. It’s completely unprofessional.”

Jake laughed at the irony, and Raven slapped him on the chest.

“Guys, please stay. We’ll order food and watch a movie. Mason, tell them you won’t be giving out any punishments tonight. Tell them to relax and that you don’t care what they do in secret. You’re not their Lieutenant tonight.”

My hormones built up inside me and then burst out in tears. I cried like my heart was breaking, and Mason came over and rubbed my back to make me feel better.

“F**k, Riley, are you okay? It’s okay.” He said this in a calm voice, but I could see the fear in his eyes. He hated it when I cried.

Page 36

Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 7:21 am

“Don’t cry, Jesus Riley. I promise we’ll stay,” Jake said as he sat down next to me.

“Yeah, come on Riley, stop these silly tears.” Sierra hugged me and wiped my eyes dry.

Amber lightly tapped my belly and said, “Whatever you feel, he feels.” Mason spoke up.

“Ah! Hands off the belly.” She quickly pulled her hand back, and I started to laugh along with my tears.

“Please, can we all just be normal?” I begged them.

“I’ll order the pizza; what do you guys want?” Mason said as he reached for his phone on the bedside table. I smiled gratefully.

“I can’t believe you were sleeping with the Lieutenant all this time,” Raven said in a low voice so Mason couldn’t hear.

“Does he make you call him sir when you’re in bed?” Sierra whispered.

“No, I don’t.” He answered for me, which surprised her and made her blush. “Do you have any other questions about our s*x life? I’ve heard it’s a big topic of conversation for you.”

My friends were quiet for a few seconds, and then we all started laughing.

“Hey, I’m just here for the pizza. Load me up with pepperoni.” Jake cut through the laughter and grabbed a beer. He opened it and drank it all.

“Uh, Riley?” Amber asked.

“Uh-huh?”

“You need to go to the toilet?” I shook my head and laughed at her strange question. “I think you do,” she said, pointing to the sweatpants I was wearing. The fabric was getting darker and darker because of a wet patch.

Mason stood up, his eyes getting bigger with fear.

“Is that your water?” Raven asked slowly. “How many weeks are you?”

“It’s too early,” Mason said slowly.

My stomach hurt like a knot that was getting tighter and tighter until there was no more pull. Then it slowly let go. I held my stomach, which was getting harder and harder.

“I have pain,” I said softly, trying to stay calm. “You should call the doctor.”

Mason was not himself anymore. Usually in charge of leadership and order. Now lost, unable to talk or move. He stood there, looking pale and terrified, not moving a muscle.

“No,” he said softly. “It’s too soon.”

Beep. Beep. Beep.

The bright light and noise around me slowly opened my eyelids. My stomach was empty and my tongue was dry.

I felt like my stomach was empty.

I tried to push my body up with all my might, but a nurse put her hands on my shoulders and said something I couldn't quite hear.

"Riley, Riley." Her voice got my attention. "You're recovering from a big surgery. Lie down, relax and I'll check your stats."

I yelled, "Where's my baby?" and tried again to sit up, even though it hurt so much to move.

"He's fine. He's with his father," the nurse said, giving me a hint of a smile. I lay back on the mattress and took a deep breath.

"He's okay?" I didn't think he would be.

I remember my waters breaking and a world of pain coming crashing down on me. Mason was so shocked that he couldn't move, so my friends jumped into action all around him.

Jake called me an ambulance from Mason's phone.

Amber got me up and kept me calm. Sierra packed some bags for the hospital, and Raven tried to make Mason feel better.

I don't remember much else, except the trip here. Every little bump in the road made me feel like I was having another contraction.

I looked up at the nurse, who was busy with my paperwork and gathering medical supplies.

“Your baby is stable,” she said. “For now.”

That didn’t sound very good.

She put a blood pressure wristband around my arm and started to pump it until it was very tight.

I said, “For now?” and my stomach dropped with fear.

“He’s in an incubator cot on the NICU unit. He was born eleven weeks early, but he came out crying, which is a good sign.

He needs help breathing, but he’s stable right now. Things can change quickly with babies this young, but for now he’s doing really well and getting the best care. Hopefully, as the days go by, he’ll keep getting better.

I tried to get up again because I wanted to see him.

“Riley, you can’t move yet. You just had surgery a few hours ago and you’re on a lot of drugs. I’ll get you a wheelchair and take you down to see them, but first I have to check your stats.”

“What the hell happened?”

“We had to do an emergency Caesarean section to make sure your baby boy was born safely because your placenta ruptured and your waters broke. You lost a lot of blood during the surgery, and we weren’t sure if you were going to make it. Obviously, your baby has inherited his strength from his mommy.” She smiled at me, but I didn’t

say anything because I felt too guilty.

I felt bad for complaining about my pregnancy, for how uncomfortable it was to share my body. How selfish was I?

“Your husband has been quite the meddler.” She smiled at me and flicked my drip machine a few times.

“What?” I asked, my voice showing how mad I was at myself.

“Yes, I think he’s been making things hard for the nurses on the NICU unit. He’s very protective and very demanding.”

I thought to myself, “Yes, that sounds like Mason.”

Page 37

Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 7:21 am

“Mason?” I looked at her more closely. “The commander is the name of the man who has been taking care of your baby.”

“What!” I sat up and gasped for air.

“Riley?” I saw Mason in the corner, holding a small blue bundle in his arms. “You’re fine, Riley. You’re really high right now and you’re going in and out of consciousness.”

I pushed out in a hoarse voice, “The commander?”

“He’s not here; I wouldn’t let him near us. Shhh, look.” He whispered as he moved closer to my bed and lowered his arms so I could see my baby’s face.

He carefully put him in my arms. This little baby had tubes in his nose and fine, dark hair on his head. He was the best.

I began to cry.

I pointed out the sweetest parts of him and said, “He looks like you.” His button nose, the way his face looked like it was blowing in the wind, and the way his eyelashes fluttered with his dreams.

Mason said, “He looks like you; he’s a mix of us both.” I laughed.

“His face looks like a prune.” It was almost too big for him, and it was all wrinkled and new. I wanted to smother him with love because he smelt like a baby.

“We can only hold him for an hour, but he’s doing well and is strong. He has to stay in his incubator cot.”

“He doesn’t have a name.” After meeting him and learning about everything he’s been through, a name seemed very important. He ought to have a name.

“Yeah, he does, Riley.” Mason looked a little nervous and chewed on his lip a little. “They wanted to know what to call him, and you’ve been awake and asleep for two days. I named him Eddie because it means strong, and he is.”

I looked down at my lovely little boy and smiled. I think my happiness was so bright that people on the other side of the world could see it.

“Hi Eddie, I’m your mum, and I’m going to take great care of you. You’ll have a lot of toys, a lot of friends, and a lot of people who love you very much.”

I looked up at Mason and saw that he was watching me closely, his eyes full of love for his new little family.

“I can already tell that your daddy is going to be very protective of you because he loves you so much. But don’t worry, I’ll help him with his people skills so he doesn’t scare away people who want to get close to you.”

Mason asked, “Aren’t you scared?” with real interest. “Doesn’t it scare you that we are in charge of his whole life?”

“Of course I’m scared, but I’ve already built the foundations. I love him, so I’ll just go from there.”

He was quiet, lost in his own thoughts.

“What if I’m not good enough to be a father?” The doubts that his father put in his

head were clearly bothering him. “What if I let him down or don’t meet his expectations?”

“Don’t listen to those bad thoughts; they are spoken in your father’s voice, Mason. You will be the best father.

He abused and manipulated you mentally your whole life, but now you can break that cycle. You can learn from our son that you are enough and always have been.

He nodded, and it was clear that he was holding back a lot of feelings. I think his eyes were full of tears that he wouldn’t let fall.

“Yes, I hope so.” That was all he could say, and he said it in a broken voice. “Please let me put him back in his cot so he doesn’t get cold.”

He put him back in his incubator and held his small hand through the holes in his cot. Mason’s hand was so big and strong compared to his junior’s that it was almost funny.

“Are you sure you want to leave your job as Lieutenant?”

I was scared to hear what he had to say. Mason has only ever known how to be a lieutenant, live on the bootcamp, and give orders. He was thrown into the deep end without a paddle all of a sudden.

In a split second, his life changed into something he wouldn’t be able to recognise. A father, a partner, living in the suburbs somewhere. I knew that he would have to make a lot of changes to give us the life he promised.

“Not at all. I don’t regret becoming a father, I don’t doubt my choice to leave my job, and I want to share my life with you more than anything else.”

He kissed me softly and pushed my hair back from my forehead.

“That ring, my mother’s ring, should be on your finger, Riley.”

I smiled more because I had never felt so complete, happy, and stable in my life as I did right now.

I was always a loose cannon, and no rules or even the law could stop me. I was just a criminal on a path of destruction.

He was the Lieutenant, ruining himself to fit someone else’s idea of perfect, but he never felt good enough.

Who would have thought that those two things that are so different would fit together so well?

It was easy for us to plan: we would raise Eddie at boot camp until my sentence was up, and then we would leave without looking back.

Just the three of us—the criminal, the lieutenant, and our beautiful baby boy—start over somewhere else.

Together, we march on.