



The Beast's Beauty (The Beauty and the Beast #1)

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Category: LGBT+

Description: "No one will ever look past these scars."

Once a popular singer, Griffin lost everything to a fire. Society cast him aside when it became clear he was no longer handsome. Sure that no one will ever see beyond the scars that have ruined half of his body, he turns to desperate measures to find companionship.

"How can I do anything but surrender?"

Kidnapped because of his looks, Ryder is delivered to Griffin to become anything his master wants him to be. He is repeatedly forced to choose between humiliation and worse. Each time he obeys Griffin, a piece of him breaks away. Can he truly refuse when every option is worse than the next?

In this psychological drama, two men struggle with their definitions of what society labels beauty as opposed to a beast... and they learn that the true definition of beauty might not be as clear as they'd thought.

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Ryder

I jolted awake with a start, the nightmare playing in my head finally dwindling to a close. I was curled up in the fetal position, shivering, and even though I didn't want to go back to sleep, exhaustion clawed at my brain. It pulled me back down, but I struggled against it. I didn't want to feel that sharp sting and the pavement rising up to meet my body, the harsh touch of men I could see only in flashes and glimpses.

My head was spinning, and no matter how hard I tried to open my eyes, they just wouldn't seem to cooperate.

I grasped for the wall beside my bed, but there was nothing there. Had I curled up the wrong way?

I groped for any wall, and I found... cement? It was cold and harsh to the touch, nothing familiar.

That realization was enough to send me into a panic, enough to where my eyes finally opened halfway, and I could see that I wasn't in my room. What the fuck? I didn't drink because of this. I'd had too many blackouts in college, and I was tired of waking up in unfamiliar places with unfamiliar people, wondering what I'd done .

So why was I here?

Why were there three cement walls and a...

I had to squint, my vision so blurry everything tried to multiply, but I realized dimly that there was a cell door there. Metal, with thick bars that flashed in the dim light and hurt my eyes, just like prison cells in the movies.

Jesus Fucking Christ, how much had I had to drink?

If I couldn't even remember drinking, it had to have been bad. Fuck.

"H'lo?" I called out, though the word sounded distorted and thick even to my ears. I grimaced, but I tried again. "Hello? Anyone..." My voice rasped over the words, and I drew in a deep breath in frustration. Someone had to be around to explain to me what was going on and what I had done in my drunken stupor.

My girlfriend was going to have to be my one call out of this place. Maybe she'd wait until she got me home to kill me for doing something this stupid when I'd promised I wouldn't drink again.

"Shit," I mumbled under my breath.

It seemed to take forever for my vision to clear enough for me to take stock of the situation and for my mind to understand that while there were walls, I wasn't close to any of them. I was damn near in the middle of the cell, and I hadn't been sleeping on a bed.

At least I was still dressed, which was an improvement to some of my other situations in the past, but there was some weird pillow thing under me and the blanket over me was thin.

I licked my dry lips, trying to swallow over the lump in my throat that told me this... might not be what I thought it was.

But what it was, exactly — that, I had no idea .

My lungs suddenly felt like they couldn't draw in air. I was going to end up having a panic attack before I even figured out what was going on, and no one was around to talk me down.

Hell, no one was around at all, and my chest felt tight, painful, as I struggled to breathe. Struggled, fought, and lost.

The light above was so dim that I could barely see anything, and there were only shadows beyond the metal bars of the cell. I trembled, and the more it sunk in that this was not some ordinary prison cell, the less I could catch my breath.

I gasped, hand going up to my chest, and I tried to remember everything I'd been taught about how to deal with these. It had been a long time since I'd had one, and I—

“Breathe, Toby,” a voice came from the other side of the bars. “Count your breaths and breathe.”

What the ever-loving fuck?

Who the hell did he think I was?

It felt even harder to draw breath through my constricted chest then, like the command worked as the counterpart instead of as the actual order.

“Who're you?” I slurred, my heart pounding so hard and fast that I might as well have been a cornered rabbit.

My heart was going to burst — or I was going to piss my pants — if I didn't figure

out what was going on.

“Your new master.”

I wheezed as I got caught somewhere between a gasp and a laugh, choking on the sound. I wanted to ask who thought this was a good joke, but I knew better. There was something about this that was far, far too intricate for a prank. I could barely even catch a breath just sitting there, let alone when I was trying to talk. I needed to calm myself down before I started asking questions.

I had a feeling they needed to count.

The lights finally started to brighten, and I winced, bringing one shaking, weak hand to the side of my head. It pounded beneath the sudden increase in sensations. Christ, wasn't a panic attack bad enough? Did I have to have dry mouth, a headache, and... Was I hallucinating?

Maybe I was still drunk. Maybe I was sick, and I was delirious, and this was some fucked-up dream.

I knew I shouldn't have read those books, no matter how many times Oscar had tried to foist them on me.

I closed my eyes, counted to five silently, then opened them again. This time, I could see someone there. Dim LED lights lined the sides of the room like we were in a movie theatre, and it provided just enough light on the other side of the illuminated cell for me to see that there was a figure. Not much else, not when it was bright on the inside and so dark out there, but it was a man.

Obviously. The sound of his voice had given that much away.

My brain felt like someone had stuffed cotton inside of it, making it difficult to make sense of anything that was happening. I was still caught up on the whole “having too much to drink” thing, but there was a part of me that knew better.

“No, seriously. Who are you?”

“I already answered that question,” he said, stepping into the light to give me a full glimpse of him in all his... scarred glory.

Something tugged at my memory about the way he looked, but I couldn’t put together the pieces.

I shuddered as my eyes slid from the top of his head to his almost melted-looking half of a face down to the casual t-shirt and jeans he wore to his shoes.

His eyes narrowed, and I knew he’d seen the way I’d recoiled from how he looked.

Who wouldn’t? It was human nature to hone in on imperfections, to know when people just didn’t belong with the rest of the pack. And this guy? He definitely didn’t belong anywhere near it.

“Whoever told you I’m into some Master/slave shit totally trolled you, man,” I said. My heart fluttered oddly as he put his hands into his pockets and just... watched me. “So there’s the whole kidnapping thing. People are going to miss me.”

“People are going to notice you’re gone, you mean.”

I scowled at him, lifting my hand to my forehead as it swam from the volume of his voice. “Same thing.”

“No one misses entitled brats like you,” he said, lip curving into the beginnings of a

sneer.

“Entitled... What the fuck, asshole?” I demanded, only to cringe again. I made my voice quieter before I punched out my own eardrums with the pounding of this headache. “Of course they’ll miss me. My parents, my girlfriend, my frat, everyone. It’s not like I’m someone you can just make disappear.”

“Except I have,” he pointed out. “You’ve vanished without a trace, and no one’s going to look for long.”

I ugly-laughed. “All right. This isn’t funny. Just open the fucking door and help me out of here.”

Because my legs sure as hell weren’t going to support me, not with whatever was running through my system. They had me trapped firmly in the tiny bed-thing, where I could do nothing but snark off to him — and I couldn’t even do that well, considering my brain was still trying to catch up to what was happening.

I wasn’t sure it even could. This just seemed like one of those impossible scenes in a movie, where some kid got taken and their badass parents rescued them. Except I didn’t have badass parents. My mom was an investment banker, and my dad was a retired lineman. Plenty of money, but not so much with the personal badassery.

“You’ll understand better when the drugs wear off,” he told me, hands finally coming out of his pockets as he got closer. His fingers gripped the bars of the cell, and it was clear that thing wasn’t going anywhere. There was no simple sliding lock. There wasn’t even anything I could see that made it open or close.

I’d have to get up and look when I could.

This was also the part in the movie where I figured out how to disengage some

mechanical lock using the zipper of my pants or something.

“Now it’s time for your first lesson.”

I stared at him, incredulous. “Even if I was going to listen to you, I can’t even move. Your goonies pumped a little too much into my system.”

Or I’d given myself too much to drink — tomato, tomahto.

“You can do this task,” he told me, his voice low in the darkness, but somehow taking on this cajoling property I recognized as the one I used when talking to my fucking dog. “It’s just something small, and I’ll give you a blanket when you do it.”

When. Not if.

This guy needed to find himself some help, stat.

“It’s going to get cold in there soon,” he warned me, crossing to the thermostat on the wall — nearby, but not close enough for me to reach by far. He pressed a button several times.

I stubbornly shook my head, only to regret it when the world began to spin all over again. I groaned, bringing up my too-heavy hands to the sides of my face and trying to make everything stop moving.

“All you have to do is take off your shirt. I’ll come get it and give you a blanket.”

I dimly noticed he didn’t say he’d turn the temperature back up, which made me wary. It could get really fucking cold in here, and it was becoming a cement prison... becoming?

I almost had to laugh at myself, and if it hadn't hurt to, I might have.

“Fuck you.”

He shrugged, not even batting an eye — like he knew I was going to refuse and had already planned on it, which was somehow creepier than his face. “I’ll be watching you.”

Like that wasn't worse.

“When you’re ready to cooperate, just let out a little bark.” His lips twitched into something resembling a smile, one corner tilting up a bit oddly because of the way his cheek was stretched. “Then take off your shirt and toss it as far as you can so I know you’re serious.”

“I’m not going to bark,” I told him stubbornly.

“You will,” he told me. Another one of those careless shrugs, the ones that meant he thought I’d already lost.

I hadn't, though, and I wasn't going to give in that easily. He'd have to take my shirt off me himself if that was what he wanted so bad.

I'd fight him as long as I had to.

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Griffin

Breathe. Count your breaths and breathe.

The irony of giving myself the exact same advice I'd just given to the boy trapped in my cellar wasn't lost on me.

Boy.

He might've been half my age, barely in his early twenties, but he wasn't a boy.

I thought about him that way anyway, and I needed to stop before it gave my conscience a bigger attack than it was already having. It had taken all I had to stand firm with him — with the pet I'd call Toby, the pup who was going to be so much better than the spoiled kid Ryder had ever been. I knew it would be better in the end, but it had still been difficult.

I leaned back against the metal security door, shuddering at the feeling of it at my back. Going into that room and knowing it would lock behind me had been terrifying, more terrifying than I'd thought it would be... but I'd done it.

My therapist would've been proud of that part, at least, even if he would've been horrified at the last. It was part of the reason I'd stopped going. I couldn't let anything change my mind — challenge my resolve — because now that I'd committed, that was that.

Maybe if I was some regular old person, but no. Not only was I the scarred remnants of a man, but I was the scarred remnants of someone who had been something once. It didn't seem like he'd recognized me down there, but they'd warned me the drugs would wreak havoc on his system.

They'd told me they'd make him more pliable, too, but that hadn't happened... yet.

Another deep breath, then I went to my office. I'd promised I'd bring him a blanket if he did what I told him, which meant I had to keep an eye on him.

I sank down into the comfortable office chair I spent most of my days in, my eyes flicking to the second computer I'd purchased just for this. The only thing it could do was play footage from the cameras I'd set up in the cellar. Everything else had been blocked. I couldn't risk anything going... public.

That would be a disaster.

He was still curled up there, stubborn and starting to shiver. I watched in full color as he tried to adjust beneath the thin blanket he'd been given, like that was really going to do anything more than taunt him with the promise of warmth, and I palmed myself through my pants.

I was a sick bastard for getting off on watching this and getting hard at the idea that he'd eventually give in and do what I said.

I didn't dare set any of this to record, which meant I'd have to rely on my imagination later on. It didn't matter. All of this would be imprinted upon my memory well enough.

I set the volume louder then rested back in my chair .

A few hours later, the sound of his voice jolted me fully awake.

“Hey!” he called out.

I rubbed my eyes, gazing at him. He was shivering more then, looking absolutely miserable.

“Hey, asshole!”

Because that was really the best way to get me to do what he wanted.

He threatened me, mocked me... and finally, after an hour of nearly nonstop talking, he turned to begging.

It made my semi from earlier turn into a full erection, and there were so many things I wanted to see him do. This, though, was only one of the first steps... and it would be far more gratifying to watch him debase himself for the first of many times to come.

Finally, I heard what I'd been listening for.

It was a quiet sound, and I had to strain to be sure, but there it was.

He barked.

It was a low, pathetic excuse for a bark, but it was a bark.

God, I was fucking hard. If there was a Hell, I had a one-way ticket after this.

I immediately grabbed the soft, plush blanket I'd bought for him and headed back to that door, keying in the security code and touching the secondary key on the chain around my throat. He wouldn't be able to see it from where I'd hidden it beneath my

shirt, but I'd know there was another way out.

He wouldn't. He couldn't.

I didn't need him focusing on the idea of snatching up the key to try to escape, even though he'd never be able to. Even if he did, there were perks to being an eccentric billionaire ex-singer. I had plenty of land for him to get lost in. I didn't know how to track worth a damn, but there was only so far he could go...

But it wasn't going to come to that because he wasn't going to escape. Not now. Not ever.

The finality of it even scared me. It was so much pressure...

I exhaled slowly and opened the door, just in time to hear him bark again, a strangled sob accompanying the sound.

His head jerked up when he heard the sound of it opening and closing.

I slowly crossed the room, not necessarily wanting to go back into the light that shone over his cell — unrelentingly bright, harsh, designed to disorient him as much as to let me watch him better.

“You're ready to cooperate, then?”

He swallowed hard, but he nodded.

“Do it.”

He hesitated, tears glistening so beautifully on his eyelashes as he gripped the bottom hem of his shirt, yanking and pulling it over his head.

The boy was lovely, his body more androgynous than masculine, just as his face was prettier than it was handsome. He didn't have the harder planes of someone who worked out, but the softness was part of what was so appealing about him.

I smiled at him, even though I knew it wasn't what he wanted to see. "Now throw the shirt over here, by the door."

He clung to the fabric, wringing it in his hands.

I waited patiently. He would either do it or not, then we'd go to the next step .

"You didn't say I'd have to d-do that," he argued as a particularly violent shiver ran through him.

"That's one of your lessons," I told him, even though I just hadn't thought to be that specific. "I'm not going to spell everything out for you. You have to take a little initiative."

I held up the blanket, letting him see it.

"Blanket first," he said.

His misery looked beautiful on him.

"Shirt first," I countered. "I'm your master. You don't get to negotiate, pet."

That lesson was going to take some time to learn. I could tell that much already. He'd still try, thinking he could somehow get the upper hand. He might've been less defiant than before, having spent his curses uselessly on the cameras, but he was far from broken.

Good. I didn't want him broken. I just wanted to... reshape him.

He hesitated another moment.

Even though guilt ran through me as he shivered from the cold, I held onto the blanket.

Finally, he tossed the shirt at the side of the cell, and I took my time going to get it. I wasn't going to play tug of war with him.

Not yet. Not with a shirt.

I grabbed it through the cell's bars, throwing it somewhere behind me into the basement. He let out a choked sound of protest, but I tossed the blanket toward him. It fell on top of him, and he quickly shook it out, wrapping it around himself.

"Now your pants," I told him.

He stared at me. He had no idea what was going on, and it made him slow.

Then again... neither did I .

But if he knew that, he would pounce on the weakness like he was the predator and I was the prey. I couldn't let him figure out how uncertain I really was. I couldn't afford to. I'd already committed to this, and I reminded myself that there was no going back.

"Pants," I repeated, more firmly that time.

"Why the fuck would I take off my pants?" he asked, burrowing deeper into the soft blanket. "It's fucking cold down here."

“Because I told you to.” I probably should’ve made him strip entirely before giving him the blanket, but there was something about the idea of breaking him down painstakingly slowly that appealed to me. He had to realize he was mine.

Until he accepted that this was going to happen, he would keep fighting me... and as long as he kept fighting me, he was going to regret it. I didn’t have to beat him or rape him to get him to obey me. It might be quicker, but that wasn’t how I wanted to teach him.

I wanted him to surrender, not to break.

He laughed, low and ugly, then he mimicked the sound of a buzzer going off. “Nope! Wrong answer, asshole.”

I shrugged. “You must really like begging,” I told him.

His eyes narrowed. “And why’s that?”

“You don’t seem to understand the way this works,” I said, my voice hardening. “I give you an order. You obey. If you don’t, I take something away... or in this case, I don’t give you something at all.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?”

I was doing the villain thing. I was being vague and telling him my plans when I needed to keep this simple. He had to listen to me, and if I justified my words at every turn, he wasn’t going to learn to do that — or at least, it would become arduous.

“I’m not giving you water until the pants come off.” An ugly smile curved onto my lips. “You’ll have to bark to tell me you’re ready to obey, too... and I might not be

around to hear you. You might have to bark all night like a little yappy dog.”

“Dude, this is seriously fucked up.”

He already was like a little yappy dog.

“Water when the pants come off,” I repeated. “The temperature goes up when you lose the undies. Actually... I think it’s a little too warm in here right now.” I crossed over to the thermostat, adjusting it until even the blanket wouldn’t be much of a help.

He let out a choked sound, and I could see it on his face. He wasn’t that desperate yet, no matter how cold he was.

He’d be begging for water soon enough, though. The drugs would’ve left him with a horrible case of dry mouth, and with the way he wouldn’t stop talking...

“You’re going to get very familiar with the routine,” I told him. “Refusing to do something then eventually giving in... You could make this a lot easier on yourself.”

He sneered at me, the expression twisting his face into something a lot uglier than my scars. “Fuck you. You don’t get to win that easily. You want my clothes off? You’re gonna have to work for it.”

I arched a brow. “You’re half-naked in a cell in my basement with no food and water, while it steadily gets colder,” I summarized, “and you’re telling me that I’m the one who’ll have to do the work? Did you hit your head too?”

He scowled, pulling the blanket over his head until just his face was visible. “Just go away.”

There was no sense in staying downstairs. It was cold down there. It was only a

matter of time until he surrendered, but I didn't have to be uncomfortable while I waited for him to give in.

“Your wish is my command,” I mocked him. “Just bark when you're thirsty.”

Then he'd be in for another treat, something else for him to balk at. I almost felt bad for him.

Almost.

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Ryder

He was going to win.

That was the worst part about all of this shit. He was going to win, and I knew it, and it was just a matter of time. There wasn't a goddamn thing I could do from behind these bars, and as long as he held my life in his oversized hands, I was going to keep yielding.

Again, and again, until there was nothing left of me.

But I still wasn't going to make it easy. If he wanted me to play out some fucked-up game for his twisted desires, fucking fine. He was going to have to earn every step of the way, and messing with the thermostat wasn't going to be enough.

The water, though... that was just cold. How fucked-up did you really have to be to deny someone something so basic, something they needed to survive? Even food wasn't as important, but pretty soon, my dry mouth would turn into something more befitting of a desert.

Fucking drugs.

Fucking asshole.

He already knew what he was doing, and that was the part that terrified me. Had he

done this before? How many times?

What did he do when he got tired of the boys he took down into his sex dungeon?

What would he do if he got tired of me?

They were chilling thoughts, thoughts I didn't want to have, but they kept stirring in my mind all the same. It wasn't like I had much else to think about, other than whether I'd be rescued. I had to hold out hope that I would be. It couldn't be that easy to make someone disappear without a trace.

I wasn't some prostitute on the streets. I was a good student with friends and a life, with parents who fucking cared for me. They'd never give up looking for me, and that meant this asshole's days were numbered.

That, or I'd just die down here.

Would he just bury me in the backyard?

Jesus Fucking Christ, Ryder. Stop with the dramatic bullshit .

Even though I knew it wasn't bullshit, not really, I had to get myself together. Thinking this way wasn't going to help.

Neither was thinking about the fact that I was both thirsty and had to use the bathroom all at once, which wasn't a pleasant combination.

Time passed.

He didn't come back, and I thought about what he'd said. He might not even hear me. I might end up obeying and barking like an idiot, while he might not hear me at all.

How long would I have to keep it up?

It ended up taking at least an hour, with me barking half-heartedly every few minutes. I'd take off my fucking pants. Hell, at this point, I might even just take my underwear off too. There was a point where I just couldn't care as much about clothes as I did about water and warmth .

I didn't really want to feel his eyes on me, heated and anticipatory, and I wiggled around to take my pants and boxers off under the blanket. I wrapped them around me as best I could, even though I knew it wouldn't help. This way, though, I wouldn't have to show off the goods before he did what he'd said.

Assuming he kept his word.

Finally, after who knew how long of awkward barking here and there, I heard the door open and footsteps follow. I didn't know whether to be relieved or disappointed. All I knew was that I was fucking cold, and I was fucking thirsty, and why the fuck was he carrying two dog bowls in his hand?

Dumb question, Ryder. Really dumb question. He wants you to be a dog or some shit.

"You barked?" he asked, in a mockery of someone who might've been saying 'you rang?'

I glared at him. "You promised you'd turn up the thermostat and give me water if I took the rest of my clothes off."

He nodded. "So...?" he prompted.

Sighing, I pulled the jeans and boxers out from underneath the blanket and threw them at the foot of the cell door — no, I had to be real— the fucking cage door. It

might've been a tad bit oversized for a kennel, but that was what he thought of it as, wasn't it?

He took the clothes and dropped them on a nearby shelf, setting the two bowls beside them. He went straight to the thermostat — thank fuck — and adjusted the settings.

“How do I know you're not just making it colder in here?” I asked. I was so cold that I thought my teeth were going to start chattering, and the idea of just curling up there with a blanket on a thin dog bed... No thanks .

“You'll just have to trust me, Toby,” he said as he returned to the table and grabbed the water bowl.

“My name isn't Toby,” I said stubbornly. He wasn't going to strip away my identity as easily as he'd stripped away my clothes.

Well.

As easily as he'd gotten me to strip away my own clothes, which was somehow worse. At least if he'd manhandled me, I'd have had that excuse. This way, though? I couldn't say he'd done a damn thing except make it colder and not give me any water.

It felt stupid, in retrospect, like things I should've easily been able to resist.

They hadn't been.

He pushed one bowl through an opening at the bottom of the cell. I stared at it, then him, then back at it.

“What the fuck is that supposed to be?”

“Your water bowl. I’ll get you a stand so it doesn’t hurt your back later on, but you haven’t earned that yet.”

How could he sound so casual?

“I’m not drinking out of that.”

“It’s brand new,” he said, and he flashed me this smile that was all teeth, that made him look even more like a monster than he had before. “Besides, dogs drink out of toilets. Aren’t you so lucky your master takes care of you?”

The words sent a chill through me. There wasn’t a toilet in the cell for him to make good on his promise, which... I didn’t know if that was better or worse. It didn’t make the threat less terrifying, and I was sure he knew it as well as I did.

“You aren’t my master,” I said instantly.

The heater had kicked on, the familiar smell filling the air, and I breathed slowly out, hoping it would hurry the fuck up...

Then I realized something.

It was going to get warm, maybe even hot. Then what? I wouldn’t be able to hide in the blanket if I was sweating my ass off, and it was only going to make me thirstier...

“We’ll see,” he said.

Fuck! I’d walked right into another one of his traps, and I hadn’t even realized it until it had been too late. Here was another impossible scenario, something else I couldn’t choose a good answer for.

Not only that, but I really did have to piss, which made the lack of a toilet seem problematic for all that I'd been briefly grateful.

I couldn't fucking win.

It took me a moment to realize he was unwinding a hose from its holder on the wall. He squirted a little bit out on his fingers, frowning, then came close again.

I scooted over and pressed against the wall like it would make a difference, only to get the chill of the concrete all over again. Maybe I was worrying about the heat for nothing. It would take a lot to get this place hot...

He ignored me, going straight for the water bowl. He squeezed the trigger on the handle of the thing on the end of the hose, letting the water fill up the dog bowl.

I wasn't sure if I wanted to laugh or cry. On one hand, I was fucking thirsty. On the other, I had to piss. And if I'd had a third hand, I'd have had to use that one to count things off on too, because this was a dog bowl he was filling up with water.

It was one of those big no spill ones, too, made for a bigger dog. I didn't know how I was supposed to pick it up and drink from it .

Duh, Ryder. You aren't supposed to pick it up .

Well, fuck him very much.

He watched me. "Aren't you going to drink?" he asked, starting to wind up the hose again.

I didn't like the way he was looking at me, but then, that was nothing new. I'd drink after he left and figure out what to do with the fact that I really had to piss,. He could

watch on his creepy cam, wherever that was. If I figured it out, I might be able to find an angle to hide from him in...

Though chances were good the asshole had several.

All the more evidence to hang himself with when he finally got caught.

“I’ll wait,” I told him, still wrapped up in my blanket burrito.

He finished coiling up the hose and set it back on the hooks, turning to look back at me. “Is there anything else you need?”

“For some fuckwad to let me out of his basement torture chamber,” I retorted instantly. Really, what did he think I needed? A day at the spa?

“Do you need to go to the bathroom?” he asked as though I hadn’t spoken at all.

Fuck.

It was the inevitable question, one we both already knew the answer to. I didn’t know how long I’d been down there, but it was long enough for my body to start protesting that it had needs. It didn’t appreciate me waiting, either, and as thirsty as I was, the idea of drinking was painful.

“Yes,” I muttered.

“Yes, what?” he asked.

I shot him a sharp look, sitting up a little straighter on my dog bed. “Yes, asshole, you goddamn motherfucking sadistic freak. That better? ”

“Yes, Master,” he corrected me, ignoring me again. That was somehow more irritating than if he’d had a comeback.

“Yes, Master ,” I snarled. “I have to go to the bathroom.”

He pointed to the drain in the center of the cell. “That’s your toilet.”

I could feel myself paling. The idea of pissing into a drain was disgusting. And then what if I had to...

“We’ll worry about your ass after.”

Oh, that wasn’t ominous.

“You can go,” I told him, as imperious as though I was the one on the outside of the cell doors.

“Nah. I’ll wait,” he said.

He wanted to watch me humiliate myself — with the drain, with the water, with struggling to keep from flashing him, with all of it. From the tent in his jeans, I was pretty sure he was getting off on it, too.

Then again, it seemed like he was getting off on all of this, so there wasn’t a reason to be surprised.

I waited as long as I could, but I really, really had to pee. I didn’t want to risk getting the blanket wet, which meant I was going to have to stand up naked in front of him. The thought chilled me enough to where I thought I could wait a little longer...

But I was thirsty, too, and goddamnit, he kept setting me up to fail.

Finally, I stood, letting the blanket stay on the dog bed. I heard his sharp inhalation, the footsteps as he got closer, and I fought the urge to whimper. I kept my back turned to him and walked back to the center of the cell.

The drain was weird. It had bigger holes than I would've expected, but then, I didn't go around staring at drains either. I just knew it was a lot bigger than the one in my bathroom back at home. For some reason, I didn't think that boded well for me.

I had to stop freaking out about it, though. If I kept panicking, he would win, and I wasn't going to let that happen.

I aimed for the drain, thankful for all the practice in dunking Cheerios in the toilet bowl when I'd been a kid. It was like heaven to finally relieve myself, damn near orgasmic in just how strong the urge had been. When I was finally done, I shook my cock off.

Fuck it.

I went to the water bowl, crouching down. I started to cup my hands so I could get some out, but he snapped, "No. Bad boy."

I glared at him.

"Your hands are filthy," he told me, making a point I hadn't expected him to make.

It hadn't seemed so gross when I was that thirsty, but now that he'd mentioned it, I was all too aware.

"So how am I supposed to drink?" I retorted.

I wasn't going to like the answer to that question, and I knew it.

“Lean over, and drink. Just pretend you’re... I don’t know...” He paused as though mulling it over, even though both of us knew that was utter bullshit. “A puppy, maybe?”

“I’m not going to do it.”

“You weren’t going to take off your clothes either,” he pointed out.

Damn it .

Why did I keep surrendering, again and again?

What other choice did I have?

I got to my knees, already hating how the cold cement felt beneath them. I braced myself then leaned over, trying to take a sip from the dog bowl but ending up half-drowning myself in the process.

I could hear him chuckling, and I shot him a fierce look — for all that it didn’t matter, considering where we were, on which side of the bars we were on. I could give him all the fierce looks in the world, but in the end, he was the one with the keys...

And I was the one on my knees.

4

Griffin

I hadn't meant to laugh, but I found myself doing just that as I watched him struggle to figure out the water bowl. Had it not been for the fact that he'd just relieved himself, he surely would have just cupped his hands in the water and drank that way. It was too unwieldy for him to try to use it as a cup, which meant...

This.

I could practically imagine the tail plug in his ass soon, wagging as he drank out of his water bowl and fueling my fantasies for days.

My look turned from something amused into something heated, and I knew he'd be even more disconcerted to see that. He still thought I was going to barge into his cell and rape him.

He had no idea what he was dealing with.

So far, I'd gotten his clothing off of him without touching him, I'd gotten him to drink from a dog's water bowl, and he'd pissed down the drain — because otherwise, he'd have soaked himself, I was sure. Everything I'd asked of him, he'd eventually done. He was a good student once he was backed into a corner... literally and figuratively.

Next he'd either need food or he'd need to go to the bathroom, and I was willing to

take bets on how long it would take for him to admit that much to me. He wouldn't enjoy it once he had, but he'd learn that there were certain things you had to do.

It wasn't a cat, who could take care of its own needs when it felt like. No, puppies had to be properly taken care of, and mine would be.

"I recognize you," he said abruptly, his eyes going a little wide as he brushed the back of his hand against his mouth.

I started. I hadn't expected that, not then, but I shrugged. "And?"

"And?" he asked, incredulous, as he rose and grabbed the blanket again to hide himself from me. "You have to have paparazzi at your doorstep. How the fuck do you think you can get away with this?"

"Because the paparazzi don't come to my doorstep anymore," I told him. My voice turned dark, warning him to get off of that path.

I was nothing. I was a has-been. I had left the industry after the accident, and there'd be no one trying to scale the gates for a glamor shot.

"Oh, right," he said, making a rude noise. "They don't want you anymore. Not with..." He wiggled his fingers in my direction. "Must've sucked, huh? To have all of that go downhill."

I lifted my chin, refusing to let the familiar self-loathing make me duck my head in shame. I wouldn't let him see that. I couldn't let him see a single iota of weakness, and my usual response... well, it was one wrought of weakness, not strength.

"It's done with." I flashed him a grim smile. "And now I have all the time in the world to spend at home to train my new puppy. It'll give me something to do since,

you know, all the rest went downhill.”

It hurt. It stung so much to know how quickly I’d become a thing of the past once my looks no longer held up, once my voice had been damaged and I just couldn’t produce the same music any longer. The royalties still poured in on my older hits, and the settlement had ensured I could live comfortably for years even without those... but I was no longer a part of that world.

No, they’d driven me out with pretty words and sidelong looks, friendly greetings but eyes that never stopped gazing at my ruined face.

Even if my voice hadn’t been affected, I still wouldn’t have been welcome.

But that was fine. Now that I had a project, something to work on, I wouldn’t be nearly as lonely. That had been the whole point of this, hadn’t it? To be less lonely? To find companionship? I didn’t want to pay someone to pretend to like me and have that hit the media.

Instead, I’d chosen this route. I’d taken someone who didn’t want me, someone who was far too pretty and far too much of a reminder of the past, and I was going to warp him until his loyalty was to me alone.

He’d never love me, but I couldn’t blame him for that. He could still obey me and be loyal to me, and he could have a life free of the mundane issues that haunted so many. Bills, jobs, dates, family — they were all burdens that could be easily cast aside.

In a way, I was almost jealous of him. But I’d get to escape too, in my own way, once our training had begun in earnest. Even if I had to return to reality each time a session was over, I could still free myself of my thoughts and burdens whenever I pleased.

“What?” I asked sharply. “Nothing to say about that? No smartass comment?”

He glowered at me, curling back up in the corner of the cell with his blanket. It would get too warm for it before long, and I’d have the most intoxicating video feed to watch as it caught every angle of his body. I’d know what he looked like inside and out before I ever took him.

I didn’t think he’d shut up for long, but I’d take what I could get.

For a moment, we stared at one another, caught in a moment where neither of us dared break the silence. I wasn’t sure if he was actually thinking about what he was going to say or if he was finally out of comments.

It sure as fuck wasn’t because of empathy.

The boy could never know what it was like to be an icon of beauty only to be relegated to nothing more than a beast in appearance... and perhaps it had only been a matter of time until I’d started to act like one, too.

Maybe I should’ve just paid for a hooker, but it was too late now. I had committed, and this was the path I was going to have to take.

“I know you have other needs,” I finally told him. I had to take care of him, at least. “You aren’t going to want to admit you’re hungry or that you have to take a shit.”

He cringed at my bluntness, and it was a near thing on my end to keep from flinching, too. I wasn’t usually this crass, but then, I’d never kidnapped anyone and held them hostage, either.

“But you’re not going to like the alternatives,” I informed him. I paused, canted my head to the side, then admitted, “You aren’t going to like any of the options, though.”

Was this too much, too fast? Was I going to break him before he even had the chance to turn into what I wanted him to be?

“You are such a sick fuck,” he snarled. “I’m not into scat. You’re gonna take me to a fucking bathroom, because I’m not going to do that down here.”

“No,” I said.

He must’ve seen something in my eyes he didn’t like, cold and immovable, because he edged back more. His back pressed against the concrete wall.

“But we still have to clean you out.”

“Oh, Jesus Fucking Christ, this isn’t happening,” he muttered, closing his eyes and burying his face in the blanket. “I’m going to close my eyes, and I’m going to wake up in my own bed. Alone. Without you here. It’s going to be a really crappy nightmare, but I’m gonna go fuck my girlfriend and forget all about it.”

I waited.

He opened his eyes.

“You’re still there,” he bemoaned.

I snorted. Had he really thought that would work?

“We’ll tackle two things at once,” I told him. “Your behavior will determine what you get to eat. If you’re good, you’ll get a nice meal. If you give me trouble and I have to chain you down... not so much.”

He didn’t like where this was going. I could tell that much.

He was right to worry. I went to one of the cabinets I'd installed along the wall and opened it, searching for the sterile enema kit I'd bought.

He didn't seem to understand what it was at first. But when I started putting it together, he gave me this dumbfounded, deer-in-headlights look .

I used the hose to fill the bag, and I attached the screw onto the end, making sure the clip keeping the water in place was firmly attached. The hook on the filled bag would be easy enough to hang on one of the cell bars, ominous and a warning he couldn't ignore.

“What the fuck is that?”

I wasn't sure if I was disappointed or pleased that he didn't seem to know what it was. I'd definitely be his first experience here — the first of so many things.

“This,” I told him, working the nozzle onto the end of the hose, “is called an enema kit.”

His face drained of color. “No. Oh, no. Fuck no.”

I smiled grimly at him. “Would you rather have an accident? I'd have to squirt you and your blanket and bedding down with water to make sure you're nice and clean.”

“I don't have to go that bad, dude,” he told me, shaking his head furiously. “Nope.”

“So you're refusing?” I asked him, the words formal enough to be ominous, like I was asking him to sign his own death warrant.

He hesitated, staring at me.

“Enemas aren’t pretty,” I told him. “Especially not the first. You’ll be humiliated,” and my cock loved that idea with a passion. “But it would be controlled. It would all go down the drain instead of...” I gestured over the cell. “Somewhere in there. Probably the corner. If you were a dog, you’d get your nose rubbed in it, even, but...” I gave him a brittle smile. “I’m not into scat either.”

He’d still have to be the one sitting down there, smelling it, knowing he’d shamefully had to defecate in the corner. He would hate me for it, but he’d remember that I’d offered him a way out. It wasn’t much better, but it would still allow him some dignity .

Some.

I could see it in his expression, the way he paled and he realized how limited his options were.

“This,” I told him, weighing the full enema bag in one hand. “Or...”

I nodded to the corner of the cell.

“And if you get any thoughts about how it might punish me to have to clean it up, it won’t,” I said flatly. “I knew what I was getting myself into.”

Sometimes, it even startled me, how much I’d figured out in just a short period of time.

“Choose.”

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5

Ryder

This was why I'd never watched more than one of the Saw movies.

All right, it wasn't because I thought I'd be transported into the middle of some porno version of one of them, but the idea of having to make these kind of choices... It had taken me one movie to decide it totally wasn't my thing.

Now here I was in my own personal rendition, stuck between one shitty place and another.

Pun intended.

Sort of.

"I'm not going to... Neither of those..." I let out a huff, trying to tell him with my eyes just how dissatisfied I was with the situation.

I'm pretty sure I telegraphed it okay, but that didn't mean he was going to pay attention — obviously. He just stood there, motionless... the enema bag in one hand and his eyes trained on the far corner.

Weren't enemas for old people? Why the hell did he just have one of those things lying around ?

Duh. For you, genius .

Every time I realized just how prepared he was, it chilled me through a little more. At this rate, I was going to be cold to the bone despite the rising temperature before long.

I was going to have to make a choice soon, too.

I closed my eyes, clutching the blanket like a lifeline even though it couldn't protect me from him. It couldn't protect me from anything or anyone, and with him bumping up the thermostat, I wouldn't even need it much longer.

I would need to go though.

I couldn't stand the idea of shamefully going in the corner like a dog locked in its cage might. The idea of it was disgusting enough, then knowing I'd be stuck in there with it, knowing what I'd done... I shuddered. I was going to have to go with the other option, but I didn't know how I was going to even admit it — let alone go through with it.

"I'm about to go upstairs," he told me.

Hatred flared inside of me as he not only forced me to make a decision like this, but put a time limit on it too. Never mind that my body would've done the same thing eventually, but this was him.

"Why can't I just use the fucking bathroom?" I demanded. "What are you so afraid of? That I'll kick your ass when we get upstairs?"

He arched a brow at me, a small smile tugging at the corners of his lips. Maybe it sounded a little ridiculous considering the fact that he was as butch as a football player and I was more like a martial artist.

Just... without the martial arts skills.

Did that make me more like a cheerleader?

“I’m terrified,” he said, deadpan.

I hated him even more for that droll reaction .

He wasn’t going to answer me, at least not with anything satisfactory. All he was going to do was stand there and wait until he finally got bored and decided to stop playing with me like he was a cat and I was just a mouse.

Or with a puppy and its new owner, if he had it his way.

I let out a low, frustrated sound that reminded even me of a whine.

He turned with a shrug, leaving the enema bag dangling from the side of the bars as he headed for the stairs. “You know the routine. Bark if you change your mind and hope I get here in time.”

“W-wait!” I burst out, my cheeks burning red. “Wait.”

He paused, turning his head to look at me. He quirked a brow, expectantly.

“I’ll... I’ll do it.”

“Do what?” he asked me, mild despite the fact that he was taunting me and we both knew it.

“Look, you know what I mean,” I told him hotly, anger flaring all over again. “I don’t have to say it.”

He shrugged again. I couldn't see his eyes, but I could only imagine the amusement in them. "Bark," he said mercilessly. "Or say it."

Why did he keep giving me impossible decisions? Why couldn't he just... do it so I wouldn't have to be ashamed at making these decisions? I hated being an active participant in my own degradation, but there we were.

I gritted my teeth. "Because this isn't bad enough?" I demanded.

"It'll be bad enough when I say it is," he said. "Not before."

How bad was it going to have to get before he said it was enough?

"En-enema," I choked out .

"Say please," he told me as he started walking back toward me.

"Fuck you," I snarled.

He gave me that unreadable look and turned around again.

I was fully convinced he was going to just leave me down there without giving a single fuck if I didn't play his humiliating games.

"Please," I blurted out, desperate when I saw his retreating back again.

"You need to work on your manners," he told me.

My eyes had to be burning with the loathing I felt for him, but I bit my lip to keep from saying anything. Otherwise...

It was better to just be quiet.

He was going to have to open the cage if he wanted to give me an enema, which meant I'd have a chance to rush him. I could take him by surprise — assuming he wasn't expecting it — and give escape a good shot even though I had a sinking feeling it wasn't going to help worth a damn.

It surprised me when he didn't come to unlock the cell door. Instead, he unwound the long, flexible tube from nearby. I couldn't take my eyes off of the nozzle. It looked like such a simple thing, so small... if you didn't think about the fact that it was meant for your ass.

And it was meant to force things into the “no entry” hole, which made it even worse.

He offered the tube through the bars, and I froze.

No.

“Come get this,” he ordered calmly from the other side of the cell. “I'll walk you through it.”

Walk me through it?

It almost sounded like he ...

He couldn't be expecting me to do this to myself, could he?

Oh, fuck, why was I surprised? He'd made me do everything to myself so far, and it only made sense that he'd keep doing that. But this wasn't something small. This was huge.

The alternative was worse.

I stared at him from my little dog bed in the opposite corner.

He quirked a brow. “I’m not going to wait here forever.” His voice was mild enough, but I could hear the threat in it. “And if you keep balking and refusing, I’m going to walk out of this door and let you shit in your own cell. It can stay there until I feel like coming back downstairs, too.”

That made it even worse, but then, every time I thought I’d had to sink to the lowest depths of his depravity, he came up with something worse.

For the first time, it really hit me, and it hit me hard. Tears welled up in my eyes, and I blinked repeatedly as I tried to clear my vision. I didn’t want him to see me cry either, but that...

That was going to happen either way. He was going to push and push, and he was going to keep pushing until this wasn’t the worst of the things I’d done to myself.

Even though he’d said he wasn’t going to wait, he waited until I got myself together and wiped my eyes with the back of my hand. This was going to be horrible and disgusting, and I knew it.

He gestured with the nozzle in his hand. It glistened with something he must’ve put on it during my little breakdown, but I didn’t even remember him moving. It didn’t matter.

I whimpered but slowly got up. Trying to wrap the blanket around me wasn’t feasible, and I had to walk naked to the edge of the cell to take the nozzle from him.

He smiled, and I hated that it made the scars seem less noticeable somehow. He was

the enemy. He deserved to be ugly and hideous and disgusting, and...

He was utterly in control of both of us.

My hand shook, and I thought I was going to drop the fucking thing. I was all too aware of the nozzle on the tip, and out of the corner of my eye, I saw his fingers go to a clip in the tubing.

Despair became my entire world.

“Get down on all fours,” he instructed me. “Ass up in the air, facing this direction.”

Of course he wanted to watch. Of course he wanted to be the creepy fuck I was getting to know — whether I wanted to or not.

How long could I refuse before I did the inevitable? I wasn’t sure I could live with myself if I just gave in instantly, but there I was, poised to do just that.

Well, maybe not instantly, but it felt like it.

Slowly, I got down onto the smooth, cold cement of the floor, my ass toward him.

At least that way, he couldn’t see that I was crying again.

“You’re going to slide the nozzle into your ass.”

Fucking really? Like I didn’t already know that? “Shove it up your own ass,” I muttered.

“What was that?” he asked from behind me.

“Nothing.”

He wouldn't care what it was anyway. He was determined to do this to me, and no matter what I did, I wouldn't be able to stop him.

Oh, hell, he wasn't even doing it. I wouldn't be able to stop myself, and that was getting to me so much that the shaking got even worse.

“There's lube on it,” he said, like he was some saint for putting the stuff onto the nozzle, “so it should just slide right in. Just relax.”

I cast him an incredulous look over my shoulder, but he only shrugged, unrepentant. I had to wonder if there was a part of him that cared what he was doing at all, or if he was really that much of a sick pervert. If there was something human in him, I could appeal to that — couldn't I?

No. I'd been trying.

With a choked sob I couldn't hold back, I brought it around to my ass, wincing as the thin nozzle slid in. It was easier than I'd thought it would be, but that was probably the only part of this that would be easy.

“Good boy,” he said.

He could take his “good boy” and shove it up his ass.

There was something soothing about his voice, though, something I couldn't help but cling to in that moment. It made me want to cry all over again, because it almost sounded like kindness.

I knew better than to think that was what it was.

“Such a good boy,” he repeated.

I gritted my teeth to keep from snapping at him.

“Now, I’m going to start the water,” he said.

I went still. I didn’t want that. I didn’t want that at all.

“Please don’t,” I whispered.

That time, he heard me. “It’s this or the corner,” he said, like I really needed a reminder.

I’d already committed to this, even if I didn’t want to admit that at all. I swallowed hard and shook my head, bracing myself.

It didn’t matter how much I fucking braced myself. The second the cool water started to rush inside of me, propelled by gravity, I let out a choked sound. I didn’t know what I’d been expecting, but this wasn’t it.

I’d thought it would be more bearable, too, not that I’d already be begging for it to stop. But the first cramp left me gasping in pain. How did people do this? My body cramped again as the water continued, relentless.

“Good boy,” the man kept saying, like that was going to make a goddamn difference.

I sobbed, and somewhere around the third or fourth cramp, I could feel it where my ass tried to push the nozzle out. A little bit of water drizzled down to my thigh, adding to my disgust.

To my shame.

I reached around, holding it in place even as I cried and begged for him to stop.

He didn't, not until he told me, "There we go. Now you just need to stay there for a few minutes before I let you release the water."

I shot a look at him, my eyes red and my cheeks tearstained, in utter horror. I had to stay like this? I couldn't handle it for another second, let alone for a few minutes.

"We're already going to have to do this again," he told me, his voice some mock-soothing thing, like he thought the gentleness would really do anything but piss me off.

"I can't," I said, shaking my head. "I can't I can't I can't I can't—"

"You can," he told me. "For your master. And you will."

"You aren't my—"

"Hush," he said firmly.

Time passed in an endless haze of cramps, of the cold water in my bowels, of my stomach bloated and distended. It rose until it consumed me, everything, every fiber of my being..

Finally, he told me, "Take out the nozzle, then you can crawl to the drain and let it out."

I closed my eyes, miserable and unable to even think up a retort. He wanted me to take it out, then move, then...

"You can do it, Toby," he said, and I could hear the fucked-up softness in his voice.

The snarled “fuck you” that was about to pass my lips was choked back when a fresh wave of pain swept over me, and all I could think about was letting it all go. I removed the nozzle-plug-thing from my ass, and instantly, more water was spilling from me.

“Hold it in,” he encouraged. “You can do it. It’s only for a few seconds.”

Sobbing despite my best attempts to keep myself from doing just that, I managed to crawl to the drain. By the time I did, I was about to lose it — in more than one way.

I barely managed to get there before I released it just in time to hear him tell me to do that. Motherfucker. If he thought I was going to wait any longer, he had another thing coming.

I couldn’t even describe how it felt if I wanted to. The relief, the horror, the humiliation, the realization that someone was watching me do this — watching me, and probably getting off on it...! All of it made up the pieces of a whole, and the entire picture was horrible.

I gave in and cried, my shoulders shaking as my ass emptied over and over again.

“Good boy, Toby,” he said again as the silence descended over us at long last. “Now... It’s time to do it again.”

“Again?” I squeaked in panicked protest. I shook my head. No. No. This wasn’t going to happen. I couldn’t deal with it again.

“You’re going to do it as many times as you have to until that water runs clear... then I’ll clean you up,” he promised me.

“You’d just leave me here like this?” I whispered in disbelief. “If I don’t do it again?”

His voice was so even that it sent chills racing through me all over again. “Yes.”

I believed him.

The next enema wasn’t any better.

So fucking help me, neither was the third.

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6

Griffin

His humiliation had been beautiful to behold.

The way he squirmed and writhed and whimpered... He would be doing all of those things from pleasure before he knew it. He wouldn't believe me if I told him that, but I knew.

He would come to prefer the pleasure over the discomfort and pain... Not that daily enemas weren't going to be a part of our routine. He'd have to get used to the discomfort because I was enjoying seeing his misery entirely too much.

My cock was hard as a rock in my pants, and I had to adjust them a little to make myself more comfortable.

I'd thought he would give more fight about the enemas, but he'd given in without much vitriol. He deserved a little bit of a reward, which meant I wouldn't just hose him down. I'd have to clean out the kennel, though.

I needed to give him a break, or he was going to snap. He needed kindness from my hand, which meant using the grooming tub I'd had put in just for him. I could get the water nice and warm to clean him with, dry him off, and put him back in the kennel with his blanket. I grabbed a towel .

"Such a good boy," I praised, and this time instead of a hateful look, he just cast an

exhausted one in my direction. We were definitely on the verge of taking it too far before he was ready.

This would be the first time I opened the kennel since he'd gotten there, but if there was any fight left in him, it wouldn't last long. It wasn't like he could get out of the basement without my help anyway.

I got the key to the cell out and inserted it into the lock, twisting it until it clicked. I grabbed the tubing and hung it over the cell bars so I could more easily clean it later. He was still there, in the middle of the room with his ass over the drain, shivering violently.

I wrapped the towel around his midsection, provoking a startled look from him, then hoisted him into my arms. He was small for a man, feminine even in the right light, and he was easy enough to carry over to the tub. He gave a half-hearted struggle but stopped trying by the time we got there.

He wanted to be clean, and that only gave me more ideas for ways to get him to bend for me. If he wanted it badly enough, he'd obey me just for the sake of a bath.

I lowered him down into the tub, pulling the towel from around him and tossing it at the foot of the stairs. It was dirty, just like he was.

I turned the water on, making sure to get it up to temperature, and I wanted to push him just a little more. I wanted to see how far I could go with him. Did I want to really risk it?

"This is a grooming tub," I said, letting the water run over my hand. "It's for dogs. Are you a puppy?"

The words were a trap, of course, and he'd know that.

He shook his head anyway .

“No? Well, only puppies get bathed in tubs like this. If you’re just a filthy human, I can take the hose to you instead of washing you down with soap.”

I should’ve played this particular hand when we’d still been in the cell, but it was damn near impossible to think of these things ahead of time.

“What do you want?” he asked, but the attempt at snark was subdued.

I smiled. He was too tired to fight much, which meant...

“A little bark,” I told him. “Just a small one. Give me a bark...” I held up the showerhead at the end of the hose. “And I’ll clean you from head to toe.”

The idea had to sound good to him, because he hesitated. He was silent for a moment, then he gave a small, tentative bark.

I had to fight not to show my surprise. He’d actually obeyed without forcing me to get stern? He really must’ve been tired.

“Good boy, Toby,” I praised him.

“Not Toby,” he said.

I ignored him. He’d learn soon enough that he was whoever I said he was and not anyone else.

I let the warm water start to flow over him, and he let out a moan. Sagging in the tub, he didn’t fight as he settled there on all fours while I rinsed him thoroughly. “Tilt your head back,” I told him.

He looked warily at me.

“I’m not going to try to drown you or anything,” I said, deadpan. “I just want to wash your hair while I’m at it. Don’t you want to be nice and clean?”

Those seemed to be the magic words.

He wanted, more than anything, to be clean. I didn’t want him to be filthy either, but I wasn’t above using it as a way to get him to submit.

I wasn’t above doing much of anything, apparently, which was a somewhat uncomfortable realization to come to.

He leaned his head back, and I wet his hair, too. I grabbed a bottle of shampoo and soaped it up, and both of us were quiet as I washed and rinsed his hair. He didn’t even try to fight, which had me feeling a little suspicious by the time I turned to his body.

This would be the time he’d argue.

It was time to get to the main event. “I’m going to bathe you now,” I told him. I wet a washcloth and put soap on it, rubbing it until suds formed, then I started high at his neckline. He froze, all but quivering beneath me.

He let me wash his face, his back and the back of his legs. It wasn’t until I ordered him to turn over that he finally balked and gave me another of those death glares.

“I can clean myself,” he informed me, as haughtily as if he were on this side of the tub and I was inside.

“Maybe right now.” I shrugged. “Once you have your mitts, you won’t be able to at all.”

I could see the wary curiosity in his expression, but he didn't ask. I knew he didn't dare... because he wasn't ready to know the answer yet. He wasn't ready to know about any of this, really, but he was getting a lesson he wouldn't soon forget.

"But you're not going to." My voice grew firmer. "Now turn over so I can get your front."

I didn't give him an "or else." His imagination would surely supply him with a whole lot of scenarios, and it meant I could save the ones I'd devised for times when I really needed him to cooperate .

He hesitated again, then turned so he could sit on his ass in the tub. He drew a leg up so he could partially shield his shriveled cock from my view. It wouldn't help for long, but I let him have his false sense of modesty as I washed his neck down to his chest, then his legs.

"You know what's next," I said.

"You're not going to play with my cock," he said stubbornly.

"I'd have to find it first," I told him, purposely baiting him.

"It's soft, okay?" he automatically defended himself, only to look horrified that he'd spoken up. "Never fucking mind. You don't need to go near that."

"Don't need to go near it?" For the first time, I let the sweet, honeyed poison slip into my voice as I whispered in his ear, "You're forgetting that I own it... just like I own you."

"You don't own me!" he snapped. "No one owns me, especially not you." His cheeks flushed from more than the warm water.

“You’re still filthy down there,” I said, just as softly. “You were spilling all over the place. Just think of how much of it got around your cock and how much of it’s around your ass...”

He blanched. It took him a moment, but he slowly lowered his leg, giving me access to his cock.

“Good boy,” I said, smiling at him and ignoring his answering glare.

This time, I was clinical but thorough, making sure to get between the folds, around the ridges... enough to make his cock start waking up from the attention — much to his obvious horror as he tried to close his legs again.

I wanted to chase that start of an erection and see where I could take it, but I didn’t want to just rape him .

By the time I sank my cock into him, I wanted him to be begging me for it.

I’d saved his ass for last, knowing it would be sore and tender. “Now back up on all fours,” I said.

I think he was less reluctant to do that, knowing I wasn’t messing with his penis, but now I wanted to inspect his ass. He let out a low hiss as I pulled his ass cheeks apart to see his hole — one day, and one day soon, it would look red and wrecked because I’d fucked him senseless.

But not today.

With the same care I’d given his cock, I bathed his ass and around his hole. I tossed the rag to the side, going back to thoroughly rinsing him off, and I could see he’d relaxed despite himself. Who wouldn’t, when they’d been pampered and bathed, even

in the wake of all that had happened? In comparison, this was orgasmic.

I didn't fetch another towel, though. Instead, I got out the pet grade dryer. He started to rise, but I put one hand on his back to keep him down. It was easier than I'd thought it would be, like he'd given up all fight.

It wouldn't last long, but it would be long enough to get him settled again before he started to struggle again.

I dried him off, focusing on his hair first then moving down his body. His shivering had stopped, but the look he gave me was inscrutable. I tilted my head. He didn't give an explanation, and I didn't press for one. I'd let him have his thoughts for now, at least.

"Time to go back," I told him.

That was when he tensed up, when the adrenaline kicked in, but I grabbed him and carried him back before it could do anything but fuel him. By the time he started kicking at me and trying to grab hold of my hair, I was already depositing him back down in the dog bed .

"Stay," I said firmly.

He scrambled up, racing for the still-open cell door.

I slammed it closed in his face from the inside, staring him down, and he backed up. Our size difference was more than a little obvious then. It finally seemed to register that he wasn't going to be able to do a damn thing... unless I allowed it.

The door bounced back a little, slightly open behind me, but he didn't do anything stupid.

“Now go lie down,” I said. “I have to clean up your mess.”

He flushed at that, the shame weighing his shoulders down. He turned for the dog bed even as he slumped, and he dropped down into it. Cuddling up in the blanket, I had the thought that he looked adorable there — even despite his misery.

Maybe it was because of his misery.

I left the cell long enough to get the hose, and I turned it on so I could spray the drain and the area around it clean. I’d clean it better when he was a little more predictable. The last thing I needed was to be caught on my hands and knees if he decided to pounce.

It would be stupid, but his mouth hadn’t shown him to be particularly intelligent.

He watched me, but he didn’t do anything dumb.

I nodded, going to him to pet his head.

He jerked his head back, glaring at me.

“Good boy,” I told him again.

He glared harder.

I smiled again. Eventually he’d look at me differently. He’d probably always be afraid of me, especially by the time I was done with him. But I could get something out of him that was more than loathing .

Leaving the kennel, I closed the door behind me, locking it back into place. “Get some rest,” I said, grabbing the food bowl. “You’re going to need it.”

Ryder

This reminded me of one of those “choose your own adventure” books I’d had when I’d been a kid. Too bad this wasn’t an adventure I wanted to be on, and every option got crappier than the last.

The real problem was that once I’d given in the first time, it had gotten easier to give in the second time, then the third time... It sort of felt hopeless and inevitable, as soul-sucking as that realization was.

I didn’t even know how long I’d been gone. It was long enough for my stomach to be carrying on a conversation with the empty space, and I grimaced. He was going to make me do something for food, too. I just knew it. He wasn’t done making me miserable, not by a long shot.

Now that I was clean, I didn’t have a problem cupping my hands in the water from the bowl and drinking. It wouldn’t stave off the hunger, at least not for long, but it would be something.

I went back to the dog bed and the blanket, and the bump in the heat had made the air warmer... but it hadn’t done much to counter the chill of the concrete walls and floor. I scooted the little bed away from the wall again, tying the thin blanket he’d first given me around my waist and half-lying on the thicker one.

Curling up in the little bed, I closed my eyes. I didn’t expect to fall asleep, but when I

did, I dreamt of men with scarred faces and too-kind smiles.

I woke with my stomach growling, and the scent of something delicious in the air didn't help that any. If anything, it got louder, and I shifted to try to get it to stop making so much noise.

"Are you hungry?" he asked, coming closer with a dog bowl.

I tried not to eye it, but I was practically salivating as it got closer and I could pick out the scent of chicken and... vegetables? Maybe. "What are you gonna make me do for the food?" I asked sourly, though my voice was rough from sleeping and it only made me sound childish instead.

"Nothing."

I didn't believe that for a second.

"There's one catch," he amended.

That sounded more like it. He wasn't just going to offer out food without there being a price. I'd learned that by now.

"What?" I sat up in the bed, keeping the blanket wrapped around me even though he'd seen more than just my naked body earlier.

He'd seen my asshole, and he'd seen...

I shuddered, not wanting to think about what else he'd seen.

"You can eat your dinner, but you can't use your hands."

He was standing right at the edge of the cell, and my stomach growled louder. I wanted that food, and I wanted it in a bad way, but the idea of not using my hands was not a pleasant one.

“Whatever,” I muttered.

Pushing the bowl through a space in the cell bars that seemed to be designed for it — for fuck’s sake, what hadn’t he thought through? — he watched me thoughtfully.

I picked up a piece of chicken with my fingers, and he cleared his throat.

Oh, for fuck’s sake.

“I will spray you down with the hose and leave you in there like a soaked mutt if you use your hands one more time,” he told me, his voice entirely too pleasant for what he was threatening.

What the fuck even?

“So how am I supposed to eat?” I demanded, even though common sense dictated exactly what I had to do: get down on the ground and eat out of it.

His eyes bored into me, and I squirmed beneath the weight of his gaze.

“Okay, okay,” I muttered, slowly lowering myself to my knees.

The scents coming from the bowl were heavenly, but I couldn’t help but look at it in dread.

“You can do it,” he said.

I shot him a withering look. “Wanna come in and demonstrate?” I snapped.

He arched a brow, and I instantly shut up. I didn’t want to make this worse for myself. It was already bad enough as it was.

It wasn’t so hard at first, when I was just eating off the top of the bowl. I could do that easily enough. It was weird to chew and swallow while on all fours, but I was hungry enough to where I didn’t really give a shit.

But I was still starving by the time I started to reach the bottom of the bowl, and that was where things got messy. My nose kept running into the side, making it impossible to chase a bite of chicken and get it into my mouth.

I triumphantly grabbed a piece between my lips, only to have it fall when I tried to chew. I let out an irritated noise, getting frustrated, and I settled down a little more so I could hold the bowl between my forearms. I couldn’t use my hands, but my arms helped at least keep it in place.

It didn’t help a whole lot, not for the food that had been pushed up against the sides. My nose was covered in juices from the chicken and vegetables, and my mouth was smeared all over with them...

But I wanted those last few bites of food. I needed them. I didn’t know when he was going to feed me again.

Time and again I tried to go after a bite, only to have it move instead of letting me grab it between my teeth.

“People are not supposed to eat like this,” I snarled at him when I got tired of trying.

“Yes, well, you aren’t a ‘people,’” he said. “You’re a puppy.” A satisfied smirk

settled onto his lips.

Right. He'd been watching that little bout of humiliation. I blushed.

"Puppies have trouble learning at first too. We can try mouthfuls of kibble next time if you want," he dared me.

So help me, I didn't know if he was serious or not.

"Real funny," I muttered.

"I wasn't trying to be funny. Come here."

I stared at him, not wanting to go anywhere near him, but I realized he was holding out a cloth .

"I'll clean your face," he said, as though it was really that easy. Just go over there and let him wipe my face off?

It beat letting all this crap dry on my skin though...

Reluctantly, I scooted closer to the edge of the cage, and he reached through. I let him wipe my face clean even though it was utterly humiliating, then I turned just in time to bite his arm.

He obviously hadn't been expecting it, and my teeth connected with flesh. With a harsh grunt, he pulled back before I could break the skin. He stared at me, shaking his head, then reached in to snatch out the food bowl.

"You're going to regret that," he snapped, glancing down at his arm. He'd have a bruise there, that was for sure, and he'd have to explain why he had human bite marks

on him if he headed out.

As soon as the thought crossed my mind, I realized I was wrong. If he even did go out instead of just having anything delivered, he could always wear long sleeves. Even if he didn't, someone might just assume he had a particularly kinky sex life.

No one had any reason at all to connect him to me. Why would they wonder about a random bite mark? He was a celebrity, even if they'd mostly written him off when he'd had his accident.

I couldn't even remember his name — which mattered, because I wasn't going to call him Master .

“I already regret everything that made me end up here,” I snarled back at him, even though my voice was quivering.

So maybe it had been a bad idea to bite him. I should've thought about that, but I'd been so desperate to do something to the bastard that I'd acted without thinking.

Then again, thinking hadn't exactly yielded any great results either. I was still in this fucking cage, just waiting for him to decide which path on the fucked-up adventure I was going to follow.

I didn't know how he was going to make me pay, but I could see the deadly look in his eyes. He looked terrifying when he was pissed off, and I realized I hadn't seen him angry. He'd been so calm since I'd arrived, but now... The mask was off, and the interior matched the exterior.

What would the monster do next?

“You really don't want to piss me off,” he warned, taking another step back.

“What, are you the Hulk or something?” I asked, feeling emboldened by his retreat. It didn’t make any sense for him to be backing away instead of getting closer, especially when he looked murderous.

He scowled. “Do you ever shut up? Do you ever think about what the fuck you’re saying?”

Well, no, not really, but I wasn’t going to tell him that. “Does it matter?” I retorted. “You’re going to do things to me anyway. I can give in or I can fight, but it’s still gonna happen and—”

My voice caught in my throat as I acknowledged the harsh truth aloud.

He jerked his head in a nod. “Exactly. So don’t make it worse for yourself, puppy.”

“Not a fucking—”

The look he gave me cut me off mid-sentence. I burrowed deeper into the blanket even though it was starting to get too warm for it, ready for him to just leave me alone. There was some kind of punishment coming, though, and I doubted I was going to get out of it.

“I was going to wait until later for this,” he said, setting the food bowl down on the nearby shelf. “But I think you need the reminder. ”

Oh, fuck. Fuck, what was he going to do?

He pulled a thick strip of leather out of his pocket, and my heart plummeted to my stomach.

It was a collar.

He tossed it at me, and as it landed in front of me, I fought the urge to fling it into the drain. It was small enough to fit through the grates... and I wanted nothing to do with it.

That was before I noticed the glint of the small padlock in the palm of his hand.

“Put it on,” he told me.

“Why should I?” I asked, eyeing the collar instead of that lock. One thing at a time. One thing at a time...

He unlocked the little padlock in his hand, making sure I watched him.

“Because you won’t like the alternatives. Are you gonna make me spell them out to you? I’ve got plenty of ideas.”

I’m sure he did. The collar was bad news, though, and I wasn’t sure what I would consider worse than wearing the sign of his supposed ownership around my throat.

I shook my head stubbornly.

He set the padlock down on the shelf by the bowl, reached into the cage, and dumped the water out. Most of it ran for the drain, but some of it splashed up on me. I squeaked, not liking the idea of him taking the water bowl away, too. That was worse than him just restricting food.

He left the empty bowl there, which felt especially cruel. This time, he didn’t say anything before he turned for the stairs. He went for them, and I didn’t call out to him to ask him to stop. I was too afraid of what the price for refusing the collar was going to be...

That, and biting him. I couldn't forget there would be consequences for that too. The fact that he hadn't told me what they'd be only made it worse. I didn't have time to prepare myself for anything... not that it would matter. I wouldn't be able to do anything.

I flinched when the door settled into its frame after him, the sound of the lock clicking into place all too loud in the basement. I closed my eyes again. I didn't want to think about this.

Instead, I tried to sleep.

Griffin

I wasn't sure at first whether his teeth had broken skin. His saliva had been warm on my arm, and I'd been sure he'd bitten me deeply enough to draw blood. He hadn't. It wouldn't have mattered much if he had because it wasn't like anyone was going to see my arm, but it was the principle of the thing.

I should've expected him to fight at some point, and I had. I kept expecting him to come at me, but he hadn't done that. He'd waited until I'd been distracted — until I'd been kind to him, even! — then lashed out with his teeth like some unruly, cowardly beast.

I'm sure people would've considered me the cowardly one, keeping him locked behind bars where I didn't have to face him in a fight. But this was kennel training for a feral creature that didn't know its proper place.

After I left him alone downstairs to think, I fixed myself my own meal, eating it in silence — alone, as always, and wishing I'd picked someone who might've surrendered a little more easily to me. It would've been nice to have the companion I'd paid so handsomely for .

Maybe I should've paid extra to have him trained before he got here.

But no. He had to learn from my hand. I didn't want his loyalty going to anyone else, forced as it might be. I didn't want him yearning for some other master or mistress.

I wanted him to want me.

It sounded so pathetic even to me that I abruptly shoved my half-full plate away, my appetite gone. I couldn't let the boy figure out just how much he was getting to me. He'd play me like a fucking fiddle if he realized just how desperate I was for him to surrender.

There was a knock on the door, unexpected and out of place, and I froze. Could I pretend I wasn't there?

It was probably some delivery person, come to deliver one of the countless packages I ordered on a regular basis, but I wasn't used to them knocking. They usually just left the box and went on their way, knowing I wouldn't live this far off the beaten path if I didn't want privacy.

I glanced down at where my arm was a little red from where Toby had bitten me, shaking my head. I didn't have time to slip into a long-sleeved shirt, so I dared going to the door without it.

On the other side, as expected, was a bored-looking delivery woman.

"Yes?" I asked her, willing her to just go away .

"I have a package that needs to be signed for," she told me. Her eyes flicked over me, avoiding the sight of my face and where the scar went down beneath my shirt. It went instead to my arm, and I could see her looking curiously at the mark.

Goddamnit. I should've just ignored the fucking door.

I took the device and stylus from her, explaining offhandedly, "Training a new dog."

She brightened at that. “Oh yeah? What kind? I have two German Shepherds at home.”

“Just a mutt,” I told her, flashing her the most charming smile I could manage from beneath the deterring mask of scars.

“Oh, those can be the best dogs,” she said, taking the thing back from me and starting to tap different sections of the screen.

“He will be,” I said with a nod, ignoring the way my heart raced in my chest. “He’s just semi-feral right now. He’ll calm down soon.”

She chatted with me about dog training, and all the while, I could only think about the fact that I had a human being in my basement. I was training him to be a dog, calling him a mutt, resigning him to a fate he knew but wasn’t ready to accept yet. But it hadn’t even felt real to me until that moment.

It felt real to me then, as I picked the package up from the ground. More supplies. More things to use against my unwilling pup. More training tools.

More. So much more.

I was genuinely smiling by the time I closed the door behind her, but that didn’t stop me from locking it with all three of its locks as always. She might’ve seemed nice, and she might’ve bought the dog story hook, line, and sinker, but that didn’t mean anything.

I was breathing normally even though it felt like a near thing.

The exhaustion that adrenaline had mostly kept at bay was coming back to haunt me with a vengeance, and I realized just how few hours of sleep I’d gotten over the past

few days. I'd been too busy trying to break him down that I'd lost track of time, and it was past time for me to sleep .

Part of me felt bad for leaving him down there with no water, but I wasn't going to give in. He was going to have to drink water my way now, and he wasn't going to like it. He was going to wish he'd just put on the collar.

Never mind that this had been inevitable anyway. He'd give in to one thing after another, each worse than the last, until he no longer saw a reason to fight.

That would be when things would get dangerous. He'd seem trustworthy, but I'd have no way of truly knowing when he gave in...

But I was getting ahead of myself. First, I had to continue to break him down, which meant breaking myself down a little in the process. If there was ever a time to sleep, though, it was now. It would give him plenty of time to think.

I retreated to my room, pulling the blackout curtains in place to keep the sun at bay. I stripped down, crawling naked beneath the sheets, and I was asleep almost as soon as my head hit the pillow.

It was evening when I woke again, and I headed straight into the shower. My new pup had to be thirsty and hungry again, and it would be time to see him wrap the collar around his own throat...

I could picture it in my mind, the strip of leather against his neck, the padlock shining in the light. I could see him kneeling. I could see him eating out of the bowl again without his hands. I could imagine what he'd look like with the mitts I ordered, too, though I wasn't ready to take away the use of his hands. He had a little bit of a ways to go before that because it meant he wouldn't be as easily able to humiliate himself for me...

I groaned, fisting my cock tighter, and stroked myself. I imagined the look on his face, and I imagined him barking for me, playing with his ball and his squeaky toys and—

My release sprayed against the wall, quickly washed away by the shower.

I leaned my head back, breathing heavily. His face lingered in my mind, the way he'd looked when I'd bathed him and he'd gotten fully clean. It had been a good look on him.

I turned the water off and got out, drying myself off vigorously before plodding back to my room to get dressed. It didn't take me long, but it was important that I look impeccable compared to his nudity.

He didn't say anything when I got back downstairs, and neither did I. I went straight to the boxes of supplies I'd had delivered over the past few weeks I'd been planning this, searching for one item in particular. I started to take it out, then I paused.

No, he didn't need to see what I was planning. I grabbed a second collar, like that was the thing I'd really been going for, and headed back to the kennel.

He was awake, gazing out over the cell, and he refused to look at me — like that was going to make me go away.

The collar I'd put in there was nowhere to be found, and I slowly shook my head. "What did you do with the collar?" I asked.

I wasn't sure if he was going to answer me for a moment. He kept ignoring me, and I waited for a moment, curious to see how long he'd play this game.

"You're only making this worse for yourself," I warned him — as though he really

needed the reminder. He knew what he was doing, even if he didn't know just how bad I could make it... or how prepared I was to do just that. "Acting like a sullen child isn't going to help. "

"Nothing is," he finally said, still staring across the kennel instead of turning his head to look at me. "No matter what I do, you're still going to keep making it worse."

"It'll get better," I promised him, playing with the collar in my hands.

He scoffed.

"Once you learn to behave."

"You mean once I let you turn me into your dog ."

How he could put so much vitriol into one word was beyond me, but I ignored it. He'd had to deal with a lot in a short period of time on very little sleep — and most of it drugged, at that. I didn't want to be outright cruel, even though he probably would have argued that all of it was.

He had no idea. He could've landed in the hands of a true sadist who got off on his pain, who'd already started raping and whipping him. What I was doing was positively mild in comparison.

There was a part of me that wanted to show him how bad it could get, how gentle I'd been in comparison, but I bit back that part of me. I had plenty of other toys and punishments I could use without ever touching him that would make him miserable.

"What happened to the collar?" I repeated.

He finally looked at me, and I could see the tear streaks down his cheeks. "I threw it

down the drain,” he spat. “Where it belonged. Then I pissed on it.”

I stilled. I hadn’t expected that answer, and I wasn’t even sure why it was a surprise. I nodded slowly. “That was an expensive collar,” I told him, but I still spun the new collar around in my hand. “But the good thing is, I have a spare.”

“I’m still not putting it on.”

“No food or water until you put that collar around your throat and snap the padlock into place,” I countered .

He flinched. “You’d kill me?”

“You’ll give in before it ever gets to be dangerous,” I told him, dismissing the words. I knew I was right, too. He had yielded so beautifully so many times before. “Are we going to play the same game again? Bark when you’re ready to give in?”

He stared at me, his chest rising and falling rapidly. He had to be hungry and thirsty already, and it wouldn’t take long for him to give in. “What if I don’t?” he asked, putting on a brave front — but I could see the scared little boy behind the adult’s defiant mask.

“Then I’ll eventually force-feed you and put a tube down your throat to make sure you get water,” I said evenly.

“So why shouldn’t I just wait for that?”

If he thought that was the better option, he’d never been force-fed before. “Make yourself miserable, then.” I shrugged and deliberately set the collar next to the padlock on the nearby shelf. “I’ll just leave this here.” I met his eyes, but he flinched and looked away first. “You know the drill,” I said. “When you’re ready to give in,

just let out a little bark.”

If looks could kill, I'd have dropped dead then and there. As it was, I watched him without a word before turning.

I waited until I was at the top of the stairs before telling him, “Oh, and I'm not coming back until either you give me that bark or I have to chain you down and force-feed you. You decide which is preferable.”

“Fuck off, you ugly-ass scarred bastard,” he muttered.

My face went blank, but I said nothing of it. It wasn't as though I hadn't been called worse, and I was sure he had more where that came from.

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9

Ryder

As usual, all of the options sucked.

The fact that I already knew I'd be putting that stupid fucking collar on by the end of the day — or night, whatever it was — was even worse. I wouldn't be able to hold out for long, but I was going to hold out as long as I could.

Then I'd have to bark.

Then I'd have to put the collar around my neck.

Then I'd have to padlock it closed.

It made my gorge rise. I glanced over at the shelf where the inevitable waited, shuddering. Why was I even putting this off?

That was a dangerous thought, one I didn't enjoy having. But part of me wanted to get it over with. It would mean seeing this part done and moving on to the next insane demand, which I wasn't ready to do. I was having a hard enough time comprehending the collar.

It wasn't even the worst thing he'd made me do — to myself — but it felt like it was .

Time passed, my dry mouth getting drier and drier. I braced myself, knowing I was

going to be giving up yet another piece of myself and handing it over to him.

And I barked.

Shame shot through me like fire down my spine, and I fought not to cry. It wouldn't help, and he'd probably just get off on it.

I barked again, hoping he was looking at the creepy-ass cameras so I didn't have to keep sporadically letting out doggie sounds to try to get his attention.

Either he hadn't heard me, or he'd chosen to take his time because it seemed to take an eternity before I heard him at the top of the stairs.

When I did, I resigned myself to the fact that I'd given in and that snarking off to him wasn't going to help.

"Ready for your collar?" he asked, tone as mild as if I hadn't insulted him and pissed him off the last time we'd spoken.

I couldn't say the words. No, I wasn't ready for it, and I'd never be ready for it. But I'd decided to do it, and that was... something.

For once, he took pity on me — or something — and he crossed over to get the strip of leather. He coiled it in one hand before heading over to the cage with it in one hand and the padlock in the other. It was simple enough, just like the other had been. There was an O-ring on either side, and they'd be joined by the lock.

Then it wasn't going anywhere.

I got up, angling my body so my limp cock wasn't directly facing him, and I went to the side of it. I took the collar from him, fumbling with it a little before taking the

lock too. I hesitated then slowly hooked it between the two rings .

“Close it,” he told me after a long moment of us standing there, looking at each other.

I didn’t know if I could.

“Close it,” he repeated.

Mutely, I turned the little lock... then slowly pressed it closed. The click of it latching made me cringe, and I tugged at it, already regretting my obedience.

“Good boy,” he said, nodding in approval. He reached out like he was going to try to touch me, but I jerked back. His smile faded.

“You said I could get food and water if I put the fucking collar on,” I told him. “Did you mean it?”

He had the gall to look a little offended. “Of course,” he said. But he didn’t turn for the water bowl or even the hose on the wall. He walked to the back, where I could vaguely see some packages, and started rummaging through the boxes.

Oh, this wasn’t good.

He finally stood, holding something in his hand. I couldn’t see what it was, not through the dark and at that distance, but his words were ominous enough. “But you’re going to have to be punished for biting me, so...” He shrugged.

The bastard shrugged, like it was just another thing . For him, it obviously was, but for me, it was so much more than that. It was fucking with my head hardcore, and I didn’t know if I could stand to find out what he was getting at.

When he returned to the light, I saw a dildo in his hand.

I gaped at the realistic-looking penis, seeing its ridges and veins first before noticing it had some kind of weird cap at the top. In his other hand, he had a few cable ties.

What the fuck even?

“This is your waterer,” he said, as though that would make perfect sense. He unscrewed the cap and went over to the sink, filling it up before tightening the cap again.

“That’s a penis,” I said flatly.

“It’s a waterer shaped like a penis,” he corrected me. Cable ties between his teeth, he started to attach the thing to the cell bar right over the water bowl. Only when he was finished pulling the last tie taut did he look back at me.

I was still staring, horrified, at the dildo.

“You need to learn how to suck cock eventually anyway,” he said, straightening. He met my eyes, but I averted mine after a heartbeat. “So that’s like... training wheels.”

“Training wheels,” I repeated, unable to wrap my mind around the prospect. How would this even work?

He gestured to it. “You suck on the tip, you get a little. The more you take into your mouth, the faster the water flows. Suck on it and it’ll squirt out more.” He smirked a little. “You’ll have to get used to that too.”

“Asshole,” I snarled. “You didn’t say anything about this. I put your fucking collar on!”

“I told you I’d give you food and water if you did,” he reminded me. “I didn’t say how I’d give it to you.”

“Well, I still don’t see any food,” I said, sitting back down on the dog bed. I was not going to suck on that thing, not with him watching.

“At this rate, you’re going to get dog food instead of people food.” He didn’t sound like he was joking. “Don’t get spoiled, Toby.”

“Ryder,” I reminded him.

He ignored me, just like he always did.

“I’m not eating like I did last time,” I said. The humiliation of sticking my head in the bowl and trying to chase the food around the bottom of it was still stark in my mind .

“We’ll see,” he said ominously.

“What do you mean, we’ll see ?” I demanded. “It’s not like I can go anywhere. You can tell me some of your plans.”

He looked at me, meeting my eyes again. “It’s less fun that way.”

“Bastard,” I muttered, not caring if he heard me or not.

“Your attitude isn’t going to do you any favors,” he said, shoving his hands into his pockets.

I could still see the trail of scars down his arm, disappearing beneath the fabric of his jeans along with his hand. I made a face.

“What do you expect me to do? Roll over and show you my belly?”

“You’ll be doing that before long.” The certainty in his voice had me worried, damn near squirming from it.

I swallowed hard, not sure what else to say. His confidence — arrogance — was so disconcerting that I wasn’t sure how to handle it any more than I knew how to handle the rest of the situation. He seemed to know exactly what he was doing, which meant I was at a severe disadvantage.

Well, that and the fact that I was behind bars and he held the key on the other side. That made a difference too.

“I’m hungry,” I told him, sullen and annoyed by the exchange and the fact that he’d gotten the last word again.

“Drink, and I’ll go get your food,” he said, still standing there, still staring at me.

I sputtered. “Um, fuck no? That wasn’t part of our deal.”

“Who’s calling the shots here?” His eyes narrowed.

Was he really going to be an arrogant prick here, too?

Stupid question. Of course he was.

“I’m not going to do that with you watching,” I told him stubbornly, shaking my head .

“You’re lucky I promised you food and drink if you cooperated,” he replied. “Otherwise, you’d be waiting.”

At least that was one thing I'd noticed about him. He kept his word once he gave it, but it wasn't like it helped me any... until now. How long that would carry over, I didn't know.

"You'll get a treat if you drink while I watch," he said.

"Oh, we're going with real bribery instead of threats now?" I retorted.

"I'm going with whatever's going to make you do what I want," he said bluntly.

It surprised me a little, but then, it wasn't like it was news. He'd already shown that he was willing to bribe and blackmail me into cooperating. This wasn't much different, only something extra instead of a means to an end.

"Nope. Not happening." I could be stubborn about this, at least. I'd drink when he left, before he could get to the creepy cameras and watch.

Then again, he was probably recording all of this too... which was just more evidence. When I was rescued — ha — they'd see the sort of shit he'd done. He hadn't laid a hand on me, but...

But nothing.

I swallowed hard, realizing how it would look. I had done everything to myself. Maybe it had been because of things he'd said and done, but I'd still done it. I couldn't imagine video footage of me shoving the enema nozzle into my ass, or...

I looked at the phallic waterer thing when he started walking away.

That would be on the video too, the sight of me drinking from it... because I was going to have to. I was thirsty enough to try it, and once he'd disappeared up the

stairs, I bolted for it.

It was awkward, tasting off in my mouth, but when I sucked on it, I got the fresh water. I tried to get more of it into my mouth, humiliated beyond belief but desperate to finish drinking before he returned.

When I was done, I retreated to my little bed, curling back up in the blanket. It was already becoming a safe haven, even though it wasn't really safe at all. It was just the only place I had to go to.

I'd started to doze off when he returned, but I perked up. He was carrying another dog bowl — of fucking course — and I couldn't tell what this was. It wasn't like the last time, when it had smelled fantastic. This didn't really have much of a smell.

He pushed the bowl into the cell's food slot, and I slowly moved closer. I stared dubiously down at its contents, gravy over some brown sludge.

"It's stew," he told me, his voice a little dry, "not dog food. Tempting as that might've been."

I glared at him.

"And it's warm. It's better than you could've asked for, considering your behavior."

"My behavior?" I asked, sputtering. "Hey, I've been doing what you tell me to!" Not because I wanted to, but that didn't change the fact that I had.

He gave me a look. "Eat," he ordered. "No hands."

Oh, fuck that shit.

I dipped my hand into the bowl of the warm, disgusting looking mess, grimacing, and brought it to my mouth.

“What did I just tell you?” he asked, his voice a low, menacing growl. “No hands, Toby.”

“Then you’ll have to come here and stop me,” I taunted him, stupid as I knew it was. “Coward.” I deliberately put the bite in my mouth and licked my fingers.

He stared hard at me, then my heart plummeted into my stomach as he unlocked the cell door.

Well, fuck. That wasn’t what was supposed to happen.

10

Griffin

I hadn't planned on touching him.

I had wanted to continue as we had been, with him agreeing to do what I told him instead of making me force him... but it seemed like not having something to directly bribe or blackmail him with was going to cause problems. I was going to have to get out the mitts sooner rather than later, but for now...

He pulled back, away from me, but I grabbed his arm before he could get out of reach. I yanked one of his wrists behind his back, then the other, feeling the frantic pulse beneath my fingers.

"I'm sorry!" he yelped as I put a little bit of pressure on them. "Fuck, I'm sorry."

"Are you going to eat like I told you to?" I asked him. I already knew the answer...

Silence.

"Things are a lot more pleasant when you just do them," I said, keeping those wrists in my grasp and marveling at how delicate they were. My hand was enough to hold them and keep them in place, no matter how much he squirmed .

At least he knew better than to try to fight me — for now, at least. I didn't doubt that he'd go for a knee in my crotch if he thought he could manage it.

Just what he would do and where he thought he would go after... That was a different story altogether.

“Kneel down.”

“I can’t with you holding my wrists like that.” He was sulking like a spoiled child, and there was a part of me that could envision spanking his ass until he gave in. It was gorgeous, taut and with just enough mass to make grabbing them look positively appealing.

“If I let you go, are you going to do what I told you to?”

Silence again.

“Do you need me to help you?” I asked, and I made sure my voice was as gentle as if I really was talking to a puppy.

To my shock, he gave a small jerk of his head in a nod.

Oh, he really wasn’t enjoying having to do anything to himself. He’d rather envision me as the big bad guy while he was the innocent victim — and I guess he was.

I was torn.

On one hand, I didn’t want to break the rhythm we’d started to establish. On the other, I wanted my pup to know that I would be there to help him and guide him if he needed it.

“Just this once,” I warned him, going for the best option I could see.

He nodded again.

I helped him to the ground, not releasing his wrists. He squirmed harder, but a warning squeeze had him going still again.

“Eat.”

He hesitated, and I nudged him closer to the bowl.

Agonizingly slowly, he leaned down, trying to eat the slop and making a mess in the process. Maybe I was cruel for making something I knew would streak his face with gravy and sauce, but I still hadn't forgotten him biting my arm the last time I'd tried to clean him up. This time, I'd watch more closely for hints that he was going to strike.

I didn't want any more dog bites to explain to delivery people, after all.

He ate in silence, until he finally stopped, his breath coming quickly. “Okay,” he said. “Okay, I'm done.”

I looked dubiously at the bowl. He'd only eaten about half, but I could see where trying to eat was exhausting him. To put my foot down or... “A few more bites,” I compromised again.

He'd never have any idea just how many times I restrained myself from doing what I really wanted to do.

He groaned, but he begrudgingly dipped his head back down, forcing down a few more bites with more difficulty than he had the first part of his meal. I didn't even have to put more pressure on his wrists.

Once he started obeying — like always — he seemed to fall into this natural progression where his response was to yield. All I had to do was get him there.

“Good boy,” I said.

When he finally finished eating those few bites, craning his head to look up at me with what could only be described as puppy eyes, I pulled him to his feet and let go of his wrists.

“Good boy,” I repeated.

He only cast me this weary look, though there was still enough poison in it to make it clear just how unhappy he was about the entire arrangement — not that I really needed to be told.

“Stay,” I told him. “I’ll get something to clean up your face,” I added unnecessarily — or at least, one day it would be, because he’d listen when I told him to stay without asking any questions about it.

I kept a wary eye on him as I walked out of the kennel, locking it in place before going to fetch a few baby wipes. I grabbed them and returned, beckoning him over to the side of the cell.

Reluctantly, he walked over to me, and this time when I wiped his face clean, he didn’t try anything.

He was already learning. There would always be consequences.

I could see him looking at the waterer, and I knew he wanted it. I knew he didn’t want to drink out of it while I was there.

I knew just as much that I didn’t care.

I wanted to see his lips wrapped around a cock, sucking and tonguing it as he tried to

coax out what was inside. I wanted him to get used to the heft and the feel of it, so when I finally let him suck me...

He was going to be glorious at it.

The thought had me adjusting my pants to accommodate the growing erection.

How long could I go with just watching him and only touching him at times like tonight when he misbehaved so much that I had to show him the way? I didn't know. I wanted to turn him over, to push him against the wall and fuck him, but I was trying so hard to be patient.

I wanted him to come to me, which meant I might well be waiting for a long time.

"Your hands, too," I told him, cleaning those off as well.

I hadn't wanted the mitts this early, but since he was going to cause trouble, I was going to have to make sure he obeyed me even when I wasn't there. I didn't want to have to supervise all of his meals — hot as it was to watch him bury his face in the bowl to try to get the food out. And I didn't want to have to worry about him trying to get the waterer out of place.

There was the harness, too... But that could wait a little longer.

I went to the boxes, sorting through them until I found the one with the puppy gear. These mitts would be comfortable for his hands, but they would keep his fingers from stretching out. Even where there was a slight give, there was too much padding for him to be able to grasp anything.

He was going to hate them.

I, of course, was having another reaction entirely.

I returned to the cell with them in my hands, and his eyes widened. I was going to have to go in for the second time that night, and I just knew I wouldn't be able to resist the urge to slide my hands down his skin. I'd behaved so much so far, and I deserved to at least feel my new property...

And I would. After his next accessories were in place.

He backed away again, but there was nowhere to go but against cold concrete walls. He ended up at one of them, hissing in a breath when his back met the wall, and he stared hatefully at me.

"If you're going to fight me, then fight," I dared him.

His eyes darted past me to where the cell door was open. If he wanted to play a game of chase, he had another thing coming. I wouldn't chase him, and he'd end up locking himself back in the kennel before long.

That didn't mean I wanted to deal with it, but I could, and I would.

"Offer out your hands," I ordered, watching him intently as I waited to see if he'd obey or try to make a run for it .

He, predictably, made a go at an escape attempt. My hand lashed out, grabbing him hard by the upper arm and pulling him close to me. If my other hand hadn't been holding the mitts, I'd have felt him up then and there. I wished I could feel more of his smooth skin against mine.

"Ow!" he exclaimed, staring indignantly at me. "That hurts."

“I don’t feel like watching you run yourself ragged trying to get away from me and out of here,” I told him mildly. I was a little disappointed because I’d thought maybe he’d realize how outclassed he was, but then, I had to admit the mitts were intimidating.

I pushed him against the wall, this time pinning him there with my much larger body.

He made another noise as his back pressed firmly against the wall, but I ignored it. I took one of his hands roughly into mine and forced it into the mitt, strapping it closed before doing the same with the other. One day, he’d leave them on because I told him to, but that day wasn’t going to be today.

Good thing I’d ordered mitts that had a spot for more of the little padlocks I’d bought.

His eyes widened in horror as he saw them, as he realized he would be able to gnaw at them with his teeth like a wild animal all he wanted... but he wouldn’t make any progress toward getting them off. The leather was stronger than his teeth, and he wasn’t going to chew his own arms off.

My little beauty wasn’t that much of a beast.

My hands slid down his sides, captivated by the sight of him, and I imagined the puppy ears he’d wear, the tail plug he’d have in his ass. I wished I could’ve watched him slide the plug inside, but I was going to have to be the one who did it since he’d just cost himself the use of his hands .

Then again... I wasn’t going to do everything for him, and he did need to let his hands breathe sometimes. No, I’d take them off to let him do his enemas and to make sure he was the one to seat that plug before I bound up his hands again.

I shivered, pressing against him and letting him feel my erection against his front

through my jeans. “This is what you do to me,” I told him, the raw need in my voice surprising me. It had been so long since I’d touched anyone — since anyone had touched me, hideous as I was now.

My new pup had to be the exception to that. He had to be loyal, had to see me as his master instead of just some ugly, scarred bastard who was holding him captive. It would take time, but I had all the time I needed, whether I wanted to need it or not. I didn’t know how long it would take to flip his thinking, but I was determined to do it.

One day at a time, one step at a time, one humiliation at a time.

He couldn’t resist forever.

Ryder

No matter how much I'd expected him to touch me, nothing could've prepared me for it actually happening. I could feel the warmth of his hands on my skin, the way his strong fingers dug into me, and I had to fight not to squirm.

The mitts were freaking me out, but it was better — marginally — than having my hands held behind my back. I'd known he was larger than me on a practical level but feeling him up close had only driven home how much smaller I was. I didn't like it. The discrepancy in our heights and weights made it that much easier for him to hold me captive.

Of course he wouldn't have kidnapped someone who would've been able to overpower him.

Coward. I'd have liked to see him try to take on some of my friends.

But then, they weren't what he wanted. He wanted me for reasons I couldn't even start to understand.

Why did I have to be the one to get picked up for this twisted shit? I may not have been the best guy around, but I didn't deserve this, either.

"You can let go of me now," I finally said through gritted teeth when he didn't release me. I tried to flex my fingers in the mitts, but they wouldn't budge. It was

nearly panic-inducing, but I didn't want him to see me break down over the claustrophobic feeling. It was only my hands. What if he got into the serious shit and started with the leather masks and all?

I shuddered.

No, I wasn't even going to think about that.

He held onto me a moment longer, and I was all too aware of his hands on my bare skin. I squirmed, and his grip tightened momentarily before he released me.

I put as much distance as possible between us, which wasn't very much, still all too aware of the feeling of his erection pressing against my front. He might not be treating this like something overtly sexual yet, but that didn't mean he wouldn't. He was only getting started.

That thought was nearly enough to shatter what little resolve I had left. He kept fucking winning, and all I could do was surrender even though it was the last thing I wanted to do. I wasn't into this, my soft cock more than attesting to that fact, but it wouldn't matter because he was.

I stared hard down at the ground, but I could see him shake his head out of the corner of my eye before he headed for the cell door. I may have called him a coward, but I wasn't any better. One failed attempt, and I'd given up.

I tried to tell myself it was just for now, but the simple truth of it was that I was too tired to fight. I didn't even know how that was possible, considering all I was doing was lying around and sleeping, but I was exhausted.

Maybe that was why I was exhausted.

That, and he'd kept me busy almost every waking hour with one humiliation after another. It was like he was trying to throw me off balance and keep me that way — and he probably was.

The sound of the key turning in the lock of the cell door was impossibly loud. I stood there with my mittened hands held out in front of me, my back just shy of pressing against the wall, and I watched him leave the cell.

I couldn't even imagine what he'd come up with next because I wasn't some perverted freak like he was, but I knew it was going to be even worse. How it was going to be worse, I really wasn't sure, and thinking about it was only going to drive me insane.

Instead of leaving, though, he waited outside of the cell door, watching me.

"What?" I snapped. "Why are you watching me?" I shifted self-consciously, realizing entirely too much of my body was on display for him.

"Because I like what I see," he replied.

I scowled. "Well, this ain't for you," I asserted.

He gave me a look, a brow drawing up. "I don't know how long it's going to take for you to realize you belong to me, but it's going to be easier when you do."

"For you," I said.

"For both of us," he said, using that mild tone of his that I hated so much. It almost made this sound reasonable, even though it was anything but.

"Oh, fuck off."

“Getting mouthy again now that I’m on the other side of the bars,” he noted .

I stared at him, not liking where that train of thought might be going.

“I have different types of gags I’d love to try on you,” he went on. “Some of them will be more comfortable than others, but you’re not going to like them.”

What kind of stupid comment was that? Of course I wasn’t going to like the gags. I wasn’t into kink. I’d heard enough stories from my friends to know it wasn’t my thing. Gags and spanking and cock rings and all sorts of other shit could just stay far away from me.

While we were at it, the mitts could go too.

“You might want to get something to drink if you’re going to continue to run your mouth,” he said. “Because I will gag you, and you won’t even be able to tell me when you want to behave again...” He canted his head to the side. “Then again, I can always watch for you to get on all fours and present your ass to me since you wouldn’t be able to bark...”

I gaped at him. “Is there some sort of manual for this sort of thing?” I finally demanded after a moment of dumbstruck silence. “Where are you coming up with this shit?”

His smile was brittle, that terrible thing that drew his scarred face up and made it all too clear what kind of person he was by the outside alone. “Let’s just say I read a lot.”

“Don’t get out much?” I taunted, unable to help myself.

His eyes flashed, and I saw something in them that went beyond anger. I almost felt

bad for what I'd said — or at least, I would have if he hadn't gone straight for the boxes.

Fuck .

"I'm sorry," I blurted out.

"No," he said, shaking his head, "you aren't. You're just saying what you think I want to hear." He closed the distance between us again, a ball gag in hand. "Get on all fours with your ass up in the air, and I won't put the gag in."

I stared at him, horrified all over again. How could he keep making the choices get worse like this? Every time I thought it was impossible, there he went again. The depths of his depravity went beyond anything I could've imagined in my worst nightmares.

And his sole focus was me.

He shrugged when I didn't move. "I suggest you get something to drink before I get in there." He was already moving for the door when he spoke.

I didn't want to drink in front of him, but I didn't want to end up going thirsty either. Shit. In a desperate moment, I closed my eyes and wished I was anywhere but there.

It didn't help.

When I opened them again, I was still in that basement cell, and he'd already unlocked the door.

"Wait!" I burst out, miserable but making yet another choice to damn me even more. "I'm thirsty." I wasn't getting down on all fucking fours for him, but I'd drink out of

that stupid thing with his eyes on me. He could watch that from his secret cameras anyway, probably.

“Hurry up,” he said. All of the mildness, the near warmth, had faded from his voice. It was curt and distant, something I didn’t like hearing. It betokened something wrong, which meant I was going to have to deal with yet another punishment.

I didn’t know how many more of them I could handle.

I went reluctantly to the waterer, wrapping my lips around the head of the false cock. I heard him hiss in a breath as he watched me, and my cheeks flushed as I realized just how intently he was watching me suck off some dildo for water. It couldn’t be helped .

I took as long as I could, but in the end, he lost patience.

He grabbed my arm again, more gently that time but just as firmly as before, pulling me away with a loud, obscene smack of my lips.

I closed my mouth, pressing my lips together and shaking my head. Like hell was he putting that thing in my mouth!

He’s going to win this too, and you know it . That ever-present fucking voice was right, but that didn’t mean I had to just yield. If that was the case, I’d be on all fours like some fucking mutt.

Chances were that after wearing the gag for a few minutes, I’d be wishing I had, but I just... couldn’t. The gag was less humiliating than getting into position like I was preparing to be fucked.

Like I was really surrendering to him and taking the next step toward being his

fucking dog.

He grabbed my jaw, and even though I fought against him, he pried my mouth open. Before I could protest, the ball was situated firmly behind my teeth, and I gagged as he tied it into place. I tried to reach it, to unfasten it, but the mitts got in the way. I let out a little whine, feeling entirely too helpless.

“There,” he said. “Maybe that’ll get you to start thinking about what you’re saying, Toby.”

My name isn’t fucking Toby .

I couldn’t say the words, but I could give him the most murderous glare I could summon up.

It was too bad he only offered a grim smile in turn, which meant it wasn’t successful at all.

He pushed me back, and I stumbled, surprised.

He let himself out of the cell before I could recover. “When you’re ready to behave, you know what you need to do.” Again, that tight smile that wasn’t really a smile curved onto his lips. “And you’d better hope I’m watching when you do it, or you’ll be waiting like that for a while. You don’t have your knee pads yet, so it might get uncomfortable.”

Knee pads? That was so not fucking comforting at all.

From the look on his face, I was pretty sure it wasn’t supposed to be.

Fucking bastard !

Getting the last word again, he glanced over me once more then retreated to the stairs, vanishing up them into what I could only assume was his home.

And I was all alone to wonder just how long it would be until I gave in and did what he told me to do.

12

Griffin

Every time I went back upstairs, leaving my new pet alone, I was lonelier than ever. It was like seeing him, feeling him, reminded me of just why I'd done this in the first place — which was great for my resolve, but not so great for my patience.

I wanted him to submit now. I wanted him to be well trained now, to listen to me and obey and beg me to touch him and fuck him...

But that was going to take time. All of this was going to take time, and I wasn't sure I could do it. I wasn't sure I could handle his hatred and his snide little comments.

I didn't have much of a choice. It wasn't like this was something I could get a refund on, something I could just undo and try again on. This was done, for better or for worse. I couldn't let him go. He knew who I was, and it wasn't like there were many scarred-up, washed-up ex-musicians around.

I rested my back against the door to the basement once it had closed behind me, burying my face in my hands. I didn't want to deal with this, with reality. That was why I was doing this.

I hadn't thought it would be quick, but I guess I'd thought it would be easier somehow. Maybe it would've been with another pretty guy, but this particular beauty didn't want to be a pup. He wanted to go back to his life.

Yeah, well, I wanted to go back to my life, too. Neither of us was going to get what we wanted.

I wanted a drink.

I wanted several drinks.

Instead, I sighed and pushed myself away from the door, starting down the hallway to my office. I didn't expect him to yield any time soon, but I wanted him to.

So little time had passed, but it was wrecking me. I could only hope it was wearing him down even more. At least I had food and a comfortable bed to retreat into. All he had was the little dog bed, and now he couldn't use his hands or his mouth. He had no idea what else I had in store for him, and part of me wanted to go downstairs again and just... gear him up.

What would it hurt? I'd get to see him in his harness, with his tail and ears, with the bars that would keep him from standing up. He'd get used to his place faster if I plunged him into it... wouldn't he?

I didn't know.

Fuck, I didn't even know if I could consider this the slow way when I'd already done so much to him over the space of a few days. But it was slower than I wanted to move. Necessary, but slower.

I just needed to have patience.

I'd never had much of that, though.

I sank down into the chair, watching my pet through the cameras. He was trying to

use his mittened hands to paw at the straps of the gag.

I felt a little bad that he wouldn't be able to drink... and that might've partially been because I wouldn't get to watch him suck on that phallus to get his water. I'd been hard since I'd gotten him here, and thoughts like that hadn't helped at all.

My erection had dwindled during my self-pity party, but it was still ever-present. I could jack off, but it felt like a waste somehow. I wanted him, and I wanted him to want me, and why hadn't I just paid for a pricy escort to pretend to be able to stand me?

Because no pricy escort would be mine, and more than ever, I needed something — someone — that belonged to me.

I must've dozed off in the chair, because enough time had passed for my pet to be sulking in his bed instead of fighting with the mitts. He still wasn't in the position I'd told him I wanted him in, which meant no reprieve from the gag.

Even with a clock to guide me, it was hard to keep track of time. I was so determined to keep him off balance that it was having the same effect on me. I wanted to curl up in bed and nap it off, but I didn't even know when I'd woken up. I'd have to feed him again soon...

But I was going to make him yield before I did. He'd get into that position and display his ass for me so I could imagine what it was going to look like with the tail plug.

He would look gorgeous with it, but he'd hate it.

Too fucking bad. He hated everything else, too.

Speed it up, slow it down, keep going at the same pace... I didn't know what to do. He might've accused me of having a manual, which made me think it was working even better than I could see, but I had no fucking idea what I was doing. It was one guess after another, and all I could do was hope that he'd do what I wanted.

The harness was a must, though. I had to be able to easily grab him, especially when he'd gotten the nerve to make half-hearted attempts to escape.

As much of a mouthy brat as he was, he knew one thing: he wasn't going to just get out of this. He could run, but there wasn't anywhere to run to. He was smart enough to understand it would only make things worse for him, even if it took him a little bit of time to accept it.

Motion caught my eye, and I saw him shifting onto all fours.

My cock was hard in an instant, and I imagined how it might feel to plunge into that ass. After all, why was I waiting? It might break him down faster if I fucked him senseless, and he belonged to me. What was stopping me?

It wasn't like I could say it was some sort of societal rule when I'd had him kidnapped and was keeping him in my basement. But it felt like it was a step too far... even though I knew I wouldn't wait forever. I wanted him to be mine, I wanted him to yield, but if he didn't...

I would do what I had to.

That thought should've turned me off, but it had me throbbing. I really was a sick fuck, and he was right. The problem was that I had about zero motivation to fix it.

If anything, I had motivation to go deeper down the rabbit hole.

I watched him for another moment then stood. I'd take the gag out as long as he stopped running his mouth, but it was time for the harness. It would probably have about the same impact as the enemas had, which meant it would push him one step closer in the direction I wanted him to go .

It was another sign of ownership, every bit as much as the collar was.

After that... I had to maintain what we were doing, but I couldn't let the momentum get too fast or he'd break in ways I wouldn't like. Or would he be able to resist even more? I didn't know.

Swap the gag for the harness, then, and continue to keep him off balance. Feed him, keep his waterer full, make him do his own enemas, then we'd introduce the tail.

Then... We'd see.

I headed downstairs, not greeting him or acknowledging him even though I could see him sitting back down. He'd have to stop that, but it would take some time.

I found the harness, the supple leather soft in my hand. He'd been lucky that I'd decided to get the more expensive equipment, or he'd be in for a lot of chafing. As it was, it would take some getting used to.

He eyed it — and me — with dread, his gaze darting between me and the harness.

“Do you know what this is?” I asked, knowing perfectly well he couldn't answer me.

He shook his head slightly, still looking apprehensively at it.

“It's a harness,” I told him. “It's going to go around you and make sure I have plenty of handholds to grab you with if you try to go running off on me again.”

He didn't look pleased, but it was hard to take him seriously when he looked so beautiful. His hands were trapped in those mitts, and a little bit of drool ran down his chin that had to be seriously damaging to his pride.

If only he'd stayed on all fours.

"It'll be comfortable," I continued. "And you'll get used to it being like your clothing after a while. "

He snorted.

I shrugged. "Either way, I'm trading out the ball gag for the harness... Unless you want the gag to stay in?"

He shook his head vigorously, not needing to think about that particular decision. The gag couldn't be pleasant, likely tasting of plastic and smelling of it too, and keeping his mouth more than just a bit open. I loved the look of it and how helpless it made him... but this was about more than a perfect mental image.

I nodded in turn, heading for the cell door. He stayed back as I unlocked it, probably desperate to have the gag out. Not being able to talk did seem to be a major punishment to the snarky little thing in my kennel.

Then again, it was supposed to be.

I closed the cell door behind me, though I didn't lock it in place. I didn't think he was going to run, and even if he did, he'd be fucking himself over.

He didn't move, only leaning up a little and watching me expectantly.

Only this piece of work could look so demanding with a ball gag stuck in his mouth.

“Harness first,” I told him.

He made a sound of protest, his eyes widening.

“I’ll keep my word, and you know it,” I said. “But I don’t want you trying to bite me while I’m getting the harness situated.”

The whine he made was so puppy-like that it got a smile out of me, and I gestured for him to move closer.

Reluctantly, he obeyed, and I started getting him into the thing. I was glad I’d looked at the design and the guide for it, because there were so many buckles and straps that I would’ve been lost trying to figure out how to make it work. I wouldn’t even need padlocks for this, even if I took the mitts off. He wouldn’t be able to get this thing off of himself.

When I was done, I took a step back to inspect my handiwork, nodding in approval. His lithe body looked gorgeous trapped inside the harness. He looked even more perfect with those mitts on his hands, tears glistening in the corners of his eyes as he obviously wondered if I was going to take the gag out.

I didn’t want to, but I’d said I would.

“C’mere, my good boy,” I told him gently.

He eyed me, but he leaned in, letting me more easily reach the strap holding the ball gag in place. I freed him from it and helped him get it out of his mouth.

He was crying, then. It felt strange because I had done something good, hadn’t I? The harness wasn’t nearly as bad as the gag.

“What’s wrong?” I stupidly asked.

But instead of going into some wild diatribe, he only choked on a half-sob, half-laugh. “What isn’t?” he croaked out.

“It’ll get better,” I told him, feeling a little awkward when I had to face those tears. I didn’t know how they could turn me on and make me uncomfortable all at once, but they managed. “You’ll get used to it. No more new things for a few days, okay?” I ran my fingers through his hair, and he just let me. Heartened, I continued, “We’ll just keep doing what we’re doing, and as long as you’re good, we won’t even need the gag.”

He shook his head but didn’t speak, which meant he’d learned at least one lesson.

“It’ll be okay,” I promised him. “You’ll see.”

13

Ryder

It'll be okay. You'll see.

Those words haunted me, almost as though they were whispered in my ear at random intervals to keep me off balance. I had gained my footing a little bit, growing more confident in what was going to happen each day.

True to his word, he hadn't wavered from his declaration that things would hold steady. I didn't think that would last forever, but it was enough to make a sense of — false — security set in.

I knew that was what he wanted, but it got more and more exhausting to resist his gentle fingers in my hair or his hands running along my skin. I just endured it, knowing it would be over with soon enough, even if the ensuing whisper of “good boy” was almost as bad as the rest.

No. Worse.

Every day, I begged him not to make me put the nozzle of the enema's tubing in my ass. Every day, I gave in. Every day, I begged him to let me take it out.

I should've just done it, defiant and uncaring of what he thought or felt. After all, I knew I was only going to yield anyway. It was a disconcerting thought — and not a pleasant one. It kept sneaking up on me when I least expected it, too, and it was there

whether I wanted to admit to it or not.

I wasn't sure how many days had passed, not really, but there had been five sets of enemas, so I had to figure it had been almost a week. That thought was insanity-inducing. Almost a week in this basement cell, where it was normal to curl up in a dog bed with a blanket that really needed a wash.

I wanted to sleep all the time, but the dreams were worse than the reality. And he was always there, always, whether I was awake or not.

I knew the man had been famous once, then he'd gotten into... some accident. I hadn't followed the gossip rags, so I wasn't sure entirely what had happened, but an ex-girlfriend had chattered about what a tragedy it had been. Hadn't he saved someone's life or something? Wasn't that why he was burned so badly?

Great. The last thing I needed was to start feeling bad for him. I couldn't think of him as a person. He was a beast in every way, and he wasn't letting up no matter how much I rebelled or obeyed. He just... kept going until he got what he wanted, when I was too worn down to argue or fight or even cry.

As I'd obeyed more, the food had gotten better, but I still had to eat it without my hands. Those were all wrapped up unless he was having me humiliate myself in front of him, and I'd stopped fighting that, too. What was the point?

"It's time for something new today."

I nearly jumped out of my skin. I hadn't expected him there, and I'd been too lost in my thoughts to pay attention to his approach. The idea of something new just when I was getting used to the familiar was horrifying, and I shook my head. I didn't argue, not wanting another few hours with the gag, but I wasn't going to just...

Oh, fuck. Why did I even try to keep telling myself that? One week, and I was already a broken toy.

“It won’t be bad,” he said, like he was the one who was having to go through these things — like he knew what it was like!

“You try it and tell me how bad it is,” I muttered.

He ignored me, which wasn’t a surprise. “Do you want the water bowl back instead of the cock?” he asked me.

“What are you going to make me do for it?” I countered, knowing perfectly well that there would be a catch — one humiliation replaced by another, over and over again until there was nothing left of me.

He held up his hand, and I saw what was in it. There was a thick metal... thing, and attached to the end of it was a rubber thing.

A tail.

I burst out laughing, high and hysterical, shaking my head. “No, no, no. We’re not... No. Just no.”

“Yes. You are,” he told me firmly.

“I don’t want the water bowl that bad.” The thought of being able to drink out of a water bowl, after all, wasn’t that much better than sucking on a bottle shaped like a cock. It was better, but not worth the humiliation of having the plug up my ass.

“But I’m sure you’d like to have a chance to walk around a little,” he said, his voice deceptively mild. “You have to be tired of that little cell.”

“Of course I’m tired of it. If you let me go, I might even— ”

“Stop,” he said, sharp and cold. “We aren’t having that conversation. I’m not letting you go.”

I was going to get the gag again if I kept this up, but I wanted out. I wanted out so fucking bad.

“If you put the tail in, I’ll let you walk around down here for a little while,” he promised me.

“It’s going to be awfully uncomfortable walking around with that thing in my ass,” I retorted.

“I’m not telling you to crawl yet,” he shot back. “It won’t be that bad. This is a small plug, to get you used to wearing one.”

That thing was supposedly small? Oh, fuck no.

I shook my head stubbornly.

And here we were again, at the familiar impasse we so often got to. I would refuse to do something, and he would take something away until I gave in anyway.

Sometimes, I didn’t know why I bothered. Maybe the last remnants of my tattered pride wouldn’t let me.

Maybe I was just protesting out of habit.

“All right,” he said, setting the plug down on the nearby shelf, where he put all the things I had to look forward to.

I hated that fucking shelf with a passion.

“When you’re ready to switch that out for a water bowl and take a little bit of a walk around here, you know what you have to do.”

Bark. He wanted me to bark. Just like I had so many times — when I was hungry, when he wanted me to do something and I tried to refuse...

“Not good enough,” I told him, my voice a little hoarse. “I want to go outside.”

For a moment, he only stared at me.

“No.”

I’d expected the answer, but somehow it hurt anyway .

“When are you going to accept that you don’t call the shots around here? You might’ve been someone when you were out in the world, Ryder ,” fuck, he really did know my real name, which made him calling me Toby even more disconcerting, “but down here? You’re just my pet.” The words were ruthlessly delivered from an equally ruthless man.

I tensed, hating the fact that I was letting this get to me. I thought I’d done well, but then, it had only been a handful of days — maybe a week, maybe not. I wasn’t even sure anymore, and honestly, it didn’t matter that much. How could it, when it wasn’t going to change anything?

Wasn’t there some statistic about people going missing having the greatest chances of being found within the first 24 hours? 48? Well, I sure as fuck hadn’t been found in the first couple of days, which made my chances get lower and lower by the minute.

And I had to consider the idea that I might never be found.

“I’m never going to be just your pet ,” I told him, gathering all the courage I could and directing my words at him with as much as I could manage. “Even if you break me down, I’m going to be more than that.”

For a moment, I was pretty sure a smile flickered across his lips, but it was gone before I could figure out what it meant. Amused? Mocking?

Pleased?

I didn’t know. He’d been mostly... weirdly courteous to me. Apart from the whole making me humiliate myself in front of him over and over thing, he didn’t go out of his way to be cruel.

I could always feel his eyes on me when he was downstairs. Hell, I could feel his gaze on me even when he wasn’t, always aware of the fact that he was probably watching me through cameras. I knew he wanted to touch me. Our little exchange the other day had more than proven that.

But he barely did.

Why?

It was the first time I wondered it, because it was the first time I really gave a flying fuck. It wasn’t even that so much as I just... wondered what kind of man he had to be to do this to someone.

“You’re still going to submit,” he said, just as he had so many times before. “You’re going to be my good boy, Toby. I just know it. You’re already on the path. We just have to keep going.”

I didn't want to keep going.

"Fine. I'll wear the stupid plug," I said. If I could get an idea of the layout of the basement, I might have more of a chance of eventually getting out and...

And what? Finding a weapon? Getting him to let me go? I doubted he had anything down here that could be used that way anyway, unless I could find something made of glass or cheap metal.

He didn't seem like a cheap metal type of guy. Everything had been luxurious and well-made.

"But I want a better bed and a clean blanket," I told him.

He considered me for a moment, and I could see the wheels turning in his head: was it too much of a demand to accept from me?

Would he do it? I couldn't tell from his expression, but it was always hard to read with the way the scars distorted half of his face.

"You've been good," he acknowledged.

Fucking finally.

"I'll replace your bedding after you put the plug in. But if you take the plug out, I'll take it back and you won't have anything to sleep on but a sheet."

He meant it, too. I could hear the conviction in his voice, and I loathed him for it.

"Fine," I snapped. "I'll wear it, like I said. You don't have to make threats."

Except for the fact that we both knew he did need to make threats. Otherwise I would try my damndest to find a way around his rules, to try to find loopholes even though there might not have been any.

I offered my hands to him so he could unwrap them from the mitts, freeing them and making me feel more human than I had... except for the fact that the tail was going to reverse that.

He grabbed the bottle of lube we used every day for my enemas and slicked up the plug, putting a thankfully generous amount on it.

“Turn and raise up your ass so I can watch,” he ordered me.

I wanted to protest, but I had a feeling that wasn't going to get me anywhere. I muttered something unintelligible, something even I didn't understand, but I knew better. Fighting him on this might seem satisfying for a little while, but it wouldn't stay that way. It would just make things worse.

I gritted my teeth and took the plug gingerly from his hands, wanting to try to leave another — better — bite mark on his arm. I hoped the first one had caused him problems, even though they didn't look like human tooth marks at all.

I leaned over, baring my ass to him, and I realized I had one tiny advantage. He wanted to look at me. He desperately needed it, just like he needed for me to yield to him. I was sure I wasn't the first kidnapping victim to think they could manipulate their captor, but... Look at him. He was probably a brute through and through.

Slowly, I started to work the plug into my ass, wincing and glad he couldn't see the pain written across my face. It took time, because I wasn't going to hurt myself, but finally the thickest part of it was through. It seated itself, my ass damn near sucking it in, and I let out a quiet whimper.

The tail brushed my ass cheeks, and I shifted uncomfortably, standing all the way up and trying not to feel it. It meant shoving my ass out with little grace at all to keep the thing from touching me.

It didn't work for long.

“Very nice, Toby,” he said, nodding in approval.

I wished there wasn't a part of me that was relieved.

14

Griffin

Every time he obeyed, there was still the same sense of satisfaction and... relief that he'd done what he'd been told. I never knew if my threats or promises would be good enough, and there was always the chance he'd laugh in my face and make it that much harder to continue his training.

But he was breaking. I could see it in the sullen resignation written across his features, the way his voice wasn't nearly as defiant as it had been. Part of me was a little bothered by that, but then he'd say or do something to prove to me that there he was, right below the surface.

Then I didn't know whether to be relieved or frustrated.

Make up your fucking mind. Either you want him to break or you don't.

It wasn't as simple as my mind would have me believe. I wasn't an expert, and I wasn't going to start googling "how to break in a sex slave" on the internet. Firstly, because I had no desire to completely prove myself guilty in every sense if they ever found him — and secondly, because there was this part of me that didn't want to acknowledge that was what I was doing.

"All you had to do was put in one little plug," I told him, "and now..." I opened the cell door, beckoning to him as I kept a wary eye on him. "After I put your mitts back on, you can take a walk around while I get new bedding for you."

I could see the flash of disappointment in his gaze when he realized I wasn't going to leave the mitts off. Hell, he was probably equally disappointed that I wouldn't be leaving the room to get his new bedding, but he'd have to deal with the fact that I was prepared. I had a dog bed the next size up, complete with a fluffy blanket and fuzzy squeaky toy for him to play with.

He eyed me, and I was pleased to note that the care he'd taken to hide himself from view had lessened so much. It wasn't like he was proud of his nudity — not yet — but he wasn't as afraid of it, either.

Especially if it meant he got to walk around and see where he was being held.

I could've told him there wasn't much to it, but he wouldn't have believed me anyway. Besides, there was still something powerful about being able to walk outside of the cage.

Before I let him step out, I put his mitts back on his hands, and he let me with minimal resistance even though he knew that once they were on...

He knew a lot of things would be impossible, but he let it happen anyway.

I watched him walk for a moment, how he stepped forward only to cringe when the tail brushed the back of his leg, then I went into the cell to grab his old bedding.

He turned, coming back, and I could practically see the intention on his face .

“Good boy,” I told him, as though I didn't realize he was thinking about trying to slam the door closed with me inside — like it didn't have a lock only I had the key to. “Do you want some scratches before you keep walking around?”

It took him off guard enough to where I swept out of the cell, acting as oblivious as if

I had no idea what he'd been considering. I dumped the dirty bed and blanket at the foot of the stairs, going to hunt through the boxes.

He followed me over there, but I shook my head. "No, these are surprises for my good little pup," I told him. "You don't get to see these until you're ready."

He scowled, but his good behavior continued. I guessed there was something about the plug in his ass that took away some of his fight...

And fuck, it looked good there, so it was an overall win. It was just another step toward his ultimate fate — the harness, the plug, the mitts... He didn't need much more. I'd have him crawling around on the floor in front of me, chasing balls and chewing on squeaky toys before I knew it.

I found the better dog bed, ripping the plastic open and shaking it out. It looked like a large, comfortable pillow, and he'd have plenty of room to stretch out.

I crossed to the cell, keeping track of him out of the corner of my eye to make sure he couldn't sneak up on me or catch me out unaware. He didn't seem like he was going to try anything again, likely seeing the futility of it. There may have been several boxes, but they weren't stacked high enough to give him places to hide.

Besides, all I'd have to do was flood the room with light, and I'd find him instantly.

I arranged the bed then turned to grab the blanket, adding that to the pallet. When I turned around again, facing the cell doors, he was standing right there .

"What would you do if I locked you in there?" he asked.

Even though my heart started to race at the thought of being trapped in such a small space, I shrugged. "You'd kill us both if you locked me in." I forced a smile, knowing

it came out as more of a sneer than anything else. “But you won’t.”

He bared his teeth at me like he was some sort of wild animal instead of anything else. Feral. But he could be feral. Feral creatures could be broken, potentially more easily than humans could. If he’d already devolved that much, it was only a matter of time.

It was terrifying and exhilarating all at once.

“Only because I don’t have the key. We’d see how you’d react to being trapped and told what to do otherwise,” he said.

I laughed. I couldn’t help it. It startled him, making him take a small step back. He didn’t understand that he couldn’t manipulate me the same way.

After the accident, I’d been alone with only my depression. People had tried to check on me, but I hadn’t wanted to let them see the state of the house. It had been filthy, truly filthy, and I’d gotten used to that.

I’d gone days without eating, and I’d only had enough to drink to keep myself from getting outright dehydrated.

I had been pretty much an animal then, every bit as much as I looked like one, and it had taken a long time for me to drag myself back out of it. But let him try to cage me and lock me away.

It wasn’t like I hadn’t done it to myself more times than I could count...

I strolled out of the cell before he could get any ideas about trying. Even without a key, he could still get himself in trouble if he made a stupid move. Contrary to what he might’ve thought, I wasn’t interested in making things harder for him. I wanted

this transition to be easy... for both of us, even though that wasn't going to happen.

"Time's up," I told him, gesturing to the open door of the cell.

He hesitated, poised like a rabbit about to bolt.

"There's nowhere else to go except to a locked door," I pointed out. "Then you'll have me pissed off, and who knows what I'll do when I'm pissed?" I flashed a wolfish grin. "You haven't seen me upset yet."

That was a lie. He'd gotten to me before. But I didn't want him to know that, even if I suspected he was just empathetic enough to realize — just not enough to care.

He muttered beneath his breath then traipsed back to the kennel, hesitating at the door and telling me, "I hate you."

"I know," I told him, even though the words stung. They shouldn't have. I knew better. I knew how he felt. I knew how he damn sure should've felt. But I guess I was hoping... "Get in."

Hoping had never gotten me anywhere. It had only gotten everyone to leave me behind.

Part of me wanted to offer him some kind of entertainment to pass the time — books, maybe, but another part of me didn't want him so easily able to escape into other worlds with other people. Books were magical in a world without magic, able to cause wonder with mere words. That was a weapon for someone like him, even if he'd probably never think of using it as more than a projectile.

That, and I had to keep him off balance. As long as he was bored...

I sighed as I closed the door behind him. This wasn't much easier for me than it was for him, even if I got what seemed like the better end of the deal. I wasn't really a monster, even if I looked the part.

Maybe he'd believe that, and maybe we'd get to... to see.

He went immediately for the bed.

"Is that one better?" I asked, knowing perfectly well it was, and knowing just as well that all I was trying to do was create conversation with someone who had no desire to talk to me.

"Mm," he mumbled, not giving me a real answer, of course.

But the way he settled down onto it and relaxed, pulling the new blanket over him and breathing in deeply, told me more than any words would have. I knew he'd wanted this, and it was something that suited us both.

That was where the give and take would truly begin.

I'd get my puppy, and he'd get to pretend he still had dignity. It was a sad, fucked-up game, but it was the only one we could play... for now.

"You have an even better one in your kennel upstairs," I finally offered.

His head jerked up at that, and he stared at me in what I wasn't sure was disbelief or just outright confusion.

"It's big enough for you," I went on even though he hadn't asked and probably didn't care about the size of the cage he'd be held in. "Once I can trust you, I'll bring you upstairs and you can keep me company while I work."

Creating song lyrics for other singers was one thing, but it wasn't everything. It was something I did more out of routine than actual pleasure. I'd lost my desire to create music when I'd realized how easily the world would throw me away... and all because of how I looked.

They'd claimed they hadn't, but when the invitations had dwindled and the terms of my contract had been adjusted, I'd known. I hadn't fought it. I didn't want everyone staring at me every time I walked into a room anyway.

"I don't want your goddamn kennel," he snapped back at me.

"There's sunlight upstairs," I replied, remembering the way it had felt upon my face when I'd first ventured outside after months of crippling depression.

He tensed. "You wouldn't risk it."

"I live in the middle of nowhere," I told him. "Do you think I'd really do something like this if I lived in the heart of Hollywood?" I quirked a brow.

He sighed heavily. "Yeah, sure, whatever."

"You really can have things better," I told him, shoving my hands into my pockets. "I know you don't think so, but it can get better." I exhaled slowly, pausing as I watched him try to pretend to ignore me. I'd have reminded him to keep the plug in, but it would've seemed cruel since he wouldn't be able to get it out with the mitts on his hands either...

Then again, he might try to be creative.

"Just make sure that ass is still full when I get back," I said crudely. "Or we'll have problems."

He replied, “We already do.”

I ignored him.

15

Ryder

It was like the tail broke everything we'd established before.

If he hadn't violated me directly before, he touched me now, running his hands along my body and leaving my skin crawling. At the same time...

At the same time, there was a part of me that was hungry for the touch. The days were long in the basement, and he was my only company. Was it any wonder that I would start craving it as something to break the monotony?

At least, that was what I tried to tell myself. I didn't want to admit that I wanted this scarred man anywhere near me, even if he was the only one around. There was no way in hell I'd ever be so desperate that I'd want my captor to touch me, let alone unmasked.

Yet, there we were.

I was frozen in the grooming tub as his hand brushed my cock, as it stirred with interest — not for the first time since getting there, but for the first time when he was there too.

He didn't move either, even as I twitched and tried to decide between jerking back and rubbing a little against his hand. I wasn't gay, but it had been a while since I'd even gotten myself off. It felt better than I would've expected, especially in the wake

of one of the gentlest enemas he'd allowed me to give myself and with the warm water still cascading over me.

"No," I whispered.

For a moment, it didn't seem like he'd heard me, but then he drew his hand back and went back to washing me. We both pretended that moment had never happened, but his hand with the cloth lingered along my spine.

I shivered, ashamed of the semi I was sporting, and I squirmed when he got back down to my cock and balls. He bathed me without commenting, the only difference that he took his time instead of his usual precursory grooming.

I didn't understand why a "no" now would make a difference. It wasn't like arguing had made a difference before.

But this went further, deeper, more .

I just wasn't sure how.

He finished bathing me in silence, making sure to rinse my hair and keep the water out of my eyes. It was going to get long and unmanageable soon, but I doubted he'd be calling for someone to cut it. He'd probably just think of it as fur or whatever.

Briskly towel-drying me off instead of using the dryer like usual, he avoided looking at me. He grabbed me and lowered me down onto the mat in front of the tub.

"Tail," he told me, handing me the plug after slicking on some lube.

I whimpered, but he didn't relent.

Slowly, I pushed the thing inside of me, hating that he was just standing there watching — but at the same time, afraid that he was going to try to “help. ”

He didn't. Instead, he offered a hand out, and I knew what it was for. Instead of arguing, I put my hand in his, letting him wrap the mitt back in place before doing the same on the other.

His smile was soft, and he looked more pleased than I had seen him before — which did not bode well for me. If he was happy, I was slipping. But there just wasn't a part of me that wanted to fight today. I'd fight tomorrow, but for today, I just wanted to be spoiled a little. I knew if I did what I was supposed to do, he'd continue to be a lot kinder to me.

“Good boy,” he told me.

For once, I just let it go. I didn't ignore it, not quite, but I let it wash over me instead of arguing.

And I wondered just what it might be like to actually be his good boy. What would it mean for me? How much further would he push me? Or would things get better? They could get worse, sure, but every time I'd behaved, he'd introduced something easier or better for me too — temporary as some of those favors might have been.

“What next?” I asked, noting that I sounded wearier than I did argumentative.

“Next, I'm going to take you back to your kennel,” which didn't sound appealing, “and go get you a good dinner.” Which did sound appealing. Some of the crap he gave me was barely edible at the best of times. “Bark once if you want me to feed you. Bark twice if you want to eat out of the bowl.”

Oh, that bastard. There he was, back with the same goddamn games. Feeding myself

was preferable for the most part, except for where I got gravy or juice up my nose, but I'd already had my bath for the day. There were some things a baby wipe just couldn't clean away enough.

I knew what the other option was, too. If I didn't want any courtesy at all, if I wanted to eat the usual crap, I'd stay quiet.

Tentatively, I let out a bark.

He quirked a brow. "And you're not going to try to bite my fingers?" he asked, more than a little skeptical — not that I could particularly blame him.

I shook my head.

What was the point? It would only get me into deeper shit, and, well... The day had been good. I didn't know why I was obsessed with keeping it that way, but it felt like something significant. I wished I knew what it meant, but it wouldn't come to me.

I had a feeling that was probably for the best.

"All right then," he acknowledged. "Crawl a few steps for me, and I'll carry you the rest of the way."

It sounded so pleasant, so natural, that I didn't realize what I was doing until I was already doing it. It wasn't until my knees were off the mat and onto the concrete that I caught on. Damn it. Panic started to rise up within me as I realized what I'd done without even thinking.

He scooped me up into his arms, holding me close and shushing me. He peppered my face with kisses — my forehead, the top of my head, my cheeks, my chin, everywhere but my lips — and encouraged me in nonsensical words to calm down.

I was crying and I couldn't make myself stop, but I didn't fight him as he brought me back to the kennel and set me gently back in the dog bed. He even went so far as to draw the blanket over me, taking off some of the chill from the basement in the process.

"I'll fix dinner," he said, "and if you still want me to feed you, I will. Nice and neat. Do you like steak, Toby?"

I didn't have the energy to argue about the fucking name, either. I nodded wearily.

"Good. Steak and vegetables. It was going to be my dinner for tonight, but I think you've earned it."

Now that gave me a "what the fuck" moment. He'd give up his own dinner? Well, not that he'd give it up entirely. He'd probably just order in like the entitled, rich asshole he was. But still. He'd gotten something for himself and was willing to give it to me?

Or is this another form of psychological warfare? I couldn't help but think.

It probably was, but how much could I actually care at this point? If it meant getting real food that I didn't have to scramble after in a bowl, I was down with it. It was as close to a fork as I was going to get these days, and I wasn't going to just snub it.

Which only reminded me of how far I'd come along the way. Once, I absolutely would have. Now, here we were, only days — weeks? — into my captivity, and I was already surrendering just like he wanted me to.

"I'll be back soon," he promised me. He tenderly brushed a few locks of damp hair from my forehead, brushing them back, then kissed the skin before straightening up back into the mountain of a man he was.

It had been a brief moment of vulnerability, and I wasn't sure what to do with it. All I could do was just stay curled up there, shivering a little for reasons that had nothing to do with warmth and everything to do with my own submission.

I'd fallen asleep before he came back, and I woke to him gently touching my shoulder. My eyes flew open, and I scrambled back a little before I could even process what was going on.

His lips pressed into a line, but he didn't say anything about my automatic reaction. He wasn't happy about it, that was for sure, but what could he really say? It wasn't like this was my dream vacation!

"Dinner," he said a little gruffly.

Which meant it was nighttime... probably. Unless he was still throwing me off, and he probably was. His habit of keeping me unable to tell what time of day it was and how much was passing was getting to me, and he had to know it. It had to be why he was doing it.

"Do you still want me to feed you?" he asked, crouching down next to me.

I hesitated, then nodded.

Surprisingly, he didn't make me bark for it. Instead, he fished out a perfectly cut cube of steak and pressed it to my lips.

I took it, relaxing instantly despite myself. This was the first real , non-bland food I'd had in a while, and it was so tender and substantial and... I moaned.

He shifted a little at that, though he said nothing of it, and he waited for me to chew and swallow before offering me a piece of herbed and buttered carrot. I wanted to tell

him to shove it where the sun didn't shine and give me the meat, but mealtime would probably be the worst time to piss him off.

I ate the carrot, which was surprisingly good, followed by a piece of potato then — finally — another piece of the steak. It didn't take me long to realize he'd taken his time in cutting it, ensuring there was no gristle or fat. The latter made sense, considering I spent a whole lot of time lying there and not any time exercising, but the former was just a courtesy.

He hand-fed me one bite after another, relaxing more until he was finally seated next to me on the floor. I was up a little higher than he was, leaning down to take each bite from his hand like a willing subject, and I didn't care. How could I, when flavor burst from every single bite I took?

This was what the canned crap pretended it could imitate, but it couldn't come close to the real thing.

Finally, the bowl was empty, and even though my stomach ached a little from eating too much, I wouldn't have turned down more in case this was a once-in-a-lifetime sort of thing.

Just as I thought the words, he told me, "You'll get to eat like that more when you behave more. That's part of your reward. Just think about it, Toby."

My name is not Toby .

"No responsibilities. No classes, no bills, no relationships, no worrying about what to put on the table, no family nonsense. Just pleasing someone and being pleased, just being taken care of." It almost sounded like he was pleading with me, like he expected me to understand his point of view in all of this.

“I like my family and relationships,” I said, and for the most part, that was true... even though they felt like they’d been in another era of my life altogether now.

He sighed. “Well, think about it. It can be this way all the time, or it can be worse. You know that.”

“Made it pretty clear,” I agreed, and a part of me felt guilt at the disappointment that flickered across his expression. He’d really thought this would convince me in some way, and it hurt him that it hadn’t.

Why I cared, I wasn’t really sure .

I scowled. This wasn’t how it was supposed to happen. I wasn’t supposed to give a fuck what this man felt or thought, yet there I was... caring and even worrying.

“I’ll replace the dildo with your regular water bowl,” he said, resignation heavy in his voice. He pulled out a few baby wipes and cleaned my face, then he rose and went to the waterer.

There was a part of me that was a little apprehensive. I’d gotten used to the thing. It was like a water bottle. The water bowl was a lot harder to drink out of. But I couldn’t tell him I wanted to suck cock to sate my thirst. I said nothing, watching as he cut through the cable ties and efficiently pulled it down. He gathered all the trash, shoving it into his pockets like he thought I’d try to figure out a way out with it.

Or kill myself .

He got the water bowl and refilled it, and I was thirsty enough to go over to it and drink. The first few sips were easy, but then I wanted more and more, and I ended up sputtering all over the place.

“Hold, Toby,” he told me, urging my head up. “Take your time. It’s not going anywhere.”

Yeah.

Neither was I.

16

Griffin

I stroked his hair while he struggled with the water, and I remembered the other treat I'd gotten him. It didn't seem so much a treat anymore as much as it was a necessity — which meant holding it hostage was a larger punishment than things like toys and even strolls around the basement.

He didn't pull away from me. It seemed like the fight had vanished, but I knew it would be back. It was only a matter of when. But that was fine with me. I wanted to see this back-and-forth, because otherwise... I'd have to doubt my progress. There was no way this could be flawless.

"I have something else for you," I said, my hand sliding down the harness, along his back. I briefly tightened my grasp on the handhold there, which pulled beneath his arms and legs in what had to be an uncomfortable move. I didn't know why I felt the need to hurt him when he was behaving, but I did. I wanted to see how he'd react, and right now, he just took it — docile and willing to be touched.

I considered whether I wanted to demand something else in turn for the newest addition to his kennel or not, but he'd been tolerating my touches. He'd even started to get hard when I'd touched his cock in the bath, which had been a pleasant surprise.

That was it, then.

"You really made me happy in the bathtub," I continued.

He went still.

“You let me touch and wash you, and your cock responded to me.”

He let out a choked sound, something I couldn't really read — though I could make a few guesses at what it meant.

“Shh, shh,” I said, petting his hair again. “It's good. You're such a good boy for me.”

“No,” he said, just as he'd said before.

“Yes,” I insisted. I didn't reach down to touch him again, even though I wanted to weigh his cock and balls in my hand. “So you get another treat. Okay? Because you're such a good boy.”

He whimpered, but he didn't move away.

“Now I want you to stay there,” I said.

I strode out of the cell, curious to see if he'd get up and make another futile run for it, if he'd stay where he was, or if he'd move just to be contrary. I kept tabs on him out of the corner of my eye as I went through the boxes again, glad I'd organized them well. I found the stand for his food and water bowls and nodded, bringing it out.

As it turned out, he hadn't stayed put, but he hadn't tried to make a break for it, either. He'd just gone back to his dog bed. I couldn't blame him too much. The concrete floor had to be chilly beneath his body despite the warmth of the basement.

I sighed, though, shaking my head. “No. Your master told you to stay,” I told him sternly. “Good dogs stay when they're told to.”

He gave me one of those venomous looks, but it lacked the heat it once would've shown.

"Come," I told him, pointing back to the floor in front of the water bowl.

Our eyes met, and I could see the defiance in his eyes hold for a moment, then falter... then he ducked his head and returned, every motion deliberately slow. That was fine with me. As long as he moved, that was all I needed from him. Alacrity could come later.

So could respect, and loyalty...

I gave a slight shake of my head, and while he returned, I put the stand up. It had two holes, one for the food bowl and one for the water bowl. It would let him eat and drink at a more natural angle

He faltered as he saw it, but he ducked his head and tried the water.

I'd guessed the height correctly, and I was pleased to see that it looked much easier than leaning down into the bowls.

"Good boy," I told him.

He didn't give me a look. He didn't do anything except get little mouthfuls of water and swallow them, pretending I wasn't there.

I touched his hair again, then his back, and he let me. The fact that he wasn't flinching away told me volumes, and even his brief act of defiance hadn't lasted long.

He glanced aside at me, and I noticed he looked exhausted.

“Not sleeping well?” I asked, concerned. He should’ve been comfortable down there. I’d gone out of my way to prepare it — but for the cement, which I thought was countered enough by the blanket and the heating.

He shook his head.

“Why not?”

“Because some psychopath kidnapped me and locked me in his basement and is making me act like I’m a dog,” he snapped, sullen.

And because he’d reacted to said psychopath’s touch, and because he was having a harder and harder time fighting me. I couldn’t get angry at him, not really.

“If you keep behaving,” I said, ignoring his words, “you’ll get to come upstairs with me.”

His head shot up, his eyes locking with mine again. “You wouldn’t bring me upstairs. You know better.”

“You still don’t understand,” I told him. “There are benefits to being rich.”

I didn’t usually flaunt my wealth, but if there was ever a time to do it, it was now. He had to realize I could more than afford to keep him locked up inside until he didn’t want to run anymore.

He inhaled slowly, moving away from the water bowl.

“You should probably get some rest,” I told him. “You’ve been such a good boy today, but I know it had to be hard for you.” I couldn’t resist making the dig at him, couldn’t resist reminding him of what had happened in the tub.

He flinched, turning so he didn't have to look at me. "You don't have to—"

"I don't have to what?" I interrupted him, still calm despite the part of me that was frustrated and impatient and wanted to pull that tail from his ass and fuck him senseless. "Remind you that you got hard when I touched you? It's natural," I said soothingly. "You're a guy. You haven't been touched in a while. "

"It's not natural ," he spat, staring down at the ground. "I don't like men that way, especially not men like you. Especially not men who look like you."

He just had to throw the appearance card in there, didn't he?

My teeth dragged along my bottom lip as I struggled to hide my reaction. At least I'd heard it more times than I could count, and I knew how to deal with it. It wounded me just as it always did, but I stayed as stoic as I always did.

"I'm sorry you feel that way."

"Oh, stop it," he scoffed. "Stop pretending you're some understanding guy instead of some piece of shit. You're just fucking with my head."

I was doing a good job of it, if this indicated anything. "I want you to have a good life here," I replied, completely honest with him. There was no point in lying, not about this. "If I didn't, you'd be strung up and fucked raw until I was done with you."

He snorted.

"Believe me if you want. You'll see. You'll get comfortable here. This will be your home. You'll be my pet, and I'll be your master, and that'll be that," I said softly.

He shook his head, but no matter how much he wanted to deny it — to deny the truth

— we both knew it was already beginning to happen. He was fighting less, giving in more easily... responding to me in ways that really were natural, though they'd be associated with me soon enough. All of his pleasure would be.

He might not be interested in men 'that way,' but he'd be interested in me .

"Now it's time to settle in," I told him. "Go on back to your bed."

For all that he'd been quick to go to it when he hadn't had permission, he was slow then, having to be as contrary as ever with me. I didn't know what he thought that would accomplish, exactly — but maybe it made him feel better.

If our situations were reversed, I wouldn't want to just give in either. I'd have to try not to break... and that was what he was doing. He was trying not to break. He was trying to save his mind despite how difficult that would be.

Despite the fact that he was going to fail.

I left him in the cell, locking the door behind me, and headed upstairs to clean up.

As always, it was quiet and lonely, and I put music on to try to chase some of my melancholy mood away. It was only a matter of time until I had companionship. My methods might not exactly be kosher, but it was the only way.

It wasn't like I lied to myself and thought I was doing something good for the boy. I wasn't. But this was the best way for me, and in time, he wouldn't care anymore — or so I told myself yet again.

I washed the dishes and tidied up the kitchen, going through the house and poking half-heartedly at different things before ending up in the office where I could monitor him.

He was lying on his back in the dog bed, his eyes open as he gazed at the ceiling. I wondered what he was thinking, but his thoughts, at least, would be his own — for now. I was pretty sure I could guess anyway, and they had to be going to the tune of utter despair.

I didn't want that for him. I didn't want him to have a life of misery and desolation. I wanted him to be as happy as he could, to realize this could be an easy life of luxury.

He raised his hands in the air, looking at the mitts on his hands, and even through the camera I could see the miserable way he looked at them. He hated them just as much as he hated me — maybe more, really.

Without them, though, he would find it so much easier to disobey, and I'd have to punish him. I didn't want to punish him again, especially not this early in the game. I wanted to give him positive reinforcements and teach him to crave my touch.

Was that really so wrong?

17

Ryder

“Come,” he told me.

I sighed and started to stand up, but he grabbed one of the handholds on the harness and pushed me firmly back down.

I glared at him. “You told me to come. I’m getting up so I can do what you fucking wanted.”

“Not that way,” he said. “Hands and knees.”

“No fucking way,” I told him. “I’m not going to do that.” Not only would it be demeaning as hell — one more slip in the downward slide — but it would hurt like a bitch. The concrete wasn’t exactly kind to my feet as it was. The mitts would protect my hands, even if they would make it hard as fuck to move, but my knees would get torn up.

“Are we really going to go through this again?” he asked, like I was a child refusing to get dressed and go to school instead of a captive refusing to fucking crawl.

“Yes,” I grumbled, refusing to move my ass an inch.

“You know you’re just going to give in anyway,” he told me as though it was simply a done deal. “Why are you fighting this? ”

I didn't admit he was right.

"Because I have to," I said honestly.

He considered me a moment, then slowly nodded. "That's only going to take you so far, Toby—"

"Ryder!" I interrupted him hotly.

"That's the problem. You're still thinking of yourself as Ryder, when you're never going to be that person again." The words were spoken gently enough, yet they felt like nails being driven into my coffin. "Let go."

"I'd like to see you just let the fuck go," I spat, staring up at him as he continued to hold the harness in place.

His eyes flashed, and I hesitated, not liking what I saw in them. "You really, really don't want me to let go," he said. The softness was gone from his voice, replaced by something ironclad and horrible.

I tried to shy away from him but couldn't get far with his grasp on the leather. "Dude. Dude, okay, chill out. I was just—"

"Be careful how far you push me," he warned.

It was like he was a different person entirely in that moment. I didn't recognize the man who had been firm but patient, who had been cruel but almost... kind about it at the same time. This man was harsh, with lines that would be easy to cross, and there was a beast simmering beneath the surface where it waited to break free.

For some reason, that scared me more than if he'd been fucking and torturing me the

whole time.

“My knees,” I finally said, reluctant but not wanting to see that look in his eyes any longer, not wanting to see his face twisted in the way that made his scars look demonic instead of just... tragic.

He frowned. “What about your knees? ”

I wanted to snap at him that he’d thought of everything else, so why couldn’t he figure that out?

He clued in before I could say anything, the smoldering anger fading from his eyes. “Oh. I put down a soft set of mats out in the basement where we’ll be working. You’ll be fine.”

Fine never meant fine.

And working ? What the fuck was that supposed to mean?

“You need exercise,” he said, as though that was supposed to sound anything but ominous.

“Yeah, so let me walk around a little bit again,” I countered. “Or I could go running outside. That would totally count as exercise.”

“With your balls swinging in the wind?” he asked, quirking a brow at me. A smile tugged at his lips. “I’m not planning on giving you gym clothes.”

Of course he wasn’t.

But if it meant getting away from that psycho, yeah, I would totally run around

naked. I'd catch a cop's eye fast enough, and I could get them back here to arrest this freak.

I might get arrested in the meantime, but I'd rather be in the most fashionable prison garb than dressed up in this fancy leather getup.

"Yeah, whatever," I mumbled.

He smiled. "Good boy."

"Oh, shove it," I muttered.

"What was that?" he asked, a little bit of that dangerous quality seeping back into his voice.

"Nothing important," I lied.

He didn't believe me, but he let it go.

He pulled something out of his pocket, and it took me a moment to recognize it as a leash. I groaned, not liking the idea of this at all, and I shook my head.

Ignoring me, he snapped the leash into place toward the front of the harness, nearest the top of my spine, and tugged.

I stayed put. He hadn't attached it to the collar around my neck, so he could drag me around like a dead body if he wanted me to move. That was the only way I was going anywhere.

He sighed and looked at me. "I have choke collars and shock collars," he said softly. "I was being nice by hooking this to your harness. Do I need to go get one of those

instead?”

I blanched. “You wouldn’t.”

He gave me the look people give everyone who pulls on a door that clearly says “push.”

“You would,” I concluded with a sigh. “But come on, dude. We don’t have to be like this.”

“Master,” he corrected me.

I didn’t like that he was starting to come back around to that again. “Whatever.”

“Say it.”

“Oh, come on, ” I whined. “Do we really have to do this now?”

“Shock collar’s going to be my first choice,” he said mildly. “I even made sure I had the right kind of batteries.”

“You’re a sadistic bastard,” I informed him, just in case he wasn’t already aware of that fact.

“Master,” he prompted.

“Go die in a fi—” I stopped. Even I wasn’t cold to tell him to go die in a fire on purpose. “Sorry. Master,” I said hurriedly.

But was it going to be enough ?

His back straightened, his expression going utterly and completely flat. This was worth more than the dangerous anger. It was like he'd locked away all of his emotion behind a blank mask, and I couldn't see beneath it.

Hell, I wasn't sure I wanted to see beneath it, not when I was sure there was a whole hell of a lot of anger behind there...

And hurt .

No. No, I was not going to fucking sympathize with my captor. I had apologized. I'd even called him Master , just like he'd wanted, for fuck's sake. There wasn't a whole lot I could do now that the words were out there.

His jaw was tight, and I watched him swallow hard as his hand trembled on the leash enough for me to feel it pull against my skin. Oh, fuck. I'd really hurt the guy.

I started to feel bad, then I remembered that he'd — oh, I don't know, kidnapped me, gotten me to strip, forced me to give myself enemas and eat out of dog bowls and drink out of a phallic waterer and put on a collar with a lock on it and wear this stupid get-up and sleep in a dog bed with a goddamn tail, and—

And things. He'd done things.

The erection hadn't been my fault.

All right, so he'd almost really died in a fire, and maybe it had ruined his entire life even though he'd saved someone else in the process, and maybe—

Oh, for motherfucking fuck's sake, I was not having this conversation with myself right then. No. It wasn't even going to happen.

I waited in silence, completely unsure of what he was going to do.

For a moment, I thought he'd walk away without a word. Instead, he tugged lightly at the leash .

"C'mon, boy," he said, his voice a little rough. "Let's go for a little walk."

As expected, the cement hurt like a bitch as I crossed it. As he'd said, there was a nice little mat covering the floor that dulled the impact it had on my knees.

"This is still gonna rip my knees to shreds," I told him. He'd had every inclination of wanting to take care of me in the past. Surely he'd listen to that?

"Right now, I don't particularly care," he muttered, his voice so low I could almost think I imagined the words.

I flinched. I didn't know why it hurt so much to hear him talk like that, but it did. God, I was so fucked up. Why did he have to go and make everything so complicated?

Why did I have to be thinking about an old Avril Lavigne song at a time like this?

Great. Now I had that stuck in my head along with everything else, stuck on fucking repeat.

I paused for a moment, trying to get used to the awkward crawl he'd forced me into. He gave me several seconds then tugged again, more insistently.

"Okay, okay," I mumbled, still feeling a little docile from what I'd done not long before. I started to walk again — well, crawl, and we went faster that time. His pace kept picking up, and it wasn't until I finally collapsed onto the mat, exhausted, that he

stopped.

“Good boy,” he told me, crouching down and running his fingers through my hair.

I eyed him wearily through the strands, wanting to reach out and knock him off balance onto his ass. It wasn't worth it, though. It wouldn't accomplish anything, not when he still held the handle to the leash.

Nothing would accomplish anything.

I let out a half-hysterical little laugh, hating myself for coming to that conclusion but unable to think about anything else. Nothing I did mattered. Nothing I did was going to change this. Nothing I did would get me out of this mess. I was solely dependent on the outside world to figure out who'd abducted me, and the more time that passed, the more hope I lost.

“Shh,” he said quietly, still stroking my hair and wiping sweat from my forehead. “You were good. You were such a good boy. You made your master proud.”

I didn't want to make my master proud. The only thing was, making him proud meant I got to just relax there for a moment instead of being forced in a ring around the basement in a rendition of a fucked-up children's song.

Ashes, ashes, we all fall down.

When had I turned so fucking morbid? I was usually only this morose when I was drunk.

I'd have killed for a beer or six right then.

“That's enough for today.”

That had been more than enough for that day. I was fucking exhausted, and I knew I'd collapse the second I hit that bed.

"I'll bring you food, so try to stay awake a little longer," he told me. "You need to keep your energy up."

Right. Food. That stuff I needed to survive, which he was going to make me eat out of a dog bowl.

And I was having weird, sympathetic feelings for the fucker? No. No thanks. I'd pass on that.

18

Griffin

I dreamt of the fire that night.

I hadn't had nightmares of it in a long time, but they came back with a vengeance until I'd thought I was burning up all over again. I'd struggled so hard to get Tasha out of that building, and I'd had to fight not to howl in pain as I'd put myself between her and the flames.

She'd had problems with smoke inhalation.

I'd ended up like this.

Even the skin grafts could only go so far, and I was ruined. The media loved it for a little while, being able to talk about the celebrity who'd risked his life for an intern. But then when the novelty had faded, there was only this broken, scarred man where a vivacious, engaging singer had been.

I woke from my own screams, sweat beading up on my forehead, and I kicked off the blankets as I fought to calm myself down.

Breathe, Griffin, breathe .

I just had to fucking breathe. It shouldn't have been that hard, but all I could remember was the stench of burning flesh, the feeling of that searing heat, the utter

terror that we weren't going to make it out on time...

But she was okay, and I was alive, and I had to at least be grateful for that... Didn't I?

I let out a choked, bitter laugh.

Go die in a fire, he'd nearly told me, the words more of a slap in the face than even he had been willing to go. At least he had something of a conscience in there. Otherwise, I wasn't sure what I'd have done. It wouldn't have been pretty, and it wouldn't have been pleasant, and it would've really cast me in the role of the beast in this particular drama.

I shook my head, trying to shake it off, but the shrill screams lingered in my ears and the stench of smoke filled up my nostrils. I couldn't get away from it, not even in my own mind, and I hated him in that moment for having brought this to the surface.

No matter what I'd done to him...

What? I challenged myself. You think he gives a fuck about you? You think he ever will?

He had to. If he didn't, this whole thing would be for nothing. Then what?

That was the ominous part of all of this. If I failed — if I couldn't get him trained — what was I going to do? It wasn't like I could take him to the local animal shelter. There would be ways to get rid of him, but he didn't deserve to disappear into the slave trade. I hadn't wanted that for him. I'd wanted a comfortable but disciplined life for him here.

I swung my legs off the side of the bed and plodded into the bathroom. I was glad the

mirrors were covered and I didn't have to see my own reflection. If I had... I wasn't sure what I would've done. Smashed it to bits, probably, because I felt wild and out of control.

I didn't dare go downstairs, not like this, not when Toby — Ryder — had dealt me such a critical blow. He'd known he'd gotten to me, and the only thing that had given me hope was that he hadn't taunted me with it like I'd expected.

What reason did he have to care about how I felt? He hadn't hesitated to call me a scarred psychopath before. He had to have seen something before I'd shut down mentally, which meant I was fucking slipping. Goddamnit. I couldn't have him poking at that particular wound. It might've been scabbed over, but it was still too new to take much prodding.

It would always be too new.

I ran the water in the sink, splashing my face with cold water until I started to feel like my body temperature was back to normal. It took longer than I'd have thought, but then, this was the first truly bad nightmare I'd had in a long time.

I wished I had my pup upstairs to cuddle with instead of the snapping, snarling beast in the basement I was stuck with — for now.

We'd made progress, but it wasn't enough. If I went downstairs and asked for a hug, he'd never stop mocking me. He didn't need to know how much I needed the comfort of a companion, and I wasn't sure if he would ever understand that a real dog couldn't take the place of a person.

Instead, I returned to bed, grabbing the full body pillow and hugging it tight to my chest before wrapping my legs around it too. It was no substitute for a human body, but it had been so long since anyone had willingly touched me. I was desperate for

contact, desperate for someone to touch me instead of recoiling from me, and every day I went without it... I felt like I died a little more inside.

After all, what kind of monster did I have to be to have done this to someone? I'd never have done this to anyone before the accident. I wouldn't have even dreamed of it .

And yet.

Here we were.

Here I was.

I dreamt of his screams then, of him begging me to get him out of the fire. I tried to wake, but my own mind cruelly kept me asleep — perhaps as penance for what I was doing, a manifestation of my own guilt in a way that even I could understand. The rest of the night was filled with screams and terror, and all I could think about was Toby.

How had he gotten so deep inside of my brain?

The sword obviously cut both ways...

I watched him eat in silence, without my usual interest. Usually it got me hard to watch him struggle with the food and water bowls, but today it fell flat.

He glanced at me after every few bites, his gaze darting to my face then back down to the bowls.

I ran a hand through my hair, all too aware that I looked like shit after my night. I hadn't wanted him to see me like this, but it wasn't like I could do much to hide it. As

much as his words had hurt, I couldn't justify holding food back from him, which meant the visit downstairs had been necessary.

I knew it made me vulnerable, and after the eighth or ninth time he looked up at me, I finally snapped, "What? Just stare if you want. You know you want to fucking look so you can make more little snide comments."

Well, fuck.

He recoiled, looking stunned.

I hadn't meant to speak, hadn't meant to let him know just how much my sanity was crumbling under the constant reminders of the accidents. It wasn't even the burns, not really. It was the memory of how close I'd come to death. It was the fact that nightmares plagued me so often. It was the knowledge that my entire life had gone down the drain because people put so much stock in physical beauty.

Here he was, gorgeous and tempting and perfect, and all I wanted to do was touch him and have him touch me in turn. But he was never going to forgive me for any of this, was he?

I clung to the fact that he'd actually apologized for the comment he'd started to make, hoping it meant we were starting to turn a corner. So help me, we had to be turning a corner. I couldn't keep doing this much longer, not with him hating me so much.

"That's not... I'm not..."

I leveled my glare on him, and he paled more.

"I'm sorry. For what I said," he said, looking back down at the floor. "I didn't mean to..."

“To do what?” I challenged him, belligerent and angry from the hurt.

“I was wrong,” he blurted out. “I shouldn’t have said those things to you. About how you look. You saved that girl’s life, and it was all sorts of fucked, the way you got chased out.”

The words stunned me, and I stared at him, unable to speak around the lump in my throat. Did he really mean it? Could he? Was it even possible for him to care that his words had been hurtful?

“But what you’re doing is wrong,” he continued.

I flinched.

“It’s too late,” I told him, my voice rough. “You know it’s too late for me to do anything else.”

“Yeah.” He let out a choked little laugh, leaning back before plopping his bare ass onto the concrete .

“Don’t sit there,” I instantly told him. “You’re going to catch a cold.”

He snorted. “Someone might almost think you give a fuck.”

“I do,” I said. “I keep trying to tell you. I don’t want this to be miserable for you. Training is just... hard.”

“I don’t get it, man,” he said, and I wasn’t sure if I was encouraged by the conversation or not. “You’re still rich as fuck, right? Why couldn’t you have just... found someone who wants to be here?”

I laughed, bitter and harsh, and gestured to my face. “Do you really need to ask that question?”

“Yeah, but... People are superficial.” He didn’t look at me when he said it. “They probably wouldn’t care if you waved a lot of money around.”

“You’re right,” I told him. “That’s the problem. They wouldn’t care.”

He fell silent, but he got up, moving to the dog bed and sitting back down. “Why me?” he asked, finally getting around to the question I’d been waiting for.

“It wasn’t you in particular,” I said. “I asked for someone like you. Just... the luck of the draw, I guess.”

“Yeah,” he drawled. “I’m so fucking lucky.”

I sighed. There had been a moment in there when I’d felt like I’d been making progress, but we had gone and broken it. Now here we were, back to this, and the pang felt sharper than ever. The loneliness was eating away at me, and seeing him there — so close, yet so far — only made it worse.

“It’s time for exercise,” I said instead of trying to continue the conversation. I headed back to the boxes, digging out the knee pads I’d bought. I’d tried to think of everything, just for him... or someone like him, who was equally scared and angry.

He eyed the pads, shaking his head. “I don’t get you,” he said. “You’re like... this kinda nice guy, then you go and do all this pervy stuff.”

“Join the club,” I muttered. I didn’t understand it either. All I knew was that... “I want a companion,” I said abruptly. “Not a slave. I don’t want you to hate me. I want...”

“You want what you can’t have,” he said as I trailed off.

I shrugged. “Maybe. Maybe not. But I don’t have much choice but to try. The alternatives aren’t any better.” I met his eyes. “I could leave you down here and just keep you fed and give you water for the rest of your life. I could sell you into the trade that snatched you up.”

He shuddered, shaking his head quickly.

“This is the least of the evils,” I said softly. “You’ll understand that eventually.”

“Yeah, well. It doesn’t mean I have to like it.”

“No,” I agreed. “And it doesn’t mean I have to like that you aren’t here by choice, either. But these are the cards we’ve been dealt, and all we can do is play them.”

19

Ryder

This was seriously fucking with my head.

How was I supposed to deal with all of this? I kept going back to what I knew about him and what he'd done before the accident — then to what he'd done to me. It just didn't make sense. Had the fire really damaged him that much? Had it screwed him up so badly he really thought this was the only way he'd ever get a... a companion ?

Christ, it sounded like a horror movie gone bad: villain really just wants to be loved.

But it also sounded more and more like the truth. I couldn't say I understood his methods in the fucking slightest — or that I liked them at all — but it was starting to be harder to hate him.

“Anyway,” he said after the awkward silence passed, “let's get these on you before you exercise.” He sounded half-hearted.

“Can I not today?” I tried.

He sighed. “You have to get used to crawling, and I have the knee pads for you. C'mon, Toby. Just a little bit, my good boy.”

Usually I'd have snapped that I wasn't his good boy, but I was realizing the things I ordinarily said weren't going to have an impact at all on a man who was this

delusional. We'd already more than established that he wasn't going to give up on this and that there wasn't fuck-all I could do about it.

Which left us here.

"You've been good," he said slowly. "If you do well with exercise and leash training, I'll take you to your upstairs kennel."

I froze at that. The idea of going upstairs into his house was heavenly, even beyond the opportunities I'd probably have to escape. It had to be worlds more comfortable up there, and I wouldn't always feel so fucking alone like I did down here. I was going to start talking to myself at any minute because it wasn't like I was spoiled for choices with company.

I went — crawled — to the door of the cell, which he opened. I stayed still as he put the knee pads on and adjusted them until they fit right. Hopefully they wouldn't chafe, because that would spoil the entire purpose for them — to make this more comfortable. I was starting to feel like I was gearing up for sports, though.

He attached the leash to the harness again, and this time I followed him out and onto the mat. He led me around, just as he had last time, and I kept up. He didn't exhaust me this time, instead letting me stop when I started to breathe heavily from the exertion.

"Am I going to regret bringing you upstairs?" he asked me.

Probably .

"No," I said.

He eyed me, sighing. "You won't be able to get out. You can't open the windows or

doors. I have the place locked down. You can't access the internet, and I don't have a home phone. My cell phone has a passcode. Do you really think I'd be stupid enough to bring you into my house without having contingency plans?"

Well... Yes, but that was only because I hadn't actually thought about it. I'd imagined a regular home — bigger than usual, maybe, and fancier, but just a regular home. I hadn't imagined some smart home where he controlled everything.

Maybe he was a tiny bit of a control freak, too.

"Okay, okay," I said. He was entirely too good at this sort of shit to be a first timer. "Do you make a lot of lists?"

He blinked at me. "Yes?" he asked rather than said.

"Explains a lot," I said.

"I have no idea what you're talking about," he replied.

It made perfect sense to me. That was how he seemed to have everything together. If he made lists, he could constantly add to them and make sure he didn't forget anything. Either that, or he just really had a good memory, but I was pretty sure he had a list habit to go along with his other obsessive habits.

"Come," he told me, leading me to the stairs.

My heart fluttered in my chest, the butterflies drifting down to my stomach and leaving me feeling a little nauseated. What was going to happen when I got into his house? He was all prepared, and that meant he probably had enough shit to keep me contained.

I had expected something dark and dirty, and it took me a moment to adjust to the sheer amount of light pouring into the windows. I saw a few things covered in black cloth, almost like we were at a funeral, but for the most part...

“Are you really going to leave me up here?” I asked skeptically. If this was a joke, I was so not going to be amused.

He nodded. “As long as you don’t try anything stupid. I have a kennel set up for you in my bedroom.”

Of course he did.

“I’ll give you a quick tour,” he said abruptly, leading me off to the right. He showed me the guest room, the kitchen, and even a bathroom before leading me down a hallway. We passed several doors he didn’t open until we finally got to the fancy one at the end.

That one, he opened, and this was more of what I’d expected from him: dark, with blackout curtains drawn and blocking out the light. There was a large bed, a dresser, a desk, a TV on a stand, a bookshelf... and a large dog kennel.

I groaned, but he ignored me as he led me over to it.

“What am I supposed to do if I have to piss now?” I demanded. The drain wasn’t ideal, but at least I got to go when I needed to. So help me if he started talking about a catheter or some shit. I would lose my fucking mind.

He pointed out a bottle. “Portable urinal. Use that when you have to go. I’ll empty it every night.”

Great. I was going to get to share my living space with my piss.

At least the bed in it looked comfortable, with plush blankets and even a pillow. I eyed him skeptically.

“Yeah, that’s yours...” He trailed off, running a hand through his hair. “I keep trying to tell you. I don’t want you to be miserable here. I want you to be as happy as you can be.”

I was glad he didn’t say happy because I’d have had to scoff at that. There was no way I could be happy in a place like this. Comfortable, maybe, but not happy.

“I’ll leave the TV on for you during the day,” he said softly, almost uncertainly. “I’d give you books, but...”

But the mitts. Yeah. I was all too aware of the limitations those offered.

“Are you ever going to take this shit off me?” I demanded, unable to stop myself.

He shook his head. “No. I like the tail and the mitts and all.” He shrugged. “You’ll get used to all of it. It can’t be that uncomfortable.”

It wasn’t, not anymore, but I didn’t particularly want to admit that to him. I grumbled beneath my breath but didn’t say anything intelligible to him. What was there to say?

Leading me over to the kennel, he let the silence fall over us again. The kennel was already open, and he ushered me inside.

It was surprisingly spacious, obviously meant for a large breed dog like a Mastiff. I wouldn’t be able to stretch out completely, but I’d be able to sit up and stretch my legs if I needed to. And the dog bed... It was made for a larger dog, too, and it was comfortable. I’d never been grateful they made fancy shit for dogs or to the rich people who bought it all before. It was probably one with support and crap.

He unclipped the leash from my harness and withdrew, closing the door behind me. There was a padlock hanging from it, and I sighed at the sight of yet another lock. The guy had to be buying the stock in the things.

I wanted to ask if he'd thought about what would happen if there was a fire or something, but I had a feeling that would be getting too close to home. Still, I didn't like the idea of getting stuck inside and having something happen .

“What happens if you like... die from a heart attack or something?” I asked instead, leaning back against the bars. “Do you have someone to come check on you even?”

He sighed, shaking his head. “No. Not really.” He looked at me, meeting my eyes. There was something almost apologetic in them as he said, “You just need to hope nothing happens to me.”

Great. That was exactly what I'd wanted to hear. Fucking wonderful.

I didn't want to get mouthy within minutes of getting into the luxury kennel, though. “And what happens if I start screaming?”

“Soundproof. All the rooms are. I'm a musician,” he said promptly. “I can't have sound carrying through the house when I'm working. And if you try it, I have ball gags, remember?”

Fuck. There went that plan. Not that I really thought anyone on the outside would come running, but it had been worth a shot.

“Anything else you want to ask?”

There was a lot I wanted to ask, but that meant having an actual conversation — and that just felt awkward as fuck. The whole situation was bad enough without me

getting to know the guy. Other than the whole kidnapping and insisting on turning me into some doglike companion against my will, he seemed like he was pretty down to earth.

He'd sacrificed a lot for someone else, but it had also done some serious damage, too.

"How fucked up are you in the head?" I couldn't help but ask, just needing to get one more jibe in before he left me alone in there.

He laughed, sounding surprised. "Do you even have to ask?" he countered .

"Nah. Just thought I'd get it official, for the record," I told him.

It was almost like he was a person and I was a person, and we were having a normal chat.

Almost.

I was too aware of the bars around me to think that he saw me as a person. He didn't want to see me as anything but a plaything, did he? Pretty soon, he'd try for that, and I didn't know what I was going to do.

Hell, I didn't know what I could do.

"I'm going to get some work done," he said, turning on the TV. "Any preferences?"

"Animal Planet?" I retorted.

He rolled his eyes, and like a fucking douche, he put it on that channel.

"I was kidding," I told him.

“I know,” he replied. With that, he left the room, closing the door behind him.

Bastard.

I sighed, settling in to watch the show. I just hoped there wasn't anything about dogs mating, or I really was going to be unamused. Curling up on my new bed, I pulled the blanket around me and settled in, surprisingly comfortable.

Well. Things could've been much worse.

20

Griffin

Moving him into my bedroom changed everything.

I'd known some things would change, but I hadn't thought it would be that pronounced. I'd thought that maybe he'd talk to me a little, but I hadn't accounted for him being a little bit of a chatterbox. The longer he was upstairs, the worse it got.

Well. Worse wasn't the best word. It was different and new, and I liked having someone there with me. It kept the loneliness at bay, or at least, it staved it off. I was still desperate for contact, and I was trying to slowly get him used to my touch. He didn't flinch when I touched him anymore, and he sighed more than he complained.

"If you don't stop talking, I'm going to gag you," I told him mildly one night as I lay back in my bed. I was trying to watch the new documentary about haunted places, but he wouldn't stop running his mouth.

"I don't like these kinds of shows," he complained, sitting up in his kennel.

I glanced aside at him, enjoying the sight of the tail and the harness hugging his body like a glove. The mitts looked good there too, and I knew it'd be another night of silently jacking off as I imagined sinking deep inside of him.

"Are you scared?" I asked.

There was a long pause. "...sort of," he finally said.

I exhaled slowly, considering taking a risk. It would be the first time I would really surrender any sort of control to him, and I wasn't sure he was ready for it.

But I wanted him to be ready, and I had to see how he was going to react to it eventually.

"Do you want to come up on the bed?" I asked slowly.

He blinked at me, his eyes widening. He glanced at the bed, then the TV, then back at me, biting his lip. "You know that's probably a dumb idea, right?" he asked.

I shrugged, playing it as cool as I could and ignoring the way my heart raced in my chest. I wanted so badly for him to agree, to keep him close because it was safer — not, of course, because I wanted the contact.

Fuck, who was I kidding? I was desperate for it, desperate enough to take a stupid risk.

"Are you going to do anything dumb?" I retorted.

He shook his head quickly. "But you don't know that I'm being honest," he pointed out.

"Shouldn't you be trying to tell me how well you'll behave so you can get out of there for a little bit?" I asked him, a tiny smile twitching onto my lips. "You really suck at this, you know that?"

He huffed out a breath. "Yeah, I'll be good. It'd be nice to stretch out. Are you going to make me lay down at the foot of the bed?"

“You’re going to be in arm’s reach,” I told him sternly.

He rolled his eyes at me.

I got out of bed and found the right key for his kennel, unlocking it. He crawled out, stretching much like a dog would. Small as he was, he had plenty of room in there, really, but he enjoyed his moments of freedom from the kennel.

The moments when we were together with him outside of it, if it could be called together when I knew he still wanted to be worlds away from me.

But this was progress, even though I had the feeling I was being manipulated.

It could’ve been worse, though. I knew he wouldn’t take off for the door — at least not right away. Even if he did, he wasn’t getting out without me, so there wasn’t far he could go. He’d learn pretty fast that there really wasn’t anywhere to go where I wouldn’t find him.

I gestured to the bed. “Up.”

He gave me a disgruntled look then climbed up onto my bed, letting out a breath of relief as he settled onto his stomach on the bed. I clipped the leash to his collar then, wrapping the handle around my own wrist just in case I drifted off to sleep.

It was a good thing I did, because I woke up a little while later to him trying to carefully unwind the leash from around my hand using his wrists. It looked ridiculous, considering the mitts, and he had to be out of his mind if he’d thought that would work.. I grabbed his wrist, and he froze, staring at me and looking guilty.

“That’s the thanks I get for letting you sleep in my bed?”

“I had to try,” he whispered, refusing to meet my eyes.

“After everything,” I said, adrenaline waking me up immediately, “you really thought...”

“I’m sorry,” he said .

“You’re sorry, what?” I growled at him, yanking him close to me. The hurt and betrayal of him trying to get loose from me during the night combined with the abrupt waking had my temper out in full force.

“Master,” he whispered, tears springing to his eyes.

“Don’t try that with me,” I told him, grabbing him by the collar and pulling him close, so close I could nearly kiss him.

So I did.

I leaned in and pressed my lips harshly against his, tasting him. He was still, not kissing back but not pulling away either. He probably didn’t dare, not after getting caught trying to slip free of me.

He still didn’t want me, and the surge of pain that came from that realization was worse than I would’ve thought it would be. I’d thought...

Fuck, I’d been so stupid.

“What? Do I repulse you that much?” I snarled at him.

I’d been so kind to him, as gentle as I could, but maybe that hadn’t been the right way to handle him. Maybe I’d been too gentle. Maybe I hadn’t gone far enough.

Maybe I'd only bent him so far instead of breaking him.

"N-no," he stammered.

Liar .

I pulled back and licked my lips then swallowed hard. "Do you even understand how lucky you've been?" I asked, my voice a harsh whisper.

He didn't answer.

I shook him a little by the collar. "Damn it, do you?"

"Yes!" he burst out, tears starting to leak down his cheeks.

"Yes, fucking what?" I demanded.

"Yes, Master!" He choked back a sob, looking at me with those gorgeous, pleading eyes. "I know I've... I've been lucky."

"Do you want to know what it could've been like instead?" I asked him, reaching around and cupping one ass cheek.

He tensed, but he started to harden against my leg.

Well, wasn't that interesting... My breathing quickened, some of the anger ebbing — only some, not nearly enough to get him out of this.

I brought that hand around, slowly running it along his cock. "Is this what you want instead?" I stroked him, slowly at first then a little faster. "You want me to get you off?"

“N-no,” he said, shaking his head even as his cock reacted to my touch.

“Are you lying to me?”

“No!” he wailed. “I don’t want to come.”

I leaned in close, my voice ragged against his mouth as I whispered, “Too fucking bad.”

He sobbed as I jacked him off. The skin moved beneath my hand, smooth but hard all at once, and I was relentless. He wasn’t going to get out of this.

He was still fucking lucky, because all I was doing was giving him a hand job. This could’ve been so much worse for him, but I knew his straight-guy mentality was making it difficult for him to process.

Moments, mere moments, passed before he was spilling all over my hand with a harsh cry. “No,” he sobbed. “No, no, no.”

“Yes,” I told him, kissing him again just because I could.

I was burning from the madness of rage and desire alike, and I slid my hand into my boxers, hissing as my cum-covered hand found my own cock. I kissed him again and again, greedily devouring what should’ve been mine already. If I was going to take from him — if I was going to ignore his pleas — then I was going to get something else out of it too.

I knew my own body well enough to wring an orgasm out of my cock in seconds, mingling our cum on my hand. I drew it up and shoved two of my fingers into his mouth.

“So fucking help me, if you bite me...” I warned.

He knew he was in deep enough shit.

“Now suck on those. You need the practice.”

His eyes went a little wide, but he sucked on my fingers as he wept.

Suddenly disgusted with myself, I pulled back, wiping the sticky mess off on the outside of my boxers. “Come the fuck on,” I growled at him.

I dragged him out of bed mostly by the collar, eschewing the leash and the handles on the harness in favor of making sure he understood just how much trouble he was in.

“Bad dog,” I told him. “Bad, bad fucking dog.”

I slammed the door to the kennel and padlocked it in place, breathing hard as I stood and stared down at him. He hadn’t fought me the entire time, but there was something about that that bothered me. Fuck, the whole thing bothered me. I’d already gone far enough by having him kidnapped, and now...

Now, I felt sick.

Sick, and sated, and so, so good.

How was it possible to hate myself so much even as I rode the waves of my climax?

I staggered to the bathroom and washed my hands, yanking down the black cloth so I could see myself in all my hideousness. I deserved it. I deserved to have to see myself like this, like I really was — bestial and monstrous.

I'd defiled such beauty, and my self-loathing and grief were written across my face every bit as much as those scars were. I didn't deserve to get to cry, not after what I'd done, no matter how many memories haunted me and left me this way.

I couldn't blame the fire for everything. Obviously there was something wrong with me, deep inside where there was no way to fix it, and I could only fight that so much.

I'd lost that fight tonight, and I didn't know how long I could keep fighting it before I gave in like the monster I was.

I got back into bed, ignoring him when he whispered that he was sorry into the darkness. I didn't care how sorry he was. He shouldn't have tried to get free, not when all I'd done was give him kindness and gentleness and...

And held him captive, and humiliated him, and tortured him in my own way.

Raped him, because wringing that orgasm out of him had been just that.

When had I become this?

Was there any coming back from it?

I didn't know.

On the wake of those thoughts, I fell into blessedly dreamless sleep.

21

Ryder

I lay awake for a long time. Every time I started to drift off, I shifted. It drew attention to the dried cum flaking off of my skin, and I woke anew.

I was still fighting to understand what had happened.

All right, I'd been dumb, but I'd thought I could sort of unwind the leash from around his wrist. If he'd been a heavy sleeper, it could've worked, but those mitts made sure it was a clumsy effort.

Or maybe you wanted to get caught .

I didn't like the way my thoughts were going.

We'd settled into a routine, him and me. I'd behaved, and he'd gone gently on me. He hadn't demanded more than I could take, which meant the touches had been light, almost nonexistent. I could tell he wanted more, but he had been — thankfully — reluctant to press against my boundaries.

Well. That was laughable. He'd steamrolled my boundaries, but sexually, he'd been mostly hands-off. I didn't know if he'd thought I would go to him eventually or what, but he'd held back .

Until tonight.

Tears welled up in my eyes all over again as I thought about how I'd gotten hard despite myself, how the deft strokes of his hand had brought me to climax no matter how much I'd fought it.

What did that say about me?

He'd been so angry. It hadn't even been about sex. It had been about him thinking I found him repulsive, disgusting. I had at first, but now, it was sort of a part of him. I didn't notice his scars unless he was being cruel, and that was rare these days.

It was like I'd ripped some festering wound open and left him vulnerable, scars and thoughts and all. It was like he'd let himself relax around me, and I'd gone and fucked it up by trying some stupid escape attempt that was never going to work anyway.

But that was me. Ryder, with all the terrible plans and the unattainable dreams. All I wanted was to go home, but...

But I wasn't even sure I could.

Even if I went back, this was going to be hovering over me. He'd gotten inside my brain, deep inside where no one should've been able to go. I wondered what would've happened if I'd fought harder. Would he have known I was serious about not wanting to be touched then? Would tonight have happened?

Would I still be down in the basement, miserable and without food or water?

I didn't know, but there was no going back.

I just wanted to sleep, to escape to a place where I was myself again — myself, not Toby, not his pet, not his dog. I wanted to be a human being who was treated like one

instead of being treated like a naughty puppy .

Instead, bad, bad fucking dog echoed throughout my nightmares.

“Toby.”

My eyes snapped open, the entire world coming into focus all at once as I stared at Griffin.

He looked as tired as I felt.

I swallowed hard, not sure what to say or do.

“I... I’m sorry,” he said.

I stared at him, unsure of why he was apologizing at first. Jesus Fucking Christ, what was wrong with me? He’d raped me, and I didn’t instantly know why he was apologizing? I had to get this out of my head. “It’s okay,” I said, even though it wasn’t. But I’d responded to his touch, hadn’t I? It had been my fault that I’d come.

“No, it isn’t,” he said. He sighed heavily, running a hand through his hair. “But Toby, you can’t do that. You can’t try to escape when I give you the privilege of sleeping in my bed. Did you really think I wouldn’t wake up?”

Yes.

No.

I didn’t know.

“There’s nowhere to run,” he went on, continuing my line of thought from the night

before. “This is your home now. Think of how good things have been. You’ve been listening, and everything’s been... good. Hasn’t it?”

“Yes,” I whispered.

“Yes, what?” he asked.

“Yes, Master,” I replied without thought.

“So we won’t have a repeat of last night?” he asked.

I shook my head .

“But it wasn’t all bad, was it?” There was something pleading in his voice, begging me to say it hadn’t been. He wanted me to excuse what he’d done.

I didn’t know if I could argue. I’d been the one to come. Even if I’d said no, my body had said yes, and that had been that.

I shook my head again.

Relief spilled across his face as I gave him absolution, and I felt... not better, really, but strange. It was a relief to me, too, to know he wasn’t angry at me anymore.

“It’ll be okay,” he said.

I wasn’t sure if he was trying to convince me or himself. “Yeah,” I said roughly. “It’ll be just fine.”

He drew in a deep breath, held it, then released it. Nodding, he grabbed the key to the padlock holding me inside the kennel and unlocked it, though he paused instead of

opening it. “No more problems. Right?”

“All you have is my word,” I whispered, feeling a bittersweet sadness wash over me at the idea that I’d broken my word the night before — and stupidly at that. There hadn’t been a chance in hell of getting free.

“But you know now that you aren’t going to escape from me. You know there can be good things here,” he said, more confidence in his voice than earlier.

“Yes.”

“Yes, what?”

“Yes, Master.”

“Good.” He took in another shaky breath then opened the kennel door. “Good boy.”

There was a flood of relief as he called me that instead of bad dog , instead of raging at me like the man I had thought he was from the moment I’d seen him .

The beast I’d expected to see beneath his scars instead of the man who was there.

I crawled out of the kennel as he held it open for me, stretching out slowly to relieve some of the pressure on my cramped limbs.

He waited patiently, even reaching down and tousling my hair affectionately as he waited for me to finish.

I wondered how long he’d wait, but I didn’t want to see the anger again. I didn’t want to piss him off again and see what was raging beneath the surface, just waiting to be awakened by the wrong words.

I gave him a slight nod, and he attached the leash to the collar.

That was new, and I didn't like it. Except for the night before, he'd fastened it to the harness instead of putting pressure on my throat. Obviously he hadn't completely forgiven me, no matter what he said.

I swallowed hard, ducking my head and slumping a little before I started to follow him into the kitchen. He tied the handle of the leash around one of the chairs to anchor me in place — more of a precursory thing than anything else, given that I could probably drag it.

I wouldn't.

He started working on breakfast — not normal breakfast, which was usually dry cereal and maybe a little fruit with a few chewable vitamins thrown in there.

My stomach growled when I smelled the pancakes cooking, and I looked hopefully up at him. He wouldn't eat it in front of me, would he? That would just be downright cruel, and I'd tried to make things right. Surely he wouldn't do that to me...

Would he?

He fixed sausage, too, cutting up a few pieces of fruit before clearing away his mess with the same efficiency he did everything else with.

I could see it, though, finally — the way he favored his scarred side over the other. I couldn't even imagine what it felt like to be in his place.

He brought over two plates, cutting up the pancakes and sausage. He held out a piece of sausage between his fingers, offering it out to me, and I stared at it for a moment.

I took it from his fingers as gracefully as I could, trying not to let my teeth get in the way. He hadn't been starving me, and dinners had usually been substantial enough, but this was different.

This was strangely intimate, and I was uncomfortably aware of the shift.

He dipped a piece of pancake in some syrup and held that out too, the strings of syrup hanging down from his hand.

Without thinking, I licked them away before taking the piece of pancake into my mouth.

He patted me on the head with his other hand. "Good boy," he murmured again.

Again.

And again.

The whole time he fed me, he repeated those words until they were like some balm to my senses. I was a good boy. I wasn't that fucking bad boy I'd been the night before. I was making him happy, which meant that temper of his would stay firmly under the surface... or so I hoped.

I didn't know what this meant, though.

I finally shook my head when he offered me another piece of fruit, full and ready for a nap after the meal.

He finished eating, then as he got up with the dishes, he told me, "I'm proud of you, Toby. You did that very well."

Thank fuck.

“Thank you,” I whispered.

He didn’t correct me that time, his back to me as he ran the garbage disposal with the little bit of food we hadn’t eaten. Maybe he hadn’t even heard me. Maybe he hadn’t cared.

The kitchen went quiet but for the sounds of clinking dishes and running water, and even those didn’t last long. He dried his hands off on a nearby towel and faced me, looking down at me.

I shivered, not liking the way his gaze swept over my body. He’d examined it before, and he’d touched it, but this was something different too. I was pretty sure I didn’t like the change, but I didn’t have much of a choice.

He returned to me, untying the handle of the leash from the chair and tugging lightly. “Come on. I think we’ll do a different kind of training today.”

Oh, that did not bode well at all, but I didn’t say anything. I didn’t want to be the reason the day went downhill when it had started so well. I followed him, tail moving slightly in my ass like I was trying to wag it, and maybe I was. Maybe I wanted to do anything that would make him be good to me.

He led me to the living room, settling down on the couch. He nudged me down onto the floor, then he guided my head to rest on his leg. He stroked my hair, and I got as comfortable as I could.

I half-dozed as he watched TV, but it wasn’t long before I could sense the tone changing. He didn’t just want to sit there and watch TV with me at his side — or maybe he did, but that wasn’t the only thing he wanted. He wanted more than that.

I bit my lip. I had a feeling I was about to put my practice on the waterer to use, and I had no idea how I felt about that.

Of course, it didn't matter. I'd do it anyway, because arguing was futile.

There was no reason to do anything but obey.

22

Griffin

Was I really going to do this?

I'd intended to from the moment I'd led him into the living room, but now that I was faced with the idea of actually doing it...

I gazed down at his face, so beautiful where his head rested against my leg, and I had to see more. I had to feel more. I'd already touched him last night, and today... Today, he was following my lead on everything. He seemed to be accepting it all, and I wanted to see how much more he'd be willing to accept.

"If I asked you to give me a blowjob, would you?" I asked, threading my fingers through his hair.

"Yes," he replied after a brief hesitation.

"Why?" I hadn't meant to ask the question, but it was out there, and I could barely breathe as I waited for his answer.

He was quiet again, closing his eyes. He didn't open them as he said, "Because I'm going to do it anyway, whether I want to or not."

I flinched. "I don't want it to be like that."

He opened his eyes, looking at me as directly as he ever had. “But that’s the way it’s going to be. I can’t say no to you, not for long. This...” He shrugged, something helpless in the motion that sent guilt racing through me. “This is going to happen.”

The words hurt. “Is it that hard to think about touching me?” I asked him.

“I’m not gay,” he said with another shrug, looking a little flustered, a little awkward. “I don’t like guys that way. It has nothing to do with the way you look.”

“You came when I touched you last night,” I told him, desperate, pleading for him to say something other than the fact that he felt obligated to give me a blowjob. I didn’t want it to be that way.

He averted his eyes, staring down at the floor. “I know. Maybe... I don’t know. Maybe things are different with you.”

His voice was a little lackluster, but I chose to ignore that. I pounced on the words themselves instead. “Do you think I’m hideous?” I asked. There was something deadly in my voice that even I could hear, as though daring him to give the wrong answer — and I’d know if he lied. I always knew when people lied about that. It always showed in their faces, making their feelings perfectly obvious to me.

He shook his head. “No.”

That word, at least, rang true. I took a deep breath, letting it go slowly. I could push this, or I could wait until he was really ready.

Before I could decide, the doorbell rang. I froze, looking down at my ungagged captive. Oh, fuck. Fuck. He’d just tried to escape the night before. There was no way in hell he wasn’t going to try to get someone’s attention.

I put my hand over his mouth, but he didn’t try to wrestle away from me. A tear

trickled slowly down his cheek as he hunched down, slumping to the floor .

“Shh,” I whispered unnecessarily.

The doorbell rang again, but I couldn't just get up and answer it. It was bad enough that there was a chance someone could see the shadows through the blinds and wonder. I didn't need him racing off to try to fuck this up for me.

The leash stayed slack, though, and he didn't try to pull away from me. I looked down at him, surprised, but he had simply closed his eyes again.

He wasn't fighting.

He'd accepted this.

My heart pounded in my chest.

He'd accepted this .

If he hadn't, he'd have been desperately trying to scream around my hand, trying to wriggle free, trying to do something. But he didn't. He chose to stay there, held beneath my touch on my floor moments after I'd asked him to give me a blow job.

The walls were — mostly — soundproof, but I waited a long time before sliding my hand away from his mouth. He didn't move, instead resting his head against my knee again. I petted his hair, grateful, relieved, unable to comprehend the sheer magnitude of what had just happened.

“You don't have to do anything,” I promised him fiercely. “That can wait a little longer. All I need is for you to stay with me.”

And I didn't realize until that moment that I was crying too, that the idea of him

choosing to stay meant more to me than I could ever hope for. My beautiful boy had had an opportunity to alert someone to his situation and his presence, but he hadn't. He hadn't even tried.

That had to mean something.

Didn't it ?

He let out a soft sound, something almost like a whine, and I sagged back against the couch. That had been close... but it had been good, too.

Because now I knew he was done trying to run.

He wanted to stay with me, and I'd wait until he was ready for anything more...

As long as he didn't take too long.

I slowly stood, murmuring, "Come on. Let's go lie down, okay?"

This time, it would be safe enough to take him into my bedroom and let him share my bed. We might not be lovers, but he had just proven he was done fighting. He was so close to being the perfect pet.

All he had to do was give in just a little more.

I led him to the bedroom, unclipping the leash to let him climb up on the bed. I followed, pulling him into my arms. He pressed in close to me, and I could feel him trembling.

"You were so good," I told him, kissing his throat. "Do you want a reward?"

He nodded, the gesture more tentative than anything else, fractional and barely

perceptible.

“How about we take off the mitts, huh? I know you don’t like them, and I think you’ve earned that.”

He nodded more vigorously. “Please, Master,” he said, already offering his hands out to me.

I smiled at him then got the key to the tiny padlocks, removing the things just like I did every day and letting him stretch his fingers. I tossed the mitts themselves onto the bedside table.

He looked down at them in wonder, then glanced warily at me.

“I won’t put them back on yet,” I told him. “We’ll just use them when I’m in the mood. Okay? ”

“Yeah,” he said, his voice a mere whisper. “This is really good. Thank you.”

“You’re welcome, Toby.” I smiled as I pulled him back against me... just where he was supposed to be.

Sooner or later, he’d understand that. He’d know, too, that this was what his life was supposed to be.

All it would take was time.