Summary

Dirk was not a coward.

“Come on out Icarus,” Priest cooed, his tone soft and terrifyingly menacing.

But there was absolutely no way he would voluntarily go to the agent — not even in the hope of recieving a small measure of leniency. Nope, he was just going to stay exactly where he was, huddled in a silent ball of misery and, rather heroically in his opinion, not break into hysterical sobs of terror.

Because hello, not a coward.
Dirk was not a coward.

He really wasn’t, despite the way others tended to mock and harass him, instinctively seeming to realise he wouldn’t retaliate. It was true he didn’t react well to violence and aggression but avoiding potential harm hardly made him craven, especially when it so regularly sought him out. And hiding crouched inside a wardrobe with his arms over his head and his eyes firmly squeezed shut definitely didn’t make him cowardly. Especially when faced with one of the most psychotic alphas he’d ever met.

“Come on out Icarus,” Priest cooed, his tone soft and terrifyingly menacing.

*He was too close. Far too close.*

“Little mouse, little mouse, come out,” Priest called in a singsong tone that was frankly all the more terrifying because the other man sounded amused. *He was having fun.*

There was absolutely no way he would voluntarily go to Priest, even if it did mean the agent might show him some small measure of leniency. Nope, he was just going to stay exactly where he was, huddled in a silent ball of misery and, rather heroically in his opinion, not break into hysterical sobs of terror.

Because hello, not a coward.

He tried to push down all of the terrible thoughts that were making his shaking so much worse and concentrate on being as small and as quiet as humanly possible. If he stayed still there was a small but discernible possibility that Priest might not find him.

“I can smell you, you know,” Priest hissed, his voice just outside the wardrobe Dirk had wedged himself inside. “Your blocks not working anymore, little one? Being on the run all the time without an alpha has got to make it hard to track down reliable meds.”

Dirk pressed his hands over his mouth to try and contain the whimper he could feel caught in is throat. *Oh god. Oh god. Oh god.*

The door burst open and Dirk made himself go limp as a hard grip caught his collar and dragged him to his feet. Experience had taught him that Priest did not react well when his targets struggled. He was dragged out of the wardrobe and Priest’s other hand wrapped around Dirk’s throat. He squeezed lightly, dragging Dirk close enough that his lips were pressed against the smaller man’s cheek. “That was a good chase you led me on project Icarus,” he said in that hissing, smug tone of hisss. “But the time for running has long since past. You’re coming home with me.”

Dirk felt his breath hitch as he was dragged down the stairs of the lovely little house he decided to hide in and saw the owners lying dead on the floor, their hands outstretched, just out of reach from one another.

“You killed them,” Dirk managed to choke out as tears started pouring down his cheeks. “Why?”

“You know why,” Priest said, not pausing as he reached the front door, already hanging from its hinges, and kicked it open. “You never should have ran Icarus. You compromised these nice people and now they’re dead and it's your fault.”
The moment they were outside Dick dared to grab Priest’s wrists. He twisted violently, the movement cleary surprising Priest because he actually let go.

“I am not going back with you,” Dick said, his chest heaving and his eyes prickling with tears. He didn’t care what Priest did to him. He couldn’t just go back there. He couldn’t.

The alpha shot him. It took a fraction of a second for Dirk to feel the excruciating pain tear through his shoulder and then he screamed, staggering back before collapsing to his knees. His whole body was shaking. Shock, he was in shock.

“You wanna try something else?” Priest asked, levelling his gun at Dirk with a bright smile. “You’ve got plenty more limbs for me to shoot if you decide you want to be disobedient.” When Dirk just stared at him Priest shrugged and holstered the gun. “No? So you’re going to behave Icarus?”

“Fuck you,” Dirk hissed, clutching his arm as he struggled back to his feet. “Just, fuck you you coward. Those people didn’t deserve to die. They were just helping -” Priest pulled out his gun and pointed it towards Dirk with a sorrowful smile. “No,” Dirk cried, throwing his arms above his head. “No, don’t.”

The bullet tore through his thigh, the force of the shot knocking him on his arse. Dirk fell onto his stomach and screamed into the crook of his elbow. He risked a look over his shoulder, barely able to see through his tears and realised Priest was stepping towards him. He still had the gun drawn.

“Stop,” he said when Dirk attempted to crawl away. “Seriously sweetheart,” Priest said, sounding exasperated. “This is getting sad. Just stop, OK.”

“I can’t go back there,” Dirk cried, still struggling to get away. He realised he was leaving a trail of blood on the families nice green lawn. He felt a sob work its way through his chest. “Please, leave me alone.”

“No can do kiddo,” Priest said without a hint of sorrow. “It’s time to go home.”

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Todd didn’t know what to think. The omega was pretty enough he supposed. A little old to be unmated but probably no older than Todd. He had dark auburn hair, light skin and pretty blue eyes. He was willowy and long limbed, probably taller than Todd which wasn’t ideal but certainly wasn’t a deal breaker.

“He looks sickly,” Todd noted, unable to disguise his concern. Were they were trying to bond him to some kind of junkie. “Is he on something?”

“Dirk recently experienced a rather traumatic accident,” Supervisor Adams said with some truly unconvincing sympathy in his voice. “He’s recovering but it’s left him a little shaken. You know how delicate omegas are.”

“Does he know about the...the bonding?” Todd asked, cringing a little because it was mortifying as fuck that he was going to marry some guy he’d never met before. He couldn’t bare the idea that it would be entirely against the omegas wishes.

“Not yet,” Adams admitted. “We thought we might introduce the two of you first to see how compatible you are. Would you be willing to meet?”

“What,” Todd blanched. “You mean now?”
“Sure. No time like the present.”

Todd nodded his head slowly before stepping back. “Look, I don't know about this. I don’t think -”

“My Brotzman, you’re currently on bail for several counts of theft and fraud. Now, you have every right to walk out of this facility and never look back. However, I don’t think the prison officers will offer the same courtesy when you’re incarcerated, but the choice is entirely yours.”

“Sure it is,” Todd said, running his fingers through his hair. “Shit, OK. OK let’s do this.”

“Excellent. If you’ll follow me.”

Todd had kind of hoped the room would be bigger on the other side but it was just as small and starkly white as it had looked through the two way mirror. Other than to scent the air and curl further info himself the omega didn’t react when they stepped inside.

“Dirk, I have someone I’d like you to meet.”

“Oh yes?” the omega asked, still not looking up. If anything he was cowering a little, even if his voice was a sharp as a knife. “Someone else to poke and prod me no doubt. All in a useless attempt to discern knowledge you would have no possible way of -”

“Dirk,” Adams snapped, causing the omega to immediately stop talking. “Please, show some manners and say hello to our guest.”

“Or you’ll do what exactly?” Dirk asked venomously, looking at Adams with so much derision in his eyes that even Todd took a small step back. “What could you do to me that you haven’t already done?”

“Mr Brotzman,” Adams said in a level tone, not breaking eye contact with the omega. “Why don’t you come back when Dirk is feeling a little better. Say next week.”

“OK,” Todd said, thankfully retreating out of the room. Dirk seemed to notice him for the first time and his sharp gaze locked onto the alpha before swiftly turning back to Adams. “OK,” he repeated. “Next week.”

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“This time the omega immediately turned to Todd. He kept his head bowed and his eyes down but his expression was carefully neutral and and polite. “Hello,” he said woodenly.

“This is Todd. He’s going to stay for a while so the two of you can get to know one another a little better. I’m going to give you some privacy. Do you promise to be on your best behaviour Dirk?”

The omega released a full body shudder before very slowly nodding his head. “Of course,” he said, the words almost a whisper.

“Excellent,” Adams said, gently pushing Todd further inside the small room. “I’ll have someone bring the two of you lunch. Enjoy.”

As soon as Adams left the room it was like a switch had been flipped. Dirk looked up sharply, his blue eyes fixed unnervingly on Todd. “An alpha?” he asked, something like distaste in his voice.

“Uh, yeah,” Todd said, feeling a little uncomfortable being under such close scrutiny. “Why?”
“It’s just interesting. They don’t usually leave me alone with alphas. Why are you so special?”

If Dirk didn’t know there was no way in hell Todd was telling him. “So, your names Dirk?”

Surprisingly the other man grinned at him, his smile bright and shining. “That’s right. Dirk Gently to be precise. And you’re Todd?”

“Todd Brotzman,” he said, offering a hesitant smile of his own. “You’re English?”

“Yes, Well sort of. I mean, mostly. Have you been to England?”

How the hell could someone be sort of English. “Uh, not yet. I’ve never actually left the US”

“Oh, well if you get the chance you must go. It’s actually very lovely there.”

“OK,” Todd said, feeling a little awkward. He paused for a moment, drawing back when he realised what he was scenting. Omega in distress. “Hey, hey it’s OK. I’m not going to hurt you,” he said hurriedly, falling back when the other man flinched away from him. “ Seriously, I swear you don’t need to be scared of me. I won’t do anything to you.”

“I don’t know what you mean,” Dirk said, his expression still cheerful despite the fact it didn’t come close to reaching his eyes. “I’m not scared. I’m actually having a lovely time. Tell me Todd, where about in the US are you from?”

How could he look so calm when his scent was all but screaming his distress. “Look, you’re clearly not feeling up to talking to me. Maybe I should come back next week -”

The scent of distress skyrocketed. “No,” Dirk shrieked, launching himself off the bed and immediately collapsing to his ass with a pained grunt. He looked up at Todd with tears running down his thin face. “Please don’t go. I don’t mean to be difficult, really. Please, just stay.”

Todd moved forward on reflex, attempting to help the omega to his feet. The other man immediately curled into himself, whimpering softly. “Please,” he cried. “Don’t go.”

Todd didn’t know what to do. Dirk clearly didn’t want him anywhere near him but he also didn’t want him to leave. Todd felt lost.

When the door opened and Mr Priest stepped inside Dirk broke out into broken, noisy sobs.
Chapter 2

Todd was invited to visit Dirk the next day. He was reluctant but smart enough to realise that the politely worded request was little more than a thinly veiled order. He didn’t really have a choice.

He waited for the door to Dirk’s room to open before stepping cautiously inside. The omega was sat bolt upright on the bed. His eyes jumped to Todd, flickering over Adams before resting on a spot near Todd’s chin. “Hello Todd,” he said, bright and sweet and utterly fake.

“Hi,” Todd said, trying not to fidget. “You feeling a little better today?”

Dirk’s smile grew so wide it looked painful. “Much better. Thank you for asking,” he hesitated for a moment and his smile faltered. “I would offer you a seat, but ah…” he gestured helplessly around the desolate room.”I seem to be lacking in suitable furniture.”

“Why don’t you sit on the bed Todd,” Adams suggested, his sharp gaze moving to the omega. “Make some room for your friend Dirk.”

Dirk clearly didn’t want to move. The smile was gone entirely, replaced with a deep scowl. “You’re going to make me lie in bed with the scent of some random alpha stinking up -”

“Icarus,” Adams spat, causing the smaller man to jolt violently. “You’re being rude. Make room for Todd.”

Dirk seemed to consider his options for a moment before visibly rolling his eyes and shuffling to the head of the bed. He crossed his legs and rested his hands in his lap. When Todd made no move to sit down he gestured towards the bed with a flourish. “Go on then. Sit down and ruin my sheets, quickly, before the nice man with the gun decides he’s unhappy with our progress and -”

“Icarus,” Adams said between gritted teeth. “Shut up.”

Todd was so shocked that for a moment all he could do was stare. The tension in the room was almost palpable and all he wanted to do was crawl in a hole and hide from the whole situation.

“Todd, please sit down,” Adams said as he gently pushed Todd forward.

The moment Todd stepped towards the bed he began to smell the now familiar but faint scent of Dirk’s distress. It increased as he climbed on top of the sheets. He tried his hardest to take up as little room as possible on the bed, sitting on the opposite end from Dirk and lifting his own knees to his chest.

Dirk was looking at him with clear betrayal in his eyes, which shouldn’t have affected Todd so strongly. “Now what,” he found himself asking, looking up at Adam’s questioningly.

“Now the two of you get to know one another. I’ll be back in an hour,” the supervisor turned to Dirk, stepping forward until he loomed over the omega. “Remember what we talked about Dirk. If i need to send Priest in here again you won’t like what comes next.”

Dirk flinched at Priest’s name and shrank further into himself. He nodded his head sharply, which seemed to be enough to appease the other man.

“A delight isn’t he,” Dirk muttered as soon as the door closed behind the supervisor. “Are you two colleagues then?”
“Me and him?” Todd asked incredulously. “What in the hell would give you that idea?”

“Well,” Dirk said, straightening slightly and looking more than a little prim as he looked down his nose at Todd. “You’re not a subject, are you? Which means you’re here voluntarily. The two of you must be fairly chummy for him to have given you such high clearance. What’s rather intriguing though is that I can’t figure out what you are. You don’t look like military, but then they might be trying something new. You could be a secret operative for all I know. Your name might not even be Todd. You could be absolutely anyone.”

“I’m not here because I want to be,” Todd said as soon as he could get a word in. “I’ve kind of got a bit of a record. I was facing jail time. When they asked me to get involved in a project here instead of prison I agreed.”

“What’s the project name?” Dirk asked, his expression shrewd and a little distrustful.

Todd hesitated. It didn’t escaped him that Adam’s had called Dirk icarus. “I don’t know,” he lied.

Dirk didn’t look convinced. He pursed his lips for a moment before turning away. “I don’t have a good feeling about you Todd,” he said and bizarrely Todd felt a pulse of hurt. “Whatever you’re doing here is going to end badly. I can tell.”

“Yeah,” Todd muttered, playing with his shoelaces. “That makes two of us I guess.”

The omega slowly uncurled his legs, allowing one leg to hang over the side of the bed. “So, what is it you do exactly, if you’re not a secret agent?”

Despite himself Todd smirked. “I’m really, really not a secret agent. I’m not really much of anything. Not right now at least.”

“Unemployed?” Dirk asked curiously.

“Sure am and with my record I’m probably going to stay that way,” Todd said, feeling a little glum about his prospects and then hugely guilty as he remembered all the things they’d promised him if he bonded with Dirk. A house, an income, security. Everything he could possibly ever hope for.

“I’m a detective,” Dirk admitted. “A holistic detective. And before you ask, I don’t work with Blackwing.”

Todd felt his eyes widen. “What’s a holistic detective?”

“How lovely of you to ask,” Dirk said cheerfully. “The term ‘holistic’ refers to my convictions about the fundamental interconnectedness of all things. I do not concern myself with such petty things as fingerprint powder, telltale pieces of pocket fluff and inane footprints. I see the solution to each problem as being detectable in the pattern and web of the whole. The connections between causes and effects are often much more subtle and complex than we with our rough and ready understanding of the physical world might naturally suppose.”

Jesus fuck, Todd thought a little hysterically. “But - but how, if you don’t use traditional investigative techniques do you -”

“Interconnectedness! Coincidence, and the rarer, sexier coinky-dinks! Once hired, I am intrinsically connected to the specific case. I then will eventually solve the mystery merely by just kind of doing whatever.”

“Whatever?” Todd asked, his voice a little strangled. Jesus Christ, his omega was absolutely
batshit crazy. “And you get paid for this job?”

“Well, sort of. Usually the universe gives me what i need. Sometimes it gives me a lot more than I’d like. Currently the universe is rather peeved that my rather aggravating captors won’t let me do the things it so desperately wants me to do.”

“Which is what?” Todd asked, feeling more and more confused by the second.

“Oh who knows, Usually I just go where I think I should be and more often that not in turns out that it’s exactly where I am. You know what I mean?”

“No,” Todd said, rubbing his forehead. “I really don’t think I do.”

“Do you know Todd that, unless I’m taken for testing or exercise, both of which are just awful, I haven’t been allowed out of this room for what I can only guess is coming up to two months.”

What the hell was he supposed to say to that.

“How terribly sad for you Todd. I truly do feel very sorry for you.”

Jesus, Todd thought, standing up and retreating back from the bed. What the hell had he got himself into.
Dirk lived in a perpetual state of boredom that was occasionally sprinkled with delightful little nuggets of terror.

The universe didn't care about Blackwings tests. Dirk tried to tell them as much but the various doctors studying him would inevitably argue that he was purposefully being uncooperative. When he didn’t provide the results they wanted, which was always, they punished him. Usually, it was small things. They would take away his bed or revoke his shower privileges. Occasionally, when he got ‘too mouthy’ they would gag him; some of the guards found it hilarious when Dirk couldn't speak.

And sometimes, if an important test went particularly badly, they would send Priest to his room. The agent would hurt him. Never anything that would permanently scar or maim. The man would simply beat the shit out of him and then leave.

Todd was...new. During his childhood Blackwing refused to let Dirk mingle with anyone outside the base. Now, for whatever reason, they seemed intent on thrusting the alpha into every aspect of Dirk’s boring and mundane life. He wasn’t naïve enough to think they were acting out of kindness. Whatever reason they had for foisting the alpha on him would not, he was quite sure, end well.

He was a rather tiny alpha, Dirk reasoned as he watched the other man pace the room. Dirk wasn’t a particularly large man but he was certainly a few inches taller than Todd. Dirk rather liked it. He wasn’t, as a rule, overly enamored with alphas, although he did try to give everyone the benefit of the doubt. The fact that Todd didn’t loom over him made it a little easier being in such close proximity to him.

“You’re going to wear a hole in the floor,” Dirk said, feeling dizzy just watching Todd pace.

“Which actually isn’t a terrible idea. Escape via an underground tunnel, although not particularly original, would still be rather effective. It’s a classic for a reason! Not that I’m picky about possible escape routes of course. Bells and whistles are not required, thank you very much.”

Todd’s stopped pacing in favour of staring at Dirk. “What?”

“What?” Dirk asked. He looked over his shoulder but couldn’t see anything, other than an extremely boring wall.

Todd, he noticed, was turning a rather interesting shade of red. “What are you prattling on about?”

“I do not prattle,” Dirk said, feeling a little insulted. “I was merely commenting on your incessant pacing. It’s quite distracting you know..”

Todd opened his mouth, probably about to say something truly awe-inspiring, before closing it with an audible click. After a moment he walked over to the bed and plopped himself down next to Dirk. He started to rub his head.

“Headache?” Dirk asked sympathetically.

“You have no idea,” Todd muttered.

That sounded a little bit like passive aggressive sniping to Dirk. He debated sniping back but decided to be the bigger person. He was beginning to realise that Todd was always grumpy in one way or another. “It’s the lighting. Causes me no end of migraines.”
“Really?” Todd asked, looking up at Dirk from under his hand. “Have you told them? Maybe they could change the bulbs or something”

Dirk almost laughed before he realised Todd was being serious. “Todd, they really don’t care if I get a headache.”

“Oh,” Todd said and oddly enough his scent altered slightly. Less agitated and more depressed. He stared at Dirk for a long moment. “I noticed your cheeks bruised. What happened?”

Dirk had, in all honesty, hurt himself falling over his own feet. Granted, he’d been pushed rather firmly out of the way by Riggins at the time but the man wasn’t purposefully trying to hurt him. At least that was what he had told Adams when the other man started shouting at him for ‘damaging one of the projects’. A sentiment that was about as touching as it was charming.

“I fell over,” he said, skirting his hand over his cheek. “It looks much worse than it feels,” he added when he sensed Todd’s depression thicken. It was quite stifling actually. Dirk stood up, trying not to look nervous as he crossed the small room. He wishes there was a window he could open. “So, how’s the job hunting going?”

“Not awesome,” Todd said glumly. “I actually got a job interview earlier this week but I blew it after about twenty seconds in.”

“Oh?”

“Yeah,” Todd said, massaging his temples slowly. “I think I came across a little too desperate, you know?”

“Not particularly,” Dirk said truthfully. “I’ve never had a ‘traditional job’. Not that I would really want to. The nine till five rut is not for me thank you very much. Although, if I’m being honest anything would be preferable to my current situation. Even, dare I say it, a desk job!”

Todd gave Dirk a rather odd look. “Do you mean that?”

“Well, I should think so. I mean, I’m not silly enough to say it couldn’t get any worse. Because believe me Todd that is a really stupid thing to say. Things always get so much worse whenever anyone says that things can’t get worse. But for the most part, yes I think just about anything would be better than being trapped in this horrible facility day after day. No sunlight, no freedom. It isn’t a pleasant way to spend one's life, Todd.”

The alpha nodded slowly. His scent had altered too. It wasn’t depressed anymore but had spiked with adrenaline. Dirk pressed back a bit, feeling suddenly quite nervous.

“I was free not too long ago. Did they tell you?” He asked, unsure why he was asking but interested to see how Todd would react.

Todd did not react with surprised.

“So you did know? have they briefed you about my entire life? Do you know everything there is to
“And why is that Todd? Why do you know so much about me? You’re not a subject, you’re not a project or an agent, so why do you have clearance? Why are you here with me now? What is happening?”

“I- I can’t tell you,” Todd said, refusing to meet his eyes. “I’m not here to hurt you though. I promise.”

“Of course you aren’t,” Dirk said, standing in the corner furthest from Todd. “Are you allowed to leave the room whenever you like?”

“I think so,” Todd said, still not looking at him.

“Good,” Dirk said. “Why don’t you do us both a favour and get out.”

Todd stood up and wrung his hands nervously. “They won’t like it if they think you forced me out. Didn’t they threaten to send that Priest guy last time?”

“Why should you care if they send that maniac in here? It’s not like he’s going to do anything to you.”

“Jesus Dirk,” Todd said, taking a small step in his direction. “I don’t want you to get hurt.”

“No?” Dirk asked, allowing a fair bit of disbelief to leak into his tone. “Then why don’t you help me escape Todd? Why don’t you open that door, right this very second, and help me walk out of here?”

Todd didn’t say anything. It was hardly a shock.

“No?” Dirk asked. “Then like I said earlier. Get out.”
Ken wanted the opportunity to observe the subject firsthand and made sure to accompany Project Icarus back to his room. The omega was uncommonly quiet during their short walk and seemed determined to resolutely ignore Ken’s presence.

That wouldn’t do.

“Not feeling well Icarus?” he asked, keeping his expressions as bland and passive as possible. The subject scowled at him beneath a few stray locks of mussed hair but kept his mouth resolutely closed. “You feel very hot to the touch. You’re not coming down with anything are you?”

“You know exactly what’s wrong,” Icarus mumbled, almost too quietly for Ken to hear. The omega was trembling violently in the grasp. He didn’t struggle when the alpha tightened his grip but his scent spiked with distress.

“I beg your pardon?”

The subject ducked his head and turned away, subconsciously bearing the side of his throat as he tried to put some distance between them.

“Icarus, I asked you a question.”

The omegas shook his head hastily, straining against Ken’s hold as he tried to pull away.

“Do I need to call for a guard Icarus?” Ken asked, keeping his tone deliberately soft. “Perhaps Prie-”

“I’m sorry,” the omega immediately cried out as he looked desperately back at Ken. “Please, I’m sorry. Don’t-”

“Then stop trying to pull away Icarus.”

The omega suddenly seemed to realise that he was still straining against Ken’s hold and Ken, despite possessing an alphas naturally stronger physiology, was not prepared to start wrestling a project into submission.

“I’m sorry,” Dirk repeated, finally settling. “I didn’t realise.”

“It’s fine,” Ken said, loosening his hold on the subject's wrist very slightly. “Just behave from now on. OK?”

A for a moment Dirk’s scent flashed with anger. Ken thought he really might need to call a guard when the omegas narrow shoulders abruptly drooped and he averted his gaze.

“Here we are,” Ken said brightly when they reached Dirk’s cell. He made sure to enter the room first and stood back to observe the omegas reaction.
“W-what?” Icarus stammered, stumbling back. “What is this?”

“It’s a bed of course,” Ken said, meeting the subject’s wild gaze with a carefully bemused expression.

“I can see it’s a bloody bed. What is it doing here? Why is it so large?”

He’d figured it out. It was really quite fascinating. Dirk came across as a ridiculous airhead but once you got past his general awkward and silly nature he was really incredibly bright. “You’ve been doing very well lately Icarus. We thought you deserved a reward.”

“So you gave me a bigger bed? What the hell do I care about a bigger bed? You want to reward me, let me go outside. Let me -”

“Icarus,” Ken said, allowing a slight growl to leak into his tone.

The omega instantly recoiled, raising his hands in supplication as he staggered back. “I know what you’re doing,” he accused as he quite literally backed himself into a corner. “Haven’t you already done enough? You control literally every aspect of my life. Do you truly need to take this from me too?”

“What are you talking about Icarus?” Ken asked with feigned innocence. “We’re giving you a gift, a -”

“Stop it,” Icarus demanded as his eyes misted with unshed tears. “Blackwing can’t do this to me. There isn’t any way this can be condoned.”

Ken decided it was time to stop playing nice. He closed the distance between them and crowded the omega up against his little corner, feeling a vindictive thrill when Icarus visibly blanched. “Stop dancing around the subject and speak clearly. What do you believe is happening?”

For a moment he thought the omega would refuse to answer but then something seemed to click into place and Dirk looked him square in the eyes. “You know as well as I do that the universe always, always finds a way. The ones that are like me, like Bart, we can’t be contained. Not indefinitely.

“We’ve been doing a fairly decent job so far Icarus,” Ken stated mildly.

“Oh yes, a facility-wide escape followed by fifteen years of freedom. Wonderfully effective.”

“That was before my time. You’ll notice we seem to have improved considerably since then.”

Dirk stilled, viably tensing before looking away. “You’ve bonded with Bart, haven’t you?”

Ken felt momentarily rattled and tried very hard not to let it show. “You can smell her on me?”

“It would make sense. You were her first friend. The first person she felt she could rely on. Of course, she trusted you. Trusted you enough to let you bond with her. And now, because of the bond, the two of you are irreversibly connected. And because of the bond and her status you can, at long last, control her.”

“Very observant Icarus,” Ken said, mildly impressed despite himself. He reached out and gently grasped the subject’s jaw. “And what do you think that means for you?”

“I’m omegan. I’m not bonded,” a single tear spilled from the omega’s pretty eyes. “And you want
“And we’ll have it,” Ken agreed, letting him go and stepping back. “The only question that remains is how much harm you cause to yourself in the process. Give in Icuras. We own you now.”

“Get out,” Dirk said the moment Todd stepped into the room.

“Umm,” Todd said, hesitating as the door closed lightly behind him. Dirk was sitting on the floor, wedged in a corner with his knees pressed against his chest. His eyes were glazed and his cheeks were splotchy. He’d obviously very recently been crying.

“I mean it Todd. Get out. Now.”

“Are you OK?” Todd asked, feeling a little stupid because Dirk was very clearly not OK.

“Please Todd,” Dirk yelled as tears started to trace down his cheeks. “If you have even a shred of decency you’ll leave. Leave this room, leave the base, leave the fucking country. Just get out.”

“Dirk, tell me what’s happened?”

“Get out Todd,” Dirk cried, his voice strangled as his scent spiked with distress. He jumped to his feet and took a stumbling step forward as he desperately gestured at the door. “Get out. Leave. Now”

Todd just reacted, turning on his heels and banging his fist on the door. “Let me out,” he shouted. The door opened almost immediately. Todd fell through the doorway and staggered to his knees. “Jesus,” he breathed, looking up into Adam's unimpressed gaze. "I need to go. Now."
So another chapter. I don't usually upload this quickly but I'm going through a Samual Barnett phase! He's so squishy!

Dirk untangled himself from the nest he’d built on the floor and ran a shaky hand through his hair. There was absolutely no way he would voluntarily sleep on the bed. He didn’t care what they did to him. Short of strapping him down it simply wasn’t happening.

His swallowed dryly, grimacing as his already irritated throat flared sorely. His handlers decided to withhold his supper the previous evening, which would have been fine if they hadn’t also deprived him of fluids. Dirk was parched and sweating rather prefusiously. He wasn’t a fool. He knew he was about to go into heat, his first in a very long time and his body was about to experience some serious trauma. He needed water. Lots and lots of water. If he didn’t stay hydrated he could become seriously ill.

_You smell ripe Icarus,_ Priest said, kneeling opposite Dirk and grabbing his face. His fingers dug into the hollow of Dirk’s cheeks, forcing his head up until Dirk was forced to look at him. _It won’t be long now._

“What do you want?” Dirk asked, wrinkling his nose at Priest’s acidic scent.

“You smell ripe Icarus,” Priest said, kneeling opposite Dirk and grabbing his face. His fingers dug into the hollow of Dirk’s cheeks, forcing his head up until Dirk was forced to look at him. It won’t be long now.”

“What do you want?” Dirk asked, wrinkling his nose at Priest’s acidic scent.

“Adams asked me to come speak to you.”

_To, not with._

“How nothing in particular. He just wanted me to come in and see you. I thought it was pretty irregular myself, but I’m starting to understand now.”

Dirk wished he could concur. They stayed like that for a long, uncomfortable moment before Priest abruptly let go and stood up.

“I’ll see you later Icarus,” he said, stepping back and actually leaving the room.

Dirk stayed where he was, hardly believing he had got through the entire experience without being hurt. He pressed back into his nest and closed his eyes tiredly.

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Dirk woke up with the unwelcome scent of Adams invading his nostrils. He opened his eyes and couldn’t quite contain a whimper when he realised how close the other man was to him. How long had he been there, watching whilst Dirk was vulnerable and asleep?

“You don’t look well Project Icarus.”

“Water,” Dirk croaked. He swallowed painfully. “Please, I need something to drink.”

“Soon,” Adams promised. There was no compassion in his eyes. Nothing to indicate he cared. “Your heat’s nearly here.”

Dirk didn’t say anything.

“Priest came to see me. He indicated that he would be interested in pursuing a bond between you.”

Dirk couldn’t help himself. He pressed his face into his blanket and whined pitifully. He couldn’t even muster the energy to feel mortified.

“I said I would consider the request but I wanted to offer you a choice first. You’re correct in your assumption that we’re trying to manipulate a bond as a means to control you. You do however have options available to you. Accept Brotzman with the knowledge that he will be a gentle and kind alpha, or deny him. In which case I will be forced to allow Priest to take you, by whatever means he sees fit.”

“How can you possibly call that a choice? I don’t want either of them. I don’t want -”

“Do I look like I care what you want, Icarus. I’ve given you a choice and very shortly I will send Todd in here. We both know that he isn’t going to force himself on you. Allow him to initiate the bond. Don’t fight him.”

“And then what?” Dirk asked, his voice scratchy and more than a little panicked.

He didn’t expect Adams to touch him and flinched violently when the other man’s fingers carded through his hair. “Then you get to spend some time with your alpha in a nice house, with a little garden and big open windows. You’ll be away from the base whilst the bond solidifies. No tests, no punishments. Won’t that be lovely Icarus?”

“Go to hell,” Dirk sobbed, pressing his eyes shut as he waited for Adams hold to turn painful. Because yes, it did sound wonderful. And it was so unfair.

Oddly the gentle petting didn’t let up. “It’s your choice Icarus. Brotzman will be in here shortly. I advise you to think very carefully about your future. You have two very different paths ahead of you. I hope you choose the right one.”

They were very clearly manipulating him. Dirk knew it and they knew it. They just didn’t care, because no matter which decision Dirk made they would get what they wanted. Control. Utter and total control.

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Todd stepped hesitantly into the room and was immediately hit with the strong scent of omega in heat. Dirk scent was rich and incredibly sweet. If it wasn’t tinged with so much despair and fear Todd would have called Dirk’s scent intoxicating.

“Dirk,” he called softly, placing the ice bag on the floor as he approached the pile of blankets in the
furthest corner of the room. “Are you awake?”

No answer. Todd knelt on the floor and gently peeled back several layers of sheets and clothes. Dirk was lying on the floor, his glassy-eyed gaze locked on Todd. His skin was flushed and he looked like he covered with a thin layer of sweat.

“Hey,” Todd said softly, reaching forward to brush a few stray strands of hair away from the omegas eyes. He tried not to feel too bad when the other man flinched at his touch. He noticed then that Dirk’s lips were dry and chipped. Jesus.

“Hey, I’ll get you a drink OK?” he said, jumping up and grabbing a bottle of water. He held it to Dirk’s lips and saw the way the other man’s eye flutter close as he greedily gulped the water. He inevitably ended up choking and coughing. Todd helped him sit up and gently stroked his back. “It’s OK,” he promised. “Everything is OK.”

“No it’s not,” Dirk said, looking at him with wounded eyes. “It’s really, really not.”
Acceptance

Chapter Notes

So then there’s that…also to the lovely person who left me a comment on the last chapter along the lines of “I give you more kudos” I'm sorry but I accidentally deleted your comment, because I'm a dipshit.

“He’s going into heat,” Todd said, trying not to look as freaked out as he felt. “It’s too early, right? I mean, this wasn’t supposed to happen for another few months. Right?”

“Close proximity to a compatible alpha can speed along the heat process,” Adams said, entirely unconcerned. “It’s perfectly reasonable. Definitely not something to worry about.”

Todd felt like his brain was going to implode. He couldn’t seem to think straight. “But, I mean, he hates me.”

“I really don’t think that’s the case. He’s merely nervous. Project Icarus has led a sheltered life -”

“I thought he was on his own for a long time,” Todd interrupted, a little weary of the dark look the other man threw him. “He said it had been fifteen years..”

“He told you that?” Adams asked, his expression eerily cold. “Then he was lying. He does that sometimes. An unfortunate trait but one I’m hopeful you’ll be able to assist in correcting.”

“He lied,” Todd repeated a little woodenly. “So he’s never been outside the compound?”

“Not since he was very young. As I said, he’s had a sheltered upbringing.”

Todd realised he was tapping his fingers against his hip and forced himself into stillness. “So what, you expect me to just go in there and…”

“And bond with him. Yes, that’s the general plan.”

Todd realised he was chewing on his lip. “I don’t know if I can do this. He really doesn’t seem to want me anywhere near him. I don’t think he’s going to be OK with me... touching him.”

“Why don’t you try and then see how things progress,” Adams suggested as he pressed his hand to the flat of Todd’s back and gave him a little shove. “Off you go.”

“I don’t,” Todd said, a little helplessly. “I don’t think -”

“Todd,” Adams said, the smile completely gone. “I’m not going to say this to you again. Go in there and bond with him. If you refuse I will see your ass thrown into a prison cell for the rest of your life. And Dirk? He’ll be given to Priest. You’ve met him right? He’s the one Dirk is absolutely terrified of. You don’t want that, do you Todd?”

“I-I -”

“Of course you don’t want that. Not for either of you. So go in there and bond with him. Now.”
Todd realised his mouth was hanging open. Fuck, he didn’t know what to do. He really honestly didn’t know what the fuck to do!

“Last chance Mr Brotzman.”

“Fuck,” Todd hissed, his fists clenching at his side. “Fuck, shit. Fine! OK, I get it. Fine,” he didn’t wait for a response and turned on his heels, heading straight to Dirk’s room. He pulled the door open with a snarl and immediately regretted it when Dirk let out the most pitiful whimper he’d ever heard.

“Shit,” Todd said, hunkering down to try and appear smaller than he actually was. Dirk’s eyes were as big as plates and his entire body was visibly trembling. “I’m sorry Dirk. I’m not angry at you. I swear.”

“What’s going on?” Dirk asked as he got unsteadily to his feet. His legs wobbled and then, before Todd could catch him, he crumpled to the floor. “Ouch,” he said. It was the most pathetic sound Todd had ever heard.

“I was arguing with Adams,” Todd admitted. “He threatened me.”

“Well then that makes two of us,” Dirk said, pressing his cheek against the floor and closing his eyes. “I do believe I quite hate him.”

“Does it hurt?” Todd asked, stepping a little closer as Dirk seemed to curl into himself. “The heat I mean?”

“It’s not pleasant,” Dirk admitted. “But it’s bearable. It might have been nice if Adam’s actually let nature run its course but I suppose he got bored of waiting.”

“What do you mean?” Todd asked, but he already suspected. There was something off about Dirk’s scent. Something chemical.

“Are you going to do it then?” Dirk asked, ignoring his question.

“Do what?” Todd asked stupidly.

Dirk released a bitter laugh. “Bond with me of course. Tie us together in bonded bliss for the rest of our miserable lives. I feel though that I must warn you, I’m told I’m not the easiest person to get along with. I talk too much apparently. i’m too different for most peoples taste. A bit off, you know?”

Despite himself Todd smiled. “You don’t say?”

“The people around me always get hurt,” Dirk continued, his eyes glazed and unfocused. “Everyone I’ve ever met has been hurt because of me, because of what I am. You don’t want to tie yourself to me Todd. I’m not good for you. I’m not good for anyone.”

“Are you trying to scare me away?” Todd asked, stepping closer and kneeling beside the other man.”Because I’m sorry Dirk but I don’t think it’s going to work.”

Dirk lifted his head off the ground and climbed to his knees. “All I’ve ever wanted,” he broke off, bending forward as though in pain. “All I’ve ever wanted is to be free. To be allowed to follow my own path. To make my own decisions,” his tearful gaze zoned in on Todd. “I don’t want to be with you. I don’t want to give anyone another layer of control. You understand that?”
“Yeah,” Todd said, his whole body churning with regret and guilt. “I get it.”

Dirk looked so stricken it was all Todd could do to not to grab the other man, steal him away from the base and never coming back.

“OK,” Dirk said, breathing deeply. “Do it then.”

“What?” Todd blurted, his mouth going slack when Dirk pulled down the collar of his shirt and bared his neck.

“Do it,” he repeated, his voice waverling. “ Quickly, before I lose every remaining shred of my courage.”

It was a beautiful throat, Todd thought in a daze. Pale and slender.

“I’m sorry,” he whispered before leaning forward and biting down.
Dirk woke to the rather strange sensation of an arm draped over his waist and a nose pressed against his nape. He immediately stiffened before internally reasoning he was far too sore to try something foolish like actually moving.

No question who said arm and nose belong to, he thought a little grumpily. Todd’s scent was absolutely all over him, filling his nostrils and making his head spin.

It was all very odd. Dirk could honestly say he had never woken up in a situation where an alpha was snuggling with him. It wasn’t bad per say but the situation was far from ideal. Dirk would quite like the other man off and away from him sooner rather than later.

“Todd,” he said, clearing his throat when he realised how raw it sounded. It felt like he’d had an extraordinarily long night of drinking. “Todd!”

The body behind him shifted, grumbling unhappily. “What?”

“I have a terrible headache. Do you think you might possibly fetch me a glass of water?”

It was a test of sorts. He needed to learn what sort of man Todd was before Dirk inevitably didn’t something wrong and ended up hurt. Todd didn’t appear the hitting sort, but Dirk had never been very good at reading people.

More grumbling before the alpha climbed unsteadily to his knees. He leaned over Dirk and pressed a gentle hand against his forehead. “Is it just your head?” he asked, voice gravelly from sleep.

“My neck too,” Dirk said, trying not to sound too accusatory. No point upsetting his alpha straight off the mark. “I’m curious. Was it your intention to actually rip my throat out? Because if so then I must say, bravo on a job well done.”

So much for not upsetting him.

“Let me see?” Todd said, gently rolling Dirk over until he was laying on his back. Todd gripped his chin gently and tilted his head back. Cautious fingers ran over his bruised neck. The alpha stayed like that for a long moment, just staring at Dirk’s throat.

It suddenly occurred to the detective that he was in quite the submissive position. He felt his cheeks heat up and met Todd’s intense gaze with some difficulty. “Is it OK?” he asked, at a loss for what else to say.

“Yeah,” Todd rasped. “It looks fine. Good even.”

“Good?” Dirk asked incredulously. “What the bloody hell looks good about it?”

That seemed to snap Todd out of his strange trance. He sat back and ran a shaky hand through his hair. “I’ll see if they’ve got an ice pack we can put on it and some aspirin. Everything else OK?”

“Oh yes,” Dirk said, curling into himself as burrowed further under the sheets. “Everything’s just wonderful.”

“You might be more comfortable on the bed,” Todd suggested softly.

"I'm actually fine where I am thank you," Dirk said, trying to sound pleasant.
"But it looks, like, new. Are you sure you wouldn't -"

"I'm positive," Dirk snapped, immediately regretting it when Todd frowned. "Please Todd. I need a drink."

Acting pitiful seemed to have the desired effect. Todd stumbled over to the door and knocked a couple of times. When it opened he said a few low words to the guard before turning back to Dirk. "They're bringing something."

"Marvellous," Dirk said, trying not to seize up when Todd settled back down next to him. "So, umm. I was a little out of things, obviously."

"Yeah," Todd said, no longer meeting his eyes. "It's been a crazy few days."

"Right," Dirk said, hesitating for a moment before he decided to just rip off the plaster. "So did we have sex?"

Todd made a small coughing noise. "Uh -"

Dirk looked at him expectantly.

"Uh, no. No, we didn't."

"Oh," Dirk said, aware he sounded as surprised as he felt. "And why... is that?"

Todd met his eyes again. Dirk realised they were rather red like Todd had been crying. "It didn't seem right. You weren't really with it and I didn't think you'd, you know, want to."

"I didn't want to bond with you either. That didn't seem to stop you."

"Yeah," Todd said, exhaling deeply. "That wasn't exactly ideal. But it's over with now."

"And we're stuck together," Dirk said, pressing a light hand against this bruised throat. "For better or worse as they say. So, what now?"

"Right now?"

"Right now, a week from now, months from now, years from now. What now?" Dirk demanded, struggling to control the hysteria the could feel bubbling inside of him.

Todd reached out his hand and Dirk instinctively leaned away. The alpha allowed his hand to fall awkwardly in his lap. "Right now, we rest. And then I think they're going to put us up somewhere, so we can strengthen the bond."

"Oh yeah?" Dirk asked, aware he was laying it on rather thick, even for him. "They're going to give us a room with an even bigger bed, are they? Well, that sounds marvellous. Really bloody relaxing."

"They said they had a house set up somewhere outside the compound."

"What?" Dirk asked, sitting up so fast he thought his head was going to fall off. "You mean off the compound, as in not here?"

"That's what they told me," Todd said. His hand crept around Dirk’s waist and pulled him a little closer until their sides were touching. Dirk chose to ignore it in favour of gaining information.
“Why would they let me out of the base? They never let out outside the base.”

Todd shrugged and sat back. He had a small self-satisfied smile on his face. “I guess, now that we’re bonded, they know you won’t wander too far without me.”

Dirk absorbed that for a moment before pushing away Todd’s arm and crawling towards the bed. He wouldn’t get on top of the damn thing but there was absolutely nothing stopping him from crawling underneath it.

“Dirk, seriously?” Todd asked, laughing. “You’re not going to fit.”

“I will,” Dirk said, not finding anything amusing at that particular moment. “Leave me alone.”

Todd abruptly stopped laughing. He waited until Dirk had managed to wedge himself under the bed before lying flat and looking back at him. “Did I do something wrong?”

“Besides bonding with me against my will?”

The other man flinched. “I didn’t really have much a choice in the matter. And you didn’t exactly tell me to stop.”

“Well it was a choice between you and Priest,” Dirk said, shuddering.

“And it was a choice between you and jail,” Todd shot back before his expression softened. “I don’t know what’s going on here Dirk, but I do promise that I don’t want to hurt you. That was never my intention.”

Dirk was saved from answering when he heard the door to their room swing open. He was immediately hit with the unwelcome scent of Adams and it made the fine hairs on the back of his neck on edge.

“I hear congratulations are in order,” he said brightly. There was a pause. “Where is Dirk?”

“Under the bed,” Todd replied dutifully.

“Of course he is,” Adams said, sighing. “Dirk, come out.”

“I think he’s happier where he is. In fact Mr Adams, I appreciate that you’re mated and all but do you think you could maybe get out?”

“Instincts getting the better of you Mr Brotzman?”

Todd surprisingly released quite a terrifying snarl.

“Alright,” Adams said, his tone condescendingly understanding. “I’ll go. I just wanted to drop off some supplies. Oh, and Dirk?”

“Get out,” Todd growled.

“I will when Dirk answers me. I want to make sure he’s OK. Dirk, are you OK?”

“Piss off,” Dirk shouted from his safe little place under the bed.

There was a slight pause before Adams laughed. “Well OK then. I’ll see you both later. After things have had a chance to settle down.”
Dirk heard the door close and then silence. A moment later there was a rustling sound.

“You hungry?” Todd asked.

Dirk was actually quite famished but he really didn’t want to leave his spot under the bed.

He heard Todd sigh and then the man was laying back down. He passed Dirk a bottle of water and a couple of aspirin. “You want a blanket?” he asked. When Dirk just stared at him the alpha sighed again before grabbing the quilt and pushing it towards him. “Just, try to rest OK?” he asked, voice a little lost.”It’ll be better when we get out. I promise.”
Dirk didn’t seem to appreciate just how close Todd had come to, well, *wrecking him.*

He had been so out of it. Not as bad as Dirk, but it had been bad. The omegas scent was everywhere and, when he was in heat, it was as potent as fuck. Todd remembered wanting to mate with him so bad. His instincts had been in turmoil, urging him to claim what was his. Urging him to claim the pretty omega who was so achingly open to him.

But he’d resisted, because no matter how much of an asshole he was he sure as hell wasn’t a rapist.

Even Dirk seemed surprised when Todd admitted they hadn’t screwed around. It hurt Todd a little that the other man just presumed the worst of him, though he could freely admit that he’d done very little to earn his trust.

“Dirk,” Todd called, lying down on his belly next to the bed. The omega had created a little fort, using his blanket to hide from view. He’d been suspiciously quiet for a long while. “Do you think you might want a shower and then maybe get something to eat?”

No answer.

Dirk had been hiding in his little cocoon since coming out of his heat. He had to be feeling pretty gross and probably really needed the bathroom. Todd had unsuccessfully been trying to coax him out for hours.

“Dirk, come on man. You can’t stay under there forever.”

More silence.

Sighing, Todd shifted around until he was at the foot of the bed and thrust his hands under the quilt. He rooted around for a moment before managing to catch the omegas ankles. He planted his feet and tugged.

He kind of expected Dirk to start struggling, but despite how much he clearly didn’t want to come out from under the bed he didn’t resist. He sure didn’t look happy though. His eyes were red and puffy and he wouldn’t meet Todd’s gaze.

“Look, I’m sorry but you can’t stay under there forever. You need to take care of yourself.”

Dirk stayed on his back for a long moment before slowly sitting up and running his hand through his tangled hair. “I thought I might be permitted some time to ponder over recent events. I’m sure you can appreciate it’s been a lot to process.”

“You’ll feel better once you’ve showered,” Todd promised, standing up and offering his hand . “Come on Dirk. Please?”

After a moments hesitation Dirk, very reluctantly, took his hand and allowed Todd to help him to his feet. They stood together for an awkward moment, Dirk still refusing to look at him, before the other man walked to his small bathroom and shut the door softly behind him.

“Shit,” Todd muttered, rubbing his eyes tiredly as he say down on the bed. “He didn’t know what to do. He was too much of a selfish asshole to deal with a very clearly distressed omega. His very clearly distressed omega. He lay down on his back and stared at the ceiling.
He must have zoned out because Dirk was suddenly walking back into the room. Todd had to admit he looked a little better. His hair was neatly combed and his face was freshly scrubbed. His clothes were clean and his scent was fairly sweet beneath the faint, sour scent of distress.

“So,” he said, his voice bright and enthusiastic. “What now?”

The question was barely out of his mouth before there was a polite knock on their door and Adams let himself inside. Priest was less than a step behind him. The moment Dirk noticed his distress scent skyrocketed.

“I haven’t done anything,” Dirk said, retreating backwards until his back met with a wall and couldn’t go any further. “Please, I haven’t!”

“Calm down Iccuras,” Adams said without a hint of sympathy, his gaze shard and assessing as Dirk actually sank into a defensive crouch. “Mr Priest is here because I want the four of us to have a chat. Mr Brotzman, I’m aware this may be difficult for you but I feel it important that we have this discussion now before things progress. You’re aware that we intend to offer you the opportunity to cohabit outside of the facility.

“What, really?” Dirk asked incredulously, eyes wide as his gaze jumped warily to Priest. “You’re really letting me go?”

“Hush Icarus,” Adams said, not looking at him. Not acknowledging his right to even be part of the conversation. Dirk might as well have not been in the room. “There are of course conditions.”

“Being?” Todd asked, moving slowly until his body was partly shielding Dirk’s. As much as possible at least when the other man was taller than him. The movement wasn’t lost on Priest, who smirked knowingly.

“Dirk will not be permitted to leave the property unless he is in your company. If he runs you will be held accountable.”

“OK,” Todd said slowly. “Is there anything else?”

“You will bring him back to the facility whenever we require it. You will be given two days notice.”

“Why are you doing this?” Dirk asked from behind him, voice curious and mistrusting.

“Icarus,” Priest shouted, slamming his fist against the wall and creating a loud bang. “Mr Adams told you to be quiet.”

Dirk actually whimpered as he grabbed Tod’s shoulder and pressed his face into the back of his neck. He was shaking again.

“Hey,” Todd snapped, suddenly furious. What the hell was his problem? Dirk only asked a question. He was a person. He deserved to be able to speak. “You don’t need to yell OK. You’re already scaring the goddamn crap out of him enough without yelling.”

“It’s not my fault your omega is so skittish Mr Brotzman,” Priest said, his expression twisted into a mocking smile. “You mated a squirrely one. That’s for damn sure.”

Priest had done something to Dirk. In fact, Todd was pretty sure Priest had done a lot of somethings to Dirk. Todd didn’t want to think about what those things might be. It made his goddamn heart ache just imagining someone putting their hands on his goofy, gentle omega.
“Mr Brotzman,” Adams said, interrupting smoothly. “Do you have any questions?”

“No,” Todd answered slowly. Which wasn’t true. He had a million questions and absolutely no idea what the hell he was doing. “So, do we just, ah - leave?”

“We have a car ready for you, with directions to your new home. We’ll have some clothes delivered for Dirk shortly.”

“OK,” Todd said, looking over his shoulder. Dirk still had his head bowed, his face planted against Todd’s neck. “So, we’re leaving now?”

“Of course. And Dirk, do behave yourself. I would have to have a repeat of your last escape attempt. Hmmm?”

Dirk released a small whimper of distress.

“Good,” Adams said, seemingly satisfied. “And please enjoy your new home. We’ll see you very soon.”
Todd was pretty sure Dirk was going to try to fling himself out of their car. Their very fast, moving car.

“You OK?” he asked, trying to keep his tone soothing.

The other man flinched violently before turning to him with a wide smile. “Great thanks. You?”

“Umm, yeah. Yeah I’m OK,” he tried to casually lock the doors but there was no mistaking the clicking noise it made as he flipped the switch.

“I haven’t been out of the base for a while,” Dirk said, staring down at the lock for a long moment. “Do you have any idea what continued forced confinement does to the human brain, Todd?”

“No,” he answered truthfully. And he was really, really didn’t want to know.

“It was a bit of a two-fold issue for me actually. You see, I wasn’t in solitary confinement exactly. They had to bring me out for their tests, but other than that I was always alone. Except for the times they decided I needed to be punished. Then they would send in Priest.”

“I don’t -”

“Being alone really isn’t very good for you, Todd. You start to lose your sense of self. You almost feel like your mind might be slipping, that you’re losing your grip on time. On reality even... It keeps you more complacent I suppose. It makes you pathetically grateful when someone does speak to you. You’d do almost anything to make someone -”

“Stop it,” Todd said, slamming his hand down on the steering wheel. Dirk jumped, curling into himself. “Just, stop it, OK?”

“You could turn the car around,” Dirk said, his words almost a whisper. “You could turn it around and we could both just leave. It’s a large world, Todd. We could go almost anywhere. You and I, we could -”

“They’d catch us,” Todd said, refusing to look at the other man. “You know they would.”

“The universe will provide for us Todd,” Dirk answered, resting his cheek against the passenger-side window. “If you let it.”

“If the universe wanted you to get away from them wouldn’t it have, I dunno, blown or the base by now or something,” Todd said, aware he sounded harsh but unable to soften his tone. Damn it, Dirk wasn’t the only one going through some shit. “Don’t you think you might be exactly where you’re supposed to be?”

“Yes, of course. The very fact the universe hasn’t blown up the base where lots of people, innocent people mind, are unfairly trapped, means I’m exactly where I’m supposed to be. Makes perfect sense.”

Todd sighed tiredly when he saw a billboard for a diner a little way up the road. They’d been driving for a while and neither of them were particularly well rested. It couldn’t hurt to get something to eat.
“Oh, we’re stopping?” Dirk asked, sitting up suddenly with something like excitement in his eyes.

“Yeah, I thought we could grab a bite,” Todd hesitated for a moment. “You’re not going to, like, run. Right?”

Dirk didn’t look particularly impressed. “I wasn’t planning on it. I mean, we are in the middle of the desert and unless I can manage to wrestle away your keys, which is quite unlikely, or hotwire a car, which I can’t, or convince someone to help me, which they won’t, I don’t think you have to worry too much.”

“You won’t cause a scene?”

Dirk’s expression turned serious. “You do realise literally no one’s going to help me, don’t you? I’m an omega in America, Todd. I’ve barely got any bloody rights. If I try to cause a scene people are just going to expect you to handle it,” his eyes narrowed very slightly. “I really would quite like to go home you know.”

“Home, like to Britain?”

“Yes,” the omega murmured, hunching into himself with a sad little grumble. “Though I hardly even remember it anymore. I’ve read up about it though. Omegas have rights there. The same as alphas and betas.”

“Yeah, I heard that,” Todd said as they pulled into the diner parking lot. He turned to face Dirk, struggling with what to say. “I know you don’t know me too well yet, Dirk. But I’m really not a bad person. Once you get to know me a little better you’ll see.”

“Oh, oh yeah. Sure. Go ahead.”

Dirk unlocked the door and slid out. He was stretching when Todd reached him, his hands high above his head. “It is very, very nice to be outside again, Todd. It’s been months.”

“Well, I’m sure we can go for a hike or something,” Todd said, gently placing his hand on the small of Dirk’s back and ushering him towards the diner. “You know, once we’ve settled.”

“That sounds lovely,” Dirk said, but he looked distracted. “Do you see that?” he asked, looking to his right with a deep frown. Todd followed his gaze and was noticed a black jeep park up. The windows were tinted and too dark to see through.

“It’s just a car,” Todd said, frowning as Dirk planted his feet. “Hey, come on Dirk. You’re hungry right?”

“Sure,” the omega said, frowning as he allowed Todd to guide him into the diner. He looked over his shoulder a few times before they stepped inside.

“This booth look good?”

Dirk sat down and Todd took a seat opposite him. They looked at their menus for a few seconds before a young beta girl breezed over to their table. “Hi,” she said brightly, her eyes passing over Todd and lingering on Dirk. Her smile grew a little wider. “What can I get you two?”

“I’ll have a coffee, black and some bacon and waffles thanks,”

“Sure thing. And you sweetie?”

“Um, pancakes and a strawberry milkshake, please,” Dirk said, his eyes jumping to her nametag. “Wendy. Thanks.”

“Sounds great,” she said and Todd was pretty sure she was checking Dirk out, which was really just kind of rude. Then again, mated omegas didn't usually cover their necks like Dirk was. Hell, he was even wearing a tie.

“They’re still in there,” Dirk said, oblivious as he stared out of the diner window.

“What?”

“The car. The weird, black government looking car is still in the carpark and no one’s got out yet.”

“You think it's Blackwing?”

“I bloody well do think that, yes.”

Todd followed his gaze, feeling decidedly uncomfortable. “Just leave it alone, OK? If they are Blackwing I don’t want to give them any reason to get out of the car.”

“It’s Priest,” Dirk said in a small voice. The scent of his distress suddenly skyrocketed. People were looking at them. “Oh my God, It’s Priest and he’s,”

“Dirk,” Todd hissed. “Calm down, now. Or else we’re leaving and you don’t get pancakes.”

Dirk turned sharply back to him. “Do you think I’m a child, Todd?”

“What?” he asked, surprised by the sudden change in Dirk’s demeanor.

“Well I just wondered, do you think I’m a child? That if you take away my sweeties I’m going to fall into line?”

“I didn’t...I don’t think that.”

“Then don’t treat me like one,” Dirk snapped, his gaze jumping back to the car. He visibly shuddered. “I’m almost sure it’s him.”

“Well freaking out isn’t going to help anything. Even if it is him, which I really don’t think it is, there isn’t anything he can do to hurt us.”

“Oh, Todd,” Dirk said with an impossibly sad look. “If you think that you really don’t understand anything at all.”
Knowing

“Dirk, please. Eat.”

The taller man slowly turned away from the window. His eyes narrowed very slightly. “And if I don’t?”

It was a test. Another one. Todd resisted the urge to roll his eyes. He was tired and more than a little freaked out by everything that had happened to him lately. His temper was already frayed and the constant poking wasn’t helping. “If you don’t want to eat Dirk, I’m not going to make you. But I know you haven’t eaten anything today. You’ve got to be hungry, right?”

Dirk looked down at his plate and very slowly started picking at his food. At least he seemed to enjoy his milkshake, which was mostly ice cream. Not the healthiest of meals but he was getting some calories. Dirk wasn’t gaunt exactly but he was thin as a rake. He couldn’t afford to lose any fat.

Todd’s gaze started to wander when he noticed the waitress was still staring at Dirk from across the counter. A low warning growl worked its way up his throat and ripped free with a furious snarl.

People were staring. The waitress looked shocked. Todd wanted the ground to jump up and swallow him. “New bond,” he muttered.

Dirk looked up sharply from his drink and leaned back cautiously. “What the bloody hell is wrong with you?” he demanded, his tone indignant despite the rush of anxiety Todd could feel through their bond.

He heard some chuckling and a few tuts before normal conversation resumed. People were willing to make some allowances for newly bonded couples. Didn’t make it any less humiliating that he couldn’t control himself.

“Well?” Dirk demanded.

Todd shuffled down in his seat. He could feel his face burning. “The waitress was staring at you.”

Dirk looked up and over at the young woman. Todd could feel another low growl trying to work its way past his lips. “And?”

“You’re -” Mine. He was about to say, but he knew without a doubt that Dirk would react badly to any exclamations of ownership. “Not an object. People shouldn’t stare.”

“She’s just not used to hearing my accent. Americans find it oddly intriguing. At least some of them do. It’s not as if we’re flocking over here anymore.”

“How exactly did you end up here?” Todd asked curiously, glad to change the subject. Dirk was right. Very few British people visited the US anymore. Even fewer British omegas made the trip.

“On a plane,” Dirk said immediately, straightfaced. “Took ages. I’m not really a fan of flying. I wouldn’t recommend it, all things considered.”

“That isn’t what I meant,” Todd grumbled. “And you know it.”

“I know no such thing. And really, your question should have been clearer. Honestly Todd, I’ve
already told you I’m not a mind-reader.”

People did not slap their bondmates, but Todd had to admit he was a little tempted. Dirk was infuriating. “Are you done?”

Dirk got a sudden and strange look on his face and immediately stood up. Without a word he up and left the booth. Todd scrambled up after him, grabbing for the other man but the omega danced nimbly out of the way without even looking at him. Todd quickly pulled out his wallet and threw down thirty dollars before hurrying after him. People were staring, again.

“You need to put a stop to that nonsense, my boy,” an old alpha said as Todd hurried past him. “Give em’ an inch and they’ll take a mile.”

He almost fell face first into the parking lot. For a moment he thought Dirk was going to try and run but then he noticed that the omega was approaching an old beat-up trailer. Dirk raised his hand and knocked, hard. His hand was poised for a second knock when Todd caught up with him. He grabbed Dirk’s wrist and dragged him back.

“What in the hell are you doing?”

“The door needs to open.”

_of course it fucking did_ . “That’s somebody’s property, Dirk. You can’t just start banging away. You’re going to piss someone off.”

“No, you don’t understand, Todd. I need to get the door open. It needs to be open.”

“You’re talking like a crazy person -”

“Get off me,” Dirk suddenly spat, eyes wide and more than a little desperate. “You don’t understand. Let go.”

“Enough,” he snarled, strong arming the taller man across the carpark and using his superior strength to essentially bully him into moving. “Get in the damn car.”

“I need to open the door!”

“No you don’t.”

“Yes, I do. _Please_, Todd. I need to open the door. If I don’t open the door something bad is going to happen.”

“Get in the car, Dirk.”

“You need to let me go,” Dirk said, desperately. “I need to open the door. I need to -”

There was a loud and sudden bang behind them. For a moment all Todd could hear was ringing but then the sound of frantic screaming registered. Someone was inside the trailer, trapped and they were trying to get out. It was on fire.

“They can’t open the door,” Dirk cried, still tugging against Todd’s grip. “For God Sake Todd, let go of me. _Please_.”

Dirk managed to rip free of Todd’s numb grasp. He immediately made for the door and grabbed the handle. And just like that it opened under his hand. He immediately fell back with a bitten off cry of panic as a ball of flames shot out of the open doorway.
Todd was up and moving before he properly registered what he was doing. He grabbed Dirk around the waist and dragged him back. When he looked up he could see a figure crouched down on the trailer floor, engulfed in flame.

*Dead.*

“I told you to let me go. I could have saved him. I could have -”

Todd barely heard his bondmate. He couldn’t take his eyes off the burning corpse. “I think I’m going to be sick.”

“Get off me.”

But he couldn’t, even if he wanted to he couldn’t bear the idea of letting him go. He needed something to hold onto. “We need to go.”

“We can’t just leave. What if there’s someone else in there?”

Jesus, he really fucking hoped that wasn’t the case. “There’s nothing more we can do. Come on Dirk, we’re leaving.”

He didn’t fight this time. Todd wondered if it was because he understand that no one could have survived the fire, or because he somehow just *knew.*

“You’re shaking,” Todd noted somewhat numbly.

Dirk shook his head softly. “I could save saved him. I was supposed to save him.”

He couldn’t have known, Todd told himself as he closed the passenger side door after Dirk. No one could have known.
“It actually looks kind of nice,” Todd said, stepping out of the car and taking out the keys to the house. “It’s bigger than I expected.”

“As far as prisons go, it’s lovely,” Dirk said snootily beside him. When Todd turned to look at him he was playing with the cuffs of his jacket. Todd wondered if he’d even glimpsed at the house.

“Dirk, please -”

“Oh my God,” a woman shrieked, interrupting Todd as she strode uninvited up their driveway. She had big blonde hair and a wide, red lipped smile. Her scent screamed omega but the way her gaze locked onto Todd indicated she had a hell of a domination complex.

“Oh my God, what?” Dirk immediately asked, stepping back as if expecting an attack. “Todd, who is that woman?”

“How should I know?” Todd muttered.

“You’re the new neighbors, right?” she asked, invading Dirk’s space as she looked expectantly at Todd.

“Uh, yeah. I guess so. Hi,” Todd said, trying not to frown when the woman reached out to press her hand against Dirk’s in a standard Omegan greeting. “We’re uh, new here.”

“How lovely. I’m Suzie. Suzie Boyl. It sure is nice to meet you boys.”

“Yeah, you too,” Todd said, aware that his lips were pulled back in a faint snarl. He didn’t know why. She was just an omega. Hardly a threat to him and his new mate. “I’m Todd. This is my bondmate, Dirk.”

“Hi,” Dirk said brightly, retreating behind Todd without returning the woman's greeting. He was smiling sweetly but Todd sensed some caution in is tone. “It’s very nice to meet you. Are you our new neighbor?”

“I sure am sweetie,” Suzy said, her smile widening as she tried to peer around Todd, “And don’t you just have the quaintest accent. It really is just darling”


“And you’ve come to live in this little town. How wonderful for us,” her hazel eyes turned to Todd with a calculating intensity. “And what about you sweetheart? Where are you from?”

“Chicago,” Todd said, smiling awkwardly. He was trying hard not to fidget. He kept reminding himself that the woman was an omega. She wasn’t a threat to him.

“The windy city. How exciting. So what brings you folks to this neck of the woods?”

“Dirk wanted to leave the city,” Todd said, wrapping his arm around the omegas waist and ignoring the way he tensed.

“To raise a family I’m guessing.”

“Definitely bloody not,” Dirk said, staring accusingly at Todd. “Absolutely no way!”
“Dirk,” Todd hissed, pulling him closer. He turned back to the omega with a forced smile. “Sorry, he gets kind of…” he trailed off hopelessly.

“Oh, I completely understand. It’s hard for newly bonded couples, but it’s a real friendly town. You two will settle in in no time.”

“Well, if you don’t mind,” Todd said, indicating awkwardly with his keys. “It’s been a long drive and we’d like to start moving in.”

“Oh of course. You boys go right ahead. I’ll speak to you both real soon.”

“Bye,” Dirk said, waving enthusiastically before snatching the keys out of Todd’s hands and striding towards the front door. “Well, she was interesting,” he muttered, a little too loudly for Todd’s liking.

“Yeah? Because I kind of got the impression you didn’t like her,” Todd said, following closer behind the other man.

“Well not everyone can be gifted with the art of observation, Todd,” the omega said, stepping through the hallway without a glance and striding up the stairs with a single focus.

Todd was pleased to see the house was modern and already completely furnished. From the short glimpse he managed it was pretty big. More than enough room for a couple starting out. Not that that was what they were, exactly. But it was still pretty nice.

“She was perfectly fine,” the taller man said, turning abruptly away from the stairs. He opened a few doors, peered inside and turned back to Todd. “So, which room do you want?”

“The main one, I guess,” Todd said, trying to keep up.

“Fine by me. It’s not like I’m not used to spending long periods in small spaces.”

“What does that mean?”

“That I’m perfectly happy to take the smaller room, of course.”

Todd’s mouth suddenly felt extraordinarily dry. “Ugh, Dirk. We’ll be sleeping together,” the omega gave him a sharp look. “In the same room, I mean.”

“Do I get a say in the matter?”

Todd almost gave in, but Adam’s warning about accountability if Dirk ran was still fresh in his mind. And he was certain the omega would try to run at the first available opportunity. And he was certain the omega would try to run at the first available opportunity. “We’re bonded now, Dirk. It’s normal for us to share a room.”

“Even if the circumstances surrounding our bond was anything but normal? Even if you forced me? Even if you knew, had I not been in heat, that I never would have willingly allowed it?”

Todd felt himself deflate and then quickly puff back up in anger. He took a step forward and poked Dirk hard in the chest. “Do you think I wanted this? To be bonded with some asshole omega who talks too damn much and doesn’t have the first idea about how to behave? Well guess what? I didn’t sign up for this shit either, Dirk. But here we are and unless you want life to be absolutely miserable for the both of us, how about you cut me a goddamn break?”

He didn’t realise he was yelling until he noticed Dirk was pressed flat against the door and was
breathing loudly and raggedly. The acid scent of fear and distress invaded Todd’s nostrils. He hesitated, desperately wanting to apologise but unable to find the words.

“I’m going out to get pizza,” Todd said eventually, angry at himself and even angrier at Dirk for looking so damn terrified. “Do I need to lock you in the pantry or something, or do you promise not to run away?”

Dirk opened his mouth a few times before dropping his gaze and angling his head so he was showing the side of his neck.

Todd was the absolutely the worst human being that had ever lived.

“I’ll - I’ll bring you back a treat, OK? Something sweet. You like sweet things, right?”

No answer. Todd already missed the constant sound of Dirk’s chatter, even if it was mostly bitter and scathing remarks.

“I’ll be back soon,” he said, the sinking feeling in his chest getting worse every second Dirk wasn’t speaking.

“Umm, bye Dirk,” he said, turning on his heels and practically running down the stars. When he passed through the front door he hesitated for a moment, debating whether or not he should lock it behind him.

Self preservation won out and in the end and he quickly turned the lock in the door before jumping in the car. He was driving for five minutes before he realised he didn’t know where he was going. He pulled onto the side of the road and pulled out his phone. He had every intention of searching for a fastfood restaurant, but five minutes later he found himself still sitting unmoving in the car.
Dirk didn’t move for a long time and then, quite suddenly, his legs didn’t seem to want to support him and he was on the floor. He was, he reasoned, very possibly in the throes of a panic attack.

No problem. It would pass. Breathe in, breathe out, repeat. Push down the panic and fear and all the other ugly thoughts threatening to devour him and embrace the quiet and peaceful void of numbness.

It worked, in a fashion. He could stand up again and his breathing returned to normal. He wiped the wetness off his cheeks and moved slowly down the stairs. He stared at the front door for a long time, silently debating with himself if he should try the door.

Locked. No surprise there, though the disappointment he felt was still a little crushing. He moved into the front room, idly running his fingertips over the cream leather couch. There was a big screen TV, cabinets, even some sort of gaming system. No doubt all things Todd would enjoy immensely but things Dirk barely even cared about.

He moved into the kitchen and immediately hated it. The white walls and cupboards reminded him too much of Blackwing. He approached the door and tried the handle on reflex. He didn’t quite no how to react when it opened easily under his hand.

Run.

If he ran and was caught, what would they do to him.

Run, the universe urged.

He might not get another chance.

Run.

He had so much to lose if he got caught.

Run.

He didn’t have anything. No money. No friends.

The universe would provide.

RUN.

He started running, scrabbling over the fence and out into the street. He looked wildly in all directions, convinced Todd would round the corner at any moment. He didn’t have much time.

Now or never.

He ran.

************************

Priest sucked his lips between his teeth and huffed out an incredulous laugh when he saw a brightly coloured jacket topped by a mop of auburn hair streak past his car. “Didn’t even last the hour;” he said, activating the comms.
“Fetch him back please, Mr. Priest,” Ken said evenly. “Use minimum force.”

“Don’t worry, darlin’. I won’t hurt your little bird,” he said, stepping out of the car and taking after the boy.

“I don’t want you to do anything to jeopardise the bond,” Ken answered, sounding stern. “I repeat, Mr. Priest. Minimum force.”

Priest allowed himself an inward sigh as he deactivated the com and caught sight of the boy. It didn’t take long to catch up with him. They exercised the subjects in the facility, but not nearly enough. Icarus's stamina was woefully lacking.

He must have caught his scent because he suddenly froze. It was an omegan defence mechanism that was supposed to calm enraged alphas. Dirk knew better than to expect such an archaic gesture to work on him, but it never stopped the dear from trying. “Lookie what I found,” he said, unable to temper down his amusement when the omega let loose the most delicious whimper of fear, spinning around to face him. “Where’s your alpha, little bird?”

“No,” Icarus whispered, stumbling back with his hands outstretched. His wide eyes flickered back and forth, looking for the nearest escape route. “No, s-stay back.”

“You’re not supposed to go out of the house without your alpha, Icarus. You know better.”

“I’m just taking a walk. I’m just -”

“The very first time you’re left unsupervised and you break the rules. That’s bad, darlin’. Real bad.”

“I wasn’t going to run. I’m not -”

“You remember what happens when you break the rules, don’t you Icarus?”

The omega bolted. Priest was expecting it and had him before he managed to take three steps. The boy cried out, trembling violently as Priest wrapped an arm around his waist and pulled him clear off his feet.

“Please,” he gasped, the delicious scent of his fear clogging Priest’s nostrils. “Let me go. Please.”

“You know better than to try begging, darlin’,” Priest said, pulling him flush against his chest and breathing heavily into his throat. He skimmed his fingers over the bandaged mating bite and pressed down hard. “It didn’t work when you were a kid and it sure as hell ain’t gonna work now.”

“Hey,” a high voice called out as a small blonde woman, in his forties and omgan by her scent, stormed up to them. “What in the darn gosh do you think you’re doing? Who are you? Are you kidnapping him?”

Dirk had grown very still in his arms. He was crying softly.

“He’s running,” Priest said simply, spinning him round and hoisting the boy a little closer when he started to squirm. “Kid has a record.”

Her eyes narrowed very slightly. “Who are you?”

“A member of the OTA. The boy here is wearing a tracker. I was in the area when the alarm went off.”
She didn’t entirely believe him. “Do you have ID?”

Priest set the omega on the floor and wrapped his hand around his upper arm, squeezing hard when Icarus tried to pull away. He got out his Blackwing badge and flashed it at her.

“Blackwing?”

“A specialist borough of the OTA.”

“Is it because he’s British?”

“It’s certainly one of the reason he seems incapable of properly behaving,” Priest said, allowing a smile to curl his lips as he looked the woman up and down. “And where exactly is your alpha, darlin?’”

Her gaze widened and then narrowed. Her eyes roamed over Dirk one last time before she dimpled a smile at him and shrugged. “He’s at home, where I’m headed. Goodnight, gentlemen.”

“Night, ma’am,” Priest said, before turning his attention back to Icarus. “We’re going too, darlin’. Back to the lovely new house Blackwing bought just for you and your little alpha. I can’t wait to learn why he thought it would be acceptable to leave you unsupervised. And why you thought you could get away with bolting. I mean seriously, Svlad, what did you think was going to happen? You knew I was following you. You can’t possibly be that dense?”

A quiet, helpless little sob in response.

“You gonna fight me?”

No response.

“You remember the last time you fought me, don’t you little bird?” Priest used his free hand to run over the scarred spot on Icarus’s shoulder, pressing down hard enough to make the omega jolt. “You wanna try round two?”

He caught Brotzman’s scent seconds before the other man came running towards them. Priest felt a small giggle bubble out of his lips. Things were about to get fun.
“Get the hell away from him,” the little alpha cried, coming to an abrupt stop a few paces away from where they were standing. Priest waited, curious to see if the boy was stupid enough to actually attack him. He felt a pang of disappointment when he realised he wasn’t coming any closer. “Did you hear me asshole? Let go of my omega.”

“Dirk here was trying to run away,” Priest said, pressing his lips against the side of the boys forehead. The omega didn’t react but his beautiful distress scent was glorious, despite being tainted by the little alpha and their new bond. Priest pulled him a little closer, jolting him to try and get a reaction. He wasn’t surprised that Icarus was literally frozen in fear. As a boy he’d always been so easy to hurt. It took a pathetically short amount of time to make Icarus cry. “You remember what we said before he was released to you, don’t you Todd?”

“I’ll deal with him,” the shrimp said, holding out his hands. “Pass him back. Now.”

“Oh, so authoritative,” Priest said, laughing softly as he pressed his face against the boys, covering him in his scent. “But I think I’ll keep him for now. See, after your last failed attempt I’m not so sure you can be trusted. Dirk here isn’t just a valuable commodity. The boys dangerous. People die because of him.”

The boy whimpered pathetically.

“I would have caught up with him, even if you weren’t here,” Todd said, being big and brave by taking another step forward. “Seriously man, give him to me. You’re scaring the crap out of him.”

“You have no idea,” Priest said sweetly. “Me and Dirk have got quite the history. Even after all these years he still runs his mouth from time to time. Not that I’m complaining of course. It gives us the perfect opportunity to chat. Ain’t that right, sweetheart?”

“I have Ken’s number. He’s your boss right? If you don’t give him back to me i’ll call ken.”

“Oh, scary,” Priest said, dropping the omega with a hard push that sent him stumbling to his knees. He approached the other alpha and grabbed him by the throat. “But how will you call him if you don’t have any vocal cords?”

The kid started thrashing, but his strength was frankly ridiculous. Priest smiled, looming over him as he allowed his grip to tighten.

“Please, Mr. Priest. Stop.”

Well, well. Tiny little Icarus finally seems to be growing a pair. The boy struggled to his feet, swaying slightly and even paler than usual. But he was standing and not peeing his panties. Priest was almost impressed.

“You scared I’m gonna hurt your alpha, Icarus?” he asked, enjoying the way the boy recoiled. “Hell, didn’t take long for you to come around, did it? Was it the rape that did it? Didn’t realise you were that kinky, sweetheart.”

“Mr. Priest,” Icarus said, his tone low and surprisingly calm despite how scared he clearly was. “You’re killing him. He can’t breathe.”

“Kind of the point.”
The boy seemed to silently debate something before he abruptly shrugged and stepped back. “OK, then. Well whilst you’re busy doing that I’m just going to head out.”

“What?” Priest asked, laughing despite himself. “I thought you were all about saving the innocents, Svlad?”

Another shrug. “Why should I care about him? Because he bonded me against my will? I hardly think that’s a rational reason to want to help someone. In fact, if I’m entirely honest with you, I don’t even like him very much. So, I’ll just leave the two of you alone. Bye.”

“Take another step and I will happily riddle you with a few more holes,” Priest said, dropping Todd and pulling out his gun.”Seriously, darlin’, don’t move.”

A look of terror morphed the omegas face. Not so cocky now, he thought, smirking as Icarus slowly raised his hands above his head and covered his face. He was surprised when Todd scrambled in front of the omega, pushing him back with his bulk and raising his hands.

“Stop,” he gasped. “Please, just stop.”

Priest looked them both over thoughtfully, using the meanest smile he could muster as he walked up to both boys. “Ok, kiddies. I’m gonna need you two to scamper on home. Now.”

“What,” Dirk said, peering over Todd’s shoulder. “Seriously?”

“You betcha sweetheart,” Priest said, enjoying the way the boy immediately looked away. “Go. Now. And remember. I’ll be watching.”

“Come on, Dirk,” the little alpha said, grabbing Icarus’s wrist and tugging him back. “Let’s get out of here.”

They stumbled backwards together, before Todd spun Icarus around and they bolted.

**********

“Are you OK?” Todd asked, the moment they stepped back inside the house. He couldn’t help himself and pressed Dirk into the wall, running his hands over the taller mans face. “Did he hurt you?”

“Surprisingly, no,” Dirk said, shying away from Todd’s hand as he turned his face away. “I’m not yours, you realise.”

“What?”

“I’m not yours. You can say I am all you like but I’m not. You don’t own me, Todd.”

“I know that. I don’t -”

Dirk looked down at him and Todd suddenly became very aware of the way he was crowding the omega. He stepped back as if he had been burned.

“Then why do you insist on saying it? Dirk asked, not moving from his place against the wall.

“I don’t - I’m not sure. It just felt right.”

Dirk’s eyes widened incredulously.
“No, no I just mean...Jesus, Dirk would you give me a break? I’m not trying to control you. I just saw that asshole touching you and I needed to get you away from him. I mean, fuck Dirk, he’s insane. I thought he was going to kill me.”

“Quite observant of you, Todd. I imagine, had he perceived you as an actual threat, you wouldn’t be breathing. Believe me, he’s done it before. Many, many times.”

Todd paled considerably and flinched back. He looked quite ill. “He’s murdered people?”

“Yes, in front of me.”

“Seriously?”

“Yes, Todd. Obviously. I mean, do you know anything at all about Blackwing? Did you think to learn a little about the organisation you tied yourself to?”

“I already told you, Dirk. I didn’t have a choice. Fuck, I didn't want this. I didn't want any of it. I just want to go home.”

“Well,” Dirk said, stepping away from the wall and brushing down his clothes with a small sigh. “Home is certainly an arbitrary concept. Especially when you’ve never actually had one. However, I can appreciate the sentiment. Unfortunately, we have a complete psychopath stalking us and we are, for better or worse, trapped here.”

“Great,” Todd said, hugging himself a little. “Now I feel much better.”
When Todd finally worked up the courage to enter the bedroom, Dirk was nowhere to be seen. For a second he thought the idiot had actually run off again; luckily his senses were in better working order than his brain cells and he quickly reasoned that if he could still smell Dirk, the omega couldn’t have got far.

“Dirk?” he called, trying to keep his tone mild. The persistent scent of the omegas stress was...upsetting. “Are you hiding under the bed again?”

“No,” came the almost immediate, muffled response.

Todd allowed himself an epic eye roll. “Seriously? How do you even fit under there?”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“Dirk, this isn’t funny,” Todd got onto his knees and edged closer to the bed. “Are you going to come out?”

A short pause. “In order to come out I would, in fact, need to be under the bed, which I’m not...so no, I won’t be coming out. Now go away.”

Todd considered dragging Dirk out by his ankles again; the omega had already proven he wasn’t violent and wouldn’t fight him. He couldn’t make himself do it though. Dirk clearly took comfort hiding in the enclosed space. He wasn’t hurting anyone. It seemed cruel to drag him out for no good reason.

“When you get bored, I’ll be downstairs,” Todd said finally, internally shrugging as he went downstairs and picked up the phone. After a couple of rings, the phone connected.

“Hello?” came Ken’s bored voice.

“Hey, it’s Todd.”

“Anything to report?” the other man asked mildly.

Todd hesitated. Should he tell Ken about Priest? The man had already threatened them. What more could he do?

“Dirk’s still adjusting. He -- he tried to go for a walk on his own and ran into a little trouble. I’m keeping a closer eye on him now. It won’t happen again.”

There was a pregnant pause on the other end of the phone. “I don’t think I need to tell you what happens if you lose him, Mr Brotzman.”

Todd could feel a bead of sweat on the back of his neck. “Yeah, yeah I get it. I’m not going to lose him.”

“Good. If that’s all?”

“That’s all thanks,” Todd said, glad to get the obligatory phone call over with. He moved back into the kitchen, hungry and restless. He opened up the fridge and was relieved to see it was stocked. He grabbed some bacon and eggs and put oil in the frying pan. He opened his iTunes and set the music to shuffle. His playlist blasted out of the tinny speakers, filling the otherwise silent space.
with the familiar lyrics of his favourite music.

“What are you making?” Dirk asked, appearing out of nowhere and scaring the absolute shit out of him.

“Jesus fuck! Where did you come from?”

Dirk threw him a look of utter loathing. “From upstairs, obviously.”

“Right, yeah. Of course.” Todd muttered, turning back to the frying pan and trying to ignore the burning feeling in the tip of his ears. “I’m making bacon and eggs. You want some?”

“I am hungry, I suppose,” Dirk said, sniffing daintily as he leaned over Todd’s shoulder to peer at the cooking bacon. ”Is there anything else?”

“Umm, maybe. What do you want?”

“Maybe something...sweet?”

Todd felt a smile tug at the corner of his lips. “I’ll see what I can do.”

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