

Smoke Rings

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Smoke Rings

by [ghostiegoo](#)

Summary

Having survived nearly being burned alive, Knox is certain his days are numbered. No one would buy a slave as damaged as he is, and there's no way he'd be able to work off how deep his debt is after his medical bills. When he's picked up by a master who collects cast offs, he finds it hard to believe that this is all that he can hope for, but it might be all he's good for.

Updates once a month at least.

Notes

This fic was heavily inspired by the work The Best Gift Ever by PaxterHobber and probably wouldn't exist without my dear editor. It is mostly to write angst, but there's some smut thrown in as well.

Hoping to update at least once every month. There may be bonus chapters if my editor LoadingNewFriend and I are feeling zesty and are free. Please read tags. This is a slavery fic. It's not super dark content wise, but slavery is fucked up and abuse occurs.

Auction

1

He couldn't feel his hands, and yet somehow that paled in comparison to everything else he was facing. The past few weeks—hell, *months*—had been a drugged out, pain-filled blur. Disinterested doctors, muffled voices, and various monitor blips and beeps filled the cotton space of his consciousness. He thought he'd never hear anything other than the noise of the factory. Knox was fairly certain he wasn't meant to be alive right now. He still wasn't sure if this was a post-death hallucination or not, and he also wasn't sure if he even wanted to be breathing. At some point, somebody moved him from the bed and into a car. He was being driven somewhere, and somebody was trying to talk to him.

"To pay off your medical costs, the foreman has sold you. You'll be auctioned to a bidder and will be their property until such time as your value has 'paid off' the debt."

Sold.

He had to smile. Old bastard said he'd never sell Knox. Could barely turn a profit (if he had at all) with the untrained wildness Knox cradled and kept. He savored it, the core of it, and let his mouth run. What could they do? Hurt him? Rape him? If they were focused on him, they were too busy to notice and punish the kids sneaking away food, sneaking lockpicks, running away. It was... easier to not think about himself.

The auction pens were lit by flickering fluorescents. He was pulled down a narrow, battered corridor. The plaster on the walls was flaking off, and his shoulders scraped in some places. It was suffocating. It smelt like piss and fear, two smells he was used to in the barracks. Knox was roughly shoved into a cell and left alone. The drugs were slowly fading from his system, and the pain was returning. He didn't mind. He was used to it. Knox shifted his attention to his hands, which... he still couldn't feel. His vision had improved, and he looked down in the dim fluorescent...

Burned.

He fell against the back wall and... he couldn't feel that either. He reached back; they hadn't given him a shirt and...

The first noise he'd made in months was a gasp, horrified, and then a choked sound as he swallowed the urge to panic cry. Oh god. *Oh god*. His back was gone. His fingers traced deep divots of scarred, hardened flesh. He couldn't feel the touch of his own hand on his back, but now that he knew how much was gone... The whip scars wouldn't be missed; they might've even been burned away. His arms weren't as bad, but still pockmarked with burns and cut scars. Why—

Why did they spend the money to save him? Didn't make sense as a cost. Was it some weird form of revenge? Did the foreman want to see him break or... finally do something to justify

buying him off the police in the first place? Maybe to avoid bein' sued or whistleblown? Whatever the reason was, Knox's gut twisted in hunger and fear.

Who would buy him? *Who would buy him now ?*

The kind of people who would buy a slave as damaged as he now was... he'd be lucky if he was bought as a farm hand. At least, there was a good chance he wouldn't be bought for pleasure. They'd have his records; they could see his scars... He'd be of no use there. He tried flexing his hands and winced with pain. He couldn't even crook his fingers. *Useless* . He curled up more, trying to keep his shaky breathing steady.

Sold, enslaved, and still able to work still meant he was alive, still meant that one day he would be able to be free, legally or not.

Useless, unable to work, unattractive...

He wasn't sure what happened to those slaves, and he was pretty sure he didn't want to find out. Knox thought back to his record, and all the marks on there. When he was 13, first on his own, he'd been stupid. Caught shoplifting, running away, they knew he could pick locks, and that he was a slippery bastard. At 16, he almost did get away. Two strikes. They made sure he couldn't run after that, so now when he walked, he favored his right leg, where their knives went a little too deep.

No matter what they did to him in the factory, he kept his head down and worked on getting others out of there, or at least keeping them going. The other kids had to learn the best way to fix a mill without getting a hand mutilated, how to avoid the foreman when he was drunk, how to pick locks, read, write. Then... they caught him setting fire to the ownership papers of the whole second shift. Those papers were burned, they said, so he had to as well. They were going to kill him in front of everyone. But the fire spread.

As fucked up as the system was, Knox vaguely remembered that they couldn't hold a public lynching or—rather, burning—like that. Had they gone through the proper channels, Knox probably would've been killed anyway, but... he wondered what was worse. To be seen as useless and die unknown, or to have died in the fire like a martyr. They hadn't broken him, but this... this might.

He had his name and his rage, but Knox wasn't sure if the shattering unknown and his burned body could get through it. He had to try at least.

Time wasn't real in the cells. One meal a day at whatever time the faceless workers felt like it, barely any water, and the only indication of time was when they shut off the lights. Pain kept him in his corner, sleeping most of the time. Once, auction-house staff came in to take a look at him, roughly getting him to his feet.

“Tsk. Not much to work with here. Put it down for a quarter off, and we’ll put it up tomorrow morning. We’re not going to break even, but we might as well try to get some kickback.” Knox grimaced and ended up on the floor again as a heavy backhand sent him down.

“Actually, make it half. Pity that person who bites, but I don’t want to pay for disposal. If it ain’t bought in three days though, call ‘em.” Knox was smart enough to stay down. When they left, he pushed himself up to a sitting position. What was he doing? He didn’t want to die. He’d survived being set on fire, being put down after that seemed like such a... defeat, spitting in the face of all his resistance up until this point. Still though, there was nothing he could do. He looked at the wall he now leaned against, the worn concrete pockmarked and crumbling in places. He pressed a nail against the rock, scratching down, and noticed that he left a small mark.

Knox continued scratching through the night, agonizingly carving the letters of his name, scratch by scratch. At least, if the worst came... there was some mark that he’d lived. That he’d been here. He wondered if anyone else in here was doing the same. At least he *had* a name.

Bought

Chapter Notes

Double update as a treat

The auction house on the first day was loud. He was paraded out of the pens with a couple other slaves, ones meant for labor from the looks of their strong bodies. The building was large and open. It looked like it had been used for something else, before it was an auction. It reminded Knox of a bank, but he'd never really been in a bank before. It had those traditional columns, fancy tiles, almost to dress up how awful the business was.

He was brought up to a small stage, one of many in the space, and shoved at the end of the lineup. He was half tempted to ask one of the auction managers if he should go for the mannequin look or more 'oh please buy me' helpless look. Prospective buyers of all sorts mingled in front of the stage. He noticed most of them were decorated in jewels or fine suits, but there were a couple more rough and tumble sorts intermixed. Those ones bought the younger slaves up for auction, and Knox forced himself to swallow his roiling fury. Trainable, able to fit into the worst places, *groomable* — fucking bastards and perverts alike; he could only imagine what those young ones have faced already. The rich were looking for strong bodies for labor like construction, so Knox was passed up. He stuck out like a sore thumb in all the lineups. He had worked in a factory, so he supposed they'd make a note of it. They could boast how his slim form could wiggle into the tight spaces or some other shit to sell him, but whatever they were doing wasn't working. He felt every gaze lingering on him, seeing his scowl along with his scars, and the auctioneer at the end of the day didn't even bring him forward or call his price out. They'd already knocked his price down; they clearly wanted to sell him. Did they think somebody as...

Did they think he'd sell without some serious leveraging? He wasn't strong. As he was pulled back to the holding pen, he took comfort that at least he wasn't the only one being brought back. That night he curled up in his corner again, scratching further at the letters.

The second day, they moved him. He was placed into one of the pens along the side and stripped down to show his body. He snapped back at the handlers just enough to earn him some bruises, but he felt more alive. There were two other slaves in this pen with him, but they avoided eye contact. Not on the stage and with the clientele right there, he could hear what they said about him.

"Ugh, a pretty face, but look at the rest of him. There's barely anything left. I'll pass. What about the redhead there?"

“Mm... he’s untrained? How much?... You lot are crazy if you think you’re going to sell him. I’ve seen slaves ‘taken care of’ for less.”

“Eh, I could use some for my, *ah*, ‘business.’ I’ll take the two there. No, no, I’ll drive away all my customers if I take *him*, ha! I wouldn’t trust him not to run off either with that look; he’s unbroken ain’t he?” That man leaned closer to the cage, sneering, “Your face is pretty enough to be a whore’s, but the rest of ya looks like a dog’s chew toy. The customers who’d request you would end up killin’ ya in a week, I bet.” Knox figured his chances couldn’t get any worse, so... he did the only thing he felt like he could in response to that. He spat in the man’s face.

He hardly remembered the beating he got afterwards. The black-and-purple bruising up his ribs was telling enough when he regained consciousness in his holding cell, though. He must’ve missed the rest of the day.

Was it worth it? It made him feel a smidge better in the moment, but he just had one more day left to be sold. *Fuck*. He turned his back towards the door, and he looked at the rough shaky letters of his name, almost completely engraved into the wall. He started working on it, trying to ignore his impending doom. The same despair that soaked into these walls was dragging him down with it. He’d die, after all that, snuffed out and alone.

Any person who’d buy him wouldn’t show at an auction house so flushed, and the handlers here weren’t planning on transferring him to another with less scruples. He was looking for a shot in the dark if even that. One last chance.

He was bought on the third day, a little before closing. He was put in the pen again, but this time he was on his own. He saw one of the handlers take a red paint pen and cross out whatever price he was listed for. He sat on the floor, one knee up, and he was quiet. He wasn’t sure what drew them to *him*. They were an older couple, richly dressed, and they peered into the cages one by one.

The pair were apparently looking for a replacement for a slave who’d passed of typhoid. The missus required specific care, and the husband had specific desires. Since Knox was cheap and untrained, he was a perfect fit to be molded into his role, or that’s what they said to the handler. Knox made eye contact as they had the man open his cage, and he behaved himself. He was... too tired, and they were the only ones who’d shown any interest in him. The older man, George, looked him over with a furrowed brow.

“Are you sure about this Rosie? There’s a lovely girl just over there...”

She gave Knox a full look over. “No, no... I like this one, and you know that when I like something, I have to have it!” George turned to the handler.

“We’ll take him.”

Knox was taken to the holding area while the sale was finalized. He was sprayed down, dried, given some rough clothes, and shoved out with a heavy collar and chain. He couldn't even bring himself to be relieved as he was put into the back of a car, watching the auction house retreat before the blacked out window was rolled up.

He was shut up in a room under the stairs, claustrophobic and cramped. There was only one other person on staff—a gardener—but she seemed to be above him in the hierarchy. His exact duties weren't given right away, and he wasn't entirely sure what he'd been bought for. He seemed to be filling in as a caretaker for the mistress' maladies, a cleaner, surrogate son, and a bed slave... when they felt like it. They were older, so they didn't often require him for sex, but... he had to be ready when they called. One thing was clear off the bat: George detested talking. He seemed to try to say as few words as he could get away with, and Knox was expected to keep quiet unless asked a direct question. And even then his answers had to be short and respectful. The worst order he'd been given though, was that he was to remain inside. He was not to leave the house or even linger near open windows. They didn't want his skin ruined by the sun apparently. The paleness, brought on by years of being shut in the factory, was attractive to them, he supposed, or it could allow him to almost pass as high-class. His new owners would probably faint if they saw how he should look, healthy and in the sun, but even Knox had started having a hard time remembering what he was supposed to look like. He had... freckles. His hair curled like his father's, but his frame was slight and lean like his mother. He could... barely remember their faces, but he was pretty sure that his skin was supposed to be golden, glowing.

Knox wasn't out to cause trouble. He knew he should at least be a little grateful, but he still hated this with every fiber of his being. He did as he was told, but only to the barest of minimums. They didn't start "training" him until his burns and (apparently) surgery scars had faded from angry red to silver. The mistress was a fan of the cane; the master had him cut his own switch. Knox could handle the pain, grit his teeth and bear it like he did all the other times. He had to be at least functional around the household. The master said he liked Knox's spirit as he shoved his cock into Knox's mouth. His wife was busy squeezing his dick as she cooed. "He might be scarred and a complete troublemaker, but he is very pretty underneath us. Just the right thing to spice up the old marriage." Knox closed his eyes, sucking in a breath when he had a chance, and counted until they were done with him.

They weren't a fan of collars, and after his 'trial' period was over, they took him into town. He hadn't been allowed outside in... *years*. He was taken to their home in a dark windowed car, and they hadn't allowed him outside (he tried once to sneak out, and he was locked in his "room" for two weeks. Apparently they had security cameras). As they pulled him along with a slip leash, he blinked against the bright sun and had to resist the urge to just... stop. Soak in the sun and warmth. He could still feel it.

Then he was pulled into an air conditioned, sterile smelling building. A flash of panic lit up through his chest. A doctor's visit? He'd been healthy though, surely they... They wanted him for sex right? So they wouldn't do any surgery down there. Knox ran through all the procedures he knew could be done to him, especially a troublemaker like him. They might've

gotten fed up with his snappy tone— they could take his *voice*. Metal flashed in the lights as they walked towards a chair in the back.

“Marcus! It’s been too long,” the mistress said, kissing a man in plain clothes on each cheek.

“Rosie, it’s so good to see you. I didn’t think you’d be making an appointment any time soon. George, I hope you’re doing well. How’s the knee?”

“Fine. It acts up, but I’ve been checking...” Knox turned his attention back to puzzling out why he was here. And what even *was* here. He could see... needles, art designs up on the walls, as well as intricately shaped metal pieces of various sizes, mostly made of silver.

“And who’s *this* pretty thing?” Marcus said, and George tugged on the leash just a little to get Knox’s attention back.

“Isn’t he gorgeous? Those freckles are just *precious* . We bought him recently to spice up our love life. Would you believe he was only \$100? I guess because he’s damaged goods. You’ll see as soon as you start working on him,” Rosie said, flapping her hand. Knox shot a glare, but George’s pull on the leash tightened, cutting off his air for just a moment. Knox immediately composed his face into the default, passive look he’d practiced, and the chokehold loosened.

\$100 dollars. That’s... *nothing* . Most slaves went up in the thousands, except for the very young or very old. Damaged goods. They saw him as damaged goods. It echoed around his head. \$100. Damaged. Barely worth the money to feed him. He should be thankful, grateful that anyone still thought he had looks. He supposed nobody had to look at his back or hands or arms.

“Ah! That explains your order. Well, I have the tracking bars all ready to put in. Would you like anything else?” Marcus drew over a tray with two shining metal bars on it, along with some other medical equipment. They were... going to implant a tracking chip in him? *Fuck* .

“Oh George, can we splurge a little and do his ears too? I bet he’d look ravishing with sapphires or topaz to match his eyes?” George sighed, helpless to his wife.

“Very well. Place the bars at the hips, and topaz to start. We’ll take a pair of sapphires too.”

Marcus grinned. “Excellent choices sir. The hips are a fun area.” He turned to Knox and snapped his fingers. “On the chair, pull down your pants and underclothes. You don’t have to do it all the way, but I need plenty of access. Lift your shirt as well.” The warning look on George’s face cautioned Knox from acting out right now. He obeyed, settling down in the chair and trying to ignore the burn of shame at being... exposed in public. Marcus settled down next to him in a chair, preparing his tools.

“Wow, that’s some pretty gnarly scarring. What happened?”

“Not sure entirely. Workplace accident. He’s being leased out to cover the bills,” George said, easing into a chair next to Knox with a tight grip on the leash.

Knox hissed as a sharp stab pushed into his left hip. Looking over, he saw Marcus pushing a thick needle into his skin. It took everything Knox had not to buck or push away. It was too unpleasant to cause the pain to confuse his brain and body. He looked away, and he saw his mistress smile a little, patting his head patronizingly.

“There, there. Just look over at me and it’ll be over quick. We’ve got to know where you are after all,” she said with a saccharine smile. Knox imagined the withering expression he’d give her if the piercer wasn’t *jamming a needle around fucking HELL* .

It took longer than Knox thought to imbed the metal bars into each hip, and the ear piercings were a breeze compared to the bars. He stumbled out, pain flaring with every step as they whisked him back to the dusty, closed in manor.

Rosie, the mistress, favored Knox. He was pretty sure half the time she doted on him like a son, and the other like a lover she’d had in the past. George, he’d heard, had some performance problems, but having Knox there took some of the pressure off. All in all, it was... not the worst place. He was fed, taken care of, and kept busy. Even the beatings were tame compared to the workshop. Every night that he didn’t curl up in the battered cot under the stairs exhausted from being worked to the bone, he was pushed off in an exhausted filthy heap next to the bed. They let him sleep, but on those days, he had to be out and showered before Rosie’s medicine was due. The few times he could retreat to his cupboard, he talked to himself in a hushed fugitive whisper, so he wouldn’t forget his own voice. So he wouldn’t forget himself.

Time passed that way for a year, and then... Rosie died. George did not take it well.

Addict

Chapter Notes

Thank you all for your wonderful comments, kudos, and bookmarks :) I'm too shy to reply to any of you, but they sustain me. I hope you enjoy this angst ride!

Knox was kept in the closet for the funeral. George hadn't even bothered to let him know when he'd be back, or what Knox was supposed to be doing in the meantime. Of course not — he was “property” after all, and... George had never wanted him. *Fuck*. George had only bought Knox because *Rosie* wanted him. How could he spice up a marriage that no longer existed? Maybe... maybe Rosie's will would have something?

Who was he kidding.

Sitting in that dark familiar space, he tried to come up with a plan. He couldn't run. The tracking piercings at his hip had been changed to be more like a... “shock collar” (as if he'd be fool enough to run) when Rosie's health began failing. He couldn't endear himself to George; they couldn't stand each other. There was... a good chance that George would sell him. He wouldn't last long in the auction house unless some other owner took pity on him, and he couldn't depend on that. George... *might* keep him, and maybe, he'll just have Knox clean. He could do that, probably. They hadn't quite trained him thoroughly in any one thing.

When George returned home, Knox discovered that he was a reminder of everything Rosie had loved, Rosie wanted, or Rosie desired. He couldn't do anything right over the next several weeks and months. Not that he wanted to please his master (he wasn't *that* brainwashed), but George gave him punishments almost as regularly as water. He had a collection of canes that he loved using, metal if Knox was particularly “bad.” Knox was smart enough not to try anything, and all he wanted to do was *survive*.

Knox's meals started to be forgotten, or skipped. He could live without one or two, usually he only got one meal a day anyway, but he could only deal with hunger pangs for so long. So eventually, he got his own, rummaging in the kitchen for at least a scrap of bread. He wasn't expecting to have *much*, but just... something right? Maybe George expected him to feed himself now? His master was livid when he caught Knox there, and the few bites he'd had managed to steal had the aftertaste of ash. He seized Knox by the arm, throwing him to the ground (Knox cursed himself for being so weak, for not being stealthy enough, for forgetting what it was like in the workshop—)

George's voice, barely *human* before, finally growled out a coherent sentence, “*I decide when you've earned food. I decide when you sleep, when you cum, when you drink, when you even breathe.*” He beat him black and blue with his favorite cane. Knox cowered, doing his

best to protect his head from the onslaught, but his hands were ripped away with an iron grip. He was dragged up the stairs to the bedroom, cuffed to the poster and propped up against the bed. The cane came down again, and again, and again until Knox's silence was broken. Gasps and sobs and shameful, frightened whimpers escaped, and they only made George more incensed. Knox was a stain on his house, an endless reminder of grief, a thing to take anger out on. At some point, he floated inbetween consciousness and nothing, entering into that space in the factory he went to when the beatings or rape were too much. It'd been a while since he'd been there, and it was nice. He could feel numb to the pain, not aware enough to process it, and even when George used him, he wasn't attached to what his body was doing.

The day after, Knox could barely move. He couldn't *think* even. George had the gardener bring him food and water, but as soon as he'd finished, he felt something was *wrong*. It was like cotton stuffed up his thoughts, and his vision swam. Memories slipped in and out like passing through a conveyor line. He couldn't... *grasp* anything. Knox would blink and find himself doing something he didn't remember. When did he start cleaning? When did George start fucking him? Why was he collared up to a leash and paraded around a party? Told to eat even as he was sick, too sweet drinks, rough hands, sharp pain that brought him back just enough to hear:

"I should've done this years ago. Rosie doted on you too much, thought you'd learn, almost thought you were a person. You're much more compliant like this. Now, you won't have enough will to even hate."

His days became a drug filled haze. Sometimes, he had a vague awareness of what was happening to him. He somehow thought that was worse than the times where he couldn't remember an entire day, bruised, bleeding, and covered in god knows what. The drug that topped them all though, was the one that made him limp. Almost completely aware in a half-haze, but unable to move. George took his time on those days, and in the dark, Knox could almost think he was moaning out 'Rosie' when he fucked him. Sick bastard.

When Knox attempted to refuse food or drink, George would leave him be. He soon learned though that it wouldn't stop anything. George would keep using him, but he'd now be starving, craving something he couldn't put his finger on. Focusing was impossible, and he only got weaker. He couldn't survive if he didn't drink or eat; he couldn't have those things without the drugs, and he was too weak to steal it (not that he would dare after the last time). He wanted to think it was his hunger or thirst that drove him back to taking drugs from George's hand, and he hated the smugness on his master's face when George purred, "*Can't live without it now, can you?*"

Not even retreating to the quiet place in his head could help—it didn't exist anymore. Physical, verbal, he could take it. He could take it, he could reassure himself in the quiet of the night. George had always owned his body, but he'd taken Knox's *mind*. He had no idea what happened when he blacked out, in the spots that slipped through his memory. He passed between the dark of his cupboard and the dark of the bedroom to the dark of the basement and the dark of the hallways. Time didn't have a meaning anymore, and for the first time, he

felt truly afraid that he'd lose himself. His life. His name. Lost in a drugged out existence until George got rid of him or overdosed him on the plethora of strange liquids and pills and shots. It was already hard to remember. When he wasn't completely intoxicated, he was too weak to do anything but sleep until he was forced to drink another drug cocktail.

George would erase everything that Rosie liked in Knox until he was a blank slate, purged of everything. A doll that could be forgotten on a shelf.

George talked more. As if trying to make up for Rosie, fragments of George's rambling floated around. He liked describing what each drug was supposed to do to Knox. How Knox would never get away, how he'd be perfect with just a little more adjustments, how this would be the rest of his life, and George would wring every bit of value he could out of a worthless, damaged, impulse-buy whore like him.

George didn't even give him the drugs on occasion. Cotton would always cloud his mind after a few days, and every day beyond the first two without them, his body was trapped in a cycle of horrible cramping and pain and nausea. He couldn't *think* still, but he could think just enough that he could look at George with as much hate as possible. Then it got too much. The walls closed in around him, and he was terrified of shadows, George looming, the sound of the cane on the floor echoing around and around, and that *son-of-a-bitch* made him beg for the drugs again. He couldn't understand—remember—why he needed them, why it was wrong. It hadn't been like this before had it? The craving he'd had—He didn't want them. He *didn't*. Even begging, George still had to force him to swallow by covering his mouth and nose.

Sensations of parties, being touched, dressed up and then put away again in the cupboard. George's Doll.

A moment of clarity, waking up, sweating, free for a moment, and in a choked whisper, "My... I'm *Knox*. I'll—I'll make it." One way or the other: it'll end.

"Are you sure you won't take the medicine? It's been a long process of experimentation, but it's the perfect blend to keep his rebellious side nicely tucked away, but still able to move around and be usable. He's the perfect pleasure slave with it."

"I can handle some disobedience, Mr. Franklem. Oh, I want the leasing documents as well. I'll be buying him outright, including debt."

Knox blurily opened his eyes. The light was bright (too bright, hadn't it been winter?) but soon after, the noise of cars and hawkers fuzzed into his awareness. He was... being sold? Fuck, *fuck* -- Wait, he could... He flexed his fingers, looking down to see he was cuffed, but he was *aware*. He could think. Ignoring the conversation above him, he did his best to take stock of himself. God, his ass hurt. His legs hurt. His head was *pounding*. Keeping his head down, he noticed he was... so thin. It only made the scars scattering his arms stand out more. How much time had passed? George didn't like him, didn't want him any more than Knox

wanted to be there, why'd he keep him? The questions kept building, and his breathing started to get shaky.

Maybe he should just... be a good slave and stop thinking for a minute.

What the fuck? No, *no* . Focus on something else. Like, who the hell is buying you.

He dared enough to raise his head. George was doing his sale in a small corner of the market. The man he was being sold to was... He was dripping with wealth. This had to be some kind of sick joke right? Knox was “damaged goods” with a record t’boot. He supposed it didn’t matter. Wasn’t like he had a say in it.

...He might not even drug Knox if he was good. No— Don’t think like that.

“Well, Damien, he’s all yours.” With a simple exchange of money and papers, Knox was... not George’s anymore. Part of him wanted to marvel at how easy it was to own somebody. Still. He was out of the frying pan.

Was he headed into another fire?

Arrival

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

He was tugged to his feet, and he felt a flush rising to his face at how his legs, like a *fawn*, trembled and couldn't hold him up. Damien, his new master, grimaced as he had to hold more of Knox's weight than he'd anticipated. *Fuck*. Knox took a few stuttered breaths before firmly standing on his own (something was wrong. He couldn't tell what through the haze still around his senses, but his legs—)

"Oh, I almost forgot," George said, passing over a parcel. "A supply of the ones he's addicted to." *What*.

"...I see," Damien replied flatly, tucking the parcel under one arm. Knox was glad he finally could control his reactions, as the fear that chilled his bones now would've surely shown on his face. He was... addicted? God, *fucking damnit*, and his new master hadn't known before George mentioned it, given his tone. Knox would have to... keep getting drugged— if he wasn't sold. Nobody wanted to waste time letting a slave "detox" or indulge expensive drug habits. His value was surely... nonexistent at this point.

How much had George *sold* him for to pawn him off?

Damien tugged gently at the leash, and Knox was led a short ways to a slick navy sports car. "Up front, seatbelt on," he ordered. Knox was surprised, but he obeyed, clicking in. When was the last time he remembered sitting in a car? Must've been before this life. He kept quiet and took an evaluating look at his new master.

Damien was young, especially compared to George. A rich playboy from the looks of his trimmed suit, expensive car, and the jewelry decorating his hands and wrists. His hair was long and a dark auburn, pulled back into an elegant knot. His eyes were a deep brown, and the way he looked at Knox was... different. Different than the bemused greed of Rosie, the hunger of the foremen, or the hatred of George. He couldn't place what the emotion was, and the uncertainty terrified him more than any of the others. He didn't want a puzzle of a master to solve. Knox turned his head to look out the window. The tall skyscrapers gave way to smaller shops and malls, then to townhouses.

"So, what's your name, and what'd you do to get old George to despise you?"

"His wife liked fucking me more than him," Knox said before biting his tongue. *Shit*. The moment he finally, *finally* had his voice back, he immediately mouthed off. Oh well. George could go fuck himself. Guess he had to now that he didn't have Knox. Instead of reprimanding him.... Damien laughed.

"He wasn't kidding! Oh you are *fun*," he said, glancing over at Knox. "I'm sure we'll learn about when that sharp tongue can be allowed, yes?" Whatever joy Knox took in finally taking a dig at George faded.

“Uh, yes Master,” he said, painfully aware of the drugs and where the power was here. He wasn’t going to be returned. *He’d be good* — No, he’d play along to survive. There was nowhere to return him *to* but the auction house. And if he went back there...

He wouldn’t come back out.

“Sir.”

“Yessir.” It made him flinch, but he needed to play nice. Damien looked pleased, and Knox didn’t know whether to relax or tense further.

“I haven’t taken a look at your record yet,” his master said casually, propping his wrist up on the steering wheel to drive as he relaxed his other hand on the arm rest. “What’re you trained in? I gather that you served as a pleasure slave?” Knox debated on being cagey, but Damien would read all about it so there wasn’t any point.

“...Worked in a factory, so I guess.. Machinery and hard labor. Then... yeh— Yes, Sir, I was a pleasure slave,” he corrected. “Never really was trained in anythin’ though.” They couldn’t drill it into his head after all. Hastily though, he added: “But I’m quick— I can learn pretty much anythin’.” *What are you doing? Are you trying to sound desperate?*

“Mm,” Damien said thoughtfully, and Knox chewed the inside of his cheek and looked away. *Shit*. Wrong answer. He watched as the city gave way to the countryside, then farmland. They were... far out. He’d never been this far away from a city. His family never had enough to do anything other than day trips to a museum or the small park two blocks down from their apartment.

“My name is Knox, by the way.” A beat. “To answer your earlier question, Sir.” There was no reason to hide it. His name was on his papers.

“Knox.” Damien rolled his name around on his tongue, like he was savoring it, and Knox suppressed a sigh. So much for the hope of doing something else. He glanced at the package sitting in the back seat. He... shouldn’t count his luck; better for his master to have a use for him with all his liabilities than be an impulse buy. Damien’s attention shifted as a rock song suddenly sounded from the speakers. He tapped at the side of his ear and started talking to somebody. Knox zoned out again, looking longingly at the sun and the wide open fields. He could see *birds* soaring around. It hurt his heart in a way he couldn’t express, and he spent the rest of the ride looking down at his lap.

The person who Damien had been talking to was apparently a doctor, and upon their return to the house, Knox would be examined. He was immediately put on edge, and his anxiety only grew as they drew up to a grand mansion. Getting out, he had to stop as he was overwhelmed by... fresh air, the smell of flowers from the extensive front gardens, the sounds of birds and the breeze through leafy trees. He felt dizzy and weak and he should be *stronger than this*. Damien didn’t comment, but the look Knox received was enough to send an embarrassed blush to his cheeks as he was caught gawking. He couldn’t take it all in, and he nursed a small amount of gratitude as Damien nudged his shoulder with a hand, propelling him

towards the door. Once there, an absolutely massive man was waiting for them, dressed in a modest work outfit with an embroidered eyepatch covering his right eye. He had curly red hair tied up into a large bun, a slim red band of a collar around his neck, and he only glanced over at Knox as he addressed the master.

“Welcome home, Sir. Doctor Monroe is waiting in the secondary parlor for the examination.”

“Fantastic. Anything else to report?”

“Quin would like to remind you not to forget dinner with work, and she’s also prepared next week’s food budget based on the market prices. It’s on your desk for approval. Cory broke a few plates washing up, but he didn’t cut himself like last time.”

Damien sighed in relief. “There’s that at least. Just have a word with him about being more careful next time, and replace the plates. Anything else?”

“Jack is home.” Damien’s face twisted, a rumbling storm of swears seeming to want to spill from his mouth (not out of anger— distinctly not, just... surprised and a little upset. Odd), and then he closed his eyes, taking a deep breath.

“Already? He doesn’t waste any time at school, does he? Well, make sure he knows the schedule, and let Quinn know we’re switching budgets to the off-season one.... Or whatever we’re calling it.” He glanced over at Knox. “Knox, this is Kinsley. He’s in charge of you lot when I’m not here. If you have a problem, you go to him or me.” Kinsley inclined his head respectfully. Knox returned the greeting. This household seemed... like a well oiled machine. “Oh, don’t bother preparing a bed in the quarters, Kin. He’ll be staying in my bedroom, and taking meals with me while I’m here,” Damien added, almost as an afterthought. “And don’t tell Jack about him.” He pinched the bridge of his nose. “The last thing I want him to do is nag me to share.”

“Yes, Sir. Of course.”

Knox, however, was stuck on *He’ll be staying in my bedroom* . Locked up, trapped. He hoped there’d be windows. He hoped he wouldn’t be chained up. If anything, being allowed around the house would be a step up from where he’s been.

Kinsley was dismissed, and Damien led Knox into the room (looks like a parlor) immediately to the right of the entryway and down a small narrow hallway. This must be the way to the slave quarters. They entered into a circular space with a narrow staircase leading up and down with a couch, table, and other items that made it seem like this was... a recreation space? That didn’t make any sense though; why’d a master care if his slaves had a common room? Either way, Knox was glad this room didn’t have any windows and doors that shut. A woman with a tightly-wrapped bun of almost-white hair had cleared a space to work in. She’d also set up a scale, a chair, and propped her medical bag on a table. There was little talk, and fewer directions for Knox. Dr. Monroe was a no-nonsense woman, and she checked Knox over with a straight-edge efficiency, drew two vials of blood, and squinted at almost every inch of him with clipped instructions while Damien stood nearby, arms crossed. Then, she asked— ordered him to strip down. Knox’s breath caught, and he glanced at his master.

Say something, you don't want to see — There was no sympathy there, and so... he obeyed. He heard double noises of air sucked through teeth as he pulled off his shirt, and he deflated. This was it, no more examination, no more nothing. Damien wouldn't want a pleasure slave as scarred as he was. His eyes were fixed to the floor, waiting.

"Well, I can tell you right away that he's dehydrated, malnourished, and underweight, even before he stripped," the doctor said. "There's... not much I can do for the scarring, but everything looks to be healed up as best as it could be." She reached out her hand and did... something. "Can you feel that?"

"No Ma'am," he said, attempting to be somewhat polite for the moment. It might make his chances better.

"This?"

"No Ma'am."

"How about this?"

"No. Any other places you want to prod til you're satisfied I can't feel a damn thing back there?" Knox snapped then bit his tongue. He glanced quickly at Damien, who didn't look upset, but there was a warning clear as day on his face.

"...In any case, I doubt he'll regain any feeling in his back or any area that's this heavily burned. His hands might be able to regain some finer motor control with some physical therapy. I'll need to see the lower half now."

"Go on, Knox," ordered his master, and Knox wiggled off his pants.

The doctor stopped moving, but her voice was calm when she spoke after what seemed like an eon. "Well. That's a problem." She said it as if finding a shirt that had been bleached by accident. Knox flinched, confused, and he reached for his pants. His lower half had been hurting, but nothing more than usual. Before he could shamefully put them back on, Damien placed a firm hand on his arm.

"Stay," his voice was quiet, but Knox had known that tone of voice for years. *Still, like a doll. That's how it's supposed to be . No— No wait, fuck, **fuck** .*

"You got him today?" Doctor Monroe asked, and he felt her hands dully on his upper thighs and ass. Dull?

"Yes, I'm surprised that there wasn't any bleed through on his pants."

"I'll make a note of this. It looks like... it's mostly started the healing process. You *do* know how to pick them, Damien." She rummaged around in her bag, and Knox couldn't stand it anymore.

"...What— Sir, what's... wrong?" he asked.

“George has... cut slashes into the back of your thighs. I’m not entirely sure why. In a part of your leasing contract, there’s a stipulation where your owner can’t damage you further in terms of permanent damage. Probably to make sure that your value stays somewhat preserved. George broke that clause in this case. I suppose he wanted to make sure you had something to remember him by.” Knox grimaced. He couldn’t *wait* to forget about that old man. Damien continued, “I’ll make sure it doesn’t scar.” He paused. “Knox, how much can you feel down there?”

“Hurts, sir, but I can’t remember when it hasn’t.”

“I’m surprised you can even walk with only a limp.” Knox saw him reach out to touch him, but... he couldn’t really feel where. “I’m also fairly certain you have whatever drugs he gave you still in your system dulling the worst of it.” The doctor returned, and she put something cool (lotion?) all over that area, headless of the way he twisted, flinched, and wanted to move away. That *Stay* kept him frozen though. She further examined his ass before she stood, wiping her hands on a towel.

“Alright Damien. It won’t be cheap, but with some care, he should heal with minimal scarring. I’m impressed that the scabbing held together through the walking. I’ll get you the STI and toxicology report as quick as I can; it may still take a while. You know how it is when it’s a slave’s. Keep him off heavy use in the meantime.”

“Yes. Thanks, Doc. I’ll call you soon.” His master placed an almost protective (or possessive) hand on Knox’s hip, thumb lingering on the bar piercing there. The doctor left a few bottles on the table as she left, shutting the door behind her. Knox wasn’t sure how much more he could handle today, and for a moment, he almost wished for the oblivion the drugs gave him. *You’re not meant to think*. His master was talking to him though, and he straightened, blinking.

“Sorry?”

“I want you to head up to the bedroom and wait for me there. It’s out that door, up the stairs, and it’s at the far end of the hallway. You can put your clothes back on to get there, but I want you naked when I return.” Knox didn’t know what else he expected, but at least he had his modesty in case he ran into any other slaves in the house. Now extremely conscious of his legs and ass, he carefully pulled back on his pants, and he took his time heading towards the bedroom. Fuck it, if his master reprimanded him, he could blame it on his injuries.

The bedroom was about as luxurious as he expected it to be. Even climbing up the stairs, the carpet was so plush his feet sank into it a little. The bed was meticulously made and massive, and aside from that, the only other large piece of furniture was a wardrobe. He took a moment to just poke around and be nosy. He was *unsupervised* after all. There was a walk-in closet with suits and other expensive clothes, a table, and the room was complete with an equally fancy bathroom. It was separated from the bedroom with a frosted glass door, and the inside had a smokey marble and gold aesthetic. There was a shower and a large tub in front of a window overlooking the back of the house. He could see a large lavender field with a few figures working in it, a greenhouse, and... a *pool*? He exhaled, tearing himself away from

the window before his longing could get unbearable. Knox was just... tired. He was exhausted, in pain, and the uncertainty was clawing at the inside of his head like a trapped animal. He was *worthless*. His treatment would be expensive, and if not, he'd have more scars, less appeal. He was bought as a pleasure slave, and he wasn't sure what kind of fucker would be attracted to him after seeing all his scars. He still had his face, and he supposed once he was cleared by the doc with his thighs... his ass was another hole.

He did risk looking around for anything that would give him the date. A calendar, clock, whatever, but there was nothing. The door rattled, and Knox panicked, stripping as quick as he could, fumbling a little and biting his lip against the dull pain. He was really starting to feel it now, as the drugs continued to fade. *Shit*. Not a good look, and he'd been snooping. His panic was quickly derailed by a delicious smell accompanying his master. He carried with him a plate of carefully cubed meat, vegetables, and rice as well as a tall bottle of water.

"Mm, good boy. Sit by the table." Knox felt his face heating up, and he looked away as he knelt by the table. *Ow*. He readjusted to put less pressure on his thighs, but there really wasn't much he could do. Damien pulled up a chair and settled in. He stabbed a piece of meat and offered it to Knox. He stared with wide eyes, and he almost didn't mind being fed like a pet. He almost took it—almost—and then he remembered.

The last time he ate something, it was drugged. And what with his attitude earlier, Knox wouldn't be surprised if Damien took George up on his suggestion. He kept his mouth firmly closed, glaring up at Damien. His master sighed. "Ah. Right. Here." He took a couple bites of the food before he offered another forkful. Knox squinted and then, with much hesitation, he took the bite. His first instinct was to spit it out, every instinct remembering the cotton *nothing*, the strange sweetness and black outs, but he reminded himself that Damien probably wouldn't drug *himself* into oblivion, since he was eating the same food. He forced himself to relax and chew.

Fuck. Oh *fuck*. It was good. It was *so* good. He could hear Damien chuckle, and the flash of anger was mixed with his ears burning in embarrassment. Still, when the fork came with another bite, Knox had to take it. He was starving, and this was better than anything that George—hell, even *Rosie*—had provided for him to eat. It was spicy, the meat absolutely melted in his mouth, and even the vegetables were flavorful. Fuck, when was he ever allowed to eat... any of this kind of food? Meat? Vegetables? Of course it was from a master's plate, but even still, this... had to just be a treat. Something to get him eating.

After some time, Knox was... full. He was *full*. He didn't think he could have another forkful, and sated, a wave of exhaustion passed over him, shoulders relaxing. He blinked up at Damien as he offered something else. Water. He took the bottle and tried not to down it immediately, but sipped at it as he kept a careful eye on his master. Damien was finishing up the rest of the food, tapping on his phone and seemingly ignoring Knox for now. Anxiety competed with food contentment and relief as he sat there and waited, sipping on his water.

He had to know, today, he couldn't push it til tomorrow. "Sir?" he asked, and Damien turned his head. "May I... ask a question?"

"Go ahead."

“...What’s today’s date?” A flash of confusion crossed his master’s face before he checked his cell phone.

“It’s... July 12th. Why?” Knox swallowed, struggling to control his breathing. It was *July*. It was September last he knew.

“...What year is it? Please, Sir.” He didn’t even flinch begging for this. He needed to know, he *needed* to know. He hoped that ignoring his master’s question would be forgiven. Put on edge given the tone of voice, his master gave the year. Knox couldn’t hear what else he said after that. He set the water down next to him, placing both hands on the ground to try and hold himself up. His body shook with the strength it took not to immediately burst into tears.

Two years. He’d been drugged up for two years. Two years he’d spent in a void, and god knows what he was asked to do, what he had taken as fact, what had *happened* to him. No wonder he’d gotten so thin, so weak. Worth less and less. George could’ve done anything to him, lent him to friends, punished him, trained him in things he no longer remembered but might still have the muscle memory for. The odd thoughts— Knox had... no idea it’d been that long, and the immovable fact of time was one thing too large for him to grapple with. Who *was* he now? His breaths came in short, rapid gasps. He couldn’t freak out, not in front of a master, couldn’t show how utterly broken—

“ *Knox!* ” His head snapped up at the sharp tone, wide eyed and trembling. Damien had pushed the chair aside, towering above him, and Knox’s throat constricted. He wouldn’t apologize for this; it was earned. Damien could punish him however he wanted, but he wouldn’t apologize for having two years of his life erased even if those two years would’ve been filled with misery. At least it would’ve been *something*.

There wasn’t any hit. Damien didn’t even raise his hand to do so. Instead, he crouched down, cupping Knox’s cheek with his hand in a bizarrely gentle gesture. “Things are going to be different here. You won’t be drugged again, not even as punishment. It’s not my style anyway.” Knox wished he could believe that. He remembered the package. Still, he wasn’t sure how to feel right now. Terrified for sure, confused, trepidation. “There’s a good life for you here. As long as you behave, I won’t have any reason to punish you. Now, up!” Knox wanted to protest but couldn’t find the words, and he shakily got to his feet. He was... tired. It was too much.

Damien motioned towards the bathroom. “Take a shower. While I’d prefer you to be bare in bed, I don’t want to irritate your injuries, so you’ll find some night clothes when you get out.”

Bewildered, Knox was nudged off to the shower. As if in a trance, he shut the door behind him, opened up the glass shower door, stepped in, and turned the shower on *hot*. The water ran down his body, and he ignored how his skin burned red. He tilted his head up into the spray. The water, the steam, and the heat made it hard to breathe, but he relished the feeling. After all, he felt like he was drowning anyway. He couldn’t tell when the water on his face was mixed with tears, but he shakily sank down to his knees, quiet sobs racking his body.

It was like the first time he’d been bought, or hell, when he was caught shoplifting and spent that night in the station. The cops weren’t kind to him there, and it only went downhill. He

was so utterly alone, but now, he was even less. He didn't know how much of him was left. How much he could cling to. *Two fucking years*. Knox might be able to take some satisfaction in the fact that George ultimately failed. He couldn't break Knox, so he drugged him instead 'cause it was easier.

Except he didn't feel like he'd escaped unbroken, that it was a victory. Two years of missing memories might be his breaking point. He pressed a hand to his cheek where his master had touched him. It was a trick right? It had to be. Gentleness was a trap to lure him into playing nice, to get something from him (sex), or to make him feel useful, necessary. Rosie used it all the time with her cooing and patronizing as she dressed him up like a doll. He was a pet to Damien. Someone to warm his bed and a hole to be used. That was pretty much all he could do.

Knox looked at his hands. The factory sucked; it was filthy, sweat filled, and every day was the same repeat of pain, struggling against the foreman and co, and trying to protect the younger kids as best he could. At least he'd done something with his hands, assembling machines, building intricate devices, creating things.

Clever boy! You'll do great things with yer hands and that mind of yours. I know you will, son
.

He screwed his eyes shut, pressing the heels of his palms against his eyes. No, this horrible, *shitty* day couldn't get worse by memories of a life he could've had. The life he threw away.

Knox stopped thinking. He cried and scrubbed himself down as if to purge anything else George had done, had infused into his skin.

He didn't feel better. Next, shampoo and conditioner, scrubbed and pulled through his curls which he untangled with his fingers, clumsy and uncoordinated. He rinsed at each step and tilted his head back up into the spray.

He didn't feel better. At last, he turned off the water, dripping, and dried himself with a towel. He found a hair dryer, and considering it and considering how much of a pain it took to untangle it, he brushed out his hair with the dryer. Emerging, he saw his master reclined on the bed, tapping at his phone and a pair of silken pajama pants waiting for him. He dressed quietly, having a feeling that the clothes he'd arrived in were long gone, including his underwear. Damien patted the bed, and Knox slipped onto it, keeping some space between them.

"Mm." Damien's hand found his side and pulled him close. "You took a while in there."

"...Sorry, Sir. I wouldn't remember the last time I took a shower, an' wanted to be thorough." He knew his tone was too harsh, but fuck it. The hand at his side strayed up into his hair. Here it went. His hair would be yanked, he'd be pulled over to give a blowjob and then dumped on the floor. Business as usual.

But that wasn't what happened. Damien simply ran his fingers through the soft fluffy curls. "We'll go through your ground rules tomorrow. It's about nine pm. I still have some work to do, so just relax. You've had a long day." Knox blinked.

“In the bed? ...Sir?”

“Yes. This is where you’ll be sleeping. What, did you think I’d let a pretty thing like you sleep on the floor? Besides, you can’t warm my bed if you’re not *in* it, yes?”

“Right. Sir,” Knox said, voice flat to hide his confusion and distrust. Damien’s eyes went half lidded, and he took Knox’s chin in his hand, holding firm.

“I’m going to have *so* much fun with you. And you’ll need to watch your tone a little more carefully if you don’t want to dabble into some of my other interests~” And then, he went back to petting Knox’s hair. Shaken and rattled, Knox couldn’t believe he’d gotten away with that.

As the minutes passed, his exhaustion, distress, and the soft, gentle petting lulled him into a quiet doze. He still didn’t believe he’d be allowed to stay, but the bed was... incredible. Soft and plush, he felt like he was on a cloud. The pajamas were nice too: soft, keeping him warm but not too warm, and didn’t irritate any sore spots. He slumped, curling onto his side as he drifted. Stuck in the edge of sleep, not yet taken under,, he heard Damien say something, which finished with “ *There we go .*” His chest tightened, trying to rouse himself in preparation for—then a blanket was pulled over him. Huh.

Knox wondered if his master would punish him if he ended up smacking Damien in his sleep because of a nightmare.

Chapter End Notes

Knox has arrived! Late week update, but it's a big one :) Big shoutout to LoadingFriend for juggling work and sleep to edit this chapter (and all my chapters).

Damien Interlude 1

Chapter Notes

Short chapter this week! But next update will be a juicy one. Thank you all for your continued support! <3

Damien was upset. The laws around debt slaves were obtuse at best, and this contract of sale was a sloppy mess. It's only purpose seemed to be to make sure that the owner of the factory Knox had been indentured at kept making money. Though the line between indentured and enslaved was fine, and Damien hadn't really done any further investigation into the difference since, functionally, there was none. Anyone who purchased Knox would share part ownership with them, and no sale could take place unless approved by the factory. The new owner would then essentially pay rent in order to make full use of Knox. A little like sharecropping, Damien thought, only with a body. He wasn't interested in sharing, but it was so hard to parse the actual amount to clear the debt or take ownership of it. He'd been texting with a number of people, including his lawyer, to try and sort out the payment required to buy Knox outright.

He glanced over at the sleeping slave beside him. Knox was curled up, as if anticipating an attack from all sides, a slight frown on his face. He sighed, brushing a gentle hand across those lovely curls again. He smiled to himself when the frown relaxed. It was good that Knox seemed so receptive to positive reinforcement. George had become cold and callused after his wife's death, and it was clear he took most of that out on his slave. The slashes on the back of Knox's thighs were a small indication of that. Damien was upset with that man; he'd lied to him about Knox's condition, and Damien had an inkling Knox was a little worse off than when he'd first spied him and George at the society party a few months ago.

It was the first social event he'd seen George at after Rosie passed. Half a business gathering, half a chance to gloat, the event drew Damien out of his own work and reclusive life to be a social butterfly. He was always good at charming people. It's how he was able to take over the company after the board voted his father out for being a drunkard (false fabrications, but such is politics and money). Damien was a brilliant showman and marketer—if he did say so himself. He'd sent sales through the roof before he convinced the board to sign full ownership back to him. Now, at least, he could spend a little more time at parties. George's family was close to his, as their business milled the grain produced on Damien's plantations (at least some of them. Damien had diversified crops that his company grew and managed, so George's family had less of an exclusivity to his business).

Damien hadn't bothered with a personal attendant. Cory was lovely, but Jack was absolutely besotted with him the moment Damien had brought him home from the auction. He really did spoil his younger brother. Cory was a little too... easy for him and his tastes, but he suited Jack, who spoiled Cory almost to a scandalous degree. With a cute face like that, Damien

couldn't blame him. Still, *he* wanted to have fun too. His last attempt at getting a bed-slave hadn't really worked out. Damien wasn't surprised, but that slave *had* a bad reaction with his prior owner while serving in that position. He should've known better than to push it.

However, when he laid eyes on Knox... *there* was a prize. George had brought him along for appearances, but Damien had a pet theory it was to have someone to take with Rosie gone. Knox was dressed up as a showpiece that would've made Rosie proud. Those tantalizing curls framing his face, freckles and exposed shoulders dusted with gold powder. He was also dressed in a tight black number that flattered his legs and hips. Topaz earrings completed the look, but Damien was intrigued by something else. His amber eyes were hiding something. There was *something* behind the drugged glaze, and Damien felt immediately drawn in. Curiosity burned. He wanted to see what George had buried. What the old man was scared to let shine. That he had a hidden treasure in Knox.

So, after the party, Damien had a conversation with George. The old man was drunk. He spilled it all. His unhappiness, his grief, his disappointment that nobody would buy Knox—not with how much he was worth—and he couldn't buy the lease out so that he could resell anyway. All the while, a vapid Knox sat on his knees next to them, not even flinching when George hit his glass on his head. Damien offered. He got in contact with the factory owner, and George consented to the sale. A few weeks later...

There was Knox. In a corner of the market (not Damien's choice) with George, and the sale was made. All that was left for Damien to do was write the check to the factory, theoretically. He *hadn't* anticipated the extent of what George had done to Knox, but Damien was glad that Knox became lucid partway through the sale. It would've been even more jarring for Knox if he'd come out of the sedatives (or whatever drug cocktail George had given him) in the car with Damien or at his estate. Besides, when Knox came out of it, Damien saw that glimmer again, stronger, and he knew he'd made the right choice. After all, what fun was there if there wasn't a *little* bite back? A personality that hadn't been beaten out. Damien knew he'd have to set limits for that, but he didn't mind the fire.

Damien sighed, putting aside his phone. Tomorrow would be another busy day. He remembered the package of drugs and grimaced. Monroe better be quick on the tox report. He paid her enough for house calls and extra services that he should get it ASAP. It'd take time to order whatever treatment was needed for whatever side effects that would come. He had no attraction to the drugged out doll George possessed, and Damien wanted that chapter of Knox's life behind him as fast as possible. He switched off the light and settled in for sleep, running his hand along Knox's side. It'll be good. Knox will be in a better place, and Damien will have a gorgeous pet, scars included (even lovely. Shame Knox couldn't feel much near them).

Outside

Chapter Notes

I am pleased to announce that this week's chapter does in fact has some smut in it!
Once again, thank you all for your support and kind comments. I read every one :)

Knox wasn't entirely sure if he was still dreaming when he woke. He was warm, snuggled up in soft blankets, and nothing was... happening to him. He half-dozed, reveling in the luxury for just a secret moment. He pushed himself up and stretched, rubbing the sleep from his eyes. He saw a tray on the table and a note, and he slowly slid out of his warm cocoon to pad over to it.

"Knox, I hope you were able to get some good rest. I'll be back this afternoon."

He glanced around and found a clock: 12:00 pm . Fuck, he'd slept in. Oh well, he didn't seem to be in any trouble. He kept reading.

"Breakfast is under the cloche."

What the fuck was a cloche. That dome thing? Who called it that?

"If it needs to be warmed up, the kitchen is downstairs. I'm sure you'll find it! Make sure you eat all of it. We want you to get your strength back. If you start to feel ill, let Kinsley know. — Damien."

He sighed. Right, he might start feeling... withdrawals. *God, fucking—* His shoulders slumped. He didn't feel like eating, despite his stomach growling. He felt like he'd lost a fight that he never even got a chance to participate in. Damien might check if he'd eaten though, and he didn't think tossing it out a window was a good idea. It could be found. So he lifted the dome and was surprised to find the food still warm. It was, well, lukewarm with some warmer spots. He felt nauseous, but he picked up a slice of jammy toast. Just... a couple bites. Just bread. And jam. It was difficult even bringing it to his lips. He took a few bites, and he even managed to get half the toast in him before it was too much. He'll just... try to finish it later. He went around the plate, having one of the two sunny side eggs and a few bites of the bacon. It became easier as he went, and soon enough, he had the plate clean. Knox slumped back in the chair when he was done, still unused to the feeling of *fullness* . His nausea still remained, but at least he wasn't hungry.

This was his second meal within 24 hours. He couldn't count on another, but he'd followed orders. Then the thought: *What if it'd been drugged?* He felt sick and blinked down at the clean plate, hyper-analyzing his body. Fuck *fuck* , stupid... things might *seem* better, but he shouldn't be so careless. He should've trusted his gut. One night of restful sleep and one

dinner didn't justify this laxness. It all came back up, nausea suddenly becoming unbearable, bile rising in the back of his throat. He ran to the bathroom, coughing into the toilet. Knox's gaze settled somewhere in the limbo between the tiles until his stomach settled again.

. He returned back to the bed, but he sat on the floor, back resting against the mattress. He had his eyes on the door.

He didn't feel himself slipping into oblivion, and despite everything, despite his absolute *hatred* of it... he longed for it. He'd gotten so used to *not-thinking*, that thinking was as terrifying as not, and where the fuck did that leave him? He wanted to be aware, to think, to fight, but he was terrified at how easily he could be made docile, compliant. He couldn't quite separate himself from who he was in those two years of stupor. His life was shitty enough, and if he was going to start cutting out parts of it, he might as well delete all of the last nine years of his life.

His fidgeting prompted him to move. The clock wasn't moving any faster, and he didn't feel drugged. He might as well... explore. Right? He was allowed to head down to the kitchen at least, so he could always say he got lost. He took a bathrobe from the bathroom, figuring he'd put it back by the time Damien returned, and set off on an expedition in his fabulous outfit of bathrobe and silk sleep pants.

The house hummed with quiet activity despite being mostly empty. Knox limped his way down long hallways on plush carpet. He could see outside. The sun, fields. He saw a dark skinned man emerging from the greenhouse, carrying a heavy bag of soil on his shoulder and a slender woman following after with a tool box. Sort of... reminded him of home: his mother following after his father to make sure he didn't drop anything important or forget his lunch. He continued on.

The dining room was lit by a crystal chandelier, fine china set in a hutch along one wall. The table had two chairs seated at it, and he remembered that...there was another person besides the master in this house— not counting the other slaves. A secondary master? *Fuck*, he didn't even know what the expectations for *them* were. He continued on, filing that away as something to panic about later. The kitchen was through an L-shaped hallway crook, and when he entered, he was hit with an aroma of fresh baked bread and the sharp spice of stew bubbling away on the stove, and even though he just ate, he was about to downright drool at the smell. At the stove, stirring away, was a woman in an elevated wheelchair. Her dark hair was tied up and covered with a lace cap, and her movements were almost magical in their precision and flare. She glanced over as he hovered awkwardly in the doorway and smiled.

"Ah! You're Knox aren't you? I hope you enjoyed breakfast."

"...It was very nice, thank you," Knox said, fidgeting. The lie was easy. The guilt wasn't even too bad. She smiled at him before gesturing to a chair.

"Take a seat, hun. You look like you're about to fall over." Knox did so, perching on the edge of a chair, and he nearly dropped the roll she tossed to him soon after: a fresh, warm, delicious-smelling roll. "I'm sure the master won't mind one roll missing for dinner." Well, that was all the plausible deniability he needed. A roll for the master would be safe. It might even settle his stomach. He took a couple breaths before taking a bite. It was *perfect* and

reminded him of the ones his mother used to make. He ripped into the roll and hummed as it melted in buttery-fluffy goodness. It didn't even make him feel nauseous after.

"S'very good, ma'am," he said, between bites. She wheeled herself over, bringing with her a cutting board so she could chop carrots and talk at the table.

"Good! And no need for ma'am. My name is Quin." He nodded, finishing off the roll. He was at a loss for words. When was the last time he'd talked to somebody? She didn't seem to be shooing him away, but he hadn't... talked in so long.

"...Does all... the cooking come from you?" he asked tentatively. She nodded.

"Yes! We're a little too far out for takeout, so I can guarantee everything comes out of this kitchen." She looked at him and pressed her lips into a thin line. "I take it you've had some unpleasant experiences with food, yes?" Knox flushed.

"That obvious?"

"It's not unusual. I will assure you that everything in this kitchen is the utmost quality, including our meals," she said with a sly grin. "We get a very nice food budget. You'll be eating mostly what the master has though."

"...Right. About that. What—" He cut himself off and sighed. "Nevermind. I can guess why I'm here." She reached out to touch his hand, and he pulled away automatically.

"I would say that's fairly accurate." She calmly went back to chopping carrots. "I wouldn't worry though. Master Damien has a little bit of a temper, but he's not cruel. We all live a good life here, probably better than most places."

"Sure." That's what Rosie had promised too, and look how that turned out for him. Quin didn't seem to mind his rudeness and continued on.

"Master Damien will fill you in on your specific duties, but if you have any questions outside of that, you can ask me or Kinsley."

"...Where are we?"

"About an hour outside of Victoria. Damien owns a great number of farms out here, as well as the greater business." Victoria, great, he hadn't been moved to a different city entirely, just a bit further away. She finished her chopping and returned to the pot on the stove. "The master will be back soon. I would be back up in the bedroom if I were you."

"W-wait! Ah..." He bit his lip. "I... Do you think it'd be okay if I went outside?" It'd been so long. He didn't want to ask Damien, and Quin seemed to have some level of authority—at least close to Kinsley if she had control over this whole kitchen. Her consideration didn't take long.

"I would play it safe, Knox. You just arrived here. I'm sure you'll be able to, just... don't push it," Quin cautioned, and Knox's shoulder slumped. Of course. He was a caged bird to be looked at and played with on occasion. A pet. Pets didn't get to go outside.

Well fuck that.

He thanked Quin again for the roll and for letting him stay for a moment, and he struggled to keep himself from bolting out of the room. He was getting *out*, leaving this strange house for just a moment. He tried to play it off like a pep in his step from the roll until he was out of sight around the corner. Knox wasn't sure entirely where to find a door outside, but he was gunning for one away from Quin so she wouldn't have any culpability. The hallways were almost a maze, but his memory of Rosie's and George's house was starting to return. It wasn't the same, but they were similar enough that he could find a backdoor out onto the lawn. The sun hit his face. There was a cool breeze, fresh and faintly scented like lavender from the purple field nearby. The grass on his bare feet was cool and soft.

He smiled, a laugh of *joy* bubbled up, and he glanced around before taking off, running across the grass. Dare he say, he almost felt *free*. He didn't go too far from the house. He didn't want to be accused of *running away*. But he indulged himself in feeling the wind in his hair, the sun on his face, bringing back memories of playing on his dad's arms as he worked, wrestling with his sister in the dirt. He forgot about his scars for a moment. He forgot about his position, his status here at the house. He was just Knox again.

He ended up flopping onto the grass, bathrobe flaring out around him, watching soft wispy clouds pass by, and arms spread wide. If he could just have this, maybe it'd be okay. He just... needed to make sure to be back at the house before the master got home. He should have... some time? Yeah.

"...Found him!" called a strong voice, and Knox roused from his impromptu nap. He sat up, rubbing his face.

"*Thank* you, Cal. I swear, the first days are always a mess. Come on you, up!" Damien's voice snapped, and Knox went cold, wide eyed. The sun was definitely lower than it had been, and before he could move, he was being hauled up to his feet. He came face to face with his master who's scowl was like a storm. He swallowed, and he glanced over at "Cal" who was hovering nearby a worried frown on his face. Oh, he was the same one who'd Knox seen coming out of the greenhouse earlier. A gardener? What was Knox's deal with pissin' off gardeners? A collar was fastened around his neck with a slim box on the back, and Knox's good mood evaporated. He'd fucked up.

"Now what were you doing out here?" Damien asked, "I hope you're happy because *I'm* certainly not." Knox opened his mouth to speak, but his master shook his head. "You know what? I don't care. Follow me." Just a touch crushed (*why?*), Knox followed him back into the house, up the stairs, and into the bedroom.

"On your knees." Knox dropped instantly. He wondered what it'd be. A flog? A knife now that he was bought out?... Drugs? He didn't think he could handle being drugged. All he'd wanted to do was be outside.

“Sir—”

“Did I ask for you to speak?” Damien snapped, and Knox lowered his head. *Fuck*. He heard an intake in breath, and he glanced up to see the man pinching his nose. “No... I didn’t get to give you my expectations, but I *did* expect you to be here when I returned home. Perhaps that’s on me for not including it in my note.” Knox was... a little thrown off, and even more confused when a gentle hand came down onto his head, playing with his curls. “Why were you running around outside? Trying to run away?”

“No! No, Sir. I wouldn’t; not again—” *Stop*. “I just— I wanted to be outside.” His voice broke, and he clenched his hands to make his nails dig into his palms. *Weak*. “I couldn’t— I know I was in the market, but I couldn’t remember the last time I was outside. They kept me under the stairs or in a bedroom all the time. And— and it was so *nice*, I thought that I could just sit out there and then come inside before you got home.” A gentle tug at his hair, and a different gasp escaped him. Blushing, he covered his mouth.

“Cute,” Damien said before sighing. He took a while to reply, but all the while he continued to play with Knox’s hair. “I’ll let this slide *this time*. That new tracking collar should be enough of a punishment anyway. But in the future, you’ll need to ask permission and wear shoes.” He looked disapprovingly at Knox’s grass stained feet. “Here’s what’s going to happen. You’re going to take a shower. Clean off all that dirt and grass, and then we’ll have a little discussion on rules.” Another tug on his hair—not too hard—to get him to stand, and he was ushered off to the bathroom.

After his shower, he stepped out and discovered his pants were gone. He should’ve anticipated that. Damien was on the bed, and seeing Knox was out of the shower, he beckoned. Knox padded over, expecting to be shoved to his knees again; however, he was pulled into his master’s lap instead.

“Now...” Damien said, running his fingers up Knox’s thighs, lingering on the piercings and then up his sides. “You are to serve me in bed. You’re to sleep here, and you’ll be taking most of your meals with me, unless I have a work affair to attend to.” His hands continued to roam, and Knox shifted, sucking in a breath as he strayed across the hypersensitive edges of his scarring. Damien smiled smugly, and one hand wrapped around his cock. The touch sent an electric buzz up Knox’s spine immediately, and he swallowed the moan he almost let escape. “Another thing...” Damien continued casually, stroking at a slow and shallow pace with clever fingers. “You aren’t allowed to touch yourself, and... your orgasms are mine. Understand?” Knox fumbled for his tongue. When was the last time he got off? George couldn’t care less, but didn’t forbid it. Had he just been too drugged out?

“Y-yes, *ah*, Sir,” he responded, struggling to hold still. George wanted him silent, still, a hole to be used. Rosie was the one who cared a smidge about Knox’s pleasure.

“Good. Last point...” Damien leaned close, brushing his lips along Knox’s neck as he swiped his thumb over the head of his cock. “I don’t want you holding back. You might’ve been trained to hold still, not make a sound, but the only time I want you doing any of those things

is if I order you to. Understand?” Damn him, damn his body, but Knox nodded, body trembling as he forced himself to allow his hips to rock into the touch.

Horny slut .

“Yes, yes Sir, mmn *ffuck* .” Damien looked incredibly pleased, but Knox was very much not paying attention at the moment. He was being indulged— shown what he could have if he was good. He knew that Damien wouldn’t be so easy with rewards. They never were, but for right now, he’d take it. His master bit at his neck and did something with his hand that had Knox gasping, shaking, and heading swiftly towards the edge.

“Go on~” Damien purred, and Knox tipped over, cumming with a shuddering moan. His master tipped up Knox’s head with his other hand, resting his thumb and finger on his chin. “What do we say?”

“...Thank you, Sir,” Knox said, unfocused and still coming down.

“Good boy.” The words caused a warm bloom of pride in his chest before he squashed that. No *no* , he— he shouldn’t care about doing a good job. He wouldn’t. Damien just jerked him off because Damien wanted to. Didn’t matter if it felt *nice* . But what *was* nice is that Damien was letting him stay here in his lap, cleaning him up, and not shoving him onto the cold floor. There was a knock at the door, and Knox’s afterglow vanished. Damien nudged him off his lap.

“At the table,” he said, and Knox walked on wobbly legs over to kneel next to the chair. He probably looked a mess, and he really hoped Quin wasn’t the one bringing it. Damien returned with another delicious smelling plate of food, and Knox watched him take a few bites of dinner before the fork was offered his way. The same hesitance almost stopped him, but... Damien had already started eating. *Damien wouldn’t drug himself* . He just had to keep telling himself that, and the panic would subside enough for him to take the spoon. Quin was nice, Quin made this.

He took the bite and melted.

Chapter Notes

My apologies for the late upload! The last two weeks was crazy with work and celebrations, so editing took a bit longer. Please enjoy!

Knox was expecting Damien to want to... toy with him again after dinner, but he simply drew Knox into bed with him and pressed a button. A TV slid forward from the wall, and he turned on a movie. Knox, confused, tired, and very sated, decided that addressing his maelstrom of thoughts and questions was too much. He curled up and settled in to watch the movie while Damien pet his hair.

He half-dozed for a while, and then he heard his master's voice. "Tomorrow we're going to head into town. Just a few errands: shopping for clothes, hair cut, and such."

"Ya gonna bedazzle me too, while you're at it?" Knox said, not really thinking, but Damien laughed.

"I just might." He ran a hand down Knox's side to flick at one of the piercings, causing Knox to squirm and gasp. "These are nice, and maybe I'll get your nipples done too." Knox scowled, which earned him a tug on his hair and a gasp.

"Mm, I was thinking about having you grow your hair out long, but... I think we'll stick with about this." Damien curled a finger through Knox's hair.

"...They're for tracking."

"What?"

"The piercings. They're gps chips, or at least one of 'em is. Master George and Mistress Rosie didn't want me wearing a collar, so they got me special piercings so they could track where I was. They weren't just to make me pretty and distract from the scars." Knox wasn't entirely sure why he was telling Damien this, but he hadn't talked in so long. "That, and they could lock me into certain rooms. Give me a shock if I stepped over the threshold of whatever room I was set to stay in." Belatedly and tiredly, he added, "Sir."

He realized, vaguely, that Damien could use that. He could easily get the program, sensors, and remote from George. A part of him thought that'd make it easier. He wouldn't be tempted to go outside. He'd be in his cage. Somewhere he knew. He'd be fucking miserable, but what else was new? He could cope with that. The hand petting his hair stilled, and Knox braced himself.

“Ugh. I already reported that man for breaking your leasing contract for what he did to your legs, but that... *system* is rife with possibilities of neglect,” Damien tsked. “Not only potentially crippling you in the case of an emergency, such as a fire.” He resumed carding his fingers through Knox’s hair, scratching at his scalp with pristine manicured nails. Knox couldn’t help the small noise of *good* that escaped and pressed his face into the blankets to hide. “I’ll make sure that they are deactivated. I wouldn’t want something to happen and they *fritz* in the shower or while I’m using you.” It was a nice thought for sure, but Knox didn’t believe that.

Things wouldn’t be better. They’d just be the same, different bad.

The next day, Knox was fed and dressed in some simple clothes and a black collar with that same narrow box attached to the back of it. Knox... couldn’t pretend that he wouldn’t be tracked—that this was how Damien would be keeping a mark on him. But he couldn’t help the small bit of excitement flaring up at being taken *out*. It wasn’t the same as freedom, but it was another day to stall being kept in a bedroom 24/7. The sports car flew across the country roads, and Damien didn’t chide him for looking out the window.

The small complex they drew up to dripped in the same luxury as nearly everything in Damien’s house and wardrobe. Knox felt incredibly out of place. He could see others, men and women dripping in jewels and rich fabrics, attended by personal slaves. Was... Damien going to bring him places? Obviously, if he was putting this much effort into caring for his appearance.

Would he pass him around?

He supposed he didn’t really have a choice in the matter. But (at least that he could remember) George and Rosie hadn’t been very interested in taking him out to places, let alone *shopping*.

The complex was different from any malls he’d seen when he was smaller. Somebody had decided the best way to construct a building was to make it primarily made out of glass with stainless steel and black metal. Even the doors seemed fancier than they had any right to be. Walking inside, there was only one floor of shops, each with a different style and branding. An elegant fountain ran quietly in the center. Fashion, makeup, electronics, it seemed like every luxury was taken care of, and many of the shops had burly men in suits standing outside the glass doors. He didn’t recognize any of the fashion labels: Succhi, Grand Lacke... The one that had the best name in his opinion was M. Le Fey Fashions. That store had a similar black-and-white pallet, but there were rich blue curtains framing the windows with clothing that seemed like it was actually functional as well as fashionable.

The first store Damien picked wasn’t a specific luxury brand store, and the mannequins in the windows seemed to be wearing a combination of nice clothing for multiple occasions. It was called *Harry’s Everyday*. He was led to the back, and Knox was overwhelmed even walking through the store. Inane elevator-like music played just loud enough to be heard as a murmur, and a scent of perfume lingered. He just trailed behind Damien, hoping this “trip” wouldn’t take long. This didn’t feel... *real*, like he was in the world. It felt like this shop, and

everything in this complex really, was out of touch with reality. His master was met with a smartly dressed salesperson.

“Damien! Welcome. It’s been far too long since we’ve given you a new look. I was thrilled at your appointment,” he said, grinning ear to ear like a cat. His pinstripe suit was pressed so sharply he looked a bit like a drawing—flat.

“Sorry, James. Not shopping for me today.” Damien gestured to Knox. “I have a new member of my household. I need you to give him a full set.” James nodded, gesturing for Damien to take a seat and snapping at Knox to follow.

Over the next couple hours, he was dressed, redressed, paraded about, and posed with different outfits in various colors, styles, and fits. Damien commented on everything, tscking at some outfits and nodding approvingly at others, until Knox was exhausted and having to bite his tongue to keep from being snippy. He didn’t like when Rosie dressed him up like a doll, and this was bringing back some of those memories. Though, at least... Damien had better taste. He let his mind wander, disconnecting from this modeling. It wasn’t nearly as fun as his mother had made it out to be on her dress form or on his sister.

When he was a child, he would sit by his mother, watching her sew together rich, colorful fabrics for the wealthy customers who stopped by for her expertise. She didn’t have a store, at least to Knox’s knowledge, but word got around that his family was the best of the best if you wanted any mechanic work or dressmaking done. The colors and textures of the fabric fascinated him, and he played with the scraps, trying to incorporate them into the mechanical trinkets he made with his father’s spare metal pieces.

As Damien and James spoke, ignoring him for now, he subtly wiped his face with the expensive silk sleeve shirt they’d put him in. No, don’t remember. It’ll only hurt more. Especially *don’t cry*.

Finally, Damien had the trunk of new clothes bought and packed, but instead of having him take it, Knox was escorted to the next storefront over. Looking over his shoulder, he saw that a few slaves, marked by red tags on their ears, were carrying the purchases out. This store certainly looked different from the sterile fashion stores, with neon green trim and posters of pretty models framed in gold. There was even a tagline above the door. “*Step out of your stress and into a new world.*” The name was *Oasis*. Inside were shelves of different bottles and boxes, and beyond the front desk was a plethora of different types of workstations, sinks, chairs, and people bustling around. Rich smelling perfumes hit him face first, followed swiftly by chemical and clean water. Was— Had Damien taken him to a hair salon? Spa? The closest he’d gotten to one of these was the piercing parlor, but... surely, a shower was good enough for a slave right? Spas were for free people, and he caught the eye of a couple of ladies getting their hair done. He was nudged into a chair while Damien embraced one of the stylists.

“Minte! It’s been too long.”

“I know. My pocketbook’s been hurting without a big spender like you.” She glanced over at Knox before back at Damien sighing. “Not here for you I see. Who’s this looker?”

“My new personal. Got him only a few days ago. Can you give him a full treatment? Ah, spend some extra time on his hands too.” She gave Knox another lookover, taking one of his hands before he could pull away, and examining.

“...Mhm! I think we can work with this. Come back in two hours. We should have him all ready for you then.”

“You’re the *best*. I’ll send you a basket,” Damien said, clapping his hands.

“I’d rather you book our spa package,” Minte replied dryly, and he laughed. Knox wasn’t sure how he felt about this and was increasingly anxious as Minte descended on him. She started with his hair, and he was guided to a sink where she scrubbed and lathered his curls.

“Huh, I don’t see much damage here! You know how to care for your curls alright.”

“I sure try when I can, Ma’am.” He had been swiping the nicest looking bottles in Damien’s bathroom to use, and Rosie didn’t spare any expense. It took a while for him to recover from the factory. She looked at him again, surprised, and he wondered if he’d done something wrong by talking.

“You from Green Village?” Knox blinked.

“...Yeah, I am. How’d you know?”

“I recognize your accent! Wow, you’ve traveled far. That’s like what, 8 or 9 hours from here?”

“I wouldn’t know, Ma’am. Ain’t like I was drivin’ the countryside on a road trip out here.” She laughed, and something in him relaxed. She might be free, but she seemed... nice. Not as threatening as a master. He shouldn’t get lured in by kindness; she could be faking it. Anything he said would be passed along to his master if it seemed like trouble. She ran her nails along his skin, and he sighed, closing his eyes.

“I was born there, but not raised. Got family down there still though. It’s a nice place. All the fashion comes from there. At least the good kind.” Knox smiled to himself. His mom certainly would have opinions about who had the best fashion there (it was her). He wondered if she still made dresses.

“...May I ask a question, Ma’am?”

“Go for it.”

“What’s the... ‘full treatment’?” he asked, cracking open one eye as she rinsed his hair.

“Oh *that*. It’s a haircut, balm-massage, manicure, foot scrub, sometimes makeup, and for you, we’ll be throwing in a scar treatment.” Knox’s lips pursed, and he kept his gaze on the

floor. He had a number of things to say, but none of them fit within the “polite” range he was limiting himself to.

As it went, it was... nicer than Knox wanted to admit. Minte was skilled and efficient, and the two hours passed in a blur. The massage sent him to almost a different plane of existence. Free people... could get this all the time? His back sounded right out of a horror movie, but after she was done, he felt like his spine was pudding. It didn't nearly hurt as much as it normally did. Then, they'd moved to the nail station. She took his hands, and he instantly tensed. She kept going, using creams, lotions, and whatever else on his hands. She focused on his scars, testing his fingers to see how bendable they were. God, he still couldn't bend them nearly as much as he'd hoped. He hadn't really... needed to use them. Damien fed him most of his meals, and he hadn't had much opportunity to try using silverware. Holding was different than manipulation, but he had a feeling his grip strength wasn't up to snuff. It was like they hadn't healed at all. They hurt, and he almost wanted to cry seeing Minte manipulate them. Unbidden, memories of the burning came back to him. When his bindings burned off and the pole he'd been tied to fell over on top of him. How he clawed his way desperately out from underneath, using anger and rage to move him towards his tormentors, his owners, thinking that if he was going to die he was going to do his best to maim one with his nails and teeth. He never got that far in reality, but he tried to in his nightmares. The burning, burning coals against his fingers.

She'd stopped, looking up at him with a tilt of her head and a wary look. Knox swallowed, realizing how erratic his breathing was, and how hard he was shaking. *Don't cause a scene. You'll be punished.*

“Sorry, Ma'am,” he said, biting back bile as he jerked himself away from... whatever breakdown had been brewing. He couldn't afford looking like a mad slave. He couldn't come up with an excuse that didn't sound equally as pathetic, even if it was true. “I'm okay.” Not that she cared. She continued, finishing up the hand massage portion and started buffing and trimming his nails. She selected a navy color with some other coat that made his nails glossy, and then...

It was over. Damien appeared not long after with a wide grin on his face. Before addressing Minte at the front, he looked Knox over, cupping his chin with a hand and tilting his head in order to do a full lookover. It only made Knox more self conscious, *more* ashamed of the state of him. When Damien turned away without a word, Knox had to force his shoulders to remain up. He wasn't looking for *approval* — Was he? He was just... so tired. He didn't want to go back to auction, and all he really wanted to do was to crawl into a small space and cover his head and stay there.

“How much do I owe you, Minte? Lovely job as always.”

“342 for everything, which also includes these.” She winked and held up a bag of bottles. “I rounded it just for my favorite customer. Lotions for the scars. His hands have a decent amount, so these should help with that, and whatever he's been using for his hair is *pretty* close to what he needs, but I've some better ones.” She continued talking, but Knox's head filled with static. 342. On him. That plus whatever Damien had spent on clothes for him. And the doctor, and the tests, and whatever drugs he needed. This pampering was... at least

three times more than he'd been sold for to Rosie. He realized he didn't know how much George had sold him for. It had to be less.

Why? *Why*? What use was he? Beyond just... a hole for sex. He had his mind, but nobody wanted him for that. Why was Damien *spending* so much on him? He didn't need to look presentable. He didn't even need clothes! Hell, his master probably preferred him nude in the bedroom, which is where he'd be kept. He'd come to terms living with George and Rosie (not happily, but he'd never be), he knew what was expected of him, and so far, Damien only had the same use for him. So *why* was he... trying to make Knox feel like he had some sort of special place with all this.

His master tugged at his collar, and Knox padded behind him, heading out to the car. He was on autopilot. He just... didn't *understand* .

While the master was away, the household slaves took their chance to have a meeting. Quin spread out a lunch of sandwiches as Cal and Ava returned from the fields. Cory was the only one who wasn't there, which wasn't surprising seeing as Jack was home. Kinsley shut the doors and settled down.

"Alright everyone, how's everything going?" he asked, plating himself a sandwich. He surveyed his crew. Ava had dark circles under her gray eyes, and she'd tied her auburn hair up too-tight, like she was back in her old position— back as a fight dog, a sniper. He made a note to refill her tea stash to help her nightmares. Quin's skin was full of color today, a good sign with her illness, and he took comfort that she seemed like she had her ship in order.

"Got that blasted mower working. Almost took me all the morning," Ava said with a small growl, grabbing a sandwich. "Cal, you should have an easier time with it this weekend. I don't understand why it keeps clogging."

"Thanks, Av', I was hoping to get that done tomorrow, since it's supposed to rain this weekend," Cal said, picking three sandwiches from the tray. "When's the master going to be back?" he asked, glancing over at Kinsley. He met Cal's eyes steadily with his one. As the groundskeeper and field tender, Cal wasn't entirely close to the housestaff, but Ava was often a quiet presence near him. He'd struggled adjusting to life here, and Kinsley wished he could find a better way to connect to the blonde, bright eyed young man. They weren't so different in terms of background, but... confrontation was not the way to break through that wall.

"Another hour probably. I would say if you're in a good place with your tasks today, you can fit in a lil' bit of freetime," Kinsley said with a rare sly smile. "Master is going to be busy with the new lad."

Ava perked up. "New person?"

"Oh, you missed it yesterday dear, since you were out. He was doing a wander around the house and outside," Quin said. "Visited me in the kitchen. He looked like a fish out of water,

and the master almost had a near conniption when he couldn't be found. He's only just arrived two days ago. He's going to be Damien's personal."

"I still feel a lil' bad for him," Cal muttered.

"Poor thing probably hadn't seen the sun in ages. You found him napping in it didn't you?" Cal nodded, focusing on his sandwich.

Ava folded her arms on the table shaking her head. "Sheesh. Well, I hope he gets some breathers. I worry about Cory, but I've been tryin' to leverage Jack into letting him come to movie night this weekend. Maybe we should invite new guy." Kinsley pursed his lips.

"I don't think so. Perhaps next time we get a chance to step away. From what I've gathered from eavesdropping, he's recovering from some fairly serious neglect and injuries."

"Picking up the toss outs again," Ava muttered, and Kinsley shot her a warning look.

"In any case, I don't want any of you having him help with tasks, but... you can let him follow you around a little. I gather he hasn't spoken to anyone in a long time, and his tongue is sharp. I'd rather he be able to have an easy conversation to get it out of his system rather than risk getting punished for it." There was a nod of agreement, and Kinsley looked at Cal.

"If he does come out to follow you about, Cal, don't let him stay for too long. I'm sure the master will send down some clarifying rules about his freetime and such, but I'd rather you not get into too much trouble." Cal quelled his seething with another bite from his sandwich and nodded.

"Now! Since we're all here, I'd love to go over the schedule changes since we have both masters back..." Kinsley said, clapping his hands together. He had a feeling that the house should be in good condition. Damien's hands were about to be even more full than they already were with Knox.

Brat

Chapter Notes

Thank you all for your continued patience and support!! Shorter chapter this week, but you'll have some fun twists turns and angst next week to make up for it. Enjoy!

The car ride was a blur. Being ushered back up to the bedroom was a blur. Dinner was a blur; he didn't even know what he was eating and part of him wished it had oblivion in it. Maybe it did. Automatically, he knelt next to the bed after dinner only to be pulled up into it by Damien's surprising strength. He let himself be maneuvered, pushed forward onto his stomach.

He came back to himself a little then, and part of him shuddered at the relief of some *normalcy*. "Hold still, this might sting a little," Damien ordered, and Knox twisted the blanket in his fists, preparing himself. Maybe he wouldn't feel as utterly worthless if he was used, as much as it sickened him to think. It was something.

But the hardness he expected didn't push into him. No pinching, no nothing. His master's slender fingers spread the cool, slightly stinging balm that the doctor had used the other day across his upper thighs. The chill and burn on his sensitive skin made him shiver. "Mm, these are healing well! Good. I pay Monroe enough, that's for sure," his master hummed. "How are they feeling for you? Walking any better?"

"Fine, Sir." Knox said flatly. The pain was just joining the low level pain he always felt. Damien sighed, and Knox felt like he should elaborate. "...You've read my file right?"

"Eh, briefly? I skimmed it, but I don't really care what's on your record. You're mine, and you're gorgeous, and that's really all that matters to me." Knox flushed, shoving down the confusion to replace it with coldness.

"Then, you should know, Sir. I'll never 'walk' any better. Even when the cuts are healed."

"Why?" Damien's hand stilled.

"They partially hamstrung me after I tried runnin' away at 16. At least, I think that's how old I was. So, Sir, I hope you have the patience in your heart to forgive my slowness when you lead me around. It'll never be better." He knew he should mind the edge crawling back into his voice. He *shouldn't* snark about this, but if Damien was so... *convinced*, so sure in his purchase and his opinion that Knox was "gorgeous," then he should really know how damaged he was. Quietly, perhaps regretting his snark, he tried to cover his ass by adding, "Ya don't have to worry 'bout me runnin' in the first place, Sir. I learned that lesson."

His master was quiet, and Knox pushed himself up just enough to look over his shoulder. There was a mix of pity, anger, and horror on Damien's face, and Knox relished the anger that bubbled up in response. He was *not* going to be pitied by a master. He moved, drawing his legs up and swiveling to face Damien, eyes flashing. "What am I to you, Damien? A charity case, or your personal slave? You can't fix my scars, my leg, my past, so why the fuck are you bothering?" *Why aren't you using me? Why are you treating me like this; what do you want?* Damien's eyes settled on anger, and Knox felt a surge of victory. His master pounced, pushing him down onto the bed with one hand possessively on his neck and the other pinning his hand.

"It's not up to *you*. I bought you, you're *mine*, and I decide how I want to treat you. Apparently, you need a firmer hand," Damien said, tugging at Knox's clothes. Knox's sneer was one of bittersweet victory. Finally, something standard, something to ground him in time and space and pain and the place he was forced into. Once his master used him and dumped him off the side of the bed as punishment, it'd feel like... the two years of void in his memory meant nothing. Things were the same, they wouldn't be better, and he could grit his teeth and bear it.

"I can take whatever ya throw at me. You think I'm scared of a lil' pain?" Damien's grip tightened, and Knox gasped, tilting his head back to try and relax some of the pressure on his neck. His master's lip curled as he released Knox's hand for a moment. There was a rattling, and his hand returned with a pair of soft black leather handcuffs.

"I don't think you're scared of that, Knox," Damien almost purred, cuffing Knox's hands up above his head, looped about a bedpost, before tugging off his pants. Knox tugged at his bindings, but despite the... tame appearance, the leather was secure. The chain rattled against the wood corner, which distracted Knox from hearing the bottle pop. Too-cold lube met his bare cock and he hissed, squirming away before gasping at Damien's pace. He bit down on his lip to prevent more noise, and his master, not pausing, leaned up to grab a fistful of his hair, pulling.

"You're such a *brat*," Damien said, not slowing the movement of his hand. "I do nice things for you, and all you give me in return is bite-back. You think I want you to be permanently injured? Or for new scars to be added?" Knox's hips jerked into Damien's hand despite his resolve *not* to give in as easily as he had last night. *He didn't matter to Damien's pleasure*.

Right?

"You don't have to—nn—*bribe* me! I know what, what you can do to me—" The chain rattled as he tried to bring his hands down, but the cuffs were sturdy. The soft leather didn't cut into his wrists, or bruise like the metal ones he'd been so used to. *Another kindness*. Damien's hand was *good*, and Knox felt himself flushing, arousal making it hard for him to think. Even though he got off yesterday, his body was eager to chase the pleasure and high that were a rarity.

"I'm doing what I *want*, and *you* aren't here to *think*." Knox's breathing hitched not in response to the hand leaving his cock to pop open a bottle of lube. *Not here to think, a doll—* "I want you *here*, and god, I can't wait to fuck you better than that ol' coot ever could," Damien continued, turning a blind eye to the glimmer of fear Knox couldn't hide. What

would he do to stop Knox from thinking if it wasn't drugs? Damien ran a hand down Knox's chest, tweaking a nipple to elicit a squirm and bitten back gasp. "But... clearly, you think you know better than me what I should do with you, and clearly, you just need to be taught different." Damien's eyes were still lit with lust and anger... or frustration.

"That's—" Knox protested, and Damien pressed his hand again against Knox's throat, circling his asshole with two fingers.

"Another word that isn't yes, more, please, or sir, and I'll gag you," Damien said, slowly pushing in, and then almost roughly probing with his fingers. Knox bit his tongue, hips shifting with discomfort. He'd... never been prepped before like this. Damien wasn't being *gentle*, but Knox had to admit... it was better than the tearing pain, the brutal fuckings he'd endured in the past.

When his master's fingers brushed up against his prostate though, Knox broke his stubborn silence. "*Oh*," he gasped in surprise, and Damien grinned.

"There... that's a much better look for you." He crooked his fingers again, and Knox's legs trembled as pleasure shot up his spine.

"B-bite me," Knox muttered shakily, and Damien shook his head.

"Mm, maybe. But..." He reached over to scoop up something, and Knox could see he was fishing his hand into a drawer filled with all sorts of sex toys. *Fuck*. The gag that was shoved into his mouth was a ball gag, and Knox couldn't *quite* get off a good one liner before it was in. "That *mouth* of yours is just so much trouble."

Damien worked him up, spreading his fingers and adding a third as Knox shuddered and rocked back onto them, demanding more rather than just laying there for Damien to overpower. His resolve to remain silent crumbled swiftly as Damien relentlessly keyed him up in return. He also made good on Knox's last words, biting fiercely at his neck and chest, sucking marks, and making Knox whine as the pain mixed with every stroke on his cock or press on his spot. His head was going almost blissfully blank, chasing towards the edge.

Then Damien stopped, and Knox almost choked. He withdrew his touch and his mouth, and Knox opened his eyes to see Damien grinning above him. Knox tried to express with his eyes the number of names and curses on the tip of his tongue that he would be saying if he didn't have this *blasted* gag on. Frustrated, he tried moving his hips to grind up against *something*, but his master only moved away.

"You didn't think I'd reward you for how you spoke to me earlier did you?" Bastard was enjoying this. Of *course* he was. Knox didn't want to think about the twist in his stomach at the thought that he might prefer this, seeing the fire in Damien's eyes, that he *got* to his master but he wasn't going to be beaten into unconsciousness. Though maybe he shouldn't count his cards before seeing Damien's full hand.

His master removed the gag, but before Knox could give him a piece of his mind, his mouth was occupied with a dick. Damien's hand had a firm grip on his head, and his master tested Knox's behavior with a few shallow thrusts. Knox knew better than to *actually* bite, so he settled with a sharp glare, relaxing his throat and pressing his tongue up against the underside. "Oh *fuck*," sighed Damien, moving a little faster. Knox slipped into practiced movements, hollowing his cheeks and doin' that particular thing with his tongue that always drove his prior masters *wild*. Then— Then again, he... he couldn't remember being *that* good at it. The factory managers just wanted his ass mostly, and George hadn't— Unless... He almost choked before *willing* his breathing under control. He could freak out about how much George had... had fucking... *trained* his body later.

Damien was no exception to enjoying his mouth at least, as he moaned out Knox's name, tugging at his hair. "*That mouth—*" he gasped. "Damn, you're *good*. You sure you weren't trained for—" Knox did it again, adding in a light scrape of his teeth against the sensitive skin of Damien's cock, and his master curled up, gasping and losing composure for the first time. *Oh*. That's interesting.

As Damien grew close (it wasn't long), he braced one arm on the bedpost, pulling at Knox's hair with the other as he set the pace, pushing Knox's head down as Damien thrust up into his mouth. Knox, determined *not* to be a limp, controlled doll, surged forward, feeling his neck twinge as he showed off how little of a gag reflex he had. *He'd* have a say in whether the master orgasmed or not. He took Damien's cock all the way to the base. Once there, he did the tongue trick again, and his master was shaking, cumming down his throat, and choking off a squawk like a startled bird. Knox frowned at the taste, but he'd learned to swallow. Damien fell back on his knees to sit on Knox's lower stomach, panting. Knox looked at him with a smug, half lidded expression, and Damien's eyes flashed with that hunger and anger again. He reached around to stroke Knox's dick, making him gasp and buck as he was reminded of how very close he was.

"Y-you...! I knew I had... a good feeling about you. I wouldn't be too smug though..." Damien said, reaching towards his drawer again.

Knox wasn't allowed to cum that night. Damien toyed with him, and really made Knox regret being such a brat, bouncing him up and down from the peak until his dick hurt and begging was on the tip of his tongue. At the same time, as far as punishments went, going to sleep incredibly unsatisfied wasn't the worst. Now, as he lay exhausted, horny, and half asleep, the whirlwind of bemused feelings only intensified as Damien slung an arm over him, snuggling up and spooning him as his breathing evened out. He wasn't... going on the floor. At least not tonight. He still didn't... understand why he'd been bought, why Damien was spending so much money on a worthless slave like him, but... he was catching on that maybe... part of his master *wanted* somebody challenging, untrained, worthless except for a spirit. Not out of pity, but out of... something else.

He'd think about that tomorrow though, and he did his best to close his eyes and pretend he wasn't being held by a master.

Damien Interlude 2

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Damien shook himself awake from the pleasant doze he'd sank into, relieved that it seemed Knox had dropped off to sleep. He carefully slipped out of bed, throwing on a pair of silk pajama pants before leaving down the darkened hallway.

He hadn't done this in a while, but surely, *surely* Kinsley would have an insight. This wasn't as straightforward as when he'd tried to bed Cal. That slave had made it quite clear that if Damien tried to make him a bed warmer, there might be a repeat of the bloody weekend that had prompted his swift inheritance by Damien in the first place. Then, with Cory, dear Cory... Jack was much more suited for that one, but at least Damien could get an easy read on Cory.

Knox had delivered on the spark he'd seen behind the drugs, in *spades*. On the one hand, he hoped that Knox was settling in if he felt brave enough to talk back, but then on the other... *Am I a charity case or your slave?* Damien *couldn't* get a read on Knox, and that bothered him. The young man had only been here for two days, and his moods had swung wildly. Minte had told him that he'd behaved almost perfectly, but seemed terrified or... *disgusted* with his own hands when she'd performed the manicure. Like he wanted to run out of his own skin.

Damien should read his file. Actually read it, and not skim it like all the others. He'd never found the need to, seeing as once they came here... well, he had his own expectations and trusted them to meet them. Everyone had. He avoided the narrow hallway to the slaves' common room where Knox had been examined just in case Ava was up late. Kinsley's bedroom wasn't up that narrow flight of stairs, but on the main floor anyway, just off the kitchen, as he always had. Damien liked having him on the ground floor in case anything happened in the night. He knocked twice on the door before entering, a sign of respect for their long history. The older man was just getting ready for bed, folding clothes neatly and efficiently into his wardrobe and making sure the stack of books on his bedside table was balanced. He looked up as Damien entered and smiled knowingly.

"Not too often you do a walk of shame to my room. What's on your mind, young master?"

Damien sighed, crossing over and flopping onto Kinsley's bed. "It's Knox. I just... I don't get him! It's almost as if he *wants* me to hurt him—or abuse him, rather. Daring me to drug him like George did."

"You're not going to, are you?"

"Of course not!" Damien said, sitting up immediately. "Just like I wouldn't mistreat *any* of you. You all do your jobs well, and if any discipline needs to happen, it's appropriate to the rule-break or mistake. I want him to be *present* for everything, but it's like he can't decide

whether he even wants to be. And... Kinsley, he's such a *brat*, and..." He pressed his lips into a thin line.

"And?"

"I *like* it. He made me... I was furious, but he was *hot* and had such a fire and— God, how am I going to convey that he needs to watch his mouthiness when I... I enjoy it so much!" He covered his face. "I feel like a *teenager* again."

"Well, you aren't too far away from being one," Kinsley said before sitting on the bed next to him. "Give him some time, Damien. As you said, he's only been here for two days, and from what you've said, he hasn't had his mind for about two years. It's overwhelming. You remember when Ava first got here, right?"

"Ha! I had to have you break down the door she was hiding behind, and I had to confiscate all the shears, so she wouldn't butcher the topiaries into expletives or hurt herself with them."

"And Quinn didn't speak for the first six months. Cal... I feel like he's a ghost. He shows up for the movie nights now and again, right? I think he's still bottling up everything he went through. At least, I'm at least able to be cordial with him. And then, Cory can't say no— not that he'd need to for you, Sir. I worry about some visitor or stranger lying to him about intentions and stealing him from here. Knox will learn the expectations with time, but he's also got to settle into his own skin." Kinsley paused. "You realize he can't go back, right?"

"To George? No, he doesn't deserve him," Damien scoffed.

"I mean in general. To the auction house."

"Why not? I wouldn't. He's *mine* ." He was... startled at the possessiveness that crept into his voice, but Kinsley only looked a little amused.

"You haven't read the file have you? Just bought him out of his debt and contract without a second thought." Kinsley sighed, shaking his head like a tired parent at their impulsive child. "He was initially sold to George at \$100." Damien thought his eyes might pop out.

" *What?* He's gorgeous! Surely—"

"Not everyone thinks a misbehaving, scarred slave is gorgeous, Damien. How much did you buy him for, baseline?" Damien was quiet, a sinking feeling pulling him back down on the bed.

"Oh. That... that explains why he was so upset tonight."

"Hm?"

"I spent... a great deal on him today. I guess... he knows how much he was valued by the system." Damien grit his teeth. "...I bought him for a dollar plus his debt, which was in the thousands. George was just going to drug him into oblivion until the debt was paid off, and then... I'm glad I reported the bastard." He shook his head. "They're wrong."

“Knox doesn’t think so.”

“I guess I’ll have to work on that. I’m not a self esteem coach though! I’m his master!”

“How about this... you’ve been keeping him mostly in your room for meals, right?”

“Yeah, just to make sure that he can get adjusted and see how that goes.”

“Bring him down for breakfast. Let him see us in action, and how you interact with us.”

“Ugg, but then Jack will try somethin’. I *know* it. Jack always wants to eat together when he’s home. I’ve finally got some peace and quiet from him.”

Kinsley laughed. “You remind me of one of my brothers when I was a kid. Try it. And... Damien?” Damien was almost distracted from the conversation by the compliment. Kinsley rarely talked about his life before the Ward family (Damien’s parents) acquired him, even though Damien asked all the time when he was a kid. That’d be something to think about later if he had *time* .

“Yeah?”

“Take it slow with him. If he really hasn’t been fully aware and you *want* him fully aware... everything is going to be basically new to him, even more so than for other new help. He’s going to act out. He’s not a mind reader. He won’t know what you want from him unless you tell him. And he won’t be able to read your moods.”

“I do not have *moods* ,” Damien protested, huffing.

“You do. I’ve known you since you were a tot, and you *definitely* have moods. You might even have to learn some patience,” Kinsley said, reaching over to give Damien a consoling pat. “Go to bed, Sir.”

Damien half-smiled, hopping off Kinsley’s bed. “Right. I should... Thanks, Kinsley. I’ll... *try* .” He really should read everyone’s files. He hoped that Knox would settle in more, and that Monroe’s medical reports came in tomorrow. He was concerned that Knox’s behavior would get worse before it got better— especially with the threat of withdrawal symptoms. George’s vile, undeserving fingers were still in Knox, and Damien couldn’t *wait* for them to be out. He just hoped that he could avoid all of that. The new normal was *better* .

Chapter End Notes

This chapter was a bit of a pain to edit. I didn't really like the rough where it started, but I think it ended up pretty alright! Sneak peak for next chapter:

Damien, "Oh boy, I hope Knox doesn't start feeling withdrawal symptoms"
[Always Sunny Theme, Title Card of Next Chapter] "Knox Starts Suffering Withdrawal

Badly"

Withdrawal

Chapter Notes

Beefy chapter this week (that's why it's a bit late). This chapter specific TW: Vomiting, needles, noncon sedation. I think that covers everything that main tags may not. As a fun note, this chapter also has the introduction of two of my personal fav characters! Enjoy!

Knox woke up in a fog. The low-lying pain that he'd grown accustomed to seemed to bounce around more sharply in his head. Damien was already awake, judging by the shower running. He also could hear his master's voice underneath the spray, but he wasn't going to strain his hearing to figure out what song Damien was singing. He pushed himself up slowly, bit by bit, and that seemed to use up all his energy. *Fuck*. He couldn't be sick right? He couldn't. Withdrawals? Both? He didn't feel any cravings, but hell knows when or if he would with the shit George injected into his system.

If you're good, you'll tell Kinsley.

Fat chance.

Expensive. Worthless. Sex or not, "good" or not, Damien would probably lock him up in a different room. If not outside. If his weak, malnourished body could even fight something off at this point. He certainly could've caught something from anywhere he'd gone yesterday. He glanced at the bathroom door as he heard the water turn off. He didn't know if he could keep it hidden. All he could do at this point was grit his teeth and push through, pretend long enough for whatever it was to blow over. Part of him hoped his misbehavior yesterday would make Damien keep him locked in the room all day, and he could just curl up and ride whatever it was out.

Speak of the devil. Damien stepped out, towel around his waist. "Good morning! How are we?"

"Fine. Sir," he lied. Then, he asked, "...What're you doin' with me today?"

"Well, first things first, some breakfast. Good news! Your test results came in this morning. Luckily, mostly good news aside from a few little things, but all easily remedied. I'll pick up what you'll need when I leave work today." His smile was wolflike. Ah, so, after that... gloves were off. He wondered what the test results said. He wondered if Damien was lying in order to drug him. His stomach turned, and his grip tightened on the sheets.

“In any case,” Damien continued. “I think you heard the other day that my brother is back from school. We’ll be eating breakfast with him in a few minutes, so I want you to get ready and look nice.”

“Sure thing, Sir,” Knox said, pushing himself off the bed and trying not to wobble as he did. He wasn’t sure why he was getting away with such a flippant attitude, but even as he thought that, Damien moved close, drawing Knox to him with a hand on a hip.

“If you’re good and behave,” he said, fingers tracing over Knox’s cock, stroking him to hardness. Knox bit his lip hard to prevent the gasp, but he couldn’t stop how his legs trembled and how he got hard almost instantly thanks to last night. “You’ll get a reward. Now.” Damien patted his ass patronizingly and stepped away, leaving Knox flushed and lost. “Get dressed and meet me downstairs in the dining room. To the left of the stairs.” He was gone the next moment, and Knox had to lean against the bedpost he’d been cuffed to only the night before for support. He took some breaths, trying to focus on the pain underneath the arousal until he could manage his boner and think about getting dressed.

He was going to meet another member of the household. He was expected to be good and *presentable*. What a fever dream. Still though, he dragged himself into one of the new outfits Damien had bought for him: a draped style blue blouse with dark pants, and Knox actually felt like it would suffocate him. He glanced in the mirror to try and arrange his hair into something that wasn’t a mess of curls and only then did he notice the plethora of bruises down his neck and across his collarbone. Flushing, he ducked out of the room before his body decided to linger on that.

The dining table was set with elegant flower china, and when Knox stepped into the room, the smell of potatoes, bacon, and some sort of peppery egg dish hit his nose like a suckerpunch. His stomach tumbled over and grumbled nauseously that it did *not* want anything to do with that spread. Damien looked up from his phone when Knox appeared, and he waved his hand to come hither.

“Jack—”

“ *Whoa !* That’s him? Damn, Damien, I can’t believe he was in the bargain bin! Oh oh oh, can I borrow him *pleeeeeeeeeeeaaasseeeee?* ” Knox and, surprisingly, Damien simultaneously flinched. Knox finally got his first look at Jack. Damien’s brother had a youthful exuberance about him and appeared downright spoiled. His outfit consisted of frills, jewelry, and embroidery that created a cacophony of fashion expression. His sandy brown hair was elegantly shaggy, like a cross between a boyband heartthrob and a puffed up chicken. His green eyes were dizzying. The brothers looked nothing alike.

“Jack—”

“I’ll be good! You know I will be! I would love to see him with Cory. Ahh that dark hair and those *freckles* would look great with him.”

“*Jack*.” Damien barked, and the other occupants of the room stiffened at the commanding tone. “One, he just got here. Two, no. He’s not for borrowing.” Something in Knox relaxed at that. One master was easier to please and expect punishments from than two.

“But *Daaaammiiiiieennnnnn*,” Jack whined, and there was a soft noise from next to the table. Knox had caught sight of the blond head peeking just above the table, and he subtly shifted a step to take a look. A slave (Cory, he assumed) was settled on a small cushion next to Jack. He was dressed in a decidedly ‘cute’ green outfit, with long, soft-looking blonde hair. When they made eye contact, Knox was... shocked at the lack of fear there. He felt like he was about to keel over or roll out the wide bay windows, but Cory’s expression had a simple smile and was looking up at the world with wide eyes. Cory... was used to this. He guessed. Knox caught on quickly to the protocol, and knelt on the pillow next to Damien, recoiling internally about how on display he felt.

“Not another word about it. Tell me about how school’s going.”

“It’s been *school*. It’s hard, but thanks to the tutor you got me, I’m passin’ my classes...” As the two talked, Cory and Knox were offered their own breakfast. Jack and Cory were having... pancakes? Or french toast. Whatever it was was absolutely drenched in powdered sugar. Jack had pulled Cory up almost entirely into his lap, and Cory had been given his own fork, skewering pieces that Jack cut for him. Knox was having Damien’s moderately healthier meal of meat, potato, and eggs with peppers. He was not allowed his own utensil and sitting up for each spoonful was a task almost beyond him. Each bite was a struggle, and his sense of nausea grew as he felt each lump of the breakfast slide down his throat. Damien thankfully got caught up in his conversation enough to give him a break. The headache he’d woken up with only grew as time ticked on, and he found himself having to switch on auto pilot. He didn’t *care* about being good; he cared about not throwing up on the nice-looking persian rug. Damien didn’t seem to notice his discomfort, squabbling with his brother over something or other, and Knox was just glad not to be the center of attention.

“Do you really got to go to work?”

“Yes, but trust me, I wish they’d delegate more. Well, I would order them to, except I don’t trust them to do a half-decent job at it or hire good people who *can* delegate.” Damien reached down to tangle his fingers in Knox’s hair. “I’m hoping to take an extended vacation, and I was *going* to arrange it for when you came home. But someone decided to show up early.” The light pets and tugs in his hair were almost a welcome distraction. A point of contact to focus on that wasn’t the pain or turning in his stomach. A harder tug suddenly brought his attention up to his master, who was speaking to him now. Oops.

“Knox, you’re staying in the house today. I’ll know if you go out.” Right. The collar almost seemed to constrict around his neck, making it hard to breathe.

“Yessir,” Knox replied quietly, too exhausted to feel disappointed.

“Let Quinn or Kinsley know if you need anything. Don’t be underfoot.” He was continuing to talk, but Knox’s vision went blurry as everything seemed to... *fuzz*. “...Good.” His chin was tipped up, and Damien brushed a patronizing kiss on his forehead before departing. Jack shoved the rest of his food into his mouth and then bounced out of his chair.

“Come’on, Cory! Dennisen’s just came out with a new summer line, and I want to be the first person there so I have all the time in the world to put you into the cute outfits they have.”

“Okay, master!” Cory chirped, and the pair of them headed out. Knox used the chair as leverage once everyone was gone, hauling himself up to his feet as he dropped his composure. Damien was going to be gone. Good, maybe he’ll... fight whatever this off before the evening. When he’ll probably be used again. His stomach turned, and he staggered into the hallway before Quinn or another slave could find him in the dining room. There was a water closet close by, next to an under-the-stair cupboard, and Knox dove inside, shutting the door and bending over the toilet.

There went his breakfast. After he was done and everything was flushed away, he slumped against a wall, putting his head in his hands. He was used to going hungry, but when was the last time he was sick like this?

He remembered. Years ago now, there was a fever outbreak in the factory. Everyone caught it, and not everyone made it out the other side. The smell of sweat, vomit, and death smothered everyone. You kept working until you couldn’t lift your head. Knox put himself in the line of fire, first to get the brunt of the overseer’s ire or dick depending on the day, and eventually, he caught the ick. He remembered the room they threw him into. Claustrophobic, huddled with other sick slaves with a shared bucket of water to try and douse the heat and pounding headaches. Knox hadn’t known if any of them would get out of it, but he wouldn’t be downed by an illness.

He couldn’t be downed by this one now. He had to *perform*. He had no idea how Damien would react if he knew, and Knox was unsure if he could keep the act up all day. He’d have to... stay away from the other slaves. The bedroom? Just moving from *here* seemed an impossible feat. He felt dizzy, and the rotten taste in his mouth made it hard to concentrate. He couldn’t... he couldn’t *trust* anyone here.

After all, they all were trying to survive. Just like in the factory. They’d tell the master immediately because it’d look good. He was the new one, the worthless one, another mouth to feed.

He shook his head, trying to *think*, and he crawled over to the door. He... the bedroom would be a good place, but anyone could come in there. Strangely, he missed his cupboard. A small space he knew nobody would go into. There had to be... *some* place here nobody looked in. He wasn’t familiar with the house, and...

“I’ll know if you go out.” Knox was being tracked. There was no hiding. He was being watched, watched, *watched*. *Fuck*. He pulled at his hair, and then, decided, if he was going to be *anywhere*, he might as well be in the place where Damien wouldn’t be upset at finding him. Which meant upstairs. Which meant going upstairs. He pushed himself up. Out the door. Up the stairs. Don’t talk to anyone. Don’t show that anything’s wrong. Bedroom door. Collapse.

Plan in place. He went.

Of course, the plan went to shit immediately. He tripped on the stairs, and he wasn't entirely sure if he was hurt. Numbness had sunk into his legs, and there was an itch his mind kept latching onto that didn't exist that he was pretty sure was real despite it not— Slender hands gripped him where he could feel, helping him to his feet, and his vision cleared just enough for him to perceive a girl with steady gray eyes in workman's overalls. "Easy there," she said. This was not a part of the plan. He shouldn't talk, he *shouldn't* .

"Sorry," he said. "Wasn't payin' attention."

"You're the new guy right? The one Damien picked up as a bed pet?" Her even voice somehow put him more on edge.

"...I guess so. I shouldn't linger."

"Why not? I mean, not like he's here."

"I... just shouldn't. I don't want to talk." It was too hard to think. He *itched* ; he was going to throw up again.

"Oh, fine, I see how it is. Alright well, watch out for any electrical panels," she said before stepping out of his way and back towards a box of open wires. Knox had a number of things he wanted to say about electrical panels, but then his stomach turned and he stumbled his way up the rest of the— no, he'd reached the top of the stairs somehow (or had he climbed up without realizing?)— down the hallway. Bedroom. Collapse. Stick to the rest of the plan.

Once inside the bedroom, he shut the door and moved around to the side of the bed where he'd be most hidden. He sank down to the floor, covering his head to try and help the migraine. He couldn't stop his thoughts from swirling around, frantic and scattered. The same worries, and now, he'd been seen by that girl. She might report. She would. What if Damien had to come back from work because of him? He'd be... Knox had to guess he'd be furious, interrupted from work he needed to get done before his vacation. He'd be punished regardless. It wasn't his fault though. He couldn't *stop* getting sick. In the darkness of the bedroom, he took advantage of the silence and of being *alone* . He let himself cry, messy, horrible sobs that only made him feel sicker, but he just couldn't take it anymore. He hadn't cried this much in so long, not counting the shower from the other day— he couldn't remember. He couldn't think. He was miserable, but crying somehow made him feel at least alive a little bit more.

The drugs. Surely, if... if he had those two years, it wouldn't be as confusing. He understood George hated him, and he knew that it was only Rosie's fondness that kept George from tossing him out somewhere. Another factory. A brothel. Worse. Knox couldn't bring himself to be grateful. He was still a slave. Still trapped. Still a *pet* .

He slipped into hazy dreams, jolting in and out of consciousness with each pang of a headache or bile choking him into wakefulness.

Beg for them. You need those drugs don't you? They will always be a part of you. You can't escape what your whore mind craves.

The door opened. He panicked. They'd come for him. They'd heard or seen. Were there cameras? Fuck, was it tracking his vitals? Heard everything he said? They'd take him away to be locked up in the shed, and he'd die there and nothing would be okay. Shoes crossed. A soft voice, not Master's, asked him if he was okay.

"Fffuuckk you," he slurred, backing himself into a corner. "Does it look like? I'll be fine. Fine. Please— Just let me have my corner. I'll be better." The words fell without really any thought behind them. The door shut again, hurriedly, and Knox scratched at his arms. *Why'd he do that?* Why did he feel like this? Why was it *getting worse* ?

He had absolutely no sense of time in the dark room. He was glad it was dark. His migraine wasn't as sharp in the dark. Pain, he could deal with. He was Knox. He'd been through worse. He'd crawled out of a fire. He could fight this. He wouldn't listen to hazy fragments of George's dark whispers and his own body starting to keen for something it didn't know. And if he kept telling himself that, maybe he'd be over it before Damine came home.

He was probably on his way. Whoever had checked on him probably called him. Knox couldn't remember who it was. The face had been blurry. Hell, most of the day had been. The corner was cold, but the bed was so far away. Besides, it was closer to the bathroom if he needed to throw up again. Knox didn't have the energy left to do much else but shiver and think. And thinking was hell right now.

You wouldn't have to if you had them. Nothingness is better than this. You know it is; you want it to be. He was betrayed by his own mind.

The door opened. Two sets of footsteps, and he pressed himself against the wall, trying to be as small as possible. They sent two. They were going to take him away. He couldn't, he *couldn't* — Hands reached for him, and he attempted to dart to the side. The hands were faster though, and his head spun as he was turned and his arms were pinned to his sides. *No, no, no* . Someone strong was holding him, and he could see a white coat in front of him.

White coat. Doctor. Man in a suit holding him— He knew— He saw the syringe in her hand.

"*No* — No please, no I can't— You can't. Please." He was babbling, begging, but the doctor advanced all the same. His voice cracked as his panic rose. "I'll be fine. *Please* , I didn't mean it. I'll be good— I can't—" He was crying again. "I'd rather be punished than nothing. I can't be nothing again." No matter what his thoughts said. "Please, I won't survive." He had no right to beg for this, but beg he did. Anything. But his kicking and begging didn't deter the needle in his arm. The heavy, false drowsiness pulled him down and down. He clawed at his last thoughts, trying to find what his last conscious words might be. He had nothing. And then he was.

Damien slumped into an armchair, pinching the bridge of his nose. “What a fucking mess,” he sighed. Monroe finished setting Knox up in the guest bed, adjusted with some quick welding from Ace to have bars on either side to attach the restraints for Knox, and dusted her hands off.

“It’s partly my fault. I should’ve given you some sedatives just in case this happened. His blood samples only just came back with all the test results.”

“What kind of drugs cause *this* ? In only a few days? There weren’t any signs!”

“Hard ones that aren’t regulatory. I suspect that George had been using his access to Rosie’s old prescriptions and the hospitals in order to make a custom cocktail for what he wants. Along with some conventional depressants and hallucinogens. By going cold turkey and having been on the drugs for about two years—”

Damien was out of his chair. “ *What* ?”

“Judging by what we picked up and the severity of the withdrawal. He’s been under for two years. It’s going to be expensive, Damien.”

He waved his hand. “What’s the use of being rich if I can’t afford it? Is... is there like... permanent brain damage? What else do I need to drag George through?”

“ *Luckily* , George knew enough not to overdose him. The consistent dosing, however, has skewed with his body’s natural chemicals. He may have increased problems with mental health, but it’s hard to diagnose that for a slave. He’ll need some level of drug therapy for at least a couple months. First phase being intense treatment, and then a second phase on a decreasing dosage. It shouldn’t impact his abilities to serve, but there are always possible side effects,” Monroe said, scribbling onto her clipboard. “My recommendation is that you keep him under a low level sedation until the withdrawal symptoms pass. I’ll also be prescribing a few injectables that should help the process go faster. He should be out of the worst of it in about... three-ish days?”

Damien rubbed both hands over his face. He was going to deck an old man. *Two years* . He’d known it’d been a while, but he’d always thought that... well, that George had only drugged him in public. And George *rarely* made public appearances after Rosie died. No wonder Knox’s eyes had filled with panic when Damien told him the year. Fuck. He knew Knox would be a hard one, but he hadn’t expected the level of crisis management required. Well, it wasn’t like Knox had any future anywhere but here. Knox was *his* . And Damien took good care of his property.

“Very well. Make it happen, and Monroe?”

“All the other test results are in your office,” she said dismissively, and Damien shook his head.

“I know, I know, but firstly, thank you for coming out on such short notice. Second... are there ways we can avoid needles in the future?”

“You can always lace food or drink with—”

“No. That’s not an option either,” Damien said firmly. She sighed, exasperated.

“I can *try* to find pills for the second phase. For *now* though, I suggest you use the shots until he’s fully out of it. I can train one of your staff.”

“Quinn already knows how for her own illness. We’ll be fine here.” They shook hands, and Monroe departed.

Seeing as Damien didn’t want gossip to begin, he called a household meeting, including some of the field hands, as Cal and Ava also did work around the house. “Alright everyone!” He clapped his hands together. “I’m sure you might’ve heard bits and pieces of what happened this afternoon. Complicated doctors note short, Knox is going to be fine. He’s going to be staying in the spare room upstairs since I didn’t want to disrupt your current bunk situation.” He surveyed the faces in front of him before nodding to Quin. “Quin, you’ll be his caretaker when I’m not here since you have medical experience. I’ll fill you in after this meeting. Ava, make sure the lift is working *smoothly*. I don’t want anyone having any trouble. Cal, I’ll need you to take some of Quin’s responsibilities; you’ll be working with Kinsley.” He exhaled, rubbing at his temples.

“Sir?” Ava started. Damien nodded, and she continued, “He’s stayin’ right?”

“Yes. He’s staying,” he sighed again. “I told Kinsley I’d hoped to give you all more time to get to know him, but... I think it’s going to be a week until he’ll be up to doing anything with you. *However*, that also means that anyone who isn’t a caretaker is not to go into that room unless it’s an emergency. I don’t want to overwhelm him while he’s recovering.” He crossed his arms. “All clear?”

“Yes, Sir!” came the chorus. Damien dismissed them and went to his office. Knox had gone after him for not looking at his file, so Damien had all the medical reports, all the documentation dating back to a police report on his desk. He was going to do some reading for once.

Movies

Knox roused slowly. A yawn, an attempt at a stretch only to find... he was handcuffed. His eyes flew open, but the flutter of panic and fear was smothered, head drowsy and cottony. Part of him was glad—the frantic head spinning paranoia was gone, and in its place was a cold calmness. He remembered hazily the last time he was conscious. The fear, the needle, being held down, begging— He didn't feel awful right now, or at least, not *as* awful. He was in a comfortable bed, his hands handcuffed to the frame on either side of him. He recognized the style of the room: ornate red walls with wood trim, a wardrobe that was probably more expensive than it reasonably should be, and with heavy curtains like Damien's bedroom. He was still in the manor. *For now* .

"How're you feeling?" his master's voice said, and Knox turned his head. Damien was hovering nearby. Why was he still here? Weren't they taking him away?

"... You drugged me."

"Sedated, to be precise."

"You said you wouldn't."

"You didn't make it easy; it was for your safety. And there should be a ' *Sir* ' there." The reminder was... almost playful, rather than a reprimand. Confused, Knox shook his head, regretting it the moment the dizziness returned.

"What's wrong with me? Why am I still here, Sir? If I'm sick, shouldn't I be in a cell?" He felt like he should be getting worked up, but the cotton in his brain seemed to diffuse any attempts.

"You're still here because I still *want* you." The flash of fury on Damien's face wasn't missed. " *And* , you are on bedrest. This is not the factory *or* Georege's home. I take care of my things so they won't *break* ." He sighed, almost regretfully. "But I should've been more proactive. And *you* should've told Kinsley or *me* you weren't feeling well. But I'll forgive you for that."

"Oh you're *too* kind, Sir," Knox said dryly, shifting about in the bed. Damien laughed. *Laughed* .

"There you are. I was worried you had lost your bite." He leaned forward, lacing his fingers together. "Here's the deal..." As Damien explained to him what had happened, why he was feeling the way he was, and what they were doing about it... the more Knox fixated on the treatment. *More drugs*. He shook his head.

"No." He took a shaky breath. "No more drugs. I can't, Sir. I don't believe you won't keep me like this." He had a hard time finding the words. "...Like half asleep. Like I can't feel anything."

“You don’t have a choice,” Damien said firmly, and Knox flinched. *Right* . Of course he didn’t. “I don’t want you drugged up either, Knox,” he continued more gently. “You’ll be going through withdrawal for the next couple days. Dr. Monroe—you remember her—has given me some medicine to help with the symptoms, and I think you’ll feel much better with it than without it.” His fingers drifted along Knox’s leg. “Good news... all your other tests came through clean. So... if you’re good, you take your medicine, and you aren’t rude to Quin who’ll be giving it to you, you’ll be rewarded.” *Otherwise punished* , Knox filled in. Probably with more drugs, more sedation. He didn’t want to make an enemy of Quin, and she was only following orders. At least right now the drugs were stopping his fear from choking him.

“Alright, Sir,” Knox muttered, conceding, and Damien reached up to brush his fingers through his hair.

“Lovely. And as a treat...” He pulled out a remote and placed it into Knox’s hand. “I had the TV in here set up, so you should be able to stream any movie you want.” Knox looked at his hand, stunned. He’d... never seen a movie before. He didn’t know what movies there *were* . Damien was looking at him, expecting a response, and Knox fumbled for words, unsure about the gesture.

“...T-thank you, Sir,” he said. Damien smiled and pressed a kiss to his forehead before departing, leaving Knox as bewildered as before.

Knox didn’t take Damien up on his “present” at first, but the quiet grated on his patience. He could only doze in bed for so long before he started getting twitchy. He turned on the TV, and was instantly overwhelmed by the choices. He picked one at random that looked cool with spaceships. He was instantly sucked in, and he almost forgot he was handcuffed in place. Towards the end of the movie, the door opened, and wheels creaked on the floorboard as Quin rolled in. He jolted upright with surprise, a little ashamed he’d gotten so absorbed, but Quin only laughed lightly.

“Oh don’t mind me, dear. I’m just here to get you your medicine.” She held up her fingers, upon which swung a couple of keys. “I also have permission to let you out of the cuffs if you won’t try to hit me.” Knox sheepishly sank down into the blankets.

“...Don’t got a quarrel with you,” he murmured, “But I— I don’t know if I can let ya stick a needle in me.” She settled at his bedside, unpacking a little bag attached to an arm of her chair onto the bedside table. He saw the syringe and instantly, his breathing picked up, hitching when it tripped over itself. Even with the sedative in his system, every part of him was screaming to run, not to let them, *fight - hide*—

Quin gently placed a hand on his shoulder. “Ava also hates needles.” She didn’t move to do anything further with the syringe or drugs, and Knox warily forced himself to relax, leaning into the cotton. “She was used as a drug tester before coming here. You met her—not sure if you remember. She’s the on-site mechanic.” A small part of Knox despaired. The one job he could do, other than sex, was already filled. She seemed nice though; he remembered the look of her eyes. “But she had to get some vaccinations for tetanus since she repairs a lot of

old, rusty farm equipment. She was a hollering, and a fightin', and she holed up in the shed. I had to slip her food through a window." She sighed, laughing a little. "She didn't believe me when I told her I have to take medicine regularly, and I have to inject it too. She thought I was the drug pony here."

"...You do?"

"I do." She patted her legs. "I have a disease that makes me slowly waste away. Since coming here, Master Damien has made sure I have proper medicine to help slow my decline, as well as enable me to build some strength." She smiled. "It's made me quite good at administering medicine to myself via needle, but... between us? I was terrified when I first started doing it. What if the dosage was wrong? What if I did it wrong?"

"Why'd you do it then? If you were so scared?" Knox asked, daring to.

"Because I figured that the risk was worth the possibility of getting better. I knew my place. If Damien hadn't bought me, it would've been a matter of days before I was put down. I didn't want to give him a reason to dispose of me. I took a breath and did it. Nothing happened. I wasn't struck dumb, and the rest of the day, I kept an eye on myself. The medicine I'd been given was what it said it was, and, as the years have gone by, I've stopped second guessing my shots." She reached out to rest a hand on his arm. "It's true that... I have my orders, and you can't refuse. But, I want you to be able to trust that at least us staff here have your side." Knox was quiet before he sighed.

"...Okay. If it'll... help. I don't—I *can't* go back."

"You won't be sent back, love. Now, don't look. It'll help with the panic." Knox really didn't want to look away once as she started preparing the materials on the side table, but he forced himself to, staring at a chipped spot on the wallpaper. A cool pad of fabric swiped over a spot on his arm. How fascinating in a house so immaculately rich there was that tiny little—

"*Fuck!*" he cursed, trying not to twist away as he felt a sharp pain and then an immense amount of pressure. Why was he just *letting this happen*? He bit down hard on his lip, staring at the spot on the wall. He couldn't do this, he couldn't, he'd hit her (you can't stupid you're handcuffed), he'd run— And then it was over.

He waited. George's drugs were sickly sweet like rotten honey, turning his vision and stomach as they dashed away any thought or resistance he had. Nothing happened.

He waited some more. Still nothing, perhaps... his headache and nausea were fading.

He waited. Quin sat with him the whole time, massaging his arm, and giving him a small patient smile.

He exhaled, and she started packing up. "You did great. I'll be back a little before bedtime. Oh!" She reached over, and after some fiddling, Knox's hands were free.

"Thank you, m— Quin," he said, massaging his wrists. She waved, departed, and Knox hit play on his movie, snuggling into the pillows like he would sink into their feathery softness

and disappear. He felt a little lost as he wondered... why he felt safe after Quin's care. Being drugged wasn't safe, so why did he feel like *he* was? Probably a side effect.

Quin was the one who brought him lunch, and then dinner, along with another shot. He was on his fourth movie, curled up on his side with his head propped up on some pillows. He'd been dozing, but he was feeling distinctly better than he had yesterday, or hell, in a while. Maybe there was some truth to what Damien said about this place. *Don't trust him*. The door opened, but he was so engrossed in the movie that he didn't notice until there was a hand in his hair. He jumped, blinked, and almost dropped the remote. Damien laughed softly.

"Having fun? What're you watching?"

"...Battlestar."

"Huh, didn't figure you for a sci-fi person."

"What did you think I'd like, some soap opera drama?" he said, belatedly adding, "Sir." He'd scrolled through enough of the categories to pick up some idea of genres. Damien tugged at Knox's hair, making him gasp before his master scooted in, snuggling next to Knox.

"I guess I wouldn't know. Maybe westerns, with the accent."

"Ha, ha, very funny. Rosie would sometimes leave the radio on, and I liked listening to some of the science fiction radio plays through the floorboards when she forgot to turn it off." Knox wasn't sure why he felt so comfortable bantering with his master like this. It was probably the drugs, or how nice the hand in his hair felt. Before Damien could tease him further about his genre preference, he added, "I've... never seen a movie before today. I wouldn't know what to look for."

"You haven't! Oh well," Damien tugged Knox closer to him, almost spooning him as he scooped the remote out of Knox's hand. "We'll just have to finish this one, and I'll show you some others that you just *have* to see." Damien's voice had lost its authoritarian edge, and he almost seemed as giddy as a child.

"You a movie person, Sir?"

"*Absolutely*," Damien said. "Ever since I was a kid. Parents weren't really around, so I just watched movies. I like all the monster movie ones, like Frankenstein, vampires, werewolves... but they scared Jack when he was old enough for me to babysit."

"Explains why ya like to bite, Sir," Knox commented, "Wanna be a vampire?" He hadn't quite realized how much he missed talking. The factory had been about surviving, and conversations there were brief aside from whispered stories to keep them going. George's rule of silence held his tongue until he was alone, but talking to himself wasn't the same as the easy conversation that he and Damien had fallen into now. He was getting better at figuring out where the line was between Damien enjoying his quips and a reprimand because

of them. He did regret his choice of words though, as his master's grip on his hair tightened, tilting his head to gain better access in lavishing some attention to Knox's neck.

"Mm, maybe. You mark up beautifully, and if you're not careful I may just suck your blood!" Damien proclaimed and playfully nipped at his neck, making Knox gasp and squirm away. Part of him wanted to laugh. *Laugh!* What the *fuck*. Masters weren't supposed to be...

Fun.

Unfortunately, it seemed his gasps had turned the playfulness into more, and Damien's hand started to roam down. "I heard you were good today. Nice to Quin, and took your medicine," he purred.

"Didn't have much choice, *ah— Sir!*" Damien had moved aside the blanket, rubbing his hand up against Knox's cock through his pants.

"I think I promised you a reward if that was the case," he continued, nonplussed. Knox turned his head in an attempt to bury his moans in his shirt, but the grip on his hair tightened. "Ah, what did I tell you?"

"N-not to hide— *Ah, fuck!*" He was flushed up to his ears already, embarrassed at how quickly Damien could key him up with just a couple touches. Damien drew him closer, dipping his fingers into his pants.

"Good boy," he praised, and Knox bit the inside of his lip, bucking into the touch despite his best efforts. "Mm, I wish I'd had your clothes taken off, but I didn't want you to be too disoriented when you woke up. Still... a little clean up never hurt anyone." Confused, Knox decided to focus on chasing his reward. *Consideration? Or manipulation?* Damien's fingers worked quickly, and soon Knox was panting and curling into Damien, cumming into his master's hand. His thoughts blanked out at that point, and Damien's hand kept moving until his shudders had subsided.

When he blinked away the afterglow, Damien was... holding him close, petting his hair gently, while his other hand tossed a filth covered cloth off to the floor. He'd cleaned Knox up, just like he said. Knox wanted to disregard how... *cared* for he felt, how their closeness was grounding him, and how hope started to bloom in his chest. He hadn't realized he'd craved touch and gentle contact like this more than the drugs. No, *no*. He *couldn't* be swayed by this. It was all to gain his trust, get close, before breaking him for good, so that he'd never want anything more. *You already are broken*, came a dark whisper at the back of his mind. Nervously, he glanced up at Damien, but he seemed decidedly as if... he wasn't going to shove his head down, or flip him over, or anything else that he might use Knox for.

"Want to watch the rest of your movie?" Damien asked, wiggling the remote at him. Knox reached out to take it, as snatch-y as possible without actually snatching it, and pressed play. Damien laughed, pressing closer, and a blush rose on Knox's cheeks as he settled in to focus on the movie, now fighting the urge to sleep.

After his movie, Damien selected something, and Knox found himself drifting in and out of sleep. He was warm, held, and the new movie in the background was a little more calm than

high stakes loud space battles. One day at a time, and somehow, he'll figure out his master's game. He wouldn't believe that this place was different than anywhere else. Damien wasn't different. Knox was certain.

The Gardener

Over the next couple days, Knox was relegated to a routine he didn't have a say in. He was confined to the bed, or at least, the room. Quinn brought him meals and stayed to chat with him while he ate (probably to make sure he actually *did* eat. His stomach still churned with nerves every time, and every bite was a struggle). Then he'd get a shot, and she'd leave him. The TV was his main source of entertainment, and while he found himself loving movies, after the second day, he... really wanted to do anything else. His mind and hands fidgeted, craving something to build or draw or... *anything*. In the evenings, Damien visited, shoving his way into Knox's bed and occasionally playing with him enough to get him hard and moaning before leaving him be. He was probably building Knox up for *something* once he was well again, and Knox felt a small amount of fear of what that'd be.

Still. He was feeling better than he had, and he was able to move around without feeling dizzy and nauseous by about the third day. After that, he couldn't be stopped. Except by the door. He couldn't leave this room; he wasn't allowed, and he knew that Quinn would be upset if he did, despite the fact he was feeling much, *much* better. He paced about for a while, and then, when he tired of that, he finally noticed the window nook. It was tucked away close to a bookshelf, so he hadn't seen it from the bed, but there was a little half-circle cushioned bench beneath the window, positioned perfectly for reading or napping in the sun. He went over to it as soon as he saw it, reaching up to unlatch the window and throwing it open. A fresh, warm breeze rushed in instantly, and he sighed, sinking down to rest his arms on the windowsill. The sun on his skin was almost addicting, but unlike the drugs, he'll certainly indulge in *this*. He could hear members of the household working below him, sounds of the kitchen and someone banging against some metal. He peeked over the window and was surprised when he was met with the face of another person, staring at him with wide, yellow eyes. It was that guy again! The one who worked outside!

"...Hi," he said awkwardly. "Um... Cal right?"

"Yeah. Uh, sorry I was just..." Cal gestured to the flower box below the windowsill he was tending to. Knox glanced to see that he was up on a ladder, and realized that...

"Oh damn, did I clock you with the window? I'm so sorry."

Cal cracked a smile and shook his head. "No no, I ducked in time. Did give me a surprise though! ...Are you allowed out of bed?"

"Probably not, but ain't like anybody is here with me. I'm not feeling like an *invalid*, so why *shouldn't* I be up? It's good for the health to get around and get fresh air," Knox said, throwing up his hands. "That's my excuse, at least. If I get in trouble." Cal was covering his mouth with a fist, cheeks puffing slightly as he tried not to laugh, and Knox found himself grinning as well. Then, Cal's face turned a little more serious, he dropped his hand, and his voice lowered.

“I’m... really sorry. About reporting you the other day. You weren’t trying to run, were you? I woulda helped, if you were, but...”

“You— You would’ve—” Knox couldn’t quite even say it. Wouldn’t that put Cal in a lot of danger? For *him* ? They didn’t know each other. Cal nodded.

“Bein’... used like that.. Mn.” He looked away, grimacing, and Knox shifted his weight, looking away as well.

“Yeah, I’m... used to it though. I don’t know if it’s... gonna be better or worse here.”

“If it helps, he didn’t... force me to.”

Knox looked up sharply. “He tried—”

“Yeah. And... I don’t believe this place is as good as Quinn or Kinsley say it is, but... he didn’t force me, an’ he didn’t get rid of me. So, that’s *something* .” Cal’s tone was heavy with suspicion, which... helped.

“Thank you. I feel like everyone else is tryin’ to make me feel like this place is a paradise or somethin’, all ‘Be grateful you ended up here.’” He pursed his lips, debating whether to ask or not. “Does... Master Damien have a thing for... damage?”

“Damage?”

“Like, damaged slaves.”

Cal shrugged. “I don’t know, but I wouldn’t knock out the possibility. Seems like... well, like everyone here woulda ended up dead otherwise, includin’ me. That doesn’t mean he’s any better’n the others, though,, an’ I don’t trust him.” Cal’s frankness was refreshing after his few interactions with Quinn, and after seeing Cory... it was a comfort that Knox wasn’t the only one who hadn’t bought in. He shifted the conversation to maybe something different.

“So you’re... a gardener?”

“Partially. I split chores with Ava, but I’m mostly the gardener here and help with the close-by fields.”

“Must be nice, bein’ out in the sun,” Knox sighed, resting his chin on his arms. “That’s what I was doin’ the other day. I hadn’t been outside and— well, *conscious*, I guess, for a very, very long time. I guess the sun just lulled me to sleep ‘cause it was so nice.” He shifted to run a hand back through his hair. “I guess... listen, I... I’ve tried runnin’ before. S’why I walk funny. If I did again, and I was caught—” He shook his head. Shadows and bad mistakes threatened to drag his thoughts down back to a darkness he wanted to forget. Right now, he wanted to enjoy this moment of sunshine and... *real* conversation. “Besides, *you’d* get into trouble, wouldn’t you? Like, a lot of it? If they found out. That would never sit well with me.” The smile that Cal gave him was understanding. Disappointed in the way things were. Knox got the feeling that Cal was... similar to how he was in the workshop. Willing to take

the punishment if it meant that somebody else had a chance. Even if it was just a flash in the pan of a chance.

“How’d you end up here? If... that’s not too bad of a question,” he asked. Cal looked a little nervous before he answered.

“I was owned by a relative of Master Damien’s. I— Then, my ownership was up in the air, and then I was sent here. Not much more to tell.”

“Right.” Short, matter of fact, and avoiding the real hurt. *Where were you before you were owned?* “Well, um, Cal,” he said, awkwardly. “I’m... glad we ended up here together. I’m... *stuck* in here for another couple days. Would— would it be okay if you came by again?”

“...I’ll see if I can. It’s nice, talkin’ with somebody who doesn’t trust this place either.” He glanced over his shoulder before cracking a smile. “I should go, but... I’ll see you around.”

The chats through the window kept him occupied over the final days of his recovery. Damien was unaware of them, and for once, Knox... felt like he had something that was his. A maybe friendship? Knox told Cal about the movies he’d watched mostly. He was too nervous to ask him any deeper questions. He didn’t want to talk about the hell they’d been through and what they were currently in. He wasn’t sure if the man *cared* about anything he said, but Cal seemed to like listening to him up on that ladder. Knox hoped that they’d be able to talk more, once he was out of this room, but... they had that window and a ladder in case he was shut inside. He just hoped that he didn’t get Cal in trouble for taking up his time.

Damien showed up in the morning two days later, and Knox’s stomach sank as he realized it was time for his *real* service, the reason he’d been bought, to begin in earnest.

Use

Chapter Notes

Apologies for the late update. I've had a busy couple of weeks, but on the good news, I quit my job that I didn't really like! As always, I appreciate all the comments and kudos <3 It fills my writer's cup for sure.

Damien had brought along Doctor Monroe, who looked Knox over and asked him about how he felt, about side effects, and after more questions that Knox wasn't sure how to answer confidently (how was he supposed to know how his addiction was doing?). She turned to Damien and praised Quinn for helping put some weight on Knox before she said, "Alright, I give him a mostly clean bill of health." She clapped a hand on Damien's shoulder as she turned to leave the room. "I'll send you the bill when I get back to the office." Damien almost couldn't wait til she was out of the room before he pounced. Knox would've thought his master would've wanted to fuck him in *his* bedroom, instead of a guest room Knox had been locked up in for a week, but he was apparently *too horny to wait* .

A mix of fear and relief combined into some unholy cocktail as Damien wasted no time slipping hand up his shirt and tugging down his pants. *Fear* . He was going to get fucked, like, really fucked. *Relief* . That was his job. Finally, he was going to do the job he was bought for. His master would use him, and he could just... stop. It'd hurt, he'd retreat, and he'd just ignore all the other times his master had touched him and it hadn't been terrible.

"You've certainly kept me waiting," Damien said, tweaking a nipple, causing Knox to squirm and gasp. All the teasing this week meant that the moment Damien's hand touched his cock, it almost jumped into his touch, and Knox felt a flush of arousal and embarrassment. Was he this easy?

"I-I didn't. *You're* the one who ordered 'bed rest' for this week," Knox retorted, gasping as Damien continued moving his hands both across his chest and around his cock.

"Back to chiding me for taking care of you? I thought I explained that I don't like breaking my toys," Damien said, leaning down to bite a hard mark underneath Knox's collar. "You also missed a *sir* there." His grip tightened, and Knox gritted his teeth against the moan that threatened to escape.

"*Sir* ."

"Good boy." His master's touch became more gentle, and Knox found that, despite his every intention to avoid it, his hips were rocking in time with the strokes as Damien lavished more attention to his chest and collarbone area. "Though, maybe you just want to get punished, see how far you can push me?" Knox shook his head. Even if the last punishment was just...

edging him all night, he didn't want to get comfortable disobeying or mouthing off. He just... couldn't help himself sometimes. It was one of the few ways he felt like he had some control, a little bit of power. Damien twisted his hand and bit hard right in the hollow between his neck and chest, and Knox couldn't stop the keen, or how his back arched. He also couldn't stop the orgasm that crashed around his ears at that moment. He hadn't realized— He didn't know he'd been so close. *How*— Oh.

Knox had figured out that pain was a low level enjoyment to his body long ago. When his hair was pulled roughly, when George bothered with preparing him even a little bit so there was a slight burn of pain instead of tearing into him, when he was bitten, it all sent a confusing jolt of pleasure through his head. It wasn't fair that they could use pain against him like that. He was supposed to hate it because it hurt, not... find any level of pleasure from it. A double edged sword, he supposed. While it turned his stomach, it did occasionally help make sex go down easier, even if he did feel like more of a slut for liking it.

He blinked worriedly up at his master, but only found a surprised, smug smile waiting for him there. Knox flushed, biting down on the whimper as Damien's hand didn't stop, driving him further, oversensitive and shaking.

"Next time, you'll have to wait until I give permission. *Or* you ask nicely," Damien purred, tugging off Knox's pants and firmly tapping his hip. "Up! Show that nice ass of yours." Knox hesitated, attempting both to wrangle his faculties as well as debate on whether it was worth it to protest. It would be easier not to, though, and he could always hate himself for it later. He pushed himself up, turned over onto his hands, and waited.

Cold, lubed fingers elicited a sharp gasp from him, as Damien lingered for a short time teasing his hole before pushing two in. Knox braced his arms on the pillow, resting his forehead against them as he did his best to relax. It'd be fine. Quick and dirty probably, given how excited Damien was to put him to use.

But, as was becoming the norm, Damien surprised him. His fingers worked cleverly, pressing up against anywhere that made Knox gasp and moan as he was keyed up. His guilt was eroded away (for now), and he pressed his forehead harder against his folded arms, shaking with each stroke of his master's fingers. It wasn't long before he was trembling, cock hard again against his stomach, and *close*. Still though, Damien didn't move to fuck him with any more than his fingers. He knew if he came; he'd definitely get a punishment. But Damien seemed content to find the best ways to make Knox's mind short circuit with just his fingers, to turn him into a quivering melted puddle desperate for him.

Bastard wants me to beg — He had the thought moments before his voice slipped.

"Please—" He choked, cutting himself off, but *that* got Damien's attention. The man leaned over him, draping across his back (not that Knox could feel it very well) to purr into his ear.

"What was that?"

"Just *fuck* me already," Knox panted, narrowly avoiding asking (begging) nicely, avoiding sounding pathetic. "Sir," he added belatedly, and his reward was another press against his

prostate by those damned fingers. The moan that escaped was louder than the others prior, probably since he'd opened his damn mouth. Still, he couldn't take it much longer.

"Mm, you *could* be nicer." A twist of the fingers, and another sharp *bite* at his neck, and Knox's vision almost went white as he cried out, hips bucking as it took every *ounce* of his willpower not to cum.

"Sir, please— I can't— I won't be able to—" He stumbled over his words. Knox was torn between his pride, his fear, and his guilt that *this felt amazing* . "Fuck me or let me cum now, *please* ." That last please was riddled with just a touch of venom. His master laughed, *laughed* , and yanked Knox's head up by his hair.

"Such a *brat* . So demanding," he said, not... upset. Knox's legs shook as he felt Damien readjust, the head of his cock pressing against his hole. *Fuck, this was it* . He didn't know if he was nervous or... relieved or even excited. It'd be back to what he was used to, a normalcy in hell that he could harden against (Pun not intended). His master gripped his hair and pushed in. With all the fingering, it was, genuinely, the least painful entrance Knox had experienced in his life, and without letting him catch his breath from the steady pressure, Damien started fucking him in earnest, grip tightening on his hair.

"Nn, *fuck* , I knew it. Your fucking ass is *fantastic* ," Damien gasped. Then, he seemed to settle into a snappy rhythm. "You will cum when I *say* you can, and if you need *help* , I can arrange that." Knox mixed a whimper with a moan, as there was another tug at his hair right as Damien's cock hit that spot inside him *just right* . He wasn't sure what Damien meant by that, he wasn't sure he wanted to find out, but he was doing his best as stars started flashing up and his head blanked out. He was dripping onto the sheets, making a right mess, but he was holding it together by a thread.

The fucking was hard, but it didn't hurt. It was rough, but not... *rough* . It was such a stark contrast to all the times prior, even when Rosie was alive, that he was terrified how *dangerously good* he felt. He couldn't even retreat to that small place in his mind because it *felt so good that part of him even didn't want to* . He couldn't chase the pain to safety.

Damien's pace picked up, and he could hear his master's breathing catch. "Go ahead," he gasped, nails digging into Knox's hips. "*Cum for me* ," he reiterated. Fuck him, Knox did as he was told. He almost sobbed in relief as his hips bucked, riding out his orgasm. Damien's hand moved from Knox's hair to the back of his neck, pushing him down. *Fuck* — It was almost too much, fear bleeding into the blank bliss that soaked Knox's mind, along with a feeling or desire Knox couldn't name because he didn't understand it. He didn't have time to think. With a few more thrusts, Damien groaned out Knox's name before cumming in him.

Knox was vaguely aware of when Damien pulled out, moving away. This was to be expected. He was used, and Damien would go on with his afternoon. He'd be expected to clean up and be ready for next time. He was just going to... be still for a bit, exhaustion seeping into his bones, trying to steady his breathing. His thoughts stuttered as they restarted, starting to race again. *What now?* Then that strange, alien voice. *Did I do a good job ?* Shut up. You don't care. Refocus. Think about what your master wants from you now.

“You have to make everything difficult,” Damien said near him, and Knox lifted his head fearfully. Shit, he didn’t figure it out quick enough. But his master’s tone wasn’t chiding, only... teasing. He shifted onto his side, propping himself up on his elbow.

“Sir?” he asked, and Damien reached out his hand to card his fingers through his hair.

“Scoot forward a bit, gotta get you cleaned up and in a clean bed. You did very good for me.”

Knox hated how he leaned into the gentle touch, how the praise spread a warm feeling in his chest. He did so, and he bit back a *squeak* as he was lifted, *lifted* by Damien. For a guy who looked as slim as he was, he was strong. Knox wrapped his arms around his master’s neck for stability, and he was carried out of the sickroom, back to the master’s bedroom.

Damien couldn’t resist teasing him in the shower as they cleaned up, probing with his fingers into his sore ass. Knox squirmed and gasped, but all Damien said was that he “just wanted to be thorough.” *Bullshit*, he thought, but then he was put into that luxuriously comfortable bed. He expected Damien to leave, Knox had served his purpose, but his master slipped into bed with him, pulling him close to his body and wrapping an arm around him. He buried his face in Knox’s neck and sighed.

“I could use a nap before dinner,” he murmured. Knox was confounded, and he stared at the ceiling as Damien *snuggled* him as he dropped off. Knox didn’t mind this. Hell, he was shamefully enjoying the closeness as it grounded him back into reality. This reality that he couldn’t even begin to unravel the machinations of. Every instinct he had screamed that Damien was plotting, scheming, breaking him gently rather than with force.

He didn’t know what he’d prefer, but he took a deep breath, furrowing his brow. Damien had to have a game. He just needed to learn how to play it. *He* needed to do some recon.

Sun

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

The morning was the busiest he'd had in a while. First, Damien ushered him into the shower, but Knox was relieved that his master didn't join in to pester (tease) him. Then he was dressed and whisked down to breakfast. Damien seemed to have more on his mind today. Knox didn't mind. The busier Damien was, the more time Knox might have today to talk to the others in the house to learn about him. Jack beamed at both of them when they arrived.

"Oh! Good morning!" he said, almost vibrating with energy. "Damien, can I—"

"No." Damien settled down, flicking his hand in a motion that Knox picked up on, kneeling in his spot without much protest. Jack made him... nervous in a way that Damien didn't. His master had a calm fire about him, hotheaded but with a silver tongue. Jack didn't seem to be that refined. Knox could just *tell* he was one of those "spontaneous" masters. He looked over to the other slave across from him under the table—Cory, he thought—who was happily nibbling on a clementine.

Kinsley served breakfast, wishing good mornings to both masters and bringing with him a truly decadent breakfast. Quinn rolled in with a tray of drinks attached to her chair and poured what must be fresh orange juice into engraved glasses. Breakfast was french toast with honey and fresh berries. It almost actually made Knox melt. Quinn's cooking was the best he'd had in years, and he was beginning to have serious debates whether being a pleasure slave in this house might be worth it if he got to eat this cooking.

"So Jack, have you decided what you're doing for the summer?"

"I thought I'd just stay here! And um, hang out?" He glanced down at Cory, reaching to give the young man a few pets. "An' um, make sure that... Cory is doing well?"

"Uh-huh. Okay, but do you remember what I asked of you before school ended?" Damien offered a forkful of toast to Knox, and he zoned out of the conversation for a moment. When he returned from toast land, Jack was looking disgruntled, pushing around a few fruits in a race around the plate.

"But *Damien* !"

"No buts! You know your mom wouldn't want you sitting idle, and while... I *appreciate* how devoted you seem to Cory, he still has his own responsibilities for the household and I want to make sure he gets his fresh air. And I want *you* to get your fresh air."

Knox looked at Cory. *He doesn't get fresh air? Does Jack keep Cory locked up, just like George did with him?*

Damien continued, “I don’t care what you do, I want you to find a project or get a job. It’s good experience.” Jack sighed exasperatedly, pushing back from the table and tapping on Cory’s shoulder. Knox felt a twist of... something as Cory climbed up into Jack’s lap. He wasn’t sure if it was discomfort at how well-trained and *unafraid* Cory was, or if it was fear that... was that what Damien wanted him to be like?

He glanced up at Damien, but his master made no similar move. Jack only wrapped his arms around Cory, nuzzling into his neck. “S’not my fault he’s so cute! And hot. We’re *fine* when we’re in our room.”

“Jack, I don’t want to argue.” Damien sighed, finishing up the last couple bites of toast for himself. “And, if work goes well, I’m actually hoping to take a small trip with you to the coast.” Jack perked up immediately, beaming.

“Really?! I know you said, but— so soon?”

“It’s been a while, and I need to get away from inventory discussions and farming. Besides, there’s a few projects here I need to work on, get everyone up to speed.” Damien’s hand fell on Knox’s head, tangling up his fingers in the curls to give them a light tug. Knox swallowed the gasp, knuckles turning white as he clenched his fists on his knees. Damien continued, “I’ll give you the dates when I have them, but I want you to behave and also let Cory get his chores done.”

Jack was still grinning as he playfully saluted, “Sure thing, bro!”

When breakfast was over, Damien and Jack departed, and Knox was immediately relieved when the masters were out of the room. He wasn’t allowed to sit idly, though, as Quinn swept over in her wheelchair. “Okay boys, why don’t we get this table cleared. Cory, dear? Leave the dishes to me and Knox.” Cory flushed, hanging his head. “Clear up the silverware, quick as you can, and you’ll do a great job.” He perked up more and hurried to his task.

Knox didn’t need prompting as he set to stacking the plates. He was surprised at being set to his own devices, not being confined, but he’d reached some sort of limit. The drugs, the sex, the food— *living* here was in an odd balance of a nightmare and a pleasant dream. It was just too much.

He wanted to talk to Cal again. He felt a pang of guilt at having missed their window conversation yesterday. Knox glanced over at Cory, nervous bouncing around in his chest as his fingers drummed on the bottoms of the plates he picked up. The other was gathering up the silverware a little bit frantically, eager to do a good job, and Knox wondered how scared he must be to be so desperate to care so much. What did Jack do to him that he barely got out of the master’s room when he was home? Quinn left them to it, leaving a cart to stack everything on, and Knox didn’t know how to break the silence; he was uneasy.

“Um, hi!” Cory said, sliding next to him to gather up the silverware. “...I’m glad you’re feeling better. I heard, um, that you were really ill.”

“Thanks,” he said, and really, he could tell Cory was being earnest. Even though the passive, *okayness* the young man had about his position terrified him, Knox couldn’t hold it against him. He seemed like he was really trying. “Um, Cory right? How long have you been here?”

“Oh! Gosh, it’s gotta be... over a year? Two years? Time’s gone real quick.” Cory smiled. Two years. While Knox was in a void, Cory was here. “It’s really nice here. Better than where I was before.” His hand subconsciously went to his neck, and Knox’s eyes followed. There was... some deep scarring there, barely visible behind Cory’s long hair.

“...They really treat you well?”

“Yeah! I mean...” Cory glanced around before scooping up the last couple pieces of cutlery, dumping them into the tub before turning back to Knox. “Master Damien scares me, a little, but Jack is very nice to me. Master Damien... he sometimes does stuff that feels like a punishment, but it’s *not* a punishment.” He lowered his eyes, shifting his weight. “I... won’t lie. I’m not envious, b-but if you ever need anything, I’ll do my best!”

“Yeah,” Knox flushed, remembering with embarrassment and guilt the mixture of pleasure and pain (that *wasn’t* bad, but should) that Damien toyed with. “I... know what you mean by that. Good to know Damien’s at least... consistent. I just don’t know what’s *normal* around here.” He stacked the plates up on the cart and pushed it towards the kitchen. A question that was kicking around in his head was on the tip of his tongue, and he wasn’t sure if he wanted to know the answer. “Cory? Do you... You just... you seem... so *okay* with...”

“What?” Cory asked with a couple blinks.

Knox didn’t want to be so blunt, but... Cory seemed to need that. “I mean, you’re... a pleasure slave here right? For Jack?”

“Um, yeah! But it’s nice,” he giggled, his cheeks flushing a rosy pink. “Like I said, it’s... better than where I was before, better than being dead, and... Jack treats me like a friend, even though the—he’s not supposed to, I think.” He rubbed his arm. “I just want to do a good job, so I can stay. I’m okay with that.”

Quinn had a whole list of tasks for them when they brought in the dishes. Knox noticed that *his* tasks were almost... nothing. Nothing that would get him dusty or be considered even slightly hard work. He hoped that he would be given *something* more to do. It’d make him feel more than just... a doll *But that’s all you are* . Shaking his head, he redirected his thoughts. Maybe he just had light duty today? A voice inside said that his main duty was pleasing his master in bed, anything beyond that was a *privilege* .

As he set off carrying a basket of linens to fold and put away in a hutch, he concluded that Cory was just... like that. Too sweet for this world, so he ended up in this system. It brought some relief to the fear that he’d turn *into* Cory—he thought too much. He winced. That was... a bit mean. He didn’t know Cory’s story. Cal seemed to be the only one who shared his doubts, so he did his best to position himself conveniently next to a window. Both to

hopefully catch the man's eye as he went about landscaping, and also just... be in the sun and fresh air. Somebody could yell at him if they didn't want him opening up windows.

The sun was nice and warm, and the repetitive folding of linens, table runners, and cloths was relaxing albeit boring, and he soon just folded his arms on the window sill and closed his eyes to soak up the sun.

"Hey!" chirped a familiar voice, and Knox sat up, glancing about in case there was a master around, but no, it was Cal, watering cans in hand. "You're out of that room!" Knox brightened considerably.

"Yeah, I got a clean bill yesterday. Sorry I missed our window chat, circumstances..."

Cal raised his hand and shook his head. "I get it. I... figured it out."

"Sorry."

"They've got you folding laundry?" Cal said, changing the subject. Knox glanced down at the crumpled fabric in his lap.

"I guess so. The other chores I got are about as difficult." He drew himself up. "I guess Damien wants my hands to keep up with the manicure I got." He held one up, wiggling his fingers. "Not sure why he'd bother. Ain't much skin to callus left with the scarring." He laughed softly, shaking his head. "I'd rather be out helpin' you. Might be hard work but you get to be in the *sun*."

"There's that, for sure," Cal said, shading his eyes with an arm as he glanced up. He seemed on the verge of asking something, but he decided not to. "Are you feeling better then?"

"Much. I actually feel like myself again, which is sayin' something. Still suspicious, a little terrified, but I can think clearly. Say, do you... know much about Master Jack?"

"Noooot... a lot. I know that Jack is the Master's stepbrother, and that he's mostly away at school." His lips pressed together, a dark shadow over his expression. "I know that Cory rarely leaves the bedroom when he's here." Cal seemed to roll his shoulders in not quite a shrug, but more like... forcing his anger to pull away. "I'm just out here most days, so I'm not caught up on the House. Don't mind though. It means I don't have to interact with either of them."

"Double jealous." Knox sighed then glanced about again. "Speaking of them though, Damien's gonna be taking a vacation. Not sure how much I'll be able to chat, but... I'd like to keep meetin' up. You're the person I actually... know the best here, an' Kingsley and Quin both intimidate me."

"I'd like to," Cal said with a smile warmer than the sunshine.

"Aw, how *sweet*." A new voice startled them both, and Knox almost jumped out of his own skin.

“Ava! You can’t just sneak up like that,” Cal said, exhaling slowly and relaxing his shoulders. A woman sidled up next to him, sticking her hands in her pockets with a grin with a scuff of her boot against the grass. “I thought you were—”

“Thought I was somebody more important sneakin’ up on you two? Nah, I’m just quiet.” She glanced over to Knox, and he was finally able to take a better look at her. Ava was... very, very tall. Her long auburn hair was pulled up into a ponytail, but even then it seemed like it was double looped. “It’s nice to see you up and about! Sorry not sorry for ratting you out, but I didn’t want it comin’ out that I’d seen ya in that state and didn’t tell anyone. Kinsley was almost aplectic.”

Knox scowled against the flush of embarrassment. “Thanks, I guess. Yeah, I’m doin’ better. So... you’re the mechanic?”

“I am! At least, the best thing we’ve got to a mechanic around here. I’m actually Master D’s bodyguard when he goes off for one of his public appearances, but he hasn’t been doing them a lot lately.” She laughed at Knox’s surprised and gawking expression. “That’s right! Though, there are some folks here who have a higher body count—” She cut herself off, pressing a finger to her lips, and cast a furtive glance towards the house. “Can’t say more though.”

“You’re *licensed* as a slave? I didn’t know that was even allowed!” He could hardly imagine being allowed to touch a weapon, much less use it.

“It’s a pain in the ass, but I was raised into it. Livestock and family guardian. I had to be able to use a sniper rifle.” She grimaced. “Had to look out for ‘property theft’ as well, but... well, I let a few too many folks past me and...” She pointed at her eyepatch. “Said I’d do better if I could ‘*only see one side of the picture.*’ Problem is, my depth perception sucks now, so it makes it hard repairing small things or tight corners. Probably was why I was sold to... my prior owner— fucking coked up bastard—, and then passed along to Damien”

Knox leaned forward, bracing his arms on the window, and trying not to sound too eager. “Oh yeah? What kind of stuff do you gotta repair?”

“Well, my latest project I’ve been putting off is that damn clock in the hall. It’s been on the fritz, and it’s an old grandfather clock that Damien’s attached to for some rich-person reason. Part of me just wants to smash the thing, but can’t do that.” She glanced over at Cal, smiling. “Cal’s a big help though when it comes to the farm equipment, so I can mostly cover everything.”

Cal was looking at Knox with a look in his eye and a small smile. “Knox, you said you worked in a workshop right? Do you know about clocks and smaller machines?” he prompted, and Knox flushed.

“Y-yeah! I mean, I wouldn’t want to step on your toes, Ava, but those complex, small, or tricky machines... I used to fix stuff like that all the time. I assembled a lot of household appliances and electronics too.”

“*Reeeaaallllyy* ? Huh, well, Kinsley said you were allowed to tag along on my chores, just not outside too much. Soo... how’s this. I’ll ‘leave’ my tools, and you’ll take a crack at that

clock. If ya fix it, then I'll put in a word for ya. If you don't, I'll take that fall, but they know I've been having trouble with it."

Knox was beaming. *Something* he could do, beyond sex and chores meant to keep him occupied instead of useful. "Thank you! *Thank you* . I'll do my best— I'll... When the master heads out next, I'll try. An' um, thanks, Cal." He'd picked up on Knox's underlying energy, his interests, without Knox having to broach the subject. It made him feel... listened to. Huh.

In any case, there was something else. "So... you aren't tracked," he pointed out. Ava sucked a breath through her teeth then shook her head.

"No, I'm not. None of us are."

"Were you ever?"

"I was," Cal piped up. "In my first year, I had to wear a lock on my ankle. Part of the arrangement, and it kept me within the perimeter." That gave Knox a bit of hope that... he could ditch the collar one day. Ava folded her arms, shifting her weight.

"Yeah, I... think it's temporary at least. Obvs Cal isn't wearing one *now* , and I'm sure you'll get a non-tracker collar like any of the others who work in the house. Cal and I don't get one since it could interfere with work." Ava pointed to the bandana tied around her arm. "This is our badge. Good sweat rag!"

Before Knox could ask any more questions, he heard his name being called by Quinn. *Shit*. He looked down at the half folded laundry and hastily started folding them into the basket, underneath the smaller, nicely folded pile. Cal opened his mouth to help, then glanced down at his dirt covered hands and arms.

"Shoot. Sorry, Knox," he said, regretfully. "We should get goin'." He nudged Ava, and she scowled.

"Ugg, but I just *got* here."

"Go. We don't want to get him in more trouble." He reached a hand to rest it on the sill. "I'll help next time, and if you get in trouble, just say that I kept you. It's okay. I'd rather you not get punished." Before Knox could protest this undeserved gesture, Cal was hauling the watering cans (and Ava) away.

Quinn's voice called again, louder, and Knox piled the laundry up and hurried back, hoping it'd be decent enough.

The past couple weeks have been wild. Sorry for the late update. My editor and I are going to be tied up with life stuff, so the update schedule may get a little more wonky through July and August. Will definitely get y'all a few updates for sure though!

Thank you as always for the support.

Debt

Chapter Summary

Knox gets up to some mischief, Damien figures out a punishment that'll work, and somehow, a clock is fixed.

Chapter Notes

Sorry for the late update! Life smacked both my lovely editor and I over the back of the head with a shovel and left us by the side of the road. Things are... still rocky and uncertain, but you can be certain that this chapter is full of smut, angst, and hot disasters!

Quinn gave him an earful at the state of the laundry, and he had to refold it. But he wasn't... beaten, or reported to Damien, and she seemed to accept that he'd just gotten caught up in a conversation. She actually gave him one of the rolls she'd made for lunch early, and it was delicious.

"Where'd you learn how to cook?" he asked, nibbling on the roll as he perched on the small kitchen table.

"I picked most of it up along the way." She rolled over to him, swatting at his leg with an oven mitt. "Off the table." Knox couldn't help the cheeky grin as he hopped off the table, perching on a stool instead. "Damien's mother bought me a few years before he was born, and they had no prior staff to teach me to cook! I was a little shell shocked. I was about... Ohh... a little younger than you are, actually, when I first came here. Soon after, I became his wetnurse while the missus was away." Knox pressed his lips together to stop the flood of questions. That... was probably a sad story.

"You saw Damien grow up, then?"

"I did. He's got a hot temper like his father, but unlike his father, he learned how to control it. He had to grow up quickly, so he can be a bit childish sometimes. Just get him started about movies." She covered her laugh with a hand, and Knox could almost remember his mother's laugh. "...He's got a bigger heart than he lets on. I'm certain you've noticed the pattern around here."

Knox's expression darkened, and he bunched up his pants in his fists. "Yeah." Damaged property. Tossed off. At least Ava had training and talent, Cal was *strong*, Cory... had won

over Jack. But Knox—

He suddenly felt like he needed to do something. *Something*. The clock? Maybe Ava had put the tools out?

“Thanks for the roll, Quinn,” he said, quickly standing, “I’m gonna go learn the house a little bit more. Stretch the legs after bein’ in bed for so long. Do you need me for anything?”

“No, but mind Cory dusting.” She smiled and waved him off. Knox hurried out, and up the stairs to where he’d seen the clock before. It was a regal grandfather clock, old and rickety, and the time was off. The wood was scratched around the lower half of the clock, like little nicks had been taken out by younger masters careening down the halls. It also hadn’t chimed *once* since he’d been here, but maybe that was on purpose. He looked around the nearby hall, but no tools were placed nearby. Damn. He sidled up to the clock, kneeling down to examine the pendulum (it didn’t swing smoothly) and base (no nontraditional additions there), then stood to look at the clock face. He could almost hear his father’s voice reminding him to take note of every detail, every sound and sense. He pressed his ear to the side and closed his eyes. The steady click-click-click of gears turning was interrupted occasionally by a hitch and the *faintest* of scratches. His fingers slid along the grain of the wood, skin catching on a groove for the top panel. That’s where the problem lay.

Knox had to move fast. Cory was dusting, and he wasn’t sure if the other slave would rat him out (knowingly or not). He ducked into where he’d figured Damien’s study was, and he grinned. The office was half in disarray, with stacks of paper and scattered sticky notes, while the other half impeccably organized and filed. He rummaged around, with half a mind to poke around and read, but he needed to do something with his hands and not his head. Knox pulled open a drawer, and he made a pleased noise as he found a quarter. Perfect.

As he dashed out, his movement caused a few papers to drift off the stacks, and he had to pause to scoop those up. He stopped short. The papers were... receipts. For him.

Paid in full — Debt & Ownership was signed in thick black ink at the bottom of both.

That’s right. Damien had mentioned... Knox hadn’t quite remembered since he was either drugged or dazed or dozing, but he’d said he wanted to buy him outright. So that Knox would be *his*. But... Knox had been told when his debt was paid off; he’d be free. Nothing would be left to work off.

With shaky hands, he returned the papers and put them out of his mind for now. He’d have to have a *chat* later with his master, but now he took the quarter back to the clock and used it to unscrew the side panel. It was... difficult, but Knox got it eventually, set it aside, and peered inside. The light from the windows lining the hall was enough to light up the problem area.

There was an unwound spring (probably making that scraping noise), several gears out of alignment, and just a couple screws in danger of falling. A grin spread across his face. This was *easy*. He’d fixed clocks all the time when he was a child, and this was just maintenance! He stopped the pendulum, and started working. The realignment required some disassembly, and he spread the parts in a small semi-circle around him, organized neatly by where they

went. He hummed an old work song while he rewound the spring, reaching up to make sure it would be in place and not scrape against anything anymore.

He was nagged by the thoughts of the receipts, but that was surpassed by his frustration in his own hands. The fine work was made difficult by the lack of dexterity. The scar tissue that riddled them had stiffened their range of movement. It didn't look so severe, but... maybe there was deeper damage. He nursed a hope he could build back the muscle memory with enough work, but how was he going to do *that* if Damien wasn't going to give him any jobs more than sex or folding soft fabrics.

It took about an hour, and then everything was back in place, better than it was before. He set the correct time by running to another room to check a digital clock and running back, releasing the pendulum. The clock ticked smooth as butter, and Knox wiped his forehead with the back of his hand.

"Whew. Still got it," he said to himself, smiling. The clock chimed in agreement, five times. Five o'clock? Already? He heard the front door shut. He looked down at himself. He was covered in grease and dust from working with the cloak.

"Cooooorryyy! I'm home!" came Jack's voice, and Knox *almost* relaxed before he heard Damien's deeper voice, letting Jack know that dinner would be at seven. *Fuck*. Knox bolted for the bedroom. Once inside, he stripped, dumping his clothes in a heap, and hopped into the shower.

He heard faintly heard the bedroom door open and close, and he scrubbed faster. He emerged, wrapped up in a towel, and Damien was sitting on the edge of the bed, an impatient frown on his face. Well, he was already pissed off, so Knox figured he couldn't make it *worse*. Before Damien could speak, Knox placed a hand on his hip, leveling his best accusatory glare at his "master."

"You really managed it eh? You bought me outright? *And* my debt?" he asked, probingly.

Damien sat up a touch straighter. "...I did. I think I told you I wanted you to be all mine. I don't want to be paying some other person for the pleasure of using you. *Tread carefully now*, prettyboy," he said flatly, a dangerous edge entering his last words. A warning. Good thing Knox was good at ignoring those.

"You paid my debt; you don't *own* me. So when were you going to tell me? Or was I supposed to be your pet until I figured it out on my own? I wouldn't be surprised if you got off on lyin'. Can't get someone to behave enough to bed them, so ya gotta cheat the system? Thanks for the new wardrobe, but I'll be heading out now." Knox let his anger bubble over in his tone. He *should* be out of here. He shouldn't be afraid because he had nothing. *Bought and paid for in full*. Damien knew he was a debt slave and yet— Man wasn't as smart as he tried to seem.

He only got a few steps before Damien's hand gripped his collar like iron, yanking him back to the bed so hard he lost both his towel and his breath. The grip didn't loosen, and a little bit of panic began to flare as he gasped for air. "If you had done *better* snooping in my office,

you'd read I bought you, *and* your debt, but I didn't *clear* your debt. You're working that off with *me* . And I have to say, *you're not doing a very good job of that* ,” Damien growled.

“Wha— Wait— Sir,” Knox wheezed, attempting to backpedal.

“Oh *no* , you're not getting out of *this* one,” Damien said, releasing his grip. Knox slumped on the bed, doing his best to catch his breath. Damien returned before he could move, looming over him and boxing him in, a cord of rope in his hands.

He fought enough to nurse his pride. Knox knew he was going to get punished, but he didn't want to tempt Damien into... punishing him with the things he truly feared. He'd been so... *so daft* to assume— Of course not, of *course* . It couldn't have been that easy; why did he even bother? Big heart indeed, but hotheaded... Damien had been rough before, but there had been a level of play to it, a dance that they'd entered. This was different. He was *furious* . Knox had crossed a line.

Damien skillfully bound his arms above his head, knotting them tight. Then he looped the rope around a hook on the ceiling, keeping Knox's arms up. Knox was forced to stand, just barely able to reach the ground on tip toes with how his arms stretched.

“An' here I thought that was for plants,” he muttered, biting a yelp as sharp, stinging pain licked across the back of his leg.

“I've treated you as best as I can, and *still* you mouth off, cause trouble, and can't follow the simple expectations I've set for you. I guess I just need to take a firmer hand,” Damien said, tapping the crop he'd retrieved against Knox's leg where he swiped. “I just want you to *learn* .”

“Don't patronize me—” Another flick of the crop, this time on his inner thigh. Knox twisted against his bindings. If he wanted to kick out, he'd just spin himself around, so all he could really do was just... take it. His shoulders were already aching. He tried to focus on that, and not how the light strikes with the crop were causing his body to heat up, a flush spreading across his cheeks. Fuck. He met Damien's eyes, and the glimmer of amusement he found there made his heart sink. Bastard had figured it out at this point; how fucked up Knox's head was that pain, if it wasn't unbearable, translated into low-lying pleasure.

“Why were you in my office?” Damien asked, voice low.

“Why do you care? You didn't tell me *not* to,” Knox said, knowing he was digging himself deeper into a hole, but did it matter? Damien struck him a couple more times, striping up his ass.

“Try again.”

“Was told to straighten up, so I figured that meant everywhere, Sir,” Knox lied. He hadn't returned the quarter, but surely, that wouldn't be missed. Then, a bit of the truth, “A few papers fell off your desk, they were about me. I put 'em back.” Damien seemed to buy that,

but when he didn't move, Knox started to get antsy. Before he spoke, his master drew the crop along the inside of his thigh. Knox's breath hitched as it was drawn along his half-hard cock, and Damien looked incredibly smug.

"You like pain," he said with a grin.

"Kindly fuck off."

"I could just leave you hanging right here all night. That'd certainly be a suitable punishment for your disobedience and mouthing off so rudely. If you really wanted me to handle you a bit rougher, I know you know how to ask nicely." Damien pressed up against his side, trailing his fingers across his chest to tweak a nipple, sliding his hand down his chest, and over to grip his ass possessively. "You do beg so sweetly~"

Knox's frustration reached its peak. Damien was *right*, and it was stupid to pretend he wasn't just a slut doing his best to hide it. But he'd still fought to keep some semblance of *himself*, to not chase any sort of pain high. It was... it was just that— Damien was so close to him, hands roaming, crop forgotten for the moment, and at the reminder of how he begged, he just... Knox turned his head just enough and bit down *hard* at the juncture of Damien's neck and shoulder.

Damien stuttered out a surprised moan. Knox stopped immediately, staring at his master with wide eyes, and Damien stared back.

It was Knox's turn to smile, grinning like a smug goddamn *idiot*. "...Looks like I'm not the only one, Sir. I wonder—" He didn't get much farther than that before his master took a fistful of hair and pulled, making Knox choke off his own moan. Damien moved away, leaving him hanging there, unsteady on his feet, and for a moment Knox was worried that he'd make good on his threat to leave him. His arms wouldn't last.

Instead, Damien returned with a bottle and, to Knox's dismay, a large looking plug. He was spun around, and cold slick fingers circled his entrance. Knox's arms ached, and he bit down on his lip as Damien wasted no time opening him up, the stretch a tantalizing pain with how quickly he was going. This was close to what he'd expected when he'd first gotten here. Forceful, punishing, rough. Though he was still baffled at even the barest of "caring" gestures, even as he was getting punished.

A hand gripped his chin, forcing him to turn his head to look Damien in the eye. "Now, what did I tell you about silencing yourself? Don't make me add more to your punishment."

"Ya mean you haven't started yet, Sir?" Knox grumbled. Damien withdrew his fingers, and Knox felt the tip of the plug push in. "*Fuck* —" His back arched, wriggling uncomfortably as the flare of the plug pushed further into him.

"You know, I considered gagging you, but I think I like you better without one. It means you can dig yourself deeper into a hole, but my patience doesn't last forever. Almost there—you're doing well," Damien said, voice softening with the last sentence. Knox flushed at the praise, frowning, but his mouth quickly fell open in more soft sounds as Damien released his grip on his face and gave his cock a couple strokes. The plug settled in somewhere in

between breaths, and Knox swallowed a small whine as Damien removed his hands once more, reaching over to where he'd set the crop on the bed stand. He knew what was coming, but he couldn't help the flutter of nerves as he remembered what George had done to his legs.

"How's—" He cut himself off, but Damien could see where his eyes darted.

"Almost fully healed. I told you, Knox, I don't break my toys." He grinned wickedly. "There's plenty of other places where this can do its magic." Straightening, Damien twirled the crop in his hand as he walked behind Knox, out of his line of sight. "Hmm... let's start with... thirty."

"*Thirty*?"

"Make it thirty five if you keep interrupting me. Keep count, and if you lose track, I'll start over," Damien said coolly, placing one hand on Knox's hip to keep him steady. Fuck, *fuck*, thirty? For— Well, he did cross several lines. He shouldn't have, but he'd been so angry. He took a steadying breath. He felt the loop of leather at the end of the crop trace along his hip, catching on his piercing, and he knew what the bastard was doing. Anticipation.

The first strikes were light, in a contrast to the smarting, quick strikes for correction earlier. They were easy to count. Knox did his best to keep his voice steady. This wasn't so bad, not as bad as when he'd been whipped. Damien settled into a rhythm, gradually increasing the force of each swat across his ass and inner thighs. The pain hummed through him, and he knew it shouldn't but it felt *good*. He felt alive, and his voice started to waver, falter, as he was lulled into the rhythm. Damien stopped, and Knox held his breath, waiting for the next strike.

"How many?"

"F—" He couldn't remember. *Fuck*. He'd lost count, too distracted by his arousal and the rhythm. "I—... Twenty... five?" Knox guessed, trying to adjust his arms but failing. It was getting harder to stand upright, and it was pulling on his shoulders. Damien circled around him, and Knox wished he could do something to wipe the smugness off his face.

"I wish you could see yourself. You're gorgeous. I guess the only way to stop your mind from racing is to keep it too overwhelmed to think." He tapped the crop along the inside of his thigh, and Knox shivered, bracing for another hit or to be told he was wrong and for it to start over all over again. Damien's voice was low. "You're at twenty-eight."

Fuck. He didn't know why it hurt more than the crop when he heard the actual number, but he fixated on how he'd gotten it *wrong*. He'd been close, too. But he hadn't kept himself together enough to keep an accurate count. Actual tears brimmed at the corner of his eyes. He couldn't do thirty more. He was having a hard enough time stringing two thoughts together with the pain, pleasure, and pressure. What happened to his endurance? In the workshop...

"Look at me." Damien's command cut through, and he met his master's gaze, trying to muster a more sturdy expression than he felt. "You've taken your strokes well, pet. Two more and you're done, but if you mouth off about it, I *will* make you recount."

“Yessir.”

“Good boy,” Damien said. The next flick came a hair's breadth from his dick, and Knox couldn't help the cry that escaped, curling up on himself as best he could.

“T-twenty-nine,” he gasped. Damien traced the crop around his lower back as if looking for the perfect spot for the final hit, and he found it where the deep scarring and mostly undamaged skin met, hypersensitive and raw. The sound of it meeting his skin was like a snap, and it was the hardest yet. The sensation rippled out, reminding his body of the twenty-nine other smacks it'd gotten. It sent his head spinning with a mix of pain, pleasure, and relief. “*Fucking ahh*— hah, thirty,” Knox finished, and he visibly relaxed as he heard Damien set down the crop on the table. Damien unhooked his bindings from the rope, guiding his arms in front of him, as Knox was allowed to drop heavily to his knees. His shoulders popped as his arms were brought down. The plug still in him jostled just large enough to brush against the spot in him, and he swallowed a moan. His legs and ass *hurt*, and he wondered how red his skin had turned. He wasn't bleeding at least. His ears picked up the sound of pants unzipping, and he tipped his head up, ready.

Damien fucked his mouth with an urgency he hadn't experienced yet and came soon after. *Sadist and a masochist*, Knox thought dimly, swallowing despite his grimace at the taste. His master pulled him to his feet, over to the bed, and bent him over. Knox closed his eyes, part of him hoped he'd get to cum too, but this was a punishment. Damien continued though. He gripped the base of the plug, rocking it back and forth until Knox was rocking back too, moans dripping from his mouth. Then, he stopped just as Knox's voice pitched, and Knox shuddered, frustrated, and exhausted. Damien shushed him, much to his ire, but the next moment his bindings were undone and the plug removed. His master pulled him fully up onto the bed, and Knox assumed that was it.

“Oh, one last thing for your punishment,” Damien said. Knox opened his mouth to say something, maybe along the lines of ‘ain't ya bein' a bit excessive,’ but he shut it. “Pain isn't a good punishment for you, even extended, but I think I know what is.” He rose from the bed, adjusted his outfit, making sure his pants were buttoned, and then... he left, shutting the door behind him.

Knox gaped at the closed door. He just— He left. Knox waited for just long enough for his own unsated arousal to nag at him a little too much, and he realized that... he'd gotten used to his master staying after sex. Damien had just *left*. The lack of attention did something the cropping hadn't: it gave him a bit of perspective.

He curled up in the middle of the bed, biting the side of his palm hard to flag his erection and calm his body down to focus on the sharp, very *not* good pain in his hand. Damien would be back. Probably. He wrapped his arms around himself. He hadn't heard the door lock. He probably could leave, but he... fuck him, he wanted to be ‘good.’ Take his punishment so he could move on. Damien had trapped him without actually locking the door, putting him in a cage. Smarmy *bastard*.

Knox would just have to be more careful next time.

Damien Interlude 3

Chapter Summary

Damien seeks out cuddles, Knox isn't sulking, and Cory and Jack are having a great night.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Damien walked down the hallway far enough that Knox wouldn't hear him stop, lean against the wall, and take a breath. He pressed his hands against the wall to prevent them from shaking. Damien didn't enjoy leaving after play in general, but he knew this was the actual punishment. Knox had to learn. Damien kept his house in order, and while he adored the wild spirit, it had to be tempered... Especially if he was to take Knox to social functions.

Still, he had a feeling it wasn't entirely Knox's fault. Sighing, Damien pushed up and headed down the hallway, knocking on Jack's door. He heard scuffling and scrambling, and Damien had crossed his arms by the time the door opened.

"Damien! Uh, hi, um. Sorry for that wait," Jack said, rubbing the back of his neck. Damien saw Cory peek out from behind Jack, and he sighed.

"Do you want to watch a movie?" he asked. That took *both* of them by surprise.

"Right now?"

"Yeah."

The movie den was Damien's favorite room in the house. Draped in cool colored fabrics with only the comfiest of low couches, it was usually also the *quietest* room in the house. Along one wall were shelves upon shelves of movies, as many as Damien could get his hands on. They were sorted alphabetically and by genre, and Jack was not allowed to touch most of them, except for his shelf of movies on the bottom. Jack loved big, flashy, loud movies like superhero blockbusters and off-the-wall comedies, and Damien's collection had grown around that shelf. Damien thought the system was fair since Jack didn't want him touching any of his game systems. They kept their own hobbies neat.

Damien picked one of his favorite movies, a classic comedy-mystery, something that wouldn't bore Jack or Cory, and Damien could enjoy as well. Jack flung himself onto the couch, immediately snuggling up with his favorite fuzzy blanket and pulling Cory onto him. Damien rounded the couch, smiling slightly at the two of them before he settled next to Cory, tugging gently at the boy's arm to nestle him neatly between them. Better. Damien

wrapped one arm around Cory and settled himself in. Cory let out a small squeak of surprise, but he soon relaxed. Jack pressed closer on his side, and once everyone was in their place, Damien started the movie.

“Hey Damien?” Jack asked. It was a little past the second act. Cory’s head was sleepily tucked up into the crook of Jack’s neck, and Damien had shifted to partially spoon the slave.

“Mm? Yeah?” He stretched, readjusting slightly, and Cory stirred before nuzzling back in.

“I... I’ve been meaning to tell you somethin’. I’ve been doing a lot of thinking, lots of it, and um, let’s see, how do I...” Damien had never seen Jack so nervous, or choosing his words so carefully before.

“Take your time,” he said with gentle encouragement, but that seemed to only make Jack more nervous.

“I’m...” Then, Jack shook his head, sighing. “I want to switch my major.”

“Then go ahead! You don’t need my permission.”

“I *know*, but... I want you to... like it and support me! You know! Like you always do? I’m just... nervous I’ll say somethin’ that will make you *not*.” Jack bit his lip, and Damien got the distinct feeling this *wasn’t* what Jack had wanted to tell him. Damien wasn’t going to push him if Jack didn’t want to talk. He reached over to ruffle his brother’s hair.

“You know I always support you. I might be hard on you sometimes, but you can get... distracted easily. If you’ve found something that really strikes your passion in a way that physics doesn’t, I’m happy. What’re you thinking?”

“Fashion! Um, fashion design, specifically,” Jack said, and the way he perked up brought a smile to Damien’s face.

“...I suppose that’s where Cory’s been getting all his outfits from?” Damien asked, running his hand over the soft blue-striped pj pants Cory was wearing (which paired well with his pastel shirt with sleepy chickens stitched on it). Only Jack and Cory would be in pajamas at 4 pm. Jack flushed, and Damien laughed, sitting up. “I’m glad to hear you’re being productive.” He paused before adding, “You can tell me anything, Jack. We’re family.” Jack nodded, snuggling close to Cory. “Now, do you want me to skip back to see what we missed in the movie?”

“Yeah! Sure,” Jack said. He pressed a kiss to Cory’s cheek. “What about you?”

“S’fun movie,” said Cory. He looked to be *quite* happy with where he was. Damien was feeling much better as well, more grounded and less... well, like a domineering asshole who didn’t do aftercare. He skipped back a few minutes in the movie and let it play on.

Afterwards, they settled down for dinner. Damien had already decided he’d bring Knox up his portion after. A couple hours of inattention would be enough. It was a light punishment

after all, and Damien wanted to be fair. Jack sat next to him today, Cory on a pillow to his left, and Damien in his usual place at the head of the table. Before Kinsley could serve the dinner, Jack's eyes went wide, grinning like the cat that ate the canary. Damien raised an eyebrow, and then Jack couldn't keep his mouth shut.

"You have a *hicky* ! Ha! I didn't see it in the dark of the movie-room. *Daaaaamn* , is that from Knox? He got you *gooooooooood* ," he said gleefully. Damien's face turned beet red, and it took most of his self control not to bolt to the nearest mirror. He rose carefully and walked over to a mirror hanging between the two china hutches. The bite Knox had given him was *dark* , with fairly noticeable teeth marks as well. *Fuck* . He tried not to think about the hot flash of arousal he felt at that, and instead focused on how he had a *work* event tomorrow and how the *fuck* he was going to cover that. Turning back, he sat down at the table without another word, doing his best to focus on the food (a pork roast with herb vegetables and potatoes). Jack continued to tease him, and he worked out his feelings by how hard he stuck the meat with his fork.

Knox *did* get him good. Damien hoped it wouldn't make the slave too insufferable when he saw it.

After dinner, Damien reminded Jack to let Cory have some evening freetime since he did a good job during the movie. He took Knox's plate from the kitchen, kept warm in the oven, up on a tray. On the way, he stopped suddenly as the grandfather clock in the hall, having been silent and broken for months now, chimed the hour and nearly scared the tray out of his hands. Ava must've gotten around to fixing it. Good! Well... he certainly hadn't missed how *loud* it was.

He stopped outside his bedroom door, pausing to listen in case Knox was up to anything before he entered. "Alright then pet, punishment is over!~"

Knox was not sulking. If he was sulking, then he'd have to acknowledge that Damien had gotten to him. He didn't move from his position for a while, curled up on the bed. He had no idea how long Damien was going to be gone, if there was going to be more, or if he was even going to get dinner tonight. His ass and thighs stung, but his shoulders ached twice over. Knox didn't feel like moving, not after realizing how he was trapped without being physically trapped. Instead, he sat up, pulling a blanket over and wrapping himself into a little cocoon, staring off at the door. He had the privilege of blankets here, and he might as well use them.

It wasn't what he needed, but as he pulled them tighter around him, they brought some comfort. Untethered, he was left to grapple with his thoughts, despite how desperately he wanted to avoid them. He'd had much worse punishments than this. Hell, living day to day before George had drugged him was a nightmare of isolation and silence. Damien's... His new master seemed to be good at reading people, which was unfortunate for Knox. He knew

it was futile to try and come out on top, and whatever victories he got were, in the end, worthless. At the end of the day, he was a pet, a slave, still in a gilded cage.

Despite all this, and he didn't know *why*, but when Damien praised him, part of him perked up. Not like when Rosie used to, which always felt patronizing. He'd filled some... pseudo-son role for her alongside his other duties, so it always felt like she wasn't actually praising him but some imaginary boy in her head. Fuck, he didn't *want* to feel like he owed his master anything, even if Damien gave him the bare minimum (like food), and hadn't drugged him (yet). As soon as he became... well... *like Cory* (his thoughts supplied), he'd lost. Maybe George had *planted* these feelings in him while he was drugged. Could he do that?

As the minutes stretched, he noticed there was no clock in the room. But he could tell by the light from the window that it was starting to get later in the evening, and he was starting to get antsy. He wanted to throw on some soft pj pants and sleep. He also wanted to sneak out, climb out the window, and sit on the roof. He wanted to talk to somebody. He... wanted to cry a little. He couldn't do any of those things. Fear of the tracking collar and that Damien could be back at any moment kept him where he was. The boredom and anxiety wrestling around made him fidget, pulling at loose threads on the blanket.

He jumped to attention when he heard his master's voice. "Alright then pet, punishment is over!" Damien said, sweeping into the room with a tray of food. Knox shook his head slightly to free it from the blanket cocoon. He hesitated, watching Damien cross to the table. "Come on then. We still gotta get some weight on you."

He didn't *understand*.

"...I'm sorry, sir," Knox said quietly. Damien raised his eyebrows in surprise. "I shouldn't have jumped t' conclusions. I know that I won't ever—" Be free. "Work it off. Not with how much was there in the first place, and how much you've already paid to care for me."

"...Well! I'm glad you've come to that conclusion. *But*, you're mistaken once again. Come here, sweet," Damien ordered, beckoning. Knox sank into his cocoon, but... he wasn't about to get another punishment. He slid off the bed, still swaddled in his blanket (Damien would have to rip that off him if he wanted that gone), and slowly walked over to the table. Damien reached out to grip his chin, before more gently running his fingers down to the collar, and to Knox's chest. "I'm not nickel an' diming you. That would be ridiculous."

"Bullshi—" Knox swallowed before choosing his words more carefully. "If ya don't mind me sayin' so, Sir, that's *not* how it works."

"It's how it works here. Mostly because I can't be bothered to itemize like that, and nobody can do math around here. Well, Jack can, I suppose, but he doesn't have the focus to be an accountant." Knox blinked.

"Wait you... seriously don't... have an accountant? Sir?" He made an obvious gesture at the wealth around him.

"I just hire somebody around tax season, and the company's got its own accountant. Quin does a good enough job doing the budget," Damien said, waving dismissively. "Eat your

dinner; it's getting cold." Knox was *almost* speechless, even more so when Damien pulled the chair out for him to sit in before he moved to the wardrobe. He was nervous about eating—he always was these days—but Damien was watching him, and he'd said Knox had taken his punishment well and that it was *over* — Before he knew it, he'd devoured the absolutely delicious casserole.

"...I could do it, Sir."

Damien looked over from examining two different colored shirts. "What?"

"...Math. It'll give me somethin' to do while you're away at least, since you don't want me doin' chores. Sir."

Damien looked guilty at that, then a bit skeptical. " *You* do math? You said you weren't trained." Knox hadn't expected that Damien would be interested enough to ask. That was more interest than anyone else who'd owned him had ever shown. This might be his chance to raise his value beyond just a damaged sex slave.

"....I went to school for a while. Before I was a slave." He'd had a life. He'd thrown it away. But his master didn't need to know about that. "Math was my best subject. I covered some foremen for extra food when they fucked up their quotas."

"Really. I'll think about it. *If* you're good. Something to work towards!" Oh boy, he'll have to 'work towards' a new chore. Never mind that he *wanted* to do something more in the house than meaningless sex. Damien just had to say it in such a way to get under his *skin* . But Knox was... somewhat shocked he'd gotten away with bringing it up at all, *and* that Damien said he'd consider it. It might be a lie to get him to behave, but it was a chance.

His master laid out an outfit on a chair, stepping back. "Mm, that looks nice enough. I'm bringing you out tomorrow. I want you looking nice, so you're going to take a shower tonight and clean up."

"...Understood, sir. May I ask what we're doing?"

"I'm heading to a little private event, hopefully the last before my vacation, so I thought I'd show you off." He ran his fingers through Knox's curls. "I want to do your makeup too, so no sleeping in!" Knox didn't really notice himself leaning into the touch; he was already dreading tomorrow. Shown off. At least by now he was pretty sure that Damien wouldn't drug him to make a public appearance like George would.

But he wasn't sure that Damien wouldn't be looking for a chance to catch him fucking up to hand out another punishment.

Thank you all so much for 10k views!!! I'm so happy that people are enjoying this little story I've started. It was a bit of a leap for me to publish this, so I'm super grateful for all the support it's gotten! ^u^ There's so many twists, turns, and dramas ahead for y'all to enjoy, and I can't wait to share.

Outing

Chapter Summary

Knox braces himself for a very long day, Damien has many meetings and secret plans, and some friendly faces enter the picture.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

The morning was a blur. Showered and fed, Damien sat Knox down in front of a vanity. Bright light on his face made him squint, and Damien tsked, setting out the supplies he needed. “Don’t squint, and keep your face calm. This shouldn’t take too long; I’m not doing anything particularly fancy, but your eyeliner is going to be on *point* .” Knox did his best, and he had the odd sense that he was used to sitting for makeup like this.

George must’ve gotten him fancied up for parties. He must’ve been drugged. Damien gripped his face, and Knox sucked in a breath, meeting his master's intense gaze. “...Do you often do makeup, Sir?” he asked, trying to distract himself from the swirl of panic which rose in his throat. Half shadows of memories tore at his attention. Sitting in too-bright light as a waspish person poked and prodded at him. George’s iron voice, unforgiving, as he forced Knox to drink more so he’d sit better for events. Damien was quiet for a moment, finishing Knox’s eyeliner before answering.

“Yeah. I don’t often get the chance these days—long hours—but I like playing around with it. I’m on PR lists for companies in exchange for better supply on some of my company’s products, so I get all the newest stuff. I used to help my mom do her makeup.” He frowned at the mention of his mother.

Knox didn’t want to stick his hand into whatever mommy-issues existed there, so he asked, “Don’t you do agriculture? Why’re you on makeup PR lists?”

“My company specializes in growing ingredients *for* makeup. We used to do food crops, but I shifted focus when I took control of the company. You can see that I’m growing lavender in the test fields outside. The warm climate here is perfect for many plants that will eventually be distilled into oils, and companies that want to go with natural ingredients instead of artificial come to me.” Knox hadn’t actually anticipated Damien’s agriculture business to be any more than simple foodstuffs or raw materials for clothes. He was at least creative with how he built his wealth. Well, how his slaves built his wealth *for* him, working in the fields for however long his family had been doing this. His hands clenched on his knees, and he took a breath as Damien blushed his cheeks.

Another question to distract himself. “What’s today going to be like?”

“Mm, I need to go to a board meeting, but then I’m getting coffee at another meeting—though that one’s more casual—and then we’ll finish up the day with a dinner party.” That was... a lot, and Damien must’ve seen it on his face. “I know you’ll do great. I have some plans to keep you occupied as well.”

“Is that supposed to make me feel better, sir?” Knox said dryly, and Damien laughed, applying just a touch of color to his cheeks.

“I’m sure you’ll have fun.” His master grinned deviously. “I know that if you *aren’t* good, you really won’t be sitting still in a seat.” Knox shifted, flushing as he felt how sore he was from yesterday. No, he’d... he’d like to be able to skip on punishments multiple days in a row. “There,” Damien said, sitting back and looking proud. “Have a look at yourself, pet.”

Knox turned to look at himself in the mirror and was stunned. Fuck, he really prettied up, didn’t he? Damien had highlighted his features in the most flattering way possible, drawing attention to his eyes, darkening a couple freckles to make them stand out, highlighting his angular features and softening other edges. His... master actually knew what he was doing, and despite himself, Knox was impressed. If people were too busy staring at his face, they might ignore the scars showing. Damien had him in an off-the-shoulder cobalt blue top and black skinny jeans, which shimmered when he moved. His collar was snug against his neck, a simple black with a little lock on it to disguise the tracker. Damien had chosen sapphire earrings for Knox to wear. Rosie had liked him with that color, too.

Damien himself was looking trim in a dark suit and red tie, and he’d given himself some fancy braids pulled along with the rest of his hair into a ponytail. He motioned for Knox to kneel on the floor, and when Knox vacated the seat, he took the chair, swiftly doing his own makeup. His was more simple, more fitting of a business heir in comparison to Knox’s pleasure slave look.

Damien paused as they were leaving to poke his head into a side room. “Jack! I’m heading out. Don’t forget to fill out the applications I got you.” Knox heard a long drawn out groan, and he almost laughed. Looking out the window, he saw Cal passing by, and since his master seemed to be pushing the issue with Jack, he scooted over to the window.

“Psst,” he whispered, and Cal jumped, almost dropping the watering can he carried before he saw Knox waving.

“Oh, Knox!” He exhaled, moving closer to the window. Knox didn’t notice how his eyes went a little wide and his breath caught. “You’re... dressed up? The master taking you out?” Cal asked nervously.

“Yeah, business meetings and stuff. Then a dinner party.” Knox glanced over his shoulder before sighing. “...I’m a little nervous. The last time I went to a party I wasn’t... me. It’s like he’s setting me up to fail, but he *says* I’ll do fine.”

“Well, if he *is* ...” Cal grumbled, distracted from whatever was bothering him by Damien’s dickery. He didn’t finish the threat, but Knox appreciated the sentiment. He looked up at

Knox with a small smile. “I rootin’ for you.”

“Thanks, Cal,” Knox said. “I think if I mess up my makeup Damien will be *very* cross. He spent so long doin’ it.” Cal opened his mouth to say something, but he heard his master call for him. “Gotta run. Good luck with the chores,” he said, grinning before returning.

He missed Cal’s quiet voice saying, “It looks nice on you.”

Despite all his reservations, Knox was excited to leave the estate. Damien had him sit in the front seat with him, and he was even allowed to roll down the windows as they sped down the highway. Knox pressed his hands against the arm of his seat, straining just a bit against his seatbelt as he leaned into the wind. It whipped fiercely around his face and his hair, and when he closed his eyes, it was almost like he was flying. He scowled as he heard his master snicker next to him, and Knox composed a neutral expression before returning to stare straight ahead.

“Aw, don’t pout. I just... I thought you were bein’ cute. I hardly ever see you smile.”

“...Do you see many slaves smile, Sir?” Knox said dryly, and Damian sighed.

“Ohhh, well, I suppose I won’t mention the old convertible I could bring out to take you out to the coast. There’s nothing like riding with the top down, and nobody else on the road.” Knox’s eyes were wide, almost *almost* caught up in the imagery. That sounded... amazing. More than he’d ever gotten. Damien brushed his fingers over Knox’s cheek, and Knox flinched back, shaking himself from the reverie.

“...If you want to, Sir,” he said, clearing his throat. Damien rolled his eyes before glancing back to the road.

“When Rosie was alive, did you ever go out?”

Knox shrugged. “Not really. Whenever they didn’t need me, they kept me under the stairs. Rosie wasn’t healthy enough to go out often. There... might’ve been one or two times, but I don’t remember.” George made sure of that after she passed. The years he’d spent with the couple had mushed together into a blur. Damien made a thoughtful noise, and Knox stifled the flash of fear.

“What’re you planning for your vacation, Sir?” he asked, desperate to change the subject.

“Oh!~ I certainly have a number of plans, some of which involve being able to give you some attention I haven’t *quite* been able to give you. Perhaps, a trip out to the coast— Jack loves it out there. You haven’t spent much time with Cory either. And I have so many movies to catch up on...” Damien continued to throw out ideas, but Knox was more concerned with what his master had in mind for that extra “attention.” Part of him hoped it’d be something... *not* sex related, but he wasn’t holding his breath. His master seemed like the insatiable type. He smiled slightly to himself. Definitely more energetic than the older Rosie and George, that’s for sure, but he wasn’t sure which he preferred.

Instead of heading to a large skyscraper in the middle of downtown or something, Damien navigated to a sprawling complex on the east side of the city. The central building was clearly the showpiece: it was almost made entirely of reflective planes of glass, a shining beacon rising between more traditional brick and mortar buildings. The whole sector felt like it'd been here for a while, and the central building was a stranger. Knox wondered if Damien had been responsible for its construction since his company had shifted gears from traditional crop agriculture, but he didn't care enough to ask.

Before leaving the car, Damien asked if Knox could *handle* keeping up with him and behaving properly, or if he would have to leash him.

Knox held back a scoff. "Don't worry, Sir. If I was going to cause trouble, I'd choose a more dramatic place than a building full of stiffies." Luckily, Damien laughed and decided not to leash him. Knox was relieved he was able to limit how degrading this felt.

That said, it was hard to keep up with much grace. They headed straight into the glass building, and the showboating only continued with the spotless marbled floors and luxuriously comfortable-looking red carpets. Damien walked fast, in long strides with long legs, and Knox's limited mobility meant *his* strides at least needed to match. He felt effort in his muscles, the first sparks of pain flaring in old wounds, and once again, felt a twist in his gut at how weak he'd become. It hadn't been *easy* moving before his drugging, but he could at least move without feeling the strain of underused muscles.

Damien paused only to greet the receptionist. "Hullo Martha! How late am I?"

"Only by a few minutes, Mr. Ward. The other board members are assembled," she said crisply, pushing up sharp magenta glasses. She looked past him to Knox, lingering on the collar. Knox met her gaze, and the look she gave him almost made his hair stand on end. "I'll mark your entry, along with your property, and forward your messages for today to your phone after your meeting."

"Great, you're a doll. Keep up the good work!" Damien said, and off he went down a manicured hallway. Knox hastily moved to catch up, feeling the sharpness of Martha's glasses on his back.

His master grandly strode through an open door to a room filled with people, snapping at a spot to the right of an equally grand chair, which he took as soon as Knox knelt into his position. Knox almost snorted a laugh at the view of everyone's *knees*, but he figured he wasn't meant to be able to see anything happening. It didn't pertain to him.

"Damien! We were wondering when you'd show. At least we *know* you'll show, right gentlemen?" said one, followed by a hearty laugh from the rest of the table.

"Did that personal give you a handful this morning? I didn't take you for the type," another remarked.

“Ahh, please, let’s get the business out of the way before our chatting takes up your valuable time. Handful is the least of it.” Knox flushed, shoulders sinking. *Why do you care*, he thought to himself.

Knox immediately tuned out of the meeting as it proceeded with very dull conversations about crop results, labor costs, and various other budget-related concerns for the fall harvest. He did his best to stay awake, but his slowly slumping posture betrayed his dozing. He was brought to alert however, when he felt Damien’s hand in his hair, tugging and playing with his curls. Every sharp pull was after some bad news, or when someone made a suggestion that Damien didn’t enjoy, and the more gentle touches were when the meeting seemed to go well. The contact, however, grounded Knox in a way he hadn’t *quite* experienced. For just this moment, he felt calm, reassured that he was doing everything he was supposed to, and that he was allowed to drift in his thoughts. Fuck— Wait, he *shouldn’t* feel reassured. He *wasn’t* trained. No... no matter what, no matter *what* had happened to him during those two years. He bit back a gasp from a particularly hard tug, feeling a blush start to bloom across his cheeks.

Suddenly, everyone was standing, shaking hands, and the conversational tone had turned a bit more jovial. He was tugged up to his feet after a moment. He felt his body creak like an old door, and he nervously glanced around the room. Damien’s smile at him was enough to resolve *most* of his anxieties, at least for now. Before his master could speak, a broad shouldered man in a blue suit strode up, squeezing past a few chairs.

“Damien! I wanted to catch you for a few moments. You remember our little conversation the other day about that proposition I had for you?”

“Oh, yes, Michael. I’m sorry I haven’t given it much thought! I’ve had a lot on my plate lately.”

“Yes, yes, but I heard you’re taking a small vacation, so I thought I might bring it up again...” He seemed to notice Knox for the first time. “Now who is *this*? Damien, I thought you already had a personal? Don’t tell me you sold that adorable blonde.” Damien seemed to be trying very hard to be polite.

“No, Cory is Jack’s really, as I explained before. This is Knox. I bought him fairly recently from old George. You know him—George Franklem? Had this little gem all to himself. Said he was untrainable, and complained *all night* to me about him, sooo... I thought I’d appreciate his beauty a bit more than that old codger.” Michael swept his gaze up and down Knox as if evaluating him for a second time. Knox kept his expression impassive, as much as he wanted to sneer and act out. Did this ‘proposal’ involve doing something with Cory?

Was the ‘dinner party’ actually going to be just... him getting passed around?

“Ah yes, George. Well... I can see why. I imagine those scars are a bit more extensive than they seem, hm? I never saw the appeal of damaged slaves, but I imagine that if you ever sell him you’ll make a tasty bit of profit.” Knox clenched his jaw, tugging at his sleeve, and looking down so he wouldn’t glare. “*If* you can train him,” Michael laughed, continuing, “You know you’re welcome to make a little purchase at my side business if you’re ever having trouble.”

“I’ll... keep that in mind, thank you. This has been *delightful* but—”

“Oh, yes! I don’t want to hold you up. However, I do look forward to chatting with you about that proposal at the dinner party tonight.” With that, they shook hands, and Michael departed. Damien’s shoulders relaxed, and he hooked two fingers under Knox’s collar, tugging him forward as he strode out of the meeting room. Knox winced despite himself, awkwardly favoring his sore leg at the sudden movement.

“Keep up. I don’t want to be late to this,” Damien said, tone short and clipped, and Knox cursed Michael under his breath for making his master irritable. He had to push himself even harder in order to keep up as Damien swept down the hallway and out onto the courtyard. He lagged behind just as Damien reached the car, and his master looked back. “Don’t think I didn’t catch that,” he said. “Get in the car.”

Knox winced as he swung into the seat. His leg *hurt* in a way it hadn’t in a long time. He rubbed small circles (the only thing he knew might help) and looked out the windshield with unfocused eyes. Damien looked over at him, irritated, but then... his expression softened.

“Ugh, right. Here.” He opened up the console in between them and pulled out a small bottle, offering it to Knox.

Knox immediately froze. “...I’m sorry, sir. I don’t know what I did but—”

“I’m not— I’m not *upset* with you. I just didn’t think Michael would be at the party later, and I really have been trying to let him down gracefully. He irritates me. He’s a slug trying to climb the ladder, but I shouldn’t take my frustration out on you.” Damien tilted the bottle. “You’re hurting. They’re pain drugs. Shouldn’t interfere with your therapy, I checked. Just take two.” Knox’s brow furrowed more, but he took the bottle before Damien could brandish it at him more. He turned it over in his hands, squinting at the label. He didn’t read *well*, but he needed to be sure.

Damen didn’t wait. He put the car in gear, roaring off to their next destination. Knox took a breath before shaking out two of the pain pills. They *were* pain pills, according to the bottle, with instructions and warnings and everything. He still had a big day ahead of him, and he didn’t mind dry-swallowing them.

“So... that Michael guy bothers you a lot at work?” he asked, trying to avoid the silence.

“I brought Cory to a party once, and he has a thing for blondes. He’s been dying to have a go with him ever since. You’ve... met Cory,” Damien’s tone wasn’t what Knox expected. He expected it to be patronizing, or for Damien to talk down when discussing Cory. But Damien said *met Cory* in a quiet way that you’d talk to a small animal: one that was fragile, precious, and needing somebody to look after them. It was a level of care that Knox hadn’t... expected towards a pleasure slave who wasn’t a wreck like himself. “I’m sure he’d be fine with it, but I really don’t want to lend him out, especially to somebody like Michael.” Knox found himself discovering just a molecule of respect for Damien. “I can’t outright turn him down, as he invests quite heavily in the company and has some sway. I’ve been fighting to prove I’m not my father, so every board member’s support is needed... at least until I’ve bought back the shares from them under their noses.”

“So, if you piss him off, then that’ll just make everythin’ harder,” Knox said. “How long do ya think you’ll be able to delay him?”

Damien huffed, turning down a tree lined street. “Probably not much longer.” He glanced over. “I was hoping he’d get hung up on *you* . I’d have a whole *list* of excuses then.”

“I’m so touched, Sir, that you think so highly of my excuse potential,” Knox said dryly, which got a laugh out of his master.

“Alright smartass,” he said, with almost a *hint* of affection, and Knox’s shoulders relaxed as Damien’s foul mood cleared. The pain in his leg was starting to fade too.

Knox had only been in a coffee shop once, and it hadn’t been for very long. They’d kicked him out as soon as they figured he wasn’t going to buy anything. The one Damien led him to was a corner shop with a garden space. It looked to have been an old shop of some kind with a curved facade painted light pink and large windows. Knox didn’t get a chance to see too much of the inside, because his master led him straight over to the garden, which was separated from the sidewalk by a trellis with an ambitious wisteria clambering all over it. The light scent of the pale purple flowers mingled with the scent of fresh baked bread and coffee in the area. Knox felt pull at his heartstrings. He wouldn’t mind coming here if he was a free person. At a round table with wicker chairs that were all different, a small group of people were huddled. They waved and called out to his master when he came into view.

“Hey all! Did I keep you waiting long?” Knox swiftly gathered that Damien was distinctly more pleased to be meeting with these people, and he was directed to kneel on a small cushion next to the table.

“Not at all! You ready to get brainstorming?” a woman asked, and Damien beamed.

“Absolutely, but first I need my coffee.” Damien waved down a server and ordered a coffee—something fancy from the sound of it, but Knox couldn’t tell. He also ordered “*the pastry of the day*,” whatever that was.

The group of people that Damien was meeting with this time were distinctly more colorful than the board room. There were three of them, one woman and two men, dressed in rainbow. She had a peacock green blouse and black skirt with a dramatic feather and flower hairpin in her short blue hair. Her name, Knox learned, was Erika. David was the man on the left, dressed in a trim baby blue dress shirt with a zig-zag pattern shaved on the right side of his hair, the other half kept long and dyed white. The last was Wesley, sporting a mid length curly brown hair pinned up in the back, and he wore an off the shoulder floral patterned blouse, with tiny yellow duck earrings.

“So, I believe last meeting we discussed finances and names. You should’ve received the paperwork,” Damien said, leaning back.

“Sure did! We got that all filled out and submitted,” Wesley said, taking a long sip of his coffee. “I think, at least. Nobody at the office said anything was wrong with it, so we should be all established.”

“ *Excellent* . Now, in regards to brainstorming, are we brainstorming venues or scripts?” Knox’s attention was a little more focused on this conversation, as the four quickly dove into a conversation involving details and ideas around... a theater production. Or a film production? He wasn’t sure, but he was even more surprised when Damien gently bumped a plate against Knox’s head.

“Enjoy, Firecracker. This’ll have to carry you until the dinner party,” he said quietly, and Knox accepted the plate. He almost gasped when he saw the cinnamon roll the size of both his fists existing on it. This was for him? Not splitting it with Damien like usual? He glanced up, but Damien was already back to excitedly chatting with the others. Knox swallowed, taking the small fork that was dwarfed by the pastry and dug in. He was able to set the pace for himself, unlike when Damien fed him, but he didn’t feel the gut-twisting anxiety with this food. A restaurant wouldn’t drug its customers, so this food was *safe* . And delicious. He melted just a bit against his master’s leg, happily taking his time to enjoy the roll. He’d forgotten how much he *loved* these. His mother used to make them as a treat, when they had the money, and he was filled with a warm glow.

His mood wasn’t even ruined when Damien’s hand met his hair again, pulling and toying with his curls. “Okay, I think... that should be enough for you all to get started. Let me know if you need any more funds.”

“Will do! This is *definitely* enough,” Erika said with almost a purr. “I’ll get to work on a writer’s group. We should have some results for you next month.”

“That’s what I like to hear!” Damien said, crossing his legs.

Wesley sighed. “I don’t know what we would’ve done if you hadn’t come along, D. You’ve been a real miracle worker. And bank.”

“Oh it’s really no trouble. Let’s save the praises until we have our first show, eh?” The table laughed, and it seemed like things were moving right along. Knox had no idea how long they’d been there for, and he carefully slid the plate back onto the table. The mood shifted, and Knox wasn’t entirely sure how.

“So... you got another one?” Erika asked, testily.

“I don’t need your judgment, Erika. It’s my money.”

“You *know* that—”

“I know enough that if I hadn’t, he would’ve died. This is much better for him.” Knox sat up a bit straighter. They were talking about him now. Fuck, he should’ve held onto the plate and been invisible. He didn’t want another examination like Michael gave him. *He would’ve died* .

There... was a distinct possibility of that. George easily could’ve done it, or even killed him by accident with the drugs. And Knox would’ve been completely unaware. There was a small part of him that thought maybe it would’ve been better than this. He would’ve just—

Stopped.

“Knox, up!” came an order, and Knox for a second *almost* , almost wanted to backtalk. He rose though, as slow as he could.

“...Oh you poor dear,” David breathed, and Knox instinctively leveled a glare at him. His master noticed, swatting his ass.

“Knox.” The warning was *clear* . These people were clearly close to Damien, and his master didn’t want him being rude to them. Well, fuck that.

“Don’t need your pity,” he said, tone on the edge of a growl. “So mind your own damn business.” He turned his head away. “...Sorry, Sir,” he added, as if that would make his transgression better. Damien opened his mouth, but David raised his hand.

“No, Damien, please, it’s okay.” Knox caught David turning to him out of the corner of his eye, and he braced himself. “I’m sorry. We don’t know your story. I didn’t mean to offend. You’re obviously capable and a survivor.” Knox felt vaguely patronized, but also a free person was apologizing to *him* . Damien didn’t look pleased, but it seemed like he was going to let it slide, brushing a hand against Knox’s leg. He felt like he should do something, or say something, but he didn’t have any words so he just roughly... nodded in acknowledgement.

Erika clucked her tongue and sighed. “It’s all a mess. I know you don’t agree with me on many of these issues but... just *think* a little bit harder about the bigger picture?” she said, leaning forward.

“I *am* a big picture thinker. In any case, everyone, this is Knox. My new personal. You’ll probably be seeing him a bit more when we get started with the actual work, but I thought I might bring him out. He’s fiery, but I like him. And I enjoy his company so far.” Knox felt his cheeks heating in a blush, and he bit the inside of his cheek. All their eyes were on him now, and he really wasn’t in the mood for attention. At least he had Damien’s admission that he enjoyed having Knox. So far.

They talked for a few more minutes and then Damien rose, leaving Knox momentarily to go and pay. He wasn’t entirely sure what to do, but he knew better than to walk off even if it was just to explore or return to the car. Erika entered his vision, and he met her gaze.

“He didn’t do any of that,” she said, glancing at the edges of his burn scars. “Did he?”

“No, ma’am, those are... old.” He glanced towards the building. He had a feeling she wouldn’t report him to Damien if he mouthed off, but she hadn’t done anything other than have a status he couldn’t and wouldn’t have. “He’s not been bad to me. Better than the others I’ve had.” He kept his words clipped. She exhaled.

“Good, I’d hoped not to toss him on his ass. There’s... well, that’s the main reason we haven’t been able to get too much funding.”

“If I can ask, what’re you doin’?” Knox asked.

“We’re a theater troupe! Well, aspiring. We want to do televised theater, but you can’t just walk into a studio and do that.” She glanced back at Wesley and David, smiling fondly.

“Damien came to one of our shows. Well, he was... the only one to come— or at least stay all the way through. We’ve shaped up since then, but he’s been funding us to buy up our own space and start getting scripts.” He knew Damien was a movie fan, but... he hadn’t expected he would be into theater too, enough to finance an unknown group.

“Oh... cool,” Knox said, “I’ve never... seen a theater.” Even before he was a slave. theater wasn’t something that his family could just ‘go see’ in their small town. There wasn’t much interest in stuff like that. “Or show.”

“Hey! You know, I bet when we do our rehearsals, Damien will want to have a look! I bet he’ll take you if you ask. We’d be happy to have another member to our audience,” Wesley said, leaning on Erika.

Knox blinked. “I... might,” he answered noncommittally. He was unnerved by how they spoke to him. Like he was a person who might... have a choice. Who might want things. Like he was a person. He didn’t know how to feel about it, so he chose to bury whatever those feelings were. Damien returned in the conversation lull, and Knox scooted to his master’s side.

“I’ll see you all next month! Good luck— or rather break a leg. Send me an email if any trouble pops up,” Damien said, waving off his theater friends, before he motioned for Knox to follow him back to the car. It was getting late in the afternoon. Knox was surprised that both meetings had taken up so much time. Still though, he appreciated being out of the house, even if it was just to sit in on meetings. He hadn’t been asked to service his master, and all he’d really done was let his hair be pet and look pretty.

If that’s all Damien wanted when he took Knox out, frankly, Knox was absolutely *fine* with that. Alas, when they got into the car, Damien turned to him and what he said ruined his day a bit. “Alright then, Firecracker, we have some time before the dinner party, and it’s going to be a delight. I promise not to tease you *too* much.”

Chapter End Notes

Happy Long Update! We are not 100% settled, but my editor and I should be getting y'all more regular updates. Please enjoy! I appreciate the patience, and thank you for reading as always. I read every comment even if I don't reply :)

Party

Chapter Summary

Knox attends a party, Damien plays a game, and Knox isn't sure if he's won or not.

There were two kinds of dinner parties. The first kind were for business deals: dances of charm and wit to leverage social position and money. They were legacies of an older age with the older crowd that still controlled most of the money. The other kind were thinly veiled excuses to see who had the hottest and most well-trained slave. Sometimes the two blended into each other, depending on how much the guests drank, but apparently Damien had taken one look at the guest list and guessed that it would be the latter.

As such, Knox had some rules to follow. “Alright. As much as I enjoy your sharp quips, I cannot let you get away with it at the party. So, no speaking out of turn, follow my orders *quickly*, and stick close to me. I have some fun plans,” Damien said, trailing his right hand up and down Knox’s thigh while his left had the wheel. He’d been giving Knox these teasing touches all afternoon, nothing more, and it set Knox on *edge*.

As his master talked, a knot formed in Knox’s throat, and when there was space, he interrupted. “Sir— Are you going to... lend me out?” he asked. He tried telling himself he’d be fine. It’d be close to what the workshop was like anyway. If he kept telling himself it was okay, then he’d probably be able to stomach it when it happened.

“What? Oh no, you’re all mine,” Damien said, like it was *nothing* and it was *silly* for Knox to ask. Knox struggled not to immediately snap at him.

“But— Isn’t that... what happens? I’ve heard about these parties before.” They never happened with Rosie, or at least, never more than just some fondling or a showcase of his mouth, but with George... He wouldn’t put it past the old man to whore him out while he was so drugged out he wouldn’t remember or know how to fight.

“Sometimes. *Michael’s* certainly trying to arrange something like that, but for right now, I don’t want to share you with anyone. So, if anyone *does* try at the party, you are to tell them that they need to talk to ‘Master Damien,’ yes?” That wasn’t as comforting as Damien thought it was. It meant that when Damien tired of him, he’d be shared out. To spice it up, or whatever.

What if Damien tired of him completely? He *liked* Knox biting back, fighting him a little bit, but... what if Damien got sick of it? What if— He couldn’t go anywhere else. Nobody would buy him. He certainly wouldn’t be freed; despite what Damien said, Knox knew his debt was too large for him to work off even if his master wasn’t charging for his care. But if he became

more agreeable, more like... Cory, would Damien bore of him? *Fuck* . He wished he could get a grasp of his master.

He focused on the present. "Yes sir. I'll... try."

"You *will* ," Damien urged.

"Sorry Sir, but it's really fuckin' hard to tell a free person *no* , *I won't do that* especially in a setting where sharing is the norm. I'll try my best an' stick close, an' that's all you're gettin' from me," Knox said, strangling his tone to get it to behave.

Damien paused, mulling that over before he put the car in drive. "Good enough."

Knox sank back in his seat and fixed his gaze to the horizon. Only a bit more for this day. In vain, he wished for his own space to retreat to when he got back to the manor.

They traveled for a while, up a long windy road through wooded country. He could see the city receding behind them, lights beginning to glimmer in the purple-pinks of dusk. The cinnamon roll from earlier was still carrying him through, but Knox was starting to get antsy. Damien had been quiet the whole trip, turning on some angsty sounding rock music. At least Knox thought it was rock? There was a lot of electric guitar. He realized he hadn't listened to any music in actual years.

Knox watched the trees rushing past as he tried not to get too buried in his thoughts and nerves. A dinner party brought up vague, hazy memories for him, but remembering them was like trying to catch mist. He remembered hands, grasping, drinks being pushed into his hands, laughter, being left alone. But none of those shreds of sensation were enough for him to piece together a picture. Part of him wished that Damien would drug him, so that he wouldn't feel so anxious, or have to worry about fucking this up. He was *used* to getting used right? This is what he was for anyway, so why was his stomach turning so much?

Because it was real. Because if he embarrassed Damien here, he'd get punished. Maybe he'd get locked away, maybe he'd have his vocal cords removed, maybe— maybe he wouldn't let Knox talk to anyone but him again. The fact this was *public* , and Knox hadn't been trained in *anything* in regards to attending parties, meant that this was another case of Damien setting him up to fail. Or expecting him to know what to do because of George and Rosie. He hadn't learned nearly anything there, except for Rosie's particularities with her condition, and even then, most of that knowledge was lost in the haze that was his memory now.

Knox didn't have much more time to ruminate, as they pulled up to a *mansion* . It was even grander than Damien's estate, and Knox's eyes were wide as he got out of the car. He steeled his expression and stuck close to Damien as a valet came to move his master's car, and they were greeted by a large woman. She was several inches taller than Damien, and her rich plum dress was decorated in extravagant gold lace.

"Damien Ward! I missed you so at my last party. They aren't as lively without you." She leaned down to his master, and they did this... air kiss thing on either side of their faces.

“Lady Everinne, I’m sorry I couldn’t attend. I had a number of things on my mind, many late nights working, and new projects,” his master responded crisply. Lady Everinne looked over to Knox like a lioness.

“Training a new personal? He looks like a fish out of water! Ha! What a delight.” She laughed, placing a delicate hand on her chest before motioning. “Come on then, dinner’s just about ready, and then we can get to the conversation and fun ~”

“I can’t wait,” Damien said, striding after, and Knox did his best to keep up. It was easier, now that the pain drugs had smoothed his aches. “Oh but,” Damien said then, glancing back at Knox. “Do you mind if I wash up for a moment?”

“Not at all! Bathroom is on the right.”

“Fantastic.”

Knox had a gut feeling that Damien didn’t actually need to ‘wash up,’ and he was right. His master pulled him into the bathroom after him and pushed him up against the sink. Knox felt his master against the back of his legs.

“I’m hoping this will keep you too occupied to mouth off, and I’m sure that it’ll be fun,” Damien said, and Knox heard the cap of a bottle.

“Fun for you or me this time, Sir?” he replied dryly, and Damien laughed.

“If you’re good, maybe a bit of both.”

And that is how Knox ended up in a room of very rich people with a vibrator up his ass, already having to restrain himself from glaring daggers at his master. The bastard looked so smug as he took a long sip of his wine. It was only a matter of time before he started playing with the remote he’d made *sure* Knox saw him put into his pocket. Easily accessed.

Damien’s only distress was Michael, who arrived late and seemed to exert every effort to try to sit next to Lady Everinne or Damien. He was only distracted when some pretty slaves emerged to catch him up to speed with the meal, and Damien tensed every time the man looked over to him.

Knox was put in a line with the other slaves along the left wall which was lined in rich green velvet drapes, ready to refill drinks when needed. The fabric was so voluminous Knox was certain he could get swallowed up if he wasn’t careful. Glancing at his fellows, he was reassured by the general expression of resentment disguised by blank eyes and clenched jaws. There were four of them, a small grouping, and they were split down the middle between men and women. The actual guests of the party numbered eleven, and several were already going heavy on the wine. One slim slave, a woman with hair braided into loops, was having to refill her master’s drink every few minutes. Damien seemed content to nurse his drink, and Knox could *not* relax. Every shift he made kneeling made him more aware of the vibe pressed up against his spot.

The dinner conversation wasn't interesting. Gossip about the old families and whatever celebrities were getting up to. Knox didn't miss Damien's look of veiled boredom as he charmed his way through the evening. He was much more lively with the theater people, and Knox shoved away the small amount of respect that poked its head up. Damien still owned slaves, owned *him* , so he was no better than any of these people.

Besides, Knox found him about as insufferable as this lot. If he lied a little bit to himself.

When Damien lifted his glass with the last dredges of his wine, Knox rose to bring the bottle over. As soon as he picked up the bottle, the vibrator started up and he straightened, swallowing hard. *Fucker* . He turned on his heel, biting the inside of his cheek to keep from making any sound as he carefully walked around the table. Damien *had* to sit in the middle, so he was the *farthest* possible walk for Knox. He took it step by step, but even with this little stimulation, with the punishment of last night and unfulfilled arousal, his body was making it *very difficult* . His pants, already tight, lost the last bit of room they might've had, and he felt the eyes of the other slaves on him. He desperately hoped that it was too dim in the room to see any bulge. *Shut* . He poured the glass of wine with surprising steadiness right up until Damien turned the vibe *up* . The jolt that went up his spine caused him to drop a couple drops of wine on the tablecloth as he tipped the bottle back up.

"Careful there," Damien said, but Knox picked up that he wasn't actually upset. He could see Damien's hand in his pocket, on the remote, and he tightened his grip on the bottle as it ticked up again in intensity. He couldn't *leave* until he was dismissed, though.

"Damein, where did you get this one? My Delilah is much better trained," commented one of the other guests. "I hope he was cheap, or you got scammed." Damien's eyes were still on Knox, amused at watching how his expression fought to keep neutral. Knox in return, turned his head just enough to hide how he flashed his teeth at his master from the other guests. The blush appearing on Damien's cheeks was more satisfying than the cinnamon roll earlier.

"I... think he's doing just fine," he said, sipping at his wine, and tapping Knox to dismiss him. Knox returned to his spot, flexing his hands on his knees as Damien continued to play with the remote. The other slaves relaxed when he returned, and while he was very distracted, the tension was noticeable. Were... they worried that he'd fuck it up for all of them if he spilled the wine? He was new. They might be sizing him up.

The evening's conversation soon grew more scandalous, but Knox was having a hard time concentrating on anything. Damien gave him moments of respite, but they only served to bring him right back up again as soon as the vibrator turned back on. He thought he was doing a rather decent job of it, but he caught a couple of the slaves' glances towards him whenever he couldn't quite bite down a choked noise. He tried not to think about what they saw of him. Then, one slave woman, Deliah, Knox pieced together, was summoned, and her owner started highlighting her features, speaking with another guest who gestured their slave over. Damien took this distraction as a chance to suddenly turn the vibrator up *significantly* , and Knox jerked forward before he could stop himself, covering up the soft moan that escaped with a cough. Before Damien could call for him— surely that was where this was leading— he was pulled into a conversation as Lady Everinne waved her hand.

“Oh I’ve been meaning to talk to you about something...” she started. Knox would’ve been grateful, except that Damien didn’t turn down the vibe. He definitely knew he’d get a punishment if he indulged or came, so Knox did his best to straighten up. He did move his hand to catch his arm in a vice grip, digging nails into his skin. The actual pain helped his mind clear enough to hold himself together. A hand, soft and light, touched his arm, and Knox flinched, flushing with shame. The slave to his right had reached out, and they appeared to be the last two kneeling here.

He was pale with braided red hair, woven with green thread. He was about as freckled as Knox was, and his outfit had been designed to expose as much of his skin as possible with only the vaguest hint of modesty. “Hey,” his voice was quiet, trying to run as an undercurrent to the louder conversation of the masters.

“...Hey,” Knox said, swallowing again, and he struggled to hold still. An apology for... his situation hung on his tongue, but he didn’t know if he *should*.

“I’m Dara.” His eyes flicked over to Everinne and Damien before coming back to Knox. “...I get it. She likes playing with me where people can watch.”

Knox flushed. “...I didn’t peg him as the type.” He side-eyed Damien, and regretted it when he caught his master’s eye. But Damien didn’t move to reprimand him. Instead, Knox felt the vibe being turned down, and he couldn’t hide how instantly he relaxed. He was still hard, humming with arousal, but he wasn’t being beaten down with the intensity. “I’ve barely been with ‘im for two weeks. An’ now he expects me to... do this.”

Dara cracked a small smile. “Mistress Everinne had me serve her at a party the day I was bought. It was her... ‘test’ to see if a slave was worth keeping. I ended up spilling an entire bottle of wine over not one, but *three* guests.”

“...You didn’t.”

“I did! An’, she kept me on. Well, I had to talk pretty fast, and it *was* my fault. I said I wouldn’t mess up again though.” He paused. “I’d say you have pretty good chances.”

“...Do I want to?” Knox muttered. “I don’t even want to be here.”

“Better here than an auction. Or worse.”

“You sound like the other folks.”

Dara shrugged. “I’m a realist.” He looked towards the table. “There are two worlds. Maybe there shouldn’t be, but there are. We’re stuck in one. We can struggle and fight to try and get to the first world or have the power of the first, but it has the power already. And they’ll use it. We can try to unify, but it’d be all or nothing. Change is slower than money.” Knox mulled that over, letting the wave of anger build.

“So what, we just... fuckin’ roll over?” he said, biting his tongue to keep his voice low.

“No. We use them to have the best life we can until the change *does* happen.”

Knox looked back to the table. "...but we're so replaceable."

"Think of the other ones at your house, people in your world." Lady Everinne motioned at Dara, and he rose smoothly with a practiced, flowing grace. "...Are they replaceable for him?"

Knox was actually glad when he felt the vibe pick up again, and Damien beckoned him over as Everinne became thoroughly distracted with Dara. He allowed himself to be pulled down into Damien's lap, and his master's thumb and finger pulled his chin to force their eyes to meet.

"So, having fun?" Damien said quietly. Knox bristled. Was he asking that to tease him about the fucking *vibrator* or was he referring to his talk with Dara? Why would Damien care that he'd be talking to a slave?

"Ya didn't say I couldn't talk at all, sir," Knox said. Damien didn't release his hold on his chin, keeping their eyes locked, and Knox couldn't admit how the vibe made him feel while keeping that eye contact. He tore his gaze away, fixing at a faded stain on the tablecloth. "...Almost couldn't handle it," he muttered.

"But you did. So good." Knox could smell the alcohol on his breath. He hadn't been drunk a bit ago, but it looked like that had changed during his conversation with Everinne.

"You gonna turn it off now? Since I did good?" Knox asked, figuring it was a good shot, but Damien's eyes narrowed. His hands felt down Knox's back, groping his ass before humming.

"Nah. I wanna play with ya when we get out of here. Which'll be soon. Texted Jack once I got tipsy that I need a pickup." *Fuck*. Knox hoped Jack wouldn't want to get in on it. Damien's hand moved around to press against his front, and Knox gasped, curling in on himself, as his master firmly rubbed at his dick through his pants. "Yooou impressed me tonight, Firecracker. You only got cheeky *once* with me."

"I'll have to step up my cheek game next time—*fffu*—" Knox bit off his curse, ignoring how his hips twitched, and how uncomfortable this was for him. Damien wasn't going to let him retreat anyway. His only solace was that everyone else was too busy to judge him for... for wanting—

"That's better," Damien said with a smirk before checking his phone. "Yes! Jack's on the way. Siblings are wonderful." He nudged Knox off, and he attracted Everinne's attention from nibbling on Dara's neck long enough for him to convey his goodbyes. Dara's eyes were half lidded, like he was... off somewhere else while his clothes were half pulled off him, a smile on his face.

"Aw... you're not staying for the fun?" she said with a little pout.

"Not really my thing, my lady. I'll send over the documents we talked about," Damien said, summoning the last of his decorum before he took Knox's arm and pulled him out of the dining room towards the front of the house.

The Reward

Chapter Summary

Knox gets his reward. Damien makes a miscalculation. Jack is promised a favor.

The night air was liberating from the heat and stuffiness of the house, and Knox felt like he could breathe again. There were no eyes on him other than his master's, and somehow, that was comforting. *Ugh*. He took the first couple steps down the stairs, but he didn't get far before the vibrator was turned up to max again. He swallowed a cry, biting hard on his lip as he crumpled against the banister, nails scratching against the stonework and flashes of white hot pleasure arcing through him.

"*Fuck*, Knox," Damien breathed, his hand now on Knox's hip, and his other tenderly, scandalously even, brushing across his cheek and tucking his hair back. "I'm going to *so* ruin you. I wonder how much I can do before Jack gets here..." The actual contact after being wound up and down for literal hours was intoxicating, and Knox found himself pressing into Damien's hands. Those hands teased him, pulling on his hair, tweaking a nipple through his shirt, and groping at his hips and ass. Damien was definitely drunk, and that made his movements clumsy and almost juvenile, hurried and horny. It would've been funny if Knox wasn't also fucking *horny* and it was harder to think than moving through molasses. He wondered if Damien would let him cum. He *better*, or Knox would gladly take a punishment.

Sooner than Damien would've liked, a slim car drove up, and Jack leaned out the window. "Daaaamiiiiieennnn, come on! I'm busy!" Damien drew away and stumbled towards the car.

"I owe you one, Jack," Damien said, depositing himself into the backseat and pulling Knox in with him. "Anything you want."

"Ooh, never mind, I'm not cross with you~!" Jack said, positively *thrilled* with this promise. He sped them home, and Damien's focus found only Knox on that ride back. A mix of exhaustion and stimulation blurred their travel, as Damien's lips found his neck and his hands roamed.

Damien's teasing only further frustrated Knox and subsequently Jack, who shouted behind him that nobody was fucking in his car but *him* (presumably with Cory, Knox thought absently as Damien boxed him in against the car door and ground his knee against Knox's boner). His master played with his hair, the vibe remote, and bit at his neck hard enough for Knox to feel his pulse in his ears, moaning breathlessly. He was too out of it to fully suppress his noises, but he still wouldn't give the bastard the satisfaction of his actual voice.

The car pulled to a halt and broke Damien from his haze. He tumbled out of the car first, and Knox blinked up at the ceiling. He should follow, but he was still caught up in the fog Damien had created. Luckily, his master leaned into his view and, flashing a grin, said “Hold on a sec, I gotta get some things ready. I’ll fetch you in a moment.”

Jack shut his door with a slam, and he hurried after his brother. “I cannot *believe* you Damien! You *have* to share with me sometime. Do you know how hard it was to drive while I was hearing his noises in the back? You couldn’t even *wait* ? ! ”

“You have Cory, relax,” Damien said, heading into the house. The vibrator turned off, and Knox, boneless, finally got a moment to breathe—let the lust-haze clear. *Fucking hell* . He wondered if Damien would remember the promise to Jack for “anything.” He’d probably ask to take Knox for a spin; he wondered what Jack was like. Knox could... he could ask Cory if he found Cory outside of Jack’s sphere. He’d said both of them were nice, but Damien was *Damien* , so Knox took that with a grain of salt.

He pulled himself out from the car, not wanting to get reprimanded for dawdling. Shutting the door, he draped his arms across the top of the small car, putting his full weight on the vehicle. The cool night breeze was, again, a blessing against his heated skin, ruffling his curls like a chorus of whispers. He hoped there weren’t any slaves still moving about in the house. It wasn’t that late, but the sun had pretty much set at this point.

Knox tried to ignore how sick he felt if he thought too hard about his current state. He was wound up like a clockwork toy, waiting for his master to let the key go. The feeling of *want* twisted in him like a house centipede, and he wished he *didn’t* . He wanted to slip into oblivion. He heard his master calling him from the house, and he peeled himself up, trudging towards the front door. On his way though, he caught movement out of the corner of his eye.

“Knox?”

Oh fuck.

Oh fuck it was Cal, and Knox wanted to crawl into a dark pit and never emerge. He must look like such a fucking *shut* in the light from the house. His hair was a rumpled mess, clothes half undone. All the subtle signs that he’d been played with. He still had a goddamn vibrator up his ass, and he couldn’t bear the only person he’d call a friend amongst the other slaves seeing him like this, especially with... what he assumed was a flushed face and hickied up neck.

“Cal! Hey, you done for the day?” Knox said, attempting to just be *casual* .

“Just putting everything away before grabbing some food.” The silence stretched a touch before Cal added, “Are you okay?”

“Fine! Well, fine enough given... Anyway, I uh... had a cinnamon roll today, so that’s pretty much the highlight.” Stupid, why would he even say that? He was nervous and fluttery, and he decided to just blame this on Damien.

“Um... that’s good!” Cal shifted his weight, placing a hand on the back of his neck. “Well, I’ll be... around tomorrow. If you want to talk. ‘Cause, uh, before I was here, I had a... similar job. So I know it’s... it can be harder than people think.” He turned his head to avoid eye contact after he spoke. Knox’s eyes widened. He’d had his suspicions after their first conversation, how Cal *got it*, but... well, that made sense.

“...Thanks, Cal. I’d... I’d like that.” He didn’t really know how to process the new jumble of feelings that piled on top of the already confusing ones. Unfortunately, Knox had apparently dawdled a bit too long, and the vibrator buzzed to life. Instantly, he clapped a hand over his mouth to strangle the sound that he made, and his legs shook.

“I— Sorry, I need to go. Master wants me,” he said, furious and ashamed and horny, and he tried to dash up the steps as best he could. He didn’t look back. He didn’t want to see Cal’s expression.

Damien wasn’t merciful, and the vibe buzzed intently with every step Knox took up the stairs to the bedroom. Knox could imagine him gleefully playing with the slider, sending the intensity up and down. He stepped inside, shutting the door a little harder than he should, but Damien could bite him. Wasn’t like there was much skin left that hadn’t already been.

“ *There* you are,” Damien said, switching off the vibe and straightening. “Over here. Pants off.” Knox didn’t bother with being obstinate. He kicked off his pants and probably-ruined underwear, and found himself swiftly bent over the bed. Damien had set up cuffs strung with a band attached to the opposite side rail of the bed, the one facing the bathroom. He was strapped in, breath hitching as his cock brushed against the edge of the bed and the lightly textured sheets. Knox twisted his head to try and watch his master, but it was tricky with his shoulders. He did see another pair of cuffs, this time with a bar, and Damien wasn’t gentle as he fastened Knox’s legs in, the bar preventing them from closing.

“Y’ better let me cum with all this trouble,” Knox muttered.

“What was that?” Damien said, leaning close. “I didn’t quite *catch* that, Firecracker.”

Knox flushed, turning his head. He wasn’t stupid enough to repeat it, and Damien seemed to be giving him an out. “Nothin’, sir, just— It’s been a long day.”

Pleased, Damien settled back, reaching for something else. “And you’ve been *quite* good, let’s see if you can continue the streak.”

Cool fingers coated in lube pushed into him, and Knox flushed at the whine he made. *Slut*. He heard a click, and the vibrator buzzed back to life. Instead of removing it, Damien used his fingers to maneuver it to the spots that made Knox’s voice raise, hips twitch and rock, and pull against his bonds. Every dip of his hips let him grind his cock against the bed, and Damien had never said anything about *not* doing that. So he chased the high, mouth hung open as the hours of play and denial and teasing crashed down around him. Damien was saying something, but it couldn’t quite pierce the cloud he was on. Then, the buzzing left him, the vibe was *out*, and he whined in relief and desperation.

Damien seemed to be at the end of his rope as well, and didn't waste time teasing him further. With one hand on Knox's back, he lined up his cock and fucked slowly into him. "Slowly" didn't last long, and the pace that his master set had Knox pulling at his binds, twisting and breathless, as his will cracked. He vaguely realized he was babbling, words broken up with gasps. He couldn't give a fuck at the moment save for one thing, which became more and more urgent with every thrust against his prostate.

"Ah-ah-ah, Sir, *sir*, please let me— Please, I can't—" He was crashing towards the orgasm whether his master wanted him to or not, and there was nothing he could really do to stop it. Then...

"*Fuck*, Knox— Go, go ahead pet. You've earned it." And with that, his vision went white as he arched, nearly screaming with relief as he came after hours and hours of teasing and denial. It was *fantastic*. No thought went through his head for once, and he didn't even feel the usual twisting guilt as he enjoyed the *hell* out of this reward. Damien was saying something again, gasping and swearing as his rhythm stuttered. He kept going, and Knox didn't come down from his high, pushed back up with every thrust. His sensitivity became almost unbearable, and he clutched at the bedsheets in an attempt to anchor himself. Damien came with a low groan, hand curling up to fist Knox's hair as he rode it out with a couple more thrusts. His hand drifted from Knox's hair, traced his spine, and found his cock, stroking it until Knox twitched and came again with a whimper like Damien had drawn the last of his energy from a hidden compartment.

"*Fuck*, I needed that," Damien sighed, pulling out. Knox shuddered, feeling cum drip from him. "Now, shall we get on to the rest of your reward?"

"...What?" Knox asked. His voice cracked.

"I mean, who *knows* when I'll be this generous again," Damien continued, and Knox bit down a hiss as his master flipped him over, pulling his arms just a *bit* uncomfortably before the rope twisted and he was able to settle his shoulders. Maybe the pain after wouldn't be as bad as when he'd had them tied above his head last punishment. "Besides, you wanted to cum right? So, let's see how much you really can."

Knox's voice went after his master worked him over *again* with just his hands. For the fourth time, Damien tied the vibe against the head of his cock as it dripped, turning it on high. The sensitivity turned painful, and he hadn't felt this trapped in his own body since he was first drugged, locked inside his skin. It was *too much*, and while he tried to croak mercy, there wasn't much he could do. Especially when Damien got his second wind. He was still handcuffed, but Damien released the strap attached to the side rail keeping him to the bed, nudging him off and onto the floor on his knees. A hand in his hair pulled him up level with his master's cock, and dutifully (for once), his mouth opened to be fucked next.

Time slipped differently. He was hyper aware of every moment: how his body drunk up the pleasure and indulged in what it still saw as a rarity; how even if it was *too much, too much*, the use of his mouth was something he could focus on, feeling good and rough, and he didn't know how to feel about that, any of this, he just knew it was *too much*. Then he was

cumming again, weakly, legs trembling and jelly like and his moan around his master's dick was enough to send Damien over. He swallowed messily, but the vibe didn't *stop*, and he wanted to *stop* now, but Damien was stepping back, away. Was he leaving? He was saying something, but Knox couldn't hear him. Breathing was hard, the floor was too close, the bed swallowing around him from behind. Louder words were said, but Knox still couldn't focus on them. They slipped around him, swallowed up by his breathing, rough, frantic.

His face was wet, and he couldn't tell if he was crying like a pathetic slut or just covered in cum and sweat. This was supposed to be a *reward*, he should be grateful— This wasn't— It couldn't— *He* couldn't. Damien was testing his limit under the guise of a carrot, and he'd found it. He fucking found it. Any composure or defense Knox had was scattered, and he could only hang on to the fear and the pain he felt.

The vibe was off.

He was damaged property, and he was acting like it, flipping out like this. Damien said he didn't break his toys, but what if— what did he do if he did? Even by accident? Fuck, *fuck*. There was no place for him here if he couldn't do this. If he couldn't—

Hands touched him, so gentle they ripped him open, and he sobbed.

“*Shit*.” That was his master. His master was cupping his face, brushing his hair out of his eyes. He had to control himself, he had to— He couldn't, he couldn't, and it only made him spiral more. His voice was hoarse, broken.

“P-please, please p... Sir, I can, I can take— I *can*, I don't kn— kn— why? I can, I can I sw— I can.”

“Shh, Firecracker, we're done. It's okay, you did well,” Damien said, softer than Knox had ever heard him speak, and he felt bile and rage coil weakly in his stomach. Fuck him. *Fuck him*, he did this! Knox hadn't asked for this, how dare he— how dare he act like—

His master picked him up with a small grunt of effort, and carried him into the bathroom. The warm shower wasn't scalding, as Knox probably would've made it if he had any sense of mind. Surreal. That's what this was. Damien praised him the whole time. Nothing hurt. No playful swats, and he didn't even touch Knox's cock more than just to clean it. But, he was cleaned. Inside and out. Wrapped in a warm fluffy towel and bundled into bed, feeling like a bird who'd broken its wing and woken up in a cardboard box filled with fabric scraps. Hate, despair, fear, and exhaustion all played in his mind, but the feeling he wanted to reject was there all the same: appreciation. Hell, even *gratitude*. Was this how he was going to be broken? Pushed over his line and then so gently coaxed back? Was this what happened with Cory? Fuck.

“There's a good boy. Let's put that mind to sleep,” Damien said, pulling Knox close to the middle of the bed and wrapping his arms around him. So Knox did, exhausted, defeated, and indifferent to any old terrors that might visit him in his dreams.

He didn't notice when Damien slipped out of bed, shutting the bedroom door quietly.

Damien Interlude 4

Chapter Summary

All Damien wanted to do was have a nice night, treat Knox, and have some fun himself. Where did it all go wrong?

Damien stepped back. With the high from Knox's mouth and the alcohol, he processed too slowly that something had changed. "Fuck, good job, Firecracker. I don't know how anybody could pass up that mouth of yours," he sighed. He finally took a look at Knox, scooping the vibrator remote out of his pocket, and he nearly dropped it. Knox was shaking almost violently, small sounds escaping as his breathing came rough and quick. "I've done the number on you, haven't I?" When Knox didn't respond, he spoke again louder, "Knox? Hey. *Hey!*" Volume didn't seem to have an effect, and worry was really starting to sink in. This was distinctly not "oh no it's too good," this was...

This was not how this was supposed to go. Knox had been doing great! At least, Damien had *thought*, but he was shocked at how quickly Knox went from moaning, being super hot, to a hyperventilating, weeping mess. He didn't know what to do, and he was too buzzed to really think, but he was certain that playtime was over. Before he spoke again, he turned the vibe off, crouching in front of Knox. Then, when he thought Knox was coming out of it, he reached out to touch his face. Knox crumbled into him. "Shit," Damien said. He was so beautiful, but... Damien felt out of his depth. He couldn't brush this over with just some touches. Then, Knox spoke, broken, hoarse and terrified:

"P-please, please p... Sir, I can, I can take— I *can*, I don't kn— kn— why? I can, I can I sw—I can." Knox thought he had to— Did he think Damien was sadistic enough to keep going? He'd try not to take too much offense, but this was supposed to have been a reward.

"Shh, Firecracker, we're done. It's okay, you did well," Damien said quickly. Slap a bandaid on it. His words didn't seem to help, as Knox's face twisted. Ugh! What did *that* expression mean? He wished Knox would cut him *some* slack; he was at least *trying*, unlike other masters. Note to self: Overstim is off the table. He'd have to try other mixes of rewards.

He scooped Knox up and made another mental note to try and work out more. It was *great* that Knox was gaining weight—he'd been so thin— but Damien enjoyed being able to manhandle him just a bit. He considered a nice, warm, bubble bath, but... Knox was so distressed and overwhelmed... Fuck it! Shower it was!

Step by step, Damien tried to do things that he thought would be rather nice. He used only the fluffiest towel to dry Knox down, then he bundled his pet into bed. He was instantly relieved when Knox met his eyes, briefly, and they weren't clouded with fear and panic. There was...

something there, but Damien... really didn't have time to think about whatever that might be. It was a good sign, probably. He didn't want to break Knox (only to bend him).

"There's a good boy. Let's put that mind to sleep," Damien said, pulling Knox close to him.

When Knox's breathing finally evened into sleep, Damien extracted himself and threw on his robe. While he might not know what to do, he did know what helped when he needed some comfort. Or rather *who*. He left quickly and quietly, heading down the hallway to Jack's room. He rolled his eyes as he heard the muffled noises of a video or livestream playing. It was so late, and he was still up? He hoped that Jack didn't do this at school. He knocked, and it was a moment before Jack opened the door.

"Damien? What's up? I thought you went to bed," Jack said, rubbing his eye.

"About to. I want to borrow Cory for tonight."

"Don't you have—"

"Knox had a... difficult time. Long day," Damien said smoothly, waving his hand. "Cory is much better at comfort than I am. Don't worry, you'll get him back at breakfast." Jack pursed his lips then shrugged.

"Alriiighhttt, suppose you can. Don't forget you owe me one."

"Only for the ride."

"Lemme get him. He dozed off, cute thing," Jack said, shutting the door. After a moment, Cory (in soft fluffy pajamas) was in the hallway, fighting back yawns.

"I know it's late, but this is easy," Damien said, snapping his fingers as he started down the hallway. Cory, being the dear he was, was quick on the draw, and he hurried down the hallway after Damien. "I just want you to cuddle Knox, be there when he wakes up. He'll probably be very surprised, but if he bad mouths you, let me know."

"Yessir," Cory chirped.

"Good boy." Back in the bedroom, Damien took his usual side of the bed, pressing his face against the crook of Knox's neck, while Cory slipped in opposite. Yes, this was a great idea. It paid to have a king size. Damien yawned, and he tried not to think about all he had to get done tomorrow.

Damien slept uneasily. He kept being nagged by last night, and it didn't help that he had a headache. Ugh, he shouldn't have indulged in so much wine. Now he'll have a hangover and paperwork and... he'll need to figure out how to fix last night. He carefully propped himself up on his elbows, exhaling. He looked over at the others in his bed and had to smile. In his sleep, Knox had nestled close to him, tangling his legs with Cory's, who was so snuggled

Damien could only see his beautiful blonde hair sticking up with some bedhead. Knox looked at peace. Damien sighed. Kinsley would have something to say about this whole mess. And maybe he'd know what was nagging at Damien.

The house manager was in the corridor between the kitchen and slave quarters. Kinsley did look busy, bent over scribbling out a schedule and duties for today, but he straightened to attention when Damien approached. "Long day yesterday, Sir. You're up early."

"I am." Damien crossed his arms and sighed. "Can you pause in your duties so we can chat?... I think I caused Knox to panic, and it's bothering me."

"Is it, now?" Kinsley gestured towards the kitchen table and chairs. Damien sat, and Quinn materialized to set a foamy mug in front of him: a latte just like he enjoyed it. He cast a quiet thank you her way before she wheeled away to continue working on breakfast.

"I'm not... used to dealing with these things like you are. I mean, you're all different. Cal made it distinctly clear he was not compatible, and Cory is... Cory. Knox, I... I really *want* ." Kinsley took his place across from him, respectfully. Quinn passed him a warm drink as well.

"So it bothers you that..."

"He flipped so suddenly! I've kinda grown to expect him mouthing off if he was done, but... he just broke down."

"Mhm."

"And, I don't know why! He was getting a reward, everything was going *great* . I feel bad, and I don't want to feel bad. I was *nice* ."

"Were you?" Kinsley asked, taking a slow sip. "Or was it all for you?"

"*Watch it* —" No, he came here for Kinsley's frankness. His own... defensiveness gave him pause. He'd planned it to be a reward to allow Knox to cum. But... maybe after... His face heated at the memory of Knox falling apart over and over. He certainly enjoyed himself... and he thought Knox had too. But if he had... would he have been so scared when he couldn't keep going? Would he have broken down?

"Oh," he said. Knox had... probably stopped enjoying it the moment Damien had kept pushing him.

"Mhm."

"I'm a dumbass." It's not a reward if there's a panic attack.

"I would not use that particular language, but you can be... quite short-sighted, Sir."

"What do I do?"

"Well... what have you done already?"

“I stopped and... cleaned him up and put him away in bed. Told him he’d done good, and I got Cory too.” Saying it now, he felt like he’d done a pretty bang up job of it! Except... “Now... I guess I feel like I should give a different reward.”

“That may be appropriate.”

“Have you noticed anything he likes? I think it’d... maybe I shouldn’t do something like last night again. What doesn’t he normally do during the day?”

“Sounds like you should—”

“Ask him? Then it wouldn’t be special! He’s my bed warmer, not my friend,” Damien said with a wave.

Kinsley pursed his lips. “He *did* go outside the instant he had the chance, Sir.”

“Outside is so... *normal* though,” Damien said with a pout and a long sip of his coffee. Kinsley cast a look at Quinn as she passed that Damien couldn’t read, but she patted Kinsley on the shoulder in response.

“Damien, if I can be direct,” Kinsley began.

“Go on,” he replied quickly with a nod.

“It might not be normal for him. You treat us very well, and you have high standards for your company and your slaves compared to... most of the country. But... have you *seen* the factory he was in? Do you think Master Franklem let him outside?”

“...He didn’t, at least, not while Knox was sober. Knox had... said something alluding to that.”

“Exactly,” Kinsley leaned forward, “With the utmost respect, Sir, and based on our prior conversation, it might... benefit you to do other things besides just having him perform his duties. Talk to him.” Damien didn’t miss the hesitation before the slave continued, “...Much in the vein of the relationship Master Jack and Cory have.” Damien sank into his chair, cupping his mug as he contemplated this.

“...I suppose I can... move up my vacation plans to try that. I just want to... *fix* this.”

“It wasn’t that easy with any of our newcomers, Sir.” Kinsley rose, rounding the table and placing a hand on his shoulder. “Try... just try thinking from his perspective some more.” *That* sounded difficult, but Kinsley had a point. He should listen to Knox more, if only to prevent another panic like last night. He had *no* interest in fucking a sobbing, fearful mess of a slave.

“Fine. I’ll... try to be better.”

Meetings and Greetings

Chapter Summary

Knox finally has a moment of peace from his Master. What shenanigans will he get up to? Chatting? Getting messy? Just don't tell Damien.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Knox roused slowly. It was hard, after all, to fight the warm cloud of safety and sweet unconsciousness. The sooner he woke up, the sooner he would have to face the day. He was sore, everywhere, and as he stirred, he realized his legs were tangled up with someone else's. Not his master's— they were too short. He froze before slowly attempting to disentangle.

“Mngf,” said the very sleepy voice behind him. “G'morning.” Knox carefully turned over, wincing as his body protested.

“Cory?” he asked, incredulous. The other slave was still buried up to his nose in the sheets, and blinking sleepily at Knox. “What're you doing here?” His brow furrowed. Fuck, did Damien go elsewhere after he broke down? Was he...

“Master Damien asked me to snuggle you!”

“...He what?”

“I'm here to give you cuddles. I didn't catch much in the way of why, but both the Masters like to hold me when they're upset.”

“Oh...” Knox almost felt touched by his master's concern, but he reminded himself the bar was fucking *low*. He didn't want to open up about what happened; he didn't want to feel exposed, *weak*. But then again... Cory was probably the best person to talk with about it. He would understand. He was also a personal after all, and maybe he'd gotten scared before. “I guess.... I was 'upset.'” He flopped back on the pillows, reaching up to air-quote his last word. He folded his hands on his chest. “...I broke down during... well, what *he* called a 'reward.'”

Cory gave his arm a gentle pat before slinging his own over Knox's chest. Damn, Cory's pjs were soft. He was a bit jealous.

“I understand. Sometimes, Master Damien's rewards feel like punishments,” Cory said, tucking his head against Knox's shoulder. “That's why I like Jack more.”

“You *have* said he's nicer.” Knox sighed. “I suppose I'll get to find out for myself soon.”

“Mm?”

“Damien owes him a favor.”

“Oh! Yes! Jack was very excited when I was scooped up for the night,” Cory nuzzled his face against Knox’s arm, and Knox’s heart melted a little. “Don’t worry. I’m sure it’ll be fun!”

“How’re... How’re you so... *okay* ?” Knox asked suddenly.

Cory lifted his head, hair falling to the side. “What do you mean?”

“I mean—you’re just... you’re fine! I feel like every night I fuckin’... Damien has me do somethin’, an’ I fuck it up or I *feel* fucked up. He’s not gonna want somebody who fuckin’ cries uncontrollably. I can’t even handle... cummin’ a lot.” Knox ran a hand through his hair. “I don’t *want* to be fine with this! I don’t *want* to be a fuckin’ sex slave, but I— What else can I *be* at this point? I’m exhausted, Cory. I don’t know how to feel, and you just seem... so *okay* with bein’... like this.”

“Oh wow,” Cory said, blinking at Knox with wide eyes. “You’ve been thinking a lot.” He hummed, considering, “I guess... I’m okay ‘cause I *know* there’s not much else I can be. ‘Cause I’m not smart enough to be a free person, an’ there are a *lot* of worse things a slave can be than a personal.” Knox’s instinct was to immediately shout that *freedom isn’t reliant on intelligence!* Cory *should* be free. They *all* should! He held his tongue though. Had... Cory been free once? Was this the better option like with Dara?

“That’s... up for debate,” he muttered instead. “I lost two years of memories with my last owner, but you seem to be a favorite here.”

“Well... Jack really likes me,” Cory said, a dark blush decorating his cheeks. “Master Damien is a little bit scarier. It’s not always easy ‘cause the masters can be... really demanding sometimes, but this isn’t a bad job to have! ‘Cause they’re both really nice, too! I always get enough food here, and nice clothes, and no one beats me, and Jack almost always lets me cum!” He smiled.

“Does sound like a bit of a dream... all things considered.” Even when Damien had cropped him, it wasn’t as brutal as any other beating he’d gotten, and he’d stopped. George wouldn’t stop until he was unconscious or had begged enough.

Cory smiled at him, smooshing a cheek against Knox’s arm. “Sometimes I get scared, too, but they’ve never gotten mad at me about it. I... have trouble with collars. And dogs. But Jack is always really patient with me, and keeps me safe when we go out. ”

“He protects you?”

“Yep! He makes sure that I don’t get stolen or lost. I’m really lucky,” Cory said, and Knox had to hold his tongue again. *Lucky* . To be treated with decency? Still, Cory seemed to have Jack wrapped around his finger, intentionally or not.

He remembered Dara's words. "...I met another slave at the party last night. He said we had to play the system."

"I dunno about that, but..." Cory grinned, blushing, and tucking his bangs behind an ear. "I can ask Jack for a lot, and he'll do it. As long as I'm good, I get treats! Like these pajamas."

Knox... wanted pajamas. "Really?" he said quietly. Cory nodded emphatically.

Dara and Cory seemed to know the best way to survive. Knox just didn't know Damien well enough, and he didn't know the rules of the game. Any chance of training and wall-building had been ripped away by the drugs.

Cory hugged him close. "You'll be okay," he said, smooshing a cheek against Knox. "They've never sent anyone away for being scared. They take real good care of us here, even if you have a bad day."

"...I don't know if I can believe that yet. I'm... *new*. Damien's spent so much on me, an'... I'm worth... not a lot. I can't *do* a lot. I fixed the clock, which was the most fun I've had in years—"

"You fixed the clock?! Whoa! I thought Ava did since she's always got all the tools whenever I see her. That's super cool!"

"I— I guess so. It wasn't too tricky; I just needed a coin."

"Just a coin?!" Knox felt a blush appearing on his cheeks as he nodded. Cory's eyes were sparkling. "How'd you know how to do that?"

"I just... always liked takin' things apart and seein' how they worked when I was a kid. I picked up clocks 'n stuff that people tossed out 'cause they were broken, but sometimes, I managed to fix 'em."

"How come you don't tell Master Damien you're good at fixing things?" Cory asked.

Knox wasn't... entirely sure how to answer that. "Not what I'm here for, I guess. Why make it complicated?" He sighed. "Besides, Ava's already doin' that job. Even though... I really would rather fix stuff."

"Why? I mean, it might not be easy for you right now, but a job like mechanic is really high pressure! Ava has to work a lot, at least, from what I've seen, and she's always real tired. An', you never have to worry about letting anyone down by not being able to fix something!"

"Oh boy, you don't know the half of it." The fights he had with his father, the disappointment he'd feared. "But... I dunno. It's what I did in a factory for years, an' even before that. I just feel like... it's simpler than sex for me. Not that the owners in the factories didn't have their way with me, but... I dunno, I had something to distract myself with. I used to imagine how I'd take apart the machines and name each piece when I was scared or if it was too much."

“I would just try and stop thinking, but that’s not very hard for me to do,” Cory said. “But I haven’t had to do that since I’ve been here.”

“...Hey Cory, I have a question. Do... the other slaves here ever get to... do things off duty?”

“Welll... there’s movie night! That usually happens once a month, and I think there may be one soon? I’m not sure it’ll happen with Master Damien’s vacation, since he might be using the theater. I don’t usually go when Jack’s home, but I do when he’s at school! It’s really fun! We watch movies, and have fun drinks, and Quin always makes a treat for us.”

“Oh, really?... Y’all can just... *do* that?” Knox held on to Cory, and he pretended that Damien wouldn’t burst this small bubble of comfort. But he did return, much too soon, in grand fashion..

“Good morning you two!” Damien crowed, throwing open the door. “Up! Breakfast is soon, and I want you both ready and downstairs in two minutes.”

“Yessir!” Cory said, sitting up promptly. Knox still laid flat, closing his eyes, but after a delay, he also answered.

“Yes, Sir.”

Breakfast was delicious, as always. Quin had been right— It was easier now. He didn’t even mind being fed like a pet at this point. At least he *was* getting fed. Knox couldn’t shake his anxiety fully. After all, he was starting “drug therapy” this week, and he was just as skeptical of that as he had been with the medicine to help with the withdrawals. Damien had given him the order to see Quin after breakfast. Dr. Monroe had apparently gone through a lot of trouble finding a pill form of his medicine, which Damien thought would be easier for him to take. Was he being considerate, or did he just not want to deal with Knox panicking? Either way, Knox wasn’t sure that pills would be any *easier*. They were still drugs, and drugs had stolen two years of his life, even if it was shitty. Knox wasn’t *happy* about this, but he didn’t have a choice. The doctor *had* made him feel better, and... Quin would know if something was wrong.

So, the master left on his last day before his vacation. Jack whisked Cory away, and Knox was left alone with Quin in the kitchen. He perched on a chair in the warm kitchen, fidgeting with his hair as Quin lined up pill bottle after bottle.

“Take a deep breath, honey,” Quin said, wheeling around to open a cabinet under the counter next to the sink.

“Easier said than done,” Knox said, wrapping his arms around himself. “I *hate* this.”

“I don’t think anyone really likes taking a lot of medication, especially so with your history.” She returned with a full glass of water, and she folded her hands in her lap. “I’m going to explain what each one does, and then, you’ll take them. You can do it all at once, or one at a time.”

“...What happens if I *don't* take it?” he asked.

Quin didn't look surprised at all with his question. “Well... I'll say that your body will have difficulty regaining strength, your mood will fluctuate potentially out of your control, and you may end up doing things that you normally would not because your impulse control or inhibition centers are not fully functioning. You may also develop health problems physically and mentally due to your body's chemicals not being balanced. I'm talking potentially worse than your detox. The drugs that George had you on were—based on what I could catch from Doctor Monroe—very black market. They were most certainly cut with dangerous materials, and it's a wonder that you survived with most of your faculties.”

Knox didn't speak, but he did blink a few times as the information washed over him. He hadn't expected her to be so forthcoming. Maybe he should've. She was the reason he'd gotten through the injections. “...This is pretty serious then,” he said, probing for a little more of Quin's perspective.

“Oh quite.” She picked up a small dish and the first bottle. “The good news is that this isn't permanent. You'll be done with the program in about three months if you take your pills regularly and keep eating full meals. Each stage you'll be able to drop one-or-two pills. When you're comfortable, I'll be providing you with a box of pills in the kitchen every morning for you to pick up and take on your own. If Damien takes you anywhere overnight, he'll have them.”

“You can't be serious right? You're going to trust me to take them?” Knox said incredulously.

“Yes. I have faith that you have common sense in your head. If you're afraid to take them alone, you can always find one of us.”

“Quin...”

“It's not easy, but you did very well with the injections.” She didn't *understand*.

Knox bristled. “But that was *you* doing it! It's *different*. If I do it then I'm—” He bit his tongue, glowering off to the side. He's the one drugging himself. He's the one responsible if anything goes wrong. She placed a hand on his, and he looked back.

“You're only going to be responsible when you're comfortable. That could take weeks, and it could never happen. But I do know that if you don't take these, *worse* things will happen, and I know you don't want to die.”

“How do you know that?” Knox said, accusatory.

“Because you wouldn't have survived,” she replied. “You believe that one day this will end for you, and you want to be there for that.” Knox didn't know what to say to her. She somehow had him dead to rights, but hearing it out loud... it twisted at his heart.

Instead of protesting, picking at the hurt, he asked, “What... did you do before Damien's ma got you? I can imagine Damien picking you up with... everything, but his parents? No offense.”

“None taken.” She hummed. “When I was a child, I was a dancer for a ballet, and then, as I began experiencing the first symptoms of my illness, I was put up for sale. The missus wanted somebody who had looks and who could be a wet nurse to the newborn in the house.”

“...Damien?”

“You got it. The missus was a lady all about appearances, so my pallor was fashionable—similar to how George kept you unhealthily pale—”

“Wait— You noticed? Damien hasn’t said shit, so I wondered if it looked normal to people.”

“No, I noticed. Don’t worry about Damien, love; he isn’t the most observant of people sometimes. Hopefully you’ll be getting more sun soon,” she said.

Huffing, Knox muttered, “Ain’t that the truth.” Then, he glanced up. “Sorry, please— Keep goin’.”

With a very patient smile, she did. “I was young enough that I would be able to keep up with Damien as he grew. By the time Damien was a teenager, he was pushing to get me medication for my illness and then a decent wheelchair when my legs went. I raised little Jack, too. Kinsley helped me adjust here, and most of my starting recipes were his.”

“And if this missus hadn’t thought you were pretty enough?”

“I would be dead. Either from my illness or put down when I stopped being useful,” she said with matter-of-factness. “You know, his parents wanted to get rid of me when he and Jack were old enough to not need a nanny, but, well... Jack’s a bit of a handful at any age. Damien mostly leveraged that fact to convince them to keep me. So you could say he’s a bit of a softie when it comes to me.” Knox... could actually imagine that, but it didn’t make Damien any *nicer* of a person.

“So... you can tell me all the horribly embarrassing childhood secrets that he has for blackmail material right?” he asked. She laughed, but she didn’t give him a yes or no answer. Instead, she started listing each drug and how it would help him. It mostly went over his head, but somehow, her confidence reassured him enough to take the first batch.

“”There, first one down. I’ll see you tomorrow,” she said. “You’re free to explore around the house some more if you’d like. I don’t have any orders from Damien to give to you.”

“That’s it...?” Knox was surprised he didn’t feel different immediately, but... that was probably a good thing. “I just get to explore?”

“Oh I could *certainly* find some work for you, young man if you stay here for thirty more seconds,” she said, flashing a smile with a threat behind her eyes.

Knox stood, backing out of the kitchen. “No, no I’m goin’! I’m goin’!”

He'd done some exploration already, but the manor was still... huge. He nervously flitted through the halls. Rooms that had the purpose of entertaining guests (a salon? Parlor? How many fucking "guest entertaining rooms" did one house need?) had aged wallpaper with magnolia flowers and vines across it. Being in those rooms made his skin crawl with the old wealth they exuded. He guessed that Damien had redecorated or painted some of the other rooms, like his own bedroom and the dining room, with simple block colors. Not creative, but at least better than that *horrid* wallpaper.

Knox even found Jack's room, which was clear by the bubble lettered sign on a door covered in stickers and stars. He steered clear of it too, but he could hear faint music from within. He hoped Cory was okay.

He ended up back at the window he'd folded laundry at before. It had the best view on the ground floor, and he didn't want to be anywhere upstairs. Plus, there was a nice long sunbeam that stretched across the bench there. He looked out over the lawn, vibrant green in the sunny late morning light. He wondered if Cal would come by.

He slumped down, watching as birds played and fluttered in the trees and shrubs dividing the estate from the lavender fields beyond. Knox wished that Damien had given him something to do. He'd even take laundry as a task, but... after last night, he felt that his master was just avoiding him. What if... No, Cory said it would be fine. And Damien had spent so much; he had to be feeling some form of sunk-cost with Knox.

"Hey!"

Knox almost jumped out of his skin as Ava popped up into his vision, her nose inches from his face. "H-hey," he said, sitting back with a small frown.

"Saw the M's car leave! Figured now would be a good time to thank you for fixing that clock! I wanted to give you something."

"Oh, it was no problem. I had fun with it," he said, unsure.

"Greeeaaaattttt, then you'll love this!" She hauled a small engine up onto the window sill with a grunt. Knox, wide-eyed, scooted back more to leave it some room on the wide sill, but Ava still had to balance it with a hand. He had to take a second, and then, a grin split his face. He laughed, a full laugh that had the vaguest hint of his father's jolly chuckle. When was the last time he'd laughed genuinely?

"Are you dumping your work on me?"

Ava was grinning over the engine and shrugged. "Only the stuff I can't figure out." She rapped her knuckles on the machine. "I've changed the belts, and 'bout five other parts, and I still can't get it going." She slid a tool box through to him, and Knox rolled up the slightly puffy white sleeves of the shirt Damien had put him in. He'll *try* to keep it clean at least.

"It could be a slipped washer, messing with the timing, making something loose enough to misalign..." he said, turning the engine so it could sit better, and he could take a closer look.

“See I thought that, but when I looked...” Ava started digging into her side, and Knox pulled out some tools.

Working together, they were happily trucking along when someone loomed above Knox. “Ava, can you hand me the quarter-inch wrench?” Knox said, arms deep in machine guts. When Ava didn’t, Knox looked up. “Ava?”

“A-ah, Kinsley!” Ava stammered, “I wasn’t shirking duty! Or uh, giving... Well, I know you *told* us not to let... Listen, I just needed an extra pair of hands, and Cal’s busy today and—”

“I didn’t say anything.” Kinsley’s voice was smooth and even, the peak of professionalism. Knox pulled back to face the older slave, squaring his shoulders defensively.

“I was helpin’ out, that’s all,” he said. “Nobody said I couldn’t to *me* ; an’ Damien didn’t even give me any list. Ain’t like I have anythin’ else to do otherwise.” Kinsley smiled a half smile, and Knox was half-surprised when he didn’t correct him for saying just “Damien.”

“Well, I suppose I’m the messenger of good news.”

Oh no , Knox thought.

“Master Damien would like to let you know that for today, you can go outside. In fact, you are ordered to go and enjoy yourself out there. The only expectation is that you return with the dinner bell.” Knox was... stunned, and for a second he assumed Kinsley was lying. But... he didn’t seem the type to step out of bounds to sabotage another slave. Too professional. “Oh, and... I would personally recommend that you return early to bathe. Damien would probably order you to anyway, if he saw you covered in engine oil and grass.” Knox glanced down at himself and grimaced. Fuckin’ Damien. He couldn’t argue with Kinsley, and Knox already felt like he was a disappointment.

“Sooo,” Ava piped up. “You aren’t gonna snitch on us?”

Kinsley made a zipping gesture over his lips. “Just clean up.” He turned to go, but then he paused, “Knox?”

“Yeah— Yes?”

“Please enjoy yourself. And I’ll keep you in mind if any machine here in the house breaks in the future.”

Knox... smiled.

Hello all! Late upload my apologies, but as you can read, there was a *Lot* happening in this chapter. Lots of rewrites and edits in this chapter (curse you dialogue).

Thank you to my lovely editor LoadingNewFriend for their patience and firm comments. Y'all should see how decorated the draft was after they got through it.

Please enjoy!

In the Fields

Chapter Notes

Updates will be a little bit more sporadic until the holidays are over :) My lovely editor LoadingNewFriend worked really hard to get this out, and we're going to try to get you updates through december. More regular updates will resume in the new year.

Thank you as always for all your comments, reads, kudos, etc. and enjoy this softer chapter.

Knox finished the engine as best as he could, and wiped his arms and face with Ava's rag.

"Thanks again," Ava said, hauling the engine back onto her pushcart. "I'll be takin' this back out to the fields now. Hopefully, we'll be able to get it back in line with the others. A line of generators being out sucks for the watering system."

"...Can I come with you? Since, guess I can now." He tugged at the tracking collar. Damien would know where he was, and it wasn't like he could run, but he'd rather enjoy the chance to go outside than brood over being under surveillance even when Damien wasn't there.

"Sure! I could use a wrench monkey today," Ava said, grinning. Knox wasted no time vaulting over the window sill. There wasn't a breeze, but the air was still refreshing. Better than sitting by a window, for sure.

Ava raised an eyebrow. "No shoes?"

"Gonna have to take a shower anyway, like Kinsley said. I don't wanna waste time."

"Suit yourself! Careful to stay on the paved paths though— closer to the fields it's a bit rougher. I don't wanna get in trouble if you get a cut or somethin'." She began pushing the cart, grunting until she got it onto the flagstone path leading out from behind the house towards the fields. Knox did his best to keep up. He was *outside*, and he was going to enjoy it, damn it! His leg would probably be... really sore at the end of the day, but he could ignore it— he usually did anyway.

Ava interrupted his thoughts: "...They didn't let you out."

Knox was taken aback. "No. I went from a dark warehouse, to a manor like this where they kept me under the stairs. At least... Damien's bedroom is nicer than that, an' I've gotten to go out a couple times."

"Eugh, must've been dusty in there."

Knox cracked a smile. “Very.” He was quiet before he asked, “...What about you?”

“Eh?”

“Well, Quin mentioned that... you were a drug mule, an’ you locked yourself in the shed when you first got here. Why’d you... trap yourself like that?”

“Oh.” Her face darkened in a scowl. “Yeah, well, when you feel like a hunted animal and you know you can’t run, hiding is the best option. That shed had so many nooks and crannies, I knew it’d be a bitch to find me. And I’d be close to the garden shears.”

“I didn’t mean to pry. Just askin’.” He knew nobody here had it easy, but he hadn’t wanted to sour her mood with bad memories.

“Then don’t ask. But... I don’t mind. I just don’t talk about that time. Past is past. I was raised in this shit, so it’s easy for me to deal, not like Kinsley or Cal.”

“Kinsley? Ain’t he been with Damien’s family for—”

“That’s for *him* to tell you,” she said, cutting him off. “And good luck. I don’t even know the specifics.” Kinsley and Cal hadn’t been slaves originally? He certainly didn’t feel comfortable asking Kinsley any time soon, but maybe... he *could* ask Cal about his life before. It could be nice to talk about a time when they were free— or it could be too damn depressing. He shouldn’t. It was a bad idea.

They followed the path as it curved around a mass of shrubbery, and the lavender from the fields burst into view. Knox’s first instinct was to run into it, but he caught sight of workers, bending low in the hot sun. He didn’t want to cause trouble for them for any stalk he trampled in his excitement.

“Here’s the main shed,” Ava said, pointing at a large, sturdy building. He was actually surprised at the size of it, especially so close to the house— they’d only been walking for a few minutes, after all. The secret, it seemed, was the line of trees clustered along the one side of the building, facing the house. Apparently, the foliage was enough to conceal it.

“So, you do most of your repairs here? There looks to be enough room for a whole workshop,” Knox said, dragging his gaze back from the lavender fields again.

“Bingo!” Ava said, pulling open the heavy barn door. Inside, machine parts, old furniture, bags of fertilizer, and god knows what else created a veritable second wall against one side. “It’s both. Damien doesn’t mind some tinkering if it makes his farm here more efficient.” Knox wandered further in, looking at all the tools; how easy it all was to access. At the workshop he’d been in before, all the tools were locked up or chained at the assembly line.

“Why are there fields *here*? He’s got... a whole business right? I sat in on a meeting ‘n’ stuff.”

“They’re a relic. Plantations have been with his family since they put down roots here forever ago. I think he uses them now to test different crop strains ‘n’ flowers and shit like that. If you

ask me, he hates the business, but he does it for the money.”

“What about the tools?” Knox asked, pocketing that bit of information to think about later.

“Don’t get any ideas,” she sighed. “They’re inventoried three times a day. I had to earn the ability to have my toolbox on the go, and that’s got a tracker on it.” She cracked a grin. “But hey, if Damien is letting you out more, you’re free to use anything here. So long as you put it back exactly where you found it. If you do anything stupid, I get the punishment. Got it?”

“I ain’t stupid, but... I got it. Thanks, Ava.” As Knox was going to circle back to that theory of hers, the door opened behind them.

“Ava, is that tractor— Oh, Knox!” Cal said, carrying a heavy-looking bag through the door, pausing to balance it on his leg. Knox stepped forward, reaching to help Cal angle the bag on top of the pile of stuff. As their hands brushed, Knox was startled by how warm Cal was.

“Thanks,” Cal said, straightening.

Knox shrugged. “No problem.”

The pause between words was too much, and Ava threw up her hands. “Good grief.” Knox’s brow furrowed in confusion, and she shook her head. “Don’t worry about it, Knox. I’ll let you catch up with Cal. I forgot I had to check the tractor. I’ll get on that.” She made a hasty exit.

As she left, Cal asked, “You’re allowed out?”

“Yeah! Well, at least for today. I think Damien feels like he fucked up, so he’s treatin’ me.”

Cal’s face clouded, and Knox knew he hadn’t given enough details to assuage his worries. Still, the other slave’s voice was fiercer than he’d expected. “Did he?” Cal asked, but the implication of his question was clear: *Did he hurt you ?*

“I guess. He was giving me a ‘reward,’ and I freaked out. I didn’t think that he’d feel bad—I shouldn’t have...” Shaking his head, Knox offered a half smile and another shrug. “It wasn’t bad, Cal. I’m fine. I think I came out pretty good, all things considered. I thought he’d get rid of me.”

“Wouldn’t let him,” Cal grumbled, before looking faintly surprised that he’d said it out loud. Knox laughed, putting a hand on Cal’s arm (wow, he was strong).

“It’s sweet that ya care, sunshine. I mean it.”

Cal’s face turned red, and he rubbed the back of his neck. “I just think it’s... not fair that you don’t get to even go outside except for a— a ‘reward.’”

“I’ll take it over nothing, which is what I got before.” Knox shifted, wanting to steer the conversation away from... *him* . “Hey, would... would it be okay if I tagged along with you today? I’m supposed to be back to the house at some point to take a wash, but I’ve missed talking with you. Plus, you work in the sun.”

Cal smiled. "You sure can."

Cal took him out to the fields and went about his routine. Knox preened under the sun. The cool grass under his feet grounded him more than the carpet of a bedroom. He had to be careful, stepping on the smooth pavers (which were starting to grow warm from absorbing the sun) when he could and soft grass when stone wasn't available.. Weeding, watering, harvesting, carting... Cal almost did it all, and Knox was blown away. No wonder he was so strong. He didn't let Knox help, but the quiet conversation between them was nice.

"Do you ever go up to the house when you're not on duty?" Knox asked, sitting on a fence post as Cal sorted through lavender stalks.

"Sometimes I go to the movie nights. I know that folks at the house wanna like... include me more, but I don't like being so close to the masters." Knox perked up.

"You do? Cory was tellin' me about them. Are movie nights any good?" he asked. "I mean, they gotta be if you're goin', right?"

Cal snickered. "I don't think I'd be the best judge, but it is... nice. Especially when the masters are gone. We're able to *drink*, and Quin always makes a little something special for us." He rubbed the back of his neck. "To be honest... it's fun, sometimes. It almost feels like things are, ya know, *normal*."

"Well, maybe you should let me know when you're goin', an' I'll come too. Damien doesn't tell me shit about his plans."

"Damien's shit," Cal muttered, and Knox almost fell off the post laughing. He caught Cal's grin as he recovered.

"You won't catch me arguin' with you, even if everyone else would," Knox said. His hand drifted up to fidget with his hair, an old habit he thought he'd lost. "You said before you came here that you had a similar job to mine. Did... Damien get you for that?" Here in the fields, there was no one around. Now would probably be the best time to ask.

Cal's posture grew tense at the question, though he looked like he was doing his best not to show it. "It's... sorta complicated, but yeah, I think that was the plan. When I, uh, *freaked out*, he had Kinsley put me out here instead." He looked at Knox, concerned. "Is he... ya know, treating you okay? I mean, I know you said you were fine, but..."

"I mean, the bar is so low it's in the fuckin' ground," Knox said, brushing his hand through his hair one more time before letting it fall to his side. "...All things considered it hasn't been... *terrible*. I haven't been drugged, an' I've been eatin'. My last master, he—he just wanted to erase me. At least... Damien seems to want me around." He made a small aggravated noise in the back of his throat. "He's *infuriating* though. I can't tell what he actually wants half the time. I almost *wish* it was as easy as sex, but he's playing a game with me, I know it!"

Cal frowned. "How so?"

"Dunno really. I don't trust how *nice* I've been treated. Plus, I don't know when it's fine for me to talk or not." Knox chewed the inside of his lip with thought. "...I keep waiting for when— if I'm not... *good enough*, or if I'm too fucked up, he'll—" Get rid of him. Send him elsewhere. He couldn't work in the fields with his leg. He'd be too slow, and he wasn't strong. Everyone else at the house seemed to have their own neat little roles. "You had a place to go when... you freaked out, but I don't." He thought for a moment and then remembered, "You said... a relative of Damien's owned you before he did?" It would suck, but he could probably survive being tossed to a wolf—more so than sent back to the auction house and tossed into a bottomless pit.

Cal paused, and his voice was carefully neutral when he spoke. "...Yeah. He was— well, he died, and I wound up as part of the estate sale. That's where Damien got me." His expression twisted into a scowl. "He was a piece of shit anyways. Worse than Damien by a long shot." He let out a breath, a ripple of held back energy running through him. Knox wanted to know how much of a piece of shit he *was*, but he was dead and couldn't hurt Cal anymore. He wondered what George was up to— then cut that thought right off. George didn't deserve *any* of his consideration.

Cal's voice was low as he continued, "Listen, I wouldn't... worry too much. You know I don't trust 'im, but... if he hasn't gotten rid of *me*, he's probably not gonna get rid of you. An', you said it yourself before, it's not like Damien isn't used to 'damaged goods' already."

"Ya gotta point." He looked out over the field, at the swallows swooping in the sunlight. "Maybe I just don't want to trust any of this is real. It's been bad for so long— How long until the rug is pulled? How long until it goes back to being bad?" He smiled lopsidedly as he turned back to Cal. "Guess though... can't ever be *really* bad if I'm still able to hang out with you."

Cal's face grew two shades darker with blush. He bumped Knox's side with his shoulder, grinning. "I know what you mean. I always kinda worry that whenever Damien sees me, he might change his mind. Send me away or make me... go back to bein' a sex slave. Though I guess he's got *you* now." He winced. "Not that— I mean—"

Knox hadn't really thought about that. Damien could think about Cal as a *backup* if Knox ever crossed a line or did poorly. If it wasn't him in any case, there'd probably be somebody else doing it— or *Cory*, and the thought of him needing to please two Masters made concern bubble in Knox's stomach. He'd be exhausted and wrung dry. "Nah, it's alright. You're right," he said. "He's got me."

Cal's shoulders slumped, and Knox knew he hadn't given the right answer. It was the *true* answer though. *Just like in the factory, you're on your own, you're doing it so somebody else doesn't*— Cal interrupted his train of thought by saying "Just... you know I'm here for you, right? I know there's not a lot I can *do*, us bein' slaves, but... let me know if there's anything, alright?" He put a dirt-covered hand on Knox's knee. "You don't have to be alone in this."

He hopped off the fence and crouched down next to Cal, balancing on his heels in a squat that he'd seen his mother do when she tended her garden. His hand ended up on Cal's to indicate he'd heard. He didn't know how to respond to that. It was dangerous—leaning on others had always come back to bite him, trusting people hadn't gotten him *anywhere* but enslaved and hurt.

Still... the way Cal said that he was here for Knox— It was so earnest. Knox had to ask. “You... are we friends?” His nerves prevented him from meeting Cal's gaze, and he wasn't sure why it was important for him to hear Cal give him an answer. It could be that... Knox got the sense that Cal wouldn't lie to him out here in the fields.

Cal smiled at him: a little shy, a little bashful. “I sure hope so. Are we?” Cal being shy around *him* ? He was the one who was nervous asking. It was a risk. In the workshop, a false friend could sell you out for extra meals, or an actual friend could be used as leverage against you. But to have someone in his corner who *got* it?

“ *I* hope so. S'why I was askin' you,” he said with a bit of a cheeky grin. “I guess there's nothin' to it but to declare that we're friends.” Cal's grin changed from shy to beaming, like the warmest ray of sunlight. Knox grinned back, and some knot in his chest finally relaxed. He didn't mind that he was getting covered in dirt sitting in the field, and he was going to stay out here with Cal for as long as he could. He *had* been ordered to “enjoy himself” after all.

Dress Rehearsal

Chapter Summary

Knox concludes his day outside, grapples with his situation, and he hatches a plan. If Cory and Dara had hacked the system, he wasn't going to flail around in the dark finding his own way. He was going to hatch a plan to get what he wanted.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Knox tried to stay out as long as possible, but as the sun started descending, Cal steered their path back towards the house. An extra lunch had been dropped off by Ava for him, most likely made by Quin so he wouldn't skip lunch. Still, he dragged his feet as they made their way towards the manor.

"I can stay a little bit longer," Knox protested.

Cal shook his head. "No, I... I want you to keep being able to go out like this. And I don't want to be the reason you're late, 'cause then we won't be able to spend time together."

Knox sighed, hanging his shoulders. "Fuck this. I wish I could stay an' not have to walk on eggshells around *him*. He knows where I've been all day with the fuckin' collar." He brushed Cal's arm again, wanting to save memories with the touch of being outside and with somebody he felt like he could talk to. "Where do you go now?" he asked, pausing as they reached the side door leading into the dining room.

"Cleaning up before dinner. Gotta make sure everything is where it's supposed t' be, and then I usually help Quin with dinner if I have time." Cal cracked a smile. "If you see a peeled potato, think of me. I'm the best in the house."

"I already *knew* you were the best in the house," Knox said, flashing a smile before ducking inside.

He tried not to feel too guilty as he headed upstairs. Nobody else got to take a shower in a luxury bathroom, and hell, he didn't even do any *work* today. He was surprised when Kinsley met him outside Damien's bedroom. "Oh good! I would be worried if you'd taken any longer. Take as long as you would like."

"I... will?"

"But don't tarry or the water will get cold."

“I’m sorry, is there somethin’ I should know about the shower I’m gonna be taking?”

Kinsley smiled. “A bath.”

“A fuckin’ *what* ?”

“I noticed your limp, and surely you have some residual pain from your scars, so I’ve drawn you a bath. Consider it a welcome from me. There’s a number of bath salts that you are free to use, but I recommend the one labeled with red. It’s made with roses, so it has some healing properties.”

“Am— am I *allowed* to do this? It’s... D— Master Damien’s bathtub and salts surely.”

“Master Damien wanted me to prepare a ‘treat’ for you that might be more your speed than... what he chose last night. I elected to do this, since you have to get washed anyway.” Kinsley drew close to place a steady hand on Knox’s shoulder. “Enjoy it. I don’t think he’ll be displeased..” Knox searched Kinsley’s face, but... he found no deceit.

“...Thanks,” he said, and ducked inside.

It was still strange to be in here, this bedroom, when Damien wasn’t around, so Knox didn’t hesitate. When he entered the bathroom, he was smacked with a wall of *warmth* . He hadn’t really taken a good look at the bathtub before, since it was slightly around a corner and (he’d assumed) off-limits to him, so he was surprised by how... *massive* this tub was. It was built into the wall with a shelf running around the edge, and large bay windows surrounded it, allowing for a beautiful view of the fields. The bath salts that Kinsley had mentioned were organized on an elegant rack, along with lotions, scrubs, and a number of other luxury items. Knox, stunned, moved automatically, stripping down and tipping an arbitrary amount of the salt in the “Rose” bottle into the bath. He got in before he could think too much more about it.

It was *wonderful* . As soon as the hot water lapped about his legs, Knox felt his knees go jelly. *Fuck* . He sank in, fully reclining against the side of the tub. He shivered, exhaling as steam rose around him. He felt like he could melt, and immersed like this, the warmth could soak into all of him, even his ruined and scarred parts. It was enough to make him forget about any pain he could feel.

It wasn’t long before guilt set in. He shouldn’t be enjoying this. He *shouldn’t* . Nobody else got this; if any other master knew he was doing this, he would be kicked out. The only reason he should even *be* here was if he was serving Damien. Kinsley said it was *fine* , that it was a ‘treat,’ that he should enjoy himself. God, it was—this wouldn’t make up for anything. He shouldn’t be allowed to do nice things for *himself* . Any time he’d tried that before, any attempt to make his life somewhat more bearable, he’d been punished, silenced, or gotten more work ‘cause clearly he didn’t have enough. Even with Damien, he didn’t feel like he’d be able to— able to have a chance to take time for *himself* , to relax, to breathe. He’d stolen away his moments, but it was just a matter of time before those were cracked down on by Damien. His master was about to be on vacation after all.

Today had been one of the nicest days he'd ever had. He got to be outside, talk to people, and Kinsley even drew him this nice fucking bath he didn't even feel like he should have because he didn't want to be the pet. He didn't want to have any special privileges.

He sank deep enough into the water to start to feel himself float, and stared up at the ceiling. What if they were all in on it? Softening him up enough so that Damien could crush him into whatever shape he wanted? Today had been... it had almost been too good. Damien had said he doesn't like to break his toys, but he liked *roles*. Everyone had their little place in the house, like it was a dollhouse. He was new. He was still fitting in, adjusting, and maybe, all this was so that he would fit nicely into Damien's picture of broken dolls in a pretty house.

But... his paranoia couldn't figure out a way to puzzle it all together so that theory held water. He wasn't the type to trust easily but... Cal wouldn't do that to him. Cory was too... Cory to be that nefarious. Quin hadn't lied to him about the drugs when he was sick. Ava let him be a mechanic even though Damien wouldn't approve, and as far as he knew, Damien was in the dark about it. Kinsley... had *orchestrated* this entire day for him. He'd probably told Damien Knox would enjoy the freedom. He noticed Knox's pain and drew up this bath. It *can't* be possible that it's all a lie. He yearned to believe it was *true*. The probability that it wasn't was—

Fuck, was he crying? He'd wipe at his face, but that'd just get water everywhere and bubbles in his eyes and it'd be a mess— God, it wrenched his heart to admit to himself that he wanted this. He *wanted* this. He'd touched the edges of the realization this morning. He wanted pajamas. He wanted nice baths to help his aching body. He wanted to be outside on nice days and eat nice food and sleep in the softest bed he'd ever been in. If he was stuck like this, as a slave... this was the best place he could be. Despite Damien being a sadist, despite the threat of punishment, the fear that it all could be ripped away... Damien *did* take care of him. He made sure that he slept, that his injuries were taken care of, and that he was eating. No master he'd had before cared about any of that. Damien was an *asshole* and demanding and a *master* — But Knox was alive. Darra and Cory were probably right.

Play the system, and you'll get whatever you want.

Knox sat up, water swirling and sloshing at his sudden movement. *Let's put that to the test then.* He rinsed in the blissful waters of the bath one last time before he moved to the shower. There, he scrubbed himself down, making sure the grass stains and machine grease were completely gone before tackling his hair. He used the fancy bottles Minte had gotten Damien to buy. He only had a small window to get ready before dinner. Knox planned to make the most of it.

The bath had dulled his pain so much that his movements were almost as fluid and spry as before the fire. After drying, he returned to the "spa center" that Kinsley had put together. There *had* to be some fancy-ass lotion or perfume there. He found several in fact, and he picked a lotion to smooth over his skin. It was a mysterious, spiced-floral scent, like a memory you could only grasp the edges of before slipping away. He did his best with his hair, combing it viciously until his curls were untangled, soft, and bouncy.

He searched through the collection of expensive clothes in his section of the wardrobe for an outfit and settled on a white button up and dark slacks. Upon examination in a mirror and

after unbuttoning the top two buttons, he reluctantly put on the tracking collar again. He didn't want to risk the temptation to hide somewhere with it off, and Damien expected him to be wearing it. His plan *had* to succeed if he wanted to prove to himself that he could have some power over his fate here. Knox was determined not to just roll over for Damien in order to have nice things. Doing a spin in front of the mirror, he felt that this outfit was a bit basic for Damien's taste, so he dived back into the closet. There, on the second pass, he found it: a black velvet corset. It was more of a... fashion-y corset, one meant to shape but not constrain. The black of the velvet contrasted against elegant lace strings that fastened in the front. He put it on, standing with his back to the mirror, craning his head around to keep an eye on himself as he cinched it closed. It did *squeeze*, and he was startled by how effective it was despite not being a full corset. He turned from side to side, looking himself up and down before smiling. This would be up Damien's alley.

It was about then that he heard the grandfather clock (*he'd fixed!*) chime 5 o'clock, and he swept out of the bedroom. *Showtime* .

Chapter End Notes

Post-Christmas update for you all! Happy Holidays no matter what you celebrate, and thank you all for sharing your thoughts in the comments, kudos, and taking the time to read this lil story of mine!

Thanks to my editor LoadingNewFriend as always (they are very excited for some upcoming chapters, which I know y'all will enjoy).

Showtime

Chapter Summary

Knox puts his plan into action. Will he be able to play his master's game?

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Downstairs, the house was bustling. Cory was carrying dishes to set the table, Kinsley was arranging silverware, and Quin was busy in the kitchen. It smelled *wonderful*, and Knox had to distract himself from how his mouth watered at the thought of being able to have it. Kinsley greeted him politely, and gave him the easy task of folding napkins to put by the places. Since there were only two people who ate at the dining table, Knox did that quickly, but Kinsley nitpicked his folding skills enough that it almost took him as long as Cory setting the plates, glassware, and silverware to get it right. Then they had a moment to breathe, and Cory bounced over to him as Kinsley checked in on the kitchen.

“Whooaa, Knox, you look super pretty!” Cory said. “You dressed up!”

Knox smiled, running a hand back through his hair. “I’m... gonna try to take a page from your book, Cory. Wish me luck.”

“I think you’ll do *great!*” He leaned over to peek around Knox to the door. “I know Jack’ll definitely be impressed, so Damien’s gotta be too! Are you going to try to get a reward for being good?” Knox tried not to get flustered, but he didn’t necessarily want the other slaves knowing he was trying to... earn *pajamas* (who was he kidding, they knew what he was for).

“I’m... actually hoping to get pajamas, and maybe rack up some goodwill for going to a movie night. Damien wants me close, and I don’t know how long he’s actually stayin’ on vacation. I wanna get some points in my book to see if he’ll let me go when y’all have one.”

“Ohhh! Yeah! It’ll be great to show him how good you are during the day. If he knows you’re good all the time, there’s no reason why he wouldn’t let you go, ‘cause it’d make you sad not to.”

“...not sure if he’d care *that* much, but I’m gonna give it a shot.” Then the front door opened, and Jack slid down the banister.

“Dammiieennn!”

Cory promptly moved to the doorway of the dining room, standing at attention with his hands behind his back, and Knox slid to the opposite side, mimicking his stance... with the exception of leaning against the doorframe. He still wanted to be *himself*.

“It’s vacay time; come on, you were almost late comin’ home! Your workaholic ass needs to sit down,” Jack continued, hopping off the banister and tackling his brother into a hug before immediately perking up. “Fuck, is that dinner? Smells fucking delicious.”

Damien didn’t give Jack much of a response other than a tired smile and a ruffle of his hair before turning towards the dining room. As his eyes fell on Knox, he tripped on the rug, and Knox had to stop himself from laughing. Well, he now knew he made some good choices in his outfit. Jack zipped right up to Cory, cupping his cheeks with his hands, and whispering something, but Knox couldn’t quite catch it. Cory was blushing though, so god knows.

His master had recovered enough of composure to close the distance, wrapping a hand around Knox’s hip, and pulling him close. “Did we have a good day today?” he murmured, hungry eyes drinking Knox in.

“I did, thank you, Sir,” Knox replied, leaning into Damien’s hand. He just barely caught the quiet “*fuck*” that Damien breathed, and he knew he’d at least succeeded in part one of his goal. He just really hoped that he wouldn’t have another... panic during the sex bit he knew was coming. Taking advantage of the space, he added, “Dinner’s ready to be served. I hope you enjoy it.” Damien narrowed his eyes then shrugged. Knox knew his master wasn’t... stupid. He knew his behavior was in stark contrast with basically everything up until this point, but he was banking on Damien being too swayed by his dick to really think too hard about it. It seemed to be working so far!

Jack and Damien took their places at the table, and Kinsley served, tasking Knox and Cory with the wine. Knox made sure not to make the same clumsy mistakes he had the other night (it helped that he didn’t have a vibe up his ass), and he added in a few lingering touches along Damien’s hand and wrist as he settled onto his knees. Jack’s eyes were also on him now. Subtly, so that the masters couldn’t see, Knox gave Cory a thumbs up. Cory beamed and returned a double thumbs up a little less subtly. Damien’s hand found Knox’s hair, and his attention was tugged up.

“After dinner. Bedroom,” he said under his breath before offering Knox a forkful of the spiced fish that was for dinner. Knox resisted both the urge to say “No Shit” and to roll his eyes, but the bite of fish was *divine* and was a solid distraction. Despite the lingering humiliation about being fed by hand, he was... getting used to it. It made it easier to soothe his worries that it could be drugged, compared to the flare of panic he always got when he was expected to eat on his own. Another bite of fish, and Knox was melting a bit against Damien’s leg.

“Sooo, Damien, I was wonderrinnngggg...”

“Yes, Jack?” Damien said with a sigh, his hand returning to run through Knox’s hair.

“Could I cash in that favor that you owe me?” Jack had leaned forward, a catty grin on his face, and his hands drummed the table with excitement.

“You are insufferable. What is it?”

“I want to borrow Knox.”

“...” Damien’s hand tightened its grip possessively, but he sighed. “I did promise. When?”

“Thinkinnggg... well, I’d say tonight, but you’ll be grumpy. Tomorrow?”

“The first day of my vacation?”

“It’ll give you a break! Not having to make sure someone is behaving. You can just kick back and enjoy some *you*-time. I want to treat Cory, too. He’s been *amazing* as always, so I wanna reward him.” Jack reached down to give Cory a pat-pat, and Cory looked like he was on cloud-nine. Jack paused. “Just... don’t wear Knox out too much?”

“You’d be surprised at how resilient he is. He loves his attention though, so be careful not to spoil him *too* much,” Damien said, glancing down at Knox, and... did he catch a smile? Fuck, maybe he was starting to get into his master’s good books even with his fuckups. That was... a good thing, Knox reminded himself. It got him closer to nice things. “And let me know if he acts out.”

“Wouldn’t dream of it,” Knox said under his breath. He didn’t want to figure out how Jack used punishment, and he didn’t want to get *double* or, worse, get Cory in trouble. Damien made a pleased sound and offered Knox another bite of fish. Jack started excitedly talking to Cory, and Damien took the opportunity to enjoy his dinner.

After dinner, true to his word, Damien didn’t even wait until the table was cleared to rise, tugging Knox’s hair before releasing his grip as he moved. Knox, half-wishing he could relax for a few minutes or even send his compliments to Quin, rose to follow, sticking close to Damien’s side. They made it to the upstairs hallway before his master jumped him, pushing him up against the wall and burying his face in his neck.

“*Fuck*, you’re gorgeous. You really dressed up all pretty for me, didn’t you?” His hands roamed down Knox’s sides, pressing against the corset and his hips. “Trying to butter me up?” Well, yes, but Knox wasn’t going to tell *him* that.

“Wanted to show my appreciation, Sir, for today,” he said, tilting his head back as Damien went to bite at his neck. “I’ll take a shot that ya like it?”

“*Like* it?” Damien scoffed against his skin, and Knox placed a hand against his master’s shoulder, pushing just a little bit in order to meet his eyes. He knew he was playing with fire, but pajamas were *worth* a gambit. The look in Damien’s eyes was enough for him to keep going.

“Y’ don’t want Jack stumblin’ on us right? Why don’t we skip right to me givin’ ya a show, Sir?” Knox could see he was struggling between his lust and his frustration at how Knox was playing him. Damien *looked* like he wanted to fight back, reclaim some of his dominance. Not that Knox could actually threaten Damien’s dominance in the first place, but Damien pulled him into the bedroom anyway.

Showtime. For real. He can... he can do this. Cory and Darra could, and there wasn't much else he could be good at to have a place here. Before Damien could open his mouth to say something smug, Knox slid down to his knees. One of his master's hands snaked back into his hair, and his voice was husky, "Go on, Firecracker."

"I gotta do everythin'?" Knox quipped, leaning forward and bracing his hands against Damien's legs. He flicked his gaze up and dragged the zipper down with his teeth (god, how do people do this, why is it sexy, it's so *small* he was lucky to get a grip on it— no, focus on being *hot*). Apparently, it worked; Damien sucked in a breath before he could respond, and Knox was a touch startled, when he tugged the pants down to free Damien's cock, to find it more than half hard already.

"Don't let it go to your head, pet," Damien said, fingers curling in his hair warningly. Knox was tempted to make another quip, but *pajamas* . He swallowed, and then, he wrapped his lips around the head of the cock in front of him, pressing his tongue up against it. Damien cursed, and Knox continued, slowly going down on the dick. He didn't know where the line was between being seductive or teasing, and he was shocked Damien was even allowing him to control the pace this much. Judging by how Damien's hips had started to do little jerks into his mouth, he was holding back.

Was he trying to see what Knox would do? Knox couldn't play the mind game *that* much. He knew... his mouth was good at least, so he could use that. He kept a steady pace, warming his throat up before he swallowed all the way down to the base of Damien's cock. His master let out a low moan, pulling at Knox's hair.

"Good to see— your smart mouth is— still useful," Damien said, struggling as Knox swirled his tongue. Damien's hips urged him for more, the hand gripping his hair pulling to try to control his head. Knox let him for a moment, closing his eyes as he relaxed his throat for Damien's shallow thrusts. He could feel his body start to heat up. He... didn't know why doing oral was something that got his arousal going, but he tried to ignore it. It wasn't like Damien was going to do anything other than tease him. Besides, an orgasm wasn't the reward he was looking for.

Damien's voice grew in volume, and Knox decided to try something. As Damien started to draw out, Knox shifted his jaw to allow his teeth to just barely scrape against the dick. Not enough to cause actual pain, but just enough to cause a threat, a sensitive sting. His master made a noise like he was getting torn in two by lust and shock that Knox would dare, *dare* . "F-fuck, yes ," Damien groaned out, pumping his hips faster despite the added danger, and Knox closed his eyes, concentrating on staying relaxed and taking breaths when he could. It was like his master had a mask that had cracked a bit; like he was losing control because of... *Knox*. He had... *power* here.

Fuck, it felt good too, even as Damien was using him. How often could he get away with something like this? Then, his hair was pulled *hard* as his master pushed him down on his dick, and he came with a gasp of Knox's name. He choked, but Damien didn't release his iron grip on his hair until he'd finished, pulling out and stumbling back to sit down hard on the bed.

Knox was dazed himself, doing his best to keep his coughing to a minimum and not feel nauseous about what he swallowed. He... he did good. He was pretty sure. Damien was scrapping up his scattered thoughts, and he was speechless. "Well, Sir? Did y' enjoy yourself?" he said, mustering up just enough seduction left to swipe a thumb over his lips meaningfully. Damien's expression was the most open he'd seen, a weakness for a master, and Knox's thrill of pride was conflicting. Pleasing a master meant fulfilling the narrative of the obedient slave, but still, he was pretty sure he'd *won* the game he'd set up.

"I— I *did*. You... you're just full of surprises aren't you? Come here," Damien said, catching his breath and beckoning. Knox rose, and he straddled Damien's lap. His master's arms looped around him, and he tilted his neck as Damien lavished more attention there before just... staying to breathe in. "Really affirmed my decision to buy you. George didn't know what he *had*." Damien pulled away and gripped Knox's chin to look at him, and Knox met his gaze, unafraid for once. "...You should get a reward," he decided, his hands around Knox's hips gripped and began to stray.

"I want pajamas," Knox declared.

"...What?"

Hastily, he added. "At least, for tonight, Sir. May I wear pajamas? Soft ones, like the ones I wore the first night. I get cold, even with you holding me, Sir. It... hurts more." His master had given him pain medicine for his leg earlier, so Knox figured it was worth a shot to remind him that he *did* hurt.

Damien pondered his request for what felt like ages, while he traced his fingers along the corset and his thighs. Knox didn't flinch, didn't give in to any touch. He had a *goal*.

"...Alright. Just for tonight."

Holy shit. No *fucking* way.

Damien wasn't done using him for the evening. He fucked Knox over the bed with his shirt half unbuttoned and corset tight. Knox couldn't care less, and he wouldn't feel certain in his small victory until he had those pajamas on him. He didn't get to cum, obviously, wound up and hard, and still half hard as Damien ordered him into the bathroom on shaky legs.

When he returned, a fluffy, soft-looking pajama set in light blue was laid out for him on the bed. Damien had settled into bed, watching a movie on his laptop perched on his knees. Knox tried not to look too thrilled at dressing, but the feeling of... what was it? Whatever it was, it made him wrap his arms around himself to give a squeeze before he slipped into bed. The fabric was like a cloud against his skin, and its warmth and comfort were enough to make tears come to his eyes. But he wouldn't cry. He *wouldn't*. He'd done it. His master pulled him close, positioning his head to be in a good place for Damien to play with his hair. He didn't speak to Knox, but he had caught the smile Damien sent his way when he got into bed.

Knox couldn't follow the movie. He didn't really care. He felt... He felt, for the first time, he'd had a say. And Damien had *listened*. He could always change his mind; Masters were fickle; they lied. Still, he was wearing the pj's. He *was*. Just for tonight, but... if he kept it

up... he might get it more. He didn't even sacrifice much of *himself* for the seduction: he hadn't pretended to be a sycophant, a pet desperate for his master's cock, he'd even... hell, threatened to *bite* that cock. They'd been right. Darra especially had been right. *Fuck*, he could— What else could he get away with?

He had his goal for next time: getting to that movie night. Now, if only he'd been able to talk to Cory more about what *Jack* liked for tomorrow.

Chapter End Notes

I won't lie. Jack is one of my favorite characters. The energy is **distinct**.

Thanks again to my lovely editor LoadingNewFriend, who did a great job getting this chapter into ship-shape. Their favorite chapter is next, so I'm sure y'all will love it.

As always, thank you for your support, comments, kudos, etc. It truly does keep me going with writing and through my 9-5.

A Jack and a Pair in Hand

Chapter Summary

Knox starts his day with Jack and Cory and learns a valuable lesson about picking favorites.

Chapter Notes

Hello all! Quick note before the chapter: Sorry this took forever. LoadingNewFriend had many, many notes on this very, very long update! Send your thanks to them for getting this chapter into shipshape. Chapters for good or ill gotten longer the farther we go along, so more content for you! But that also means chapter updates may be delayed depending on how meaty the content is. Also I noticed there were some odd spacing after italics and punctuation, that's because I use google docs and paste into it. I try to fix what I see, but I can't catch 'em all.

Thank you all for your patience and please enjoy :)

Also, this is the proper introduction of one of my favorite characters. A true icon.

Knox woke to roaming hands and gentle nibbling at his neck. Half-asleep, he exhaled, stretching to tilt his head. The soft fabric of his pajamas rubbed against his thighs as his legs twitched and rubbed together. Fuck, this was almost nice. Right up until Damien bit harshly at his neck, making him gasp and remember where he was.

“F— G’mornin’ to you too, Sir,” he grumbled. Damien hummed, lavishing enough attention on the place he bit to make Knox squirm, and Knox was *certain* he was leaving marks. “C’n I do something’ for ya?”

“Makin’ sure Jack knows not to leave marks on you. I’m going to be going out for coffee and some errands, and you’ll be having breakfast in the kitchen. I expect your *best* behavior.”

“I know, I know, y’said.” Knox rolled over, and Damien grabbed his chin, forcing their eyes to meet.

“I repeat: just because you were so good yesterday, doesn’t mean my expectations are any lower. Jack is a little more lenient than I am, but if I catch wind of you being a brat to him, I *will* punish you myself.” Damien let go, and Knox sat up, rubbing his chin.

“Hear ya, Sir.” He paused. “D’you... want me to wear the collar still?”

“Y... Hm. No, I think you can do without. You’ll be with Jack all day, knowing him,” Damien sighed. “Besides, Jack would take it off anyway.”

Knox wondered if that’s why Cory liked Jack so much. He seemed more... lenient. Then he thought about what Cal said, about how he barely sees Cory when Jack’s around, and he decided not to count his chickens. Damien instructed him to get dressed and head down to get his own breakfast, and he was out the door soon after. Knox wandered into the kitchen in a more casual outfit than yester-evening. Damien hadn’t laid out anything for him, so Knox had picked out a three-quarter sleeve blue shirt and slacks (honestly, he would absolutely stay in the soft pajamas all day if he could). Quin rolled up to him with a steaming cup.

“Good morning, Knox. Do you drink coffee?” she asked, offering the mug. Coffee. Fuck, when was the last time he had that?

“Used to. Thanks.” He took the cup, taking a tentative sip. *Yep*, that’s coffee. He didn’t mind the temperature as he chugged it down. Quin laughed, light like a bird, and ushered him towards the table.

“Come now. Master Jack will be up soon, and I want you to carry up his breakfast. Cory will be down to help you in... oh, about a minute or so,” she said, setting down a plate of warm muffins with honey and butter in front of him. She placed a cup with pills next to it, but he decided to ignore that until he had something in him. Quin gave him a look.

Knox grumbled, “I’ll take them. Just. Muffin first.”

Quin wheeled back to start arranging the tray to go up to Jack with another laugh. “Not much of a morning person?” she asked.

Knox wanted to say “Not much of a person,” but instead, he quipped, “If I was meant to be up early, I would be a rooster.” He shoved a muffin in his mouth, and right at that moment, Cory bounced into the kitchen. Quin greeted him much the same as Knox, except with a hot cocoa instead of coffee.

“Good morning, Knox!” he chirped, sitting on a stool across from Knox. “You get to be with me and Master Jack today! Are you excited?” Knox shrugged, making a noncommittal noise as he focused on the honey-sweetness and buttery richness as the muffin melted in his mouth.

“S’... not what I’d pick,” he admitted. He was nervous again, and he hated how often he felt nervous these days.

“Aw, Knox... it’ll be okay!” Quin wheeled out of the room, presumably delivering breakfast to the other members of the house, and Cory continued, “Jack said I was getting a reward, remember? And Jack is *much* better at rewards than Master Damien. Um— *but don’t tell the master I said that*.” His voice dropped into a whisper, looking over his shoulder like Damien might jump out from behind the doorframe or a cupboard slightly ajar. He picked up a muffin. “But, anyway, Jack wouldn’t do anything I don’t like during a reward,

and *I* wouldn't like anything *you* wouldn't like. So... I'll take care of you, okay? I promise." Knox didn't want to sort out the flurry in his chest and figure out what he was feeling. Cory was... too sweet, and if he really had Jack wrapped around his finger, then he was probably right that he could protect Knox like that. Except... Knox was pretty sure he was going to be the tool of Cory's reward, and Jack was very determined.

"...Thanks Cory. I just don't want to cause trouble for you. Damien doesn't like sharing me in the first place, and if I do something Jack doesn't like, Damien's gonna have my head."

"Oh, that won't happen!" Cory said, like it was *just that easy*.

"How do you know?" Knox set his muffin down, losing his appetite. Cory started to reach across the table, hesitated, and then popped out of his seat instead and ran around the table to pull Knox into an awkward hug.

"It'll be okay, Knox. I know Jack really well. I spend the most time with him out of everyone here. You're gonna be great, and I promise to give you tips and warnings if you need them, 'kay?" Cory's voice was determined but soft. Like... he hadn't really been in this kind of role before and he was doing his best. Knox couldn't believe it, but... he was going to rely on Cory. He knew better than Knox did, after all. He exhaled into Cory's chest.

"Okay."

He did his best to finish his muffin, but he couldn't quite get the rest of it down. He'd be hungry later, what with having three full meals put into him on the regular these days, but he could deal. Quin had returned and pressed a tray with a cloche and silverware into his hands, and a mug into Cory's.

"Alright, you boys better head up there. Master Jack just rang the service bell." Showtime... again. Cory led the way up the stairs and to a room Knox hadn't been in before. He'd seen it exploring, but he'd steered clear of it.

Even before Cory knocked, the door opened, revealing Jack barely able to stand still. "Oh! Oh yay! You're *both* here!" The young master reached with grabby hands towards them before realizing that dragging Cory in would be a bad idea with the drink, so he motioned instead. "In!"

Jack's room was nearly the opposite of Damien's formal and luxurious room. Knox's head was already spinning with how *loud* the room felt. It was lit by colored lights, big and small, strung up around the space, as well as a few scattered table lamps that bravely fought back any remaining darkness.. There was a fancy chair, like one of the office chairs in Damien's office, but it was neon pink and green with extra padding around the lower back and head. It sat in front of an impressive array of monitors and machines, colored in the rainbow. Off to the left, almost taking up half the room, was... clothing, fabric, and everything else needed to create fashion. Rising about a foot off the ground and three feet across, here was even a round stage with extra lighting around it. The right side contained Jack's— No, there wasn't... a bed. There was a hammock and a wardrobe. Did Cory sleep on the floor? The amount of

fluffy, colorful rugs in this room was almost obscene, and it seemed like the only place that could be a bed was a circular couch with a wide seat area. Jack didn't seem afraid to express his tastes: wild, carefree, and with the trappings of a teenager sprinkled throughout. As loud as it was, Knox found himself swept up in a bit of its magic. The memory of his own, old room was hazy at best, but he did remember the wall he'd strung string across to pin designs and sketches, drawn hours past his bedtime.

Jack draped himself over the couch, making grabby hands again at the drink in Cory's hand. "Thank you, sweet," Jack said, patting Cory's head as he took the drink. Sipping it, he swept his gaze up and down Knox. "Just set that down, an' let me take a look at you." Knox placed the tray down on a tray table next to the couch, and he stepped back so Jack could look at him.

"Y'want me to spin or somethin'? Uh, Master Jack?" Shit, hold your tongue. Jack laughed though, seeming to take it in stride.

"Sure! Give me a spin. Today, I'm gonna have you up on the platform with different outfits. From what I've seen, Damien likes dressing you up in his drab 'semi-professional' style. But I bet we can do something *fun*." Knox gave him a slow spin, feeling a bit ridiculous. He caught Cory being scooped up into Jack's lap, and Cory snuggling into Jack's side. "...Yeah, *yeah!* I got some ideas."

"...Ideas?"

"First things, don't... call me master or sir or any of that. Just Jack is fine." Knox had to bite his tongue to stop himself from saying, "Alright, Just Jack."

"Secondly, relax. We don't just fuck like rabbits in here. I mean, I totally want to fuck you, but like, my *other* motivation is that I need a model that's closer to this client I'm designing a few outfits for. Cory's so *cute* and small, but my client's got a build more similar to yours, especially now that I've *finally* gotten a good look at you. You're gonna help! And, if everything goes well, you may even get a lil' *somethin' for your troubles*, as they say~" Cory was beaming at them both.

Huh.

"...So what now?" Knox asked.

Jack stretched, pulling the tray of breakfast over, and suddenly brandishing a remote. "My favorite streamer is going live in ten, so I figured we could chill while I have breakfast. If y' wanna do something with your hands, here." He reached over for... a tablet? Must be. It had some buttons on the side of it. Knox took it, but he... was unsure what he was supposed to do, sitting down on the floor just beside the tangle of Cory and Jack's legs.

Cory leaned down. "Like this!"

He tapped a button on the side and the tablet lit up, showing a number of games and other apps on the screen. This was... the most tech he'd been around in his *life*, so he immediately started exploring as Jack pulled up a nearby monitor to watch a livestream of some group of

guys playing a game with lots of cars and explosions. Knox wasn't *entirely* sure what was happening there, but he had settled into playing the first game he clicked on.

His river farm was flourishing in the middle of summer with a small crop of blueberries, when Jack patted his head. "Alrighty! That was delicious, but I'm *bored*." Fuck, should he not be— No, no Jack *gave* him the tablet. He saved the game and carefully set it up on the couch. "Cory can you—? Oh you're already doing it, thank you! So good." Cory had been clearing Jack's breakfast dishes, whisking them off to the door. Jack motioned for Knox to stand and pointed to the pedestal. Okay, modeling. He could do this.

He stepped up onto the platform, and Jack slid over with his tablet. "Cory, can you be on clothing?" Cory nodded and moved near the rack. Knox tried to ignore how much this reminded him of the auction house as he waited for instructions. "Okay, okay, let's see. I know that blue really looks good on you... Cooler tones for sure. Cory?"

"Got it, Jack!" Cory started pulling out tops and bottoms from the rack and laying them out for the master to see. Everything from blouses, to button ups, to odd asymmetrical shirts, and several styles of trousers seemed to be amongst the pile as well.

"This... is supposed to be for your client though, right? Does the color even matter? Uh— Jack?" Knox asked.

Jack picked up a pairing: a blue shirt with a weave that made it look like there were flowers in it and a pair of pants that had a subtle sparkle. "Change into these!" He looked over some accessories. "Well, if the outfits I put you in aren't flattering, then I can't get a good image. And, *I* also want you to look good. Good eye candy." He gestured to Cory. "I dress Cory in all sorts of outfits, and I always make sure he looks the prettiest he can be. And he's already pretty darn cute!" Cory blushed. Well... that answered that. He couldn't think of anything else to stall, so... he started changing. He kept his front to Jack, but he knew his scars were everywhere. The worst ones... he knew he couldn't really hide when Jack wanted him after this, but the less he could show, the better.

It didn't matter though. He saw the look on Jack's face, naked of any mask, more plain than Damien's had been: a combination of a wince and a grimace. Master Jack wanted to borrow him because he probably looked as pretty as Cory. Knox kept changing, methodically. Damien was the one who liked picking up cast-offs, damaged goods. Any second now, he'd hear the words "that'll be all," and he'd go back to Damien. Jack would find a different reward for Cory. There's a dozen he could name that any pleasure slave might like.

"Straighten up for me?" Jack said instead, and Knox did, cautiously eyeing the man. Jack appraised the outfit before nodding, "Mm.. a little trim along the waist. I can easily adjust that, but I wanna see the back." Knox started to turn, but Jack's tone was sharp as he said, "No! Don't move. The lighting is perfect."

Knox hated how he flinched. Fuck. He used to be good at controlling his fear. He just couldn't shake Damien's warning. He wanted to keep the pajamas. Jack tapped a couple of buttons on the tablet, and Knox made a startled noise as the platform started to turn. He swiveled about, and Jack started murmuring under his breath, jotting down some notes before he had Knox change into the next outfit.

Jack's intensity as he scribbled notes, pinned, and sorted fabrics reminded him of his mother. How precise she always was, how much she cared for each piece of fabric. Jack... Jack really *did* care. This wasn't just... a rich boy hobby.

As Jack spun him around in his third outfit, there was a sudden screeching noise, and the platform dipped sharply. Knox stumbled to recover and avoid completely falling on his face on the floor. Jack moved quickly, catching his elbow to steady him. "Shit! Are you okay?"

"Yeah, yeah, I'm fine." Knox sat up. "What happened?"

"Damned if I know!" Jack squinted, poking at the stage. "Maybe something got jammed? Cory, did you see anything?"

"No! ...I'm glad you're okay, Knox." Cory helped him off the platform, and Knox, intrigued, distracted himself by peering over the stage. The platform had tilted suddenly, like... whatever made it spin jammed. He looked at Jack, then Cory, then...

"Can I take a look at it? Might be fixable," he said. They both looked at him with identical expressions of wonder, and Knox had to fight not to roll his eyes. *I'll take that as a yes*, he thought, crouching next to the stage and carefully shifting the panel aside. The mechanism was actually relatively simple. The only part he didn't recognize was what must be the connector block needed to talk to the tablet. It was just a scaled up music box turntable. One of the gears had just popped out of place perhaps due to wear and tear. Knox adjusted a few things, and then, he removed the gears that looked too worn.

"If you can get me gears of these sizes and a wrench, I can probably fix this in an hour."

"Really? I was— Isn't it just easier to get another?"

Knox wasn't sure why Jack was asking *him*, but he shrugged. "Why waste this one? It's fixable, just like..." He glanced at the clothing rack. "If a seam ripped on a pair of pants, you'd stitch that up rather than get a whole new pair of pants, right?" If Jack made his own fashion, then surely he'd see the value in that metaphor. His eyes lit up, and Knox knew that he understood.

Huh.

"I get it! You know what, I'll get those parts for you, and you can fix it! Later though, I think I got all I needed. Did you like anything in particular?" Again, *why was Jack asking him*? Cory must've seen something on his face because he put a hand on Knox's arm.

"Jack sometimes likes to make me things I need, or likes to know what I like in case a customer has similar needs to mine."

"...I liked the— what was it... the turtleneck? I get... really cold sometimes, and I've never had winter clothing. I know it's summer but—" If Cory got pajamas from Jack, maybe Knox would be... warm in the winter.

“Got it! I’ll keep that in mind.” Jack moved a bit closer now, fiddling with the shirt Knox was wearing and smoothing it down. “Mm... what do you think, Cory? Shall we show Knox how we do things?”

“Whatever you want, Jack!” Cory’s hand was still on Knox’s arm, squeezing with reassurance. Knox tried remembering what Cory had said earlier. Master Jack was easier than Damien. He could— If *Cory* could, he could. Jack pulled him over towards the broad couch, unbuttoning his collar. He snorted at the hickeys Damien had left.

“Pff, he *likes* you, yeesh. He’s acting *jealous*, leaving those marks on you,” Jack said. He reached over to cup Cory’s face, smiling warmly at the slave. “But Cory’s all I need.” Jack settled back against the couch, looking between Knox and Cory like two desserts he couldn’t pick between. “Alright then, my lovely boys, why don’t you put on a show for me? Knox, you lead.” *Fuck*. He turned to Cory, and was met with a gentle smile. It was like Cory was saying “*It’s okay; I’m okay with this,*” but Knox still couldn’t help the way his skin crawled as he closed the gap between them. He couldn’t disobey, or even be too snippy with Jack. Damien would hear of it. His hands found Cory’s hips. He had to *lead* right? What the fuck did that mean? Did Jack want him to... act like a master? He’d never been asked to do this, or hell, even have sex with another slave before (unless... George had. He didn’t know, he *couldn’t* remember). Knox couldn’t do that to Cory, he couldn’t— His hands were shaking, and Cory turned them just enough so it looked like Knox was the one who leaned in for the kiss.

Cory’s lips were soft, like satin. Knox was shocked— Kissing? That was— He didn’t have time to think, and he forced his hands to wander. He didn’t know how good of a kisser he was while he was panicking, but if Cory noticed anything off, he didn’t show it. Cory’s hands tugged at his shirt, and Knox started unbuttoning Cory’s. He got the sense that Jack didn’t like slow and seductive, so he worked quick. Sliding Cory’s shirt off his shoulders, Knox pulled off his too, eyeing Jack in the corner of his vision.

The master leaned forward, watching intently as Knox kissed down Cory’s neck. “Yeahhh... this was *worth* it. Get those pants *gone*, boys,” he said with a small sigh of happiness.

Knox’s hands were still shaking, and Cory’s hand, out of sight of Jack, caught his. Knox took a second to breathe, trying not to panic, he didn’t know what he was *doing*. It’s not like George had trained him. Damien sure hadn’t. Damien didn’t want to *share*. Knox steeled himself and dove back into it, kissing Cory softly as Knox unbuttoned Cory’s pants. If this was happening, then Knox was going to do it *right* — Or at least... how he thought it should be done.

Cory’s hands were playful, and as Knox kissed along his jaw, those hands ran along his sharp hip bones and tugged his pants down. Jack shifted back, enough to give them room, as Knox gently guided Cory down onto the couch. They broke apart, and Knox caught Cory’s eyes. They were shining with... excitement. Cory... wanted this? Or at least was *very okay* with this. Something twisted in him (Guilt? Pride? Confusion?), but he pushed it away. Ignoring Jack, he focused on Cory, kissing down his chest and running his hands up to meet with his mouth. Cory’s soft noises were adorable. Using his mouth was something Knox knew, and knew he was good at, too. It was *safe* — as safe as anything could be in this place. He

captured one of Cory's nipples in his mouth, sucking lightly as his hands roamed down to Cory's sides and hips. *Damn* him if he wasn't going to treat Cory well. Cory seemed to be enjoying himself too, wiggling underneath his attentions, and Knox could feel a growing arousal against his chest as Cory moaned softly close to his ear.

"*Fuck* yeah," Jack breathed lustily, and Knox almost stopped. He'd... forgotten a master was there, watching. Knox had to swallow down barely restrained anger. He couldn't ruin this for Cory. Cory was *good*, and he was... "Cory, come here," Jack ordered, and Knox withdrew. Cory's small whine was quickly smothered as Jack pulled him into a deep kiss.

Wait— No, there was something different about that kiss. Jack cradled Cory's cheeks in his hands, caressing with his thumb, and the movement wasn't... *dominating*, controlling, *forcing* like a master— like a master would. Knox, half perched on the edge of the couch, stared unabashed as Cory melted into Jack, and Jack held him like he was a *treasure*, kissing him like he was savoring a dessert. Jack ran his hands down Cory's sides and broke the kiss. He ran his fingers through his slave's blonde hair. "Ready for your reward, my good boy?" Knox felt like he was intruding on some intimate moment, but... that didn't make sense. Cory whined softly and nodded. Jack's eyes swept over to Knox. He repositioned Cory off his lap so he could rise. "From what I gather, your mouth is pretty good. Suck him off, and *treat* him," Jack ordered, a bit of the master slipping back into his voice, but the tone was *still* different than Damien's. Jack wasn't... Jack was just serious about treating Cory, and if Knox didn't do a good enough job, *then* he'd get upset.

"Sure thing, Jack." He couldn't help but smile a little when he looked at Cory, sliding between his legs and down. The couch was wide enough that he could comfortably settle on it. "Lemme show ya how good I am," he said to Cory. Was it the atmosphere? Was it... the familiarity Jack and Cory had? Either way, he didn't want to keep Cory waiting. He tugged away Cory's lilac briefs, and having been given permission, wrapped his slender fingers around his cock. He followed that up with placing a kiss on the head, taking it into his mouth a moment later. Cory's hands wove their way into his hair, but didn't pull or give sharp tugs like Damien would. Cory's thighs closed around his head, and Knox hummed, sliding his hand down as he chased it with his mouth. There wouldn't be a single moment Cory would be longing for contact. His mouth, his hands would be there, bringing pleasure. The sounds Cory made were quiet moans and gasps, whining, wanting *more*. Knox obliged, swallowing his cock completely and holding at the base. Jack made a strangled noise behind him, and Knox felt his own underclothes being tugged down.

"*Knox*," Cory moaned out, hips twitching in little thrusts into Knox's mouth, but he seemed too overcome to get much leverage, his legs turning to jelly. Knox pulled off, pressing kisses down the shaft as he looked up at Cory. He gasped as *very* cold fingers circled his asshole, and when he looked over his shoulder, he was met by a sheepish Jack behind him.

"Sorry! Couldn't wait to warm it up," he said with a shrug, and without any other warning, he pushed in with his fingers.

"F- *fuck!*" Knox cursed, fingers clawing against Cory's thighs. Even with the lube, it was *rough*, an intense pressure with a sharp stinging pain. It was enough for him to want to curl away, but... he'd had worse. He'd had *worse*; why was he so *weak* about this? Fuck, fuck—

He panted against Cory's leg, knowing he was failing, he was ruining Cory's reward, he was — he was—

"Jack," Cory said then between breaths, and Jack slowed.

"S'rry, got excited. Forgot, he doesn't pre-prep like you." Jack's fingers withdrew, and his pace became more teasing, opening Knox up slowly until his shoulders unclenched and his breathing steadied, though his mind was still racing. Jack... apologized. Kind of. *Twice*. Cory corrected him. That and the kiss and then...

Knox decided he should do what his owners wanted from him: not think and just suck dick. He captured Cory's cock in his mouth again, bringing one hand down his thigh to fondle his balls while he was at it. The renewed stimulation threw Cory back into the thick of it, and Knox heard his back hit the couch hard. Jack's fingers quickened as Knox relaxed, and he didn't *quite* seem as experienced as Damien was in targeting his spot. The rhythm they all found lulled Knox into a pleased haze. Then, a tap at his hip brought him back.

"You're doing so good, Knox. Can you turn over? Cory, scoot back to give him a bit more room. Back fully on the couch." He'd asked *nicely*? Fuck, Cory had it—Cory wasn't kidding when he said Jack was... good. Knox turned over, bracing his weight on his elbows. "Gorgeous. Both of you. I bet you were getting close, weren't you, Cory?" Cory, still flushed, hard, and panting, nodded. "You're free to cum, both of you; Knox, if Damien gets pissy about that, *I* said so." Knox blushed too, nodding. He was... embarrassingly hard for just some fingering and dick sucking. "The only thing is... Cory? You can start in his mouth, but I want you to finish on his face." Knox looked up at Cory nervously, but Cory smiled back, brushing a few of his locks out of his eyes. *I'll be careful*.

Knox tipped his head back, and Cory nudged the head of his cock against his lips while Jack lined himself up. Knox took a breath, then parted his lips to let Cory in. *Fuck*, the angle was different than he was used to, and thanks to Cory, Jack waited despite the hum of excited energy—Knox could *feel* him trembling to hold back. The pause was enough for Knox to figure out how best to breathe on his back like this, so when Jack started fucking him in long, slow thrusts and Cory's hips began moving again, he wasn't panicked. In fact, low moans began rising in his chest, which caused Cory to gasp and his hips to twitch faster.

Jack went for it with enthusiasm, much like he seemed to do everything, and no part of him could stand still. His hands roamed across Knox's skin, staying away from the scars for the most part, but his fingers lingered on his hips, gripping and caressing in equal measure. For all that enthusiasm, he wasn't... it didn't hurt. As Cory's sounds started growing louder, Jack went faster, losing his rhythm. The uneven tempo was enough to keep Knox off kilter, startled gasps and muffled moans escaping whenever Jack struck his spot.

"This is— this is *great*. Fuck yeah. Good, *good* boys," he panted. "Your ass is *amazing*." His hand found Knox's dick, stroking it with the same level of sloppy excitement, and Knox's hips rocked. *Fuck* — His mind was starting to slip— It wasn't *bad*; it was different. He felt... safe? Even in his position, he felt like... he trusted Cory to help if something went wrong, like submitting to something like this was *okay*. It was a strangely wonderful bit of peace, settling around his consciousness with deep pleasure curling like a warm fire in his core. He was getting close.

Cory shuddered, and Knox didn't know how someone could make a moan of his name sound so sexy and so cute at the same time. Cory pumped his hips once or twice more before he came, following Jack's orders to the letter. Knox swallowed the small amount of cum, and he closed his eyes as cum splashed on his face. He'd think that was gross in a bit, but he was distracted by Jack scooping his legs up, pulling Knox forward, and bending him almost in half as he pounded into him. The hand on his dick was *fucking good*, and Knox was cumming too before he knew it, Jack's nails scratching at his upper thighs. Jack came a second after, gasping, and jerking his hips as he filled Knox. As the three of them descended from the high, Jack giggled.

"Hehe, *nice*." Knox heard a click, and he opened one eye that seemed out of any danger to see Jack using his phone with one hand, holding his dick as he pulled out with the other. Pictures? Well, it'll last Jack longer, at least. Knox felt absolutely *filthy* as his body calmed. Cum on his face (please, please not in his hair), stomach, *in him* — He hoped he'd be allowed a shower. He hadn't realized he'd gotten used to that after Damien used him. Jack flopped onto the couch, sighing happily, and patting both Cory and Knox on the head. "Well done. That was *everything* I'd imagined." He poked his tongue out at Knox. "Careful, I might steal you more ~" He glanced over at Cory, expression softening, and cupped the blonde's cheek with a tender hand. "Did you enjoy yourself, cutie?"

"Mhm! Thank you, Jack." Cory ran a few kind fingers through Knox's hair. "And you too, Knox." Knox's blush was swift coming, and he pushed any confused feelings aside in order to sit up, wincing. He already felt sore.

"So... what happens next?" he asked, surprised that his voice wasn't as scratchy as he thought it'd be.

"Clean up! Then, my siesta. If you're feeling up to it, you can fix that platform, but me and Cory are going to nap for a bit. I'll text Kinsley for the parts. There's... *probably* some lying around, right?" Jack pressed a kiss to Cory's cheek. "Can you snag a couple warm washcloths?" Cory, thrilled, untangled himself and slipped off the side of the couch to go retrieve the clothes on shaky legs.

Both of them cleaned Knox up. He didn't have to lift a finger. He'd probably still have to take a shower later to clean himself out properly, but it was... nice. Damien had gotten him used to freshening up soon after sex. Knox didn't have to worry about having to stand any time soon. Half lidded, he allowed himself to relax, feeling just a bit pampered. "Y'know, thought about it, and give me a half hour, an' I can probably wrap my head around repairing that stage," he said, and Jack nodded.

"Okie! Here then, take a blanket." Fuck, it really was that casual and easy with Jack. He was tossed a fuzzy blanket, and Cory bundled himself up in one as well, snuggling close to Jack as the master settled in the middle of the couch. Knox slipped over to the side, but he was pulled into the snuggle. Jack futzed with the blanket to make sure Knox was properly cozified.

Jack dropped off immediately between them, but Cory looked at Knox with a big smile. "See? That went pretty okay, I think," he whispered.

“It... wasn’t what I expected, that’s for sure. You really do this every day?”

“Pretty much. I mean, we usually go a couple rounds, but Jack likes to play video games or watch things along with the fashion stuff. They— Jack designs outfits at school, and I model them for pictures. I’ve helped Jack do super well! Or, so I’ve been told.”

Knox wasn’t sure if he should poke into this, figure out what was happening here, and because he couldn’t help himself, he poked. “Do you know what the rest of the house... *thinks* you guys do?”

“Well... only a little. I’m sure they mean well, but I get fussed over a little bit by Quin. Ava tries talking to me, but we don’t have much to talk about. I’m not smart enough, but that’s okay. I have my place, and I’m happy about it!”

Knox’s heart lurched, but he bit his tongue against the more frank answer and tactfully said, “They think that... Jack traps you in here. That he’s like a sex-pest, worse than Damien. Keeps you in here to isolate you and use you.” Cory’s eyes went wide.

“What?! Jack doesn’t do that! ...But, I guess I can’t blame them.” He smiled. “This is me and Jack’s secret world. Jack feels... comfortable with me. I’m the person that... he... can talk to.” A little more to himself, Cory added, “Jack *cares* about me. Jack wants me for more than just... sex, and I never thought I’d get lucky like that.”

Do you love him ?

He steered his thought train away from *that* question. He didn’t want to know the answer to that question, and he wouldn’t know what he’d do with whatever answer Cory would say. Instead, he lowered his head enough to gently bonk Cory’s forehead with his. “I’m glad they’re wrong, out there in the house. I don’t know... if I *should* be okay with it, but this is better than I’ve ever been treated.” He sighed before smiling a half-smile at Cory. “Thanks for... protecting me. Never thought I’d have somebody lookin’ out for me.”

“Ehe, I won’t lie; it’s a little fun being the protector!” Cory nuzzled his cheek against Jack’s arm, and Jack sleepily moved it to drape across Cory’s back. “And... if this happens again—which I wouldn’t mind if it did— I’ll do it again.”

“...I appreciate it.” Knox tentatively rested his head against Jack’s other arm. “I—” He stopped himself. It was hard to admit, but... Cory was giving him big, hopeful, puppy eyes. “I wouldn’t mind if it did either. If— this is going to be my place in the house, I might as well try to find the good parts of it right? And... I think you’re a pretty good part of my life right now. ”

Cory beamed. “Really?!”

Knox reached over to ruffle Cory’s hair. “Yeah, really.”

“Well, for what it’s worth, Knox,” Cory said with a small yawn. “I think you’re a pretty good part of my life now, too.”

As the sounds of soft breathing filled the quiet that followed, Knox was caught up in his thoughts. There was still time for all of this to turn to ash, but Cory had followed through. If Knox was being honest with himself, this wasn't a bad start to the day. He'd gotten fed, fashioned, and fucked better than Damien. He really *shouldn't* pick favorites, but... he was starting to see why Cory talked up Jack so much. He stretched with a small yawn he caught from Cory, and Jack sleepily shifted his arm, wrapping it around Knox, and pulling him to his chest.

Knox should *not* pick favorites.

Sweet Kisses and Sabotage

Chapter Summary

Knox's time with Jack and Cory comes to an end, but his return to Damien is inevitable. Unfortunately, Damien is still himself.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

A languid, nonchalant doze gave Knox time to breathe, but even still, he was the first one to really stir and become fidgety. Jack directed him between yawns to the parts for the stage while snuggling more into Cory. Fixing the platform wasn't a challenge, but it was enough to scratch the itch of doing something with his hands, keeping his mind busy, and when he was done, Jack and Cory were awake enough to chat with him. Jack showered him with praise and a couple of kisses across his cheeks, and Knox was even fed a few sweets along with the late-lunch that Cory picked up from the kitchen. It felt like a world of difference from his other days here, and Knox had to smile to himself. No wonder Damien had lost Cory to Jack. If *he* had a choice between the two, he'd probably pick Jack too, especially when that evening, Jack allowed him to wear pajamas as they settled into watching some flashy animated show. Knox lost track of time a little, entranced by the cartoon. It was just... all over the place.

Jack's hand scuttled onto his shoulder, and Knox's attention was pulled away. "Heyyyy Knox," he said, voice low and full of desire in a very "Jack" way: playful and eager. Jack's hand traced down his chest to pull at the band of his pants. "I like to be taken care of before bedtime."

Ah. Yes. Knox didn't even need to hear the request to use his mouth for him to slip off the cozy couch and onto the ground between Jack's legs. Jack tugged down his sweatpants to pull out his dick. Knox hadn't quite gotten a good look at it before, but if he had to describe a cock as cute, Jack's would get close. It was shorter than Damien's, but thicker. He reached forward with his hand, looking up at the master for any particular instructions before he got to work. Jack grinned down at him. He pulled Cory over to his side, wrapping an arm around his waist.

"Don't go too fast now. I wanna enjoy my show still," Jack said, and Cory readjusted to nestle close. Knox's fingers wrapped around Jack's dick as Jack attempted to pretend he wasn't paying attention to what Knox was doing. Cory, however, made no such effort, watching Knox with wide, interested eyes. Knox shifted forward to bring his mouth close to the head, jerking in quick motions to get Jack hard enough for the soft, warm breaths to matter. He hovered there, moving his hand, and just barely brushing his lips against the cock, testing the waters. Jack made a quiet whine, turning his head to pull Cory into a sweet kiss

that swiftly turned passionate. Knox shifted his fingers, running them down the shaft as he peppered a few kisses of his own along it. Jack's legs crossed behind him and pulled him forward.

"So much for watching your show," Knox murmured with a small smile, but it went unremarked on as Cory and Jack continued their... make outs. Like... like they were a pair of teenagers in the back of a car. Dwelling on it would only bring up more questions, so Knox took all of Jack's cock into his mouth, all the way to the base. The master broke the kiss with an almost *squeak* of a moan. Knox remained there, lightly sucking (going slow, as he was told), and Jack's hand found his hair. Cory was looking at him with wide eyes again, and there was... was it awe or jealousy in his expression? Jack seemed to be trying very hard not to immediately start fucking his throat before deciding all that energy should be diverted to Cory. Jack's free hand roamed over him, tracing his sides and grabbing his hips. Cory seemed to be loving the attention. Knox settled into a nice rhythm, pressing his tongue up against the bottom of the cock in his mouth every once in a while to create a more firm suction and... strangely being content with using his mouth like this. Jack's hips couldn't resist the urge to roll, smoothly thrusting into his warm mouth without going too deep. He closed his eyes, bobbing his head in time with each little thrust.

"*Fuuuuckk!* I'm gonna die. Die of sexy, the both of you. You're— you're *so good*." It was unclear who Jack was praising, so Knox cracked open an eye. Jack's face was flushed, pupils blown wide with lust. He turned to nibble at Cory's neck, and Cory whined. Jack's right hand ran through Knox's hair, eager but not as domineering as Damien, and his other, free hand dipping into Cory's pj pants now. Jack certainly liked sharing the attention. Cory clung to Jack, jerking his hips as desperate little moans fell from his lips.

The show behind him was reaching some sort of climax at this point: the music competed with the sounds from Jack and Cory. He drew up to just suck on the head, keeping his hand moving to cover where his mouth had left. Looking up at them, Cory's eyes were clouded in a lusty haze, completely adoring Jack as his soft moans started including his master's name, breathless and stuttering. Knox pressed his thighs together, suddenly aware of how much... *this* was affecting him. A warm flush had spread from his face to his neck. He felt like a... a... *slut*. Cory's sounds— No, Jack's hand in his hair— No, sucking a cock— *All* of it had him flushed with arousal and wanting more. Cory let out a high pitched gasp, muffled as Jack brought him into another kiss. He shook as he came into Jack's hand, completely overwhelmed with pleasure. Knox took the opportunity to go back down on Jack's cock, but his gaze was locked on the pair above him. Jack brought his fingers up to Cory's mouth, and as well trained as he was, Cory cleaned up the mess with small licks and sucks on his master's fingers, resting heavily against Jack as his breath steadied. Jack's attention turned to Knox then, and the thrusts into his mouth became a little more eager, the grip on his hair a little tighter, and Jack's mouth ran with breathy praises. It didn't take Jack long to follow Cory with his orgasm. Knox was surprised by it, coughing as he did his best to swallow, but a few drips ended up on his lips and chin. Jack sighed, content, and patted Knox's hair.

"'Good job' doesn't do *that* justice. Woowww...." Knox rested his forehead against Jack's leg, catching his breath, before Jack scooped up his cheeks to tilt his head up to clean. "I know Damien has different expectations. But he's not here, is he? You did such a good job, so you deserve a treat, too." Cory didn't have to do anything. He just had to... be near Jack,

and he got a handjob. *Their relationship is different* — “Do you *want* a reward?” Jack asked, his eyes bright and eager. Knox’s blush was suddenly very obvious to him, and he didn’t know what to say for a moment. His body definitely had an answer. Would it be— He *had* earned it— Was it okay?

Fuck it. It wasn’t like he knew when he could next get off, and he was riled up. “... Yeah.”

Knox’s treat, a handjob like Cory’s, was the gentlest he’d ever experienced, and he curled into the master’s side as he moaned and Cory reached out to pet his hair for reassurance. Then, Knox was made comfortable on the odd couch with blankets and a pillow. Cory and Jack snaked into the hammock, and sleep was swift for them. It wasn’t for Knox.

He stared up at the ceiling in the darkness. This was dangerous. Jack’s room was... like a wonderland. Everything that’d happened today felt like... It had mostly been a bunch of sex, which is what he’d expected, but it had also been surprising. Cory and Jack— Jack *was* a master, he acted like one, but he listened to Cory. He treated Cory *differently* than he treated Knox. Cory had it *good* for a pleasure slave. Knox... still wanted more for him, for both of them. But since freedom wasn’t in the cards, there had to be something he could do now. He sighed, rolling onto his side. Operation Pajamas had worked on Damien. Maybe he could devise a way for it to be this *easy* for him. Damien had responded to the seduction well, but Damien was *anything* but easy.

After he woke in the morning, Knox had a few thoughts pulled together. He realized that having a favorite master was dangerous, but Jack had let him do... so *much*. He played a damn video game! Jack had dressed him in clothes he’d never imagined wearing, and he’d even been impressed with Knox’s mechanic skills. Maybe... maybe he should ask Damien for more. Jack might still be—but Cory lived it up.

Dangerous. *You’re a slave; you shouldn’t get used to expecting more*.

Cory and Jack posed a puzzle of their own. He couldn’t get how they kissed out of his head. He— It wasn’t like the “kisses” masters gave him. Forceful, shoving tongues, choking him out, leaving his lips bruised, wet, and sometimes bloody. Damien hadn’t even kissed him, not that Knox *wanted* to be kissed by him like Jack did Cory. Kisses weren’t exactly something common between slaves and masters. They were for control. Dominance. Their right to his disgusting body.

Jack had kissed Cory like a lover, an equal. Soft, sweet, and gentle. He’d cradled his head in his hands and savored it. It’d stopped Knox’s train of thought at the time, and even now. Was there something there? Did Cory— He’d thought of asking, probing into how Cory felt about Jack... Was this what Jack used to manipulate Cory? Or did they... did they both have feelings for each other?

Whatever was happening there, he didn’t want to ruin what happiness Cory had carved out for himself. He should just... stay in his lane. Worry about himself, as he headed back to *his*

master. The bedroom was empty when he checked, and since he didn't want to wait and let his anxiety build again, he took a chance and looked into the forbidden study.

Damien was sorting through paperwork and stabbing at a calculator with his finger. Knox's mouth was going before he could stop it. "Thought you were on vacation, Sir. Guess you're more into pain than I thought," he said, leaning against the doorway.

Damien tried to mask his startled jump at Knox's voice by carefully setting his pen down and running a hand over his hair. "Well, I've neglected a few things here while working. *You*, I see, are back from serving Jack. I hope you behaved yourself yesterday. I expected you earlier, but... I recognize Jack's schedule runs differently."

"Yeah, J— Master Jack said to tell you the favor's repaid."

"In full, based on the pictures he sent me," Damien said, as if his thoughts still lingered on those pictures. He pushed back from his desk. Knox tried to ignore how his skin crawled that pictures of him... so *debauched* had been sent out over text. "In any case, it seems him spoiling you hasn't changed that sharp mouth at all. Come here; I missed you." Knox had almost thought he'd gotten away with it. Sighing, he drifted over as Damien shuffled the papers out of the way.

"How can you chide my sharp mouth when you enjoy it so much?" Knox said with a small grin. "Sir?"

Damien's thumb brushed over his lips, and he pulled Knox into his lap. "I have half a mind to put you to work, but... you said you were good at math, yes?"

Knox was taken aback, but he nodded. "At least what was involved in the workshop and the bit of schooling I got. Not sure how much I'll remember, but it was always my best subject."

"Good. I want you to check my work. Something about these expense reports isn't adding up with what I have in our accounts." Knox swiveled around in Damien's lap to pick up one of the reports, skimming it. Brushing back his hair, he strangled an annoyed huff as Damien's hands started to wander on his hips and thighs. He pulled over a legal pad and Damien's pen, and he surveyed more reports, beginning to scribble down the relevant balances. As he started writing numbers and calculating, Damien's fingers continued to wander.

"Do you want to use me or use my brain, Sir?" Knox snarked, trying to focus on the math as Damien's hand crept up his chest. His master laughed softly in his ear.

"I want to see how good your focus is," he purred, biting at his neck on the same hickies he'd left the day before. *Fuck* if that flare of dull pain didn't stir interest in Knox's pants. He gritted his teeth, a high-pitched moan dying there. He had to prove that he wasn't just a dumb... hole for Damien. Jack knew, Ava knew, but the most important figure in this house didn't yet. Now that Knox had at least some confidence he was staying (for now), he could show Damien. He had to *focus*. Working as Damien felt him up was difficult. The teasing touches threatened to scatter his thoughts, and Damien kept sucking on his neck to try and draw more sounds out of him. But as Knox pushed through, his master stopped. Curiosity had taken hold, distracting him from his insufferable teasing.

“Are you doing it all by hand?” he asked.

“Hand or in my head, which you are *not* helping with. *Sir*. I wasn’t allowed to use a calculator or computer,” Knox replied, all but stabbing the paper as he furiously jotted numbers, calculated in his head, and tracked down any errors on a separate column. He was being careless with his tone, but Damien was... was *sabotaging* him! Frustrated, horny, and remembering *just* how good Damien was at being an asshole, he zeroed in on the numbers. Damien’s hand slipped up his shirt, and he bit more hickeys along his neck.

It felt like ages, quiet noises slipping from Knox’s lips. His body was betraying him, flushed and horny. He wasn’t able to both suppress his noises and focus on doing math, so he had to pick one. He picked the numbers (probably to Damien’s enjoyment). Then, *finally*, he slammed down the pen. “Sir, ‘ve found all the errors.”

“Errors? As in...”

“Multiple. Mostly in...” Knox squinted. His reading was always rough and scanning an end-of-year financial report full of legalese was not the *best* for practicing. “Investments? Maybe company shares? Looks like somebody’s been lying to you about your numbers.” Damien stopped teasing him, reaching around to pick up the legal pad. Knox hoped his shaky writing was legible. Even putting aside Damien’s teasing, it wasn’t like he’d been able to practice his penmanship.

“I’ll be damned. Looks like you’re right. I hadn’t dug as deep as you, but what you did lines up.” Damien flicked the pad back onto his desk. He tipped Knox out of his lap. Knox squawked in surprise, and Damien’s hands gripped his hips. He whirled Knox around to face him. “You did a good job, Firecracker. I’m impressed.” Knox flushed, spreading his legs as Damien slotted between them. Damien was in a *mood* after all, and he didn’t want to play with fire today. Jack had already run him a bit hard yesterday.

His master’s hands roamed across Knox’s chest and then tugged down his pants. “This seems more like a reward for you than me,” Knox said dryly. Though his nonchalance was broken by Damien’s hand wrapping around his cock.

Damien’s other hand pushed against his chest until Knox’s back hit the desk, and he hovered over Knox. “Maybe. I’ll consider a reward later,” he replied, reaching for something in a desk drawer. As Damien’s hand stroked Knox’s cock, slow and teasing, Knox was hardly prepared for when fucking *cold* fingers met his ass. Damien didn’t wait, slipping two fingers into him, and wasted no time finding the best way to have Knox twisting and rocking against the desk. Knox’s nails scratched against the wood of the desk, papers scattering everywhere. Infuriatingly, though Knox’s gasps and moans filled the office, Damien seemed content with just winding him up. Just as Knox was stringing together a phrase that couldn’t fully be classified as begging, Damien’s fingers withdrew, and his master stepped back.

Damien’s eyes were dark with lust as he traced a hand along Knox’s leg. “Just perfect,” he said, “What a mess you’ve made.”

Fuck you , asshole , is what Knox wanted to say, but instead he gritted out, “Oh no, what a series of events. Are you going to...?”

“Maybe later. You got indulged with Jack, and I have to make sure you remember *my* rules.” Damien patted Knox’s hip patronizingly. “Bedroom. I’m going to finish my work.”

Knox tried not to storm out. He’d look ridiculous trying, with how jelly-legged he felt. Past him had no idea how much a day with Jack was a *vacation* compared to serving Damien. He certainly *wasn’t* going to sulk about it, still aroused and frustrated, in the bedroom.

Chapter End Notes

A packed chapter for y'all this week! As always thank you to my editor LoadingNewFriend for making this chapter readable.

I'm going to aim for an update at least once a month, so that way if something happens, y'all aren't wanting (and I'm not late/behind). Plus, if I'm really on top of my game, it means any bonus chapters are bonus!

Butterfly

Chapter Summary

Damien takes Knox on an outing to become cultured at a film festival. Will he succeed?

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Knox had flopped onto the bed by the time Damien returned, flipping through a book that his master had left on the bedside table just to have something to do. He couldn't read well enough to parse it, but... that wasn't really the point. He was just... fidgety and needed something to do with his hands. His master shut the door, shaking his head at Knox before moving over towards the wardrobe.

"You are certainly in a mood," Damien said, rummaging through the clothes.

"Maybe I should wind you up and leave you and see how *you* feel," Knox muttered, setting aside the book with a flick of his wrist and sitting up at attention. Damien laughed, pulling out an outfit neatly folded on a hanger, and setting it next to Knox.

"I'd like to see you try, Firecracker." Knox would never dare, but... the image of giving Damien a taste of his own medicine *did* send a curl of satisfying heat through him. He glanced at the outfit; it was one of the "semi-formal" ones that Damien had gotten from their shopping excursion, and it was even one that he didn't mind: a loose white shirt and navy vest with dark slacks.

"Are we going out?" he asked. It was hardly past noon— a bit early for any evening parties.

"We are heading to an event I didn't think I'd get to go, and that you might even enjoy." Damien sounded elated, giddy even. "I'm *so* glad I was able to secure a couple of tickets at the last minute. I'm taking *you* along because I can't tire of showing you off, and I want to get a better feel for you."

"I dunno, you've done plenty of feeling already," Knox said under his breath, beginning to change.

"It's a film festival."

Knox stopped short, frowning. That... was not what he expected. "A film festival? What's one of those? It's not like a movie theater party right?"

"It's different, incredibly different! And sometimes, *better* than the theaters." Damien fumbled with his tie as his hands attempted to emphasize his words and got tangled in the

silk. “It’s a showcase of independent filmmakers. It can be on anything, with any direction, any range of budget from shoestring to producer levels. But the *art* — the creativity is able to breathe!” Knox rolled his eyes, turning to face his master and nudging his hands out of the way to help tie the tie. He wasn’t entirely sure why. It’d probably be funny to see Damien show up and rub elbows with fancy people with a crooked tie, but seeing it irritated Knox enough— itched the back of his brain that wanted to *fix* things. The silk slipped easily over his fingers as he re-knotted the tie.

“And you expect me to... what? Comment on the camera or the acting? I don’t know anything about film making.” Delayed, he added, “Sir,” and dropped the tie.

“No. I just want you to tell me which ones you thought were good. It’ll help me pick out movies to culture you with that you won’t fall asleep during.” Damien straightened Knox’s vest and opened up a box on the inner shelf of the wardrobe, drawing out a silvery collar with a tracking box tucked at the back.

“...Speaking of,” Knox said, tilting his chin up as Damien fastened the collar. “Sir, may I go to the... movie nights? When the others have them here?” Damien paused, tracing his fingers down Knox’s chest. Knox tried not to hold his breath. He knew... he’d been pushing it with his attitude today. He hadn’t *planned* like the other night, but it just felt right to ask if Damien was (for *some* reason) wanting him to get into movies.

“I’ll consider it. *If* your behavior is good,” Damien added before Knox could get too attached. “And *if* I don’t need you that evening.”

What would you miss anyway? One night of sex? Oh noooo... Knox thought, rolling his eyes as soon as Damien turned his back to him. He’d just have to make sure not to give Damien a reason to say no.

The car ride still hadn’t lost its magic. The countryside flew by. Today, Knox’s eyes were drawn to people working in the fields. They were all wearing the same sort of uniform, but Knox didn’t recognize it. He did catch the glint of metal from the steel chains stretching between each person.

“My competitors’ fields,” Damien said, glancing over. “This area’s climate is ideal for agriculture, so there are a few organizations that hold land out here bought from the old plantation families. They go for a... quantity approach to their labor. I handle mine differently, as you’ve probably noticed, and I think it’s helped my profits. Chains are cumbersome to fieldhands’ movements.”

“Mm,” was all Knox responded with. What was he supposed to say? *Good for him*, he gets to be a rich slave owner. Knox pulled his gaze away from the people in the fields before he could wonder what their treatment was like. He watched scattered swallows take off as they crossed a bridge, envious of the birds again. There wasn’t a cloud in the sky.

They turned off the highway, and Knox spotted a road sign with one name that stood out. *Green Village - 280 mi.* His heart jumped into his throat. When had his hometown become

big enough for a sign to say it existed so far away? Has it changed that much? Was his home still—

It didn't matter. He shouldn't think about it. He'd never see it again.

The venue was a renovated farm, with gravel paths lined with string lights, and it was a lot *busier* than Knox had anticipated. Damien motioned for him to stay close as soon as they got out of the car, and for once, Knox didn't mind—he didn't want somebody to pick him up thinking he was lost. People mingled and chatted, holding plastic cups of what was probably wine. There seemed to be a wide variety of fashion here too: people wearing t-shirts and jeans mixed with folk wielding luxury bags and pretty summer dresses. This wasn't just for snobby rich types like Damien? A couple of barns were lit, cork boards by the doors displaying posters for the movies showing within. A few canopy tents were set up with tables, and Knox spotted a bar. Ah, there's where the wine was. He... hoped Damien wouldn't drink. Or make him drink (though part of him wondered about getting drunk—let it go, let it all happen).

"We're going to be meeting up with a few friends of mine after the first showing," Damien said, picking up a program from a small table and smiling at the attendant there. He clutched it in his hands like an excited child. "They want to see the second show with me, and we'll probably stick together for the rest of the day."

"Are they the theater folks you met with at the café?" Knox asked. They were better than the business guys or the people at the party.

"Sharp. Yes, we'll be meeting up with Erika and Wesley. David couldn't make it today. They were asking after you, you know."

"Yeah?" He was a bit surprised. Then again,. Erika had treated him like a person. *He wasn't—No, yes, he was*— Maybe she cared enough to check up on him. He was... better than when they'd last seen him. More weight, more healed. Still broken and damaged, but less alarming to a free person with some morals.

"I'm not surprised. Erika's not afraid to hold my feet to the fire if she thinks I'm doing wrong," Damien laughed, "We first met at one of these. They were showing a sample of one of their productions, and I ah... made a misinformed critique. We got into a bit of a debate. I love that— willingness to fight to defend your art. After she thoroughly proved me wrong, I offered to fund her troupe."

"Would've liked to see that," Knox said with a wry smile. The image of Damien thoroughly humbled after a chewing out by Erika brightened his mood. "What're we seeing first? Uh, sir." Damien hadn't called him on it, but Knox caught a few eyes looking their way. His master surveyed the pamphlet, pulling out a number of shiny, waxy looking tickets.

"Mm, looks like we have 'Butterfly' first. That'll be in barn 3, so let's head there."

As they walked, Knox noticed there weren't many other collared slaves here amongst the guests. Great! *Great*, just more attention on him. He eyed the poster to the movie as they went into the barn. It depicted a woman covered in butterfly wings, and the tagline was: "To change, to suffer: the cycle." It didn't particularly grab Knox's attention. The design seemed like it was... *trying* to do something, but Knox couldn't figure out what it was. He just hoped the actual movie was better than it looked and sounded from the tagline.

It was worse. Knox tuned the film out in the first fifteen minutes, and he spent the rest of the runtime watching the other people soak up this melodramatic clusterfuck. A disappointing number of them *didn't* look half asleep, and more than he would've thought were intently watching as if it was the next greatest thing. He hoped those were critics who only cared about paying attention to write a review rather than actually enjoying it. Looking over at Damien, he noticed that his master's lips were slightly curled into a half-interested frown. Guess the film's message of "the ideal state is suffering so you can change" didn't appeal to him either.

The ushers turned up the string lights as the credits rolled, and people began to filter out. Knox jumped to his feet to get out of there, but Damien remained. "Hold on. Remember? I want to hear what you thought of it." Knox strangled the annoyed scoff he wanted to describe the film with, but he sat back down, sinking in his seat.

"It was fine," he said flatly and uninterested.

Damien leaned closer. "Oh come on, you have to have more thoughts than *that*. It was fine?"

"Yeah it was *fine*. I dunno," Knox said, crossing his arms.

"I didn't like it," Damien said. "It was trying too hard— I don't think the director believed in the film."

"I dunno, I think they didn't believe in the audience with how much they knocked us over the head with the messaging," Knox muttered.

Damien seemed to light up at the increased detail of Knox's opinion. "Oh yes? Let's dig into that, since *I* thought there wasn't enough concrete—"

"Is that you, Damien?" In the emptying barn, apparently one person had recognized his master. Knox peered around him, and he had to keep his expression even as that pushy asshole from Damien's office, what was his name... *Michael* rounded the aisle of empty chairs. "I had no idea you'd be here!"

"Michaellll..." Damien said through partially gritted teeth in a pained smile. "How... great to see you. I had no idea you had an interest in film."

"Well, it's a newer interest. I happened to see a movie that struck me to my core. I heard around the office there was a film festival that was showing it, so I had to snatch up a ticket," Michael said, his gaze drifting over to Knox.

“Really?” Damien said, placing a hand on his hip as his eyebrow raised. The skepticism in his tone was palpable. “What—”

Before Damien could fully ask his question, Michael interrupted, “You’ve brought that new personal of yours. My, he cleaned up nice didn’t he? I must admit, I didn’t expect him to last, but he must have a strong constitution.” The renewed glint of interest in Michael’s eyes made Knox’s skin crawl. It reminded him of the foremen. It reminded him of George on a good day — when Rosie was still alive. Damien rose from his chair to casually put himself between Knox and Michael.

“I know what I’m doing, and I have good taste,” Damien said. “But I’m so interested in knowing what film swayed you into this.”

“Oh— Right,” Michael said, distracted, and Knox was grateful for the opportunity to slink a bit more behind Damien as he looked for an escape on the other side of the chair aisle. Surely it wouldn’t be too conspicuous to just leap them like hurdles to freedom right? “It was actually this film!”

“This one,” Damien said as flatly as Knox had described his thoughts on the film earlier.

“The message really... struck me Not to mention the choices made with the acting,” Michael said, doubling down. Knox turned his head away to conceal how he had to cover his mouth with his fist. The *acting*? If the writing was as subtle as a cow in a ballroom, the *acting* was as obnoxious as a band with all the instruments out of tune and played by chickens.

“Well, I have a busy day today. This was certainly a... meeting,” Damien said, attempting to sidestep around the other man.

“Oh— hold on, I was wondering if you’d like to come over for an evening while you’re on vacation. I recently got my hands on a good vintage that I’ve been wanting to share with some company. I invited some other members of the board, and I thought we also might have a bit of *fun* with a few slaves I recently purchased.” He inclined his head. “You could bring your personal or that blonde,” he said as if that was an incentive.

“Oh, I have my hands full making this one,” He gestured to Knox, “On his best behavior. Perhaps another time. Enjoy the festival, Michael,” Damien said with the thinnest veneer of patience and politeness. Michael seemed to take the hint then, and he stepped out of the way. Knox didn’t hesitate to follow his master out of the barn, feeling Michael’s eyes on his back.

When they were out of earshot and Knox had taken a glance over his shoulder out of paranoia, he asked Damien in a whisper, trying not to be too blunt, “Sir, I know you said he was a ladder climber, but what is his deal?”

Damien pinched the bridge of his nose. “I haven’t a clue, Firecracker. If he’s trying to get into my good graces, it’s not working. He’s got his eye on you now, which was the goal— I don’t want Cory getting in fifty feet of that man, and the sooner Michael forgets about him the better.. Ugh, I’d fire that man if he wasn’t so close to the board. Every member’s support is needed for me at this moment.”

“...What does that *mean* that he’s got his eye on me?” Knox pressed.

“You don’t have to worry about that,” Damien said, shifting closer as they walked. “You’re mine, and he’s certainly not going to get his hands on you. He wouldn’t be able to handle your smart mouth anyway.” As if that was any sort of comfort to Knox. He rolled his eyes, and Damien’s expression twitched, realizing Knox didn’t believe him. Of course Knox didn’t believe him! Was Damien expecting Knox to *trust* him?

It was a ten minute wait until the next show, but luckily they were saved from the long silence that stretched between them when Erika appeared from the crowd. She wore a stunning summer dress splashed with a rainbow of colors and cat eye peacock-green sunglasses. She was a step ahead of Wesley, who was balancing a plate of little desserts on his arm. Instead of the duck earrings from before, he had little film reels in his ears and a matching black and white asymmetrical top.

“Damien! And Knox! It’s good to see you both,” she said, beaming. “Thank you for the tickets, darling.” She and Damien exchanged a hug, and Knox and Wesley made eye contact over the plate of treats. Quietly, with a small smile, Wesley offered a little square chocolate-covered cake-thing. Knox eyed it, reminded of how delicious the cinnamon roll had been, but still, he hesitated. *Remember, this is food for the public, Wesley is expecting you to eat it, you can do it.* After a quick glance to see if Damien was looking (he wasn’t), he took the small cake. He popped it into his mouth right as Damien looked over.

The chocolate was rich and coated his tongue first. The creamy, pillow-y soft vanilla cake swept his taste buds up before the chocolate could lull him too much. A curve ball came in a delightful surprise of a tart dollop of strawberry jam that had been hidden in the center of the little cake. Knox transcended just a *little* bit.

He wondered if he could get more sweets if he *sweet* -talked Damien. Heh.

“Knox?” *Oh fuck right.* He cleared his throat, zoning back into the conversation. Damien was looking at him like the smug bastard he was. Knox ignored his flush at being caught out with an open expression of delight.

“Yeah— yes sir?” he said.

“I suppose I’ll have to check out the desserts after this show. We’re about to head to the next one. Erika asked you a question.” Erika waved her hand.

“I was just wondering what you thought of the show you saw, just out of curiosity. We skipped that one in favor of seeing a shorter film. We would’ve met you over there sooner, but *somebody*,” She elbowed Wesley, “Got caught up with the food court.”

The man in question grinned sheepishly. “It all looked so *good* though! I had to try a little of everything.”

“...You didn’t miss much,” Knox said. He hesitated, debating his next words, but... these theater friends of Damien’s... they made him feel a little more emboldened. “It was pretty bullshit.” Erika laughed, and Damien blinked and shifted with Knox’s word choice.

“That’s a... way to put it for sure. I thought it had some interesting shots and art direction, but...” He cut off his halfhearted defense, and Knox grinned.

“You thought it was shit too,” Knox said, daringly. Damien flushed, and he turned his head.

“...Knowing the type of person who likes that film sours my opinion on it,” he said, casting his eyes around in case Michael was going to manifest from the crowd again.

“Oh don’t be such an elitist; if a film’s shit, then it’s shit. Don’t beat around the bush.” Erika placed her hand on her hip. “The best thing about those kinds of films is learning what *didn’t* work.” Wesley munched a few other desserts, and Knox scooted closer to be within treat-passing range.

“Hopefully this next one will be a bit better,” Damien conceded.

“That’s not the spirit of a film festival, D, you know that!” Wesley teased, passing Knox a cookie. “What do you wanna impress Knox with? Hoity-toity culture? You gotta get some wine in you. You’re much more fun then—taking art less seriously and all that.” Damien straightened, starting to puff up like he was a ruffled bird.

“I— That was *not* my intention. I simply thought it would be a nice outing.” He paused. “And... Knox hasn’t seen many movies aside from the ones I have in my streaming library, and I thought this would be fun.”

“Neeerrrrdd,” Wesley chirped, winking at Knox, and Knox decided that he rather liked this man. Anyone who could knock Damien down a peg was good in his book. It was odd to be included, but it was nice to pretend he was a person. *He still was* .

“Shall we get going then?” Erika asked, “I think David likes this next director, so hopefully, the film won’t give Wesley more ammunition.”

The next movie began with an opening shot of downpouring rain, soft piano accompanying the rumbling sounds of thunder and water on the pavement. A pair of yellow heels came into view, panning up to a woman running in the rain. A voice-over described the day, the month, the year, the decades in her life as she ran and ran. The music swelled. If Damien had torn his eyes from the screen for even a second, he would have seen Knox bored out of his skull, flatly watching the screen with an unfocused look in his eyes. He was starting to pick up a trend. Movies would... sometimes try to be filled with feeling and meaning, but they’d just make like an ass of themselves. He supposed they just weren’t to his taste. This one, it turned out, was about this woman who made countless mistakes: relationships, job, getting involved with a slave... her life was a mess, and she knocked out her brother to steal their grandmother’s jewels for money. His name was Barrington, which Knox found absolutely ridiculous and was his favorite part of the movie by far. With rain and crows around her, the woman confessed her crimes to her brother after having a near-death car crash. She cried against her brother as he held her, and he forgave her and said their grandmother would too. Knox couldn’t help the sound of frustration that escaped. She was forgiven just like that. Immediately. Without question. Bullshit. He tuned out of resolution to the movie after that,

fully resting his chin against his hand until the lights were turned on again. He didn't care about how her life came together, or how she forged better bonds with her family. Forgiveness didn't work like that, especially in this world. If you fucked up that badly, *tough*. It's not that easy.

Erika and Wesley were chatting as everyone got up, and Damien turned to him. Knox was already opening his mouth to voice his opinion before his master could ask.

"I didn't like it."

"Better or worse than the last one?"

"*Better*, but that ain't sayin' much. It's like this was in a fantasy world where forgiveness *works* like that." He exhaled, crossing his arms. "Are they all going to be this kind of... sappy fantasizing about how directors think the world should be?"

"What do you mean? About how forgiveness works?" Damien had that curious tone in his voice. Knox bit his instinct to just call it all bullshit, and tried to figure out how to phrase it nicely.

"It just... doesn't happen like that," he finally said. There had to be an atonement, a punishment, for as long as it took to earn it. Because if there wasn't... then, well, he wouldn't be here. He could've just gone home, just done what his dad wanted him to do and accepted he couldn't be himself anymore. He didn't go home though, and this... *all* of this... was his price for that decision.

"I'm not sure," said Damien. "Some things can just be forgiven, especially with family."

"Maybe with you and Master Jack." He wasn't sure it'd be the same with his family, not after it'd been so long, not after what he said to them. It was better that they didn't know where he was, that he didn't go back. He had to live with his choices. A balm of comfort like *forgiveness* wouldn't help him survive.

Damien's brow furrowed. It was clear Knox had concerned him, but Knox turned his head away before his master could read any deeper into his expression and words. Damien wouldn't get it. He lived a cushy, rich, and *free* life. Knox raised his voice a bit to attract the theater duo's attention. "What did y'all think?" he asked.

"I liked it, but it was... a little heavy handed," Wesley said.

"A little?" Erika said, laughing, "I keep wondering if they computer animated the crows or if the filmmakers got a giant net and ran around a field. I lost count!"

"I wonder if the crows are all independent or if they're unionized," Wesley added with a grin. "Erika, if you couldn't tell—"

"I thought it was so *boooooorinng*. I had hopes! Dreams!" She draped a delicate hand across her forehead. "I weep into Wesley's bosom for the brain cells I lost. I need more wine in me if this is what we're starting out with."

“Well,” Damien said as if attempting to wrangle the conversation sidling up to Erika, “I think we have some time to swing by for more desserts and drinks before the next movie.”

Erika cheered, and she led the way out of the tent. Knox slowed his pace to stay a bit behind Damien, still able to listen in but . While Damien, Erika, and Wesley chatted, Knox let himself fade back to slightly behind Damien’s side. He felt shaken from the wave of feelings that movie had inadvertently brought. He just... needed to calm down, shake away the ugly decisions he’d made, the feeling of—

You deserve this.

Chapter End Notes

Surprise! I'm back! It's been a while without an update, but I swear I have a good reason. This chapter in particular was... in a terrible shambles. I wrote it originally in an overworked fugue state a few months ago, and the start of April was the first time I'd gotten to look at it since then.

Thanks to LoadingNewFriend's incredible tolerance to what I affectionally call "shitty first drafts," this chapter has gone through the wringer to become Actually Good (I hope so at least). It was terrible I promise you: the dialogue was rough, everyone was out of character (ever do that to your own OCs? It's wild), and I fully just had to rewrite 90% of it.

Writing is a process, and it's important to give a tough section the time it needs in the oven instead of rushing it out (even though I have been dying to get this out to y'all).

But! Here it is at your device of choice to read. I hope to continue monthly updates moving forward. I appreciate the patience and as always I read every single comment and appreciate all kudos <3

- Ghosie

Bird

Chapter Summary

The film festival continues to not impress. Knox learns a little bit more about Erika and Wesley, and he even makes some bad decisions. Damien regrets some of his choices.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

“You’re askin’ me to make an impossible choice here, Wesley.” Knox said, staring down at the platter of desserts that the other man presented to him.

“Well, it *is* a choice to take all of them,” Wesley chirped with a wink.

“You’re going to make him *sick*, Wes!” Damien protested, wrapping an arm around Knox. “You can have... three, Firecracker.”

“It’s a *party*, Damien, lighten up! Speaking of, I got us some liquid lightener,” Erika said, setting down two bottles of wine and a stack of plastic red cups on their table. The dessert tent was spacious enough to allow for mingling visitors, tables for the catering, and a few smaller tables with fold out chairs for those who wanted to sit. Wesley had taken it upon himself to get a whole dish of “the best desserts (in his opinion),” and Damien had dragged over two extra chairs for Erika and Knox. They sat unevenly in the grass, but Knox didn’t mind. He wondered if he got to sit in a chair because Damien didn’t want any grass stains on Knox’s pants, or if he wanted to look like a good, gentle master for Erika and Wesley.

“*Two* bottles?”

“Well, considering we’ll polish a bottle off ourselves— I know how much you like your wine, it’d be rude not to get Knox and Wesley their own bottle,” Erika said with a smile.

“Oh, Knox doesn’t—” Damien started to say, but Knox interrupted, reaching for a cup.

“Thank you, Erika. Really makin’ me feel like part of the crew.” He knew what Damien had been about to say. That Knox didn’t drink. He didn’t, and he probably shouldn’t. It could send him into a panic if he got drunk and felt himself slipping away just like under George’s control. But he didn’t have to drink much, and Erika and Wesley looked at him like he was at their level. Knox could drink if he fucking wanted to. He glanced at Damien out of the corner of his eye and cracked a bold half smile. Damien’s expression twisted in conflict and confusion, but he eventually settled on throwing up his hands.

“Alright, let’s crack open the bottles and have a good time then,” he said, defeated. Erika popped open the wine bottles with a grin.

Wine, Knox decided, was one of those fancy things that people pretended was good for social points. But that didn't stop him from drinking it while he picked out *four* little cakes from the tray Wesley had assembled. The conversation was light and unhurried, all of them pausing between topics to drink and eat and laugh. Maybe it was the wine, but Knox felt confident enough to ask a direct question. "Damien told me you met him at one of these, Erika, but how'd you and Wesley meet?" he asked the pair of thespians.

Erika glanced at Wesley with a fond smile. "Ohhh we've known each other for a while." Her fingers gently touched his forearm, and Wesley's cheeks became a dusty red. He nibbled on a little cake. Oh— they were— "When I was fresh out of school, ready to take on the world of professional theater, I stumbled into this goof at my first job. Well, 'job.' I had an internship with the costuming director there, and it was unbelievably stressful. I bumped into Wesley—"

"Oh don't tell the story, Eri, it's so embarrassing," Wesley said, covering his eyes.

"I was about to have my third stress cry of the day, and I decided to hide myself in the costume racks, and who do I find *also* doing a stress cry?" she continued. "But *this* guy. He'd been sent to fetch *fifteen bolts of fabric*. All by himself! In one trip! A nightmare. We had a stress cry together, and well... that kind of bonding experience does a lot to start a friendship."

"I didn't think anyone would come *in*. I barely got any time by myself when I was there," Wesley bemoaned, but the smile on his face told Knox that he was mostly being dramatic for comedy. Knox didn't... pick Erika and Wesley for a couple, but with the way she looked at him, the way Wesley leaned over to let their shoulders brush, the way their sentences sometimes flowed together, and how familiar Erika's fingers seemed with the curves and dips of Wesley's arm, he felt confident drawing his conclusion.

"I didn't know that about you two," Damien said, leaning forward. "I was under the impression your troupe formed together in a bar."

"That's where we met David! He was a bartender by night, accountant by day. But he *yearned* for the arts. We did form in that bar after a while. Wesley and I needed somewhere away from our respective dictators but close enough that we could get back if there was a fire."

"Sneaking around?" Knox said with a small grin. "Given that y'all are here, I guess ya weren't caught."

"Nope! You'd be surprised how easy it is to distract managers and masters alike with a flashy distraction or set up a situation only they can deal with."

"Nah, I know," Knox said, kicking back the rest of his wine.

"You *know* ? I'm right here!" Damien said, aghast.

"An' I've already tried out a couple tricks on you," Knox said. Erika giggled at that as her fingers surveyed the treat tray. Seeing Damien's expression and flushed cheeks, Knox sighed and added, "When I was in the workshop, if I gave whatever formman was on duty good

numbers in the reports they had me doing, or I— well, they wouldn't notice if a couple other slaves slipped off the line to take a break, or a few extra portions of food went missing.”

“Wow, that's pretty badass,” Erika said, eyebrows up and eyes wide with her admiration.

“You did catch on to someone messing with my company's numbers. I shouldn't be surprised you've had practice at 'finding' those good numbers,” Damien said. His expression was unreadable to Knox. Knox had the realization that admitting to forging business records was a good way to lose the ability to do more for Damien in the future, but he'd... wanted to impress. In any case, Damien had almost certainly read his file, which probably contained all his offenses (or at least the ones he'd been caught for). What *did* matter to Knox was Erika's praise and Wesley looking at him with stars in his eyes. He didn't do it for approval, but... he wanted to impress the two theater people. Take away from the damaged slave they saw before and replace it with the image of a covert rebel.

At least, it was more of a comfort to think of his time in the workshop like that. He didn't know what comfort he could draw from his time with George.

“I was never that bold,” Wesley said. “I wish I was.” Something about the way Wesley said that— he wasn't talking about a boss like Erika. Had he been—

Erika suddenly hopped to her feet, checking her watch. “Oh! Oh! Oh my gosh, we're gonna be late. Chug your wine, let's *move* .”

They hit a few more films, roaming between the barns. Some Knox liked more than others, but there wasn't really any that... drew him in. He wondered if he just didn't get it. If he wasn't smart enough, or if he just couldn't give enough fucks to care about how So-And-So feels about the metaphysical nature of dreams.

The sun was low in the sky when they headed into the last film. Erika stretched. “Mm, I'm ready for some dinner! But I heard this one was just about fifteen minutes long.”

“Fifteen minutes? Bold. I didn't think they'd allow such a short film in,” Damien sniffed. “I never saw the appeal.”

“I mean we did see ones under an hour today, so under thirty doesn't seem like *too* much of a stretch,” Wesley added, leaning more on Erika than he had before. The wine had hit Knox too, a tipsy buzz keeping his steps light even after the long day. He *was* glad he didn't have to lean on Damien.

“What's it called?” Knox asked. Fifteen minutes didn't seem enough time for a story to become obnoxiously artsy, so he had some hope for this one. He didn't know why Damien was so dismissive. A shorter film meant that it wouldn't be as much a waste of time if it turned out to suck.

“Bird,” Erika announced.

“Bird?” All three of them said at the same time with varying levels of enthusiasm.

“Yep! It’s just ‘Bird.’ If there’s not a bird in this, I will be *devastated*.” She laughed and led the way to a smaller barn— maybe it was more of a shed? Knox didn’t think a shed would fit the whole... “movie” experience— surely right? Even as they sat down, Knox could hear the muffled sounds of people leaving the festival. He rubbed shoulders with Damien and Erika as they settled into the narrow seating. A rising sense of panic, of being trapped, of this being too small, too close— gripped his throat. He swallowed, fixing his gaze in front of him. *Calm down*. Luckily he didn’t have to wait long; the movie started, and he was able to focus on that instead.

The film opened on a round blue bird sitting on a branch. It faced the camera, feathers puffed to reveal hints of gold and white. The camera pulled back to reveal the bird was trapped within gilded cage bars. The bird began flying around the cage, singing sweetly, but focused towards where the camera was. It dove forward but had to veer to the side and try again. Further drawing back, the camera revealed the birdcage was hanging in a beautiful garden. Lush greenery spilled out of pots, and sunlight dappled across the ground. The bird fluttered, beginning to pull at the bars with its tiny, delicate claws. When it got too tired, it had to fly back to the branch, then back to the bars, then back to the branch, then—

There was no sound aside from the bird’s song and the rustling of plants. The bird’s chirps grew louder, more desperate, crying out for the freedom the garden promised, before beginning to fade... and slow. The flaps of its wings grew more and more frantic, as each takeoff was more agonizing than the last.

Then, one takeoff proved too much. Its wings stuttered.

It fell, dropping like a stone. It landed. It lay motionless on the bottom of the cage.

The camera pulled aside. Two people: a man and woman entered the garden from a noble-looking house, chatting louder than any bird. “And this is my garden,” the woman was saying, “I have the most wonderful thing in here— Oh, it’s stopped.”

“I heard birdsong earlier. Is that—” The man frowned.

“Oh! Don’t worry. It isn’t *dead*; it’s not even alive in the first place.” She crossed the short distance to the cage, fine silks brushing against the stonework. She fished the bird out of the cage, taking a clock key out of a plant pot. “It just needs another wind up. It’s such a wonderful little thing, but I’m excited for the latest one to come out. Less maintenance, they say.” She stuck the key into the bird’s stomach and turned. The sound of clockwork gears clicking into place drowned out any other sound. They ground into place in a way that made Knox wince— They weren’t greased enough or were misaligned, his instinct told him.

The woman placed the bird back in the cage and locked it in. She turned away as the bird returned to life, singing once again.

“So marvelous! It looks so real, but it’s just a thing. Where can I get one?” The bird began swooping towards the bars of the cage again, fluttering around its enclosure, and repeating its cycle of trying to escape. It sang all that time. The pair left, still talking, and all sound faded until it was just the birdsong and the beating of wings. Then, slowly, that too faded, and the

camera drew back in towards the bird. Ignorant of the knowledge it wasn't even a bird in the eyes of the world as it dreamed of flying around the garden.

Then it was over.

The other film watchers rose from their seats, chatting and filtering out. Damien was standing, commenting something about the lack of substance. Erika was protesting, loudly, and their debate took place in the air above Knox's head. Wesley was quiet.

Knox flinched as his eyes started stinging, and when he reached up, his fingertips brushed wet skin. He was crying, and he was grappling with a strangely profound sense of... loss. Melancholy. That bird— The movie had been short, but he felt every moment for that bird. That clockwork bird. It thought it was real— and to Knox... that *bird* was real. He was *real* *damnit*—

"Hey." He turned his head, alarmed, and Wesley was smiling softly at him. "You got it. Didn't you?" His voice was soft to avoid drawing the attention of Erika and Damien. Knox nodded, unable to form real words. Wesley's eyes were also misty, but he seemed to be holding it together more than Knox was. "I know the person who made this. They'll be at some of our early rehearsals. You'd like her, I think."

"Is she... does she know— was she a...?" No, Erika didn't seem like someone who had experienced being owned. But that meant, "Were *you* a...?" Knox asked, barely a whisper. Wesley nodded. It made sense why Damien didn't see it, and why Erika seemed so fierce in defending the film. He didn't even have time to grapple with the new knowledge that Wesley was *freed*. He'd never met anyone who was— it always seemed like an impossible dream.

Knox got it now: why Damien put so much value in movies. This one, this small, short film, had put his feelings on a screen in the form of a tiny blue bird. A bird trapped in a vicious cycle he couldn't even begin to think about escaping. He couldn't *allow* himself to think about escaping. Wesley offered him a hand, which he took, standing up on shaky legs. Maybe it was the wine making him more emotional.

"You have my admiration, Knox," Wesley said, keeping hold of his hand. "I don't think I would've survived what you went through. I got lucky. A free girl with almost no fear of the law took a liking to me, and I got out."

"Erika does seem like a force of nature." He hadn't expected anyone to compliment how he survived, or recognize how hard it was to keep *yourself* in-tact. It was... nice. More than Dara had given him.

"I hope we'll get to see you more, and..." Wesley looked to almost say something, and then chose something else. "Here—" He flicked a card out of his pocket. "Address. I doubt Damien has given you a phone, but if you ever want to contact me without him knowing, slip out a letter here."

Knox took the card, slipping it into his pocket. "You're lucky I know how to write."

Wesley smiled. “I had a hunch. Can’t forge numbers if you don’t understand them. Let’s catch up.”

Damien and Erika were locked in conversation when Wesley and Knox walked out behind them. They didn’t seem angry, but Knox didn’t understand why they were arguing for the sake of arguing. Then, almost as quickly as they’d started, they were laughing.

“I guess I’m a bit of a purist. I didn’t consider the bird a metaphor for a person stuck in a rut,” Damien said. Knox pursed his lips. *Not just that*. He should— He *had to*. He cut off Erika.

“It’s about slavery, sir.”

“...What?”

“Everyone thinks the bird isn’t a living being, someone with desires and needs, ‘cause it’s just a machine built for a purpose. Slaves don’t need to have desires— and if owners could get away without taking care of needs, they would.” He paused, glancing at Damien and adding “...excluding more generous masters,” just to cover his ass. Damien opened his mouth, as if to interrupt, but Knox pushed on, words tumbling out so he could get his piece in before his master could stop him, “But the bird doesn’t know. The bird will keep hurling itself against the cage until it dies. Then it’ll be wound up again because it has to keep going for the master. We can’t die in peace.” He cleared his throat. “‘Xcuse me, Damien, but... I liked this one.” Damien looked taken aback, frowning as he considered Knox’s words.

“But... they can’t show that kind of stuff here. There’s *some* rules maybe...” Damien shifted uncomfortably, and Erika jumped in.

“Oh you know how it is, D! There’s always one or two that push the boundaries of the rules, don’t throw a fit. Come on! Let’s get another round of drinks and celebrate a successful festival— And some dinner too. Dinner is a *must*. I’ll simply die, Damien, if I’m not fed. You don’t want that do you?” She grabbed Damien’s arm and steered him towards the refreshment tents.

Dinner, drinks, dessert. Knox was exhausted when he finally climbed back into his master’s car. Damien hadn’t drank much on the second go-around—just another glass of wine—and Knox had a feeling that was for his benefit.

He curled up as best he could in the seat as Damien pulled out onto the road. It was close to nine, and the last of the light was finally fading from the sky. “...Was *Bird* really your favorite?” Damien asked. Dangerous.

“...It made me get it: why you like movies so much. It put a feeling I didn’t know I had somewhere I could see it.”

“Do you... feel like that bird now? With me?”

“Sometimes,” Knox said, and he didn’t elaborate.

“I...” Damien’s grip turned white on the wheel, and he fixed his gaze ahead. Knox wondered if this was it. He pushed it too far. Fuck, he even dropped the “master” in front of other people. Erika and Wesley might not give a damn, but *Damien* definitely did. He probably made Damien feel like an idiot for not getting it— and he *was* but that wasn’t the point. You don’t let your masters feel humiliated. That was step one of not getting beaten. Damien could just dump him at an auction on the way home. That’s it! Knox injured his pride one two many times today and made him feel like a shitty person (though Knox thought that was true).

Damien didn’t, but he didn’t speak to Knox again. It crawled on his skin, and he had the urge to just... talk about the movies again. Something to break this awful pit of dread growing in Knox’s chest.

The only thing Knox heard Damien say before they got home was, “I wish I’d had more to drink.”

Chapter End Notes

As always thank you to my lovely editor LoadingNewFriend who rocked the edits on this chapter. It was in better shape than the last one, but things have been BUSY.

Please enjoy! I read every comment and appreciate every kudo.

Damien Interlude 5

Chapter Summary

Damien might've bit off more than he could chew with Knox. Unsettled after the movie festival and car ride home, Damien heads down to the kitchen for a stiff drink to sort out what exactly is bothering him. Luckily, he has Kinsley, who's always there to steer him right.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Damien couldn't sleep. He rolled carefully to face Knox, making sure not to wake him. A frown creased his slave's face, and his sleep was restless with little twitches and shifts. Damien slipped out of bed, walking down to the kitchen in the silence of the night. He'd got what he'd wanted. He had a better idea of who Knox was, and... what he thought of Damien. He chewed on the tip of his finger, scanning the kitchen shelves. He'd known when he bought Knox that he had more going on than most masters would pick up on, but he'd had no idea how clever and witty he could be. Knox had picked up on the true meaning of *Bird* when Damien had missed it. He leaned against the counter as he reached up, pulling a glass down along with a bottle from the other cabinet. He wished that Knox...

He poured himself a drink.

Kinsley appeared in the doorway, sensing a change in the house, probably. "Couldn't sleep, Sir?"

Damien pushed off the counter, spinning around. "...Kinsley, how did my parents get you?"

"They picked me from the Forks Auction House, you know the one." Something in Damien's chest twisted. He *did* know the Forks Auction House, but he'd seen Kinsley's papers. They didn't have any auction house logo on it. In fact, all they had was a court seal. Kinsley had never gone up for auction. It hurt to know that the man who practically raised him would lie to his face like this.

"They didn't. I looked through all their papers when they died. I've seen yours. Please, Kinsley, I'm not a child anymore."

"Is that an order, Sir?" Kinsley asked. His voice was smooth, but Damien's heart stung.

"If it has to be," he replied. Kinsley pulled two chairs from the table, sitting in one as he gestured for Damien to take the other. He sank into it, unsure what he'd gotten himself into.

Kinsley sighed, brushing a hand over his eyepatch. “My family and your family got into a feud. This was... oh, your dad was in his twenties, same age as me. About ten years before you were born. We owned a plot of land where the lavender fields are now. Your family wanted that land, and they weren’t going to play nice to get it. We weren’t as well off, so they thought they could buy us out.” Kinsley’s tone was very precise and measured. It was as if he was stating facts out of a history textbook rather than his own story.

“They sent us letters, threats, police, anything to scare us off. It was about dinner time when a knock came on our door. I answered, I was the oldest, and both my parents worked late. Your father and a group of about twenty relatives showed up with a briefcase of cash and an offer to buy our land there and then. They were trying to scare us with numbers. My younger brother ran upstairs to use the landline while I kept your dad busy. Enough hemming and hawing to let us call in more family. Your dad said it’d be the final offer, and then he’d stop playing nice. That’s when a few of my cousins showed up with their families. It got heated. We told them to screw off, never come back if they didn’t want lead in their guts.” He snorted, shaking his head.

“I don’t know who shot first, but by the end of it, your dad was bleedin’ out, a few of them and some of us were dead, and nobody got away without an injury. When the cops showed up, I was gettin’ ready to finish off your dad. He got rushed to the hospital.” Damien’s eyes were wide. Kinsley had almost— He had no idea— “The public defender we got said that with the money and lawyers your family had, there was no way most of us weren’t being put in slavery for the rest of our lives. I took a plea deal to take the fall, so that the rest of my family could go free.”

“That’s... that’s why your debt is so astronomical. You have—”

“At least seven murder charges on me, along with a binder full of other charges. Not even your wealth could pay it off.” Kinsley half-smiled, ruefully looking out the window. “I’ve come to my peace about it, and I hope that my family is doing well.”

“Do you have any contact with them? I can’t imagine my father would allow it, but he’s been dead.” Damien was almost out of his seat with worry. He was astounded by Kinsley’s sacrifice for his family, and he felt a small glow of pride at being practically raised by this man. Family was so important to Damien. His parents had been... his parents, but his family here, now— he knew he’d make the same sacrifice for Jack in a heartbeat.

“I sent a letter out after your parent’s accident. My littlest sister is going to be a mom soon,” Kinsley’s voice was warm and rich. Damien’s shoulders relaxed, and he took a long drink. The butler shifted forward. “What’s brought this on, Damien?”

Damien shook his head, a whirlwind of emotions tangling his reason. He shouldn’t ask, he *shouldn’t*— he knew what the answer would be. And *yet*. “If I could free you—pay it all off somehow—would you leave me?” Kinsley had always been there. He taught him how to ride a bike, showed him how to shave, and consoled him through his disastrous breakups in high school and college. Damien couldn’t imagine him... *gone*. His strong hand touched Damien’s shoulder, and he met the older man’s sad eye. He knew the answer. How could he not when Kinsley spoke about his family with such warmth and looked at him like that. He was secondary in Kinsley’s life to them.

Damien wanted to be first. He wanted to be Kinsley's first choice, but... that was unfair. They might all want to leave him. If Kinsley had been his father, Quin had been all but his mother. She'd be dead if he hadn't kept her. Knox would— Wild, beautiful, *infuriating* Knox would be doomed to have his brilliant mind smothered by drugs by a bitter old man. *Damien* knew that his slaves were so much more than everyone else saw them for. He wasn't like the people in the *Bird*. They were real to him!

Damien sank back in his chair, taking another drink. God, he'd put money on it that Knox had been languishing in boredom when Damien wasn't there. Forbidden from doing too much to allow him rest, to keep him— *Fuck*, to keep him *safe*. Like a delicate bird.

Knox had been finding his own ways to keep busy at least. Damien knew that Ava couldn't fix clocks.

"Kinsley— I'm sorry for the interrogation into your past. The film festival just had... a movie that hit Knox and I differently, and I wasn't sure how to reconcile that."

"Ah," Kinsley said with a small smile. "Aren't you the one always telling people that cinema can open you to new perspectives?"

"I just didn't expect me to fully *miss* a perspective," Damien said. "...I seem to have given Knox the wrong impression about me. I don't want to be a jailor to him. How... Do you have any advice on how I can show him... differently?"

"I always tell you to be more patient," Kinsley said, reaching over to pat his shoulder. "Time will help, experiencing more together, but keep in mind that you are his master. He may never see you as anyone other than, as you say, a jailor."

Damien shook his head, setting his glass down with determination. "No, *I'm* different. He has to see that. I need to... find a way to get through to him and then show him I won't hurt him. I want him to choose me." Damien hopped out of the chair, filled with a new fire. Kinsley exhaled heavily, rubbing at his face. Damien wasn't sure if that was an encouraging reaction, but it didn't matter. He wanted Knox— Well, yes, but he wanted Knox to trust him, to see him as more than... a master. Let him believe in Damien enough that he could be his little firebrand self— to *hell* with Damien's previous rules. Knox was so much more *fun* when he could be himself instead of playing a role, and Damien wanted to be the person Knox relied on. To be his *first* choice.

"Thank you Kinsley," he said beaming. "Oh! I do... I would like to know one other thing."

Kinsley raised an eyebrow. "And what's that, Sir?"

"What's one of your dreams?"

"Excuse me?"

"You heard me. What's something you've always wanted to do? You've helped me so much, and... well, given your circumstances, you may never be able to... really live out those dreams."

Kinsley blushed. Quietly, he admitted, "I've always wanted to dance on stage: the spotlight on me, the star of the show, and dressed to the nines." Damien smiled, and Kinsley straightened, drawing back. "Don't laugh."

"No, no! I think it's great!... and I think I know how I can help you fulfill that. If you'd like."

"I'll think about it, Sir." He smiled back, and Damien felt his heart ache less.

"I should get back to bed. Jack and I have decided that we'll be going to the coast in two days for my vacation. Could you pack our luggage for that? I'm leaving it as a surprise for Knox and Cory. I know you'll keep the house shipshape while we're gone. Oh! Also, please feel free to keep sending letters to your family. I could also try to arrange for you to see them, if you'd like."

"Have a good night, Damien. And... Thank you. I'll let you know." Kinsley returned to his quarters, and Damien headed up to the bedroom. He wouldn't be sleeping quite yet, though. He had to plan if he was to sway Knox over to his perspective.

Chapter End Notes

Hello all! Happy update, and I'm also pleased to announce that there'll be another chapter coming your way before the end of August to make up for the long wait. LoadingNewFriend and I have been cooking (by that I mean ripping more of my draft apart and needing to reforge most of it). Thank you again to them for the edits, and thanks to all of YOU for reading (despite my update schedule).

Damien is so, so very close, yet so far to the actual reality of "Slavery is pretty bad, actually," but he's in his era of "I'm not like other girls." Will he ever learn?

Repair

Chapter Summary

Knox's repair services are requested once again as Damien has left him to his own devices. He ends up catching up with a familiar face at the same time.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Knox, unaware of Damien's nighttime plotting, was having a quiet morning. Damien had rushed out without really a word to him, and it seemed to him that Knox had the day pretty much to himself. He knew Damien would probably want him to sit around and not do anything messy, but his fingers itched to do something. He settled on snooping around Damien's bedroom some more, poking into any uninvestigated drawers and storage containers.

Kinsley appeared in the doorway, knocking on the frame with his knuckles. His eye had the faintest trace of a dark circle underneath it. "Knox?"

"The one and only," he drawled, shutting the current drawer he was on and turning to face the steward. "What can I do for ya, Kinsley?"

"Quin's wheelchair is having trouble. I thought you may have a spare moment today in order to take a look at it." True to his word, Kinsley was throwing him a mechanics job.

Immediately, Knox abandoned his rummaging, breezing past Kinsley. "Trouble? What kind of trouble? Blew a gasket, electric, something with the wheels?"

"I can't say for sure. The chair's motor seems to be having some motor control issues, and I'm worried— She's worried about falling," Kinsley said. Knox didn't miss his slip, noting it in the back of his mind for curiosity later. Maybe he could ask Cory for some gossip.

"Yeah, that ain't good," he murmured in agreement. His mind was already turning over the possibilities, and he couldn't help the eagerness in his step to get downstairs.

Reaching the kitchen, Knox was surprised to see Cal pushing Quin's chair in. Quin sat stately in it, but it was clear that one of the wheels refused to turn smoothly.

"Perfect, thank you Kinsley," Quin said, smiling. "You should get back to your duties. I've got two sets of good hands here." Kinsley inclined his head towards Quin before departing through the doorway. "I'm not entirely sure if I have the right sorts of parts for you, but Cal here has brought everything from the shed that could be useful."

Cal half smiled. “Mostly pulled what Ava uses, but I can grab something if it’s missing.”

“That should be a good start at least,” Knox said, couching next to the chair to take a look. “What’s going on?”

“Well, it’s been on and off for a while, but it really acted up last night while you and Damien were out,” Quin said with a shake of her head. “Thank you for coming to take a look. Ava’s more used to working on larger machines than my chair, and Kinsley said that you might be able to help. I’ll move out of here so you can take a look yourself.” She lifted a hand to touch Cal’s arm. “Cal, you have permission to help move me to a chair.” She adjusted so that Cal would be able to slip his arms under her legs and around her body. From where he was crouched, Knox had a perfect view of the flex of Cal’s muscles as he lifted Quin as easily as a feather. A dusting of a blush heated his cheeks, and he glanced away before he could be caught ogling too much.

Knox hadn’t really been able to consider... other people before, and unfortunately, Cal was falling swiftly into the “attractive and handsome” category of consideration. Wouldn’t he like to be lifted like—

“Knox?” Quin asked, breaking him from his wandering thoughts.

“Sorry— Got distracted, go ahead,” he mumbled. He tried not to squint at her suspiciously understanding smile.

“It’s no worries. As I was saying,” Quin continued, settling into the cushioned chair that Cal had set her in. “The console for steering started slowing— or at least wasn’t responding, and then— there’s an option to switch this chair into manual mode, and the switch to turn it on flipped, but it didn’t seem to actually allow the wheels to turn freely. It’s as if the brake is still on or it’s in motorized mode.”

Knox whistled. “Really decided to throw a wrench in everything. Alright.” He started with an inspection.

The voice of his father echoed from his memory, “Lay it all out in front of ya. Get the picture in your head before you start. Saves you trouble when putting it back together.” He traced his fingers along the machinery, each wire, and each metal part. The console had to communicate with the motor, which prompted the wheel. He just had to figure out where along that path the flow was broken. If it was electric, a connection problem, he’d have to get better tools, but if it was mechanical, like the wheel catching on a part, that would be much easier.

“I’ve never seen you so focused,” Quin remarked with a small chuckle. “You don’t need to impress me.”

“M’not tryin’ to—” Knox said, chewing on his lip. “You said that the console felt like it was changing into manual mode? Is that a switch on the console or on the wheels?” Quin answered “wheels,” and Knox nodded, gears turning in his mind. He glanced up at Cal. “D’ya mind helpin’ tip this up so I can get a better look at the wheels an’ undercarriage?”

“Course,” Cal said, kneeling down next to Knox. Together, they tipped the chair onto its side. Being so close, Knox could feel how warm Cal was again. He wished he ran as warm; it’d make the winters easier on him. Knox reached down to start taking off panels and turning wires to figure out their source.

“Mm,” he hummed, chewing on his lip. “I think I got it. I’ll need... some electrical tape, wire cutters, a socket wrench, and a...” He squinted. “Actually just get me both a philips and a torx, I dunno which’ll fit better.”

“You just—” Cal cut himself off. Knox, curious about what he was going to say, glanced up to see him looking slightly dumbfounded. Cal caught him looking and ducked his head, a dark rose spreading across his cheeks. “R-Right, give me a sec to grab everything,” he said, rising to fetch the tools. Knox smiled to himself, already thinking about where he was going to start.

It didn’t take long once Knox had those tools in his hands for him to eagerly get to work. With the angle needed to access the wheel, axle, and the terminal wires for the motor connection, Knox thought it best to tip the chair back up from its side so he could get fully under it. Fortunately, he had an extra pair of hands in Cal. The other man was holding the chair up by the arm, tipping it so Knox could wiggle under. It reminded Knox a little of the workshop, squeezing into the tight spaces of machinery to get the best angle (though with less danger).

“I must say, I think I prefer you to Ava,” Quin said with a small chuckle, “She’s much louder and swears more.”

“Every mechanic’s got their own process,” Knox said, popping his head out from under the chair so she could hear him better. “I’m usually thinking too much to talk for once. I used to time myself, see how fast I could take apart and put back together whatever junk was lying around.”

“At the workshop?” Quin probed.

“Nah, I didn’t really have the time even if I had the ability to. I did it when I was a kid. My old man ran a repair shop out of the garage, and I’d sneak bits out of his repair pile.”

“Was your father as much of a troublemaker as you are?” she teased.

“I wouldn’t be such a troublemaker if Damien didn’t keep trying to push my buttons, but... I was always kind of a tricky kid. If the old man didn’t shave his head, I could probably count the gray hairs I gave him.” Knox was keeping his tone casual, and he hoped that Cal couldn’t see how his teeth grit while talking about his father. Quin probably thought their situation was “like father like son,” but the only thing they actually shared was their talent for machines. Knox didn’t want to be anything like his father.

Guess he got his wish, even if it wasn’t what he wanted. He was nothing like his father: a sex slave, a troublemaker, and a disappointment.

Cal cleared his throat, bending down to ask, “So uh, what’re you doing to fix it?”

Looking up at the other man, Knox could tell he was throwing him a bone to escape Quin's inquiry into his father, and Knox could kiss him for it. "Oh! Well, the real problem is that the wheel rotor got bumped at some point, and it ended up tightening the wires here," Knox explained. He traced his fingers over the wires, feeling the bumps on their surface. "The wires got overstretched, meaning that the connection between the wheel, motor, and console was prone to disconnection. Setting the wheel in manual mode wouldn't have changed anything because the wire wasn't transmitting information effectively." He reached for one of the screwdrivers. "I just need to reset the system, cut the overstretched wire out, and then connect it back up. There should be enough in-tact wire that I can patch it." He glanced over at Quin. "Though you might want to ask Damien to order a replacement transmission wire. It'll probably be specific to the chair model and motor, so I doubt you have one here. I should be able to fix this in like, mm, fifteen minutes? The most time consuming part will be resetting the wheel and then checking if the console works again after the repair." Both Quin and Cal stared at him, and a faint self-conscious blush dusted Knox's freckled cheeks. "...What? You asked."

"You're amazing!" Cal blurted.

"Oh, well—"

"I'll have to second that," Quin added. "I expected this to take a few hours. You're a true natural."

Knox wanted to protest. He wasn't used to getting praised for this. His father had expected it, and nobody outside of his family had really cared before—let alone thought that it was amazing. "...Thank you," he said, ducking his head back under the chair to hide his smile. "I'm not too great at a lot of things, but math and machines just... make *sense* to me." Knox adjusted the wheel, finally able to access the damaged wires. "It's nice to be able to do it, especially with something complicated. It's like a puzzle for me." It was more satisfying than any brain teaser or jigsaw puzzle, though. Even more so when he was helping someone.

It took about as long as he said it would. Fifteen minutes later, he wiggled out from underneath the chair and rose. "Boot her up, Cal! Let's see if I wasn't just fluffin' up my ego," he said with a grin, coiling the clipped wires around his hand to be tossed in a bit.

"You got it," Cal said, setting the chair down flat before turning on the console. The power screen lit up (promising), and Cal switched the mode. Knox experimented with the console a bit. Moving the joystick, he was thrilled with how the chair launched into motion with smooth acceleration. He tested to ensure turning and moving in reverse were equally as smooth, but a core of warm satisfaction settled in his chest.

"Oh I'm so excited! Cal, can you help me back into it?" Quin asked, clapping her hands. Cal pulled his gaze from Knox in order to turn to Quin and assist her. Knox's cheeks warmed. He hadn't guarded his expression—had Cal been watching him?

Quin settled into her chair and took a moment to readjust before she took a test drive around the room. "This is perfect. Thank you so much," she said, rolling up to Knox to grab his hand. "I *must* repay you for saving me such hassle. Kinsley was right to recommend you."

“Oh, you don’t really need to— I was just happy to keep my hands busy,” Knox said, rubbing the back of his neck.

“Nonsense. And you too Cal! I’ll fetch something for you since you assisted me this morning.”

“But—”

“I won’t hear it! Both of you stay put right here, and I’ll be right back.” With that order, she sped out of the kitchen.

Knox hadn’t been expecting Quin to want to repay him for fixing her chair, but she seemed very determined to with that order. Still, the small smile on his face was there to stay for now. He glanced over at Cal, also bound by the promise of whatever treat Quin had rolled off to get. “I didn’t expect to see you today, to be honest. It was a nice surprise,” he said, leaning against a kitchen counter.

“Yeah! Me too, um, to both.” Cal moved to lean on the counter next to Knox. “So how is... how are things going with Damien?”

Knox exhaled, lifting a hand to rub across his face. “Not terribly? He took me out to this film festival. I got to hang out with some theater folk he knows. I like ‘em, an’ one of them used to be one of us. I guess that’s why they treat me like a person. More than Damien does at least.” He braced his hands on the counter, crossing his legs. “I’m not sure where I stand with Damien now. He asked for my honest opinion, an’ I gave it, an’ he hasn’t spoken to me at all since. Usually he says somethin’ to me in the morning or leaves a note, but maybe he was just in a rush.” It had been nagging at him. The wheelchair had been a nice distraction, but he couldn’t tell if Damien was upset with him or not. “I hate this. I hate fuckin’... needing to care about what he thinks.”

Cal nodded. “Sometimes... I can’t help but think about how whatever I’m doin’ would affect my resale value.” He made a face. “Not that I really think he would, but... I dunno. You never know, right?”

“Ain’t that the truth,” Knox said. “He’s certainly been possessive over me, which makes me want to believe that he won’t sell me, but I can’t read his mind. Fuck, it’d save me a headache or ten if I could.” He exhaled. “I ain’t worth shit. Last auction I was at would’ve been my *last auction*.”

“If it’s worth anything... you look a lot better now than you did when you got here? That’s one thing he’s done for us both, at least. I also wasn’t... exactly worth much when Damien got me.”

Knox glanced down at himself. He *had* gained weight, and his skin wasn’t faded in color anymore. He *felt* healthy, and most days the pain in his leg or back wasn’t even that bad. It helped that he slept in a master’s bed instead of the floor. “Damn, really?” He hadn’t pried before about Cal’s history, but he did know that Damien had a thing for picking up “damaged goods.” He settled back on his elbows, tossing the decision to ask back and forth in his mind. “I guess Damien saw somethin’ in us.” He hesitated and then he looked over at Cal. “I

wish... I'd gotten to feel the satisfaction of *something* happenin' to mine. Any of 'em." He cracked a rueful smile. "Well, I did get some. Almost killed me, but I did. Burned a whole bunch of fuckin' ownership contracts at the warehouse. A whole shift was able to get out. The look on the foreman's face who was on duty that day was like *cake*."

"You— you did that? Knox, that's... you're a *hero*. How did you even get the papers?"

"I mean... I never really *thought* of it as being a hero. I was mostly trying to take revenge," Knox said, shrugging off the title. "But it *is* a good story." He'd never gotten the chance to tell it. He spun the tale of sneaking through the empty halls in the night, how the lock on the safe took almost too long to pick, getting caught on his way back— The burning. How he'd laughed, full of fear and elation when he sent burning ashes of papers down into the factory floor, lighter in hand.

"I can't exactly tell a master, and the other slave at my last place didn't talk to me— or wasn't allowed to. I haven't really felt comfortable with anyone but you since comin' here. Quin's nice, but I think she's tryin' to be my mom, y'know?" Knox rolled his shoulders, stretching the leg with his old injury out at the same time to flex it. Being on the ground had made it a little stiff. "I hope those kids are doin' well— or didn't get picked up again. Most of 'em were in the workshop on minor charge, like loiterin' or shopliftin'. Hell, I was in there on a pickpocketing charge plus the bail I couldn't pay." He glanced over Cal. "Did they get you on a similar bullshit fine?"

Cal nodded. "Yeah. Loitering. You've been working off 'pickpocketing' this whole time, huh?"

"At first. They added charges for anythin' and everythin'. A part went missin'? Add it to the debt." He lifted his arm to roll back his sleeve, tracing the burn scars there. Cal's hand jerked forward, his eyes wide before he seemed to stop himself. Knox stopped, realizing that Cal probably hadn't seen his scars before. "Sorry, I forgot."

"No, it's okay. That was me; I was just startled," Cal said, rubbing the back of his neck bashfully.

Knox still rolled his sleeve down, speaking with just a bit more care. "They're worse on my back; I can't feel pretty much anything there. The foremen set me on fire." This time, Cal didn't stop his fingertips from brushing against Knox's arm, and Knox didn't pull away. He couldn't blame Cal. What could you say to that? It was nice though. He wasn't used to gentle gestures like that.

He took a deep breath, wrapping up the story, "They lumped the medical bills on my head." He grimaced. "Damien left out my papers, so I got to see my total. I'm not ever gonna work it off." He glanced over to Cal, attempting to get the focus off his scars for the moment. "What about you? Loiterin's more minor than pickpocketin', but you've been in the system for a chunk too."

"Somethin' similar. I was young and stupid enough to think the system was fair when they first got me, though." Cal hesitated. His expression grew pinched, mouth drawing in a thin

line as if he was suddenly nervous to continue. “I could tell you the story, if you want to hear it?”

“If you’re willin’ to tell; you’ve heard a chunk of mine,” Knox replied, shifting to fully turn to Cal, resting his elbow on the counter.

“The guy was like... he wanted me to think he loved me, or maybe he *did*, or thought he did, or something. He talked sweet, but it didn’t stop him from hurting me, or... any of the other things masters do to slaves.” Knox could read between the lines of what Cal meant. *Fucking him*. “Whatever his reason, I figured he was gonna try to convince me to stay after I paid off my debt.” Knox was doing all he could not to scowl as Cal spoke. What a two-faced *snake* — using love like that.

Cal sighed. “Every time I asked how long it would take, he said ‘soon,’ or that it was taking longer ‘cause of the clothes he got me that I didn’t ask for, or whatever. I know I was stupid to believe him, but I just... I hoped, you know? But then the years started going by, and it got harder, and then one day he left out my papers, and I saw my total, like you did. He was making sure no matter what I did, I’d have to stay forever.

“...I did a lot of the housework, by then— I think he liked the idea of, like, his little houseboy taking care of him or something. He didn’t keep as much of an eye on me. It wasn’t hard for me to take a knife out of the kitchen, and that night when he came to bed, I...” he trailed off, glancing up at Knox to gauge his reaction.

Knox’s eyes were wide. “Holy shit. You killed him,” he breathed. He couldn’t believe the guts of this man. Knox had *dreamed* of seeing George dead— but that had only meant outliving the ancient bastard. Cal took it into his own hands, and he was still walking.

“I... yeah,” Cal said quietly. “I ran that night, after. I thought either I’d get away, or I’d get killed for what I did. I didn’t even *think* about getting resold. But I guess since I was already a slave, there wasn’t much they could do t’ me. My new master could’ve had me put down, but... Damien didn’t.” He forced a laugh. “The really fucked up part is I *know* Damien’s been messing with my debt too, or I wouldn’t still be here.”

“Wouldn’t you be free then?” Knox asked. Damien could just be repeating history to keep Cal around longer.

Cal shook his head. “I don’t... really know the details. I *hate* it, but I’m pretty sure he’s doing me a favor, ‘cause as soon as I’m free, that murder charge is waiting. It doesn’t count now because I wasn’t a ‘person’ when I did it—I was a slave.” He made a face. “But I can’t fight a court case with nothing. After I lost, I’d end up somewhere else to serve out the sentence, and it would probably be a lot worse than here. They don’t send murderers to nice places.”

“Damn, I’ll give Damien one thing: that fucker knows the system, an’ he makes it work,” Knox sighed. “Still, I gotta admire your bravery, Sunshine. You took one ‘em out. I never had the guts.” Never had the agency either, not with how drugged up George had kept him. “Y’ve called me sunshine before. How come?” Cal asked, curious.

“Oh, y’know, I have a habit of—” Knox was interrupted from his explanation by Quin returning with a plate of piping hot crumble cake muffins— he was 90% sure they were actually “coffee cake,” but when his mother would make them on special occasions, that’s what he’d call them as a kid.

“I hope I didn’t keep you both waiting long,” she said, offering the plate. “Kinsley just got back with them, and Jack insisted on trying one first. You have it from him that they are ‘teeeeeeeeeeriffic!’”

“I need one of those *immediately*.” Knox didn’t know that he needed a muffin until he laid eyes on that plate of confectionery perfection. He pushed off the counter, scurrying to scoop a hot muffin into his hands. Cal was swiftly behind him.

“You’re *not* going to take that out of this kitchen. I don’t want you getting crumbs all over the carpets,” Quin said, tapping the plate with her fingers until she looked both Cal and Knox in the eye.

“Y’s’m’m,” they replied with mouthfuls of muffin.

Knox lingered in the kitchen with Quin and Cal for maybe a little too long into the afternoon. He chatted with them both about the movie festival and the theater people, how he’d fixed the grandfather clock— It was just... nice. Both of them either had the patience of saints to listen to his chatter or they didn’t mind the sound of his voice. He did try to shut up on occasion, but as he picked the muffin down to crumbs, he was running out of his main excuse to linger. He just wanted to take more time for this.

His ears picked up the sound of the front door. Shit, that might be Damien. “I should skiddaddle. I probably kept ya a little too long.”

“I had a good time,” Cal said with a small smile. “Don’t worry about it.”

“You hurry along now, Knox. Thank you again for your help,” Quin said with a gentle wave.

Knox hopped to it, taking a couple striding steps to the door. He placed a hand on the doorframe and looked back. “Oh! Cal, I give nicknames to people I like. The reason I call ya Sunshine is that’s what you are to me.” He’d almost forgotten that Cal had asked. He really couldn’t linger longer, so he didn’t catch if Cal had any response, heading down the hallway to meet up with his master.

Damien was already taking the first steps up to the second floor when Knox entered the foyer. He looked up expecting Damien to greet him or chide him for not being where he expected Knox to be— but he hardly even looked at Knox. His brow was furrowed in deep thought and he seemed to have a goal in mind.

Knox’s gut twisted with more worry. Seems like whatever *mood* Damien had been in this morning hadn’t cleared. How was he supposed to approach this? He started up the stairs

behind. “Hey, uh, you’re back,” he started, cringing about how fucking awkward that sounded.

“Mm? Oh, don’t worry about doing anything for me this evening,” Damien said with a dismissive wave. “Just go to bed whenever.”

Just— Don’t worry— *What?* Knox stood, dumbfounded on the stairs as Damien continued without a care in the world, down the hallway and into his office. Knox looked down at the carpet. He blinked, almost as if by doing so he could banish whatever that interaction was and try again (it didn’t work). He was so fucked— He didn’t know what he did, but he must’ve done something. His big mouth got him into some serious shit if Damien was ignoring him outright now. The last time his master did that it was a punishment, but somehow, this didn’t feel like Knox was being played with.

Knox went to the bedroom, hoping that somehow he’d be able to figure out what the fuck was happening before he made things worse.

Chapter End Notes

What?! Another upload so quickly! Yes! My writing fingers are hard at work (and my editing brain has fallen over). Thank you once again to LoadingNewFriend for making sure my Cal dialogue is on point and for making people sound like real people.

I hope you all enjoy! We're approaching my current favorite arc, and I'm very excited to share. I read every comment (even if I don't respond) and kudos are always appreciated.

Vacation

Chapter Summary

Knox finds himself swept up in a vacation he only half-expected, but he certainly didn't expect it would be only Damien, himself, Jack, and Cory. Frustrated by the lack of clear communication from Damien, Knox decides to bide his time, hope for the best, expect the worst, and maybe uncover some details about his master while at his childhood vacation home. Cory is unconcerned.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Knox was, in fact, not able to figure out what was happening. He could only assume that Damien was still in a foul mood after the movie festival, and he was keeping Knox in the dark as part of whatever punishment he'd worked out. Resolved to stop thinking over the small exchange over and over again, Knox had actually picked up one of the books that Damien kept on his shelves. He wasn't a strong reader, even with the added difficulty of dropping out of school, so *Harrington's Dream for the Modern Man* was enough of a struggle that it kept his mind occupied instead of imagining marching into Damien's office and demanding an explanation.

After some time, Damien slipped inside, trying to make as little noise as possible before he realized that the bedside lamp was still on and Knox was staring right at him. His master straightened, shutting the door. "I didn't think you'd still be up," he said, beginning to unbutton his shirt.

"Thought you might change your mind, Sir," Knox said, leaving it at that. He set the book on the nightstand, not bothering to sit up from his recline.

"Ah, understandable. Not tonight. We have a busy day tomorrow," Damien said, languidly pulling off his shirt.

"...What's going on tomorrow?" Maybe an answer!

Damien left his shirt open as he leaned over the bed with a cheeky smile. "Did I not mention? I'm on vacation starting tomorrow, so we're going to be leaving for that." Damien's tone was matter-of-fact, and Knox got the impression that he was being patronized to, especially when his master reached out to pat his head like a dog. "Don't worry. I have some great plans in store."

It took everything Knox had *not* to swat at Damien's hand, but his tone was strained when he pressed for more. "And you think it'd be better as a surprise."

Damien pulled off his shirt, draping it over the back of a chair before he unbuckled his pants. “Of course! Everyone likes surprises. Just think of it as something to look forward to.”

Flabbergasted, Knox watched as Damien slipped under the covers, snuggled in, flicked off the light, and turned away to get his precious shut eye. He couldn’t even begin to figure out where to start. Everyone likes surprises, huh? It’ll be something for him to look forward to? Damien certainly sounded like whatever his *scheme* was, it was positive, but Knox couldn’t trust that. He couldn’t trust *anything* Damien said, and he still remembered the *last* time his master had given him a surprise “reward” after that party. His anxiety built again in his throat as Knox sank into the bed. He remembered that the vacation had been mentioned, but now... isolated with Damien, a secret plot awaiting him, and the weird, unresolved tangle he felt between them after what he’d said after the film festival... it jumbled in his chest and kept sleep at arm’s length.

He wished Damien would just fucking tell him what was happening and what he wanted. His head hurt. Frustrated, he turned onto his side and tried to get some sleep.

He did not get much, and the flurry of the morning knocked him flat. Damien was gone when he woke, dragging himself out of bed to put on the travel outfit laid out for him: simple clothes that were easy to move in. That was the calmest part. After he stepped out of the bedroom, Kinsley was there, giving him firm directions to help pack the rest of the luggage. Quin pulled him away to take his medicine and eat something before he was interrupted by Jack barreling into the kitchen to raid snacks. Cory trailed behind him, and it was at that point that Knox realized that they were coming as well. That made sense, and it brought a wash of relief that it wasn’t *just* going to be Damien and him.

Jack, Damien, Cory, and him all somehow ended up in the car, heading down the freeway southeast. Knox was still in the dark about the details of their vacation. He had no idea how long they’d be on the road (only that it’d be more than an hour), or where exactly they were going. He knew they weren’t going anywhere in Victoria, but it had to be somewhere that would be reasonable to get to by car— unless they were heading to some remote rich person airport to fly. He was just part of the luggage either way, so he should just stop worrying about it. He did hope that, wherever they were going, Damien didn’t expect him to cook; he’d be in for an *awful* meal.

He was settled in the back of the car with Cory. Damien had relented to allow Jack to pass them tablets to tap on mindlessly while the masters fought over the radio. Knox... didn’t. Instead, he kept his face turned towards the window, looking out at the scenery racing past. He chewed on the corner of his lip, thinking over what might’ve set Damien into this weird mood that he was in. It had to be because of what he said when his master had asked him about *Bird*. The only other time he’d ever been so brazen with a master was at the workshop. He ran a thumb over one of the scars on his other hand. That hadn’t ended well. Damien *had* wanted to get to know him by asking him about bullshit art movies. For some reason. Knox didn’t know what he’d been expecting. He felt sick at the thought of needing to... smooth things over with his master. He stood by every damned thing he’d said, but the bastard still held his leash at the end of the day. He’d have to...

Knox felt soft fingers brush his arm, and looking over, Cory was smiling at him. “I’m excited to be on this trip with you!” he said, keeping his voice low so the masters couldn’t hear.

“Have you been on one before? They don’t happen much, I figure,” Knox asked.

“No! And that makes it even *more* exciting that I’m doing it here with you! And Master Jack! I really liked spending that day with you.” Knox had to half-smile back at Cory. It... *had* been better than he’d expected.

“You don’t happen to know where we’re going right?”

Cory nodded, looking quite proud. “I do! Master Jack said we were going to the beach house! Apparently, they haven’t been there in a loooooong time, but Jack promised to take me for taffy and seashell collecting.” Knox raised an eyebrow.

“That’s special. Y’all don’t go out together... in public, right?”

“Well... only sometimes! I’m a very good model for Jack, so I go to fashion shows occasionally but... it’s usually only for that.” Cory shrugged. “I don’t mind. It’s safe in Jack’s room.” Jack seemed more possessive than Damien. Keeping Cory in his room, not taking him out and about, keeping him from interacting with anyone else in the house really. But—

Those touches they shared. Those *looks*.

Maybe Jack really was protecting Cory— or at least, protecting against whatever scandal their relationship would cause.

“I’m glad that you’re here, Cory. I wouldn’t want to have to juggle these two alone.” He chuckled under his breath. “Maybe, *we’ll* even get a vacation one day. Kick back with a couple of cocktails and go dancing.” Fuck, he wished he could name a specific one.

“I’d rather stay in. Have a bath with pretty candles and fizzy bubbles,” Cory said, laughing.

The car traveled along at a quick clip. The rolling fields were broken up by hamlets and smaller towns that had blobbed onto the central city of Victoria, like moons orbiting a planet. Their infrastructure and highway junctions stretched towards the larger city like probing webs. Jack and Damien’s fight over music was reaching a fevered pitch.

“*I won the game of Ispy! That means* that I get to play my songs,” Jack declared, cranking the volume to 100 as he popped in a CD. Damien frantically reached for the dial, but Jack grabbed his hand as the music rattled the car like an earthquake. Knox felt the deafening bass in his *bones*, his *core*, and he was honestly afraid he’d be shook out of his skin. Cory was not as rattled, bobbing his head to the beat as he snuggled into his seat to play a colorful game on the tablet. Damien and Knox both grimaced at the same time.

“I’ll pass,” Damien said, almost having to shout over the electro-trance-whatever-music, and he switched on the radio, cutting off the song. He replaced it with a moody rock song. Also not Knox’s preference, but it was better. Jack whined, tugging at his brother’s arm, but Damien simply sang along with the song, a cheeky grin tugging at the corners of his lips.

“Damien!”

“Driver picks. Sorry, Jackie, I don’t make the rules.” Knox shook his head, pulling one knee up to brace his foot against the back of Jack’s chair, and he pulled up the sudoku app on the tablet. He had a feeling the music battle would last allll the way to the beach.

The crunch of tires on gravel and the car slowing to a crawl roused Knox from the small doze he’d slipped into. Lifting his head as they came to a complete stop, Cory was already bouncing out of the car to help Jack, who also couldn’t contain his excitement at arriving.

“Come on, Cory! Let’s show the ocean who’s back in town,” Jack crowed. His floral patterned t-shirt was deafening, like the shirt was belting out a song about margaritas at three am, and his acid washed jean shorts looked to have been cut shorter just for this outfit. Jack was laughing as he took Cory’s hand and pulled him down a stone pathway. The... ocean. There was a faint whiff of salt on the breeze that rustled the tall, leafy trees around them.

Damien sighed, opening the back of the car. He surveyed the contents, lifting a hand to run his fingers through his hair. Damien’s outfit could’ve been out of a summer fashion magazine. He wore a fitted peach colored shirt, but he’d unbuttoned the first two rows to expose his collarbones to the dappled sunlight and rolled up the sleeves. It paired well with the light khaki pants, which clung to the curves of his legs. He’d also taken out the tie that normally kept his hair up, and his dark hair drifted gently in the breeze, sweeping about his face and shoulders. Knox caught himself looking, and tried to ignore the flush on his cheeks. It certainly wasn’t... bad that his master had some looks to him.

“Knox, give me a hand with these,” he said, starting to unload... more suitcases than Knox remembered packing. He bit his groan back, and he headed over to start lugging the luggage. He did steal some time to take a look around by adjusting his grip a little more than necessary.

The area was gorgeous and *warm*. Blooming flowers of all colors lined the white stone drive. Blue slate stepping-stones lead to the door of a smallish (but still grand in its own way) country house. It was two floors tall with climbing ivy and rich green hedges surrounding it. With a crane of his neck, Knox could spy a smaller side house with “CARETAKER” printed above the door. Ah, that’s probably why the place looked cared for. Turning back to the house, he noticed the shutters were painted a spattering of colors, like a child had gotten hold of several neon paint buckets, a stark contrast to the refined elegance of the rest of the house. Damien leaned over.

“Noticed the shutters? Jack’s doing.” Knox allowed himself a small laugh.

“Of course it was. I can’t imagine *you* getting covered in paint to make abstract art on the side of your house,” he remarked. Then, before he could get in any trouble, he asked, “How long are we staying here, Sir?”

“Four nights! Jack has a party that he’d like to attend at the end of the week, and I also have some plans back home. Some movie marathons, fun with you, the like.” Oh joy. Before he

could even ask, Damien papped the palm of his hand on his forehead. “Ah! I suppose you’re also wondering where we are! I apologize for not filling you in. It ended up being such a scramble.” An *apology*? It didn’t even sound patronizing either. “We’re near a place called ‘Cottage Cove.’ I know, very *rom-com*, but it’s a lovely place right on the coast. When our parents were around, we’d come here for a month in the summertime. Jack is notorious at several brunch locations. I wonder if the ban is still in place at the pancake house...” Shaking his head, Damien smiled and continued, “In any case, your duties have expanded a bit to some housework. I almost *dare* to ask if you can cook.” His master picked up a few bags himself and swept up the path, a bit of a cheeky swish of his hips in his wake.

What the *fuck*? “Well, we can see how fast I can make the smoke alarm go off, and that’ll tell you.” He’d never *cooked* before. He hoped at the very least he’d be relegated to laundry and cleaning. He could do *that* .

“Mm, that sounds like an experiment that’ll be more trouble than it’s worth. I suppose I’ll have to roll up my sleeves then.” *Ha!* A master? Cooking meals for— for slaves, not just himself? Ridiculous. Still, Knox allowed himself to relax an inch. Maybe... Damien wasn’t going to retaliate for what Knox had said after the festival, and this *was* going to be a pleasant surprise. *Maybe* . Damien was a subtle bitch.

They dropped the luggage in the entry hall. The interior of the house was eclectic: a mix of heritage items, furniture that was patched and repaired, modern sleek-and-seashells style fixtures, and vases that had clearly been glued back together. The entry hall had a small hutch that contained a collection of tiny ceramic animals next to a hat stand that’d once been bent somewhere about the middle. It was lived in— or at least it had been, once. There was a staircase leading upstairs that had once been much narrower— possibly a slave’s staircase, like the one at George and Rosie’s that he’d had to take— but it had been widened with a different color of wood and made more presentable. There was a double doorway leading into a different room on the right, and a smaller door on the left.

“Go ahead and get familiar with the place. I’ll get the last load,” Damien said, waving Knox off. Shrugging, Knox set out to explore. He chose the wider doorway, crossing the hardwood floors into a spacious living room. A wide, zebra striped coffee table sat in the middle of an expensive looking area rug that took up almost half the room, and was surrounded by plush couches. He almost moved on, but one of the couch cushions caught his eye. It wasn’t flush with the rest of them, and he could see plastic underneath. Knox may not enjoy surprises, but he *did* like uncovering secrets. He lifted the cushion to find... a whole collection of board games in a sunken, hidden, storage compartment. The edges of the lids were worn, and some were taped at the corners. He glanced over his shoulder, half expecting Damien to appear to put a stop to his snooping, before he lifted up the first layer of games to see what else was in here.

His sister always hated board games— at least the ones that Knox was good at. They’d only had two and a pack of cards. Her favorite was FestivalLand, where you rolled a die and moved to whatever color square it indicated. Knox had *hated* it, but she’d turned it into a whole knight’s quest in an amusement park that they’d never actually get to go to. His favorite was the one where you had to slot different geometric pieces in a grid, trying to trap your opponent, who was doing the same to you. He was pretty sure his father had actually

made that one for him since it didn't have a real box, but Kate always wanted to play *her* favorite. So that was the one they played. Ugh.

Deep in the bowels of the storage compartment, he found a battered copy of FestivalLand, but someone had drawn skulls over the mascots' heads. It had probably been Jack... but on second thought, it was funnier to imagine Damien doing it, and that kept his sister's memory from souring his mood.

There was a connected kitchen at the back, separated from the living space by a bar-like island and a small round table. He found the bathroom, and then the doorway left from the kitchen led into a dining room that seemed to have a layer of dust over it. The porcelain dishware in the display cupboard here hadn't been disturbed in some time. There was a caretaker here, right? He paused, wiping a line through the dust on the table. The caretaker was purposefully avoiding this room, so... was it because Damien had told him too? Was it something to do with Damien's family? Ugh, he shouldn't care as much as he did, but if Damien wanted to know more about Knox by watching art movies with him, it was only fair that Knox would get curious about an abandoned room. Or was it? Knox shook his head. He didn't care about whatever tragic backstory Damien might have. He still owned Knox after all and others, and he was a rich bastard. Boo hoo. He shoved his curiosity aside, continuing to explore.

He stumbled into what he first thought was a whole cinema, but it was just a very loving recreation of one. A screen took up most of the opposite wall from the door, and a dark red semi-circle couch was sunk into the floor slightly. Speakers flanked the screen, and it really looked like it must be Damien's favorite room in the house. He didn't see any movies on display, but there was probably a hidden storage somewhere in here, like with the board games. At this rate, he wondered if he'd find the closet Damien kept all his skeletons in. They probably wore suits. The décor looked newer than any other part of the house he'd seen, and bitterly, Knox thought of how nice it was that Damien was able to embrace his hobby, his passion like this. Just turn an entire room of a smaller but still lavish house into his own space. Knox had just a corner of Damien's room, and even then, it felt like he might as well not try. He quickly turned on his heel and left.

With no sign of Damien still, he decided to head upstairs. The bedrooms were all up here, and Damien had been bringing the bags up. He rounded a hall corner, trying to decide which door to open first, before he was distracted by two double glass doors flanked by gossamer curtains. He had to shield his eyes from the bright sunlight that streamed through the etched glass. He could feel the warmth of the sun radiating through it, and the deck beyond the doors sparkled in the light. Before he could help himself, he stepped through them.

The view was spectacular: an expanse of deep blue shimmered in the early afternoon sun, stretching unfathomably beyond the horizon. The *ocean*. He'd never seen it before, and its... *immensity* made him feel as small as a mouse. No wonder Cory and Jack immediately sprinted for it. It took his breath away. He could smell the clean salt in the air, sharper now that there weren't trees blocking the wind, and the sea breeze ruffled his hair as he stood on the deck, hands braced against the rail. Would Damien let him run down? Would it be warm? A flock of white shapes swooped down from the skies. Seagulls! *God*, if only he could fly like them.

“Pretty spectacular eh?” Damien said, sliding an arm around his waist and gazing out at the sea. Knox jumped, a curse on the tip of his tongue, but he bit the inside of his lip, firmly fixing his gaze on the sea.

“It is, Sir,” he said, measured. “I’ve... never seen the ocean before. What do ya want?” His master laughed under his breath.

“I’m not the only one who needs a vacation it seems. I want you to relax a little. I’ll get everything in order here. Follow the path there. You see it?” He pointed, and Knox saw a stone-laid path winding down through the greenery to the sea grass and then the beach. That must be the way Jack and Cory took.

“That’s... it?”

“Yes. Go have fun. I’ll ring a bell to call all of you back.” Damien paused. “Don’t... worry about your scars, Firecracker. This is a private beach.” Knox... hadn’t considered that. If he *were* to go into the water, he wouldn’t want to get the nice clothes wet (not that he *cared*, but Damien definitely would— at least that’s what he told himself).

The consideration Damien offered threw him off balance. “I won’t go far, and I hope you don’t expect me to go out and swim, Sir, as an order,” he said. Might as well head this off at the pass. Damien tilted his head, inviting Knox to continue, so he did. “I don’t know how. To swim I mean.”

“Really?”

“Never had the chance as a kid,” he said. He also wanted to tell Damien that teaching slaves to swim wasn’t common. After all, it opened up an escape route. But after the *Bird*, he had to bite his tongue. Damien was in a good mood, seemed to be acting extra “nice,” and Knox needed more time to figure out what his game was this time. Cory must know how to swim if he was excited to go down to the beach (or maybe that was just because he got to spend more time with Jack).

Damien gave him two playful pats on the ass. “Well the day won’t wait for you to learn. Get going!” Knox stuck out his tongue, attempting to respond in the playful way he knew Damien would like, but he took the chance to escape, darting back through the glass doors before his master could change his mind. As he reached the start of the trail down, he found his worries about Damien weren’t able to stifle his building excitement. The ocean— He never thought he’d be able to see it, let alone go *into* it if he wanted to. He wished his leg hadn’t been fucked up so he could run on the sand properly, feeling the wind in his hair and spray on his face.

He might try anyway, even if it hurt.

Hello friends! Long time no post! Had a number of Life Events happen on top of the holidays, but hopefully, I'll be back to a regular upload schedule very soon. Thank you all for the patience and the kind comments over this unexpected hiatus, and thank you to my editor LoadingNewFriend who always does an excellent job in shaping up my rough drafts.

As a side note, this is the beginning of my favorite arc (at least currently written), and I'm so incredibly excited to share what's coming.

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!