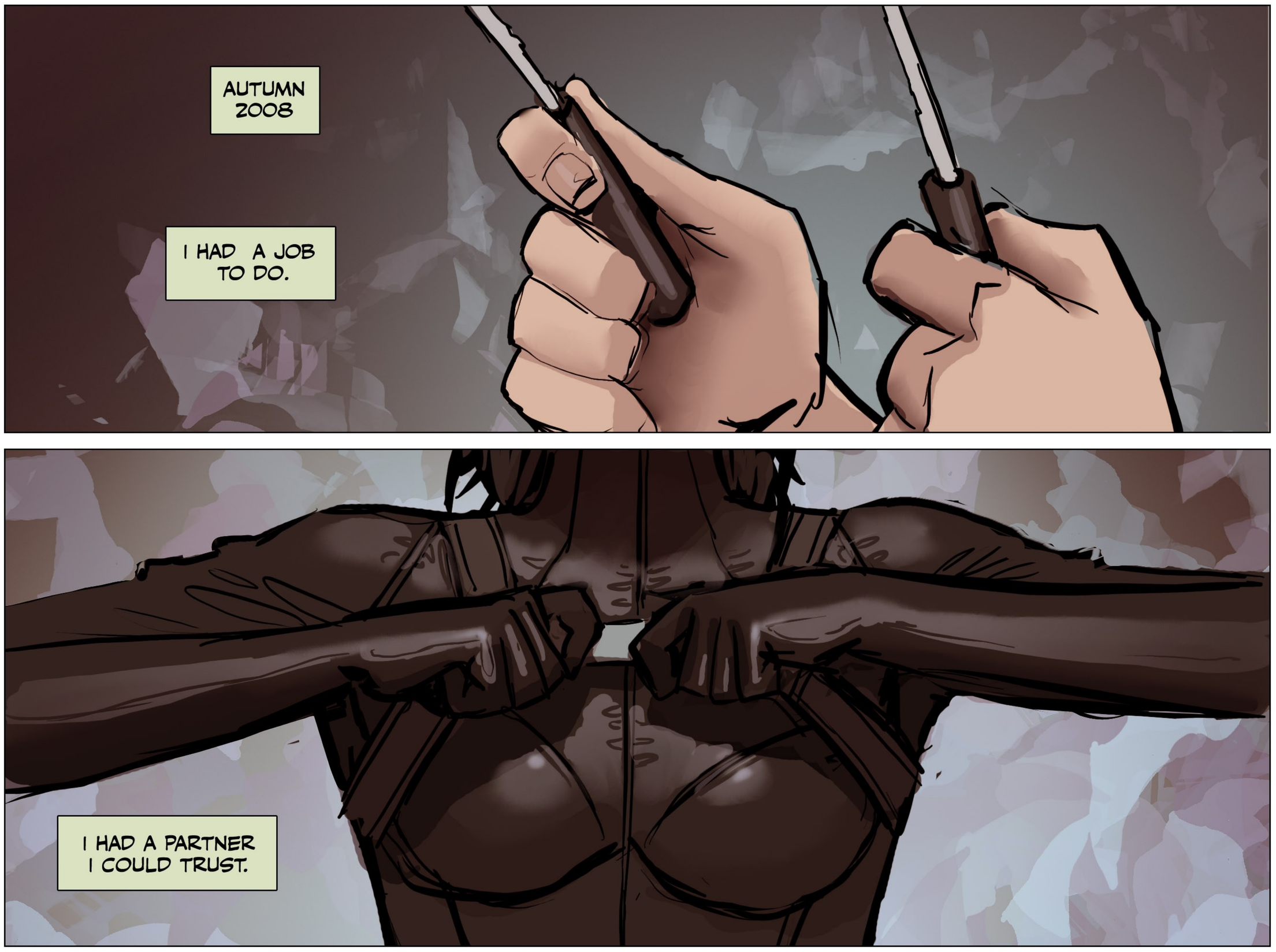
Sunstone

Mercy

TILL DEATH DO US PART


AUTUMN 2008
I HAD A JOB TO DO.
I HAD A PARTNER I COULD TRUST.
WE HAD THE TOOLS FOR THE JOB!
...AND WE HAD THE SKILLS NEEDED TO GET IT DONE!
IT WAS TIME FOR THE BIG...

WISH

READY?

NOPE. BUT I'M IN IT TILL THE END!

THE OLD FAMILIAR BUILDING LOOMED OMINOUSLY ABOVE US. ON ANY GIVEN DAY, IT WAS A MUNDANE PLACE BUT ON THAT DAY, WE CAME LOOKING TO RATTLE THE SKELETONS IN ITS CLOSET. BECAUSE OF THAT, THE PLACE FELT SIGNIFICANTLY MORE DANGEROUS.

STILL, WE STUCK TO OUR PLANS AND KEPT A LOW PROFILE. AFTER ALL, THE LOST SOULS THAT WANDER THESE HALLS WERE USED TO OTHERS LIKE THEM. THEY WOULD IGNORE YOU IF YOU ATTRACTED LITTLE ATTENTION.

BUT IN THE HIGHER FLOORS MORE VIGILANT GUARDIANS KEPT THINGS IN ORDER.

THE JANITAUR!
ANCIENT AND TERRIFYING THE LUMBERING BEAST TENDED TO THE MACHINERY THAT KEPT THE WHOLE PLACE RUNNING

WE THOUGHT IT PRUDENT NOT TO DISTURB HIM SO WE DID AS THIEVES DO AND KEPT TO THE SHADOWS WITH OUR EYES ON THE PRIZE

THE UPPED FLOORS WERE EMPTY AT THE TIME. WE CHOSE THE HOUR OF OUR DEED WELL. RESEARCHED IT ALL BEFOREHAND...

BUT EVEN SO, EVERY PLAN IS INEVITABLY TESTED BY THE CIRCUMSTANCES

FOR US, THESE CIRCUMSTANCES TOOK OMINOUS SHAPES OF THE DARK INHABITANTS OF HIDDEN PLACES

THE ATTIC GOTHS!

STILL, THE ABILITY TO IMPROVISE IS THE FIRST SKILL MASTERED BY ANY GOOD DOM!

WHAT DO YOU MEAN THE JANITAUR IS GOING TO THE ATTIC? I WAS GONNA GO THERE AND RELAX FOR A BIT

DAMN IT!

IT IS AN AGE OLD RULE. TO SCARE A MONSTER YOU NEED A BIGGER MONSTER. ALL WE NEEDED TO DO IS WAIT FOR THE AIR TO CLEAR...

...AND ONCE BOTH THE UNWANTED COMPANY AND THEIR SMOKE WAS GONE...

THE PRIZE WAS OURS FOR THE TAKING

THE LOCK LOOKS ANCIENT AND COMPLEX... YOU SURE YOU GOT THIS?

AS LONG AS YOU KEEP ANY UNWANTED VISITORS AWAY, I GOT THIS!

OKAY THEN! GET TO IT!

AND SO FOR HOURS BATTLED THE STRANGE ANCIENT MAGICS THAT HELD THE OLD DOORS SHUT, WHILE ALLY DID HER BEST TO KEEP THE RAPTORS AWAY

HOLD UP! FUCKING RAPTORS!?!?!

KA-TLACK

SSSSHH! I'M TELLING THE STORY HERE.

FINALLY WITH A DEXTROUS TWIST I FELT THE LOCK'S ELDRITCH SPELL GIVING WAY TO US

AND NOT A MOMENT TOO SOON AS THE RAPTORS MULTIPLIED AND THREATENED TO DROWN US IN A MURDEROUS FLURRY OF TEETH AND CLAWS.

THE PRIZE, ALL OF THE HIDDEN TREASURES OF THE ANCIENT MANOR'S ATTIC WERE OURS FOR THE TAKING AND...

ALAN, THE FUCK ARE YOU DOING?

HEY! YOU TOLD ME YOURSELF! EVERY STORY HAS TWO ANGLES TO IT. WHAT HAPPENNED AND HOW IT FELT WHEN IT HAPPENNED, RIGHT?

OKAY?

WELL I COULD TELL YOU THE TALE OF US GOING TO THE TOP FLOOR OF THE COLLEGE BUILDING, SPOOKING AWAY SOME GOTHS AND THEN CROUCHING IN FRONT OF THE ATTIC DOORS PICKING AND REPLACING THE LOCK FOR TWO HOURS...

BUT THAT ONE'S KINDA BORING!

I SEE, SO YOU'RE GIVING ME THE HOW IT FELT VERSION THEN?

HEH... FAIR ENOUGH.

EXACTLY! I MEAN YOU KNOW THIS STUFF BETTER THAN ANYONE, *LISUX!* THIS WAS AN IMPORTANT MOMENTOF OUR PAST AND I FELT IT NEEDEDA CERTAIN AMOUNT OF GRAVITAS...

SO ANYWAYS, BACK TO MY STORY! WE BROKE INTO THE ATTIC BUT THEN REALIZED JUST HOW DUSTY THE PLACE IS SO WE KNEW WHAT WE HAD TO DO!

CLEAN UP!!!

OH FOR FUCKS SAKE!

OKAY, ALL JOKING ASIDE, IT WAS HARDLY A GLAMUROUS OR BOMBASTIC THING BUT TRUTH WAS, THE PLACE WAS OURS, AND IT NEEDED A LOT OF CLEANUP BEFORE IT WAS IN ANY WAY SUITABLE FOR WHAT WE HAD IN MIND.

SO NATURALLY WE STARTED SMUGGLING IN CLEANING SUPPLIES

MORNIN'

MORNIN'

COULDN'T FIND A NEON JACKET?

COULDN'T DEAL WITH ALL THE SUN INSIDE THE BUILDING?

I'M GOING FOR INCONSPICUOUS

JUST... ACT CASUAL!

DUDE, I'VE SEEN A GUY CARRY A STUFFED PARROT AROUND THESE HALLS ONCE. NOBODY CARES

SIGH... FINE.

LET'S JUST HURRY!

CAUSE I WANNA GET THIS STARTED!

THIS IS GONNA BE A BITCH TO CLEAN WITH OUR ONLY LIGHT BEING THE WINDOW.

YOU KNOW THAT, RIGHT?

YEAH... BUT WE CAN'T RISK PEOPLE NOTICING LIGHT COMING FROM AN ATTIC THAT HAS NO KEY

NOW PUT THIS ON!

GAS MASK? KINKY!

NOT REALLY. I BORROWED THESE FROM WORK. TRUST ME, YOU DON'T WANNA BREATHE IN OLD DUST AND SINCE A VACUUM CLEANER IS OUT OF THE QUESTION AS WELL, WE GOTTA MAKE THE BEST OF IT

KHH-KHH

ALAN

AND WE DID JUST THAT.

WE MADE THE BEST OF IT.

KHHH

I AM YOUR DADDY!

GOD FUCKING DAMN IT, ALLY!

BUT THAT WAS THE THING WITH ALLY. IT WAS EASY TO MAKE THE BEST OF ANY SITUATION WITH HER AROUND.

PUT YER BACK INTO IT YA FILTHY LAND LUBBER!

AYE AYE CAP'N!

OOOH!!! WHO LIVES IN A PINEAPPLE UNDER---

SHUT THE FUCK UP!

HAHAHAHAH!!!

AND HONESTLY THANK GOD FOR THAT ATTITUDE OF HERS, CAUSE THE CLEANUP WAS JUST THE FIRST STEP.

CHRIS, BUDDY! REMEMBER HOW YOU TOLD ME YOU GOT AN ELECTRIC DRILL?

SURE?

CAN I BORROW IT FOR A DAY?

CLASSRROOM IS EMPTY!

DRILLING NOW!

VRRRRRR

DAMN, ALAN. BUY HER A DINNER FIRST!

WE REALLY WENT ALL IN WHEN IT CAME TO OUR NEWLY FOUND PLAYROOM.

I ADDED A BUNCH OF SUSPENSION POINTS ALL OVER THE PLACE...

RUMMAGED FOR HOURS THROUGH OLD DISCARDED FURNITURE AND EQUIPMENT FOR BONDAGE USEFUL STUFF

ORGANIZED EVERYTHING...

THE WHOLE THING TOOK US OVER A WEEK, BUT IN THE END, OUR WORK WAS FINALLY DONE...

AND THEN, THAT COMING MONDAY... IT WAS PLAY TIME

YOU GOING OR WHAT?

HELL YEAH! LET'S GO!

SLAM

UN. BRO-KEN

YOU SURE ARE EAGER TO GET TO COLLEGE TODAY

SOME SPECIAL REASON?

CAN'T SAY!

IT'S A SECRET!

THE HOURS DRAGGED THAT DAY, WE DID OUR RESEARCH BEFFOREHAND. FIGURE OUT A SCHEDULE WHEN OUR FREE TIMES ALIGNED WITH THE CLASSROOM BENEATH US BEING EMPTY. SURE, ITWAS AN OLD BUILDING WITH THICK WALLS, BUT WHY RISK IT.

I GOT TO THE ATTIC FIRST THAT DAY. IT WAS ONLY APPROPRIATE FOR THE DOM TO ARRIVE EARLY. AFTER ALL, I HAD A SCENE TO SET.

AND THERE WASN'T MUCH TIME CAUSE SHE TOO WAS ON HER WAY.

... SHE HAD HIGH EXPECTATIONS...

AND I WAS DAMNED IF I WAS GONNA DISAPPOINT HER.

WELL, HELLO THERE MISTER!

OOOH WHAT'S WITH ALL THE ROPES?

YOU'RE LATE!

YEAH, DUDE, SORRY BOUT THAT. TOOK ME TWO FLIGHTS OF STAIRS BEFORE I REALIZED I WAS HOLDING ONTO THE RAILING

THEN IT HIT ME I'D PROBABLY BE HANDLING YOUR DICK SOON AND I'M NO GERMOPHOBE BUT STILL... HAD TO WASH MY HANDS JUST IN CASE.

BASIC HYGIENE AND ALL THAT

APPRECIATED.

YOU'RE STILL LATE

AAAAH...

WELL, SHIT! GUESS I'M GONNA HAVE TO TAKE MY PUNISHMENT THEN! AREN'T I?

YUP! NOW GIVE ME YOUR HANDS!

YOU MEAN MY FRESHLY WASHED HANDS, MASTER?

WISEASS!

ARMS UP!

HARNESS FEELS FAMILIAR

YUP, LAST TIME YOU HAD ONE OF THESE ON WE WERE IN A LIBRARY THOUGH.

NOW, UP YOU GO!

HEH!

WHAT?

WITH YOU ON THIS TABLE ALL HELPLESS...

KINDA LOOKS LIKE WE'RE ABOUT TO DO ONE OF THOSE DIAPER HUMILIATION PLAYS

OKAY, ALAN! IF YOU PULL OUT A FUCKING DIAPER OUT OF YOUR BAG WE'RE DONE!

OH GOD, THE BABY IS TANTRUMING AGAIN...

NOW WHERE DID I PUT THAT PACIFIER?

ALAN, I FUCKING SWEAR!!!

RELAX, DUMBASS! IT'S ONLY A BALLGAG!

WAIT, YOU REALLY THOUGHT I WAS GONNA PULL OUT A DIAPER?

HEY, YOU SAID IT LOOKED LIKE CHANGING A BABY. IT KINDA FELT LIKE A SETUP FOR A GAME!

I'M NOT INTO THAT, AND YOU BETTER FUCKING BELIEVE I'D ASK FIRST IF YOU WERE.

BY THE WAY, NOTHING BITING IN TOO STRONGLY?

I MEAN THAT'S KINDA THE POINT HEH, BUT NO, WE'RE GOOD

MASTER

JUST CHECKING CAUSE WHAT I DO NEXT WILL RAISE OUR SHOULDERS AND IT'S SUPPOSED TO MAKE SOME KNOTS DIG IN

HOW BOUT NOW?

OOOOH! Y-YEAH! NOW IT'S GETTING IN THERE!

TOO MUCH?

NO, BUT I JUST FELT MY SPINE POP AND IT FEELS GREAT!

DUDE! CRAZY IDEA! IF THIS BDSM THING DOESN'T REALLY PAN OUT FOR US WE SHOULD TOTALLY OPEN A CHIROPRACTOR'S OFF---

MMMP!

YOU TALK TOO MUCH FOR A PLAYTHING!

NOW SIT TIGHT WHILE I GET THE REST...

OF...

WOW

MEWFE!!!

MEWF---
!
MERCY!?

HOLD ON!

MWAH!

HEY,
YOU OKAY?

MY---
MY LEGS ARE GOING NUMB!

SHIT!
I'M ON IT.

BETTER?

GOD YES.

SIGH...
IT'S MY PROGRAMMER STAMINA. GOOD WITH FINGERS... BUT THE REST NEEDS A LOT OF WORK
KINDA STIFF
HEH HOW ARE YOUR ARMS?
ON IT!
I REALLY AM SORRY. I'LL MAKE IT UP TO YOU
HUH?
OH, YOU ALREADY DID.
YOU KNOW HOW IN MY ROOM WE WERE ALWAYS KINDA VERY CLOSE TO EACH OTHER, WHAT WITH THE LACK OF SPACE AND ALL
YEAH?
WELL... I GOT TO TAKE A STEP BACK AND JUST... SEE THE BIG PICTURE, THE ACTUAL BEAUTY OF IT ALL. MY SLOPPPY KNOTS ASIDE, YOU WERE... GORGEOUS
I KNOW IT'S NOT VERY DOMMY TO SAY THAT BUT IT'S THE TRUTH.
OH, IT'S DOMMY! PRAISE IS A PART OF THE KINK
AND... HEH... THANK YOU.
ALLY, I THINK THIS IS THE DAY I FELL IN LOVE.

WHAT?

HEH! NOT WITH YOU. WELL... MAYBE A LITTLE BIT, BUT I THINK THAT'S FINE.

I FELL IN LOVE WITH ALL OF THIS. BDSM, FOR THE FIRST THING IT FELT MORE THAN SOME KINK. I FELT LIKE WE CREATED SOMETHING WONDERFUL.

GOD YOU'RE A FUCKING NERD.

AND YOU'RE A TERRIBLE SUB!

BUT I'M A GREAT DOMME

NOT TODAY!

OWWMMMM

YES MASTER!

OH WE'RE STILL DOING THIS?

I'M NOT A KFIFFEW

KFIFFEW?

A QUITTER, NOW LAY DOWN ON YOUR STOMACH!!

AND STOP SQUIRMING!

HEH...

THOK THOK THOKKA THOK

OUR FIRST TIME AT THE ATTIC WAS A WILD AND SOMEWHAT BUMPY RIDE.

I MEAN THAT LITERALLY TURNS OUT THE FLOOR UNDER US WAS A BIT WARPED SO THE GYM BOX KEPT WOBBLING UNDER US.

THANKFULLY THE CLASS ROOM BELOW WAS EMPTY AT THE TIME. THE LAST THING WE NEEDED WERE RUMORS OF ATTIC POLTERGEISTES BUMPING UGLIES.

BUT BEYOND IT BEING AN EXCITING FORBIDDEN EXPERIENCE, THE ATTIC REVEALED SOME FEELINGS THAT NEEDED TO BE ADRESSED.

IMPORTANT FEELINGS ABOUT IMPORTANT STUFF.

THERE REALLY WAS NO WAY OF GETTING OUT OF IT.

WE HAD TO HAVE... *THE TALK!*

NO WAY!

WHAT? WE SAID WE WERE GONNA HAVE AN HONEST CONVERSATION ABOUT WHAT WE'RE OPEN TO TRYING OUT UP THERE. WE DON'T WANT ANOTHER DIAPER SCARE, RIGHT?

SO YEAH. THIS IS ME BEING HONEST. I'M OPEN TO IT

YOU'RE OPEN TO PETPLAY?

YEAH. I MEAN HOW IS THIS A SHOCKER. MOST STUFF WE DO INVOLVS COLLLARS FOR CRYING OUT LOUD.

YEAH BUT WE'RE TALKING ACTUAL *BITCHSUITS!*

YEAH. SOME OF THEM LOOK HOT! WHAT?

WOW. YOU THINK YOU KNOW SOMEONE

REALLY? THAT DOES NOTHING FOR YOU?

I MEAN... I DON'T KNOW I NEVER REALLY GOT INTO THAT.

ALLY, REMEMBER WHEN YOU GOT ME THOSE ONLINE STORIES. PERSONAL FAVORITES, YOU SAID.

I SEEM TO RECALL ONE WITH SOME GIRL APPLYING TO BECOME A FAMILIAR TO A WITCH AND...

I DOWNLOADED THE WRONG ONE, OKAY. I'M NOT INTO PETPLAY!

FUNNY THING IS SHE WOULD KEEP SAYING THIS FOR YEARS TO COME

I THOUGHT YOU WEREN'T INTO ***PETPLAY***?

I WAS NEVER IN THE SCOUTS EITHER BUT I STILL STICK TO "*ALWAYS BE PREPAIRED*" MOTTO

THIS ONE IS KINDA NICE.

THAT'S FOR PETPLAY.

I KNOW. IT'S A GIFT FOR LISA. INSPIRATION FOR HER STORIES AND... STUFF.

I THINK I'LL GET THIS ONE.

INSPIRATION FOR LISA'S STORIES?

OF COURSE!

BUT I'VE SAID IT BEFORE. ALLYIS A BIG OLD FUCKING LIAR!

BECAUSE TURNS OUT, SHE WAS VERY MUCH INTO PETPLAY.

OKAY, SO NO PETPLAY. GOT IT.
EEEH, ACTUALLY, PUT PETPLAY AS A MAYBE, BECAUSE I CARE ABOUT YOU!
UH-HUH...
RIGHT THEN... SUSPENSION?
SURE, BUT ONLY IF THE BEAMS CAN HOLD. AND LIKE... AFTER I GET USED TO IT IN GENERAL CAUSE I GOT ALL NUMB THE LAST TIME
YUP. FAIR POINT
HEH
WHAT?
I'M SORRY, IT'S JUST... I STILL CAN'T BELIEVE YOU'RE INTO PETPLAY. I NEVER WOULD HAVE PEGGED YOU FOR---
OH! PEGGING!
UH--- HOMEWORK!

OKAY, FIRST, THE HOMEWORK THING... DIDN'T FIX IT, AND AS FOR PEGGING!? ***ABSOLUTELY NOT!***

YEAH, NO.

FIRST OF ALL, THAT GUY HEARD THE WORD PEGGING AND STOPPED. HE FUCKING KNOWS WHAT'S UP!

AND AS FOR PEGGING ITSELF... WHY NOT??

BECAUSE YOU ARE TOO FUCKING HAPPY ABOUT IT FOR ONE!

OKAY, JUST HEAR ME OUT!

ALLY, I RESPECTED YOUR LIMITS

I KNOW, AND I'LL RESPECT YOURS! BUT CAN I JUST POINT SOMETHING OUT?

FINE...

OKAY, SO HOPEFULLY ONE DAY WE'RE GONNA FIND OURSELVES OUR SUBS, AND THEY MIGHT WANNA TRY OUT SOME BUTT STUFF, RIGHT?

WHAT'S YOUR POINT?

WELL, THE WAY I SEE IT, THE BEST WAY TO DO IT TO THEM IS BY KNOWING HOW IT FEELS BEFOREHAND. I MEAN THAT'S THE WHOLE POINT OF OUR SESSIONS, ISN'T IT? TO TEST STUFF OUT

SIGH...

WE'LL DO IT TOGETHER.

WHEN YOU SAY TOGETHER, YOU DON'T MEAN YOU'LL JUST PULL OUT A STRAP ON AND–

ALAN, I CAN'T *AFFORD* A STRAP ON

AND NO! I'M THINKING WECAN TRY IT OUT WITH SOME REASONABLY SIZED... YOU KNOW...

BUTTPLUGS

I'LL... *THINK* ABOUT IT.

FAIR ENOUGH. BUT WOW, YOU REALLY FREAKED OUT ABOUT PEGGING,

ALLY, ONE WORD. *DIAPER!*

YEAH, FINE I FREAKED OUT A BIT TOO. BUT SERIOUSLY, IT'S NOT LIKE I WAS JUST GONNA RAM IT IN THERE. I WOULD HAVE BOUGHT YOU A DINNER FIRST.

FUCK OFF! ALSO IT JUST OCCURRED TO ME THAT SINCE I MET YOU MY LIFE HAS GOTTEN EXPONENTIALLY WEIRDER.

THE WORD YOU'RE LOOKING FOR IS BETTER!

ALSO PETPLAY INVOLVES BUTTPLUG TAILS.

JUST SAYIN'.

HEH!

YEAH... THIS WAS GOING TO BE A WILD YEAR.

OH YES.
THAT WAS
A WILD YEAR

FOR ALL
OF US.

HUFF...
OKAY...

EVERYTHING
GOOD?

GNNN---

Y-YEAH...

SEE, WHILE YOU AND ALLY WERE BUSY TRYING TO FIGURE OUT STUFF AT YOUR OWN PACE, I HAD NO SUCH LUCK.

I HAD MY FOURTH EVER TATTOO CLIENT READY FOR ME...

NOW, BETWEEN LAURA AND TWO CLIENTS THAT JACOB GOT FOR ME I ***HAD SOME*** EXPERIENCE BY THEN.

PROBLEM WAS, THIS CUSTOMER WAS MY FAVORITE SINGER AND THE SOURCE OF MY BISEXUAL AWAKENING, AND I WAS ABOUT TO MAKE SOME PERMANENT ARTWORK ON HER SKIN.

NO PRESSURE.

ALRIGHT, THEN!

BE GENTLE, NOW! IT'S MY FIRST TIME!

OKAY

LET'S DO THIS!

WHOA, ARE YOU... ARE YOU SHAVING MY BACK?

YEAH.

WHY?

FOR MY BACK HAIR COLLECTION

RIGHT... DUMB QUESTION

FUNNNY THING THO. TURNS OUT SHE WAS EVEN MORE NERVOUS ABOUT THIS THAN I WAS AND YOU KNOW WHAT?

SOMEHOW THAT HELPED.

WHAT'S THAT?

JUST WATER. RELAX.

JUST...

JUST... TELL ME WHEN THE PAIN IS ABOUT TO START.

WAIT! YOU'RE NERVOUS ABOUT THIS?

WHAT GAVE IT AWAY?

MY TWITCHING OR MY VOICE GOING FULL ON SOPRANO MID SENTENCE?

WELL,
I'M PRETTY SURE
I GOT YOU BEAT
ON THE FREAKING
OUT TERRITORY

HOW
COME?

WELL... I'M
HERE STARING AT
YOUR SMOOTH, PRISTINE
BACK AND...UH...

FUCK
I'M SOUNDING
LIKE A MASSIVE
CREEP HERE,
AREN'T I?

YOU'RE NOT IN
THE RESTRAINING ORDER
TERRITORY YET.

GO ON.

RIGHT.
POINT IS I KINDA
FEEL LIKE SOMEONE
CASUALLY ASKED ME TO
IMPROVE ON THE
MONA LISA REAL
QUICK

WAIT, ARE
WE GONNA BE
OKAY HERE?

YOU DON'T HAVE
LIKE SHAKEY HANDS
RIGHT NOW?

WHAT?
OH, NO, NOTHING
LIKE THAT. IT'S JUST...
HONESTLY? I'M A BIT
STARSTRUCK
I GUESS

STARSTRUCK...

BY ME?

WELL, YEAH.

WHOO BOY I'M SO FAR FROM BEING A STAR I'S NOT EVEN FUNNY

OH SHUT UP! YOU ARE AMAZING!

AND... I GUESS I'M ALSO FEELING A LOT OF PRESSURE RIGHT NOW CAUSE I KINDA OWE YOU A LOT.

YOU OWE ME?

Y---EAH. YOU WERE KINDA MY BISEXUAL AWAKENING

UH

I... PROBABLY COULD HAVE SPARED YOU THAT INFO, HUH?

HEH!
LISTEN I GOT A BUNCH OF DUDES CRUSHING ON ME SO I GUESS THIS MAKES FOR AN INTERESTING CHANGE OF PACE.

WHOOP-DE-DO THIS MAKES FOR AN INTERESTING CHANGE OF PACE. EVERYONE WANTS ME!

I'M STRAIGHT THO.

YEAH I THOUGHT I WAS TOO BUT THEN YOU STARTED SINGING AND HERE I AM.

SERIOUSLY THOUGH. I'M NOT FLIRTING OR ANYTHING WHEN I SAY, IF IT WASN'T FOR YOU BEING YOUR SEXY SELF AND ROCKING SO HARD I WOULDN'T HAVE RECONSIDERED MY SEXUALITY IN A BIG WAY, GOTTEN HOOKED ON YOUR MUSIC, WENT TO YOUR CONCERTS, AND... WELL.. I NEVER WOULD HAVE MET LAURA.

SO YEAH. I OWE THE HAPPIEST TIMES OF MY LIFE TO YOU SO... THANK YOU

AW... THAT'S ACTUALLY SWEET.

AND WHILE WE'RE AT IT, LAURA WOULD NEVER HAVE MET ME EITHER SOOO...

SAY THANK YOU LAURA.

LAURA?

OH... I GUESS SHE WENT TO THE BATHROOM OR SOMETHING

HAHAHAHAHAAH!

A FEW HOURS LATER.

DOESN'T HURT TOO MUCH, DOES IT?

HEH. NO, IT'S NOT TOO BAD.

SO, SEE YOU IN ABOUT TWO WEEKS FOR THE NEXT PART.

TILL THEN REMEMBER TWHAT I...

OH HEY, LOOK WHO'S FINALLY BACK.

UH... YEAH I HAD TO GET SOMETHING DONE BUT... I LEFT YOU IN HER COMPETENT HANDS

YOU'RE NOT KIDDING.

SHE WAS VERY GENTLE.

OH I'M SURE SHE WAS.

ANYWAYS, SEE YOU BOTH

YUP!

WHERE WERE YOU!?

I THOUGHT THE TWO OF YOU COULD USE SOME PRIVACY.

WHAT?

NOTHING... YOU GOING? IT'S CLOSING TIME.

LAURA?

HEY, TALK TO ME WHAT'S WRONG?

NOTHING. I... I JUST ...I SAW YOU GETTING ALL COZY WITH HER AND... WELL I DIDN'T LIKE IT, OKAY? I'M ALLOWED NOT TO LIKE IT!

HOLD UP DID YOU THINK I WAS FLIRTING WITH HER?

I DON'T KNOW WERE YOU?

LAURA, WHAT THE FUCK IS YOUR PROBLEM?

YOU . WHY DID YOU GO AND TELL HER THAT SHE WAS YOUR, AND I'M QUOTING HERE "BISEXUAL AWAKENING"

WHAT? BECAUSE IT'S FUCKING TRUE? YOU KNOW THIS, I TOLD YOU THE WHOLE STORY BEFORE

YES I KNOW IT BUT SHE DOESN'T HAVE TO! WHY WOULD YOU EVEN BRING IT UP? WERE YOU HOPING FOR A CHANCE THAT SHE MIGHT...

MIGHT...

I WAS NEVER THE CRYING TYPE. I GUESS IN THAT I TOOK AFTER MY DAD... THROUGH MOST OF THE BAD TIMES IN MY LIFE, I WAS ALWAYS GOOD AT HOLDING BACK THE TEARS, BUT THAT DAY I COULDN'T DO IT.

YOU WANNA KNOW WHY I TOLD HER?

I DID IT BECAUSE... GHK I WANTED TO THANK HER... BECAUSE OF THAT MOMENT AND HER MUSIC I ENDED UP MEETING YOU..I WANTED TO THANK HER FOR BRINGING YOU INTO MY LIFE!

BUT I GUESS YOU WERE TOO PISSY TO STICK AROUND AND HEAR THAT FUCKING PART WEREN'T YOU!?

A-ANNE-

FUCK OFF. I'M GOING HOME!

NO!

ANNE!

LEAVE ME ALONE!

I SAID!

LET GO!

NO!

I AM SO SO SO SORRY, OKAY?

I AM A COLOSSAL IDIOT!

PLEASE FORGIVE ME. PLEASE, ANNE. PLEASE PLEASE PLEASE, I... I FUCKED UP.. I...

SIGH...

YOU REALLY ARE AN IDIOT

YES!

BUT NEVER DO THIS TO ME AGAIN!

NEVER EVER!

PROMISE!

I PROMISE!

I WON'T LIE... MORE THAN ANYTHING I WANTED TO BELIEVE HER

I GUESS WHAT WITH MY RELATIONSHIP WITH MY DAD, I KINDA GOT USED TO HONESTY BEING A GIVEN, A PROMISE MEANT SOMETHING. A PROMISE WAS IMPORTANT. IT WAS REAL

AND... WELL, THERE WAS THE OTHER THING, TOO. SHE WAS MY FIRST TRUE LOVE.

I DON'T KNOW. I GUESS I ALWAYS IMAGINED IT THAT WHEN WE CARE ABOUT SOMEONE WE BUILD A SHRINE FOR THEM IN OUR HEARTS, STOCKPILING ONE WONDERFUL MEMORY AFTER ANOTHER...

AND I IMAGINED MY SHRINE TO HER AS A MAGENTA LIT WALL OF PRECIOUS MEMORIES... OF FIRST TIMES, SECOND TIMES... WONDERFUL TIMES

EXCEPT... THAT DAY THE SHRINE HAD BEEN VANDALIZED. A PICTURE PERFECT OF US DEFACED BY A BAD THING. AND I'LL GIVE LAURA THIS...

WHATEVER FLAWS SHE HAD AT THE TIME, MY GIRL WAS NOT A QUITTER.

FIX'R UP'R

INSTEAD OF GOING HOME, SHE INVITED ME TO HER PLACE THAT NIGHT.

I ACCEPTED... I... WANTED TO HEAL THIS, AND SHE WAS DETERMINED TO DO THE SAME

LIKE... STRIP SERENADING ME DETERMINED.

IT WOULD HAVE BEEN HILARIOUS AND WONDERFUL IF THE MOOD OF IT ALL DIDN'T FEEL SO... CAREFUL

AFTER ALL, WHEN SOMETHING PRECIOUS HAS BEEN DAMAGED YOU TREAT IT WITH CARE...

YOU TREAT IT LOVINGLY

SO YEAH... THAT WAS THE FIRST TIME I'VE EVER HAD MAKE UP SEX.

AND YEAH... IT FELT DIFFERENT. PEOPLE OFTEN DESCRIBE IT AS EXTRA HOT, BUT. I GOT SOMETHING DIFFERENT FROM IT. OH, IT WAS HOT, NO DOUBT ABOUT THAT BUT IT ALSO FELT... DESPERATE,

IT FELT LIKE IT WAS MORE MORE THAN SEX. HIDDEN WITHIN OUR BREATH AND MOANS WAS A PLEA TO FORGET THE BAD. COVER THE DAMAGE WITH A FRESH COAT OF PAINT AND INSTEAD REMIND EACH OTHER THAT YOU CARE, THAT YOU STILL WANT EACH OTHER'S COMPANY.

IT IS AN INTIMATE MOMENT THAT IN ITS EAGERNESS FEELS ALMOST PANICKED. DON'T LET GO! DON'T LEAVE! STAY! IT IS A CARNAL RENEWAL OF UNSPOKEN WOWS.

AND THAT'S WHAT LAURA COMMITED TO DOING THAT NIGHT.

SHE WANTED TO FIX IT.

DESPERATELY AND EAGERLY...

TO UNDO THE BAD MEMORIES

AND REPLACE THEM WITH GOOD ONES

AND YOU KNOW WHAT... BETWEEN APPLYING THAT ELBOW GREASE...

RUB RUB

FIX'R UP'R

AND A GENEROUS AMOUNT OF SPITSHINE...

PTOOEY!

FU-HUUU-CK!

SHE PULLED IT OFF.

IN THE POST ORGASMIC BLISS HER LITTLE BOUT OF JEALOUSY FELT A LIFETIME AWAY, AND THE ONLY THING THAT MATTERED WAS THE PRESENT.

BUT. THAT BUZZ INEVITABLY FADES AWAY... AND SEX, NO MATTER HOW GOOD IT IS, CAN'T FIX EVERYTHING.

TURNS OUT IF YOU DON'T ADRESS THE REAL PROBLEM, NO MATTER THE AMOUNT OF EFFORT TO COVER IT UP SOONER OR LATER...

CRACKS WILL APPEAR.

OH...
AND SPEAKING
OF CRACKS...

WHAT THE
FU---

ANNE?

WERE
YOU IN A CAR
CRASH?

WHAT?

RIGHT... IS EVERYTHING OKAY AT HOME THEN?
YEAH? WHY?
YOU SURE?
OF COURSE I'M SURE, WHAT'S WRONG?
JACOB?
LAURA!
WHAT?
DID YOU SCRATCH HER UP LIKE THAT?
OH THAT... UM, MAYBE? PROBABLY? YEAH?
FOR CRYING OUT LOUD... JUST... GET DRESSED.
OH, GOD. JACOB, I'M SO SORRY.
NAH, IT'S FINE MAYBE THIS IS GOD OR SOMETHING TELLING YOU NOT TO GET A BAND TATTOO, BUT WHAT DO I KNOW...
OH NO. I'M COMMITTED. STILL...SUCKS. I WANTED TO SHOW IT TO THE MIRIAM WHEN I CONTINUE HER TATTOO...
I'M SORRY YOU WANNA RUN THAT BY ME AGAIN?

OH SHIT...

JACOB, I...

I WAS SO EXCITED THAT TOTALLY FORGOT!

YOU FORGOT...

YOU'RE SHITTING ME?

WHAT'S THE PROBLEM?

WHEN HE TOOK ME ON AS AN APPRENTICE WE MADE A DEAL...

HE'S SUPPOSED TO SUPERVISE MY FIRST TEN TATTOOS...

LIKE... IN CASE SOMETHING GOES WRONG.

I SHOULD HAVE CALLED HIM.

OH COME ON...

THERE ARE FIRST TIMERS OUT THERE TATTOING ON THEIR OWN

LAURA, I DON'T STICK MY NOSE IN YOUR MANAGEMENT OF THE BUSINESS HERE, SO KEEP YOURS OUT OF MY TEACHING METHODS. OKAY?

FINE...BE A FRIGGIN DIVA....

BUT I'M JUST SAYING, YOU LET HER TATTOO ***ME*** WITHOUT SUPERVISION!

THAT'S BECAUSE IF ANYTHING WENT WRONG, YOU WOULDN'T SUE HER OR THE GODDAMNED SHOP!

STOP! PLEASE!

JACOB, THIS IS MY FAULT.

AND LAURA, LET ME DEAL WITH MY OWN FUCKUPS!

I'M SORRY. I WAS STARSTRUCK AND GOT CAUGHT UP IN THE MOMENT. IT WAS STUPID, I APOLOGIZE AND IT WON'T HAPPEN AGAIN.

AND... I'D APPRECIATE IT IF YOU'D SUPERVISE MY SHADING.

FINE...

NOW GET DRESSED. I SWEAR, YOU LOOK LIKE YOU SPENT THE NIGHT IN THE LOSING CORNER OF A FIGHTING MATCH.

OH COME ON, IT'S JUST A FEW HICKEYS!

IT'S NOT *THAT* BAD!

WHAT!? I'M *PASSIONATE!*

YOU'RE A FREAK IS WHAT YOU ARE!

HEY! WHAT WE DO IN OUR BED IS OUR BUSINESS!

OH FOR SURE!

BUT ME SCHEDULING A SESSION AND THEN YOU FUCKING UP MY CANVAS MADE IT MY BUSINESS AS WELL.

SIGH... COULD HAVE TAKEN ON AN ACTUAL CLIENT...

I SWEAR... BRUISING AND SCRATCHING HER UP LIKE THAT... WHO DOES THAT?

GODDAMNED PERVERTS, THAT'S WHO!

KSSSS

IS IT BAD?

WELL... HARD TO SAY. MY PATENTS WERE NEVER INTO CORPORAL PUNIHSMENT SO I DON'T REALLY HAVE A SENSE OF MEASURE HERE... BUT IT STILL HURTS.

YEAH... THE BELT WAS A BAD IDEA.

I MEAN NOT NECESSARILY. HITTING ME WITH THE BUCKLE SIDE OF IT THO... THAT WAS A BIT QUESTIONABLE

I'M *SO* SORRY.

BUT OKAY, IN MY DEFENSE, IT MADE SENSE IN MY BRAIN AT THE TIME.THE BELT WAS MADE OF LIGHT LEATHER SO IT HAD ABOUT AS MUCH IMPACT AS A WET NOODLE

SO, I THOUGHT I'D TRY THE BUCKLE SIDE... AND YEAH... IN HINDSIGHT, NOT THE BRIGHTEST IDEA I EVER HAD.

YEAH... THANK GOD FOR THE BALLGAG. IT SOAKED UP MOST OF MY

UH...

CONSTRUCTIVE CRITICISM

IF ITS ANY CONSOLATION, IT'S MY TURN NEXT TIME SO... I DUNNO... YOU CAN TEST THE BELT FOR YOURSELF.

HEH!

I'M NOT A VINDICTIVE PERSON. AND ALSO... I REPURPOSED THE BELT ALREADY.

REPURPOSED?

YEAH... I'M WORKING ON SOMETHING.

AND I THINK YOU'LL LIKE IT.

AND SHE DID LIKE IT...

IN FACT, SHE LIKED IT SO MUCH THAT FOR THE FIRST TIME EVER SHE DECIDED TO SKIP A CLASS THAT DAY IN ORDER TO GO TO OUR SECRET PLAYHOUSE.

JUST TODAY THO. NOT PLANNING ON MAKING A HABIT OUT OF THIS.

YOU KNOW... I NEVER HAD A TREEHOUSE OR SOME HIDEOUT AS A KID, BUT I SUPPOSE OUR ATTIC WAS KINDA SIMILAR TO THAT.

BUT IT WAS SO MUCH BETTER.

BECAUSE NOBODY KNEW ABOUT IT

THÜNK

AHEM... THO THERE WERE SOME CLOSE CALLS.

HM...

THUDUMPADEDUMP

WHAT THE HELL?

BWAH!

HRMF...

OUT OF THE WAY

SO...

WE HAD A SIMPLE SET OF RULES, BUT ONE OF THE BIG ONES WAS, WE DON'T DO ATTIC STUFF WHEN THE CLASSROOM BELOW US IS OCCUPIED

IT WAS A GOOD RULE. A SMART RULE.

BUT WE WEREN'T SMART WHEN WE WERE IN THE ATTIC.

WE WERE HORNY.

HORNY PEOPLE OFTEN MAKE BAD DECISIONS

THEY MAKE STUPID COMPROMISES.

HORNY PEOPLE MAKE MISTAKES

LIKE THE MISTAKE OF ASSUMING THAT THE OLD FILING CLOSET STASHED ON THE ATTIC FOR GOD KNOWS HOW LONG WAS STURDY

SNAP

KRAKK

NATURALLY, WHAT FOLLOWED NEXT WAS THE SOUND OF WORLDS LOUDEST PILE OF DOMINOS COLLAPSING

WAH!!

THUDUMPADEDUMP

DUDE! WHAT THE FUCK?

OH, GOD! ALLY!!

ARE YOU OKAY? FUCKING HELL ONE OFTHE LEGS MUST HAVE BROKEN OFF

YOU THINK?

ARE YOU HURT?

JUST MY BUTT, BUT I DON'T THINK THAT'S FROM THE FALL.

DAMN!

WE REALLY SHOULD GIVE ALL THIS OLD STUFF A THOROUGH CHECKUP

LIKE... NEXT LEVEL CHECKUP

UHUH...

SAY, ALAN... THIS WAS PRETTY FUCKING LOUD

ALRIGHT, WHO WAS IT???

EEP!

I KNOW I HEARD SOMEONE UP HERE! I SWEAR IF I CATCH ANY OF YOU SMOKING IN THIS HALLWAY THERE'LL BE HELL TO PAY!

HM...

TA-TLACK
TA-TLACK

GODDAMNED HOOLIGANS...

RRUMBLE

HE'S GONE.

FUCK ME THAT WAS CLOSE

DUDE, HE SCARED THE BONER OFF OF YOU!

RRUMBLE

YOU AINT KIDDING

COME ON, LET'S GET DRESSED AND GTET THE FUCK OUT OF HERE!

UHUH...

WE COULD DO THAT...

OOOR... WE CAN ACKNOWLEDGE THAT THE SOUND BELOW US IS THE CLASSROOM GETTING EMPTY SO THE HALLWAYS WILL BE BUSY...

THA---T'S... A GOOD POINT, ACTUALLY.

WE SHOULD PROBABLY WAIT FOR ABOUT TEN MINUTES.

OR YOU COULD GO FOR A PERSONAL RECORD AND SEE IF YOU CAN LAST LONGER THAN THAT

I MEAN... HALLWAYS ARE PRETTY NOISY NOW. NOBODY WOULD HEAR US...

MASTER?

YOU'RE GETTING OFF ON THIS, AREN'T YOU?

A LITTLE!

AND SO, INSTEAD OF LEAVING, WE STAYED. JUST ANOTHER LITTLE COMPROMISE

ANOTHER LITTLE RISK. AND AFTER ALL WHY NOT? WE WERE ALREADY THERE AND READY...

AND OH SO ENTHUSIASTIC.

IN FACT, I WAS DOING MY BEST TO CONTROL MY PERSONAL ENTHUSIASM.

93 BOTTLES OF BEER ON THE WALL, 93 BOTTLES OF BEER.
TAKE ONE DOWN AND PASS IT AROUND, 92 BOTTLES OF BEER ON THE WALL.

92 BOTTLES OF BEER ON THE WALL, 92 BOTTLES OF BEER.
TAKE ONE DOWN AND PASS IT AROUND, 91 BOTTLES OF BEER ON THE WALL.

91 BOTTLES OF BEER ON THE WALL, 91 BOTTLES OF BEER.
TAKE ONE DOWN AND PASS IT AROUND, 90 BOTTLES OF BEER ON THE WALL.

90 BOTTLES OF BEER ON THE WALL, 90 BOTTLES OF BEER.
TAKE ONE DOWN AND PASS IT AROUND, 89 BOTTLES OF BEER ON THE WALL.

ON THE WALL, 89 BOTTLES OF BEER.
ROUND, 88 BOTTLES OF BEER ON THE WALL.

WALL, 88 BOTTLES OF BEER.
87 BOTTLES OF BEER ON THE WALL.

WALL, 87 BOTTLES OF BEER.
86 BOTTLES OF BEER ON THE WALL.

WALL, 86 BOTTLES OF BEER.
5 BOTTLES OF BEER ON THE WALL.

WALL, 85 BOTTLES OF BEER.
84 BOTTLES OF BEER ON THE WALL.

WALL, 84 BOTTLES OF BEER.
UND, 83 BOTTLES OF BEER ON THE WALL.

THE WALL, 83 BOTTLES OF BEER.

MNNNH!

MMMHH!

WEFF!!!

ANYHOW, THAT DAY PASSED. THE NEXT ARRIVED AND FOUND US A LITTLE BIT BOLDER AND A LITTLE BIT WISER.

WE DOUBLED DOWN ON OUR SUPPIES OF ROPES AND PACKING TAPE, AND FASTENED ANYTHING THAT COULD BE FASTENED.

SOME OF IT WITH A FAIR BIT OF STYLE I MIGHT ADD.

AND AFTER THAT... WELL, THE AUTUMN WAS MILD AND THE COLLEGE LESSONS SLOW... POINT IS MORE AND MORE WE'D FEEL THE ATTIC CALLING TO US

A SCHEDULE COMPROMISE HERE, AND A SCHEDULE COMPROMISE THERE...

AND WHAT STARTED OFF AS ONE MISSED LESSON SOON TURNED TO FIVE... TEN... TWENTY...

SHALL WE?

AFTER YOU, MISTRESS!

AND YET... WE DIDN'T CARE. WE EAGERLY MADE THOSE COMPROMISES.

IN FACT...
AS FAR AS COMPROMISES GO, WE WERE JUST GETTING STARTED.

DUDE, EVER THINK OF SHAVING THAT GOATEE THING OFF?

I MEAN... YEAH I GUESS, SOMETIMES. WHY THOUGH?

I DUNNO I THINK YOU'D LOOK...

PRETTIER?

A WEEK LATER...

YYYUP!

I WAS RIGHT!
YOU DO LOOK PRETTIER!

IN FACT, I KINDA
WISH WE HAD SOME STUFF YOU
COULD WEAR AS WELL..

YEAH, WELL
DUDE GEAR SUCKS
ANYWAYS

HARDLY A
BIG LOSS.

I WASN'T
TALKING ABOUT
DUDE CLOTHES

AH... SO SHOULD
I ADD THIS TO YOUR
LIST OF KINKS?

WE'LL SEE...

DEPENDS IF I LIKE
THE END RESULT

YOU KNOW...
THAT'S NOT
HALF BAD!

REALLY?

YEAH!
HOLD ON!

DAMN!
RIGHT?
UH...
OKAY THAT'S JUST DUMB. HOW DOES YOU DRAWING CHICKS IN BONDAGE GEAR MAKE YOU GAY?
WHERE'S THE LINK?
DID I EVER TELL YOU THAT ONE OF THE MANY RUMORS ABOUT ME AFTER MY SKETCHBOOK THING WAS THAT I WAS GAY.
THERE WERE MALE GEAR DESIGNS THERE AS WELL.
RIGHT... BUT STILL AT MOST THEY COULD MAKE A CASE FOR YOU BEING LIKE... BISEXUAL OR SOMETHING?
YES, BECAUSE ASSHOLES WITH A BONE TO PICK REALLY CARE ABOUT NUANCES LIKE THOSE.
AH...
YEAH...
FAIR ENOUGH...
HEY NOW! I DIDN'T SAY THAT TO DAMPEN YOUR MOOD!
THE REASON I EVEN MENTIONED IT IS BECAUSE ONE OF THEM JUSTIFIED THIS THEORY BY SAYING THAT I GOT, AND I'M QUOTING HERE: *"A PAIR OF DICK SUCKING LIPS"*! AND I MEAN...YEAH, HE'S A JACKASS BUT NOW I'M THINKING HE MAY BE ON TO SOMETHING HERE
HMM? WHAT DO YOU THINK?
MUACK!
HAHAHAH I THINK YOU'RE A FUCKING IDIOT!

WELL? DOES ALANA MAKE YOUR KINK LIST?

ALANA, HUH?

WE'LL SEE. FOR NOW, I'LL MAKE GOOD USE OF THOSE PRETTY LIPS OF YOURS, AND THEN WE'RE GOING *SHOPPING!*

SOOO... IT DIDN'T STOP WITH MAKE UP ALONE...

AFTER ALL, IT WAS THE END OF OCTOBER OR AS WE CALLED IT, THE FETISHIST GARAGE SALE MONTH.

AFTER ALL WHEN YOU'RE ON A BUDGET, AND LOOKING FOR SOME KINKY OUTFITS, LOOK NO FURTHER THAN HALLOWEEN WHEN EVERYTHING UNDER THE SUN HAS A SEXY VARIANT!

POINT IS, THAT MONTH WE CUT DONW ON POINTLESS COSTS LIKE... FOOD... AND TREATED OURSELVES WITH CHEAP PVC, AND CHEAPER SPANDEX.

DUDE! CAT EARS!

DUDE! OPERA GLOVES!

NICE!

OKAY, WHICH ONE DO YOU THINK FITS ME BETTER?

I'D SAY MAID, BUT THE CAT ONE'S PROBABLY SMARTER. IT CAN GO DOMME OR SUB!

CAT IT IS!

THEN I SUPPOSE...

THAT MAKES YOU THE MAID!

NO FUCKING WAY!

OH COME ON I'D WEAR IT FOR YOU.

IT'S EMBARASSING.

SO? LITERALLY EVERYTHING WE DO IS EMBARASSING. THAT'S HALF THE FUN!

...BUT OKAY. YOU CAN JUST SAY MY SAFEWORD AND I'LL DROP IT.

WE'LL TAKE THIS ONE TOO!

OKAY, IN MY DEFENSE...

SUNSTONE IS A REALLY STUPID SAFEWORD!

HAH! YOU KNOW... SHE TOLD ME THAT SHE TRIED TO GET YOU TO CROSSDRESS BUT NEVER COULD

I ACTUALLY THOUGHT THAT WHOLE BATCHELORETTE PARTY THING WAS THE FIRST TIME

NO, THERE WERE A FEW MORE INSTANCES. FEW TIMES AT THE CRIMSON AS WELL...

BUT REALLY IT COMES DOWN TO THIS. WE'D NEVER SHARE MANY OF THESE THINGS WITHOUT CHECKING WITH EACH OTHER. I RAN ALL OF THIS WITH HER BEFORE TELLING YOU AS WELL.

ONLY TIME I EVER BROKE THAT RULE WAS BACK WHEN I FIRST MET YOU, AND SHARED HOW ALLY AND I TESTED OUT BUTTPLUGS TOGETHER.

KHM!

I'M SORRY YOU DID WHAT NOW?

AAANYWAYS BACK TO THE ATTIC!

THERE WAS SOMETHING TO THE FACT WE HAD OUTFITS TO WEAR. CHEAP, SURE, EMBARASING? KINDA. BUT IT MADE THE WOLE THING FEEL SOMEHOW MORE.... OFFICIAL. SO WE IMMORTALIZED THE MOMENT BY STARTING A NEW TRADITION THAT LASTS TO THIS DAY.

OH THIS ONE IS GONNA BE MY NEW SCREENSAVER!

FUFF WOU!

I SUPPOSE THOSE OUTFITS WERE OUR FIRST LOSS OF BALANCE AT THE EDGE OF THAT SLIPPERY SLOPE OF KINK. SEE, IF THERE'S ONE THING I LEARNED ABOUT FETISHES, IT'S THIS: YOU GOTTA CONTROL THAT SHIT! OTHERWISE IT HAS WAYS OF QUIETLY EVOLVING INTO AN OBSESSION.

AND YEAH... THAT'S WHAT HAPPENNED TO US.

VERY QUICKLY WE FOUND OURSELVES GOING THE WAY OF YOUR AVERAGE DISNEY PRINCESS AND WANTING A WHOLE LOT FUCKING MORE.

BUT TO GET MORE WE HAD TO EARN MORE... THIS MEANT MORE GIGS, MORE HOURS AT THE STORE... AND A WHOLE LOT LESS FREE TIME TOGETHER.

IT WAS YET ANOTHER COMPROMISE WE WERE ALL TOO EAGER TO MAKE.

THIS , OF COURSE MADE US VALUE OUR ATTIC TIMES EVEN MORE, TO THE POINT THAT WE TOOK MORE AND MORE RISKS TO GET THERE.

CRAP, I THINK SOMEONE'S COMING!

YEAH, US!

COME ON!

BUT TO US, THE RISKS WERE WORTH THE REWARD.

SO THEN SHE TOLD ME, YOU THREE ARE THE BIGGEST FREAKS ON THE CAMPUS

PLEASE... THIS PLACE IS MADE OF NOTHING BUT BARELY LIVING HUSKS WITH ECHOES WHERE THEIR SOULS SHOULD BE

DUDE! THAT'S METAL!

DEEPER!

OH---Y-YES THAT'S IT! KEEP GOING!

HONESTLY, WE WERE SPIRALLING OUT OF CONJTROL AND I GENUINELY THINK WE WOULDHAVE GOTTEN CAUGHT IN THE END, IF IT WASN'T FOR THAT ONE DAY IN NOVEMBER...

THE DAY OF....

THE BURRITO!

REGULAR?

YOU KNOW WHAT? GIVE ME THE HELLFIRE!

YOU SURE?

YEAH! LIGHT ME UP!

WELL LOOK AT MR MONEYBAGS. YOU KNOW YOU CUT DOWN ON A FEW OF THOSE AND WE CAN AFFORD SOME DECENT TOYS.

HEY, FUCK OFF I DON'T HAVE A MOM MAKING ME LUNCH AT HOME! I'M HUNGRY!

ANYWAYS, WANT SOME?

ALAN, THAT THING IS CALLED THE HELLFIRE. THAT'S NOT THE KIND OF ASS PAIN I'M GOING FOR TODAY!

YOUR LOSS!

SO HOW'S YOUR HELLFIRE

KOFF A BIT INTENSE BUT GOOD! SURE YOU DON'T WANT SOME?

AND DEPRIVE A MASOCHIST OF HIS PUNISHMENT? WHAT KIND OF A DOMME WOULD I BE THEN?

FUCK OFF!

STILL GOOD?

KHM Y-YEAH... I MAY NEED A SODA

FUCKING HELL, MY EARS ARE ON FIRE.

YOU KNOW YOU DIDN'T HAVE TO FINISH IT!

KHH-- I'LL BE FINE. PLUS I PAID FOR IT!

FUCKING DUDES... I SWEAR.

SNACK SLUSH

BURP PHEW... THAT WAS ROUGH!

JUST GONNA QUOTE MY MOM ON THIS ONE. OVERINDULGANCE IN SPICY FOOD IS THE KIND OF A RISKY BEHAVIOR THAT CAN RESULT IN AN ULCER.

REALLY?

YOU OF ALL PEOPLE ARE GONNA LECTURE ME ON RISKY BEHAVIOR?

OF COURSE. I GOT A PRIVATE LECTURE HALL UP IN THE ATTIC.

YOU GOT A LECTURE HALL?

PRETTY SURE IT'S MY TURN TO BE THE "TEACHER"

NOT IF I PULL A REAL DICK MOVE AND LOCK YOU OUT OF THE "CLASSROOM" FIRST!

HAH.. FUNNY.

ALLY?

HEY, WE HAVE A SCHEDULE DAMN IT!!!

ALLY, COME ON! THE FUCK ARE YOU DOING!?

EARNING MY DETENTION!

EARNING YOUR DETENTION... HEH.

YOU LITTLE BRAT!

HEY, I KNOW WHAT GETS YOU RUNNING... THIS TIME LITERALLY.

FAIR ENOUGH.

SO YOU'RE REALLY GONNA KEEP YOUR JACKET ON?

HEY, I DON'T HAVE A FANCY SEXY OUTFIT AND.. YKNOW... AT LEAST IT'S LEATHER

THAT COUNTS FOR SOMETHING!

PLAY THE CARDS YOU GOT, HUH?

SOMETHING LIKE THAT. OKAY, TEST IT.

NGGGG--- DAMN!

NOT BAD, ROOKIE!

YOU TALK A BIG GAME, MISSIE. LET'S PUT A STOP TO THAT. OPEN WIDE!

THERE WE GO FINALLY SOME PEACE AND QUIET

MPF MM

OKAY, LET ME GET A GOOD LOOK AT YOU

WOW... YOU KNOW I'M NOT USUALLY ONE FOR THESE KINDS OF GAGS BUT YOU LOOK STUNNING IN THIS ALMOST VINTAG--

OH GHAAAWD

FWAF?

MMH?

OH GOD I THINK IT'S THE BURRITO!

NNNNGH FUCK ME, THIS MUST BE WHAT ENEMA PLAY FEELS LIKE!

MH?

OH DON'T YOU GET ANY IDEAS!

SIGNOW

OH GOD I GOTTA GO!!!

SCISSORS!

WHERE S DID I LEAVE---

A-HA!

OH. HERE. DON'T MOVE! LEMME CUT THE...

M-MM!!

WHAT?

OH, DUH, THE GAG! LEMME JUST

M-M!

YOU DON'T WANT ME TO UNTIE YOU?

M-M

YOU WANNA STAY LIKE THAT?

MHM!!!

YOU WANNA SEE WHAT IT FEELS LIKE ALONE?

MHM!

HOW LOVELY....

LOOKS LIKE I GOT MYSELF A DAMSEL IN---

GMMMMMNNN!!!!

SIGH

I--- I'LL BE BACK IN TEN MINUTES TOPS, OKAY

MHM!

OH!

MY BAG!

WAW?

I BRING MY OWN TOILET PAPER IT'S A LONG STORY NOTIMEFORITNOW!!! WON'TBELONGBYEE!!!!

AND THEN... WELL, WHAT FOLLOWED WAS A WHOLE LOT OF STRAINING BEHIND CLOSED DOORS.

ME DOING... THE OBVIOUS

AND ALLY... WELL, IT TURNS OUT, ALLY HAD HER OWN REASONS FOR WANTING TO STAY TIED UP LIKE THAT.

I MEAN, SURE SHE WANTED TO FEEL WHAT IT FELT LIKE TO BE LEFT ALONE LIKE IN ONE OF HER ONLINE STORIES.

BUT EVEN MORE SO, SHE WANTED TO SEE IF SHE COULD GET HERSELF OUT OF MY RIG BEFORE I CAME BACK

BUT THE FACT WAS, I DID A GOOD JOB WITH IT ALL THAT DAY. A REALLY GOOD JOB....

HUFF

HUFF

SIGH

IN FACT, UPON LEAVING THE SCENE OF A NATURAL DISASTER I CAUSED IN THAT TOILET, I DISTINCTLY REMEMBER FEELING REAL FUCKING GOOD ABOUT MYSELF.

I MEAN, THERE WAS SOMETHING EXCITINGLY ELECTRIC ABOUT THE IDEA OF HER BOUND AND GAGGED LIKE THAT WAITING FOR ME TO RETURN

I WAS GONNA MAKE MY WAY UP THOSE STAIRS, OPEN THAT DOOR AND HOPEFULLY CATCH HER TRYING TO ESCAPE HER BONDS.

I'D SAY: "YOU JUST BOUGHT YOURSELF ANOTHER HOUR OF DETENTION, BUT FIRST, TEN STRIKES WITH A RULER."

YEAH... I REALLY HOPED THERE WAS A RULER SOMEWHERE UP THERE...

BUT AS I MADE IT TO THE TOP FLOOR, ALL THE FUN, DOMMY THOUGHTS IN MY MIND WERE PROMPTLY REPLACED BY A SINGLE WORD...

FUUUUUUUUUUCK!

KINDA FUNNY THE STUFF YOU REMEMBER ABOUT THE BIG MOMENTS OF YOUR LIFE

LIKE...

I REMEMBER THE ACTUAL SONG THAT THE JANITOR WHISTLED AS HE WAS WORKING. AMERICAN PIE.

I REMEMBER THE EXACT TIME OF IT ALL

AND I REMEMBER THIS STRANGE CALM OVER THE WHOLE FLOOR

I SWEAR, IF IT WASN'T SO FRUSTRATING, THE EXPERIENCE WOULD HAVE BEEN DOWNRIGHT RELAXING.

THE UPPER FLOOR OF THE COLLEGE WAS ALL BUT PERFECTLY SILENT, WITH ONLY THE SOUND OF AMERICAN PIE AND THE INCESSENT TICKING OF THE CLOCK BREAKING THE QUIET

I DIDN'T PANIC AT FIRST. I FIGURED WHATEVER BUSINESS THE JANITOR HAD IT COULDN'T TAKE LONGER THAN TEN MINUTES.

SO FOR A WHILE I LET MY MIND WANDER.

AT FIRST I WAS INDULGING IN THOUGHTS OF WHAT WAS TO COME...FUN THOUGHTS OF DETENTIONS AND OTHE RPUNISHMENTS

BUT AN IDLE MIND IS A RESTLESS ANIMAL AND SOON IT TURNED TO OUR PREVIOUS SESSIONS REVELING IN THE MEMORIES

I THOUGHT... DAMN, ROPES REALLY DO LOOK GOOD ON HER...

IT'S KINDA TERRIFYING HOW EASILY A NICE MEMORY CAN TURN INTO AN INSTRUMENT OF TORMENT

BECAUSE THEN I REMEMBERED WHAT HAPPENNED NEXT...

OH SONOFA BITCH! WHAT IF SHE CRAMPS UP AGAIN!?

NOW, ON ALLY'S SIDE OF THINGS, AND I KNOW THIS BECAUSE SHE TOLD ME, SHE SPENT THE FIRST FIFTEEN MINUTES OF HER SOLACE THOROUGHLY TESTHING HER BONDS AND TRYING TO DETERMINE IF ONE COULD GET OFF BY USING THE CROTCH ROPE ALONE

YOU KNOW... DOING SCIENCE AND SHIT.

MMH---

AFTER SHE EXHAUSTED HERSELF WITH THAT,, SHE STARTED AMUSING HERSELF IMAGINING THE HELL I WAS GOING THROUGH WITH THE HELLFIRE MAKING ITS BLISTERING EXIT

OH DEAR HEAVENS! GET OUT OF ME , DEMON!

MPFFFT

BUT AS TIME PASSED, SHE FOUND THINGS LESS AND LESS ENTERTAINING, AND THEN...

SHE STARTED TO WORRY.

GROWING INCREASINGLY UNCOMFORTABLE WIHT BOTH HER BINDINGS AND MY ABSENCE, HER MIND STARTED THINKING UP WORST CASE SCENARIOS. WHAT IF SOMETHING WENT TERRIBLY WRONG

WHAT IF SOMETHING HAPPENNED TO ME

SHE DOUBLED HER EFFORTS IN TRYING TO WRIGGLE OUT OF HER BINDINGS BUT TO NO AVAIL

HNNNNGH!!!

SHE WAS STUCK!

HMFF

HMMF

SHE WAS ALONE...

AND THEN... PANIC SETTLED IN

IT SETTLED IN FOR BOTH OF US IN FACT.

PREVIOUSLY SOOTHING TUNE OF AMERICAN PIE BECAME A GRATING NAIL ON THE CHALKBOARD AS ITS VERY PRESENCE MOCKED ME.

SHE WAS STUCK, AND ALONE AND I COULDN'T DO ANYHTING ABOUT IT.

WELL... I COULDN'T DO ANYTHING SANE.

LISTEN, IT MADE SENSE TO ME AT THE TIME. SURE IT WAS ALL KINDS OF RISKY, BUT IF I COULD GET HIM AWAY FROM THE ATTIC, CAUSE A COMMOTION, I'D SNEAK UP THERE AND ST HER FREE

I MEAN, WHEN ALL REASONABLE OPTIONS ARE OFF THE TABLE, YOU HAVE TO RESORT TO THE UNREASONABLE ONES

AND I ALMOST DID.

BUT I WAS SAVED BY THE BELL

BELE-LEEP

YEAH--- I'M DONE UP HERE. OH YOU'RE AT THE PARKING LOT ALREADY

SURE, I'M ON MY WAY

I FUCKING FLEW UP THOSE STAIRS,

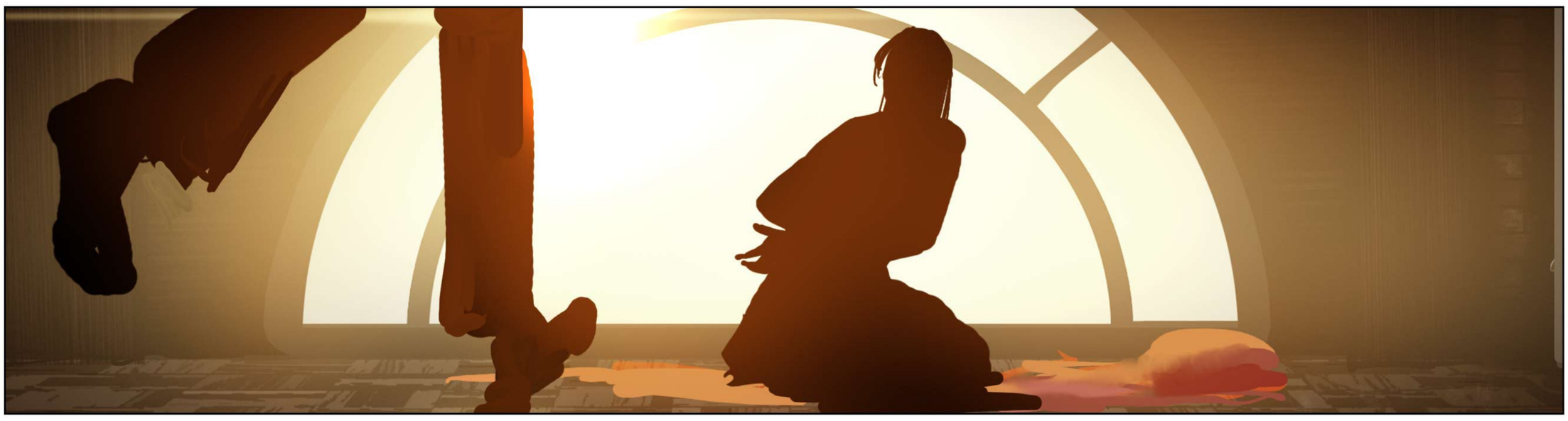
I NEEDED TO KNOW THAT SHE WAS OKAY!

WHEN I OPENED THOSE DOORS THE FIRST THING I FELT WAS IMMENSE RELIEF...

OH, GOD, ALLY, I'M SO SORRY, THE---

THE SECOND THING I FELT...

WAS MY HEART BREAKING



IT'S FUNNY... YOU'D THINK THAT WE'D GET OUT OF THAT ATTIC AS FAST AS WE COULD THAT DAY , BUT WE DIDN'T.

WE STAYED THERE FOR AT LEAST AN HOUR LONGER, FOR THE FIRST TIME EVER ENGAGING IN SOME HONEST TO GOD AFTERCARE.

NO SESSION REVIEW, NO NITPICKS OR CRITIQUE, NO POINTERS. JUST WARMTH AND KINDNESS...

ALAN?

HM?

FROM NOW ON, WE REALLY GOTTA SET SOME LIMITS

I THOUGHT WE ALREADY DID THAT.

HEH YEEEAH... THIS TIME WE GOTTA STICK TO THEM THO

YEAH...
LIMITS...

LIMITS ARE
A BITCH!

ESPECIALLY WHEN
IT'S SETTING LIMITS
ON SOMETHING YOU
REALLY, ***REALLY*** WANT.

AFTER THE WHOLE MIRIAM ARGUMENT, THERE WAS A CHANGE IN LAURA...

HOW DO I PUT THIS....

SHE BECAME MORE AFFECTIONATE... ESPECIALLY IN PUBLIC

AT TIMES TO THE POINT OF BEING DANGEROUSLY BOLD ABOUT IT.

TO THE POINT THAT I HAD TO PUT LIMITS TO IT

I MEAN, IT WAS STUPID

IT WAS COMPLETELY RECKLESS!

BEYOND INAPPROPROATE

BUT IT WAS ALSO SO INCREDIBLY FUCKING FLATTERING.

THIS WAS A STATEMENT

HER EYES SAID "FUCK THE WORLD, I WANT YOU AND ONLY YOU! "

RIGHT HERE RIGHT NOW, IN FRONT OF EVERYONE!

MY EYES SAID YOU'RE FUCKING CRAZY!

BUT ALSO, TELL ME MORE!

WHAT?

SHE MADE ME AN OFFER I COULDN'T REFUSE

OKAY I MEAN I COULD...

I JUST DIDN'T WANT TO.

HOWEVER I DEFINITELY MADE A MENTAL NOTE THAT WE'D HAVE TO TALK ABOUT SETTING LIMITS IN PUBLIC

BUT LIKE IN A FEW WEEKS.

I MEAN I HAD OTHER PRIORITIES AT THE TIME. I HAD EXAMS, AND THE WORKLOAD AT THE TATTOO SHOP WAS NO LAUGHING MATTER...

AND AFTER ALL THERE WAS NOTHING WRONG WITH FLAUNTING YOUR LOVE EVERY NOW AND THEN...

...

AND BY EVERY NOW AND THEN I MEAN RELENTLESSLY AND ALWAYS

AT WORK...

AT WORK BREAKS...

AT COLLEGE

DURING THE RARE NIGHTS I'D SPEND AT HOME WITH MY DAD...

LIKE I SAID, LOVING SOMEONE MEANS BUILDING A SHRINE DEVOTED TO THEM IN YOUR HEART...

AND THE FIRES IN OUR SHRINE BURNED BRIGHTER THAN EVER

BUT FEED ANY FIRE WELL WNOUGH AND IT HAS WAYS OF RUNNING WILD...

ALL IT TAKES IS A FEW ROGUE SPARKS...

FUCK, WE GOTTA FO BACK WE FORGOT YOUR SCARF.

SO?

SHE'LL SEE YOUR UH... MY MARKS

IF I WANTED TO HIDE THEM I'D WEAR MY TURTLENECK.

NOW COME ON!

TIME FOR YOU TO MEET MY BEST FRIEND!

HOLY CRAP SHE LIVES!!!

THERE'S MY FAVORITE GINGER!

THERE'S MY FAVORITE SELF- LOATHING BLONDE!

OH YOU BITCH!

NO, YOU BITCH!

WHERE HAVE YOU BEEN? IT'S BEEN FUCKING MONTHS!

EXAMS! MOVING! A WHOLE LOT OF SHIT!

COUGH

OH YEAH, LAURA, MEET CASSIE MY BEST FRIEND!

AND THE FIRST WOMAN THIS ONE SAW NAKED!

CASSIE WHAT THE FUCK!?

SIGH... WITH THE BENEFIT OF HINDSIGHT AND KNOWING THINGS ABOUT LAURA NOW THAT I DIDN'T KNOW THEN...
THIS WAS A TERRIBLE JOKE TO START THINGS OFF WITH!

BY THAT POINT I WAS WELL ACQUAINTED WITH THE NUANCES OF LAURA'S ANGER

THERE WAS THE SUBDUED ANNOYANCE SHE WOULD AT TIMES DIRECT AT JACOB WHEN HE WAS DECIDEDLY UNINTERESTED IN TAKING ANY OF HER SHIT

THEN THERE WAS THE REPRESSED FURY RESERVED FOR THE UNREASONABLE CUSTOMERS WHO WOULD AT TIMES MAKE IT THEIR BUSINESS TO ANNOY THE FUCK OUT OF HER

AND YES... THERE WAS THE JEALOUS ANGER I WORKED HARD TO FORGET...

BUT THAT DAY SHE HAD INTRODUCED ME TO A NEW SHADE TO HER COLORFUL PALETTE OF DISCONTENT

OH IT HAT THAT FAMILIAR MOOD OF SUPRESSED RESENTMENT, THE KIND THAT LEAD TO HER OUTBURST AFTER MIRIAM'S TATTOO...

BUT IT WAS ALSO DIFFERENT... INSTEAD OF ANY KIND OF AN OUTBURST OF FRUSTRATION, THIS SIMMERING GRUDGE MADE HER DISTANT.

DETACHED... INTERESTED IN ANYTHING BUT THE PEOPLE AROUND HER.

I BELIEVE THE COLOQUIAL WORD TO DESCRIBE HER MOOD WOULD BE... PISSY.

SO WHAT'S NEW WITH... WELL, THE BOTH OF YOU?

HOW'S TATTOING LIFE?

PRETTY GOOD. I MAY ACTUALLY GET A FULL TIME JOB AT THE STUDIO EVEN.

RIGHT?

MMHM

I THOUGHT YOU WERE ALREADY WORKING THERE FULL TIME

OH NO. I'VE BEEN APPRENTICING UNDER JACOB, OH YOU GOTTA DROP BY AND LET ME INTRODUCE YOU TO HIM

JACOB IS VERY BUSY

YEAH, I KNOW I DON'T MEAN SPEND THE DAY, I JUST WANT TO INTRODUCE HER

MMH,

SO LAURA, YOU'RE A MANAGER THERE?

UHUH.

R-RIGHT

STOMP

SO WHAT'S NEW WITH YOU?

WHAT?!

GET OFF THE FUCKING PHONE!

OOH THAT'S RIGHT YOU HAVEN'T SEEN IT YET!

LOOK! A PHOTOGRAPHIC PROOF THAT I'M SORT OF A A METALHEAD NOW

BEEN CARRYING THIS AROUND FOR WEEKS TO SHOW YOU!

HOLY CRAP, IT'S LIKE ONE OF THOSE BLURRY PHOTOS OF THE BIGFOOT BUT... LESS BLURRY AND MORE UNBELIEVABLE!

CASSIE THE METALHEAD. NEVER THOUGHT I'D SEE THE DAY!

WELL A LOT OF IT IS STILL WHAT I CALL LARINGHITIS ANTHEMS, BUT YEAH, YOU WERE RIGHT. THERE'S A A BUNCH OF GREAT BANDS OUT THERE.

SO WHICH ONES HAVE YOU BEEN LISTENING TO?

OH, UM, WELL SINCE I WAS ALWAYS BIG ON MUSICAL THEATRE, MY BOYFRIEND. TOM ACTUALLY STARTED ME OFF WITH SOME SYMPHONIC METAL BANDS.

NIGHTWISH?

AMONG OTHERS, YES. THERE'S WITHIN TEMPTATION...

YOU SHOULD GIVE EPICA A TRY

I DID, THEY ARE A BIT... TOO INTENSE FOR ME TOM SWEARS BY THEM THO.

TOM HAS A GOOD TASTE!

SO WHAT ABOUT YOU YOU STILL INTO THAT BAND, MIRIEL?

MIRIAM. OH YEAH, BIGTIME!

IN FACT, CHECK THIS!

OH MY GOD, ANNE!!! WHAT THE FUCK?
HEHEH, IT'S A BIT LARGE BUT....
NO NOT THE TATTOO, WHAT'S WITH THE BRUISES?
OH EHEH, YEAH UM... WE GET PASSIONATE.
PASSIONATE LIKE THE FUCKING DRACULA, DAMN!
IT'S CALLED A HICKEY. DON'T WORRY ONE DAY YOU MAY GET ONE TOO.
I'VE HAD HICKEYS BUT NOT LIKE A DOZEN OF THEM AT THE SAME TIME. WHAT ARE YOU TRYING TO SIGN YOUR NAME ON HER, JEEZ.
OKAY, REEL IT IN, CASSIE.
NOT COOL!

YEAH, I THINK I LOST MY APPETITE. I'M LEAVING.

LAURA...

YOU COMING?

I--

OH, GOD, ANNE, I SWEAR I DIDN'TMEAN ANYTHING BY IT I WAS JUST SURPRISED AND...

NO IT'S... IT'S FINE

SHE'S NOT USUALLY LIKE THIS, IT'S JUST BEEN A ROUGH WEEK...

FINE. STAY THEN. I'M GOING TO WORK.

LAURA WAIT!

HEY!
WILL YOU STOP FOR CRYING OUT LOUD!

LAURA
WHAT THE FUCK WAS THAT?

YOU TELL ME
WHAT THE FUCK WAS THAT?

WHAT?

I'M THE FIRST WOMAN SHE SAW NAKED,

THAT WAS A JOKE

MOCKING ME FOR THE HICKEYS

SHE WAS JUST...

AND YOU!

ME-ME
WHAT?

YOU
APOLOGIZING
FOR ME!?

WHAT?

YOU APOLOGIZED FOR ME.

I APOLOGIZED BECAUSE YOU DIDN'T.

BECAUSE THERE WAS NOTHING TO APOLOGIZE FOR!

REALLY? YOU WEREN'T THE ONE TAKING EVERYHTING TOO SERIOUS THERE? IGNORING THE CONVERSATION, AND THEN GETTING ALL PISSY WHEN SHE TEASES YOU A BIT?

THAT'S TEASING ME A BIT?

HOLY SHIT, LAURA
YOU SPENT MONTHS TEASING ME ABOUT BEING 19 AND NOT BEING ABLE TO BUY YOU DRINKS AND I LET IT SLIDE, SHE CALLS YOU DRACULA ONCE AND IT'S THE END OF THE FUCKING WORLD OVER HERE

OH PLEASE, SHE WAS PUSHING MY BUTTONS FOR THE MOMENT WE MET.

THE FIRST WOMAN YOU SAW NAKED?

OH COME ON!

OH MY GOD, SHE MOONLIGHTS AS AN ART MODEL AT MY COLLEGE CLASSES, AND EVEN THAT WAS A DUMB JOKE AS I'VE DRAWN OTHERS BEFORE HER!

FINE. THAT WAS A JOKE. YOU KNOW WHAT WASN'T A JOKE? HER TONE OF VOICE WHEN SHE STARTED GIVING ME SHIT FOR THE HICKEYS

HICKEYS THAT MIND YOU I SUGGESTED YOU KEEP HIDDEN

OKAY, I AM SORRY ABOUT THAT

BUT I DID TELL HER TO STOP. SHE WAS JUST SURPRISED.

I MEAN EVEN JACOB WAS SURPRISED WHEN HE SAW THEM FIRST

YEAH... BUT WHEN JACOB WAS SURPRISED YOU DIDN'T APOLOGIZE FOR ME.

BECAUSE YOU WEREN'T ACTING LIKE A PISSY TEENAGER.

MMM

YEAH I'VE HEARD THIS OH, IT'S JUST LAURA HAVING ONEOF HER MOODS. SHE'S ON HER PERIOD SHE'S ACTING LIKE A FUCKING TEENAGER...

MY PARENTS DID THAT TO ME...

SO DID MY EX.

I WAS NEVER GOOD ENOUGH FOR THEM SO THEY KEPT APOLOGIZING FOR ME...

NEVER EXPECTED FOR YOU TO DO THE SAME.

THERE WAS A PAUSE PREGNANT WITH EXPECTATION...

SHE EXPECTED ME TO APOLOGIZE...

BUT I JUST FOUND THIS WHOLE THING SO COLOSSALY STUPID...

THAT'S SO NOT FUCKING FAIR, LAURA!

YEAH.. IT'S NOT.

LAURA!

FUCK!

SOONER OR LATER EVERY LOVESTRUCK SWEETHEART LEARNS THE CRUEL TRUTH. THERE ARE NO PERFECT RELATIONSHIPS.

NOT A SINGLE SHRINE OF THE HEART IS WITHOUT ITS WEAR AND TEAR

AND AFTER A YEAR AND A FEW MONTHS OF LOVING HER, MY OWN SHRINE HAS HAD ITS FAIR SHARE OF THEM...

THE SMALL CRACKS.

SMALL JABS

MOMENTS OF INSECURITY

OF SAYING THE WRONG THING AND ACTING LIKE IT'S ALL FINE

BUT LOVE MEANS LETTING SOME THINGS SLIDE. IT MEANS MAINTAINING THE SHRINE...

THE WHOLE THING SORT OF REMINDS ME OF KINTSUGI. A JAPANESE ART OF RESTORING BROKEN POTTERY BY GILDING THE BREAKING POINTS.

AND I SUPPOSE IN MY HEART'S HIDDEN PRECIOUS SHRINE I WAS DOING JUST THAT.

COVERING THE CRACKS IN THE WALLS WITH GOOD MEMORIES

GILDING THE HURTFUL MOMENTS WITH CHERISHED ONES...

PROBLEM WAS... IN KINTSUGI, THE IDEA WAS THAT GILDING CELEBRATES THE HISTORY OF THE RESTORED THING.

I WASN'T CELEBRATING SHIT.

THIS WAS LITTLE MORE THAN COVERUP AND A EVEN THAT WAS A FAILING EFFORT...

BECAUSE NO MATTER HOW MANY CRACKS I GILDED...

MORE APPEARED.

NO... THIS WASN'T LIKE KINTSUGI AT ALL. KINTSUGI WAS SOMETHING BEAUTIFUL...

A TRIUMPH OF RESTORATION.. A REFUSAL LET GO. SURVIVAL INSTINCT TURNED INTO AN ARTFORM.

THIS, HOWEVER? THIS WAS JUST AN ATTEMPT AT STEMMING THE BLEEDING.

EACH NICE MEMORY WAS LIKE A BANDAID ON A SPREADING WOUND

AND I WAS RUNNING OUT OF BANDAIDS...

OF GOOD MEMORIES...

AND THE FUCKED UP PART WAS... IT TOOK ME BY SURPRISE, BECAUSE FOR THE LIFE OF ME I COULDN'T FIGURE OUT...

WHEN THE FUCK DID IT GET THIS BAD?

I WOULD END UP NOT SEEING LAURA FOR FIVE DAYS AFTER THAT. MY MESSAGES UNANSWERED. MY CALLS GHOSTED. WITH EACH PASSING DAY I GREW MORE AND MORE ANXIOUS.



I WAS NEVER IN A SERIOUS RELATIONSHIP BEFORE HER. I HAD NO FRAME OF REFERENCE ON HOW TO DEAL WITH A SITUATION LIKE THAT. SO FOR FIVE DAYS I WAS JUMPY. EVERY RING OF THE PHONE WAS LIKE AN ELECTRIC JOLT FOLLOWED BY A WAVE OF DISSAPOINTMENT WHEN IT WASN'T HER

AND I'M NOT GONNA LIE. A FEW DAYS IN MY ANXIETY AND CONFUSION TURNED TO FRUSTRATION AND ANNOYANCE. IT FELT LIKE SUCH A POINTLESS ARGUMENT. I JUST DIDN'T GET IT.

GIRLFRIEND PROBLEMS?

THAT OBVIOUS?

WELL, IT'S BEEN MONTHS SINCE THE LAST TIME YOU SPENT FIVE NIGHTS IN A ROW SLEEPING HERE.

DON'T GET ME WRONG I LOVE THAT YOU ARE AROUND MORE BUT BETWEEN THAT AND THE MOOD I DON'T NEED TO BE A DETECTIVE TO PUT TWO AND TWO TOGETHER.

LAURA AND I... WE HAD A BIG FIGHT... A STUPID FIGHT AND... DAD I DON'T KNOW WHAT TO DO.

THING IS... IT WASN'T MY FAULT BUT I THINK SHE WANTS ME TO APOLOGIZE!

THEN TELL HER YOU'RE SORRY AND BRING FLOWERS, AND MAYBE CHOCOLATE

WHAT?

I MEAN, YOU SHOULDN'T DO IT EVERY TIME... IT'S JUST... HOW DO I PUT THIS?

YOUR MOM, BLESS HER SOUL, WAS A KIND LOVING WOMAN BUT THERE WERE DAYS WHEN SHE WOULD COME HOME AND START ARGUING ABOUT THE MOST INSIGNIFICANT STUFF.

IT TOOK ME A WHILE TO REALIZE THAT IT WASN'T ABOUT THE SMALL STUFF IN THE END.

IT WAS HER JOB. HER HEALTH PROBLEMS... HER WORRIES THAT FOLLOWED HER HOME.

AND HERE SHE WOULD TAKE ALL HER ANGER AT THE WORLD AND FOCUS IT ON A PIECE OF MUD ON MY SHOE, OR A PIECE OF LAUNDRY OUT OF THE BASKET...

AND I WOULD APOLOGIZE. BECAUSE SOMETIMES THEY JUST NEED SOMEONE TO APOLOGIZE.

I DON'T KNOW WHAT YOUR PROBLEM WITH LAURA IS. BUT WHAT I'M TRYING O SAY IS...RELATIONSHIPS ARE... NEVER IDEAL. THERE ARE ALWAYS COMPROMISES TO BE MADE

AND SOMETIMES THAT MEANS THAT EVERY NOW AND THEN YOU SET YOUR PRIDE ASIDE BECAUSE YOU LOVE THEM

EVEN WHEN THEY'RE DRIVING YOU NUTS.

HEH...

SO FLOWERS AND CHOCOLATE, YOU SAY? A BIT OLD FASHIONED DON'T YOU THINK?

THE WORD YOU'RE LOOKING FOR IT TIMELESS AND CLASSIC.

OH, AND THEN AFTER THAT THERE WILL BE A SPEECH. THERE'S ALWAYS A SPEECH.

DON'T INTERRUPT THE SPEECH.

GOD, THIS IS GONNA BE SO EMBARRASING

LAURA!

ROSES?

YOU SHOULDN'T HAVE!

FUNNY!

WHERE'S LAURA?

SHE TOOK A WEEK OFF.

AAAND YOU DON'T KNOW THAT AND YOU BROUGHT FLOWERS.

HOW BADLY DID YOU FUCK UP?

HONESTLY? I DON'T THINK I DID BUT... I DUNNO. I GUESS I JUST WANT THIS TO BE OVER...

AAH... WELL I SUPPOSE SOMEONE HAS TO BE THE MATURE ONE

HEH... YEAH KINDA.

BUT YKNOW... DON'T TELL HER I SAID THAT!

NO WORRIES I GOT BETTER THINGS TO DO WITH MY TIME THAN GETING LAURA ALL RILED UP

IN FACT, WHEN YOU TWO PATCH IT UP...

IF... WE PATCH IT UP

THAT BAD?

I DIDN'T EVEN KNOW THAT SHE WAS AWAY FROM HERE THESE LAST FIVE DAYS.

EEESH

ORNAMENTS AND SYMBOLS 4

WELL THEN, IF YOU PATCH IT UP, CAN YOU TELL LAURA THAT ANDERSON IS COMING BACK THIS FRIDAY AND HE'S BRINGING IN ANOTHER ARTIST SO SHE'LL HAVE TO SET THINGS UP FOR HIM.

SURE!

ALSO IF YOU WANT TO OFFICIALLY WORK HERE YOU MAY WANT TO BE AROUND ON FRIDAY AS WELL. I'LL VOUCH FOR MY STAR APPRENTICE.

NOW, WHEN I CAME TO THE STORE... I HAD A BIT MORE CONFIDENCE ABOUT THIS WHOLE THING.

MAYBE IT'S CAUSE JACOB WAS PRETTY MUCH ALWAYS THERE, OFTEN THERE WERE CUSTOMERS

I DUNNO... I FIGURED I'D AVOID THE GRAND GESTURE OF SOME LOUD EXTENDED APOLOGY THAT WAY...

KINDA LIKE ONE OF THOSE MOVIE MOMENTS IN WHICH I GO: "I'M SO---"

BUT SHE SHUSHES ME. "IT'S OKAY" SHE SAYS.

THERE'S A KISS...

AND ALL IS GOOD.

THERE, ALONE ON HER DOORSTEP HOWEVER, I FELT LIKE ONE OF THOSE DOOR TO DOOR SALESPEOPLE...

BZZZZT

YKNOW... THE KIND FOR WHOM YOU DON'T OPEN THE DOORS .

THE KIND YOU IGNORE.

KZT

YES?

WHO IS IT?

ME- IT'S... IT'S ANNE.

I, UH... I CAME TO SEE YOU, AND, I DUNNO... TALK

KZT

STAY THERE.

SO? WHAT IS IT?

I DROPPED BY TO UH... CHECK ON YOU.

JACOB SAID YOU TOOK SOME DAYS OFF

YEAH?

I UH... I THOUGHT YOU WERE MAYBE SICK AND SO... I CAME BY

AND... UM...

I'M SORRY THAT I APOLOGIZED FOR YOU.

I... YEAH...

I APOLOGIZE.

TO YOU!

NOW... TURNS OUT, MY DAD WAS HALF RIGHT.

THERE WAS NO SPEECH.

JUST A HUG.

AND I WAS HAPPY ABOUT THAT...

I MEAN, WHY RUIN THE WONDERFUL MOMENT. WHY PICK AT THE SCABS WHEN WE CAN MAKE A NEW WONDERFUL MEMORY.

ANOTHER PRETTY BANDAID FOR THE WALL

I MEAN WE WERE GOOD...

RIGHT?

IT'S FUNNY THINKING BACK ON THOSE DAYS. THE NAIVETY OF ME...

MY DAD HAD THE RIGHT IDEA....

PROBLEM IS HE DIDN'T KNOW THE FULL STORY

IT'S TRUE THAT SOMETIMES YOU SET YOUR PRIDE ASIDE FOR THE ONES YOU LOVE.

I MEAN, NO RELATIONSHIP SURVIVES WITHOUT SOME FLEXIBILITY.

YOU LET SOME STUFF SLIDE, YKNOW...

PROBLEM IS YOU LET TOO MANY THINGS SLIDE AND YOU LOSE THE VERY GROUND UNDER YOU...

AND BEFORE YOU KNOW IT, YOU'RE FREE FALLING.

IT'S LIKE FREE FALLING.

YOU GET TO FEEL THE RUSH

THE ADRENALINE...

THE FEAR...

ALL WHILE KNOWING THAT SAFETY IS A CHORD PULL AWAY. THE QUESTION IS HOW CLOSE TO THE GROUND ARE YOU WILLING TO FALL BEFORE YOU DO IT.

HOW DANGEROUS YOU WANT IT TO BE...

IT WAS SOMETHING THAT ASHE TOLD ME, AND WHILE I NEVER REALLY SAW EYE TO EYE WITH HER WHEN IT CAME TO THE INTENSITY OF THE GAME... I FELT THIS

SEE, ASHE WAS A STERN DOMME.

SHE LOVED THE SENSE OF CONTROL AND HAD NO PATIENCE FOR BRATTYNESS, BACKTALK OR SASS

ONE OF HER FAVORITE PUNISHMENTS WAS A FORM OF SOLITARY CONFINEMENT. SHE'D BIND A SUBMISSIVE AND LEAVE THEM ALONE FOR A PERIOD OF TIME.

SHE CALLED IT THE TIME-OUT

AS YOU CAN IMAGINE THIS WAS ONE OF HER METHODS THAT ALLY AND I DISAPPROVED OF GREATLY DUE TO OUR OWN PERSONAL EXPERIENCES...

BUT THAT'S THE THING. WE DIDN'T MATTER. OUR EXPERIENCES... THEY DIDN'T MATTER.

ASHE WAS CAREFUL IN HER SELECTION OF SUBMISSIVES. THEY HAD TO BE EXPERIENCED. SHE MADE HERSELF CLEAR IN HER DEMANDS

SHE KNEW WHAT SHE WAS DOING.

AND TRUTH WAS, HER SUBMISSIVES WERE HAPPY.

THEY WERE DOING DANGEROUS STUFF. TAKING RISKS... AND LOVING EVERY MINUTE OF IT

TODAY I TAUGHT YOU A VALUABLE LIFE LESSON. NOW WHAT DO YOU SAY?

IT WAS THEIR GAME THEIR RULES THEIR RISKS

THANK YOU, MISTRESS.

GOOD BOY.

THEIR LIMITS.

AND THAT WAS THE THING. THERE WERE MANY KINDS OF DOMS, MASTERS, SADISTS, DADDIES MOMMIES OR A MYRIAD OF DIFFERENT KINDS OF TOPS. BUT IN THE END THE MOST IMPORTANT DISTINCTION ABOUT THEM WAS HOW MUCH THEY WERE WILLING TO RISK FOR THEIR GAME'S IMMERSION.

HELL WE EVEN USED ACRONYMS FOR THE DIFFERENT APPROACHES TO THE KINK.

ME PERSONALLY, I WAS PARTIAL TO THE S.S.C AND R.A.C.K AS THEY DID A PRETTY GOOD JOB DIFERENTIATING THE... FUCK...ALIGNMENTS I GUESS.

WOW... THIS SHIT REALLY IS A LARP... HEH

ANYHOW, S.S.C. STANDS FOR SAFE SANE AND CONSENSUAL, AND REPRESENTS A WAY OF ENGAGING THE KINK WITH ABSOLUTE PRIORITY BEING PLACED ON SAFETY, A CLEAR STATE OF MIND OF PEOPLE PARTICIPATING AND THEIR ABILITY AND WILLINGNESS TO CONSENT

R.A.C.K. HOWEVER, OR RISK AWARE CONSENSUAL KINK. IS BASED AROUND THE IDEA THAT BDSM IS INHERENTLY RISKY, BUT AS LONG AS THE PARTICIPANTS ARE AWARE OF THAT, CONSENT TO THAT, AND WILLINGLY SHARE IN ON THAT RISK, THE GAME IS ON.

SO, WHAT ABOUT ALLY AND ME?

WHAT "ALIGNMENT" WOULD WE BE

IN OUR OWN FREEFALL, HOW CLOSE TO THE GROUND WOULD WE DARE TO GO BEFORE WE PULLED THAT CHORD

BEFORE THE WHOLE ATTIC INCIDENT WE PRETTY MUCH JUST DID WHAT FELT RIGHT

PLAYED IT BY EAR...

BUT THAT DAY WHEN THINGS WENT WRONG, WE STARTED THINKING ABOUT IT.

WE DIDN'T KNOW IT AT THE TIME, BUT THAT DAY WOULD END UP DEFINING WHAT KINDS OF DOMS WE WANTED TO BE.

COME ON, HARDER, DON'T BE A WIMP!

HEY, YOU'RE THE PROGRAMMER. I'M TRYING NOT TO SNAP YOUR BRITTLE TENDONS

ME??? HUFF-- YOU LITERALLY SIT ON YOUR ASS IN THAT ANTIQUE PLACE MOST OF THE TIME POLISHING WOOD!

OH IT'S HARDER THAN YOU THINK!

SEE FOR YOURSELF!

FUNNY!

BUT LADIES FIRST!

HUFF--
SERIOUSLY THO, WHAT'S WITH THE WHOLE DRILL SERGEANT WORKOUT REGIME

HUFF---
IT'S JUST---
IT'S JUST STRETCHES HUFF

I UH...
I'VE BEEN READING UP ON SOME THINGS AND THEY SAY YOU SHOULD STRETCH BEFORE DOING BDSM STUFF

I SEE...

AND HYDRATE!

WANT SOME?

I'M GOOD

ALLY... UH IS EVERYTHING OKAY?

WHAT? OH NO... I MEAN---

YEAH IT'S GREAT, IT'S JUST... I DUNNO, I FEEL WE MAY BE A BIT RECKLESS WITH THIS STUFF.

LIKE... THE OTHER DAY WHEN I WAS...UH ALONE... I KEPT FEELING LIKE MY LEG WAS ABOUT TO CRAMP UP AND LAST NIGHT I READ THAT EXCERCISES AND STRETCHES HELP WITH THAT...

SO UH... I WANTED TO TRY THAT...

AND MAYBE SOME OTHER STUFF.

OTHER STUFF?

YEAH... IF THAT'S OKAY WITH YOU?

SURE.

SO WHAT'S THIS... STUFF?

I MADE A LIST!

I FIRMLY BELIEVE THAT A LOT OF PEOPLE GET INTO BDSM BY SEEING IT SOMEWHERE AND THEN TRIAL AND ERRORING THIS SHIT UNTIL THEY EITHER GET BURNED BY IT, BORED OF IT, OR TAKE IT SERIOUSLY ENOUGH TO GO LOOKING FOR SOME ACTUAL REAL IN PERSON GUIDANCE.

THAT WASN'T AN OPTION FOR US BACK THEN, PRIMARILY BECAUSE THE VERY THOUGHT OF LOOKING FOR A BDSM CLUB OR LEARNING COURSES WOULD SEND US TO A GIGGLING FIT

IN OUR MOMENT OF NEED, ONCE AGAIN WE TURNED TO THAT LAST GREAT BASTION OF FREELY AVAILABLE INFORMATION...

THE INTERNET.

THE PLACE WHERE ANYONE WITH A KEYBOARD AND SOME FREETIME BECOMES AN EXPERT

WHERE "TRUST ME BRO" BECOMES A CREDENTIAL

AND FOR BETTER OR FOR WORSE, ALLY FOUND A LOT OF SELF APPOINTED EXPERTS THERE...

DAMN, YOU REALLY DID YOUR HOMEWORK ON THIS...

EEEH...

TECHNICALLY I DID THIS INSTEAD OF DOING MY HOMEWORK

IT'S FINE. I'LL CATCH UP ON THAT.

ANYWAYS LET'S GET TO IT.

AND TO IT WE GOT. IT WAS A LONG LIST OF TIPS, TRICKS AND ADVICE. SOME WERE GREAT, LIKE STRETCH PROPERLY BEFORE TRYING COMPLEX BONDAGE RIGS.

OR THE ONES ABOUT USING PROPER TOOLS FOR THE JOB TO REDUCE THE RISK OF INJURIES

DON'T USE REGULAR KITCHEN SCISSORS INSTEAD USE TRAUMA SHEARS?

THE FUCK ARE TRAUMA SHEARS?

TURNS OUR TRAUMA SHEARS ARE AWESOME SAFETY SCISSORS!

AND WEIRD LOOKING.

THEN OF COURSE THERE WERE THE QUESTIONABLE TIPS

AN ASPIRIN?

YEAH. BOTTOMBABE32 SWEARS BY IT. SAYS IT'S A BLOOD THINNER SO IT REDUCES THE RISK OF BLOOD CLOTS DURING LONGER INTENSE BONDAGE SESSIONS.

OKAY SO UH... UPDATE. SPANKANDTANK6 SAYS THAT ASPIRIN ACTUALLY INCREASES RISKS OF BRUISING WHEN DOING IMPACT PLAY

MMMHM... MAYBE YOU SHOULD HAVE CONSULTED WITH SPANKANDTANK6 BEFORE YOU MADE MY ASS INTO A CONTEMPORTARY ART PIECE.

YEEEEAAAHH...

SORRY.

AND THEN THERE WERE THE STRAIGHT UP NOPE ADVICE... LIKE THE HELPFUL LIST OF HOUSEHOLD BUTTPLAY ITEMS AND POSSIBLE LUBRICANTS.

SIGH...

SUNSTONE!

COWARD!

OR ALL THE WONDERFUL AND SUPER PRACTICAL IMPROVISED BONDAGE GEAR YOU CAN FIND ON A BUDGET

LIKE ZIPTIES!

YOU SURE ABOUT THIS?

TIGHT-PACKED SUSAN SAYS THEY FEEL AMAZING!

ZIP IT!

WELL?

MAN, FUCK TIGHT-PACKED SUSAN! THIS SHIT SUCKS!

SO YEAH. THE TIPS VARIED IN QUALITY, FOR SURE, BUT IN THE END WHAT MATTERED THE MOST WAS OUR ATTITUDE. THE DIRECTION WE CHOSE. WE SET OUR LIMITS AND WE WOULD STICK BY THESE. SAFETY FIRST AND SAFETY ABOVE ALL THINGS. FUCK THE IMMERSION. THAT WAS US.

BUT THERE WAS AN UNFORSEEN SIDEFFECT TO THIS. OUR SESSIONS NOW INCLUDING LONGER SETUPS, WARMUPS STRETCHES, AND EVEN MORE AFTERCARE. THEY TOOK LONGER. DEMANDED MORE DEDICATION... MORE TIME.

MORE OF IT....

MORE OF US.

YEAH I'LL SET EVERYTHING UP.

OKAY?

HOW LATE?

FINE BUT THIS BETTER BE WORTH IT!

LITTLE BY LITTLE OUR GAME GREW INTO AN INSATIABLE MONSTER ALWAYS DEMANDING OUR ATTENTION AND AFTER A WHILE I STARTED NOTICING IT. A THING THAT BOTHERED ME.

THE THING WE SACRIFICED FOR THIS OBSESSION OF OURS..

US.

WE SACRIFICED ALL WE WERE BEYOND THE KINK AND STORED IT UP ON THAT ATTIC.

ME? I LOVED THE GAME BUT I LOVED ALLY AS WELL. SURE IT MAY NOT HAVE BENE A ROMANTIC LOVE BUT IT WAS GENUINE.

AND SURE, WHEN IT CAME TO MY MOST TREASURED MEMORIES WITH HER, SOME OF IT WAS THE KINK... OUR GAME...

BUT THE REST... IT WAS THE WINTER COFFEE

PAINTING UNDER A TREE...

THE SIMPLE TIMES OF SEEING A MOVIE TOGETHER...

STILL I'D BE LYING IF I SAID THAT BACK THEN THE SACRIFICES WEREN'T WORTH IT...

HELL, HER ENTHUSIASM ALONE WAS WORTH THE PRICE TO ME.

OH, THANK GOD, YOU'RE STILL HERE. SORRY I TRIED CATCHING A BUS BUT I MISSED IT SO...

IT'S FINE. I HAD STUFF TO DO ANYWAYS.

GREAT!

OKAY, SO, FIRST OFF, YOU KNOW HOW I WAS DOING THE SYSTEMS MAINTENANCE GIGS FOR A WHILE NOW.

SURE, I FULLY UNDERSTAND WHAT THAT IS. YOU TURN COMPUTERS ON AND OFF AGAIN, RIGHT?

FUCK OFF! BUT ALSO, SOMETIMES, YES.

ANYHOW I GOT LUCKY WITH A LOCAL BUSINESS HERE, AND RECOVERED SOME FILES AFTER A CRASH SO THEY PAID ME A NICE BONUS...

SO I WENT SHOPPING. HERE, THIS ONE'S FOR YOU!.

THIS IS NOT A PETSTORE COLLAR..

NO IT'S NOT. MOMMY GOT PAID! NOW, LET'S STRETCH AND THEN YOU'LL HELP ME PUT MY THING ON!

HEY, ALLY...

HUH?

I'VE BEEN THINKING... IT'S BEEN A WHILE SINCE WE SAW A MOVIE TOGETHER

I MEAN, IF YOU CAN GET YOUR PC UP HERE...

NOT PORN. I MEANT A MOVIE MOVIE.

LIKE... CINEMA. THIS SATURDAY?

OH, I'M ACTUALLY WORKING THE WHOLE WEEKEND

IT'S A WELL PAYING GIG BUT... YKNOW.. LONG HOURS.

SURE...

STILL, I'D SAY THE HOURS ARE WORTH IT!

SO? WHAT DO YOU THINK?

I WILL REFER YOU TO THE STANDING OVATION.

I DIDN'T PUSH THE ISSUE AT THE TIME. I BELIEVE YOU WROTE ABOUT IT IN YOUR STORY ONCE... THE FEAR OF RISKING THE GOOD ENOUGH FOR THE SAKE OF WHAT IF.

IN OUR CASE, THE "WHAT IF" WAS A A CHANCE FOR A MORE BALANCED FRIENDSHIP. .

BUT THE "GOOD ENOUGH" WAS LOOKING IRRESISTIBLE THAT DAY

IN FACT, SEEING HER LIKE THAT I WAS PERFECTLY CONTENT IN LETTING OUR GAME, OUR VERY OWN MONSTER DEVOUR US BOTH.

HEH... FUNNY WHAT A FIVE HUNDRED DOLLARS LEATHER DRESS WILL DO TO A FETISHIST...

YUP. YOU HEARD ME RIGHT. FIVE! HUNDRED! DOLLARS!

IF YOU THINK THAT'S PRICY NOW, CONSIDER THE FACT THAT WE WERE IN COLLEGE!

HEH...

ALLISSON CARTER, THE WOMAN WHO TO THIS DAY BUYS HER CLOTHES ON SALE BECAUSE THAT'S JUST SMART BUDGETING...

BUT WHEN IT CAME TO FETISHWEAR, SHE HAD THE SELF CONTROL OF A TODDLER ON A SUGAR HIGH

I SWEAR, IN THOSE LATE DAYS OF OUR ATTIC ADVENTURES SHE PRETTY MUCH BECAME THE SUGAR MOMMA OF OUR ENTIRE GAME

HO HO HO! REVERSE SANTA IS HERE AND BAD BOYS GET PRESENTS TODAY!

REVERSE SANTA... IT'S NOVEMBER!

REVERSE SANTA BOWS TO NO CALENDARS!

TURNS OUT SHE WAS GOOD AT EARNING MONEY. AS SHE PUT IT: "PEOPLE WHO OWN COMPUTERS RARELY MAINTIAN THEM UNTIL IT'S TOO LATE. AND THEN THEY PAY PEOPLE LIKE HER TO RESTORE CRUMBLING OPERATING SYSTEMS AND RESCUE THEIR FILES."

THESE THREE FOLDERS?

OH GOD, YES! CAN YOU BRING THEM BACK???

SHE WAS MAKING GREAT MONEY DOING EXACTLY THAT, AND WITH THAT MONEY CAME NEW GEAR, TOYS, AND YES... OUTFITS.

YOU'RE KIDDING...

AND REVERSE SANTA NEEDS A REINDEER!

TO MY MISFORTUNE ALLY GOT TO CHOOSE THE OUTFITS BUT YOU DON'T LOOK A GIFT HORSE HEADHARNESS IN THE MOUTH... OR SOMETHING...

I LOOK STUPID!

WELL, YEAH... YOU STILL NEED THE TAIL!

THE--- TAIL!?

SURPRISE TAILS ASIDE, I WAS VERY MUCH FINE WITH THIS NEW STATUS QUO

YOU WERE RIGHT. BUYING MORE OF THESE WAS AGOOD IDEA AND JUST SO I CONTRIBUTED AS WELL, I BOUGHT A BUTTLOAD OF BATTERIES!

O FFFF- WUCK!

SEE? I'M HELPING! NOW, LETS SEE HOW LONG THEY LAST AT MAX SETTING!

VRRRRRRRRR

ACCESS TO ACTUAL GEAR RESULTED IN EVEN MORE INSPIRATION.

THE KIND OF INSPIRATION THAT MADE IT DIFFICULT TO FOCUS ON ANYTHING ELSE

SO WE DIDN'T.

DO! DO NOT! ~~TRY!~~

INSTEAD WE JUST KINDA HYPERFOCUSED ON OUR GAME

HEY, DIDN'T YOU SAY YOU BOUGHT THOSE BUTTERFLY CLAMPS TOO?

UWMM-- MO?

AH! NEVERMIND! FOUND THEM!

TWO SESSIONS PER WEEK TURNED TO THREE...

FOUR...

FIVE...

SOMETIMES EVEN TWICE A DAY.

LIKE I SAID, OUR GAME GREW INTO AN INSATIABLE MONSTER.IT FEASTED ON ITS SCHEDULED TIME, GORGED ON THE SCRAPS OF FREE TIME THAT WERE LEFT, AND WHEN ALL OTHER TIME WAS GONE IT TURNED ITS HUNGRY GAZE TOWARDS THE FORBIDDEN TIME.

WAIT!

DIDN'T YOU HAVE A PAPER DUE TODAY?

EH, DON'T WORRY ABOUT IT. I'LLASK FOR AN EXTENSION.

IT'LL BE FINE.

SEE, EARLY ON WE WOULD SKIP A CLASS EVERY NOW AND THEN FOR THE SAKE OF THE GAME. STILL, WE WERE REASONABLE ABOUT IT...

LIKE ALLY SAID

NOT PLANNING ON MAKING A HABIT OUT OF THIS!

IT WAS RARE ENOUGH FOR PEOPLE NOT TO REALLY NOTICE...

?

BUT IN THOSE LATE DAYS, WE GOT RECKLESS ABOUT IT. AND WHEN YOU GET RECKLESS... PEOPLE NOTICE

MR. BENSON? I'M ABOUT TO CLOSE THE DOORS.

OH-- UH, YEAH, III--- I'M NOT FEELIGN SO WELL SOOO... IMMA HEAD HOME.

AT FIRST WE THOUGHT, NO BIG DEAL, WE'LL CATCH UP...

I MISSED A PAPER. BUT I GOT AN EXTENSION

NICE!

LIKE, EVENTUALLY.

OKAY I HAVE 3 PAPERS DUE TOMORROW SO WE GOTTA MAKE THIS QUICK

NO WORRIES!

FFFFFF--- UUUUCK!

BUT THEN THINGS STARTED TAKING A TURN FOR THE WORSE...

WHOA, ALLY? WH--

I FLUNKED A TEST, AND I NEED A DISTRACTION!

COME ON!

IT WAS TIME FOR US TO WORRY....

MOTHER FUUU--

YOU LOOK STRESSED!

YOU KNOW... I HAVE A CURE FOR THAT!

OH THANK GOD! WHAT TOOK YOU SO LONG?

I HAD A CLASS?

OH--- YEAH

UH, I WAS KINDA WAITING FOR YOU... THIS IS IMPORTANT.

UH, I HAVE A PHONE?

YEAH THIS IS NOT SOMETHING I WANNA DO OVER THE PHONE.

SHIT... I'M ACTUALLY TOO NAUSIATED FOR COFFEE RIGHT NOW...

CAN WE JUST... GO UPSTAIRS.

WE REALLY GOTTA TALK.

O---OH R-RIGHT.

SURE.

TALK!

KINDA FUNNY, REALLY. IF I HAD TO TRULY PICK A POINT WHERE IT ALL STARTED FALLING APART, IT WOULD HAVE BEEN THAT DAY

THE DAY OF THE BIG SCARE!

I'M VERY CLOSE TO FLUNKING FOUR OF MY COLLEGE CLASSES

(...)

OH THANK GOD!

WHAT?

OH, NO! I MEAN, THAT'S HORRIBLE IT'S JUST...

WELL, THE WAY YOU SAID WE GOTTA TALK!

I MEAN WE HAVE A LOT OF SEX, I DUNNO, I THOUGHT... YKNOW...

WE HAD...AN OOPSIE?

AN... OOPSIE? YOU LOOKED LIKE YOUR LIFE FLASHED BEFORE YOUR EYES

HEY, DON'T GET ME WRONG. IF IT HAPPENNED, I'D HAVE YOUR BACK NO MATTER YOUR DECISION, IT'S JUST... ALLY YOUR MOM SCARES THE CRAP OUT OF ME!

I MEAN, SHE GRILLED ME WHEN YOU JUST INTRODUCED ME AS YOUR FAKE BOYFRIEND!

THEN YOU TELL ME ALL GLOOMY, WE GOTTA TALK IN PRIVATE, YOU'RE TOO NAUSIATED FOR COFFEE?? I AGED TEN YEARS CLIMBING UP HERE!

I WAS HERE ACTIVELY DEVELOPPING AND ULCER IMAGINING A SITUATION WHERE I HAVE TO TELL HER I GOT HER DAUGHTER PREGNANT??

WWWWOW!

YEEEAAH... NOW THAT YOU MENTION IT SHE'D MAKE YOUR LIFE A LIVING HELL.

OH GOD, SHE'D PROBABLY PICK A CAREER PATH FOR ME AS WELL. SHE DID NOT SEEM IMPRESSED WITH MY ANTIQUES RESTORATION LONG TERM PLANS.

NOT GONNA LIE. CONVERSATIONS WERE HAD ABOUT THAT...

SO... WE'RE GOOD?

YEAH, DUDE.

BUT I REALLY AM IN TROUBLE.

I MESSED UP!

ALL THOSE PAPERS I'VE BEEN POSTPONING HAVE PILED UP AND... I KINDA LOST TRACK OF DUE DATES AND NOW I GOTTA DEAL WITH THEM CAUSE IF I DON'T I'M RISKING DROPPING MY GRADES

THAT PUTS ME AT RISK OF LOSING MY SCHOLARSHIP AND I CAN'T AFFORD THAT. I'M MAKING NICE MONEY RIGHT NOW, BUT NOT PAY THE TUITION MONEY, AND... OH GOD, IF MY MOM FINDS OUT I'LL NEVER HEAR THE END OF IT

IF I DON'T FIX THIS, I AM FUCKED!

YEAH, TO BE HONEST, I'VE BEEN HAVING SIMILAR ISSUES.

AND YOU'RE NOT FREAKING OUT?

I MEAN... YEAH. I DUNNO. I DIDN'T WANT TO WORRY YOU ABOUT IT SO I FIGURED I'D JUST PULL SOME LONGER NIGHTS AND CATCH UP.

OR...

OR?

WELL, BETWEEN OUR JOBS FINANCONG OUR TOYS HERE AND OUR SESSIONS... THAT'S A LOT OF TIME INVESTED

HMM... I GUESS WE DO ALREADY HAVE ENOUGH STUFF SO WE COULD CUT DOWN ON WORK.

ON WORK?

WHOA THERE! THERE ARE THINGS I STIL NEED TO GET.

PLUS, I STARTED MAKING SOME CONNECTIONS... I MAY ACTUALLY BE ABLE TO GET A JOB NEXT YEAR. MAYBE EVEN AFFORD TO RENT A PLACE OF MY OWN.

LORD KNOWS, BETWEEN MY MOM AND MY SISTER... I NEED SOME PRIVACY.

OKAY?

SO WE STOP THIS THEN?

HEY THERE!

NO... NOT STOP. JUST... YKNOW... TONE IT DOWN.

WE KINDA WENT FROM TWICE A WEEK TO SOMETIMES TWICE A DAY.

YEAH, FAIR.

SO, WHAT I'M PROPOSING IS WE GO BACK TO TWICE A WEEK.

HEH...

BACK TO SQUARE ONE THEN?

JUST UNTILL WE DIG OURSELVES OUT OF THIS.

DEAL?

DEAL.

THINKING BACK, IT SEEMED LIKE THE SIMPLEST OF IDEAS. JUST CUT BACK ON THIS ONE SMALL THING.

PROBLEM WAS ENTIRE FRIENDSHIPS ARE OFTEN BUILT AROUND SMALL THINGS . A SHARED INTEREST... GAMING, SPORTS, COOKING, FISHING, CARS...

FOR US IT WAS THE KINK

IT WAS OUR BOND. OUR THING, OUR COMMON INTEREST, AND IT WAS ALL NICE WHEN WE HAD THE TIME TO ENGAGE WITH IT...

BUT AS OUR SCHEDULE TIGHTENED...

TENSIONS INCREASED

AND AT FIRST WE THOUGH, IT'S FINE... WE'LL GET USED TO IT.

WE'LL JUST FOCUS ON FIXING OUR COLLEGE ISSUES. SIMPLE!

BUT IT WAS THE FURTHEST THING FROM SIMPLE

TURNS OUT SOMETIMES THE EASIEST WAY TO NOTICE GETTING ADDICTED TO SOMETHING IS HAVING IT TAKEN AWAY.

THAT'S WHEN WE STARTED NOTICING ITS ABSENCE.

NOTICING THE BURDEN OF ITS WEIGHT UPON YUS

NOTICING THE TIME CRAWLING ITS WAY TO THE MOMENT WHEN YOU GET TO HAVE FUN AGAIN

AND WITH EACH PASSING HOUR YOUR FOCUS MELTS AWAY.

AS IDEAS MULTIPLY, AND THE PRESSURE RISES

BUT WE KEEP TELLING OURSELVES IT'S FINE!

AFTER ALL, WE KNOW THE CURE TO ALL OF THIS.

WE JUST NEEDED A BIT OF THAT GOOD STUFF.

JUST NEEDED TO VENT...

ALL OF THIS REFLECTED ON OUR GAME.

DIMINISHED IN ITS FREQUENCY, IT BECAME MORE RAVENOUS

RECKLESS

INTENSE...

LIKE A VALVE RELEASING ALL OF OUR PENT UP CHARGE,

AND THE PROBLEM WITH VALVES IS, IF YOU DON'T RELEASE THE PRESSURE REGULARLY, THINGS TEND TO BUILD UP AND TURN... VOLATILE

I'M SORRY, WHAT CAN I SAY, I THOUGHT IT WAS A SIMPLE RECOVERY BUT DUDE WENT ON SOME SHADY SITE AND NOW HE HAS RANSOMWARE SO I GOTTA SEE IF THE BACKUP DRIVE IS AFFECTER AS WELL OR I CAN JUST REINSTALL HIS OPERATING SYSTEM

ALLY I UNDERSTOOD LIKE FIVE WORDS IN ALL OF THAT, MEANWHILE I WASTED MY TIME PUTTING ON ALL THE STUFF YOU PREPARED ONLY FOR YOU TO FLAKE OUT ON ME.

FUUUUCK... DUDE I'M SO SORRY!

RAINCHECK?

SIGH...

YEAH... THIS WAS THE UNFORSEEN FLAW IN OUR LITTLE PLAN.

IT FAILED TO ACCOUNT FOR LIFE GETTING IN THE WAY

SOMETIMES ONE OF US WOULD BE LATE OR MISS THE SESSION ENTIRELY AND THIS LEAD TO ARGUMENTS.

SEE THAT'S THE OTHER THING!

WHEN A DOM AND A SUB PLAY TOGETHER, A SINGLE SESSION WILL IF IT GOES WELL, SATISFY BOTH OF THEM...

BOTH GET WHAT THEY WANT.

TWO DOMS IS HARDER.

NOT IMPOSSIBLE, MIND YOU I'VE MET PEOPLE WHO MADE IT WORK IN DIFFERENT FUN, CREATIVE WAYS...

SOME WERE PROFESSIONAL PERFORMERS WITH A STRONG ON STAGE CHEMISTRY AND ENOUGH SENSE TO KEEP THEIR EGOS IN CHECK

OTHERS, WERE COUPLES CAPABLE OF COMPROMISE

EVEN CAPABLE OF SHARING.

ALL OF THEM WERE MATURE ENOUGH TO MAKE THE BEST OF THEIR CIRUMSTANCES AND HAVE FUN

OPERATIVE WORD BEING MATURE.

ALLY AND ME, HOWEVER, WERE AT BEST SPARRING PARTNERS AND MAYBE KINDA RIVALS.

AND THAT WORKED FOR A WHILE, YKNOW...

I MEAN, SURE, WE WOULD POKE FUN AT EACH OTHER, BUT EVEN THEN WE'D HAVE A SERIOUS USEFUL TALK AFTERWARDS

DON'T YOU FUCKING DARE COMING EARLY OR I WILL CHOKE THE SHIT OUT OF YOU YOU LITTLE BITCH!

MKHM-KHH KHH-KHH--

I WILL CHOKE THE SHIT OUT OF YOU....

YOU LITTLE...

BITCH?

OKAY, UH... FULL DISCLOSURE: I KINDA APED THAT LINE FROM A STORY I READ LAST NIGHT...

IT WAS ONE OF THOSE, *IT SOUNDED GOOD ON PAPER*, DEALS...

BUT THEN YOU HEAR YOURSELF ACTUALLY SAYING IT AND...

UH...NO!

I NEARLY HAD A LAUGHING FIT! WHICH, I'LL REMIND YOU, IS NOT A PLEASANT THING WHEN GAGGED!

REALLY, MR "DON'T JUST SUCK IT, WORSHIP IT!"

HEY! I STILL STAND BY THAT BEING A GOOD LINE!

THE LINE WAS FINE! BUT YOU DELIVERED IT LIKE A TOTAL DWEEB!

I HAD A LAUGHING FIT WITH A DICK IN MY MOUTH!

SO, YEAH! COMPLAIN ABOUT A GAG AGAIN YOU WUSS!

HAHAHAH! OKAY, FINE! WE BOTH NEED TO WORK ON OUR DOMSPEECH!

YEAH...

IT WAS A GOOD PLAN...

IT COULD HAVE WORKED...

OKAY!

SO WE'LL TRAIN EACH OTHER, WE'LL ADVISE EACH OTHER. AND WE'LL MASTER THIS DOM SHIT!

OR SUB SHIT!

UH... YEAH THAT TOO!

SOUNDS LIKE A DEAL TO ME!

SHAKE ON IT?

OH FOR FUCK SAKE!

IF IT WASN'T FOR THE STRESS OF IT ALL...

BALANCING THE GAME, WITH THE REST OF OUR LIVES HAD TAKEN ITS TOLL ON US AND WEEK BY WEEK WE LAUGHED LESS AND ARGUED MORE.

CAN WE DO THIS JUST ONCE WHERE YOU DON'T LEAVE ROPE BURN MARKS ALL OVER ME?

REALLY, THIS COMING FROM SOMEONE WHO SUCCESSFULLY NICKED ME WITH FUCKING SAFETY SCISSORS!

OH YOU WANNA GO THERE, MR I LEARNED TO TREAT HEMP ROPE, LET'S TRY IT OUT!

OH, FUCKING OOPS! BETTER GET A TURTLENECK TO WEAR AROUND YOUTR MOM!

IN THOSE LAST DAYS, OUR FEEDBACK ONCE HELPFUL AND PURPOSEFUL TURNED MEANSPIRITED, FRUSTRATED...

VINDICTIVE...

BOTH OF US STARTED KEEPINNG SCORE OF FUCKUPS

DAMAGING THE BOND BETWEEN US THROUGH SHEER ABRASIVE FORCE OF OUR CLASHING EGOS...

NEITHER OF US WILLING TO GIVE... TO COMPROMISE...

I GUESS, DEEP DOWN WE BOTH KNEW IT WAS A MATTER OF TIME BEFORE SOMETHING INEVITABLY BROKE...

BUT NEITHER OF US THOUGHT IT WOULD BE OUR VERY FRIENDSHIP.

I STILL CLEARLY REMEMBER THE DAY WHEN IT ALL CAME TUMBLING DOWN

ALLY WAS LATE.

AGAIN...

OH THANK GOD, YOU'RE STILL HERE!

YOU'RE LATE!

AGAIN...

WELL YOU COULD HAVE USED THE TIME TO GET READY

I AM READY!

YOU'RE NOT WEARING THAT?!

I'M THE DOM, I GET TO WEAR WHAT I WANT.

WHAT DO YOU MEAN, YOU'RE THE DOM? IT'S MY TURN!

NO, IT WAS YOUR TURN THE LAST TWO TIMES, WHEN I SHOWED UP AND YOU DIDN'T.

OH REALLY, THAT'S THE WAY THIS WORKS NOW? I CAN'T MAKE IT SO I MISS A TURN?

NO, THE WAY THIS WORKS IS THAT YOU RESPECT ME ENOUGH TO TELL ME ON TIME WHEN YOU CAN'T MAKE IT. THAT WAY I DON'T WASTE MY TIME COMING HERE AND DOLLING MYSELF UP FOR YOU... TWICE!

ONLY FOR YOU TO MESSAGE ME AN HOUR LATER TO TELL ME YOU CAN'T MAKE IT.

TCH!

FINE. WHATEVER, I DON'T WANNA ARGUE ABOUT THIS!

SO WHAT ARE WE DOING TODAY, OH GREAT MASTER

WELL, YOU SAID YOU WANTED TO TRY STRAPPADO IN HEELS TO SEE HOW UNCOMFORTABLE IT IS

BUT I DON'T KNOW... WE HAVEN'T BEEN STRETCHING RECENTLY, AND WITH YOU BEING LATE I DON'T THINK WE HAVE THE TIME FOR A PROPER WARMUP--

YEAH YEAH, LET'S GO. GET MY BOOTS AND THE ROPE.

WHAT ABOUT THE WARMUP?

ALAN WE'VE BEEN SKIPPING WARMUPS FOR THE LAST FOUR TIMES AND NOTHING HAPPENNED.

I'M WARMED UP AND LIMBER ENOUGH. NOW GET TO IT.

OKAY, SO HOW IS IT?

I'LL LET YOU KNOW WHEN YOU ACTUALLY DO IT. COME ON, PULL MY ARMS UP

MORE?

YES, ALAN. MORE! THE IDEA IS WE TEST THIS ON EACH OTHER SO WE KNOW HOW FAR TO GO WITH A SUBMISSIVE.

REMEMBER? CAUSE IF YOU DON'T MAYBE YOU SHOULD PUT ON SOME HEELS AND I'LL SHOW YOU HOW TO PULL ON A ROPE

THIS OKAY?

HOW IS YOUR BALANCE?

MY BALANCE IS FINE. PULL HIGHER.

YOU SURE?

OH FOR CRYING OUT LOUD, YOU WANTED TO BE A DOM, ARE YOU GONNA TIPTOE LIKE THIS AROUND A SUBMISSIVE SOME DAY? JUST PULL MY ARMS HIGHER!

I WANT TO FEE---

DROPTHEROPE DROPTHEROPE NOWN OWNOW!!!!

ALLY?

MMMMM

I'M FINE! JUST... UNTIE ME!

ISIT YOUR SHOULDER?

IT'S JUST A SPRAIN... JUST LET IT GO.

YOU WANNA GO TO THE DOCTOR?

AND TELL THEM WHAT? THIS GUY I KNOW IS A CLUMSY DOM?

HEY, YOU'RE THE ONE WHO KEPT ASKING TO PULL YOUR ARMS HIGHER!

YEAH, I ALSO ASKED TO BE THE DOMME TODAY!

WHICH IF I HAD BEEN, GUESS WHAT, MY SHOULDER WOULD FEEL FINE!

OH WE'RE DOING FUCKUP LISTS AGAIN?

CAUSE TWO CAN PLAY THAT GAME.

WHATEVER!

YOU KNOW THAT TODAY WAS MY TURN AND YOU STILL WON'T ADMIT YOU'RE IN THE WRONG.

BECAUSE I'M NOT!

YOU DON'T GET TO JUST BLOW ME OFF WEEK AFTER WEEK AND THEN EXPECT ME TO BOW DOWN TO YOUR SCHEDULING WHIMS.

WELL EXCUSE ME FOR HAVING SHIT TO DO! I DIDN'T HEAR YOU COMPLAINING ABOUT SCHEDULING WHEN I WAS BUSY PAYING FOR LIKE 80% OF STUFF WE GOT UP HERE

WHAT'S THAT GOT TO DO WITH ANYTHING?

I'M WORKING MY ASS OFF SO WE CAN AFFORD SOME DECENT TOYS HERE. ALL I'M SAYING IS I THINK I EARNED THE RIGHT FOR YOU TO CUT ME SOME FUCKING SLACK EVERY NOW AND THEN.

THERE!

I'M UNDER A CRAPTON OF PRESSURE RIGHT NOW AND... I NEEDED THIS TODAY. I NEEDED YOU TO LET ME BE ME TODAY BUT...

I COULD HAVE LET IT GO.

I COULD HAVE IGNORED HER LASHING OUT LIKE THAT, AND JUST ACEPTED THAT SHE WAS STRESSED OUT AND NEEDED TO VENT...

RIGHT...

BUT I DIDN'T...

I DIDN'T BECAUSE WHAT SHE SAID, IT FUCKING HURT!

SO I HURT HER BACK...

HOW INSENSITIVE OF ME.

I AM TRULY SORRY FOR NOT PERFORMING TO YOUR EXPECTATIONS.

I'D HATE TO SEE YOU NOT GETTING THE RIGHT BANG FOR YOUR BUCK

OH FUCK OFF!

AND THERE IT WAS...

EVEN NOW I CAN'T HELP BUT TO WONDER, IF I ASKED HER, WOULD SHE TELL ME?

IF BACK THEN I ASKED, WHY ARE YOU SAYING THIS, THIS ISN'T YOU...

WOULD SHE HAVE TOLD ME THE TRUTH

ABOUT THE STRESS OF WATCHING HER MOM WORKING TWO JOBS TO PAY OFF OLD LOANS YET STUBBORNLY REFUSING ALLY'S HELP

AND ABOUT THE MOUNTING PANIC OF POSSIBLY LOSING HER SCHOLARSHIP AND HOW THE IDEA OF FACING HER MOM ABOUT IT HAD BEEN AFFECTING HER SLEEP, LEAVING HER PERPETALLY TIRED AND GROUCHY...

WOULD SHE TELL ME THAT IN ALL OF HER STRESS HER ABILITY TO EARN WITH THESE GIGS OF HERS HAD BECOME THE ONE THING GIVING HER SOME HOPE AND A SENSE OF CONTROL OVER HER OWN LIFE...

AND HOW WITH ALL OF THIS ON HER MIND, SHE STARTED HYPERFOCUSING ON FINANCES TO THE POINT THAT THEY BLED INTO OUR ARGUMENT THAT DAY...

WOULD SHE ADMIT THAT SHE DIDN'T DO WELL UNDER PRESSURE AND ALL OF THIS GOT THE BETTER OF HER?

WOULD SHE SAY THAT SHE WAS SORRY?

BUT MOST OF ALL I WONDER... WOULD I HAVE LISTENED?

I CAN'T WASTE MY TIME WAITING FOR SOMEONE WHO CAN'T MAKE TIME FOR ME!

BECAUSE FROM MY END I SAW A FRIEND WHO OVER TIME BECAME SEEMINGLY MORE INTERESTED IN OUR GAME THAN IN MY COMPANY. AND YET,SHE WAS CONSTANTLY LATE FOR OR MISSED OUR ARRANGED MEETINGS...

CAN'T MAKE TIME FOR YOU???

I'VE ALIENATED EVERY SINGLE FRIEND I HAD BECAUSE OF YOU!

A FRIEND WHO DISRESPECTED MY TIME AND EFFORTS AND THEN TRIED TO JUSTIFY IT BY POINTING OUT THAT SHE WAS MAKING MORE MONEY THAN ME

A FRIEND WHO NO LONGER CARED...

YEAH... I CAN'T MATCH THAT. KINDA HAD A SHIT START WHEN IT CAME TO SOCIALIZING WHICH IS PARTIALLY WHY I CARED ABOUT YOU SO MUCH...

AND YES... THERE WOULD COME A TIME WHEN WHEN WE WOULD COMPARE THE SHAPES OF OUR EMOTIONAL SCARS AND LAUGH ABOUT IT ALL.

I GUESS THAT'S THE THING WITH SCARS. THEY ARE A REMINDER OF OLD PAINS...

BUT THEN AND THERE THE PAIN WAS FRESH.

I WAS ANGRY AND I WAS HURT. AND WHEN SOMEBODY HURTS YOU... YOU GOT YOUR OWN WOUNDS TO DEAL WITH, IT'S NOT YOUR FIRST INSTINCT TO PATCH UP THE ONE WHO INFLICTED THEM.

NO, INSTEAD I FOUGHT BACK AND WHAT WAS ONCE OUR BOND BECAME NO MORE THAN A PIECE OF ROPE IN A SAD TUG OF WAR, WHER NEITHER OF US WAS WILLING TO GIVE AN INCH...

AND IF THE BOND BREAKS, SO BE IT!

AND FOR A LONG TIME I THOUGHT THE FEELING WAS MUTUAL. YKNOW... I FIGURED WE WERE EQUALS IN ALL OF THIS.

BUT AT LEAST I KNOW THE NUMBERS NOW.

AFTER ALL THAT'S WHAT MY FRIENDSHIP IS TO YOU, A 20% COPAY ON A TWO YEAR LOAN?

ACTUALLY, HERE, YOU WANT THIS AS WELL?? HERE'S MY KEY AS WELL. I'LL GIVE YOU MY 20% SO YOU CAN HAVE IT ALL!

100% ALLISON CARTER!

ALL FUCKING YOURS!

ALAN, WAIT!

COME ON, STOP!

PLEASE, DON'T DO THIS!

WHY NOT?

WHAT'S THE POINT? ARE YOU GONNA TELL ME THAT THIS TIME YOU'LL BE HERE ON TIME? THAT YOU'LL SOMEHOW FIND THE TIME FOR US? WHAT'S GOING TO CHANGE?

AND THEN I SAW IT...

A MOMENT OF REALIZATION IN HER EYES...

A SAD KIND OF AN EPIPHANY...

I...

UH...

NO...

NO... YOU'RE RIGHT.

THIS IS NOT HELPING.

I THOUGHT THAT REDUCING THE FREQUENCY WOULD HELP, BUT IT JUST MADE IT WORSE. I KEEP DWELLING ON THIS PLACE... AND I'M NOT GETTING ANYTHING DONE....

SIGH...

SAME.

SO... SO I THINK MAYBE WE SHOULD JUST STOP THIS? STOP OUR GAME?

RIGHT?

...

YEAH.

YEAH, LET'S STOP THIS.

IT WOULD HAVE MADE FOR A POETIC ENDING TO IT ALL, WOULD IT NOT?

BUT THAT'S NOT HOW WE ENDED... SEE, FRIENDSHIPS, THEY HAVE THIS HABIT OF ENDING IN A MORE HEARBREAKING WAY

FRIENDSHIPS FADE.

... AND YOU DON'T EVEN NOTICE IT AT FIRST. WE SURE DIDN'T. WE FIGURED WE'D JUST BE SMART ABOUT OUR SITUATION. REMOVE THE TEMPTATION ALTOGETHER, FOCUS ON THE STUFF NEEDED TO BE DONE. GET OUR LIVES UNDER CONTROL, Y'KNOW... BE RESPONSIBLE.

FOR A WHILE WE PRETENDED IT WAS FINE.

BUT A PRETENSE WAS ALL IT WAS, REALLY...

OUR TALKS FELT LESS LIKE CONVERSATIONS AND MORE LIKE A WALK THROUGH SOME STRANGE EMOTIONAL MINEFIELD

CAREFULY WE AVOIDED THE TALKS OF OUR KINK, OF THE ATTIC. MEASURING OUR WORDS, SECOND GUESSING OUR JOKES...

IT FELT DIFFERENT FROM THE TIME WHEN WE LOST ACCESS TO MY ROOM.

AFTER ALL THE ATTIC WAS STILL THERE. WE HAD THE KEYS...

IT WAS AS MUCH OF A TEMPTATION TO US AS WE WERE TO EACH OTHER.

IT DIDN'T TAKE LONG UNTIL ALLY STARTED HAVIGN LESS AND LESS TIME FOR ME. ALWAYS A REASON...

ALWAYS AN EXCUSE...

AND THE THING WAS... I THINK EVEN THEN I FELT IT

WITHOUT THAT BOND BETWEEN US...

WE WERE DRIFTING AWAY...

FADING.

UNTIL ONE DAY...

HEY, I DECIDED TO REMOVE OUR STUFF FROM THE ATTIC IN CASE SOMEONE GETS IN AT SOME POINT

ANYHOW I FOUND YOUR BOOTS AND WANTED TO CHECK IF YOU WANTED THEM?

UHUH... YOU WANNA RETHINK THAT, BUDDY?

BE-BLIP

NO.JUST DO WHAT YOU WANT WITH THEM. I DON'T NEED THEM ANYMORE.

THERE'S OTHER STUFF HERE AS WELL, STUFF YOU BOUGHT.

BE-BLIP

JUST GET RID OF IT ALL.

YOU SURE? SOME OF THIS STUFF IS PRETTY PRICEY.

BE-BLIP

YES! I'M SURE NOW STOP MESSAGING ME ABOUT THAT FUCKING ATTIC!

BE-BLIP

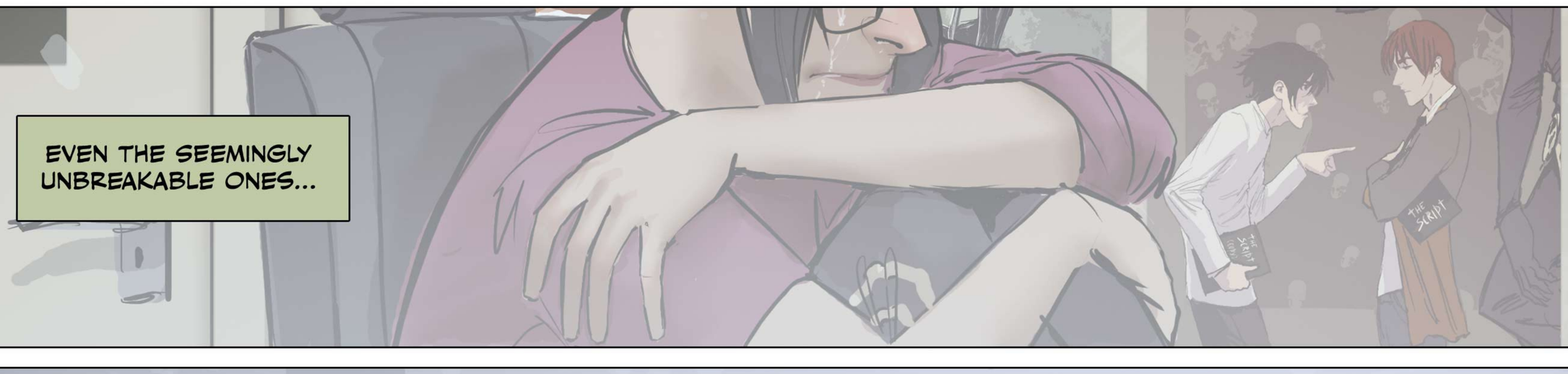
IN FACT... I THINK WE SHOULD PROBABLY NOT SEE EACH OTHER FOR A WHILE AT LEAST.

BE-BLIP

IM SORRY.

LIKE I SAID... FRIENDSHIPS FADE...

EVEN THE SEEMINGLY UNBREAKABLE ONES...



AND YOU KNOW WHAT?

EVEN THOUGH WE WEREN'T A COUPLE... IT BROKE MY HEART.

KINDA SURREAL JUST HOW MUCH DAMAGE A PHONE MESSAGE CAN DO

HELL, A PHONE MESSAGE ENDED UP KILLING MY WHOLE DAMNED RELATIONSHIP...

BELE-LEEP

BUT BEFORE THAT... BEFORE THINGS GOT BAD... THEY WERE BETTER THAN EVER.

LAURA AND I MADE UP. WE WERE HAPPY AGAIN...

TWO DAYS LATER SHE MADE A JOKE THAT I SPENT SO MUCH TIME AT HER PLACE I SHOULD PROBABLY JUST MOVE IN.

THE LAUGHTER DIED OUT AS SOON AS OUR EYES MET AND WE BOTH REALIZED IT WASN'T A JOKE... NOT REALLY.

HEH...

I HAD BUTTERFLIES IN MY STOMACH FOR THE NEXT TWO DAYS...

SORRY! UGH! I USUALLY SLEEP ON THAT SIDE.

MPF!

BELE-LEEP

HEY, JACOB, WHAT'S UP?

NOW? I THOUGHT IT WAS TOMORROW

OH I GOT YOUR STAR PUPIL OVER HERE

WE DID. HOW DID YOU KNOW?

HEH!

SNIFF

OH, DAMN...

UH, LAURA CAN I BORROW A CLEAN TSHIRT? MINE FEELS A BIT FUNKY!

NO NEED

YOU KEEP LEAVING YOURS HERE AND I KEEP WASHING THEM!

HEY!

DON'T HEY ME, GET DRESSED. ANDERSON WANTS TO MEET YOU!

OKAY, NOW! BEFORE WE GO IN, THERE'S SOMETHING YOU NEED TO BE READY FOR

WHAT?

SO ANDERSON HAS A SON, GOOD TATTOO ARTIST, BUT LIKE ANY OTHER ARTIST, HIS BEGINNINGS WERE... UH SHAKY.

HE DID A PORTRAIT TATTOO OF HIS SISTER AS A BIRTHDAY GIFT TO ANDERSON

OH THAT'S SWEET!

UHUH!

RIGHT!

WHATEVER YOU DO, DON'T LAUGH AT IT!

LAUGH?

TRUST ME!

IN FACT... I DUNNO, TREAT IT LIKE A SOLAR ECLIPSE OR SOMETHING. WE ALL DO

ANDERSON!

THERE'S MY FAVORITE WALKING TALKING MID LIFE CRISIS!

HAH!

I GOT A GRANDKID AND A JANKY HIP!. MID LIFE IS WAY BEHIND ME, LAURA.

JANKY HIP, MY ASS! I'VE SEEN YOU DANCE! YOU'RE FINE!
AND SPEAKING OF FINE THINGS
MEET MARIANNE!
UH, HEY!
OH, SO YOU'RE JACOB'S NEW TRAINEE, HUH?
SPLITTING HEADACHE
NICE TO MEET YOU, MARIANNE, PUT IT THERE!
Amy
OH SWEET MERCIFUL HEAVENS!
Amy

RIGHT! UH! VERY NICE TO MEET YOU!
UH LIKEWISE!
HEH! RIGHT THEN!
WHILE WE'RE DOING INTRODUCTIONS, LET ME GET ADAM OVER HERE AS WELL
I'M SO PROUD OF YOU
THAT TATTOO WILL HAUNT MY NIGHTMARES
OOOH, LOOK AT MY GIRL! SO BRAVE!
SO STRONG!
FUCK OFF!
INSPIRING!
OKAY, YOU TWO, THIS IS ADAM MILLER! HE'LL BE WORKING WITH US FROM NOW ON.

ADAM, MEET LAURA! SHE MANAGES THE STUDIO.

AND THIS HERE IS MARIANNE. SHE'S A FELLOW ARTIST.

HEY!

I'M ADAM! I, UH...

I WON'T BE SHAKING YOUR HAND

I... HAD A BIT OF AN ACCIDENT!

OH, PLEASE!

I'M NOT EVEN SURE IF MINE WILL EVER WASH OFF AT THIS POINT!

SO YEAH... THAT WAS THE DAY I MET ADAM. I LIKED ADAM.

OH, BY THE WAY, THAT PHONE MESSAGE THAT I MENTIONED? THE ONE THAT DESTOYED MY RELATIONSHIP? YEAH... IT CAME FROM HIM.