For You

by Deadmockingbirds

Summary

He doesn't know where he comes from or hell, what the fuck he is, but he's something. When the strange man with the green eyes comes to take him, he goes willingly, anything's better than being an alien--because rather than call himself Superman, even if he is, he wants to find his mama the only one who can answer anything than to stick around Earth.

But what he finds is that he's a Ryker and he belongs to the man who has claimed the rights to DNA and owns the future. Of course Briggland does the forbidden: falls in love with a clone. He learns what it means to be a Ryker, how he wishes he never was one and of the greater dangers looming. All the while hunted by the strange men in black that fall from the sky.

Notes

This is an original work and Copyright to me, Mock
The Non-graphic rape non-con tag is because the clones in this story don't always have a choice in the sex they have. Even though they accept it and it is the way of "their world," it still isn't right and it's just one of the things our hero has to fight against. Savy? I know it's a sensitive topic, but #Mockpromises this story does not condone or take a topic like rape lightly.

I've layered so many themes in this story and used Science Fiction to do it. I really want to see if I've succeeded, so I hope you'll read and follow along.

This story is complete, but I will be making edits the whole way through, so I will post chapters probably one or two a weekish.

I'm both really excited and really fucking nervous to post this. This work means a lot to me.
Prologue

Chapter Notes

Okay, so lots of plot setting before we get to spankings and stuffs like that, but get to it we will ;-) I know y'all are going to love Ridomie (think dominant Cas on steroids with funky hair) He comes in at chapter 6, I think.

~This isn’t my story to tell, but it’s my fault that they have a story to tell at all. I, find it only fitting that my voice begin, and end in the prologue. I set the wheels in motion, but left my broken trail for them to finish. I am responsible for what lies forward. And I don’t regret it. I make the same choice every time.~

Odyessa Chance

BEFORE

I have one requirement: Run. I don’t focus on my breath, or the ground beneath me. Just to get far away.

Run.

That word pounds in my head, the ability to keep me going fuelled by fierce adrenaline. And the fear; the fear that I will fail.


I cling to the precious cargo wrapped in my chest. I have to get him away—away from those who hunt him. Tiny fingers dig into my jacket, tight, I can feel little nails hook into my skin despite its polyester defenses. They beg me not to let him go. ‘Please, please save me. Please, please don’t leave me.’ Poor, baby. He doesn’t know what’s happening. I’m not even sure he knows who I am. I’m the only one—the only one—that knows, the only one with any hope to keep him safe.

Why me? I don’t know.

I’ve never tried to figure out why the powers that be chose to give him to me, but they did and I’m glad. As I run for his life, I catch a breath of his sweet baby scent. The tears in my eyes stream away like drops of nothing into the crisp midnight. He’s brave in his terror, silent, still holding tight, ever so tight. If I could pull him any closer, I would, but as it is he’s molded to my body like he’s a part of it.

They’re not right behind me, but then, they knew better than to follow too close to me. They kept their distance, always trying to get the boy when I wasn’t close, when I couldn’t protect him.

I suspected I would have to fight them to really keep them away. Running is never enough, just part of the mission.

Running is to get him far away.

To create distance between him and them.
Running, because I'm faster, and because I have more to run for than they do.

Finally we reach our destination. I check my watch, my guide. We're early. I succeeded my second task of the night. I got him to the checkpoint.

Next is the hard part.

_The road is well lit, without a soul in sight._

This is where I have to leave him with no way to know for certain if he's safe. I know he'll be safe from _them_ which is more important than anything else, but he could be taken in by unkind people—that's a battle he'll have to fight himself.

Some things can be predicted, but because decisions change, nothing is ever certain—even the past. The only thing predictable about time is that it goes on. Time waits for no one—someone said that once—but what they didn’t know was that you could change time, if you were fast enough.

And I am, I’m faster than time. It can run, but I'll find it every time, because his life depends on it. _Until my heart stops beating._ For now, I leave him here, because there's no other choice and hope that I've caught time..._this time_. Anything is better than what awaits him back there. Back to the place I have to go.

Prying him from my body feels like being skinned alive. Especially when I have to take those hands, those precious tiny hands, and loosen each finger from the death grip on my jacket...on my skin. I will remember that moment as long as I live, and it will torture me. The feel of his warm, skin, its softness, its innocence.

The confusion.

Because he should be allowed to hold onto me, and me to him. I should never have to let him go.

I set him down, so I can see his tear stained face; my baby knows to cry silently.

Kneeling in front of his cherub face, and smoothing his blonde curls, damp with sweat, behind his ears, I wipe his fresh tear droplets with my Jacket’s sleeve.

“Baby,” I coo desperate, I don't have much time. “I have to leave you here.”

“Noooo…” he begins to whine too loud.

“Shhhh…” My voice is soft, melodic, as I begin to hum his lullaby. He's soothed instantly, but still frozen with fear. I remove the watch from my wrist. I need it, but can get by without it; he needs it more. He sees what I'm doing, and guesses its significance. _He’s a smart boy._

“But Mama,” his voice wavers as he tries not to cry, lip bulging out. “You’ll come back, won’t you?”

_Mama_. My heart hitches off rhythm. He knows me. He always knows me; I’m always worried he’ll forget.

I nod, but I don’t mean soon, and I honestly don’t know. My life is in constant danger. “I want to, baby, but nothing is certain. Nothing is ever certain.”

He looks like he wants to cry loud sobs, but my brave boy holds back.

“Can you do something for me, baby boy?”
He nods vehemently, always wanting to impress. I set the timer. “I’m going to give you my watch, and when it starts to make noise, you need to find a big person to help you – if I’m not back that is.”

“But I prolly won’t need it right, Mama? Please, come back.” He doesn’t sound like a little boy begging for his mama, as he should. His voice sounds strangely mature, his request more like a command.

Quite like a Major, really.

I want, so badly to promise him that I will, but I can’t. I card my fingers through his hair telling him, “I want to Darling. I want to more than anything,” hoping he’ll feel the sincerity in my voice.

“Don’t you love me?”

That’s when my resolve falters. Shards – not just pieces – little, tiny, itty-bitty, shards of glass imbed themselves in my heart among other organs causing every part of me pain.

I grip him firmly by each shoulder, and look directly into his azure blues. I say what I always say, because I never know if this will be the last time I will ever see him. “I love you Baby. I always love you. Remember that you have a Mother, and she loves you. Please remember.”

I feel them close. I have to go. Draw them away.

I take one last look at his sad little face before I turn to resume where my night started: running, running always running.

Running before it's too late.

Running to out run time.

Running to save his life.
“Where is he, Lexington?” My brother looks at me narrowly, his hands palm down on his desk in a real intimidating type fashion. Does that shit really work on other people?

Probably. Pussies.

I sit, casual-like. I’m in no way worried ‘bout answering him anytime soon. I’d rather make him breathe a little heavier than he is now; one of my few joys in life. It ain’t often I have something he wants. Course, it’s more often he has something I want. I know what I’m doing ain’t smart, but man, it fuckin’ feels delicious.

I steeple my pointer fingers, and thumbs from each hand together, folding the rest of my digits over each other. My left foot is already crossed over my right thigh, I rest my elbow on the rise of my left thigh and I’ve got ‘fuck you’ written all over my face. I consider him several moments longer than he would like, almost too long. To the point where I see his anger building like steam rising, ready to boil over into lava, and stream down his perfect face.

That’s when I answer.

“How am I supposed to fuckin’ know?”

He picks up his desk in one fall swoop, and throws it across the room, sideways, and advances on me. I’ve displeased him. Ooops.

He grips me by the throat, and I let him. I’m up against the wall, the pain builds, my lungs struggle for breath as they burn; I want to fight away from his hold, but I don’t. Fighting is a mistake.

Instead, I fucking smile at him, a dare to just kill me and be done with it. But we both know better. A Ryker, will never kill another Ryker. We are too valuable, especially to each other; no use dead, and we’re too fuckin’ arrogant to think one could possibly be a threat to the other. We have many similarities, us Rykers, that being one of them. We also look alike. Not as alike as the clones, but we all have the same hard noses, square jaws and Ryker blonde hair. Ryker blonde being a color in and of itself, the same hue as butter when the sun glints off of it, more like gold anywhere else. We start off small, but we grow large and indestructible.

Disgusted, he slams my head against the unforgiving Cyntripien marble wall, blood spurts from my head, and I slide down the wall, greasing blood all the way down. I push my hand into the open wound. It’ll be healed soon enough, once I can remove my bracelet. For now I’ll just have to slow the blood flow, ’till I can see to it. Even without removing my bracelet, it’ll still begin to heal immediately. One of the perks in being a Ryker. There are many, but there are also many fucking ‘not perks.’

My brother Derco being one of them.

He walks over to the wreckage of his desk, as I sit on the ground, holding my fucking bleeding head, and laughing at him. He turns on me quickly, his anger gone, a smile on his face….one I don’t fucking like. One that means he has me by the fucking balls, and he knows it.

I have no idea what he plans to blackmail me with this time, but it ain’t gonna work. I made a promise, and unlike some people, I intend to keep my fucking promises. Not that she deserves for
me to keep my promise, but some men still have honor.

The room gets a little darker, almost like he planned it that way, as a cloud moves in front of the sun, blocking it, and suffocating its light. The entire west facing side of Derco’s office is a window, which lets in all of Cyntripien’s beauty, as well as all of its ugliness. There ain’t too much ugliness, from the outside anyway, Cyntripien is a beautiful planet.

But sometimes—sometimes she’ll look as if she can swallow you whole.

“Here is what I want.” He remains where he is, but stares down at me now. I don’t feel as in control as I did a moment ago, but I’m still not afraid of him.

He was well mannered enough when he said it, perfectly mannered, well-bred Ryker heir he is, but I know different.

Know he’s just a bratty rich kid who’s got a hard on for pleasing Daddy. Our Daddy.

His instructions are a demand. A demand that comes in ‘that tone.’ A tone I’d learned over the years to heed, one that demands my perfect attention: Else people I care about die, or worse.

“I want, the boy, and I want you to tell me where he is, so I can send my army to fetch him.” It’s like he’s making a list for his birthday.

And I’m the Mother fucking wish fairy come to fill his wishes.

I want to slice his throat. We’re not supposed to kill each other, but it don’t mean we aren’t tempted to from time to time.

“And I want a different genetic coding, but that ain’t gonna happen,” I say.

“But it is going to happen.” He is matter of fact, conversational even. “I have your precious Oydessa, and I’m going to begin doing some not nice things to her the longer you hold onto your little secret. Now tell me where he is.” He sounds gleeful at the prospect, but at the same time like he’d rather not, but only because he has better things to do.

‘C’mon Derco, like you have anything better to do other than torture people.’

“Bullshit. You don’t have her. You couldn’t,” I say that because it’s true. Ain’t nothing can hold Oydessa, not even me.

“I do,” he states confidently. The one thing about my brother, he’s an evil, cruel mother fucker, but he don’t lie.

“Impossible. You’ll understand if I must request t’see proof.” I begin to make my way slowly to my feet again, ’cause he has my fucking attention now whether I want him to or not.

“Naturally, though you should know by now, I’m good to my word.”

He is that, as I just said. Him reminding me of a fact I already know does nothing to waver my decision in wanting to see her. Mostly I just want to fucking see her.

Fuck. Now I have to fucking see her. My body starts shaking slightly, and it ain’t from the blood loss.

“Very, well.” He nods in the direction behind me. “Monitor.” My brother makes the command, and for the first time in too many years Oydessa’s standing beside me. It’s not really her of course,
just a just a hologram, but it’s her enough to make my skin crawl, and make my heart stop wanting to beat. I’m frozen for a moment having to close my eyes, open them again, and shake my head to get my senses back.

He continues on as if this is proof enough, and I hate to admit it; it is. I can see where she is. She’s here, at Ryker corp., but on another compound, not sure which one, but through trial and error I could find out easy enough. Matter of fact, could find out easy enough in other ways too. He’s making no attempt to hide her whereabouts. He doesn’t care if I find her, meaning he’s got some kind of crazy hold on her even I won’t be able to break. I can tell she’s in a room, alone.

She’s…fucking, so damn beautiful, like always. Her fierce red-blond hair flows around her and her creamy peach skin hasn’t aged a day. The only things giving away her age are her firm, and steady grey eyes—you can always tell a person's age in their eyes. Dess is a lithe creature. She’s tall, with plenty of long lean muscle. Most of it in the power turbines she calls legs.

After all this time, I still love her.

And I really don’t want to fucking love her.

“Fine, so you have her,” I pretend not to care. I’m pretty good at it, ‘cept when it comes to her.

“Like I said,” he smiles, amused. He’s the cat, and I’m the fucking mouse he’s toying with. “Now tell me where he is.”

I stand there, dumbfounded, just looking at her, trying to fucking figure it out. He has her…Somehow…I can’t fucking figure out how, but if he’s found a way to hold Dess, he’s found the way to hold the fucking universe.

“What good is that? She’ll want nothin’ t'do with me — she’ll hate me— if I bring you her boy.”

“I didn’t say you had to bring him to me – I can do that myself – I just need to know where he is.” He ignores everything else I’ve said.

Now I’m fucking smiling. “That’s just the thing Derc,” I use the nickname I had for him when we were kids. He fucking hates it when I call him Derc. “You can’t go get him, only I can.” Now I’ve got to tell him my secret. Can’t believe after all this time it’s the fucking kid forcing my hand at telling it.

But it’s gonna be worth it to see the look on his face.

He looks at me confused. I savor the feeling I get at watching his reaction unfold like I’ve just bit into a juicy piece of meat. I have to tell him now, ‘cause he’s got Dess, and I’m going to have to go get the fucking kid anyway. There’s no out here.

I’m going to hold it back though, ’till the last possible moment. Until I absolutely have to tell him. I make my way back to the chair I had been sitting in, and take up the relaxed position I began in, only now I’m bleeding like a fucking sieve. Fuck it. I’ll leave it. If I bleed all over his pristine, white office, it’s his own damn fault.

He’s going through a number of emotions. Anger as one of the top, but also surprise as in ‘how did this slip from my control’ and frustration wondering how he’d get me to tell him without having to actually ask.

I don’t want to wait for him to come to a conclusion this time, I decide to ask a question of my own. “Why do you think I know?”
“That’s obvious. You’re in love with her, and she in turn loves you. Why wouldn’t you know?”

Answering my question with a question wasn’t an answer to my question at all. I answer him anyway, my emotions getting the best of me. “Loved me. Past tense. That was a long time ago, before you and her…. I can’t even say it, or I will kill him. I almost did, eighteen years ago.

Ignoring the murderous glint in my eyes, he smiles victoriously. That’s all it takes, I stand from my chair and make to leave. “She can fuckin’ have you.” I need to go smash something now. I consider calling to order a last minute training session on my newest army of Ryker clones, they’re always good for smashing around.

“She told me you knew,” he answers, mildly desperate and it feels like a fucking win. He knows my volatile temper is at its end, and he’d better give me something, or I will be gone.

“She told, you?” Now I’m staring at him in disbelief, ‘cause that don’t make a lick of sense. In fact, if someone were to hear the whole story, they’d say none of it made a lick of sense to begin with. Matter of fact, none of this is probably making any sense right now.

But it’s my first clue that something else is going on, something I don’t think even my dear brother is aware of. I realize now, I’m on a fucking treasure hunt, most likely orchestrated by my dear, sweet, wife, with the first treasure being to retrieve her Bastard son. But why didn’t she just ask me herself? And why would she hand him over to his power, crazed Father?

Point is, Derco ain’t supposed to know that I know where the boy is. I’ve done a damn good job of ensuring he didn’t know that I knew, for her sake. Wish she’d at least told me this part of the plan.

I certainly didn’t do it for the boy’s sake. Far as I’m concerned, he’s the devil’s spawn begot on a night of betrayal, and treachery. I didn’t do it for Ryker kind either. I mean there’s no one in particular I wish death upon, at the moment, not even my brother as much as he pisses me off, but Ryker kind is a self-entitled race, but I still didn't do it for them. They come by it naturally of course, being that most of their genes are now entirely infected. Infected with Ryker genes.

Nope. I did it for love, plain and simple. Ain’t that why most people do anything, stupid?

“Yes, and I’m willing to let it go, that you’ve neglected to tell me all this time, if you’ll tell me where he is.” He doesn’t sound mad anymore. He knows I’m going to tell him, in due time.

“I don’t know what kind of game the two of you are playing, but I don’t want any part in it. If I get the boy, I want Dess out of here, and I want nothing to do with him either,” I say.

“Where is he?” he repeats for the sixteenth time, calmer than before. Fuck it. I’m telling him, I’ve got shit to do.

“Earth.”

“Earth?” he spits. “She would dare leave my son on that antiquated pile of rocks? I’ll kill her!” He balls his hands into fists, probably wishing he hadn’t already thrown his desk, so he could throw it again.

He could try to kill her. I don’t know that anything can kill Dess. But he could hurt her, I know that much. I know it because she’ll let him, and make me watch, so I’ll partake in whatever twisted plan they’ve cooked up.

It’s time to reveal my secret.
“He’s on Earth, but not that Earth.”

“Lexington—”

“Earth three hundred thousand years ago.”

“Argh!” He locates his fallen desk, and throws it at me. Nice way to treat someone who’s just trying to be helpful. I cleanly dodge out of the way. He’s madder that I ducked out of the way of a punishment clearly intended for me. He’s on top of me, picking me up, and tossing me across the room into the pile of wood that had once been his desk.

It hurts much less than the marble, but I feel it. I’m far less strong with my bracelet, and Derco can easily overpower me. I could put up a fight, but I let him have his fun. His world is about to spin on its axis.

“Then it’s of no use! We can’t even reach him, unless she agrees to go, and she won’t.”

I roll off the woodpile, and stand before him, towering above him. My brother is tall, but I’m taller. I cross my arms. “I can get him, and I will get him, if you’ll leave me out of this once I’m done.”

“How can you get him? That’s a genetic impossibility. You can’t travel through time. No one can, except her,” he says the words, suspecting I’m about to tell him otherwise.

I am.

“And me.”

“Impossible.”
“Do we have a deal?” I want to get this moving along.

“How?” He ignores my question, which is more of a plea. I still want to leave to brawl with newbie clones.

Sighing I hold up the wrist with my Ryker crest bracelet, balling my hand into a fist, knuckles facing him. Making a big show of it, I remove the bracelet, and toss it at his feet.

Immediately, I feel the force reset, and bleed into my veins. Like a shroud has been lifted, I can see. My power is mine once again, and I’m reunited with that which is my birthright. I squeeze my fist a couple of times, flexing, testing the power. I do this every time I remove my bracelet, almost like I’m unsure it will still be there. I go long intervals wearing my bracelet, so long I worry it will be gone…dried up if left unused.

“Hit me now,” I dare him, hoping he will. It would do my brother good to have a bit of fear of me. It’s been too long the other way, but it’s time for a change. I can feel it.

His eyes are a mixture of liquid rage, and amazement. Instead of hitting me, he speaks. “Father knows?” It’s just barely a question. I nod.

“I wanted to tell you, but—” I begin wanting to explain the whys of Father’s allowing me to keep my secret. It’s not as mysterious as he’s making it out to be. Ryker heirs are based on strength. Technically I am far more powerful than Derco will ever be, except for the one thing stopping that from ever happening: My weakness, and I’m not talking about Dess.

Because of my weakness, the ‘throne’ so to speak, went to Derco when our Daddy’d had enough of being Ryker king. Now, he plays a much smaller role in the Ryker kingdom, while still managing
to be an all-consuming hegemony.

“Silence. It doesn’t interest me to know.” He turns away, not wanting to look at me. I don’t give a fuck if he’s upset by it. What he and Dess did to me trumps this a thousand fold. “So you can travel through time too?” he continues on like we’re discussing the weather. He can’t help his curiosity.

“Yes.”

“Then get him,” he hisses through clenched teeth, and a tight jaw. “He’s just become a whole lot more valuable.” I have no idea what the fuck that means. Don’t care neither.

“No. First I want your word – I want nothing to do with him after this, and she’s out of here, far away from here.” If this was what she wanted – her son here with his father then she can fucking have it, but I’m not sitting back and watching the three of them play house.

“I can’t promise you either of those things. I need you to train him, you’re the only one who will do it properly.” I didn’t fail to notice him leaving out anything about her. That means he's not going to tell me what his bargain is with her, but either way, she's not leaving. I accept that one right away. No point in arguing with stone.

“I’m not fuckin’ trainin’ him,” I try to make my tone sound final, but it’s not as final as his tone and Derco has ways of getting me to do the things he wants, no matter how often I try to resist him. And I’ve just made it fucking easier for him, now that he knows my weakness.

“You are. You’ll do it anyways because I have willed it. I cannot kill you, but I can make your life a living hell.” Case and point.

But I’m still in the driver’s seat, for the moment. “Fuck you. I’m not doing shit.” I reach down to retrieve my bracelet. He steps on my hand, but my skin hasn’t made contact with the gleaming stone that sits underneath the leather yet.

Without any effort at all, I push his entire foot from my hand reaching to grab him by the ankle in one swift move. Now he’s on the ground. He’s not bleeding but at least I get a little retribution for earlier. He’s looking up at me stunned. He can’t believe I’ve just manhandled him, so easily.

I don’t give a shit about his reaction now. I’m getting the fuck outta here. I go back to reaching for my bracelet, with success this time, securing it around my wrist. “You’ll leave that on from now on,” I hear from the ground. Looking back at him, I see he’s recovered from the shock, and is back to full Ryker authority mode, as he hops easily back to his feet.

“Always, do.” I don’t care about that order. I don’t want to take the bracelet off. Things are better for me as is.

"Wait. Give it here, what's on there that makes you weak?"

I hand it to him so he can inspect it. "Moldevite," I tell him.

He studies the tiny black stone on the back, smoothing his thumb over it, then returns it to me. I tie it back on. He’s watching me a little different now, as if I’m not the same brother he’s known for the past three hundred years, like I’m someone new, like he’s learning my movements for the first time, trying to read what I think, trying to come up with the right thing to say to get me to do what he wants.

There is no right thing. Only the wrong things will make me.
My Brother is one thing if nothing else, and that’s intelligent. He figures me out, has had me figured out all along. He decides something, the look in his eyes making my blood run cold. “Since we’re sharing secrets, I’ll share one with you that not even your dear sweet, Oydessa knows.” He dusts himself off, taking his time telling me, as he straightens himself out. “I can hurt her. I know how. I’m not telling you how I know, but you can trust that I do, and if you don’t bring me our boy I promise you this; I’ll hurt her, I’ll hurt her everyday, I’ll enjoy it, and there won’t be anything you can do to stop me.”

Derco hid truths in there. He twisted and manipulated words. He didn’t out right lie. I believe him, but he’s omitting things.

Of course there is a first time for everything, maybe now will be the first time he lies, but I’m not taking that chance with Dess.

He has me in a corner again. Just when I thought I finally bested him at something.

“Why? Why train him? We can only imagine how powerful he’ll be, what if he takes us over?” True to Ryker form, Derco is already underestimating a potential opponent.

“Because he’s mine. I won’t have my son, a Ryker, know nothing of his own culture, and birthright, heritage. He will fight like a Ryker, and think like a Ryker. Besides, he’ll be better than a Prince; he’ll have no reason to want to overtake us. He’ll adapt to life here. He’s a Ryker by blood, and Ryker blood is naturally drawn to power; power I can give him. You know this. I see the way you are with your armies, Major,” he uses my title, mockingly.

I can’t deny his words, but I don’t like them. Especially since they’re true. As much as I judge Derco by his actions, I ain’t no saint neither.

“Yeah, and as a Ryker drawn to power, he’ll have no qualms about killing us, he don’t know our ways. He’s not raised like us.” I’m referring to the Rykers don’t kill Rykers mantra. “He’s been raised away from us, he might not care, so much about the pride of a family he’s got no connection to. He could be dangerous enough without training, with it, he’ll be deadly.”

“And we’ll be all the better for it.” His statement, and the intensity of his azure eyes closes the conversation. He takes my silence as agreement. “See? Isn’t this much better? Us discussing rather than me having to order you about and making threats?” He stops to admire this moment. That’s just one of the many fucked up things about our family. We have no second thought to threatening that, which the other holds dear, while at the same time holding family pride, so deep we truly desire to ‘get along.’

I ignore him though. I’m not in the mood for this shit. Truth is, I’ll go get the kid to get the two of them off my back, but I’m not going to be able to stand to be around him. This new development is giving me second thoughts. I’m hoping to talk some sense into my brother. I think he’s seriously underestimating this opponent, as Rykers are prone to.

I’ve underestimated Derco this entire conversation, haven’t I? I’m not impervious, neither.

Seeing I’m still not convinced, he continues to talk. More to make nice than anything else. He doesn’t like when we disagree – don’t stop him from issuing orders I don’t like. “My son will love it here. His Ryker blood will feed from the power I’ll give him. He’ll adopt our ways, and even if he doesn’t, you know I have ways of making him obey.” It’s only a repeated summary of what he’s already said, and it doesn’t move me whatsoever.

“You know nothing about him!” I yell, this time at my wit’s end. How do I make his stubborn side
“I know enough,” he says cryptically, saying no more about it, his firm eyes confirming he’s not going to. I leave it. If I haven’t convinced him by now, I’m not going to.

“So I have to waste my valuable time goin’ t’get him, and more of it trainin’ a boy I don’t even want to look at. What the fuck do I get out of this?”

“Now, now, there’s no need to get volatile, Lexington. And I’d think it’s obvious what you get out of it; vengeance.”

“Vengeance?”

“Yes. Revenge. Sweet Revenge. You can punish the boy for his very existence in this world. I’ll happily allow it. It will be good for the boy. He will need to learn who his betters are. I plan on punishing him often, as is my right.”

I ignore half of that statement, focusing only on that which applies to me. Derco can beat the kid to his liking. He’s probably going to be a shithead, like his half-brother anyway. “Just ‘cause I can’t stand the boy, don’t mean I want to punish him for no reason. It ain’t his fault his mama’s a cheating fool, and his Daddy is a—”

“Enough. That was years ago. You’re going to have to forgive me someday, and should have done by now.”

“I’ll never forgive you. You slept with my wife.”

As usual, he ignores the accusation. I don’t say it, so explicit often, but when I do he pretends as if I haven’t. I don’t know why I bother. He’s right. I’m stuck with him and I should move past it. But I never will.

“Whether you want to make him hurt, or not, isn’t it better to have power over that which you detest?”

Yes. I say in my head without thinking. I’m like them, like Rykers even if I hate that I’m like a Ryker. “I don’t detest him. Why should I? It’s not his fault.” I make my futile argument.

“It doesn’t have to make sense. It’s enough that you do,” he says with meaning, and I go quiet. There’s nothing to say to that. He’s right. I hate the boy. Hate him for the things he didn’t do, which is why I don’t want him around. I will take out my frustrations on him, ‘cause he’s the only one I can.

“You’ll see the truth of my words soon enough. I know you better than you think, and better than you know yourself.”

Does he? I sure the fuck hope not.

“I’ve things to do, and you have clones to beat to a bloody pulp. After that, bring the boy to me.” He turns his thickly muscled frame away from, sliding like a panther past me toward the door of his office.

I haven’t given him a definitive answer, yet he’s acting like I have. I guess in a way I did, though ‘suppose he knew how this would go—mostly—since before he called me to his office.

I stand, silent, unmoving, wondering just how the hell he always knows.
Him gone I run my hands through the thick part of my blonde Ryker hair, astounded with my apparent misfortune. Looking up, I notice he’s left the hologram of Dess on. She’s sitting.

I watch her with her unable to watch me. I watch her with all the hate I can muster — and still it's not enough to make me unlove her.

Her red-blonde hair glints like fire as she moves. The cream of her skin, those plump pink lips, her grey eyes, all melding together to procure a creature of beauty only equaled by the Gods. She was one of them, as surely as stars have lived in the night for all the years of the existence of the Universe.

She's more than them.

For a moment, I consider letting Derco hurt her. Would it hurt as much as it did when she broke my heart?

It wouldn’t. I know it wouldn’t, and even if it would. I can’t.

My earlier thoughts come back to me, as I watch her, thinking. She wants this. After almost two decades of running, she wants me to bring him back where this all started.

She’d risked her life making sure Derco wouldn't get their son, and I'm certain she wouldn’t mind dying to see that mission through. Instead, somehow, her life’s work has culminated to this point, and somehow the end lies with me.

Unless I’m only the middleman. Sure the fuck feels that way right now with the clever little way she avoided having to ask me to perform this little task herself.

Their son, can't escape me. I know that, and she knows that except unlike her I don’t know why that’s true.

Maybe that will be how I hurt her, by not fucking helping her. Show her she's worthless to me now. Will she even care? Will it be worth it if it did? For the briefest of moments, I consider it. I remember all the more important reasons why Derco shouldn’t have him. She may even thank me for seeing something she don’t right now. She may be happier in the end if I don’t do this thing she might only think is the ‘right’ thing. As I see it, the world could only benefit from Derco having less power.

But Derco will hurt her if you don’t. The thought itself clenches my heart. The pain — thinking of her in pain — overwhelms me. Her hurting means my hurting.

And I’m too selfish for that.

Damn the world to hell.

“I’m sorry Darlin’,” I whisper.

And I run — not thinking of the consequences.
I shiver. It’s cold.

I remember being little and wanting her to come back. Bad. I looked at what she gave me: A watch with green numbers. I recognized the numbers. I knew numbers. My mama taught me. The seconds ticked by. What am I waiting for? Oh yeah, a noise. I wondered what the noise would be like. I waited some more. She’ll come back. I was confident.

She’ll stay with me this time. She said she loves me. There’s nothing to worry about.

Time ticked by. Just a few seconds, but it felt like days. If possible, the street gets quieter. I stared at the watch, and became mesmerized by the moving green numbers. I played with the zipper on my blue and grey coat. I kicked at the ground. I twisted the golden curls in my hair. I kept looking around constantly expecting something to happen.

But nothing did.

Before long, the watch started to make a sound; a high-pitched beeping sound. I shook the watch thinking that maybe it’s broken.

I hoped it was broken.

But the watch wasn’t broken — only my heart — that sunk to my gut as I realized: She’s not coming back.

‘She’s not coming back.’ I said it aloud, quietly to myself. Saying it makes it real.

I shouldn’t cry though. She wouldn’t want me to. She needed me to be brave, didn’t she? She hadn’t said that, but I’d seen it in her eyes.

And she was. Brave I mean.

I listened for a heartbeat longer, heard a sickening sound far, far in the distance. The disturbing noise defined the silence. I didn’t think anything of it then, except that it was a noise, and not the wind. I know now it was my mama, crushing bones and snapping necks.

I fingered her watch, as the beeping died down, and all was silent once again. The green numbers disappeared, so did the watch, just like my hopes of her coming back for me.

It’s time for me to go. I have a job to do.

I walked around in the dark for what seemed like hours, I was three fucking year old. It was too late at night for anyone to be out. There’s no one. She’d really left me — alone.

I remember that night like it was yesterday’s bad dream. I was naught, but a babe, and I was fucking terrified. I finally took up residency beside a mailbox on the corner, opposite to a street lined with pretty houses.
The mailbox was colder than my body, and I was already freezing my nuts off, but I crouched beside it low — exhausted. I’d never been without someone to help me. She’d done this lots already in my short memory, but always…Always I was passed off to someone, and never left to my own devices.

First mission on my own, and I’d fucking failed. Big time.

I can still remember the crispness of the grass.

Grass that was still malleable enough to bend with elasticity not gone winter, but sharp enough that I could feel distinctive blades beneath my thin corduroy pants. A cold autumn night.

I rested my head against the mail box, feeling no comfort returned from it’s soulless body, but still willing to relay to it all my woes to it, even never having it return a word of compassion to me.

I didn’t cry though. If I were going to die a babe in body, I would die a man in spirit, I’d always made that fucking promise to myself. With nothing but the wind to sing me to sleep I closed my eyes, and imagined the mailbox was a magic, red dragon…

I don’t know why I always think of that shit. It’s fucking sad shit that I should just forget about. I haven’t seen my mama in years. I’m alone for good now.

My bike purrs beneath me, like the kitten I tweaked her as. I don’t feel the vibrations, but I know they’re there. The wind breezes, my funny shade of blonde hair whips out from the front of my helmet and across my fringe. The leather of my jacket creaks as I shift to make the bike turn, and wind down the road that stands quiet in the onset of dusk.

I let the throttle rip. I want to fly.

Fast is not a term I can use to define the speed I’m flying now. I’ve flown faster, swifter, smoother. Best to describe my velocity is, faster than any bike I know exists, yet still slower than my mama’s feet.

Now I’m thinking of her again, and I don’t fucking like to think of my mama, but I can’t help it, sometimes the memories just seep in.

‘Specially, when I ride.

When I think of my mama, my mind plays games. Invents stories. Darkens my waking hours. Drives me to the edge of fucking madness.

And in the memories, I delve until I think I’ve found clues. Until I’m certain that I'm not meant to fly on bikes, but on the wings of time.

I pull up to the roughly built, off to the side of the highway, pub.

Stashing my bike in the front with the others, I pull off my helmet letting my blonde locks fly loose. They’re sticky with sweat; I push them back off my face.

Isn’t going to matter much here what I look like. I can already smell the mixture of gas, leather, and whiskey. Muted music leaks out from between the cracks of the worn wood getting louder for a second as a hefty, burly man exits.

He looks at me, a ‘what the fuck you doin’ here?’ crosses his face, but he shrugs not caring too much as he hops on his bike, and rides off into the setting sun.
I go inside. The music is as loud as I expect, and the smell worse.

I’m in a biker bar. I really don’t know what the fuck I’m doin’ here… again. I get a few looks, but the look I give back stops’em from coming near me. They never really know what to expect from me. I’ve gotten into a few brawls here.

Maybe that’s why I’m here. Okay, so it is. I hate admitting that even to myself. It’s a good place to take out my anger on someone; someone I feel deserves it.

I walk up to the bar, and order a whiskey, neat. I need to sip on something to appear casual, to fit in. I order what I order ‘cause it seems like the thing you’re supposed to order here. Doesn’t matter what I drink. *Doesn’t do shit to me like it does everyone else.* No buzz, nothing.

The bartender slams a brew in front of me instead. “Nice try, kid. I know yer not of age. Boys don’t drink Whiskey in here.” He stares at me a moment longer before he turns back around.

I slam a tenner on the bar top. Don’t know what difference it makes for him to serve me beer instead of Whiskey. Served is served. Wasn’t going to make a difference to the cops if they walked in here.

I have a feeling cops don’t come near places like this anyway. I’m sure that’s not what worries him. Maybe he thinks I’ll get drunk faster drinking Whiskey, and start a fight. Maybe it’s his rule.

Either way, I take my beer and find a corner, a dark corner. Yeah, another night in the trenches…

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I was found that night, when my mama left me, I mean.

I’d formulated a plan, which was nothing more than moving to the front of the mailbox, where I would be in full view of both the artificial light from the street lamps, and the eerie glow of the moon’s light.

All of the windows in the neighborhood were dark — except one — and I was positioned perfectly. Anyone walking by the window would see the front of the mailbox and see me clearly.

My heart sped up with hope, the more I stared; someone would walk by that window, see me, and come out to look in the very least. And when they saw me—well—who would be, so heartless as to leave a little boy out in the cold? And I was pretty damn cute as a little boy. All wavy blonde curls, and button nose. I could have probably sped things up — could have, should have, knocked on doors ‘till I got lucky, looking at them like the bubbling babe I appeared to be.

But I was a little boy, and I thought my idea genius at the time, so I just fucking sat there.

I gripped the watch tightly in my frozen fingers as if it was my mama. It was all I had left of her in that moment. It was everything to me. I thought of my beautiful mama: her scent, her fiery hair, her love…

I must have finally drifted off to sleep, because when I woke up, I was in a bed. I grabbed for my watch, and discovered that it had somehow remained safe in my hand.

"He kept screaming for his mother all night," a quiet, smooth voice had said.

"I’ve contacted the Ministry. They said they’d send someone when they have a worker available. For now he can stay with us. I know that’s what you want," a gruffer voice had said back, a man’s
"Poor thing. He was so cold. I wonder where his mother is?" said the woman again. I remember immediately liking her voice.

I drifted back to sleep, feeling safe.

Behind hooded lids I could see the sun peak into the window, of the room I was in. I opened my eyes groggy, with sleep, and saw the beautiful face of a woman.

"Mama?" I rubbed my eyes with my free hand, the other still gripping the watch, and sniffled my running nose.

"No," she said sadly cupping my cheek, and producing a tissue from her pocket. She wiped my nose as she told me, "I'm Miss May." Miss May had been the one to find me saying she’d heard a knock on her door in the early morning, and when she opened it, I was there, sleeping, and shivering. That confused me. I knew I hadn’t knocked, but I knew better than to say, so. Maybe my mama had come back and brought me to her. I liked that thought enough to keep it.

Miss May didn’t have any children of her own. It was just her and her boyfriend Steve.

I had stayed a long while with Miss May, though can't remember exactly how long. The Ministry, overloaded and understaffed, took awhile to send someone to find out about me. Was to my benefit. Miss May, and Steve were nice people and they took good care of me.

As much as I had liked Miss May, and Steve, I cried every night for my mama. I tried not to let Miss May see, but eventually, she found me crying.

“What’s wrong, sweetie?”

“My mama,” I whined.

She looked at me with a funny worried expression. She sat down beside me on the blue bed sheets, and bit her lip.

I didn’t understand it then, but now I could tell you what that look on her face had meant and it went a little something like: How do you tell a little boy you can’t find any trace of him ever having parents?

They had done some of their own groundwork, Miss May and Steve. I knew because she would assure me everyday they were looking. Posters, flyers, an add in every paper and electronic form of media – like I was a lost puppy.

Still they found nothing, and nobody came for me.

The only proof of her existence being that watch, the strange looking watch with green numbers that had stopped working. Dead. Lifeless as the trail she left for me to find her.

The ministry finally sent a tall, awkward looking lady with stern lips, and short, dull brown, hair. At first she looked through me like I was just another case, but after just a few hours I had her eating out of my hand.

Miss May claimed I had a heartbreaking quality about me making it hard for even the sourest people not to fall in love with me. Don’t know if she’s right, but Merna was a tough nut to crack, and she had been enchanted with me.
She saw how well I blended with Miss May and Steve’s daily life, and she wanted me to be able to stay on with them.

They wanted me of course, and eventually fell in love me. I think Miss May loved me from the moment she saw me. For her it was like the stork brought her a baby and that suited her just fine.

Merna worked her magic enabling me to stay with them for a long while. I was happy as I could be and allowed myself to adjust, not knowing if I’d ever be reunited with my mama.

It was late one night. I can't remember exactly when it was, but I'd say roughly two years after Miss May and Steve had found me. I do remember that it was a lot warmer than it had been the last time I’d seen my mama.

I was in bed asleep.

Somehow my mama found me. She always knew how to find me, I just didn’t know how to find her.

I heard the window of the ground level bedroom open, and I sat up startled.

“I knew not to make a sound. "Baby. Baby, c’mere,” she shout whispered. I rubbed my eyes. I knew we’d have to go, but I didn't want to. Whenever Mama came, we always had to run. She looked around, cautious as she tried to give me a minute. I knew she was stressed though, and that we had to get moving fast.

It was hard that time. I loved Miss May, and I adored Steve. They had talked about adopting me, were working on it even.

At the time, if I couldn’t be with Mama, then I wanted to be with them.

She looked back at me “Do you have a jacket, Sweetie?” I nodded, and looked over to the closet where Miss May had clothes for me. While she grabbed a jacket, I grabbed the broken watch I always kept under my pillow.

I looked to my Mother’s wrist. It was bare.Apparently she didn’t need a watch anymore.

“Baby….we have to go…” her voice was urgent, and I could sense a hint of regret.

She opened her arms for me, and I ran to them grateful to have her hold me for any amount of time. With the grace of a cat, she hopped out of the window, and we ran.

No one can catch us.

As she ran with me clutched to her, I thought about Miss May. She’ll be sad in the morning when she finds me gone. She loves me. She’ll cry. I don’t like Miss May to cry.

Impossibly, Mama sped up. We ran faster than we ever had, or at least than I ever remembered we had. I saw the flash, but heard nothing. The warm night turned cold. I peeked up from my hiding place in Mama's shoulder and saw that the trees were bare and covered with snow.

We were somewhere different, in a flash and at the time I didn’t know what had happened, but now I knew, we'd somehow travelled through time.

I noticed the light coming in the windows. It was daytime; the night had suddenly having vanished. She set me down; we were indoors. “I’m so sorry I had to do this to you baby. You’re safe again.
You’ll be fine here for a while.” I knew she would leave me again. There was no use in asking her to stay. I knew she wouldn’t. I remained stoic this time.

A woman looked over at the two of us, and I smiled happy that someone would see me with my mama. I looked back to Mama; her face was pained. I looked back to the lady; her face was concerned. I looked back at my mama to ask her why the lady was looking at me funny, but she had already vanished. The lady ran over to me. "Are you all by your self little one? Where are your parents?" Least she was a nice lady.

"My mama. Did you see my mama?’ I asked her desperate for someone to have seen her.

"No, but I will help you find her," she said with fierce resolve.

I knew she wouldn’t, find her I mean. My heart sunk. How did she not see her? She’d looked right at her. I didn't know then why I was the only one ever seemed to see her, maybe I was the crazy one? And I’d of convinced myself of that, if it weren't for one thing.

I heard a familiar beeping sound, my eyes widened realizing what it was. The broken watch on my wrist, I looked just in time to see it flashing four zeros, and sounding its alarm.

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The point is; I’m not normal.

Can’t tell by looking at me. I appear as an average build, maybe even slightly on the smaller side. I’m tall, but a lot of people are tall. That doesn’t place me out of the ordinary.

The bartender though, he’s seen me in fights. He’s seen me take on guys three times my size. That's not fucking, normal. That's as fucking not normal as it gets. Yeah, I’m something different, but I couldn’t tell you what that different is. I look around the bar for someone. No one in particular, just the biggest dog in this place.

I get these urges I can’t explain, urges to hit someone and be hit by someone.

Yeah not something: Someone. I hate myself for it.

My heart beats with the desire, my blood pumps with the need. I chug down my beer, slam it on the table and make for the restroom in a vain attempt to fight it. I’d like to think I don’t want to hit people, but I do. I like the feeling, the power.

I like it more when they hit me back.

I wish I could feel what it was like to be hurt, or broken physically. I want to feel pain. Physical pain, but no matter how hard they fucking hit me, it's not good enough. I need harder, harder, harder.

Splashing cold water on my face, I rinse quick. Once, twice, three times. I take a little time in the mirror, surveying myself like I'm cataloging who I am. I don’t look anything like my mama. Sure, there are similarities, and you can tell we’re related, but we look about as similar as a pumpkin and a squash.

I don’t often do this, look at my face, I mean. My face makes me wonder things I don’t want to wonder. Like why the fuck do my eyebrows arch over my azure blue eyes, like they are always cruelly mocking something? At the same time, they're razor sharp like a hawk’s wingspan. The two of them sit making one fearless, unmoving statement, on either side of my sharp, unyielding
nose. My nose sticks out from my face now; slender, patrician; vicious. Hasn’t been ‘button’ for a long time.

My lips, contrast my nose, by being plump mother fuckers, pink and nestled into the sharp bed of my jaw. When I smile, my lips soften everything, giving a lovely deception of peace, and calm on an otherwise wild, raw canvas of pain.

Then there’s my jawbone. A cold, sharp, border. I turn it over in the mirror from side to side considering what immovable force could conceivably pass on a trait of such emphatic, command, and why I, should have something of such defining magnificence as this jawbone? A jawbone should not dare to be so, symmetrical or perfect, and should not sit as the construct of my face.

The features of my face, are the enigmatic fucking link to my past—prominent.

This is why I eventually will be found, by those who seek me; the men in black with only Mama between them, and me.

Because, should they miss my telltale features, they wouldn’t miss the one that sits on my head. Shiny gold, tousles that spring messy, and all over the place in an organized chaos. My hair stands out. No one’s hair pulls the eyes of a crowd quite like mine does—like a beacon of light in a dark tunnel.

Just who the fuck am I? And why, with all of the features of a God, was I orphaned to this place? Yeah, I said it. I fucking hate Earth and I’ve been to enough places with my mama to know Earth isn’t the only mother fucking planet with life on it.

But my face isn’t going to reveal anything — not today.

Instead I have to draw clues from my memories. I splash more water on my face…

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I was six. I was in a shopping mall. Strangest fucking mall too, with its ethically, questionable marine theme. Sharks in the walls of the Food Court, penguins living in snow caps in the corner of the mall next to the GAP, dolphins swimming beneath the floors of Pottery Barn. I was a kid though, so I was pretty fucking enchanted as I walked through with Charlotte, and Harry; my foster parents at the time.

In the middle of the mall they had a huge aquarium filled with fish—all sorts—and above that a bridge arched in a pronounced ‘U.’ It was made entirely of glass, and enforced by steel of some sort. I remember walking over that bridge as I held Charlotte’s hand. I was to her right, and Harry was on her left.

I heard the flash first, and the breaking of glass next. Something hard collided with me and propelled me forward with it. Next I knew, I was falling, then I was wet. I was struggling; pulled under by whatever had hit me. I heard a scream, and my name called once: That had been Charlotte. She’d never fallen. She was on the other side of the bridge, somehow. In that time—in that space of time that her scream happened—other things happened all at once.

How I saw it, wasn’t how everyone else saw it; still can’t fucking explain it any other way.

The thing that had collided with me, was a man, all in black. His dark hair was slicked back, and his eyes glowed a fierce green. He was broad shouldered and incredibly strong, holding me against him as he held me under the water.
I struggled against him for what felt like forever, but it wasn’t. Remember. It all happened in the fraction of a moment that it takes to say the shortened form of my name. That’s it.

Just five letters.

I was under the water, with the man in black. Mama appeared in another flash. She fell from the sky, and landed on what was left of the bridge. She scanned the water below.

My eyes were open, and I clearly remember the aquamarine color of the water that surrounded us. There was a large piece of glass above us – still falling as if in crazy slow motion— from the broken bridge, and we were tossing and turning beneath where it would eventually fall, as I continued to struggle to get away from the man that held me.

Her hair spread behind her like fire as she jumped in the water without a thought, smashing through the glass that had yet to land in the water. She peeled the fingers of the man that held me in an iron grip easier than a hot knife slides through butter.

His face contorted in pain, bubbles escaped his mouth. Mama grabbed me from him like a lion snatches food. She pulled him along too though, and easily. He looked like he must’ve weighed two hundred pounds, while I’m sure Mama was one twenty-five soaking wet, but she made him look feather light. He was attempting to struggle away from her, but he couldn't escape her grip no matter how hard he tried.

I was frozen in awe at the unusual strength of my mama. Her grey eyes were a dark storm.

The man was scared beyond belief, and I could see now how he wished he hadn’t partaken in his short, foolish mission. He could do nothing but be dragged up to the surface with us as she swam at a speed that had to be faster than light, and with a force stronger than gravity.

Before I knew it, I was safe and sound on the ground outside of the tank, but below the bridge. All of that happened. All of it. And Charlotte only had the chance to cry my name.

I assume the glass from the bridge had finally reached the water, but I couldn’t be sure at which point. I was trying to focus on my mama. I wanted to keep track of her; I didn’t want her to disappear this time. But I couldn’t. She was too fast. I intrinsically knew she couldn’t stay. She had to take care of the man with the green eyes that glowed neon and then she would be gone again.

She began running, still holding the man’s hand, and he had no choice, but to run with her unless he wanted his hand separated from his body.

By the time I was spotted by another mall patron, my mama, and the man were long gone. I never saw her disappear, I only saw the flash, far, far in the distance. The patron was a woman. When she saw me standing there, dripping wet, her eyes went wide. My teeth began to chatter, but it wasn’t because I felt cold. I don’t feel cold – not on Earth anyway. It was the energy of what just happened. Never the less, she rushed over to me, taking her jacket off, and placing it around my little body; assuming I was freezing. “Mama,” I said as I pointed toward where Mama had ran.

“Yes, dear. We’re going to get your mama.”

People said there was no way I could have jumped from the tank and survived. They were right. The tank was one hundred and fifty feet high. People also said, I must have gotten splashed from all of the glass that fell in chunks into the water. There was no way for me to be inside the tank as I had claimed.

But how did I get from the bridge, to standing beside the tank below that fast?
One of the officers from Mall security had a brilliant theory that seemed to appease all of the minds of the shoppers who had witnessed the accident. I had run. Run when the bridge began to collapse (from the weight of too many people going over the bridge at once). I must have been in shock he said, and not known where I was going. I must have kept running, and just ended up in the space below.

Other people were wet from the splash too. It didn’t matter that I was drenched…that no one else below was anywhere near as wet as I was. The explanation was, so fucking unbelievable, but it was still more believable than mine. When I had told them what I saw happen, I got a few: "What an imagination you have little boy," type comments. Yeah. That’s what they fucking said to me. Like I was the one with the imagination.

I left Charlotte and Harry’s home shortly after that. The whole thing had freaked them out too much. They didn’t believe me, but they also didn’t believe the Mall cop’s theory either. And funny story, the part that freaked them out most, was my first word to the lady after the accident. Mama, I’d said. I’d never called Charlotte Mama, and though they didn’t admit it aloud, they knew that I had not made anything up. They knew I believed I’d seen my mama — and they’d decided I was crazy, unstable even.

They thought I was some strange wizard child from Harry Potter or something, and they were scared I’d have effect on their other foster children. They were somewhat reluctant to give me up – I give them that — they were good people. They didn’t want anything bad to happen to me, they just didn’t want anything bad to happen to them more. Don’t blame them one bit.

That time was the worst. Of all the times no one believed me, that one I remember that one most. Was after that, I decided never to speak of her again to anyone. I knew, too, I had to keep my strange idiosyncrasies a secret. I couldn’t show anyone who I really was.

My freakish tendencies were more apt to come out when I was emotional — so I kept my strong emotions inside bottling them and bottling them, ’till I felt like I was going to burst.

This meant no playing ball, or any other sport. Another place for my tendencies to slip. Another place where something of my true nature could be found. It meant not arguing — well as often as I could prevent — and not getting into fights.

Except when I come here of course. A place where fights are normal and I can get it all out.

Keeping vigilant. That’s important to my survival. Looking everywhere, all at once as only I can.

Because I never know when they’ll come. I never know Mama will come to take me. I don’t even know why things happen as they do—hell, I don’t even know where the fuck I came from.

But I always know this: I’m hunted.
Thoughts Past

Chapter Notes

Forgot, we meet Ridomie in this chapter, but it's just a tidbit.

**Major Ryker**

It was another place, another time, another fucking dimension and I remember it as I gather my crew.

“Please,” she begged me, very pregnant, on her knees. "I need your help.”

“You cold hearted bitch. I’m not helping you. Take your bastard child and burn for all I care.” Didn’t mean a fucking word of it and she knew it.

“Look, I know you’re hurt — but see reason Lexy. He can’t have this baby—”

“Maybe you should’ve thought of that—”

“I know, I don't need the lecture,” she looked down at her stomach as explanation enough. She’s right. It was a fucking mite too late. You just…you never think it’s gonna be you. Other people get cheated on, but not you.

‘Cause I knew I was gonna end up helping her anyway, I made a lame attempt to get something out of it when in reality, I’d help her either way. "Tell me why."

She didn’t say a word. Not one God dammed word. She knew the why I was asking after, and it had nothing to do with that Devil’s spawn she carried.

“You’re breakin’… breakin’ m’heart Lex…” choked out like she fucking meant it, even though I knew she didn’t.

Bitch.

“I’m breakin’ yers? Fuck you. You know what, yeah, I’ll help, ‘cause yer right, my brother can’t have that fuckin’ monstrosity inside’a’ya. But I’m not helpin’ you, and I definitely ain’t helpin’ it. So just…get! I’ll be there, when the moment’s righ’. ‘Till then, I don’t wanna see yer, ugly, lyin’ face!” My accent's always stronger when I'm pissed.

Except, she isn't ugly. She was the most beautiful thing I’d ever seen. Still is.

“That’s not what I want, but it’s all I can ask.”

“Yer askin’ a mite more than ya should already, Darlin’.” We stared at each other a long moment. I couldn’t tell her to leave again; was I ever mad though.

Eventually, she left of her own accord. I should’ve just fucking strangled her — would have been the end of this whole nightmare from the beginning. But for all my high, and mighty talking I couldn’t — no wouldn’t — do it. Not ever. From there on it was simple. She would run and she
would hide the child. And I, well I would slip into a darkness that gripped me and that I can't fucking shake.

Was a long time ago; least it seems so, now. The fucking kid should be close to manhood on Earth, but here, he ain’t even close. Wonder if the kid even knows his own birthday? There wasn’t time for trivial pieces of information like that, not as Dess saw it. She was busy trying to keep him free of his Daddy’s clutches.

So why give him back now?

Fucked if I know. Fucked if I know anything anymore. But don't give a flying fuck one way or the other—I'm not involving myself.

I’d long ago ceased to care. I made my choices and I chose to live my existence how I should have in the first place: As a Ryker. A mindless one at that. It was thinking that got me in trouble in the first place.

“I want to come, Major,” Ridomie says. Fucking Ridomie. I cuff him hard across the face. I’m in no mood to deal with him, and he fucking knows better. He also knows better than to rub the red hand print on his face.

“You’re not goin’ nowhere. And is that how you’re suppose’t’talk to me?”

“No, sir. But—"

“But nothin’. Now you can spend yer time cleanin’ this place from top to bottom, and you are here by suspended from yer other duties fer the week while you complete this task.”

“This place? As in Ryker Corp.? C’mon Major, I’m sorry, sir.”

“Yeah as in Ryker Corp. Ain’t yer hearin’ right? And if it takes you any less than a week you can do it again until the week is served.”

He mutters something under his breath, which should be a curse, but I know it can’t be ‘cause Ridomie’s mouth is cleaner than a bar of soap. He has some distorted sense of morals, and even though my mouth is the complete opposite, I admire him for it.

I don’t admire clones, really, but I admire Ridomie. In fact, I’ll never have a son, but if I did he could stand to be a little like Ridomie.

Ridomie was from a special batch of clones.

Ridomie looks like he's going through his own personal turmoil because of the punishment I issued. He hates cleaning more than he hates being beat. Good. Will teach him not to fuck with me.

But he still holds a title around here, and there are still things for him to be told; things he needs to know.

Dess can leave a particular time, and come back the same time she left if she wants—she's that good at running and travelling. I don’t have quite that much control over my abilities.

She mastered it. Where she’d come from, everyone was like us (Dess and I).

I, on the other hand, am in the infancy of these genetics. But being I had to keep my abilities a secret, I couldn’t tell Dess neither. I learned what I could by watching her, and asking her, but
without having her show me certain aspects of my gifts I was left not knowing everything.

Someone had to know and I picked the only person in all the worlds I knew I could trust: Ridomie.

“When I get back, from where I’m goin’, I need you to tell me how many days I’ve been gone, immediately. Just say a number, soon as you see me.”

He looks confused, but knows better than to question me, after I’ve just punished his ass. He nods.

“I’m taking three men with me, you’ll be short, but considering yer suspended from duty fer now, you won’t need’em right away. If I’m still gone once you’ve served yer sentence carry on as you would, take the missing three from a new batch.”

“A new batch, sir? But won’t they be too, young?”

“Yeah. But it’ll only be temporary.”

I give him a meaningful look, and he nods again. “I’ll look out for them, sir.”

“Least it means you’ll get a visit down to see Miss Taggart,” I say to him suggestively. I know he still likes to visit her.

He looks scandalized, Ridomie has a strange sense of morals, for a clone. “She’s my Mother!”

“Only in a manner of speaking, but she’s not yer Mother Ridomie.”

It’s written all over his face, he wants to disagree with me, but he won’t. I’m a Ryker. He does give a small word of protest he only would to me. “But she raised me.”

“Yeah, so think of her like yer older sister’s best friend who babysat you, and you think is hot, and would like to fuck.” Because I don’t really talk to clones, like I do Ridomie, I still forget that he’s not really familiar with the concept of sisters, or even babysitters. Clones don’t know much outside of Ryker Corp, outside of war.

Giving up in arguing the semantics of his relations to Miss Taggart he replies, “I’m not interested in women, sir.” He looks at the ground like he’s ashamed, though I don’t know why he would be. Not a clone in Ryker Corp could say he hadn’t been with another man. It was expected they’d have relations with one another, encouraged in fact.

“You don’t have to be interested in women. All right then, Miss Taggart’s virtue is safe, from you anyway.” Something’s off about Ridomie though, and it has nothing to do with his ‘mother.’ I study him a moment, trying to figure it out, but another question comes to mind. “Why were you, so hell bent on comin’ with me, anyway?”

His eyes give him away, and ‘cause he knows I’ll skin him for lying he answers truthfully. “I just want to see him, sir.”

Figures. Bet rumor of the prodigal Ryker returning spread through the flock like fire and they’re all excited to get a first look. “You’ll get to see him soon enough. Yer gonna help me train him.” I can’t help but chuckle. All the clones know about Derco’s mythical first son. He’s talked about, a lot, which Derco did in on purpose, for just this instance, he's always been certain his son would return; he wanted to ensure all of Ryker Corp. would be in awe of him.

“G’on now. Get outta here before I add to yer sentence,” I say lighthearted, and that’s when I notice: The kid’s smiling.
Ridomie doesn’t smile much. Takes after me that way I suppose. All Ryker clones are called that on account they are made from Ryker DNA. Is fucking creepy as hell, but true nonetheless, that each have traits inherited from my father’s DNA.

Understand, they're not my sons, or Derek's sons or even my father's sons. That's a bit of a puzzle to wrap your head around, but they're not. The genealogy is still too far removed and it somehow results in a hair color that's light brown and sometimes dark brown in color, but never Ryker blonde.

So at times I can see some of my Ryker traits come through.

But anyway, he's smiling, and I know it has nothing to do with anything except the newest family addition I’ll be bringing home. Watching Ridomie leave, I wonder just what the fuck he knows that I don’t, and not for the first time I wonder just what the fuck is going on.
One of These Things is Not Like the Other

Don’t look at me like I’m a fucking Orc. I don’t know why I’m like this. Can’t ask my mama either. Haven’t seen that woman since I was thirteen. She used to come, often. Often enough I knew to expect her at some point. But she’s stopped coming. She’s given up on me.

Do I really believe that? No. It's just easier than considering the alternative. I’d rather think her still out there, somewhere than not. That's dead in case you're confused.

Either way, I’ve stopped expecting her.

Behind me, the door to the restroom opens. Who the fuck is coming in here when I’m here? I say as much to the poor bastard who is about to become a punching bag. I don’t need much more of an excuse than that, hell, I don’t need an excuse period. Fact: I try to look for reasons not to punch. “Get the fuck outta here,” I growl it to the sink not turning around.

I should have. I should have turned around. What happened to looking everywhere all at once?

My mama would be hitting me upside the head about now.

The person grabs my leg, my face hits the fucking sink – smashes the fucking sink, face is fine (He's gonna pay for that shit, not me) and drags me out of the restroom, and through the pub like I’m a fucking rag doll. What the fuck is going on? No one can grab me like that, drag me. I don't react still in shock that anyone’s able to drag me at all.

My heart’s racing, I think I have serious fucking trouble here. There's only one kind of person whole could do this that I know of.

Mama's voice rings in me head. “Don’t let them get a hold of you, baby. If you do, it's over.” ‘Cause it has to be, has to be one of those things – the things that look human, but aren’t human.

Just like me.

And now one has hold of my fucking foot.

Desperately I dig my fingers into the wood floor trying to get hold of something, but the wood is old, and I’m made of something akin to concrete. There’s nothing but a trail of claw marks in my wake.

I don’t bother screaming for help. Not ‘cause I’m too proud. Well I mean….okay, I am too proud, but at the moment I wouldn’t mind a little pitching in. No, I don't call for anyone, ‘cause that would be signing of their death certificate.

The person that has hold of my foot, could only still have hold of it, if he was one of the ones who hunt me.

The ones in black that fall from the sky.

I can’t fucking see him yet, but I know it has to be a him—never seen a female man in black. Mama told me it’s because they don't make women, whatever that fucking means. There was never time for her to elaborate.

No one in the pub raises a finger to help me. Doubt they would even if I asked, not only am I not
particularly liked, but they're the kind that wouldn't help me if they did. They barely grant us a

gaze long enough to light a match. Fucking Bar keep even nods to me, like I've casually decided to
leave, like I'm not being dragged.

Asshole.

Giving up on my brilliant idea to grab onto something, I spin myself around, so I can face the
fucker face, the steel cold man in black.

Least I'm successful in that and I that I'm right about one thing: It's a he, but he's not in black, or
not exactly. He's got strange, green army-type fatigues, like I've never seen before, on Earth, or on
the black dudes that want me. He's different in other ways too, ways I can't articulate just yet,
'cause he looks similar, but I know sure as I know my name, buddy's not the same as the others.

I know he's gotta be one of them, though, since he's able to drag me—he another version, or
something? Skyfaller two point oh, or something? Don't fucking know, but I think I might be
screwed—especially if he's got buddies. I can take one easily, but they (whoever's sending them,
my mama didn't think it imperative to tell me) know that and always send at least ten of the
bastards.

Another thing that's different, this guy doesn't seem to know me, to be prepared for the likes of me.
For instance, he should be looking at me, keeping me in his sights. And he's not. Arrogant Fucker
assuming he's got me beat. I haven't even done anything yet.

He'll be sorry when I do.

Maybe this one's a mistake, like the puppy born with three legs. Either way, I hope he had his fun,
taking me by surprise like that, because he's a dead man walking. It's the last time he'll take me, or
anyone else by surprise like that.

I sit up, and bend as far in half as I can while being dragged reaching for his wrist wrapped
securely around my foot. This guy's stupid, and cocky, and he's about to pay for those mistakes.
I'm able to get hold of his wrist, and pull.

He turns around then, all right, he turns around fast, falling on his ass. It's eerie how much he
resembles the ones who hunt me, but he just isn't. I'm not stupid though, I know this means I've just
got more assholes who want me—why do people fucking want me?

Just because I know he's not the same as the jerks my mama and I fought in the past, doesn't
prevent me from treating this situation the same. It's all I know. I give him time to stand up as I
look around to see if there are any others. Fuck this is eerie, I see nothing. What the hell is going
on? There's just this one lone asshole, who thinks he can fucking drag me out of a bar by my foot
to God knows where.

And now he's mine.

I happy. If there's just one, I can have the brawl of my dreams right now. When Mama and I fight,
we don't have time to play, it's kill or be killed, so we just get the job done. But if he's all alone, I
want to have some fun.

I have enough smarts not to let me guard down, I'm still expecting his cavalry to show up. "Who
the fuck are you, other than a dead man?"

He looks up at me with dark eyes, not green eyes like the others, and not paying attention to a word
I'm saying to him. It's like he's a heat-seeking missile, one completely intent on destroying me
with no personality and no emotion. Well that is like them.

I'm doing like I'm supposed to, looking everywhere all at once and I can't help the excited, happy bubble of hope I feel that maybe Mama's coming, maybe I'll get to see her and know she's not dead.

But Mama's nowhere to be seen.

Sure she hadn't been here in years, but neither had they. Usually when they showed up, so did she. Fact, she usually showed up well before them, or at least in pretty close to.

"Just kill Baby. Don't think. Thinkin' gets you dead," she had told me—tried it into my fucking head since I can remember. That's what I'm thinking when he starts moving, in a tactical way, not coming directly at me, him circling me while I circle him. C'mon, if you're not going to talk, just lunge at me, so I have an excuse to finish this.

I don't want to go first. I want information more than I want to kill him, so I'll wait and only make a move if he forces my hand. If I execute him without trying hard enough for the information I seek, I'll regret it later. I fucking hate regret.

"Where did you come from?" I try again, though I'm beginning to get the picture he's not going to say anything to me. This is pointless, but I can't help but keep it up and I know I'm just prolonging the inevitable.

The killing part. I don't like to kill anymore than the next person. I might like punching, but not killing. Killing's different.

"Look, pal, I don't want to have to kill you, but I will if I need to. Just answer my questions."

You know what he does? He fucking smiles at me. Smiles like he's crazy, like he's more than happy to go down fighting. Like he would die happy, just for getting the chance to fight me. I'm able to get a better look at him now that I'm not being dragged. I've never looked too carefully at the men my mama and I fought before – never had the time, really. Was too distracted with saving my mama, and I.

I get time to really see his eyes. Sure they're cold and calculating, like anyone who's about to engage in hand to hand, but there's softness in them, like he is a person and not just a cold blooded killer. That's the biggest difference between him and them and it's the only difference I get time to see, before I see the dirt move before he does and now, this fella is all mine.

He moves toward me as I predict and I grab his lapels and knock his feet out from under him. "C'mon, get up. You making this easy on purpose?"

I get what I want, a reaction. I've just pissed him off. Oops. I laugh. Seriously, did they send me the runt? This guy isn't even worth my time. "How about go home and come back with more if you're just going to dick around dick?"

He grits his teeth and flexes his broad shoulder girdle and makes another attempt. This time he's faster and gets hold of my jacket because yeah, I'm being an arrogant shithead, but whoa dude, you do not touch my fucking leather. "I'm going to kill you slowly—forget snapping your neck, I'm going to make sure you feel the pain of dying." It's a bit overkill, I know, but understand I'm kind of pissed at these assholes. They've ruined my fucking life, made it so I can't even be with Mama, anything they do is bound to make me want to hurt them.

I grab his wrist and in one sharp twist, I break his arm, he gives a short, but painful cry of pain. "Don't touch my jacket."
"Yes, sir? That fucking distracts me and apparently breaking his arm isn't the big deal I thought it was going to be. He doesn't even look mad about that, fact, he was more enraged over me suggesting he wasn't fighting good enough. He rams me this time, his big fucking shoulder clips my jaw, the one that's too straight anyway and god, I feel alive.

It hurts, so much, and my cock hardens loving it. I've never felt this turned on in all my life. This. This is what I've been missing. Too bad this guy wants to kill me, we could really have something. I'm a hair's breath from, 'take me to your leader,' but I can't. Can't let my fucking cock rule me more than it already does.

I gotta know though, gotta see what it would feel like. I'm pretty sure no one else is coming—and am actually the tiniest bit glad Mama's one of those people not coming, because if she saw what I'm about to do, she'd spank my ass for sure, I don't think, 'but I'm eighteen' would get me out of that one. Mama never had time for disobedience, that's something that would get us killed.

Recovering quickly, I grab him, fist my hand into his hair and crush our lips together. This is probably the dumbest thing I've ever fucking done—it's down right reckless. I've just given him my head on a fucking platter to snap if he likes, but I dunno, I think it's a lot to do with my mama not coming. My life's been about living 'till the next one of those moments, but now that's over. She's never coming back, but before I go home, turn on some Adel and bawl my eyes out over it, I'm going to kiss the hell out of this guy.

His hands do go to my hair and for some reason, I feel like a celebrity. It's like he just wants to touch it, so he can run his fanboy ass back to his friends and tell them all he's touched my fucking hair. And he's kissing me back, but not in the rough, dominant way I'm kissing him, he's submissive, pliant, he's letting me kiss him and if his pants are anything to go by, he fucking likes it.

But how do you enjoy anything with your arm fucking broken?

I pull away and it breaks his fanboy heart. Okay, this is not one of the ones from before, I know that now. There's just no way. A bit of hope sparks—maybe that's why Mama didn't come. She knew this one little rebel dick would be no match for me; maybe she's not dead.

"You like that? You more of that?"

"Y-yes, sir, but sir, you have to come with me."

"So now you fucking speak. That's all it took? You just needed some blood in your dick first and now it's fucking tea and fucking scones with cream?"

"I-I don't understand sir."

"Nevermind. You're coming with me and don't think just because I'm driving you can try anything. In fact, give me your other arm."

"Please, I swear I won't touch you, unless you want me to," he says suggestively.

"Look, we can do this the easy way, or the hard way. Both ways end with your other arm broken." If I could just tie him up, I would, but there's no substance on Earth strong enough to hold me, so I think it's safe to assume, nothing can hold him.

He takes a deep breath and gives me his arm, just like fucking that. I can't believe it—he's going to
let me break his arm and I do. The cry of pain equals before, but it's short and he seems to have mastered the art of hiding his pain. That's...that's kinda fucked up actually.

He follows me to my bike and I hop on, he does the same, with only a little difficulty, his useless arms hanging from his shoulders.

Something's fucked up in fucksville—that's all I know as I drive down the highway with this douche on my bike. And I'm fucking slow now since my bike's having trouble with the weight of us. I've more than just tweaked her engine, I've made her strong too, so she can hold the likes of me, but she's having trouble with the two of us.

The place I live isn't far, so I just hope to luck out and make it there without her falling to pieces. All the while I'm trying to figure things out.

Of course I'm thinking about Mama again, it's hard not to with this shit showing up on my doorstep and the memories I try to keep locked away, tumble forth like the rolling tide.

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A lullaby fills my senses with calm as she rocks me back and forth. We'd been traveling for days. About, three. I don’t want to say anything to ruin the moment or make her disappear, so I just remain quiet. She strokes my hair, and continues to sing as I breathe in her apple cider scent.

The sun is beginning to set, and we are in the middle of a wooded area.

It isn’t cold at all. In fact it’s, so warm, I want to take off my jacket, but I don’t want to move. Sweat pours down my face, and onto to her white tank top. She's hot too, but she keeps me close to her body like a second skin.

“Do I get to stay with you this time, Mama?” My voice is both sad and hopeful.

“Oh, sweetheart.” It’s her way of saying ‘no.’ She doesn’t like to say no. “For a little while. Two more days, okay?”

“Okay.” We get to be together for two days.

I don’t recognize the road we're travelling. It is like we're in a new world. The trees are larger than any I’d ever seen. The leaves are huge. Big enough to wrap my entire body in, like we've entered some freaky Jurassic Park. Even the bugs are strange. They’re all kinds of weird colors, and as big as my hands—we've had to eat a few and believe me it was just as fucking disgusting as it sounds.

There have been no people, not one.

I'm seven in this memory—least I think I am. My age has always been a guess, my birthday an estimate. I've gotten used to keeping track of things in terms of events instead of dates. I know it was shortly after the bridge incident at the mall. I honestly never cared where I was, as long as it was with her. I remember following along behind her and sometimes staring only at her, in awe, my one and only world.

We walk for a long time, and she shows me how to traverse the rough terrain. She expects me to do a lot of it by myself. I'm surprised to learn that I don't have any trouble doing as she expects. I'm able to climb over rocks, and even up mountain faces with ease. There are rocks in our path. Big ones. Some she pushes out of the way for us, some I help her with, and even a few smaller ones she has me move all by myself.
I'm amazed at what I can do, but don't understand how I'm able to.

“How come I’m so strong Mama?” It's not the first time I’m asking.

“Because you’re special, Baby.”

I pout. Mamas’ always say that to their little boys. I know she's hiding what I really am. I quicken my pace, jumping over a few rocks, and passing by a few weird looking animals as I go.

I'm a bit pissed at her for not telling me what I want, no, need to know. She let's me move ahead of her, knowing she can easily catch up with me whenever she wants, letting me have my space for a bit.

When we stop to eat, she smiles amused over my behavior. I get a gentle lecture. “Come on, baby. We don’t see each other like this often. You going to make your anger at not getting what you want more important than us?”

I sit on a tall rock to make myself feel bigger. “No,” I whine, but she doesn't believe me.

She stops what she's doing, and sits below me. I can still recall every detail of her beautiful face.

“Does it matter?”

“Yes.” I cross my arms.

“Why?”

“Because, it will help me.”

“Help you how?”

“To know who I am.”

“If I tell you who you are, then that would be my definition, not yours.” She moves closer and puts her hand over my heart. “Who you are is in here. Your essence, your energy, your soul – or whatever you want to call it. Abilities don’t define you. Yes they are important. They can help you, but you decide what you do with them. Your essence decides. The having of them means nothing.”

I'm too young to understand what she's saying, so she tries again. Her eyes flick down to my shoes, the ones with Spiderman crouched down the side.

“You see Spiderman?”

I nod, amazed she even knows who Spiderman is.

“He had special things he could do. Sticking to walls, shooting webs from his wrists, so he could swing from building to building. Right?”

“Yeah.” I'm trying to pay attention to her, but my all my little brain can thing is: Does he even exist where she comes from? Maybe he's real? Maybe she knows him? My mama is strong like Spiderman — maybe they come from the same place…

“But he could have done bad things instead of good things, right? Tie people up in his webs. Sneak up buildings and steal things from them? Huh?”

“No! Spiderman would never do bad things! Spiderman is a good guy!”
“I know he is baby, but do you think it was his special powers that made him good or bad, or his choices?”

I think about it, and kind of get what she's trying to teach me. I'm still too young to fully grasp the concept, but I did get it later.

I have to ask her though, I have another reason I want to know. “But Mama, I’m a freak, I'm not like everyone else.” I look down at my feet.

She plucks me off the rock and holds me tight to her chest. “Do you think that I’m a freak?”

“No.” That's stupid. My mama is brave and amazing. My mama is a super hero.

“Then you aren’t either.”

At the end of our time together, that's all I got. I didn't know anything beyond that they want me.

It was always the same: They’d fall from the sky. At first only a few were sent. One, sometimes two, or even four men dressed from head to toe in black. But then more began appearing, and if I didn’t know any better, I’d say it coincided with both my growing up—getting stronger—and the fact that they’d soon learned my mama could easily kick the asses of just a few guys.

But during that trip and for the first time ten men appeared.

The air is warm and thick. Sweat pours down my face as the ten men surround Mama and I. The leaves are twice as big as me, and so are the men in black, but I feel stronger and bigger than all of them.

“Don’t wait for them to come to you, Baby,” Mama whispers from behind me. “Look everywhere, all at once. Watch for detail that only you can see. Predict what they’ll do.”

It's a crash course, but it would have to do. She didn't expect this.

I'm not scared. I'm looking forward to tearing anyone apart that dares to lay a finger on my mama. I take heart in what Mama had said; I looked everywhere, all at once. I swear, I see the grain of sand beneath the foot of the one to her right move the fraction of a fraction of a millimeter, and I know, his foot is about to move.

More practiced, and well versed in the fighting of these demons; she doesn’t wait – just like she’d explained – she explodes. It's amazing to watch Mama go into battle.

She grabs one without another thought, and begins to swing him by his shoulders like a ball attached to a string. Instinctively, I move with her, circling in order to avoid the man’s legs and suffer the same fate of his counterparts.

Each of them looks alike. Each of them with dark hair atop smooth scalps, each of them in a black shirt that bulges in all the right places, but washboard flat in the front. The black shirt tucks neatly into strange black fatigues, showcasing a trim waistline, and the fatigues puff out, just a little, over the tops of their boots.

They look strong and immovable, but as Mama swings her human battering ram, each of them fall
like bowling pins, scattering throughout the strange forest; it effectively splits them up.

I know what she had done. It would have been much harder for us to take all ten on at once, but scattered like they are now, we could encounter them one, or two at a time.

I note her technique.

“Get the boy!” one shouts frantic, and I know that one will go after my mama.

The one that comes after me, is lightening fast – like my mama. I’ve never seen anyone run as fast as her before—not even close, but I think this guy could do a decent job. As fast as I know he’s moving, everything seems to slow down for me. I know I have all the time in the world.

“Don’t let them grab you—whatever you do—else they’ll have you,” Mama’s voice rings in my head.

I lunge at him, and as small as I am, you’d think he would have laughed in my face. Instead I see fear in his eyes. It stops me for the briefest of moments — till I hear my mama scream my name; I kick into action…
When my mama would come take me, we were always short on time and now, I feel the weight of time closing in on me like I need to get the fuck outta here, now. I don't know where I'm going to go, or what I'm going to do, but I'm going to use buddy boy on the back of my bike to help me. It's not good, but it's the only fucking plan I've got.

I still don't trust that there aren't more lurking. I don't know how it works; only she knew that. Only one thing I can know for certain: If one of those men have shown up before my mama she be dead. I do think the eventuality is less likely, now that I know this dude isn't like the others, but who knows—he could be the one that got away, maybe Mama's somewhere fighting a hoard of them?

I can't think about that right now though. If she has died, I know it was saving my ass, and my ass isn't going to become a sitting duck for these assholes, especially not if my mama sacrificed herself for me.

Most of the time I left with the clothes I wore. Sometimes I was able to grab a toy when my mama would come get me, sometimes not.

Even a beloved toy I might have taken with me on one getaway, I might have to relinquish on another run. Eventually, I learned not to have attachments to stuff — or to people. I would bring nothing with me, not even memories.

Time was what we raced against, like we could beat it. My mama, always only minutes ahead of their clock.

There was one item, however, that I've always managed to keep; the watch Mama had given me when I was little. For a while, I’d worn it all the time. Once, a foster guardian tried to take it off, so she could bathe me. I screamed bloody murder ’till she left it. I showed her that it was already broken, and no more harm could come to it by wearing it in the tub.

I used to think that it would be my proof, the watch I mean, to prove Mama existed, but in the end I realized I kept it, so I could prove Mama's existence to myself.

The band is circular, like all regular watches, but that’s where the similarities end. The band doesn't clip, or latch through a hole, or even slide on by way of stretchable elastic. Instead, there's and opening so that it can slide onto my wrist. Once it's on, the two ends of the opening joined together, making the band become one seamless loop.

The face is a rectangle shape, and made of what I can only describe as clear, opaque glass, 'cept I know it can't be glass—glass is supposed to break, or at least streak and get dirty, this stuff doesn't. The numbers, when there are numbers, shine like a hologram, almost like they're gonna jump off the surface. But the numbers don't work for me. Ever.

It's a stupid broken watch, a useless memento of Mama that I don't need, but dammit, I'm driving back to the house to get it. Because as much I don't want to build attachments to things, to people, every now and again, and attachment creeps up and there are at least five them in this house that if I'm honest are home, even if I know they won't be, so I can say goodbye.

Home is a strong word. It’s more accurately described as the place I rest my head on occasion, anyway, since I hadn’t yet reached the age of majority, I'm eighteen, at least that's what I tell
people. It's the most fucked up version of a home for boys you've ever seen. Not the bad version of课题 up, it's just not conventional. The idea with a home for boys is, you turn twenty-one, you
leave, plain and simple, but some like it here so much, they stay on and help. At the moment, we
don't even have any younger boys we're looking after, it's just us older men and boys and David,
who runs the place.

Still it's probably all around smarter if I quietly slip inside, grab what I need and go. I turn my bike
off at the gates. "Do I have to break your legs too, or are you going to come with me quietly?"

"I'll obey you, sir."

I don't trust him, if anything, his obedience makes me trust him less, but unless I want to kill him,
he's got to come with me. We walk up to the door and I slide my key inside, calling out to check if
anyone's home—they're not. I nod for him to follow me up to my room.

It's dark now, the sun gone in between the time I kicked this guy's ass and the drive here. Most of
the house likes to party and that's where they are now, David's away visiting a family member. It's
not weird that I'm not with the guys from the house. Let's just say I told them all to go fuck
themselves and leave it at that for now. I want to think about them as much as I want to think about
Mama.

Once in my room, I tip-toe to my closet reaching up into the far recesses of the top shelf pulling out
a pristine looking granola bar box. I take it out of the box, fingering its resplendent band. I stare at
the face, and will it to send me a message, or a clue of what to do, or at least start to fucking work,
and transport me to some place of safety

It doesn't.

I put the box back and snap the watch home on my left wrist where it belongs. The band locks in
place sizing itself to my wrist’s circumference, and closing at the juncture making the loop
seamless. It remains lifeless as always, and I stare at it dumbfounded. I reason that if it still has the
ability to size itself then it can’t possibly be broken, but that's all it can fucking do. I should just get
rid of it.

Besides, I don't need a watch to tell me that the lost time that has been running to find me all my
life is ever closer. I can feel it as if time is a part of me, running through my veins.

I take nothing else; I'll leave with the shirt on my back as usual, which includes my leather jacket of
of course, another gift from Mama. It's old and worn and too big, but she left it for me last year. I
never saw her, but it was wrapped around me one morning and I knew it had to be from her.

I’ll even leave my bike. It’s slower than them anyways and me for that matter. Where the fuck am
I going to go though? I can’t just run from these people. My mama had often ‘zapped’ us to strange
places before she would leave me at others. I had no idea how she did it, or if I could do it. Maybe
I'll have to try.

I’ll have to leave that decision for another day of course, Mama's never taught me that particular
skill of hers. For now, I just need to get away from this house.

I turn to jump out the window this time assuming buddy boy can do it too, but I freeze when I see
who's sitting on my bed.

He didn’t come upon me like the rest of them always do. He sat behind me — on the bed — even
waiting for me to walk past him back to the window not worried about me escaping him in the
least. I know this, because I can feel his air of confidence. He is power. He is force. He doesn’t care that I am what I fucking am, and he’s not afraid of my powers, ‘cause he’s fucking confident in the fact that he exceeds them.

*His* eyes glowed the fierce glowing green I remember and I am scared, more scared than I've been in my whole life.

He says something, my name (he knows my fucking name) low and careful. The words act like a hypnotist's cue: Wide-awake.

And just like that I wake up into my life.
Just had to get one more in today, so you could see some spanking! Hooray spanking! Hooray bratty Ryker!

WARNING: This is a non-consensual spanking, but think parent to kid. I promise it does not go past disciplinary bounds. And Ryker really does fucking deserve it.

“Going somewhere, Briggland?” The sound of my name is the word that connects me with him. No one here knows my full name. They know me as Brigg. But he knows my full name, probably knows more about me than I do, and I feel like I’ve found them. Like I’ve found the other knives.

For a long while now, I’ve had this fucked up thought running round in my head. My mama, placing me in these different times, these different places, left me feeling like a piece of a puzzle from another puzzle. I closely resemble puzzle A, but I belong to puzzle B, so you've got to smash me into place.

More like as if I was a knife placed in a drawer of spoons. Even a knife in fork drawer, is closer than a knife with spoons, but no, I'm as far apart from the spoons as I can get and it's always been explicitly, obvious to all of the spoons that I don't belong with them.

They tolerate me, but we agree on something: I don’t think I should be there, and they don’t think I should be here. All the while thinking, knowing that this isn't my real life, that I was just biding time ’till my real one came to get me and now here he is.

My leather creaks as I turn immediately, and watch the inhuman silhouette. He’s fucking studying me. I can’t quite make out all of his details in the dark, but my eyes can see well enough to make out the familial resemblance. There’s no doubt in my mind: This man and I are related and he’s as dangerous as a fucking pack of wolves.

I’m the damn rabbit.

Like a rabbit though, I’m territorial as fuck and he’s in my fucking house. It doesn’t help that I’m a tad bit emotional, and fucking fed up with the disruptions my life has been experiencing in the past twenty-four hours.

I’m quiet, but the yelling is implied. “Where the fuck is my, mama?” I didn’t know I was going to ask the question until I asked it. As much as I was trying to bury that thought, apparently it’s in the forefront of my mind.

I can easily see his eyes narrow at me — even in the dark — and well, fuck, I’ve pissed him off. A shiver works its way through me as he stands up, slow, calculated, analyzing his prey — me.

“Swear at me again, boy, and I’ll be draggin’ you back home by your slovenly kept hair.” The gruff southern canter of his accent seems, familiar. And there’s no mistaking the finality of his words.

I swallow.
And shiver again. There’s no denying how fucking scary this guy is. He’s nothing like the others that have been sent – not at all.

I merely think about running, yet I didn’t think I’d moved a bit—unless maybe he can sense the air moving with attempt—but he seems to know what I’m about to do before I’ve even made to do it. Can he read my mind?

“Move, and it’ll be the same. Stay. Right. There. You will be comin’ with us,” he speaks quiet, and lethal, a talent of his own making.

This man is frightening, I find it hard to breathe with him looking at me like that, but somehow I manage. Who exactly is the ‘us’ he speaks of? I don’t see anyone but him as I look around again, but I don't doubt my new friend came with this guy.

In answer to my silent question, two men pour into the window out of nowhere. They look a lot like buddy, even dressed like him in the strange green fatigues and black shirts—close to the men who usually hunt me, but not the same. They stand beside each other, silent and at attention, waiting for further commands.

The situation has become more than I can manage. I might be able to take these guys, I should have killed the other one (bringing him with me was stupid) but I'll never be able to take him, the man who looks like me.

This is it then. The end of this long, mundane dream I’d existed in. I know I'm going with him. I want to. My mama’s dead, and I’m sure of it now. Intrinsically, I know if this guy's coming to get me, all hope is lost and she's gone. If she is, I’d rather die a knife amongst knives. Even if he's taking me to my death, I want to go with him.

“I’ll go with you,” I tell him not even bothering to put up a fight. That’s your hero folks… Pathetic little man-child who can’t live without his mama…Waving the white flag of defeat.

The man moves into the scant light offered by the moon looking at me as if I've lost it, I have to catch my breath. Atop his head, shimmers the same shade of golden blonde hair, like mine — it's even the same length just a different style. It's kind of freaky looking with the one side of his head shaved completely bald, and the other graced with a tumble of blonde jetting off to the left side of his head, and falling over his shoulder. Yeah, it actually reaches his shoulder, making him look like some sort of war Elf from Lord of the Rings.

His hair doesn’t seem any better than mine, making me wonder why the fuck he’d called me slovenly. Yeah, it looks perfectly brushed, but so is mine, I'm assuming he's one of those proper types that thinks long hair is for punk rockers and metalheads, but he looks more like the metalhead than I do. He doesn't make any fucking sense.

Huh. Probably just doesn’t like me. No surprise there. No doubt he's an authority figure and authority and me have never gotten along so well.

His brows have a razor sharp wingspan, and swoop over his eyes just like mine. Eyes that are the same as mine in every way — except their color. His glower a fierce malachite. His cheekbones, also prominent like mine, and his nose every bit as harsh, and vicious. His jaw looking like it had been carved from the very stone mine had been. The similarities make my breath catch again and my body tingle on the verge of an exciting, yet terrifying discovery.

“Yer gonna come with me willingly? Are you fuckin’ stupid? Guess I should expect as much, you didn't kill him,” he says nodding toward broken arms guy. "And you didn't even look around the
room before you entered it."

"You want me to fight you?" I ask.

"No. I just expected someone else. Not a dumb kid. You got the lippy part right."

"Dumb? I think it's dumb to enter a battle you can't win. I can't beat you." I leave out the other stuff, 'cause yeah, it was pretty dumb to do both of those things. I'm not thinking straight.

"True." His eyes are bewildered, like he’s seeing things he hadn’t expected and trying to figure me out. “Shouldn’t you, ya know, at least want to die trying?”

I shrug. “Doesn’t seem to be much point to that. There’s always hope you’re not intent on killing me, I could get away later.” I smile at him, cocky-like.

He shakes his head. “Yer not yer Daddy’s boy, I’ll tell you that.”

Daddy?

In that moment, I realize my unconscious thought he was my father. We look a lot alike. I look more like him than I do my mama.

It’s hard to fathom there could be someone else out there I look more like than him. Then again, kids don’t always look exactly like their parents. I look almost nothing like my mama.

I've got to be related to him though. Maybe he's an uncle? I squint my eyes at him. “Whose boy am I then?”

He sets his hunter’s gaze on me not at all happy with my question, and from the looks of it I’m not going to find out just yet. “Figures she wouldn’t tell you. Dumb Bitch. You’ll find out soon enough.”

Wait. Was he fucking referring to my mama? I should be pissed about the way he's talking about her and I am, but there are more important matters to tend to at present. “You know what happened to my mama?”

He doesn’t answer, but yeah he fucking does know. I can see it in his eyes when I mention her name.

“Enough damned questions. We’re leavin’. Now. Let's go men, out the window." The two men who had just joined this party, obey immediately, but the guy who came with me remains where he is. "Brodix. Can't you hear me from over there? I said let's go.”

"Yes, sir. Sir?"

"What now?"

"My arms are broken, sir."

"Fuck. Did you do that?" he asks looking to me.

"So what if I did?"

"You lippy little shithead, least you did something right."

I don't get why, he's calling me names and being a fucking douche, but I like getting praise from
the man. It inflates me a bit. There's something about him beyond his caustic language and brusque demeanor that's...good. I can feel it. I have made a lot of stupid choices in the past few hours, but this is a smart one.

"Okay, Brodix, on the bed. You're not going to be able to run fast enough with broken arms." He obeys instantly.

"Wait! What are you going to do to him?" For some reason I'm thinking lame horse and shotgun.

"You're worried about him now? after breakin' his fuckin' arms? I don't get you kid."

"I only broke them because I had to, you're not gonna kill him are you?"

"It ain't your business. Get out the damn window."

"No. No way." I'm brazen enough to be defiant, but I'm watching my language; I don't doubt this guy's the follow through kinda guy. I've never had that in my life. It's usually just me, doing whatever the fuck I want. Except with Mama. She says something, I fucking listen and obey.

"I'm not in the mood for arguin'," he mumbles as he pulls something out of his pocket. It's a needle filled with a strange, green liquid that almost glows and reminds me of kryptonite. I don't say anything and just watch. I think if this guy was intent on killing, uh, Brodix? He'd of done so by now.

Now that I'm looking at him, at Brodix, I can see that he's actually in a lot of pain. He doesn't look like your standard issue bad guy right now. He looks young and scared—but he's not scared of the monstrous man, if anything, his eyes are filled with respect.

Brodix lets the man, shoot him up with green liquid. His eyes close then open again, he looks at the man as if he'd just saved his life. "Thank you, Major Ryker, sir."

Major Ryker? Fuck. So we are related. "We shouldn't have to wait too long, and your arms should be okay. Can you make it out the window?"

Wow. He's almost, nice. Why's he such a dick to me?

"Yes, sir. I can do it," Brodix says like a dog wanting to please its master. Do they all look up to this guy? If they do, I think I'm fucked.

Brodix does make it out the window. I don't see his landing from where I am, but I assume the other guys help him somehow, 'cause how do you fucking land without the use of your arms?

"Okay, your turn, Ryker. Go."

I said I'd go, doesn't mean I'm going to go prettily. I want to know stuff too. "I will come with you, but I can make this a hell of a lot harder for you if you don't tell me where my mama is."

"You listen to me little boy. I like doin' things the hard way, 'specially when the hard way includes me draggin' you by that Ryker hair of yours. Yer goin' learn now that what the Major says, goes, and I say get yer ass out that fuckin' window, now."

I assumed 'Major' was just a title, but the way he says it, makes it seem more like an identity.

"Move." When I don't, he grabs me by the nape of my neck, and pushes me towards the window.

"I'm not fucking jumping. I can't jump from that high—I'll meet and leave out the door like a
normal person." I don't want to let on about my abilities even if I suspect that he already knows.

"Fine. You want to start out like this, I'm okay with that. Yer gonna to have a sore ass Ryker."

He drags me over to my bed and there's not a damn thing I can do about it. He's way stronger than me, I still throw kicks and punches and anything I can to get away, but it's no match and he's got me over his knee. Is he going to spank me? "What the hell dude? I'm not five."

He ignores me and tries to yank down my jeans, clearly having no concept of how they work. "How do these come off?"

"If you think I'm fucking helping you spank me, guess again you fucking pervert."

He stands me up and his eyes look like deep, dark pools of green lava. "I don't know what a pervert is, boy, but you have two seconds to pull those down before I add to what you have comin'."

Oh god. This is happening. I can't stop him. It's not like I haven't been spanked before and it's not like I don't go looking for pain, but I know that a spanking from this guy is likely going to hurt in a whole other way than pain like I'm used to experiencing.

I liked when Brodix hit me, I really did, but I had another kind of adrenaline pumping through me, this isn't going to be the same. "Okay, I'm sorry. I'll do it. I'll jump."

"You will and with a sore ass. I don't take kindly to Ryker brats thinkin' they can disobey my orders. Take'em down, now, 'cause I don't got the patience for whatever's holdin' those on yah. I'll just ripe'em off and you can make yer first entrance into Ryker Corp, half naked. Don't make any difference to me, kid."

I'm sure it fucking doesn't. Pissed off and embarrassed beyond belief, I obey him, 'cause I don't like the sound of any of that, but I like the sound of me half naked with a red ass least.

"Those too," he says toward my boxers.

"C'mon, really?"

He moves to just grab me and I hop back. "Okay, okay." I pull down my own underwear and really wish I'd just jumped out the fucking window.

He pulls me over his lap, my bare ass right there for me to whack and holy shit, if I wanted pain, this is it because his hand can definitely inflict pain onto my bare ass. "Ow, okay. I get it. I'll listen to every fucking word you say." This is not the kind of pain I was looking for, I can feel my ass getting redder by the second and I definitely want him to stop.

"I seem to remember telling you to watch your language." I get more words of wisdom from his hand, to my ass.

"You swear more than I do!" I complain.

"Yer gonna to learn kid that sometimes there are people superior to you, you gotta treat with respect. I'm one of them. That's a perk of being the Major, I get more freedoms than you." All of this said while still spanking my ass, I'm actually starting to tear up.

"Swearing's like breathing to me, don't I get any passes on that one?"

"Try it and find out."
When my ass is surely fucking red, he stops and stands me up and I'm thankful it's over. "You deserve a helluva lot more than that, but we don't got time. Yer lucky Ryker."

"Lucky? My ass is throbbing," I say rubbing it a bit before I pull up my underwear and jeans.

He narrows his eyes at me. "Oh, c'mon. Ass isn't a swear word, is it?"

"My mama'd say it is. You're lucky she's not here. Fine, you can say ass."

"Damn?"

"Acceptable."

"Bitch?"

"No. Now get out the damn window, now."

This time, I fucking listen—after I've wiped my fucking eyes and jump.

On the ground below, all three of the men are waiting for us, at attention. Of course they're waiting for the Major's orders, but something tells me (given the way Brodix was calling me 'sir') they'd likely stand at attention for me too. Apparently where we're going, I'm a somebody.

Least that's what I think, 'till one of them speaks. "He broke Brodix's arms, Major."

Tattletale. I shrug my shoulders. "I thought he was trying to kill me."

"Kill him? Major, Brodix would never try to kill a Ryker."

"Enough Ter-X. Yer boyfriend's fine. Ryker's still a Ryker. Would you complain if Derek broke Brodix's arms?"

Boyfriend? Did I kiss someone's boyfriend? He didn't seem to mind. Didn't even try to stop me.

"No, sir."

"Ryker gets the same respect as any Ryker. Off the training fields, you obey him, understand?"

They do? What are training fields?

"Yes, Major, sir," they all say in unison.

I put my hand up like I'm in class, but don't wait 'till I'm called upon before I speak. "Uh, question. Who is Derek? And why am I in charge?"

"You don't get to ask questions. You're in my fucking bad books Ryker. I didn't like you to begin with and as it turns out, you're worse than I thought."

Yeah, I fucking figured that one out on my own, thanks. "Will you at least tell me if we're related?"

The rest of the class looks shocked that I'd dare speak to the Major in such a manner. "I should think that's fuckin' obvious and I believe we just had a discussion about disrespect soldier."

There wasn't a lot of talking in that discussion. "I meant, how are we related, but yeah, yeah. I'll shut my trap."

"No. No fuckin' way. That's it Ryker, you can go back over my knee."
Whoa, wait, like in front of people? "What'd I do? I said yes."

He looks me over and abandons his advances on me, I think he fucking believes me and lucky for me, I think he's looking for reasons not to punish me right now. We really must be on a short time budget. "I can't fuckin' believe this," he grumbles to himself. "Can someone tell me the appropriate terms used when addressing your Major? Ter-X, please fuckin' inform Ryker before I throw him across the yard."

"Yes, sir, or yes, Major, sir."

In other words, he only likes to hear 'yes' to the things he fucking says with a 'sir' or 'Major' attached to it and from what I've heard from these guys, both are okay too. "So let's try that again, Ryker and see if you've inherited any Ryker brains at all."

It's really hard to keep my mouth shut, when he keeps insulting me like that, but I strangely want to prove to him that I'm not some sort of…Ryker defect. "Yes, sir," I cut him off before he has a chance to take me through the whole fucking rig-a-ma-roll.

I think he wants to strangle me. I've done as instructed, but in the cheekiest way possible. "You know what? Your father can deal with you."

He's calmer now somehow and when he is, I notice his accent's not as thick. He sounds a lot more like the other guys than some wild cowboy.

But suddenly, his fingers thread through my hair and latch onto my scalp, tugging at the base. "Keep up everyone and when I say, dive for me. Brodix, how are the arms?"

"They're okay. They work, just a little sore," he says waving them about, to show they're not broken.

"If you're sure, you can't be a second slower, you three are my fastest, but you're still too slow, with slow arms you'll never make it, soldier."

"I'll be okay, sir. But, Ridomie's faster than me, why didn't you pick him?"

"Partly because I need him around to run the damn place while I'm gone, but mostly because he's a fuckin' lippy punk, just like our new friend Ryker."

I can't help smiling and imagining this Ridomie guy, anyone who can annoy the Major as much as I seem to, deserves a medal, except with Ridomie, the Major's voice is fond and if the Major did affectionate, I'd call it that. I think the Major likes Ridomie. I don't think he'd leave just anyone behind to run what's his.

The Major tugs and I move with him like a puppet. Jesus fuck that hurts, but I grit my teeth and keep my mouth shut. "All right, Ryker. I hope you can run, 'cause yer keepin' up with me."

Without ceremony, he tightens his already too tight hold on my scalp, making true on his threats, and drags me — literally — as he begins to run.
Ridomie

Chapter Notes

Say goodbye to all of Mock's silly little errors, Hall295 has kindly offered to proof for me! So you can thank her for the smoother read. Thank you Hall, I so appreciate you.

Many have asked: "Mock, how do we pronounce Ridomie?" In my head it's RYE-DOME-E

Some of the names are weird, so anything you want to hear phonetically, just let me know.

Hope you enjoy this chapter. Ridomie is Mock's fave character of all time. Like, of any character she's ever written. Here's the first chapter we really get to see him.

The last time I'd seen the kid, he was three years old. It's funny how they grew, considering what they grew into. Unreasonably small, ‘till they reach maturity then they turn into fucking giants — like me.

I’d followed them — Dess and her baby. I knew when they'd be going, because it was my idea. Dess agreed, with that much of it, but refused to let me come with her and the kid. Told me it was too dangerous, and I shouldn’t be helping her no more anyways.

Since when did danger stop me? I've been in danger since the day I met her.

Was a good thing I’d followed her that night. She’d left him all alone, and he ended up by some sort of red, aluminum, tower. Instead of following her orders, he curled up beside it, then later on in front of it.

Stupid, kid. Lucky I couldn’t be seen by human eyes. Well, that isn’t exactly right. Human eyes can see me, if I'm moving slow enough, but I didn’t have plans on letting anyone see me that night.

I lifted him, gentle-like, into my arms. It was only for the instance between moments, but it was enough time for a zephyr of his baby scent to reach my nostrils. I felt an aching in my chest. A blasted connection. Likely, because he's of my blood; however small. I couldn’t help thinking how he was supposed to have been mine.

I laid him down on the step quick, but swift. He stirred a small bit. Only he would feel my ministrations. I touched a hand to his blonde Ryker hair, moving his fringe back. “Easy there lil’ solider, I’m here.” He couldn't hear me, his eyes stayed closed and asleep. I knocked on the door – all of this happening in the moment between moments. The spark of an instance; I couldn’t, wouldn’t be seen.

I waited nearby, but outta sight, making damn sure that boy’d been scooped away and safe inside before I’d go anywhere. When the humans took him inside, I felt like I could breathe again. He was just a little thing. Little Rykers can get cold, they're more susceptible to some of the ailments our human ancestors had been. I ran a long time after that, trying to out run the feeling that struck my core that night and everyday for a year. I had to fight the urge to go back and see him, check on
him, bring him back to Ryker Corp. It was hard to hate him, especially holding him in my arms like that. I wanted to protect him. Fucksakes, I wanted more than that, I wanted to *raise* him as my own, my blood being undeniably drawn to his.

*I never got that close to the boy again. It was already too close.*

I stayed away and my hatred grew back strong over any feelings I might have had, like a patch, overtrop a small rip. And all it fucking took was one look at him, even after all these years past, for that patch to be ripped off and the feelings to burst through.

It could have gone either way – meaning he looked to me like a mixture of Dess and Derco when he was little. Least that’s what I told myself. I wasn't expecting to see what I saw – almost walked out of the damn door. Seeing him, standing there, looking all vulnerable, looking like I did at his age was too much for me. 'Cause it wasn't just his physical looks making him look like me, it was the pain etched into his soul, the shitty life he's had to live molding him into what he is, like it did me, making us the same on the inside as well as the outside.

Because the kid does look just like me too. I can’t fucking deny it. The kid’s a fucking replica of me, almost a clone. Sure he’s got some growing to do, he’s got to fill out some, but someday he’ll be as big as me, most likely bigger. I was a runt too at his age and three times as lippy.

No doubt he *looks* like me, like a Ryker, but he doesn't act much like a Ryker.

He has some of our qualities to be sure. Our arrogant, cocky nature is a strongly inherited trait. Don’t think there’ll be any filtering out of that one — ‘specially since it's been key in our survival — but he’s different in other ways. Mostly in that he doesn’t know our ways and that makes him handle situations different. He fucking threw me for a loop saying he’d come with me. No Ryker backs down from a fight, ‘cause no Ryker believes he can lose a fight.

He was right of course – he would have lost, but it don’t mean a Ryker wouldn’t have tired.

Huh, he’s one of us, but not one of us. A Ryker with a different set of morals, a code of ethics he structured himself with no influence from anyone in my world, our world.

I can feel him writhing under my hand as I run. He’s smart enough to try to keep pace with me, so the tugging on his hair is minimal. Gotta say, he's damn fast and the bubble of pride is there before I want it to be. I might be his uncle, but it's not good enough — I was supposed to be his daddy. It's especially hard when he looks so much like me, fuck, even acts a helluva lot like me. Does bring to mind the question: why does he look so damn much like me? *He ain't supposed to — he's supposed to look like Derco.*

Stamps and Ter-X are keeping up, but as I predicted, Brodix is having a hard time. You may run with your feet and legs, but arms contribute to gait pattern and his can't fucking keep up. I waited long as I could, so his arms could heal, but it wasn't enough time and I can feel the gap between us and where we have to get pulled, getting further away and once it's too far, it will be impossible to catch. I'll have to wait for another one — I can find another one, but I don't want to fucking wait. Can't wait. It's easier by myself, with people; it's difficult. We have to be touching for them to be pulled with me. Course they can get pulled themselves, but they don’t know where it is they have to jump, can't *sense* it like I can. Don't know what speed they have to jump at.

Their DNA doesn’t have that seventh sense like mine does, like Dess’ and likely Briggland's. Only unlike Dess, I’ve not honed my ability. She can latch onto time and make it go where she wants, unlike me who just has to tag along to where it's going.
My 'technique' is a little knowledge mixed with a little guesswork, it's the best I have to offer. It makes getting back to the same time I left more difficult — I could return us a day from when we left or it could be a month, or even a year, but one thing I know, I can get us back.

Fucking Brodix still has to speed up and I'm about to go faster. When we reach a certain speed, I hear the familiar beep to my right. On Brigg's wrist is a watch I couldn't forget if I wanted to. The watch she used for so long, the one I thought she'd lost when all this time she'd just given it to my doppelganger. She doesn't need it anymore I suppose. Don't know that she needed it much in the first place. She most likely kept it for the sole purpose of giving it to him in the first place. It would help train him in her craft.

The craft of time.

I guess if we don't make this shuttle, we can use that to help us find another, but it will be the same problem. We still have to be fast enough, I might have to come back for Brodix another day, he's just not going to make it. 'Cept I only like to leave my brother alone at Ryker Corp. so long. That's another problem. This kid is creating a host of fucking problems for me, which I can't fucking think about now. First, get us to the checkpoint.

Running with time, time running just ahead of me, I can see it, and most important feel the opening I need, the one that will take us home.

I run straight for it and give the signal to jump, everyone following, and hopefully everyone being pulled with me, 'till suddenly, all that’s left is to fall.

Fall from the sky.

RIDOMIE

I wanted to go with the Major, but he doesn't know why, he only thinks he knows why. Doesn't matter much anyway, I couldn't' tell him why I wanted to go if he asked me, because I don't even know why — just that there was this deep itch, like a need. It killed me that he wouldn't let me. Not to mention, I had to put up with too many questions as to why I was cleaning. I lead, not clean. Guess that's not exactly true, since my flippant tongue tends to get me in a lot of trouble — I know I'm lucky to be cleaning and not incinerated — the Major is good to me.

I hoped I would be finished when he returned with the new Ryker. It's hard to say why it's important to me, but I don't want his first glimpse of me to be with a mop and broom in my hands. He'll already have plenty of reason to look down on me.

I'm mopping the front entryway of Ryker Corporation. Everything is white in this building; the ceilings, the floors, the walls are all in white marble. A large fountain is in the center as you walk in and when you look up, the white ceiling is forever above your head. Walls of balconies funnel all the way up; white marble archways rainbow for days across the white sky and everything gleams (because I cleaned it all top to bottom) and because of the lights, so many lights, decorating the walls.

Dual staircases greet you and they lead you up into the maze of rooms built for the Ryker family and their guests. None of this is for the clones. We are free to walk through certain wings and have sex in any of the guest rooms. There is a separate section of Ryker Corp. just for clones, where we can sleep and eat and hang out, if time permits.
There's a school campus on the property where the clones and even Derek Ryker attend. It's almost as if we're real people, but we're not. We're not anything.

It's busy here today, like it has been everyday, since people from the towns and villages heard the news: The new Ryker would finally be coming home. Everyone's hoping to be the first to see him.

I want to see him too, but not because he's more handsome than any Ryker to date (though I did enjoy Derek's face when he heard that bit of news), the smartest Ryker to date and the strongest one to date as well, nor because he has the best set of genes known to Rykerian kind. How could they know any of that? Most of it's just silly clone lore. Clones with nothing better to do than fantasize and hope he chooses one of them to stick his cock into.

A hush washes over the crowd suddenly and there's a sea of frantic whispering. The two wide metal doors of the entryway slide apart and in walks the Major, Ter-X and Stamps, but no Brodix.

I stop what I'm doing, don't even pretend to continue doing what I'm doing, wrap my hands around the mop handle and try to get a glimpse, but there's too many people blocking the way. Everyone's crowding around him.

I get caught up in the frenzy. I've got to see him. I drag my mop with me, still pretending to clean in case the Major lays eyes on me, but he's still covered by the crowd, I've got to get closer still.

I start pushing past people and clones. The clones let me by. The people let me by too, but I get the usual mixture of disdain and fear. They snub their noses at me because: What does a clone, a non-Rykerian think he's doing pushing past us like he's some sort of somebody?

Yeah, figure that one out, more advanced and dying for them, but not people.

But we're not just their army, we're also their authority. It's only natural for people not to like us for that reason alone. It doesn't help that the way we are trained to deal with the 'common' Rykerians, is fairly harsh; they tend to think of us as unfeeling creatures.

And sure, some of us are, but more of us are like them, at least with how we think and feel. We are definitely different. Not only are we more advanced genetically, Ryker Corp. is all we know. We aren't permitted to leave the grounds, unless it's to be in the villages, protecting and policing Rykerians, so we've developed our own culture, complete with its own set of morals and ethics. We aren't even allowed to interact with the Rykerians. They usually keep their distance anyway.

I'm close now, just outside the circle that's formed around the Major. I can tell by the octave of his voice how pissed off he is. "Ridomie! Where the fuck are you? Get your ass over here and get some men to hold these people back. Stop touching him," he says to someone that's not me.

I still can't see the new Ryker, but I know he's under all those hands, everyone wanting to see what perfect genetics feels like. "Tiren, Stox, Auklan, with me," I order. I jut my mop out at the crowd of people surrounding the Major and the new Ryker and they all begin to back off. Tiren, Stox and Auklan form a barricade. "I'll have to ask everyone to step aside, or you will be asked to leave."

The Rykerians obey me, but there are still clones staring on thinking they are exempt from my orders. "What are you staring at? Do I need to start handing out punishments?"

"No Captain, sir," they all say and scam. We keep our ring formed around the Major and the new Ryker. He'll be that 'something new and shiny' for a few days I guess, then they'll relax.

The crowd has dispersed, no one who is left is daring enough to look on. I can finally see the new
Ryker, some of him, but not his face. He's curled up against the Major, that's right, you heard me: Curled up against the Major — I can't believe the Major's letting him do that. Guess when you have that many people crowding in on you, without warning, you can't do much but make yourself smaller behind the rock that could protect you, or be trampled.

He's a Ryker all right, he's got the Ryker blonde hair to prove it, but it's currently threaded through the Major's fingers, the Major's dragging him by that Ryker blonde hair. I haven't even had a good look at him yet, but it starts.

A little feeling deep in my center and I don't like the Major to touch him that way.

Okay, we need to pause there, because…what? Calm down Ridomie. You must be riled over the new Ryker too. No, not just riled, you must be delusional.


I look wide at the Major and to everyone else still standing around us, because who talks to that Major like that? No one. Even the Lord Ryker himself uses more respect. "I have half a mind to string you up by yer ankles, boy." He releases the new Ryker roughly enough, he trips, almost falling backward, but catches himself.

Anyone else would be in the least abashed, but not this guy, he's as cocky as any Ryker I've ever seen, but there's more.

As Ryker straightens himself out, smoothing out the strange clothing he's wearing I get the full effect of his presence, I look into his azure blue Ryker eyes and I'm lost forever.

He's a bit small for a Ryker. Half the size of the Major, but bigger than his half-brother Derek. He'll be big, though; I can see in his eyes he's still young. His eyes. They're as blue as the Lord Ryker's, that stunning azure blue and they look far better on him than Derco Ryker.

He's got a full head of Ryker blonde hair — the special color, no other Rykiran has, certainly not a clone — and it's cut in a funny style, straight, past his shoulders and parted to one side. Some of the guys do that here to be different, sure, but it's not the usual. Other than that, he's a smaller, younger version of the Major, he's damn beautiful. I don't blame people for wanting to touch him. I want to reach out and touch him, but I'm not stupid enough to do it.

He radiates cool confidence and from the way he stands I know he's relaxed. He's in a room full of predators and he's relaxed. He couldn't be unaware, it's in his blood, he'd be able to sense it — danger, yet he's not afraid. If anything we should be afraid of him.

I love all of it. My heart is beating so damn fast I'm frozen by the thud. Then he looks right at me.

"Thanks pal," he says adjusting his jacket.

Pal? He says it like I'm…like I'm…somebody. Like I'm a real person. My heart skips a few beats.

The Major is still looking at him with extreme disdain, the new Ryker knows it too, but he doesn't let it crack his demeanor. "So uh, this is it? Ryker Palace?"

He smiles. It's magnificent.

It's not like the other Rykers — well, not like Derek and Derco, I've never seen the Major truly smile, that guy's never happy — it's a good, warm, inviting, happy smile.
Usually when a Ryker smiles something bad is about to happen to you.

I can't say anything, I just want to watch him. What's happening to me? The Major doesn't have my problem with staring. He can talk to the new Ryker just fine. "Yeah, it's a palace all right and yer its fuckin' Prince. Get movin."

"Whoa, okay, but don't I get an introduction? Are these men staff?"

Wrong answer, new Ryker.

The Major reaches for his hair again, I'm surprised when the kid is able to react as fast as he does, to cover his blonde Ryker hair—no one except Lord Ryker is as fast as the Major. "Please, I'm sorry. Oh right, I mean yes, sir, but I'm just curious and I just wanted to thank them."

It's fascinating. Never have I seen a Ryker act like this. Never have I seen someone talk to the Major like this and have the Major be so...patient. I never thought I'd use that word and the Major in the same sentence — is the world coming to an end?

The Major acts differently too. He's still an angry heat, but something about the new Ryker makes him take the time to respond. "Tiren, Auklan, Stox and Ridomie. Happy?"

"What's up with the names around here? You all sound like a bunch of lost boys. And whoa, look at the hair on these guys — how come you don't get after them, Major?"

He says 'Major' like it's the Major's name rather than his title.

"Okay, enough Ryker. Move, or I'll drag you."

"Yes, sir," he says smiling brightly at the Major. "Right away, sir. I just, thank you fellas, much appreciated."

The guys are freaking out inside, I can tell, but they school their features — I think they all think they're about to be incinerated. I'm watching the Major, 'cause has he gone crazy? He'd be handing out whippings to any clone acting like that. I guess that's expected though, having clones beat, but I know he'd do it to his other nephew too. Does he have a soft spot for this one? I didn't know it was possible for the Major to have a soft spot.

The Major looks at me. "Ridomie," he says and that jolts me out of my musings.

"Huh? Uh, yes, sir?"

"Am I under some kind of curse today?" he says to himself. "Remember what I asked yah to tell me?"

Oh yeah. "Seven, sir." The Major's been gone seven days.

He nods. That's what Rykers are supposed to do, not thank clones. Maybe that's the new Ryker's way of toying with us. "Where's Brodix, sir?"

"We lost him." His voice is grim, more than you get from any other Ryker.

I look over at Ter-X and share a meaningful look with him. Brodix was his mate. No one cares when clones are lost, except other clones. Nothing will be done about his death — Brodix is just another clone lost in the call of Ryker duty.

"I said, I'd go get him, but I need some time," the Major adds.
"So not dead?"

"No, just lost. I'm pretty sure just left behind, but it's hard to say. I'll do my best to find him when I can."

Well that's something. I know the Major will try, eventually, but the truth is, clones just aren't his priority either. We're all quiet for a moment, mourning the loss of our comrade — I know as well as they all do, we're never going to see him again.

The new Ryker surprises me again. "I'm sorry. So fucking sorry. It was my fault. I'm the one who broke his arms. If he won't go back to get him, I'll go back to fucking get him."

Ryker must have known that would get him in trouble, his hand are already on his head, shielding them from the Major, but he'd said it anyway. Why would a Ryker risk trouble for himself over a clone?

The Major's stunned too, we all are. The Major decides to latch onto the one thing he knows has happened: Ryker's being belligerent. "Yer goin' nowhere, 'cept where I tell yah, t'go. Move yer hands."

New Ryker doesn't even fight it, but he winks at me and my cock is hard, holy Ryker, my cock is hard. And if I'm this hard over the new Ryker, I can just imagine what the others are feeling for him. That thought makes me angry and I can't figure out why. I know I don't like that. I don't like the thought of anyone else touching the new Ryker — the jealousy is overwhelming. C'mon Ridomie. Get a grip. He's a Ryker, like any other, it's best to steer clear of him.

The Major grabs his skull again, tugging his hair painfully and drags a stoic, yet teeth gritting Ryker away. I'm watching 'till he's out of sight and when he is, I'm relieved — I feel like I can breathe again. Everyone else stays behind.

Ter-X falls to his knees. "Someone, go get Heli-o," I bark. That's Ter-x's twin. I move to kneel with him and pull him to my chest as Auklan and Stox leave to do as bid.

"He's gone. I'm never going to see him again; I know it. The new Ryker broke his arms, he couldn't run fast enough... I tried to stay back with him, but the Major told me to run. What was I supposed to do?"

"You did what you had to. The Major will go back for him."

"No he won't. He won't. And neither will the new Ryker, just wait 'till we're on the training fields, I'm going to rip him apart for this."

I slap him hard across the face for that. "I know you're in pain, but you can't say that stuff out loud. What if one of them hears you? You'll go straight to the incinerator for that. What would Brodix say?"

He wipes at tears. "Yeah, I know. I'm sorry, sir. I won't say it again, I'm just mad."

I'm mad too. None of it makes sense. The new Ryker is different. I thought he might be good, but maybe he just wants us to think that? "What happened? Why did the new Ryker break his arms?"

"He said he thought Brodix was going to kill him, but Brodix would never do that."

"I don't think the new Ryker knew, Ter." At least that's what I want to believe.
Heli-o arrives. "Take him, feed him, make sure he's ready for practice." No one's going to understand a grieving clone. "Stamps, I want to talk to you. Everyone else get out of here."

I walk back over to my bucket in the now empty entryway and place the mop back inside. I'm trying to cool down my testosterone, it's still through the roof, and my dick feels like it's going to burst and I can't stop thinking about the new Ryker.

An unfortunate side effect of Ryker genes: insatiable sex drive no matter the circumstances. My body wants the new Ryker, I'm sure all of us do (except maybe Ter-X), but I've never experienced a need this excruciating before. "What do you think about the new Ryker?" I ask quietly.

He shrugs. "Seems like a Ryker to me."

"Does he? What about this business with Brodix?"

"Hate to say it, but you know what Brods is like. He tends to charge in without testing the waters and he probably wanted to be the one to bring the new Ryker to the Major, you know how much he's always trying to impress him. Between knowing that and what the new Ryker said, he probably felt threatened. He doesn't know Brodix, he probably thought he was going to be killed."

I nod. "Do you believe him when he says he's sorry?"

"Hard to say. He's just as cocky and arrogant as any Ryker, lipping off the Major to boot, but that just seems like recklessness. He seemed sorry, but I just don't know. I can tell you one thing though, Brodix wasn't mad at Ryker."

"He wasn't?"

"No. He was completely gaga over the new Ryker, Ter-X was jealous."

My whole body tenses. But why should it? The whole thing is normal. It's normal, even for mated clones, to have interest in other clones, it's just not usually a Ryker. Consequently, it's normal for the Top in a mated pair to become jealous when his brat's eyes stray. We're extremely possessive to the nth degree, it's the added testosterone and right now, mine is spiking.

"Much as Brodix might have found the new Ryker attractive, Ter-X knows how much Brodix cared for him." Clones are promiscuous until they mate (they might look but they don't touch), with one exception: Rykers. Not that a clone would want to say no to fucking a Ryker, but even if they did, they couldn't.

"Oh yeah, we both know that, but Ter-X was going all Top because Brodix was bragging. He liked what the new Ryker did to him — really liked it."

"He liked getting his arms broken?"

"No, not that, from the sounds of it, they had a pretty intimate greeting."

"Intimate greeting?" Something tells me I really not going to like what he's about to say. I feel wound as a compressed spring, I tighten my grip on the mop I'm holding.

"Yeah. Get this. New Ryker kissed Brodix."

The mop handle snaps. I don't even know how it happens, but the next thing I know we're both flying toward the wall. Stamps's neck is gripped tight under my hand and I don't even know how it got there, I'm breathing heavily. "What do you mean new Ryker kissed him?" It's a growl, I can't
even control myself. I realize what I'm doing and what I've just done means. I back away from Stamps, releasing him.

"I'm sorry, I don't know what...I don't know what just happened," is what I say, but we stare at each other both stunned and both knowing exactly what happened.

My every instinct wants to claim the new Ryker. No. No. This can't be happening. But the strong buzz of testosterone I feel racing through my blood tells me that yes, it is happening.

It's happened.

"I, I, gotta get out of here. Clean that up for me?" I say to Stamps, who's frozen in fear for me and he should be.

"Yeah, Rido."

Most of the time the guys are formal with me, but on occasion, some of the ones who were raised with me, slip into informal addresses. I swallow hard and nod.

Of course the thing that has never happened before, happens to me. Ridomie. Of course my blood decides on a Ryker, the new Ryker, the most prized Ryker. I should just jump into the incinerator now because my life is over. My blood has decided and there is no undoing of that decision.

But dammit. I'm going to try.
Thank you to all following this story! It means the world to me. I will get back to all comments (on every story) tonight. I'm going to try to post the next 2 chapters of this one tonight as well. I want to get to the Brigg and Rido parts. A little more Plot/World Building stuffs in this chapter and next...and then on to fun stuff!

In the next chapter, you get to see the only Het-smut Mock writes ;-) so stay tuned.

And in case you haven't read the story I just posted, here are updates:

GUW -- Next and soon
BDD -- Right after GUW
WW -- After both of those
Enjoy!

I'm sitting in some sort of waiting room.

I don't really know what else to call it. It has white walls, white marble floors, white leather couches, white fucking everything, outside two massive doors, the doors that slid open for the Major as he walked through them, when he left me behind telling me to: “Stay.”

Seriously. Where would I go? I rub my sore head.

Being dragged by your hair is not fun, lemme tell you, and especially whilst attempting a backward run at speeds I’ve never run on my own.

Then this place. It looks like a fucking palace, but I keep hearing it referred to as Ryker Corp. Corporations are businesses, least where I'm from, this place feels like a business, but they seem to treat it like a home and with the amount of people running around all over the place, it's hard to say what the hell this place is. One thing's for sure, this place is fucking busy. Do they all live here? And so many of those men who look alike, but not. They're like a pile of Smurfs. They all look the fucking same, but you can see minute differences.

I feel real shitty about Brodix. How was I supposed to fucking know? I thought he was going to kill me. I figured he'd recover quick, my mama told me that's why you had to snap their necks — they heal faster than I do, least the ones we always dealt with did, according to her. But it's become clear that these men are different, if anything, they're an older model of the ones Mama and I used to fight.

In any case, Brodix's left behind and I think I'm very unpopular.

And holy shit, that Ridomie guy, I think he could grind metal with that stare. Intense grey eyes, with a hard face like stone. The other guys have some strange hairdos, but the color is always some shade of brown: lights, darks, mediums, chestnut, chocolate, fucking camel brown, but not
Ridomie. His is a black, spiked Mohawk, down to his neck. What kinda black? The kinda black you get when you take all the light from a room. Stormy and calm at the same time, like the clouds in his eyes. He looks just as miserable as the Major and I don't doubt, every bit as angry — another cheerless motherfucker.

I'm starting to think no one smiles around here.

I continue to rub the fuck outta my fucking abused scalp, it feels bruised and it still burns.

There are two men, guarding the door I guess, and I see them trying to steal glances of me. Doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure out I'm some kinda celebrity around here. Maybe I should make friends. "Hey, who are you two?"

The one with the pink striped through his hair looks at me, almost like he can't, not look at me. "Uh, I'm Turnit, sir." The other guy elbows him for saying that.

Are they not allowed to talk to me?

I ignore the Major's orders, too fascinated by these two. Me standing up, makes them stand a little straighter even though I'm about as big as they are. I peer at them, looking them over. I decide to try something. "I said, what's your name?" I say with a little more aggression to the one who wouldn't answer me.

I'm distracted though, beyond the door, I hear shouting. The Major. And someone else.

I can hear bits of their conversation (they're talking about me, no surprise there) but I can't make out everything they're saying and it's strange. On Earth, I can hear through most doors and walls, I had to get good at tuning out conversations, but whatever these doors are made out of, it's like what I'd imagine any other, uh, Earth person? to hear.

It's settling. I'm comforted by the sounds of their deep baritone voices coming through the door, the one's I'm barely able to hear, makes me feel, normal.

The doors suddenly slide open. "Brigg. In. Now." It's the Major, who else is that bossy?

Makes me jump a bit, my leather groans, and I make the mistake of running a hand through my hair, until a bruising pain reminds me of what it's been through. I wince, the Major smiles at my discomfort.

“Do I need to drag you in here, boy?”

"Coming, sir." I have no wish to piss him off just now, my leather jacket creaks louder, as I walk toward the Major and into the large white office.

It faces open water and it's stunning. The entire east-facing wall, is made of glass, with the desk facing us, the natural sunlight pours in, giving the sense of good. But I know I've just walked into danger – I've always had that sixth sort of sense.

It's not often I feel fear. When I do, men fall from the sky, but the fear's there now – doesn't mean I'm going to let it show. The man standing behind the desk, he's terrifying in different ways than the Major is. With the Major, I've quickly learned, you act like a little jerk, you pay the consequences; behave, and he'll mildly tolerate you. He's predictable.

Not the man behind the desk. He's the type of man that makes rules, and changes them as it suits him, without giving you the fucking memo.
The Major is dangerous because he has nothing to lose.

This man is dangerous because he does.

His hands are steepled atop his desk and like the Major had, he studies me. Also for different reasons. These two are like two sides of the same coin. They move and behave similarly, but for decidedly different purposes.

My breath hitches when I see his eyes. Deep, vibrant, azure blue — like mine — but yet they're nothing like mine. They hold something different there, something cold and dark. His other features are like the Major's and mine. The long face with the same hard jawbone and cruel nose, but his version of the features, that are apparently those of a Ryker, are far more delicate than the Major's, or mine, giving him a slight feminine appearance, while still very decidedly masculine. His 'Ryker' hair looks almost white and it's long. Long, long, long to his waist, with half of it tied back into a ponytail at the base of his skull.

"Please, sit," he instructs in a cool, tinkling voice and an accent that is polar opposite to the Major's. The Major has a strong southern cantor sometimes and I'd say he was from the deep South, if there is such a thing here, but this guy, well all I have to compare him to is James Bond. Actually, he's King Thanduil of the Woodland Realm with James Bond's accent. Fucked up.

And I don't need to be the international man of mystery to figure out that this means these two (who I'm going to assume are brothers, because it's pretty fucking obvious) have not grown up together.

I obey knowing for sure that I'm in a Lion's den, and I'm the fucking sirloin.

"Allow me to be the first to welcome you home, Briggland." His voice is kind, but not the good kind of kind. It's the kind of kind, that has a fucking volcano rumbling beneath it. You know? The fake kind of kind.

I shouldn't say anything, 'till I know what's going on, but well, Briggland Ryker does a lot of stupid shit he shouldn't do. "Look Dickhead, before you welcome me anywhere, how about telling me what the fuck is going on?"

His eyes narrow at me in a way that quickly tells me just how not used to being talked to in that tone, or with those words, he is. I see a hint of amusement. The Major definitely cracks a smile. "Ah — your mother's spirit, and your uncle’s impudence.” He nods over to the Major. “Do not worry, my son, we shall help you curtail both of those qualities, lovely as they are."

Touché. That's one helluva a bite to swallow and, he's done that on purpose. The words ‘be careful what you wish for’ come to mind. I asked to know things, but now that I have the opportunity, I don't want to know. I look over to the Major — no idea why — as if he's going to help me. The man who until now I thought never smiled, looks like he's trying to keep himself from laughing his ass off. He thinks I'm a fucking riot.

"Is there a problem, Lexington?"

It's my turn to keep from laughing — cause seriously, Lexington? That's the big scary Major's real name?

"No problems, but this kid is hil-fucking-larious! If I'd of known he could be this much fun, I'd of went to get him sooner."

"Don’t be crude.”
It doesn't stop the Major from finally releasing a chuckle.

"Okay, okay, it's nice to see you laughing for once, even if it's at my expense," the man says and cracks a small smile at the Major, like he might actually be fond of him, but then the man's smile changes, it's no longer nice. "I don't think I've seen you laugh this hard in eighteen years. It's too bad our little Briggland couldn't have been around then."

That effectively stops the Major's laughing and cuts off his smile, like unplugging a lamp.

With that taken care of, the man turns back to me. "Now, Briggland, as I said — you are home now whether you like it or not. You will soon come to realize the truth of that. You didn't possibly think you belonged amongst those, humans, did you?"

'Humans' is said with a considerable amount of distaste, his mouth puckering, like he's just sucked on a lemon.

"What are you talking about? I am human," I say even though I know I'm not. He's just really grinding my gears and I want to say whatever will piss him off most. And I know, I know, don't poke the fucking bear Briggland, but I promise, anyone would want to with this dude.

"Yes, well I suppose in a sense we all are. We used to be apes at one point during evolution too, but I'm sure you don't go round shouting out your genetic relation to them, do you?"

That shuts me up. I'm smart enough to figure out: Rykers must me some sort of Human 2.0., but far enough along the evolutionary conveyer belt that they don't even relate to being 'human' anymore. He talks about humans, like he's better than them and it is much like how humans on Earth related to apes: They're the better, smarter, more evolved race.

"Haven't you ever wondered, Briggland, why you were, so different from them?" He nods, imploring me to consider the possibilities. "Why you were faster? Stronger? Why all of your senses seemed keener? Why only you seemed to have a seventh sense about time — almost as if you were related to it, as if it were a part of you, coursing through your veins? Hmm?"

Course I have. Those are all the questions I'd asked myself too many times with no answer, but him asking them sends a shiver down my spine and pisses me off at the same time. There's something about this guy, he really gets under my fucking skin. It doesn't help that they were the questions I'd asked my mama, with her never fucking obliging me.

I don't answer him, I don't have to answer him, he can see the answer plain on my face.

"It's simple really. It's what happened when a monkey could no longer live as just a monkey," his crisp, cool accent explains. "It's what happened when a man needed to be more than a man, he adapted. I'm talking about evolution Briggland."

"I'm the product of evolution?"

"Oh no, you are the product of a night of deceit, and lies. Your uncle, your mother and I are the products of evolution."

He says it that way just to be a facetious asshole and smiles hoping it will hurt me. It doesn't. Fuck him. I've already had enough of this fucking conversation — I suddenly don't care where I am — I just want to kick the shit out of him. Sensing my ire like a mouse to cheese, the Major looks at me, and gives me a warning grunt. Whatever he has invested in this, he's not going to let me fuck it up. Fine, this asshole has five more minutes to make his point, then I'm going to kick his ass, no matter what the Major ends up doing to me.
“Mark my words, son, you are most definitely not human.”

“All right, let’s say I bite. Let’s say I even believe you. What am I?”

He smiles his deadly crocodile smile and begins lecturing, like a teacher to his student. “We make up a new race of Humans — if that is easier for you to understand. We are descendant from them,” he says like he hates to admit it. “I rather like to think of us as ascendant from humans. We are a higher race; more intelligent, better. Humans from the time we pulled you from, would consider us ‘alien.’” He pauses fingering his chin with thumb, and forefinger, deciding how to continue his little explanation.

I interrupt. “So, are we mutants?”

“You have been reading far too many comic books little boy.”

Least it sounds like they have those here.

He scowls for a second, not liking I’ve stopped him mid-thought, and that I compared his precious race to mutants. He calms though and continues. I can feel the tension growing. His next words aren’t quite snapped, but close to. “No. We are not Mutant. We are the next phase of genetic evolution.” He pauses to be dramatic. “We are Rykerians,” he says, with sharp, flashing teeth, like a croc about to feast, calculating how he’ll rip through your skin first and make sure to burst each of your tendons in a particularly gruesome fashion, before he slowly chews each bite, devouring your essence. His eyes shine proudly — as though he invented the race all by himself.

“Rykerian?” My eagle shaped brows knit together.

“Yes, as in Ryker.”

Oh. Should have seen that coming, I guess he did invent the fucking race, least someone in the 'family' did. Jesus fuck, naming a race after yourself? I raise my brows. “You folks sure think highly of yourselves.” I expect in the least, a sharp reprimand for my comment. Doesn't come.

“Yes. I do. You would too if you had changed the very core of genetic evolution. If you had not only built on the ideas that Charles Darwin set forth thousands of years ago, but re-invented what even the Gods hadn’t thought possible.”

It seems odd to use the words 'Charles Darwin' and 'Gods' in the same sentence, and in relation to each other, as if they were not mutually exclusive. On Earth, they're always talked about as two separate ideas, he talks about them as if there is a god and his name was Charles Darwin, but now his name is, Ryker.

It's kind of freaking me out a bit, him acting like he owns the fucking world. Does he? “Are you fucking arrogant enough to claim you are God?”

“I'm not going to make any claims, son. You can see for yourself who I am, we'll have lots of time together.”

I don't like him calling me that. Sure he hasn’t come out and said it, but I have enough brains to decipher who he is without having it spelled out for me. This must be my father, doesn't mean I like him and this conversation isn’t exactly endearing me to him.

He looks over to the Major. “He is quite a clever little fellow, isn’t he?”

Clever little fellow? I'm going to pound on him for that alone.
The Major doesn’t look happy, in fact, he looks like he's in a different world all together. I recognize the look on his face, it's one I’ve used many times: He's bored. He's got more important shit to do than this. “Quit toyin’ with the kid Derco, and get to the point — or should I do it for you? Fuck Derco, he can learn all this in classes.”

*Derco* looks amused and irritated by his brother’s impertinent attitude. Whatever he's feeling, he responds by facetiously waving his hand, and nodding at the Major. “By all means, Lexington.”

The Major wants to tear his head off — instead he tenses his muscles, and comes to sit on the edge of Derco’s desk in front of me, crossing his arms. “Look, kid. Yer mama ran with you eighteen years ago.”

“I know that,” I bite out.

The Major has a temper based on reactions like I do, but unlike me doesn't have the desire to restrain it. He backhands me, hard, across the face before I see it coming, my head reels sideways. Lucky, for me, my head is still attached to my neck — otherwise I'm sure I'd be picking it up the damn floor, across the room. My hand goes to the place on my jaw where he hit me. My eyes look up at him, shocked.

It shouldn't shock me, especially after that spanking he's already saw fit to give me, but it still amazes me that anyone can do that to me; hurt me.

I’d had a foster mother try that before. It had resulted in the breaking of her hand. The simple act of her hand hitting my cheek, a cheek that to her had been like backhanding stone — had broke her hand. She knew that day that there was something different about me, and I was discarded from yet another home.

The Major doesn't have that problem. *Fuck*, that hurt. Whatever I'm made of, he is too. I feel a wetness at the corner of my lip and I swipe at it looking at my fingers; blood. I look down at the Major’s hand, the one responsible for splitting my lip open, and stare at it in awe. *Fuck.* I'm fucking up. I like that he can hurt me, that anyone can for that matter. It's another notch on the 'normal' belt. I'm normal here.

My 'father' doesn't seem bothered by this either, instead he's transfixed by the blood on my face and fingers. He seems to shiver at the sight of it. *You sure our 'Rykerian genes' don't contain any Vampire in there, Pops?*

“Not with me, boy,” the Major defines for now and forever. “You won't talk that way to me. Take your hand, away,” he says making clear that I won't get respite for disobedience, and that he means for me to feel every bit of pain he decides to give me and watches to see if I'd dare oppose him after that.

I don’t want to look weak in his eyes, ever. I don't know why, but (and don't fucking tell him) I like the Major. I take my hand away, letting my cheek throb, and allow my blood to continue to drip down my face onto the floor. I grit my teeth, hating that my eyes water beyond my control. I'm not used to this level of pain. I always wanted it and craved it, but not much had been able to hurt me before and I can count on my one hand the number of times I've experienced real pain in my short life.

I'm realizing now how foreign pain, real pain, is to me — the physical kind anyway. "Yes, sir," I say hoping it will buy my way back into his good books, if he has good books, but I doubt it.

He carries on like none of that happened. “Yer mama successfully hid you away all this time, but since you’ve had the misfortune of bein’ sired by a madman, he’s been hell bent on findin’ ya. Now yer back home where you belong, and where you’ll stay. Get used to it, kid.”
That's it? That's his speech? Looks that way; he stops talking after that – he's so god damn taciturn, though so am I, most of the time. Derco watches us, like a movie, waiting to see what we’ll do next, with a crazed interest.

Keeping my attitude in check I ask, “why, sir?”

The Major nods toward me. “‘Cause of that.”

I freeze when I realize what he's referring to. “My blood?”

“Yep.”

I look passed the Major. “What on Earth for?”

“Ah, Earth. I would prefer for you to forget that antiquated pile of rocks,” Derco says, as he turns to the Major with a look in his eyes like he can’t stand something anymore. “For Goodness sake, Lexington! His blood is far too valuable to let drip onto the floor like that, at least catch it in something.” The way he says it reminds me of a person complaining against food wasting.

The Major grumbles something about "a damn waste of his time," but moves to look for something, 'cept apparently there's nothing to 'catch' my fucking super blood in, so he advances on me. I throw my hands up in surrender, but he ignores them, pulls me up out of the chair and grabs my white t-shirt, ripping a piece off. "That's my fucking shirt!" I say before I remember who I'm talking to.

I expect to get hit again and I do, but this time all I get is a swat across the ass, like a misbehaving five-year-old. Still hurts like a son of a bitch, but it's way better than being slapped across the face with that marble hand. "Watch your mouth. Take this."

Derco continues to watch our interactions with interest, as I sulkily take the piece of my god damned ripped shirt and mop up my battered lip, while simultaneously licking my lip, to wet what's already started to dry around the area, as I wipe. There's lust in Derco's eyes. Not for me (thank fucking god) but for my blood – that's almost as creepy.

I take a deep, shaky breath. "My mama didn't want you having my blood, my DNA. She doesn't want you playing God with me.”

“Well, that is a rather terrible way of putting it, but essentially, yes that's what I plan to do with your blood – I want better clones. What she wants doesn't matter, you are my son and as such I have personal rights to you.”

“Personal rights? You can’t own a person.”

The Major makes a move to restrain me, but his puppeteer, Derco, signals for him to let me rant.

“In the time you are from, I am sure this idea of, ‘owning a person was highly unethical.’ I remember a little from the history books of those barbaric times; it was utter chaos.”

“You’re fucking, God damn right it's unethical!” I tense in preparation for another backhand from the Major, that never comes. Instead, Derco, comes around to the front of his desk intent on a lamb basting of his own style. The Major has his buttons and Derco has his.

“Yes. One can own a person,” he stresses as if he's talking to a complete imbecile. “Fathers own their sons and daughters, everyone really, brothers can own their brothers and sisters depending on the situation. Husbands own their wives, and women own anything left over.”
“Have I gone back in time? What is this? Seventeen forty-five? What the hell are you talking about?”

“I am talking about a hierarchy system that's worked a long time on Cyntripien and all other planets owned by Ryker Corp. The strong out power the weak, and the young respect and obey the old. It is more organized to have this idea based as a cultural belief. It prevents confusion and also, rebellion. You belong to me now, so get used to it, or life is going to be incredibly difficult for you.”

Yep. seventeen forty-five. It does explain a lot though, for instance, what I see going on between the Major and Derco. Does that mean the Major's weaker than Derco? Does Derco own the Major? I can't imagine anyone owning him. That's a scary thought.

“Lucky for you, we are a family of power, the family of power, actually. You are a Ryker, and as such will be granted dominion beyond your wildest dreams…after you are trained of course. If you prove worthy, you can inherit all this when I'm dead. Until that time you will devote yourself to me, devote several human lifetimes of subservience, to me.”

What the fuck? Seriously, what the fuck? Too late, I realize the gravity of my situation. “Where is my mama?” I ask, afraid of what he'll tell me, but my gut tells me that he's the reason she didn't come for me.

“Your mother? What has she got to do with any of this? She means nothing anymore. She is a memory best left forgotten. You will not see her again, Briggland. It is not necessary to who you are, or who you will become. You will be trained; you will obey Ryker law. You are mine. The end.”

It takes a lot to make a something like me, a whatever the fuck I am, a Rykerian, light-headed, but that does it. I don't let on of course and I try my second of the two options I have left: Begging. “Please. I'll be a good little Rykerian if you tell me what you've done with my mama.” I'm trying to go for 'I don't give a fuck,' but even I can hear how desperate my voice sounds.

Derco looks me square in the eyes. "As far as you're concerned, your mother is dead. Leave it.”

It doesn't escape my notice, that, that's a shady fucking answer, a non-answer. Fuck. Fine. Time for choice number one: Kill him, or die trying.

Advancing on him, quickly, I take Derco by surprise, tackling him to the ground in an instant. Getting some good punches in on him, I have a pretty good start on mangling his face before I’m interrupted. The Major, on the other hand, expected me to lose it and if I didn't know better, I'd say he let me get a few punches in on Derco. I know he must have, because if I had a brother who fucking owned me and acted like this dickface does, I'd want to punch him in the face too. But a few is all he'll allow, the Major's ready for me and takes me down easily, quickly locking my arms behind my back, and pushing me to the floor, my face crushed against the cool marble.

Derco hastily makes his recovery, glaring at me as he wipes his own blood from his lip. “You will pay for that. Rykers do not treat other Rykers that way, as you will learn and that is the last time I will allow you to disrespect me.”

I know I'm out of my league and I shouldn't have attacked him knowing it was a fight I would lose. I know better, but he pissed me off and there's only so reasonable I can be after that. I definitely shocked him this time, but I don't think I'll be as lucky next time.

I'm far too riled now to give up, my blood is racing, the same way it always does when I crave
fighting, pain, blood. “What did you do with her?”

He’s standing over me now, sneering and taking great pleasure in repeating for me, “your mother is
dead to you. You’re going to live with us and be trained, be one of us, and there is nothing you can
do about it. You can take comfort in knowing that it's what she would have wanted.”

I doubt that. Even from my weak position on the floor, I vaingloriously taunt him with my eyes,
smiling at him with a promise. A promise that he may have won this time, but one day I'll win.

“Get him out of my sight before I beat the tar out of him. Show him to his rooms, and explain to
him what he will be doing for the next four weeks. I don’t want to see him until he can show me
more respect.”

He says that like it's a punishment. Not seeing him and getting out of his sight sounds fine to me,
until I realize I’m now in the hands of one very pissed off, hot under the collar, Major. In one
smooth move, he hoists me up, sets me to my feet — all the while holding my arms behind my
back. "And one more thing," Derco adds. "His hair's too long, he's not earned that level of status
yet."

I glare at him. Who the fuck is he to tell me to cut my fucking hair?

"How long to you want it?" the Major asks.

"Same as Derek’s."

Okay, again. Who is fucking Derek? I don't bother asking, as if anyone will tell me. They don't like
to fucking tell me anything.

“I’m gonna let go of ya. Think about movin’ and I’ll happily drag yah by yer stubborn, Ryker hair
again.”

"Yes, sir." I'm still pissed, but I've been humbled enough by that take down (I've got to learn how
the Major does that) not to misbehave any further. For now.

“Good. Come.”

Being with the Major's already proved to be no picnic, but I prefer it to Derco hands down. My
leather creaks as I walk, my battered body moans, everything’s talking ‘cept me.
Chapter Notes

I promised 3 chapters of this story, so here we go with number 2 and 3 (1 was yesterday).

This chapter has something you've never seen Mock write before: Het-smut. So um, warning for those it squicks and uh, well it'll be interesting to see what y'all think. It's pretty short.

Enjoy!

I was young, probably same age as the kid. Fucking ironic, I know. And she – she was the most irritating person I’d ever had the displeasure of meeting. I loved her the moment I set eyes on her. I knew I’d sacrifice my bleeding heart before I’d lose her, and that for the Major is as close to hopeless as it comes. I was lost to her, before I’d even had the chance to form my strategic retreat.

She was fiddling with a door, right in the fucking middle of a corridor of Ryker Corp. The same fucking corridor that my own Major had put me in charge of patrolling. It was before I was a Major. Just a peon. Just my Father’s slave. She was certainly not an idea I should of ever entered-fucking-tained. But I couldn’t even simply walk by pretending I hadn’t seen her. There was no way I was gonna arrest her either. Besides, I was already fascinated. Back then, women didn’t live at Ryker Corp., hadn’t for a long time. The Mothers were just an idea being worked on. Seeing a woman, when I hadn’t seen one in so many years (since my mama) was, fuck, it was weird and amazing. Specially because it was her.

“What the fuck are you tryin’ ta do?” I tired for intimidating, hoping it would fucking scare her. Nope. Not even close.

“What’sit look like? Help me.”

I did, without hesitation. And it was that moment, that moment right there: Began my descent into darkness.

She wasn’t as strong then you see, but still stronger than me and my entire platoon put together — even then.

I was strong though, only, I wasn’t supposed to be. I’d been hiding a secret. One my mama’d warned me to keep. Was only as I matured I found out why.

To help her, I had to remove the crest around my wrist. The leather band my father’d given me, which symbolized both my rank in the family (nothing), and that I was a Ryker (period). I wasn’t much at that point. “Here, hold this.” I handed it to her, and felt my blood surge with the power I’d been born with; my birthright.

“Why? What is this?” Her grey eyes squinted at it, as she took it from me. Her blonde-red hair flashed like flames, as she looked her head down to peer at it.

“D’ya want my help, or not, darlin’?” I wasn’t fucking answering that question.
Her eyes became grey streaks of anger. She looked like a kitten trying to tell off a tiger. I bit my lip to keep from laughing at her.

“I am not, your darling.”

Wasn’t expecting that. Thought she’d be pissed at me for the bracelet thing.

I laughed as I opened the door for her, feeling proud of myself, preening like a peacock. S’when I realized what door it was she had me open, ‘cause I was too stupid in lust to ask her in the first place. “What the hell woman? Yer gonna get yourself killed.” I swiped my amulet back, and secured it home on my wrist, instantly feeling my powers go mute again. Still there, still strong, but only a shadow of what they were meant to be.

She rolled her eyes, then smiled. I was enthralled by her. Never had I witnessed anything, so pure, so spellbinding.

“You coming?” She nodded her head towards the door — a cool draft was leaking from it — I nodded only able to get out an awkward, “uh, yeah.” Fuck it. I’d of followed her into oblivion. Pretty much did.

That was the day we blew up our first refrigerator — our first act of rebellion against Ryker Corporation.

I knew right away looking at Dess that she was like us, like Rykers, but that she was decidedly not a Ryker. Dess isn't from this time at all. I didn’t know that then, and she didn’t bother to fucking tell me neither.

We weren’t caught, which was a fucking miracle and that miracle was Dess. She’d travelled, she ran, pulling me to her with a strength I didn’t know a woman could possess. Next thing I knew we were flying through time; got the fuck outta there. No trace of us to link us to the ‘crime,’ because we were far in the future by then.

I ended up blamed for not being vigilant enough, since it was on my detail — still got the scars to remember that punishment by — but we’d both gotten away with it. With my daddy, anyway.

But not Dess’s conscience.

She cried. Cried everyday for thirty fucking days over that shit. Said she hadn’t wanted to do that in the first place, but she had been ordered to. She vowed never to do it again though. That explosion had killed (she used the word murdered) eight hundred and eighty-seven fetuses. In her mind, she’d killed babies; don’t think she ever forgave herself really, but Dess is a warrior. She never got over it; she did move on. She let it fuel her, gave her a new purpose: Destroy Ryker Corp. I was happy to join her.

But then she’d gone and fucked that up.

We decided our best option would be to gather a rebellion together, with people from planets all over the galaxy. There were definitely enough people, pissed at Ryker Corp for all we’ve done. Not everyone agrees with the whole cloning thing to begin with, especially the type of cloning Ryker Corp. has done: clones of themselves and let’s not get started on the topic of gene patenting.

So we began gathering an army that would take years just to begin to build momentum. Why was I willing to help her? Why, else? Love. I was dumb enough to fall in love with her.

Love’s far more powerful than hate. Hate can motivate you to a point, sure, but love, people will
do anything for love. Anything. And Love never dies neither, even if you’d like it too. It’s got endurance enough to feed the fire, and stoke it hot, forever.

Love is far more dangerous than hate.

I wasn’t even sure I cared too destroy Ryker Corp. much one way or the other. I just wanted whatever she wanted, and most important, I wanted her happy. Didn’t tell her I loved her though, not for a long time, but I had since that very first moment. Before we knew it, fifty years had passed, and I still hadn’t told her nothing bout my feelings for her, though I suppose she knew.

I did love her though. Fiercely. And the Gods help whoever tried to take her from me.

In that time, those fifty years, I had been promoted to ‘Major’ and there I stayed, and would for all time. I didn’t want nothing else, and my father didn’t want me progressing neither. Sometimes made me think he knew what I was up to.

Our plan was fool proof, and we were ready to begin setting it in motion. We had gathered more than fifty years of information, we’d collaborated with over seven planets. We knew Ryker Corp. inside, and out. We were ready. Then it all went to shit.

Just like the kid who fucking steals your blocks, Derco did that — with my Odyessa. He knew about her. He watched her. He watched us. Derco and I were close back then and I was stupid enough to trust him with the knowledge of her, but I knew right away it was a mistake. The way he looked at her I knew he wanted her. Who wouldn’t? She was fucking wonderful.

It all culminated one day when I saw her looking at him. The twinkle in her eyes was all too telling. My possessive Ryker blood burned for her, and I was going to own her as surely as the universe owned the stars in the sky. “He can’t have you. You’re mine,” I growled at her. Derco had just left — all his fucking teeth showing — and she had been staring after him.

I didn’t care what she wanted in that moment; only that she fucking understood one thing: I owned her. “I belong to no one,” she said. But she didn’t fucking mean it, she was taunting me. She wanted to be owned, to be claimed. By me.

That was my cue to grab her face and kiss the hell out of her to prove it. She and I became the kiss forgetting our plans, our mission, our everything. We existed for no other reason than to kiss, and kiss some more. Like a clash of lightening we collided over, and again.

It was the first time we made, love. Yeah in all those years.

I picked her up easily — by the small of her back — squeezing her ass as I let my hands travel up her back to the curve. She arched away from me, as I leaned into her navel, trailing kisses up her creamy, peachy-bronze skin.

Lifting her to the wall, I slammed her against it. She exhaled a moan. I opened her shirt, only enough for me to have access to suck on her nipples attached to the supple breasts I’d been staring at forever.

She carded her hands through my stubborn Ryker hair as I paid her gorgeous breasts tribute. I looked up at her finally, with intense eyes that spoke all the volumes I was saying to her, without my mouth having to utter one word.

I said them anyways. “You’re mine, Darlin’.”

She nodded, and splayed her arms above her head, up the wall, in submission. A creature who falls to no one, willing giving herself to me. I felt more powerful that day than I ever would again. I felt
like I owned the world.

I made quick work of her shorts, but slowly peeled her panties down each, luscious thigh. All the while staring into her grey eyes and captivating her soul.

When I finally entered her, it felt like a sigh rather than an explosion. It was like something'd been incomplete, scratching at the back of my mind, so intense I craved it — and I'd finally got it, my body could relax all the nervous tension it had been spending, trying to coax me into acquiring what I needed. Her.

As I pushed in and out of her, I looked into those grey eyes, professing my love with every stroke. Thanking her, for allowing me to have her, telling her how much I needed her. I smiled a rare smile, and she smiled back. Together we were sunshine.

I make it sound easy. I make us sound perfect, but we were far from. For starters, she annoyed the living shit out of me. We fought. A lot. Everyday it was something, and after our relationship finally became more, so did our fights and arguments. Only making up was a whole lot more fun. We loved each other though, well I loved her. Thought she loved me too.

Not everyone got married anymore. The custom was old, and insignificant to most, but for those who did, it was more significant than it used to be. We secreted away to another planet and got hitched in a fit of romance Dess and I weren't really prone to. For a while things were...well, I ain't never had better.

But in one day, it all ended. Like the flip of a coin the tables turned from the brightest day to the darkest night.

And since we were the fire starters for the rebellion, when we ended, it did too all crumbling to nothing. There's a lot more too it than that, of course, but I'm not thinking of the rebellion right now. I'm thinking of her, 'cause I've got her fucking son, that looks like me trailing behind me at the moment.

Seven little words was all it took: The baby, he's not yours he's Derco's. They changed everything.

I don't like to repeat what I did after that, cause I'm not fucking proud of it. If my mama knew, she'd give me the thrashing of my life and I'd deserve it.

“Get. The. Fuck. Out.” I was seconds away from tearing her in half.

She reached to put her hand on me. “Lexy…”

I ripped her arm off of me and fucking threw her — clear across the room. In that moment I didn’t fucking care about her, or the child she carried. The he, she knew even then it was a he. I wanted it dead. The boy ruined my whole reason for existing.

Her genetics were years more advanced than mine – though I couldn't tell you how many more – I was a polar bear trying to throw a mountain. In other words, it did shit to her and her baby. Truth was, she'd let me throw her, and I fucking knew it. That somehow made it worse — that she was letting me punish her. I stopped right there.

Whether she allowed it or not, whether it hurt her or not, it was still against my own code of morals. Dess and I liked to play rough, 'specially while we were fucking, but this was different. This was just hitting with true intent to harm her. I had to stop. And despite the fact that she’d taken my heart and thrown it in a blender, she was the woman I fucking loved, the only woman I’d
ever give my heart to — and she could use it for a fucking smoothie if she wanted to.

And she did.

“Leave. Yer gonna have to get outta here,” I said not able to stop my voice from wavering, and barely able to stop my knees from giving way to beg her to turn back time, and stop this from happening. It was something I knew she could do, yet would never do. She already loved her baby boy. I knew she would never forgive me if I asked her to. If she wanted the damn thing I wanted her to have it too. I wanted her to have anything she wanted.

I left the room, demolishing the doorway, as I fucking left my heart on the floor.

I’d never bothered to help her back up.

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He follows behind me, not saying one damn word.

I really wish he would. Give me an excuse to knock his block off ‘cause I want to hit him, hurt him. It felt so fucking good to take out my frustrations on his face. Of course he picks now to behave.

Since he’s a Ryker, he gets his own set of rooms, large, fancy – fit for a Ryker. Derco won’t have his little prince in anything less, though I wonder how he feels about his boy now? That was quite the fucking homecoming. Bet he wishes he left well enough alone. I do.

I open the doors and the sun pours in giving the impression of sanctity. With the window open, you can hear the ocean.

*Okay, Major. Showtime.*

I can barely look at the kid without wanting to do something violent to him. With the change in genetics, came the increase in the amount of testosterone running through a male, making us prone to extreme violence on the turn of a dime.

It's a good thing this conversely means an increase in Growth Hormone, which in part, is why we can heal faster than our *human* counterparts – when we get violent, people tend to get hurt. Translation; I can happily throw the kid into a wall if I want to and he'll recover just fine.

I refrain and remind myself there'll be plenty of time to beat the tar outta him on the training fields where beating on him will actually teach him something and make me less culpable. I shouldn't care, I don’t have to care, but I can't help thinking what Dess would do if she found out I was knocking on her boy for no reason. I know she’d permit me to discipline him, especially if she knew what a mouthpiece he could be, but not for fun. If I’m honest, it's not the only thing stopping me. “There’s clothing in the closets for you. I expect that thing yer wearin', to go into hidin’ by morning, or it's gettin' incinerated.”

His eyes light with suppressed anger.

“I expect an answer, soldier.” Kid doesn’t know it yet, but he's my newest recruit.

“Yes, sir.”

Somehow, I know exactly what he's thinking. He wants to rip me limb from, guess I can't blame him; least he's smart enough not to act on his impulses. Guess intelligence is yet another thing he
shares with Derco.

“These will be your living quarters.”

“Yes, sir.”

“You stay in here, ‘til I say you can leave. I’ll let you know yer schedule in the mornin’” I say, purposely wanting a rise outta him.

I get a glare – the kid doesn't like being told what to do – but nothing else. What's wrong with him? He lose his nerve already?

“You the one holding my leash, Major?”

There it is. The smart ass Ryker side of him coming out. Bet it won't be long before Derco has him slip right into living here. He'll be just like them in no time. “Yeah, and I hold the fuckin’ whip, too.”

“Don’t worry, Major. You won’t get trouble from me.”

The fuck I wouldn’t. I growl at him. He says good things, but says them cheeky-like. “Not likely.”

He's smirking at me when he says, "if he's my daddy, guess that makes you my uncle. That right, Uncle—"

"Do not finish that sentence." I should give him a whack upside the head. “I'm the Major, or preferably, sir. I have no interest in bein' anythin' more than that."

"Jesus Christ, what the hell did I do to you anyway?"

"You were born," I say without thinking.

"Yeah, I thought as much."

He did? I peer at him, studying him a little closer. I'm strangely fascinated with the kid, like I've always been with Dess (no need to remind me how much trouble that got me into) and I wonder why he says the things he says and how he comes to the conclusions he comes to. That's more wondering than I do about any other living person. But I gotta say, all this wondering about the boy has spurred some wonderings on other topics – it seems this boy has opened up a whole nest of wonderings that I suddenly have desire to know about. "Did anyone ever tell you about makin' assumptions?"

"No one told me anything. No one tells me anything. I've had to figure crap out on my own a long-ass time. I'm not stupid Major."

"No, I don't suppose ya are."

He does something I don't expect (a fucking trend with this kid) he smiles. "Why, Major, did you just say something nice to me?"

Fuck. I did. Fuck. I've been looking at this kid too long, he's spellbinding – also just like Dess. I turn to leave, not able to look at him anymore. The emotions of the past eighteen years are beginning to catch up with me, and I don’t like that. The Major doesn’t have feelings, not anymore.

“Wait!” His air of false confidence is gone. Looks just like the lost little boy I found that night. “My mama,” he bleats like a little lamb. “Please, help me. You know what they did to her. I know
you do.”

I turn my body to face him. What the hell makes this kid think I’m gonna help him? I’ve been too fucking nice. Probably. But if you ask me, the kid’s crazy. Just where do you have to come from to think I’m any kind of nice? I’ll have to rectify that. “What makes you think I’m gonna help you, boy?” I say and back him roughly against the wall, lifting him off the ground by his shirt collar. He smells like leather, his jacket creaks like it can talk. He turns his head to the side, wincing in pain. I haven’t even begun. I’ll have to teach this boy not to be such a fucking pussy.

“C-cause. You’re not like him.”

For that, I throw him clear to the other side of the room. He lands with a crash, the marble spidering. Fuck. He’s gone and set off my temper, and now I’ve broke shit. But unlike with his mama, who I left staring at me from the cold floor, I advance on him and pick him up by his stubborn Ryker hair. It’s most likely still sore from our travel home and I'm right, he's in instant pain. He grabs at my hand in his hair, unable to affect valiance. “Please, Major. I’m sorry, sir.”

I let go, but glare at him for good measure. “Sit.” I gesture to the bed. I’m not in the mood to deal with this shit. He does, still grabbing at his head, studying me, beginning to recognize he should deal with me cautiously. “Look, I don’t know what happened with yer, Mama.” This is true. I know she’s not dead, and I’ve seen her, but I have no fucking clue what Derco’s done to her to make her stay and I've no idea exactly where she is. Yet.

“I do know yer stuck here. Means, you’ll do what yer daddy says and what I say, or answer to the both of us, and a whole fuckin' building full of clones. Forgettin’ about yer mama's good advice, you should take it.”

"I'll listen to you, but I'm not fucking listening to him. That guy is douchebag."

I'm going to kill this kid. I'm going to fucking kill this kid. I set my face to glare mode. Matter of fact, just picture my face like that, with a permanent glare from now on. I'm gonna be glaring a lot of the kid keeps this up. “First, I’d better never hear a swear word out of your mouth again, soldier, least not in my presence. We've already been over that one – that's my last warning, or you can go over my knee again and this time I won't hold back.” The kid is fucking lucky to get a warning at all. The Major doesn’t give warnings — but I’ve already spanked him, thrown him into a wall, backhanded him, and dragged him by his hair. I should reign in my temper for today.

He nods. "Yes, sir."

"Second, Derco ain't the kind of trouble yer used to dealin' with. If yer so hell bent on not listenin' to him and just me, then consider it an order from me: Obey him, Briggland. Also my only warning.” I don't know why I care to warn him. I should just let him get beat on, Derco style. But even I fear Derco sometimes. He doesn't just hand out beatings, he breaks your soul then puts it back together making sure to leave glaring scars behind. His other boy is proof enough of that.

Kid nods jerkily; I can see the thoughts of hypocrisy cross his eyes.

“I believe I requested a verbal answer from you — also last warning.”

“Uh, yes sir.”

“Good, boy. Now were gonna square somethin’ up here. I ain’t here to help you about yer Mama. I don’t want nothin’ to do with her. Yer mama is someone everyone is best to forget.”
“My mama’s been saving me, from him since I was little, sir.”

Yeah. His mama, and me, ‘cept he doesn’t know that part. “That’s yer daddy yer talkin’ bout. How d’y’all know he didn’t save you from her?”

“I know, sir. If it’s anyone I need saving from, it’s him. I’m sure of it.” His voice is hard as stone, rough as the terrain in a Cynthripien desert.

“You don’t know a thing about her.” I want to strangle this kid. Damn him for being, so much like Dess in that way. Always having faith in something. If only he really knew his mama. Maybe I'll have to be the one to fill him in.

“Hit me if you have to, sir. It won’t stop it being true. Least for me.” Sure, he talks respectfully, but his eyes are pure challenge.

I’m ready to knock his block off — like I’ve wanted to do from the outset of this. But it's more than just that, a strange new feeling bubbles its way to the surface. I want to protect him. Hearing him talk about her, his mama, the deceitful bitch that she is with so much pride and blind faith worries me. This kid's naïve, about our world at least. He's easy prey for people, like his Gods damned parents. I want to shield him, but also whack him upside the head a few times to wake him up.

Sure his mama's 'saved' him from particular dangers, but that don't mean she's not gonna eventually pull him into her own schemes, use him for his special powers, like she did with me. And also like she did with me, she'll use his love for her, that blind fucking faith shining in his azure blues.

Least he knows that Derco ain't the friendly sort, but he's being stupid about him. He was the one lecturing me on fights you can't win and all that other bullshit and now he wants to enter a battle with Derco Ryker, the Ryker? Sorry kid, but that's just suicide and I can't let you do that.

The whole thing makes me want to stuff him in a ship and run to some other planet, hell even in another time. The idea itself is crazy because I know we'd eventually be caught and returned here, to Ryker Corp. Derco finds a way — he always finds a way. But I know I could hide him good for long enough. Long enough to teach him on my own. I shake my head at myself though, trying to shake away these feelings and ridiculous notions. I don't care about this kid. I don't care about this fucking kid. But I can't shake the feeling that my blood runs strong in this one and it's drawing me to him, making me care. Rykers are funny about blood, in many contexts.

He crosses his arms, leans back in the chair he's sitting in, the leather of the chair creaking in time with the leather of his jacket. His entire body relaxes; all fear of me is gone. “What’ch’you got against my mama, Major?”

Fuck. I know that look. That look's neither his mama, or his daddy and it's fucking creepy being given your own cocky set of lines, and looks back at you. Not to mention, how headstrong he looks; no wonder my own Daddy'd beat the tar outta me, so many times. Lucky for me, I fucking invented that shit.

I cross my arms right back at him, deepening my glare in a terrifyingly calm manner — one that demands compliance – and wait for him to respond, not saying anything.

It doesn't take long. He keeps his arms crossed but they loosen and become a little less set against the world. He tries to sit up a little straighter without me noticing. He's about to learn I notice everything. “You about done, little boy?”
He nods then remembers. “Yes, sir.”

“Good. Glad we straightened out who’s boss here. You can add that one to the list — no lippin’ off to the Major neither, or your ass is mine. We clear, soldier?”

He swallows. “Yes, sir.”

“I’ve had enough’a’lookin’ at yer face for a lifetime, an’ I’m gonna have to see ya first thing. I’m leavin’, but yer orders are thus: Get yer ass into that bed as soon as possible, lights out. And before you protest,” I warn, seeing the questions and in-fucking-digence in his eyes. “Your body ain’t never been through what it’s gonna go through tomorrow, it's already been through a lot today. So just do what I tell ya.” I wait looking him square in his azure blues.

“Yes, sir.”

“Be dressed and ready to go in the mornin’; wear the clothes in the closet,” I repeat. "I'll send someone for you." 'Cause is sure as fuck ain't going to be me.

“Yes, sir.” His tone is defeated now, like all the steam's been let out. And I’ve had about all I can take of this kid today, but he still doesn't give up.

“Major, was he telling the truth?”

"'Bout him bein’ yer daddy? Yeah I know for a fact.”

"That's not what I was asking. Much as I don't want to believe it, I think that part's too undeniable. What I meant was, is this what she would have wanted? Me living here?”

Would she? Say she had died, would she want him to know his family despite the evils she believed them to have committed? Despite what Derco would use him for? The answer's resoundingly, no. She hid him from his daddy for a reason, a good one; her death wouldn’t change that.

But things have changed. She wants him here now. Why? Who knows, but want him here she does. And even if things hadn’t changed, even if she had died, she would want me looking out for him, I know that much.

But I can’t travel in the same way she can. My only way of truly looking out for him, is what I've already done: find him; keep him with me.

Resolved not to lie to him, I’d rather not answer the question, but the way he's looking at me, it's like her looking at me and I can't say no to her. “No. She wouldn’t have wanted you here… but she would have wanted you with me.”

“With you? But…why you?” For a brief second, I feel sorry for him, his whole fucking life's a maze. He keeps following leads trying to find where his real life begins and the lie ends. He’d find the pathway out of one corner only to be met by a new wall of obstruction.

“I’m gonna give you a good piece of advice, son that you’d best heed: Don’t go askin’ questions ‘till you know enough, to know if you really need the answers.”

He looks confused, but he clamps onto the advice like a lifeline. Like it's a clue, or something important that he needs to figure out. “G’on.” I grunt at him, I don’t want to talk to the kid no more. I must be getting through to him some; he instantly obeys me this time.
I finally leave him and with too many thoughts ringing 'round in my head. His question has me thinking of too many questions of my own, with only one person to answer them. But I'm going to forget her and forget the questions.

‘Sides, once again, she's wrangled me in; has me on another mission for her, blind. Looking out for her kid. Every time I look at him, I'm filled with regret and pride. He ain't mine, but he should have been mine. He ain't mine, but he's just like me. He ain't mine, but he is all the same. I hate it. That woman's got a special talent, I tell you. A special talent for making me do shit I don't want to do.

And making me wish I was dead.
“Vallee. Now.” I point using my head to nod at the floor, but I don’t need to; he knows. Usually I make them undo my pants too, it’s an alpha thing, but I can’t wait for all that. I don’t know what’s wrong with me.

“Yes, sir. Captain Ridomie, sir,” he smiles, excited to be chosen by me. He practically scrambles to his knees and I can’t shove my cock into his mouth fast enough.

I choose Vallee, because he’s the best at sucking cock. He knows what I like, and how to drag it out. There’s nothing Vallee likes better than sucking cock, especially when it’s my cock.

That’s what I need now, a long, leisurely cock-sucking. Mostly because I want to prove to myself that I don’t want the new Ryker, but also because I’m ready to explode after looking at new Ryker: Briggland Ryker.

I usually let Vallee do his thing, but I can’t now. I grab his head and fuck his mouth violently, because I feel violent; I am violent and hungry. I can feel the fire in my eyes as I watch his mouth inhale my cock and I can feel the fire fueled by testosterone and the unyielding desire to claim.

But who am I kidding? Vallee isn’t the one I want to claim and it won’t satisfy me. Sure it will take the edge off, short-term, but then it will proceed to make the need worse. But fucking his mouth makes me feel normal. But I’m not normal and I want the one person under me that I can never have under me.

I’m a clone. A nothing. Not even a person. Made with the same Ryker epigenes that give more strength, more powerful than any other on this planet, but still not enough to give me status. The status I need to be Rykerian.

Useful, valuable, yet nothing.

I hate that it’s him. Why does it have to be him? Why does it have to be him that makes my blood sing? Damn Rykers. Damn that Ryker.

And I don’t just want him, I want him to be mine. I want to own him—that’s the problem. A clone can’t own a Ryker. Actually, we’re not permitted to own anything. Even the shirt on my back is not really mine. It is loaned to me by Ryker Corporation, used for a day, then put in the wash for tomorrow to be picked up by someone else to use.

My rage increases; none of this (Vallee's mouth on my cock) is doing any good. All I can think about is the new Ryker. I come down Vallee’s throat, but I’m not in the least relieved. Vallee swallows and pulls away, wiping his lips and looks to me for praise.

“What are you smiling about soldier? That’s the least favorable cock suck I’ve had from you. Get back down, I’m going to fuck you.” I’m going to fuck him raw. Maybe that will satisfy me.

A clone that’s displeased anyone in charge is always in a real hurry to make it up, even if said person in charge is being a real dick. Yes. I know I’m being a complete jerk, but better to take it out on Vallee than the Major. He scrambles to his hands and knees. “Please, sir. Please allow me to make it up to you.”

“You’ll make it up to me all right.” I tear at the green fatigues that conceal what I want. I pull them down and to his knees. I love Vallee’s ass. It’s tight, round, fuckable, but right now it’s all wrong.
Damn, it!

I push Vallee over. “Get dressed and get the fuck out of my sight.”

“But, sir. I’m sorry. Whatever I did—"

“You didn’t do anything, Vallee,” I sigh, mad. I should apologize, but I don't.

“O-okay, but sir, I could do that thing you like. Please, let me make you feel good.”

I want it. I want to erase what happened earlier when I laid eyes on him.

I haven’t nodded but he’s already moved back to my cock, still hard, barely satisfied. He swirls his tongue around the head. “Fuck me Rido.”

I grab him by the back of the neck and pull him up to kiss him hard and practically eat his tongue; my other hand grips him around the torso, mashing him to my body. His pants are still down, I reach around to tug on his cock as I keep kissing him; he moans, my testosterone spikes and I have to be in him.

I throw him over the railing, and push the black shirt up his back sinking my teeth into his skin: Blood. I need to see his blood, taste it; I want to see his back covered with my marks and bruises. “Take me, Ridomie. Mark me, please.”

I smile. Vallee knows me well. See? He’s all I need. I like Vallee. He and I could settle down one day, become mated. I’d forget all about what happened today. When I saw him.

I bite Vallee again.

The new Ryker: Arrogant, even as the Major tugged on his hair and he looked at me like he could mean something. He'd called me pal. Why would he call me pal?

I slap Vallee’s ass. “Yeah, Rye…” Vallee was also raised like me and I allow him to refer to me casually when we fuck.

Ryker. I can’t stop thinking of his blonde Ryker hair and the way my cock felt because of him. Never mind my cock, now that I think about it, it was my whole body; it reacted to him. There’s no other way to say it; I didn’t like the Major’s hands on him like that when it should be (always be) my hands on him like that.

I’d never felt such feelings about anyone before, let alone a Ryker; I’ve gone too far this time; I should be incinerated. I need to make the feelings go away. Vallee will make the feelings go away.

I slide a finger into his ass and twist it in and out, preparing him for my cock. Yes, this is good. I like this, have always liked this. Ryker is gone and forgotten. I’ll just do my best to stay far away from him. I’ll go near him little as possible. I hate most Rykers, I can hate him too; just because I find him attractive, it doesn’t mean anything. Most of my men find him attractive. I’ll ignore the fact I want to slaughter them all for saying so.

I hear a throat clear. “Captain Ridomie,” the Major says.

I look behind me and scowl and no I’m not supposed to scowl at the Major, but I’m in this messed up mood today. It’s all the new Ryker’s fault. “Can’t it wait? I’m kinda busy right now.”

If I'm not supposed to scowl at him, you can bet I'm not supposed to talk to him like that either.
Next I know, I’m plastered against the railing and Vallee is hastily doing up his pants while the Major leaves his finger prints around my neck, my cock still hard and hanging out. “Leave soldier,” he tells Vallee, who’s not as stupid as I apparently am, because Vallee leaves without being told twice.

Since the Major’s also a Ryker, he gets listened to right away, but moreover, we respect him; at least we usually do. Every now and again someone tries to be a wise-ass and he has to set them straight — kinda like me right now.

“Yer on duty with me fer that, and if I hear an inkling of the lip you’ve been giving me lately boy, I promise I’ll make sure you regret it.”

The Major doesn’t make idle threats. “Yes, sir. I’m sorry, sir. That was inappropriate.”

“Was more than fuckin’ inappropriate, but I got more important things to worry about just now,” he says releasing me. I put away my cock and zip up my pants. “I came to tell you yer demoted. Lord Ryker wants his long, lost son in charge of yer team. He’s the Captain and yer his first lieutenant now. You report to him.”

“What? I mean what, sir?” That can't be right. I could care less about being demoted. All of that is just official stuff. My crew knows I’m who they go to no matter what my title says. But I cannot be the new Ryker’s first lieutenant. No way.

“I know you can hear me fine Lieutenant.”

I’ve already been too cheeky, I have to tread carefully not to piss the Major off anymore, but I really don’t want to be the new Ryker’s First Lieutenant. I decide not to respond, but the expression on my face tells it all.

“What’s crawled up yer ass? Yer usually more agreeable than this, soldier.”

“I’m fine, sir.”

“Yer not fine, so don’t say yer fine.” He waits for me to tell him why I’ve been so moody.

“I don’t like the look of the new Ryker.” I can say things like this to the Major without fear of being incinerated. We have a good relationship. He deserves more than I’m giving him right now, but I can’t reconcile my feelings enough to tell him anymore than that. I am telling the truth.

He looks suspicious, but he accepts what I’ve said. “He ain’t normal that’s fer sure. He’s different than us, Lieutenant, and much as I hate to admit it, clever as hell. He’s strong too. I’m gonna test him tomorrow, but I can’t let him die. I need you looking out for him. You are in charge of keepin’ him alive. Understand?”

Can it get any worse? "Yes, sir."

“Get him ready in the mornin’ and bring him down to the fields. Don’t let him do anything stupid, or it’s on you.”

Okay, so it can get worse. I accept my fate though, it’s not like I have much choice. “Yes, sir.”

“Good. Now go find that boy and fuck him good. Yer gonna need to be in a better mood before you interact with Briggland Ryker.” I swear I hear the Major laugh, but I know I have to have been imagining things; the Major doesn't laugh. Besides, I’m too dumbfounded by my new orders to really be here and did the Major just tell me to go have sex?
I don't know, but either way, the whole world's just gone to...well it's just gone.

Next Morning

“Hello? Captain Ryker, sir? I’ve come to help you dress, sir.” I wait, but there’s no answer. Did I mention how much I hate certain Rykers? Arrogant just like the rest of them. He's probably not answering just to toy with me.

I knock several more times, but when he doesn’t answer I admit myself. I’m not taking the rap for this Ryker. No way. Never in a million years.

The anteroom is empty; I look around curiously, but not for long and move to the door of his bedroom. I knock and have to knock twice before I hear a muffled, “hmmmmmph...” I decide to take that as come in, even if I’m sure it sounded more like a 'get lost.'

I open the door. The new Ryker is face down on his bed, completely naked. I begin sweating, my cock is already hard for him, I need to have him; it’s uncontrollable. Seriously, what’s wrong with me? I do my best to restrain all of the feelings I’m having, but it’s almost impossible. My face is contorted into my pissed off look.

I look anywhere but his perfect ass that I want to bite and claw and suck. I move to his closet; he needs clothes pronto. I think I’m going to be in the clear, but everything goes downhill from there. “Who the fuck are—you're that Ridomie, guy aren't you?” I hear his voice croak from the bed.

“Yes, I’m Cap… I mean, Lieutenant Ridomie, sir.” I turn around. I should not have turned around. I almost drop the pants I’m holding. Ryker stands there in all his Ryker glory with one of the nicest cocks I’ve ever seen. I can’t take my eyes from it and he’s seen me looking at it. Just kill me now. Someone please, just incinerate me now.

He smirks knowing exactly how awesome his penis is. “See something you like?”

I scowl and turn away.

“Oh c’mon. I’m joking around — are all of you as fucking anal as that fucking Major dude? I sure as fuck hope not.”

Did he just call the Major a, dude? What’s a dude? And he swears just as much as the Major. Matter of fact, he looks a helluva lot like the Major.

“Here are your pants, sir,” I tell him when I turn around and make sure not to look down. But that means I have to look at his eyes and I get lost there. His cock is great. I don’t want to down play it at all—I mean it’s really great—but his eyes, they’re this beautiful rich azure blue. The Lord Ryker has eyes that color, but I’d never got lost in them. I’m staring again.

He doesn’t seem to notice this time. “Why are you calling me sir?” he asks looking curiously at the pants I’m holding up, “and don’t I need some boxers or something? Or am I expected to go fucking commando?”

“Boxers? Commando?” What is he talking about?

He looks at me curiously. “I guess everything’s fucking different here. Boxers, like underwear? The thing you put on before your pants? And Commando’s an 'Earth' term, I guess, for not wearing them.”
I have no idea what he’s talking about, but at least his inane questions are distracting me from his body.

“Here, I’ll fucking show you.” He moves past me and into the closet. He’s got a few bruises on him I hadn’t noticed ‘till now, the Major must have been pretty hard on him for those to still be there. I have to ball my fists and grit my teeth to restrain myself. I’m turning animal again — someone else has marked him, nobody should mark him: Except me.

“Who put those marks there?” I don’t mean to ask it, but the words come out of my mouth all the same.

“Huh? Oh yeah. I’m a little bruised up from that Dickhead you guys call Major, but I’m all right, thanks. They’ll heal up quick. Feels nice to be able to say that.” Then he smiles. Ryker smiling is like…it’s like…well there’s nothing in the whole universe that’s more interesting to me. I’m fascinated.

“Here they are,” he says holding up some kind of tiny white pants that are cut short. “My mama told me never to wear dirty underwear, but looks like I’ll have to.” He slips them on, thankfully covering his ass and his cock, but it might be worse than naked. Those ‘underwear’ things look really good on him.

He grabs the pants from me and throws them back at me. “Tell the Major if he expects me to dress like a fucking clone, he can come do it himself, because I sure as fuck am not going to wear that shit.”

He goes back to the closet and comes out with some other clothes, same ones he was wearing yesterday and starts putting them on.

I feel like an idiot. I was stupid enough to begin to think that this new Ryker wasn’t like the other Rykers; I’m realizing this only now after he’s said that comment. Except he is the same as the other Rykers: A cloneist asshole.

I watch him not able to speak, as he puts on the strange clothing and even though I hate him for what he’s said, I can’t help but admire how good he looks in what he’s put on. The ripped, blue pants are almost scandalous and there’s no way I want him walking around for the benefit of the other clones in that. I can see his funny little white pants for Ryker’s sake!

“You can’t wear that stuff,” I say without thinking. I’m not supposed to talk to him like that. I’ve lived all these years and I’m going to be ended by this little Ryker punk.

He looks like he wants to strangle me to death with his bare hands. “Who the fuck do you think you are, anyway?”

He's right. I shouldn’t be speaking to him like that, no matter how much of an asshole he is. Derek Ryker is an even bigger asshole and I’d never speak to him like I had this Ryker. “I’m sorry, sir. You’re right. I’m no one, just a worthless clone. Shall I head to the incinerator?” It’s probably better this way. I’m better off dead than to have to live another second with this emotional anguish over New Ryker.

“Incinerator? What the fuck is that?”

He doesn’t know? Aren't all Rykers born knowing that they incinerate misbehaved clones? “It’s where defective clones are sent to be burned to ash.”

“As in burned alive?”

“Yes, sir.” Why does he having a hard time understand this? Am I not explaining it right?
“That’s fucked up! No! Don’t go be burned alive! Jesus Christ! What the fuck kinda place is this?”

He thinks the incinerator is…wrong? I have to bite my lip. I want to smile, so big, but I don’t want to get too excited. He must be taunting me, somehow. Derek would do something like that, I have to assume for the time being the new Ryker will too.

He’s still shaking his head though. “You’re not going to do that, right? Fuck. Okay, I didn’t mean to be an asshole. I’m a real asshole sometimes, but Jesus fuck! I’d never send you to be burnt alive! You don’t think that’s crazy?”

I don’t know what to say now. Is this some kind of a test? He seems to genuinely not like the idea of the incinerator. Of course I think it’s crazy. I’ve watched too many of my friends and brothers burnt alive, sent to walk themselves into their own burning. I hate thinking about it. But it’s the way of things here, it just is.

“I…It saddens me, sir.” I feel it best not to lie to him. The Major said he’s clever, I don’t know what he’d do to me if he figured out I wasn’t telling him the truth — the truth is a big deal to us clones.

“Well I tell you, it fucking infuriates me,” he says. He looks like he wants to punch something and his beauty goes up a couple of notches for me. He’s crazy beautiful angry.

I try again. “What I meant, sir, was the Major wants you dressed for battle. You’re the new Captain. I’m your first Lieutenant. He’ll be angry if you show up like that.”

“Me? Captain? That’s a fucking joke, right? I don’t know shit about battles. I’m not Captain, you can be Captain.”

He may be right about his skills, I’ve never seen them, so I don’t know, but it doesn’t matter; a clone can never out rank a Ryker no matter how unfit for the position he might be. If it were ranked by skill, I’d be Colonel and not Derek Ryker. The Major is at the top of that list of course. He’s the General Major, and definitely is fit for the category, but he prefers to go by Major. Because of that, no one else is a Major — simply because he says so — though technically they could be. I don’t know why the position even exists anymore.

“I can’t be Captain, sir.”

“Is that why you keep calling me, sir?”

“That and because you’re a Ryker, sir.”

“Look, let’s clear something the fuck up. My last name may be Ryker — though I’m seriously considering changing it after this little family vacation — but I am not a fucking Ryker. Stop calling me, sir. If you need that to be an order then I order you to stop calling me sir. Jesus. Do I look like the Major to you?”

Does he really want me to answer that? Because my answer would be yes he most certainly does. Either way, I’ve calmed down a little. Maybe I’ve misunderstood him. The Major also said he was different. “What should I call you, s…What should I call you?”

“Name’s Briggland, and you are?”

I’m freaking out inside. I can’t call him Briggland. Lord Ryker will incinerate me if he hears that.
"I'm Lieutenant Ridomie." I don't get what he's doing, I already told him that, maybe he's not so bright after all? I doubt that though.

"No. I already know that. I mean, like what's your first name? Or am I not allowed to be on a first name basis with you?"

He's allowed to be on an anything basis with me, but I don't want him to know my first name. My first name was taken from me, just like everything else. A name is the only thing a clone gets, but I was stripped of that along with any dignity I might have had and given something else. I got to keep Ridomie though, so Ridomie's all anyone ever gets. Some know. The one's who were raised with me know, but they also know never to call me by my name, or the one that was forced on me.

"I just go by Ridomie," I say and hope it's enough. It's really hard for me to leave off the moniker, sir.

"Just Ridomie, huh? Cool." He flops back on the bed. "Look, if I don’t dress in that shit, will the Major, uh, incinerate you?"

I want to lie, so he'll just change, but he'll find out. "No he won’t." It’s hard to leave off the sir, but I don’t call him Brigglend. His jacket creaks with every move, he looks like sex and I want to climb on top of him. My cock is beginning to hurt; I’m going to have to find someone to fuck. I’ll leave poor Vallee alone. I don’t think his ass can take anymore. Maybe Rex, I’ll find Rex. He's a Top. Tops fucking Tops can be violent. They don't like being topped so much, but I'm the Top of all the Tops and he'd do that for me. I need violent right now.

"Not changing then," he says. That’s no surprise, but it is a surprise that he actually cares what might happen to me. I’m so confused.

"I will be in trouble," I try. "Anything you don’t do, or do that the Major doesn’t like will be blamed on me."

"You look like the kinda guy that can handle trouble, so long as you’re not being burnt alive, I can live with that," he winks.

Okay, so he’s still a cocky Ryker asshole, but he’s not quite like his Ryker predecessors.

"I’ll have to go get the Major, sir, I mean…” I can’t say it.

"Brigglend. Why can’t you say my name?"

"I could get incinerated for that, sir." I give up.

"By the Major?"

"No, sir. By your father, sir."

"Fucking asshole," he huffs. I look around because you cannot say that kind of stuff around here. He doesn’t seem to notice me looking. "Fine, okay. What about, Ryker? Can you call me that?"

"I’ll try, Captain."

"Ryker, say it."

"Ryker."

"Good. And, you can go get the Major. I’ll handle that guy."
Rykers. Always thinking they can handle way more than they can. “I don’t know.”

“Are you calling me weak Ridomie?”

I don’t hear my name often and when I do it’s a Ryker saying it, but when he says it, I wish I could hear him say it over and over again, while I shove my cock in his... I have to stop thinking like that.

“No, Ryker. The Major’s pretty strong though.”

“You got that right.”

If he agrees then why isn’t he moving to change? This Ryker’s frustrating. If he were mine, I’d… dammit, I have to stop thinking like that. I’ll repeat that until I understand that Ryker will never be mine. But maybe he’ll want to fuck in the least. Derek fucks all of us clones at some point. Yeah. I could live with that.

“Please Ryker.” I’ll beg him if I have to. I’d prefer not to disrupt the Major — he’s been in a really bad mood for weeks now and I’ve pissed him off on my own enough too. Looks like Briggland — did I just call him Briggland? — has too, if those marks around his torso are anything to go by.

“Fuck, no. Sorry, buddy. This one’s between the Major and I.”

Stupid Ryker arguments; I’m always getting caught in them. “Okay, Ryker, but don’t say I didn’t warn you.”

Fuck my life. At least I’m able to leave his presence. I can’t take it anymore; the testosterone’s built to an unhealthy point. Once I’m out the door I have to undo my pants and stroke my cock — I can’t wait and I have to come. Now. It doesn’t take long in the unusually empty hallway. I don’t care who sees me, really, only that I’m doing this outside of Ryker’s door. Testosterone spikes in us clones at the most inopportune times; it’s not unusual to find clones jacking off in hallways at any time of the day. It just doesn’t happen to me. Ever. I can normally control myself until I can find another clone to stick my cock in, but ever since I set eyes on Briggland Ryker…this is embarrassing.

I come hard. It’s satiates me, but only a little. I can still feel the speed and strength of testosterone racing in my veins. Damn it. I hate him. I hate Briggland Ryker.
Figuring Out Ryker

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

The Major is as I expect: Displeased, but he looks like he expected it. Still doesn't get me off tasting the Major's wrath. "What did I tell you, soldier?" he says, grabbing me by the throat.

"That I'm responsible for him, sir, but he's a Ryker, sir. Save manhandling him—"

He let's go my throat. “Fine. That kid wants to test me, he’ll find out what that entails. C’mon.”

Of course he makes me come with him.

The look on the Major's face when he comes through the door makes Ryker cover his head, probably thinking the Major is going to drag him around my the scruff of his hair again. He doesn’t. Instead, he pulls him up by the lapels on the creaky jacket he’s wearing. Ryker looks pissed about that and punches the Major square in the jaw.

I stare transfixed. Not even Derek Ryker is brazen enough to do that.

The punch was solid, but doesn’t dislodge Major Ryker from his jacket. The two of them are in a full out battle now, one I know not to go near. I’ve never seen two Ryker’s go at it with more than words before, but I know to leave them fight.

Ryker's trying to get another hit in on the Major, the Major has no choice, but to punch him back and try to subdue him. "Don't you dare, punch me again, kid."

Of course Ryker tries to punch him again. The Major grapples his nephew and pins him on the ground, with one knee to each side of his torso. The Major gets a few more hits to Ryker's face and it makes him a bit dizzy. He adeptly slips Ryker’s left arm out, and maneuvers Ryker at a speed it doesn’t look like the younger Ryker’s expecting, and extracts his other arm out of the jacket, easily. The motion rips them apart, and Ryker stands, ready in case the Major might attack him again.

The Major's up on his feet too, throws the jacket at me (I catch it) then circles around Ryker like a wild animal. He’s not finished teaching him a lesson. I don’t even see him flinch before he pounces at Ryker. This time, Ryker is tackled to the ground in a prone position, his arms securely locked behind him.

The Major, pushes his forearm down into Ryker’s back, his Ryker bracelet presses into Ryker’s skin and the kid can’t move. Suddenly, Ryker doesn’t look so good. He’s woozy. It’s like someone covered his head in cloth. He’s shaking his head like he can’t hear well and blinking around like he couldn’t see too well either. I don’t know what the Major did to him, I don't know the Major knows he’s done something to him, but Ryker submits and let’s the Major manhandle him and sit on his arms, to hold him in place, and lands a punch to each side of his head.

Ryker’s definitely spinning from those hits, but whatever had control of him moments before is gone. He’s almost out for the count when the Major drags him toward the bath. I don’t follow, but I can hear everything.

“You’re gonna need to train a little fucking more than that to beat me kid,” the Major says. I hear the water turn on and the sound of his body being thrown in.
Ryker squeals. “Holy, Christ-Fuck! That’s fucking cold Asshole!”

I hear something else and I’m pretty sure the Major’s just climbed into the shower with Ryker. “Take yer shirt off, before I rip it off.” Is Ryker in the shower still clothed? I hear scrambling around and assume that it’s Ryker taking off his clothes.

“Get rid of the pants, and briefs too.” Briefs? Is that what those things Ryker was going on about are called? He’d called them something else. How does the Major know what they are?

“What? No! That’s like…This is child molestation!”

The Major laughs, but it’s not his good kind of laugh. “Believe me kid, if I wanted to molest you, I’d could’ve done, so by now. Undress, now.”

“What the hell? At least let me keep my underwear! You don’t need to wash me there!” I assume he’s talking about his cock. Great. Now I’m thinking of Ryker’s incredible cock again, I don’t want the Major touching it either.

“No, you’re right, I don’t. I don’t fancy lookin’ at it neither. But since beating your ass properly ain’t an option right now, I’m goin’ for the humility factor. I highly doubt after this, that you'll give Ridomie any more trouble. Last chance, disrobe, or I’ll gladly help you.”

I hear more scuffling and I assume that’s Ryker taking the rest of his clothes off. Then I hear the loud slaps, the Major’s, holy crap, the Major’s spanking Ryker. I just jacked off—three times—in the hallways on the way to get the Major and now I've got another raging boner. Ryker's in as much agony as I am, but for different reasons. "O-okay! Okay! I'm sorry, I'll get ready." The Major doesn't stop though and really lays into him, until I think…is Ryker crying?

Then there’s silence for sometime, which is broken by Ryker's squeal and complaints about the Major 'rubbing his fucking skin off' then the Major saying, “Here, wash yer own dick,” it relieves me a ton. I don't want anyone touching his dick if I can't.

“I can wash my own hair too, sir,” Ryker says.

“I don’t care what you can and can’t do. I’m washin’ it.”

“C’mon Major; it’s fucking freezint! Hurry the fuck up! I can do it faster than that!” I hear more 'spanks,' and Ryker shutting up.

Finally the Major says, “I don’t like this fucking Earth style hair cut, we're cutting it like yer daddy said to. You look like a lemon cunted mother-fucker. Yer gettin’ a normal Rykerian style cut as soon as possible.”

“What the fuck is a lemon cunted mother-fucker?”

Another slapping sound. “Watch yer mouth, boy.”

“Me? Listen to you.”

“I’m the Major, I can do what I want. You on the other hand will do as I tell ya.”

“Fucking hypocrite—Ow!”

There’s a lot of that (wow is Ryker stubborn) until finally, the Major comes out, dripping wet and still fully clothed, dragging Ryker by the towel around his waist to his bed and moves to the closet
to get the clothes the Major wanted him to wear in the first place. I should have grabbed them, but I’m too transfixed. Ryker’s body looks burned from the harsh treatment, looking like the Major brushed him all over with a bath brush. I see the scratches and bruises both from the fighting, and the being dragged around the room that have also been rubbed raw. The roots of his skull are noticeably red too and he’s rubbing at them. Can’t see the spanking I know happened, must have been on his ass that covered by the towel.

The Major returns to our sides, dripping water all over the floor as he goes and throws clothes on the bed near Briggland. “I think I can trust ya to dress yerself the way I expect from now on.”

“Yeah, yeah.”

The Major never accepts that as an answer. He gives him the evil eyebrow, and crosses his arms over his chest and looks imposing.

“Yes, sir.”

“Well, go on then.”

I look Ryker over a second time. His lip is freshly split on the left side, and the bruise puffs out from that same side of his lip into his cheek, continuing up into his eye. His hair is dripping wet, and plastered to his head. He doesn’t look any less deadly, he looks more so. He finally obeys the Major and dresses.

“I hope we cleared up my expectations for you,” his lips exaggerate, and enunciate specific words stringing them together in a southern cantor that’s always stronger when he’s mad.

“Yes, sir,” he says, rubbing the back of his head sheepishly, cheeks heating, probably remembering that horrific shower.

“In addition, I’m gonna make a hog-roast outta that,” he says pointing to the jacket I’m still holding.

“Please, sir. I promise I won’t step a toe out of line — just don’t burn my leather — I’ll do whatever you want.”

“Means a lot to ya — don’t it?” he smiles his Ryker smile, the one no one wants a Ryker to smile at them.

“Who gave it to you?”

“My mama.” I have a Mother too. It’s not the same as when a Ryker has a Mother. My mother isn’t a real Mother, not really, but the one that was my mother is still important to me. Enough I can understand.

“Yer lyin’ boy. How could she have? You haven’t…” He stops talking not wanting to give any Ryker business away. For his part Briggland looks broken.

The Major’s malachite eyes turn black at the mention of her, once again rousing my suspicions. This Mother had done something to piss both Ryker men off.

“It showed up on my last birthday,” he says desperately.

“It’s just as well then. You need t’forget about her. Burning this jacket’s a good way t’start.”
“Please. I don’t have anything of hers.”

“Yeah, y’do. That’s hers,” he points his hand down to Ryker’s wrist, I look down; there’s some kind of circular band wrapped around it.

“And yer filthy mouth is like hers too.”

He instructs me to burn the jacket and to be down at the fields directly after morning meal — I’m to take Ryker there — and the Major leaves. We’re alone again; things really aren’t going my way.

Ryker’s looking at me funny. “Hey Ridomie, will the Major incinerate you if you don’t incinerate my jacket?”

“No, but he will beat me.”

At least it give him some pause, but then he pounces and all I can think about is how good he smells, least at first, then I come to my senses and grip the jacket he’s tearing away from me. I’m strong, stronger than most clones, but I’m not Ryker strong and this Ryker is strong even for a Ryker, least at his age. He’ll out do the Major one-day, in my estimation.

“Ryker, let go.”

“You let go.”

My cock very much likes Ryker being this close, I grapple a thigh around him just to see what it feels like, we’re facing each other, I see an opening and I take it, grab his arm and pin it behind his back, both of us are each holding a piece of the jacket. He may be stronger, but my skill set in fighting is higher. I’ve been training, fighting, been at war since I was just a little guy, being raised. I have him in such a way, the jacket we’re both gripping could tear; he freezes.

“Please. Okay. I give. I fucking give, don’t fucking ruin my jacket.”

He gives? But he’s a Ryker? Rykers don’t ‘give.’ This one does. He lets go of the jacket but I don’t let go of him, I do ease off his arm. I can see his face; he’s pouting. He’s cute when he pouts like that, with his Ryker lip sticking out. I hate him.

“I’m not going to incinerate your jacket, Ryker. I never was.” If he’d of just waited instead of reacting.

He smiles his crazy beautiful smile and his eyes light up at the same time. “You’re not?”

He’s close enough I could kiss him, if I could kiss him. He should be mine. Why don’t I get something that’s mine?

“No.”

“Thanks, Ridomie! You’re the best!” He takes his free arm and hugs me.

“Okay, okay. Enough, Ryker,” I say automatically then freeze — I keep messing this up, I’m not supposed to talk to Ryker like that…Not supposed to talk to Ryker like that…Not supposed to talk to Ryker like that. I’ll repeat it till my brain believes it. But he really shouldn’t’ be hugging me either.

“Sorry. Are you weird about dudes hugging dudes? ‘Cause you know, for me I kinda go both ways,
so I’m cool about it.”

Great. Now he’s apologizing to me. Wait. He’s apologizing to me. All the blood’s gone to my cock and I’m having trouble thinking straight. I think he doesn’t know that Ryker’s are not supposed to be talked to like that by clones. Still I can’t keep talking to him like that. He’ll find out eventually and then he’ll be angry.

“That depends. What’s a ‘dude,’ Ryker?” That’s not the right thing to say either. I can’t help myself; I like the way this feels, to be treated like a person, by someone the world sees as a person. An important person. To have a regular conversation with a Ryker.

“A dude. Like, a guy. You know? And a girl would be a dudette. I haven’t seen too many girls around here though.”

“I don’t think it’s weird. Guys hugging guys,” I tell him too quickly. “Ryker, we’re a corporation of only…dudes,” I try out his word. “How do you think we have sex?”

“Oh. Oh.”

I’m still holding him, both of us know this, and the longer I do it, the more awkward it’s getting, but I don’t want to let him go. I want to swipe the hair from his brow, I want to put some salve on the wound on his cheek…

“So you all like dudes?” he confirms.

“All of us.”

“Aren’t you guys all brothers? Isn’t it like fucking your brothers?”

Man. He really doesn’t know anything about Ryker Corporation, I’m realizing. First I have to release him. I unravel myself, taking the jacket with me. I’m not giving it back. I want it. I know that’s weird; I’m doing it anyway. I fold it over my arm and he watches and I get the strange sense that I am in charge even though it should be the other way around.

“Some of us are brothers in arms, yes, but only others of us are brothers genetically. There has to be a particular amount of allele match and this only happens if we are from the same womb. For example the triplets: Rex, Terry, and Clash, they’re brothers genetically. Ter-X, one of the guys you came with and his brother Heli-O are twins, brothers. I am from a single womb of the same Genetic Batch, or G-batch, so I am not their genetic brother, but since we are from the same G-batch we consider ourselves brothers in arms; we were raised together,” I say proudly, because not all clones were raised by the Mothers, it’s a symbol of status amongst clones to have been raised as such. Not that he’ll know that.

“Okay, way over my head dude, but I’m a learn as I go kinda guy. I’ll take your word for it, some clones are not brothers and some are, so you don’t have sex with your brothers.”

“Not quite. Some of us have sex with our brothers. What would be wrong with having sex with a brother?” I ask.

He looks at me like I’ve lost my mind. “Because. Everyone knows you can’t have sex with a sibling — your offspring will end up all mutated and shit.”

Oh. I see. He thought brothers having sex meant defective progeny, yes; I can see why he’d look at me like I’m crazy. Defective progeny would be a huge problem. That’s no problem; I can clear this up. I smile. “We can’t have offspring, Ryker.”
“Oh, yeah. Guess it’s all dudes here.”

“Well, that’s one thing, but there’s more: We are infertile. All clones are. We cannot reproduce, so there’s no worry about us having sex with a sibling, even if there were female clones. So it’s not impractical for us to have sexual relations with each, other since there is no logical or functional reason to bar us from such activities. Perhaps on Earth this is not the case?”

“Well how about that it’s just fucking weird?” he asks ignoring my question.

I don’t know how to answer that. Weird? Why would it be weird? We know our brothers best. We love our brothers best. We trust them and are most comfortable with them. It’s only sex.

“Look, man, I didn’t mean to offend you, it honestly makes no difference to me what you do. It must be a cultural thing, or something. We just didn’t do it on Earth. It was a major fucking faux-pas. And the people that had sex with their siblings were thought of as fucking weirdos, least in the time I’m from. Though way back, royal families often shacked up amongst their family members to keep the blood in the family ‘pure’ and even after that, cousins could marry cousins in any family, but in my century, well it just wasn’t a thing. But hey, no judgment, to each their own. So you guys fuck your brothers? At least you’re not my brothers, or are you? ‘Cause I wouldn’t mind fucking someone and I just don’t think I could fuck my brother, you know? I’ve been through a lot of shit in the short time I’ve been here. I know from experience, fucking’s a great way to relax. Least I think so.”

I don’t understand all of what Ryker’s said, but I hear the last bit loud and clear and suddenly I can’t think of anything else. The mere thought of him fucking another being, human, clone or otherwise, awakens the thing in me, the thing all clones have in their blood; it’s what makes us crazy territorial. I don’t want him to fuck anyone else. That realization hits me harder than me realizing how much I want to fuck him.

Because this makes it more than just fucking.

Clones fuck other clones all the time. We are by nature polyaormous. For instance, I fucked Vallee several times last night, but if I saw Rex fucking him right now I wouldn’t care. But every once in a long while a clone will become territorial over another clone and this person is said to be his mate—the one.

The clones who have a ‘one’ say when they saw him for the first time, it was like all their senses focused in on him and from that moment on they couldn’t let anyone else near him, they could think of little else but him. No matter how hard they tried, their hormones would spike and they wanted to kill anyone who looked at their mate. It was uncontrollable.

When a mate was claimed, he knew who he belonged to and deferred to his mate for everything, even over his superiors. Of course a proper Top knows when to assert his authority and when it could get his mate incinerated and acts as such.

But enough of that. Why am I having these feelings for Ryker? I always thought I was a defect and now I’m sure of it. There’s no way I can be Ryker’s Top. If anything, he should be mine. And even if he felt the same for me, which he doesn’t, Ryker’s do not mate with clones. Sure they fuck them, but they don’t mate with them. My life is quickly becoming complicated.

Right now, all I know is that this feeling has hold of me. My hands tense on his jacket as I try to restrain myself from claiming him right now. The thought of him fucking anyone but me is making me crazy. I want to ask him who he’s thinking of fucking and kill them. Instead I make myself say, “we are not your brothers.” I could lie that we are, so he won’t fuck anyone else, but
subconsciously I want to leave room that he may fuck me someday and I don’t want him thinking I’m his brother if he thinks it’s weird. I’ll take care of the other part another way.

“Great,” he smiles and his eyes sparkle at me.

I want to take him far away and lock him up somewhere. Damn it. I hate this. I hate Ryker.

“C’mon. We should go.”

“Wait. What about my jacket?”

“I’ll take good care of it for you. Wouldn’t want the Major to find it in here and incinerate it himself would you?” So now I am a liar. The Major gives orders and expects them done to the point there’s no chance of them not being done. He’ll never look for this jacket again. But I have to have something with his scent on it, or I think I might actually go crazy. I hate Ryker.

“Right. Thanks. I owe you. Anything, name it, it’s yours.”


“Be careful making an offer like that around here Ryker.” That’s all I say and he nods like he’s once again grateful for my good help and advice when really it’s all to my own selfish gain. I jerk my head to the side for him to follow me, and he does.

But he shouldn’t.

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I follow him.

This guy kicks some serious ass. I think I’ve made my first Ryker Corp. friend. I follow behind him as he leads me from my Rapunzel tower (my room seems to be up a lot of fucking stairs) and through a maze of hallways. I have to admit, this place kicks ass too, even if my father seems like a real douche-bag.

It’s nothing short of exquisite; the architecture is unlike anything on Earth. Some of it doesn’t even seem to make structural sense, though I’m not a fucking architect, what do I know? But to me, it looks like one gigantic piece of art. Classy. Everything looks fucking expensive — I guess the clone business really pays off.

Paintings — mostly of people that look alike. Rykers — I don’t need a genetics degree to figure that one out — Rykers many generations down, line the walls, mostly men; but the occasional woman. Where are all these Rykers now?

Man or Woman though, they all share the same strong jaw, patrician nose, hawk-like eyes, and blonde hair. Just like me.

A strange sensation washes over me that all of this time, the time I’d spent wondering where I’d come from, this was here: Ryker Corp. and here is where it was written on the walls, all this time, for me to see exactly where I’d come from. Fucking blows my mind.

“Wait here, Ryker,” Ridomie shakes his head at himself, fucked if I know why, then says, “I mean…forget it. I’ll be right back, okay?”

“Yeah, dude. Take your time.”
He kinda scowls at me. Maybe he doesn’t like my Earth lingo. Who the fuck knows? I’m excited to look around now that he’s gone. This place is crazy — people fuck their brothers, my family manufactures clones, there’s got to be a whole lot more crazy where that came from.

I head back down the hall we’d just come. I’d seen a painting I was particularly interested in, but Ridomie seemed pissed about something and I didn’t want to irritate him further by slowing him down while I play ‘investigate the Rykers.’

I don’t buy that my mama’s dead. I’ll admit, for a brief few moments I did last night, but when I came to my senses, I realized that no one’s actually said she was dead. They’d implied it a helluva lot, sure, but I they just want me to forget about her.

Well fuck that. I’m not. I’m gonna find my mama. But first to learn something about my surroundings. The dude I’d seen was familiar looking, more familiar looking than any of the other Rykers in the paintings. I stop at his painting on the wall and read the name before I look at him closely again: Malvrick Ryker.

I look up into austere, azure blue eyes that are piercing even from his painting. There’s something familiar about him — something about him reminds me of the Major. This man is a Ryker and that Ryker gene is fucking indestructible in this guy. Who knows how far back in the Ryker ancestry this man had lived? Even that’s an assumption, that he’s dead, I mean. I haven’t seen a picture of the Major, or my father, so I’ve concluded these are ancestors long passed. Huh. Maybe none of them are dead — maybe I’d be meeting them sooner than I want to.

I decide to keep looking for paintings of the Major and my father, so I head down another hallway and look at each of the paintings, studying them, not paying attention to where I’m headed. This hallway’s filled with a lot of clones. They’re all looking at me, I’m guessing because of my Ryker hair, or my good looks, but either way I decide to put on a show. “Hey fellas!”

“Hello Master, Ryker. Sir,” several of them say at once, but none of them are brave enough to come near me. What has my family done to the poor dudes? I suppose the whole being burned alive thing doesn’t help. I’ll try to put them at ease.

“Hey, you there. Yeah, you,” I say to a clone, big one, walking alone. And yeah, this one’s bigger than some I’ve seen. Because of all the movies I’ve watched, I always thought clones would all be identical, but that doesn’t seem to be the case. They look really similar, the way cousins, or siblings would, but not identical except in some cases. I’ll have to ask Ridomie about that, later, but I’m sure it’s got something to do with the whole triplets, twins thing he’s mentioned. They’ve got some decidedly ‘Ryker’ type features, but softer – softer noses, softer cheekbones, softer eyes, which are so similar on each, you would mistake them all as being ‘twins’ if you didn't look long enough; they're all about the same build. Thick muscled men, with solid good looks, brown hair (though the shade varies) and I should clarify that not all of them have a lot of hair. Many of them have half-shaved heads, with differently styled Mohawks, some of them have colors like pink, blue, purple, or green streaked through their hair and I get it: It's their only real way of being different from one another. No one has hair past their necks. Ridomie has the longest out of any clone I've seen yet, pushing that nape of the neck mark. I know right away, that's got to mean status, especially after the way Derco had instructed the Major to get my hair cut and to keep it the same length as Derek's. Still don't know who the fuck Derek is. Maybe Ridomie'll tell me that too. He seems keen on teaching me things.

Anyway, the big guy walks up to me. He’s not afraid of me—not really—but he’s not comfortable around me either. “You wanted to see me, sir?”

“Yeah. I’m the new Ryker in town,” I’m beginning to learn what that means, so I use it, “I wanted
to introduce myself. Who are you?"

“Tysen, sir.”

The more I chat with the guy, the more I come to the realization I have been just from talking to Ridomie: These guys, these clones as I keep hearing them referred to as, aren't exactly men. I mean they look like men, sure, especially Ridomie. But they're not men. They don't have that something like the Major making them seem older. They're like giant man-children. I feel like they're my age, even if that can't possibly be true and it makes me wonder all kinds of things about clones.

I ask the guy, Tysen, bullshit questions, about the weather and such, the Briggland Ryker charm melts him instantly and I have him laughing. I can make friends when I really want to. And Thank. Fucking. God. He's laughing.

I tried to melt Ridomie, but that guy’s too uptight. For a moment, I’d thought my Ryker charm didn’t work around here, that maybe in this universe Ryker charm doesn’t exist, but here I am now, charming the fuck outta Tysen.

The other clones are curious; I can sense it. They’ve all stopped to watch our entertaining and engaging conversation. Before long the rest of them join us, asking me questions about Earth, and me asking them questing about here; Cyntripien, they tell me. I keep everything light. Nothing deep today. I need rapport with them before I find out what I really want to know.

I’ve got my hand on this gorgeous, doe eyed clone, Vallee, when Ridomie practically stalks up to us and tears me away from him. The whole hallway goes quiet, like they think someone is about to die. I'm leaning that around here, that's a very real possibility. Ridomie’s lost in some rage glaring at both Vallee and I like he’s the one going to do the killing. He's panting hard, like he's trying to get himself under control and not doing such a great job. Something’s wrong, very wrong, but it’s something I don’t fucking understand and don’t fucking know what to do about.

Vallee stares back at Ridomie a long time and a wordless message is passed between them. A trace of worry is in Ridomie’s eyes. Vallee gets on his knees before me. “Sir, I’m sorry for being so familiar with you. You’re a Ryker, I shouldn’t have done such a thing.”

I give him my most fucking incredible look. “I want you to be familiar with me,” I say reaching to help him up of the ground, but I swear I hear Ridomie growl and Vallee refuses standing on his own, quickly, so I don't have the chance to help him.

He gives a nervous look toward Ridomie, but asks me, “may I be excused, Master Ryker?”

I decide there's already been enough nervous tension, so I tell him to go, without mentioning that there's no need for monikers like 'master,' but I don’t miss that he looks toward Ridomie for another wordless message, before he leaves. Then it dawns on me.

Vallee is Ridomie’s boyfriend.

He’d seen me with my hand on his boyfriend’s shoulder and was pissed about it, but because I’m a Ryker, he can’t get mad at me (I am so good at figuring this shit out), so is taking it out on his boyfriend instead. He probably wants to kill me right now. I would too if Vallee were my boyfriend — he’s seriously, smoking hot.

The rest of the clones stand and stare; they want to see the show and I like fucking attention, and I want to see how far I can push Ridomie, so I’m happy to give it to them. I’ll tell Ridomie it’s a joke later and it’ll all be cool; trust me.
I feel like Ridomie wants to tell them to leave and get the odd sensation he’d like to wring me out, but I know he can’t do that, I’m learning pretty quick how this Ryker thing works, so I do what they expect. I make my voice as authoritative as possible. “What the fuck do you think you’re doing?”

He doesn’t move. Doesn’t answer. He literally can’t; it’s as if he’s frozen in place, with that horrifying angry look on his face. I sense I’m making things worse, but I feel I’ve passed the point of no return and have to see this through. Either way the audience is getting the show they paid for.

“What was I doing? What were you doing? I told you to wait where I’d left you. Do you have any idea how long I’ve been looking for you, Ryker? I thought something happened, I thought…”

He trails off and I’m not even worried about what he thought because, hold up, “any idea how long he’s been looking for me…” He’s been gone for what, twenty minutes? He makes it sound like I’m an inconsiderate douche-bag. Okay. Joke’s over. I let the ugly side of me come out.

“I’m the Ryker, here. I get to do whatever the fuck I want and I don’t need some asshole clone babysitting me, so if it’s all right with you, fuck off.” Not my best, but it does the job, I see Ridomie’s veneer crack and he looks both like I’ve slapped him in the face and like he…hates himself. Shit. Didn’t mean to do that, I didn’t mean to hurt his feelings, I just wanted to get back at him for his asshole bullshit. At least he’s still pissed though. Enough it will protect him from getting too hurt by my words, cause they’re just that: words.

I’m an asshole, but not that kind of asshole.

“Come,” I say to him while he’s still frozen and start leading him back down the hall like I know where I’m going. He follows behind me dumbly, until I stop. “I don’t know where the fuck I’m going.”

He’s restraining himself, I can see it in his body; he doesn’t answer me. “Would you like me to show you how to get to the mess hall, sir?” It’s polite, but not indicative to what he’s thinking.

“I told you to call me, Ryker.”

“That’s inappropriate, sir.”

“Cut it out Ridomie. I’m fucking sorry okay? I’m not Einstein, but even I could figure out what happened.”

He looks confused. “You…you did?”

“Yes, and I wanted to tease you a little because you’re so fucking uptight, I decided to see how long your rope was. It’s not very long for the record.”

“What?” He shakes his head. "No, I was out of line.”

“You thought I was making a move on your boyfriend. I would have done the same. He’s smoking hot by the way.”

The tension is back. I probably shouldn’t have said his boyfriend is good-looking, I already learned back there that Ridomie’s the territorial type, shit, Ryker: You’re a damn fool. “Sorry, I didn’t mean that as in I want him, or anything, I was just saying I understand why you’d be protective of him.”

He’s still not saying much and I’m fucking out of shit to say except, “so can we just put this behind
us?"

"Of course, sir."

"That's not putting it behind us."

"You are who you are. A Ryker, sir. And I am who I am, a clone."

"Fuck you, Ridomie."

"If you like, sir." He pants when he says that, he's restraining. This isn't him and it's work for him to act this way.

"Just, fucking lead the way to food. I've had enough of this bullshit for a lifetime."

He looks like there's yet another thing he's afraid to tell me, probably in case I send him to be burned alive or something. "Out with it, Rye." Just because he's being an anal douchebag with me, doesn't mean I'm going to do the same.

"There's no longer time for morning meal, sir — the Major will be expecting us on the fields. We should head straight there."

Great. I'm even less friendly when I'm hungry. "Just as fucking well. Let's go."

Chapter End Notes

After that convo btwn Ryker and Ridomie, I thought I should mention, there will be NO graphic scenes of "incest" sex -- I know that squicks some of you. It's not that kind of story, just a something I thought existed in this world due to the nature of these clones. I don't even think there's any 'mentions of.' So...yeah...hope you enjoyed!

Mock
xoxo
"What did you say you did with my jacket?"

"It's away, sir." In other words, he doesn't want to fucking say. Doesn't matter, I'll find it.

Ridomie opens two big, sliding white doors without touching them and without pressing any buttons like I'd seen the Major do. I had assumed Derco had let the Major into his office, but when he'd brought me to my room, the doors had opened for him the same way and there was no one on the other side, no one could have let him in there. I assumed motion sensors were responsible, but this door had opened 'too soon,' and I get another idea. “Did you do that with your mind?”

He nods curtly. He’s still pissed at me. I’m not really that happy with him either, but I want to let it go. "Can you open all doors with your mind?" Hell. Can I do that?

"Not all of them, sir. Some of them are locked."

How do you lock a door that you open with your mind? I don't know, but it's fucking cool. "So is this like the power of the force? Can you control other shit with just your mind?"

"We can 'talk' to other forms of technology with our minds and our voices. Both can be useful, sir."

"Does that mean no trees or large mountains?"

"What are you talking about, sir?" I really wish he'd stop calling me sir.

"Will you teach me?" I ask instead. Bet I can do it.

He doesn’t answer me that time and I appreciate Ridomie's balls – ignoring a Ryker like that – fact, I get the distinct impression I'm pissing him off. I guess the least I can do is leave him alone for now – I'll make it up to him later. I follow him without anymore pestering.

We enter and we’re on a platform high above the ground, below us are fields as far as my eyes can see and my eyes can see pretty fucking far. It’s wide open and I could run if I wanted to. I’m not going to, though. Where would I go? It'll just be more running. I'm tired of running. Yeah it's no picnic here, but it's no picnic anywhere I go. So far, I haven't learned too many good things about this place, but there's an odd kind of peace in being here none-the-less. Sure, I could say that I want to back to my nice cozy little place on Earth, but I've always known that none of it was real. I knew I was just waiting for my real life to begin. Now I can finally find out what that is. I'd rather live my truth – however horrible it turns out to be – than hide in a lie.

Off into the far west, I can make out the shoreline. I can hear the water. I want to see what an ocean on Cyntripien looks like.

“You even think of running, boy, and I promise you, I’ll make that shower seem like fun,” I hear the Major say. He’s obviously not a very good mind reader if he thinks that's what I was thinking.
It’s not a nice greeting either, I want to tell him, but he doesn’t care. “Where the fuck have you two been? I’ve been waiting for you.”

Ridomie looks at me, and smiles deviously; fucker’s about to sell me out. Go ahead, fucking do it, I say to him without words. “Master Ryker wanted to introduce himself to some of the guys,” he says innocently.

“I told you to get him here on time, didn’t I Lieutenant Ridomie? What did I say would happen if you let him succumb to his own stupidity?”

It’s my turn to smile when his little plan to get me in trouble backfires.

“Yes, sir. You said I’m responsible, sir.”

Guess he forgot about that one, I think it’s fucking hilarious.

“I’d quit laughin’ if I were you, soldier. You’re on my list. You can both make up the time to me afterward. We’ve been waiting for you ten minutes, you can give me fives days of chores.”

“Five days, for ten minutes? That’s outrageous!” No of course Ridomie doesn’t say that, that's all me. I pay for it when the Major whacks me upside the head. Hard. I swear I can see stars.

“As outrageous as talkin’ back to me?” He rakes his eyes over me keenly. “Anymore smart-ass remarks?”

I can see in his eyes he’s prepared to make that spanking he gave me feel like massage and right here too, I can still feel my ass from that – the Major spanks fucking hard. “No, sir.”

“Good.”

Entering the room further, I see we aren’t alone, but surrounded, by clones, tons of them, so all I can see is their black shirts at first. I get the same cold feeling I used to when I was running with my mama, except I realize that for the first time, they haven’t come to me, I’ve come to them. And I'm kinda dressed like them, now. This must be how ironic feels. There’s hundreds of them and I can’t control my urge to saddle up beside the Major and even Ridomie, even if I’m not so sure either of them are really on my side at the moment. I don't recognize any of them, but that doesn't mean none of these are the ones who came with the Major to collect me. It's hard to tell them apart from this distance.

The Major notices my slight terror, like he notices everything. “Don’t worry kid. You’re their fucking King, at the end of the day.”

I blink at him. Was that…reassurance? It's the second time he's been nice to me and I understand him being nice, less than I understand him treating me like I'm the scum he's scrapped off scum.

“Meet the new Ryker. He is your new Captain.”

No one says a word. I look at the sea of faces that from here look pretty fucking similar to me and wonder who's captain I am, exactly, ’cause none of them look like they want me to be their captain, let alone their king. Ridomie had been their Captain and I get the feeling he will be no matter what the Major has to say about it. At least to these guys. They're different than some of the clones I’d talked with earlier. They seem like...like Vallee. If Vallee is here, I can't pick him out right now from the others, but I don't think he is.

And then a kid in the back proves me right.
“It looks at him, someone’s already taught him a lesson.” A hushed awe settles over the crowd, clear disbelief that anyone would speak to a Ryker that way (I catch on quick).

This little fuck, is obviously referring to my face, which the Major beat the fuck out of. How about I fuck him up and see what he thinks of me then? I move to charge at the mouthy little clone. The Major stops me of course. That guy, always ruining my fun. He gives me a look that says to wait, that I’d get plenty of chances to fight.

He grabs me by the fucking arm and drags me in front of the lynch mob that is literally out for my blood. “I thought you said I’m their King, Major?” I hiss at him.

“Yeh are. But the rules on the field are a little different. You have to earn your place out here. They ain’t so happy ’bout what happened with Brodix.”

Oh yeah. That fucking guy. Still holding my arm, he grabs my bruised chin hard, and wrenches my face sideways. “I did that to him, for doin’ this to me.” He turns his head seeming proud to show off the bruise I’d given him. The crowd takes a collective breath, as I give them a cocky nod and eye even though the Major still has my face squished in his thick hand. "Did that all by his lonesome. Any of you been able to hurt me like that, yet? How about a few of you at a time?"

Silence. From me too. I don't know if he's doing it just for their benefit, but it feels nice getting his praise.

“Well?”

“No sir, Major sir,” half of them say, but the other half are quiet.

I can feel the animosity mixed with impending violence: The need to taste my blood.

“Fine. That ain’t enough for all of you? Dawz, get your ass up here.”

“My pleasure, sir.” The clone, Dawz, walks up and impressively jumps from the ground, up onto the platform, landing smoothly in front of us. He looks at me darkly and reminds me of the one’s who chased my mama and I, but when I see him up close; he’s not at all like the men in black. Something’s not right. None of the clones I’ve encountered so far, are quite like the men that chased my mama and I. Does Derco have a special force of them he sends out just for me?

I don’t get to wonder about that long. The kid, Dawz, cracks his neck — actually fucking cracks his neck — preparing to beat my ass. What an assuming son of a bitch.

“To the death,” the Major says.

To the what? Fucking a kid up is one thing, but kill him? He doesn’t look to be sharing my moral dilemma. He wants to kill me, every inch of him does – I know, I’ve seen that look before. All these fucking clones would probably like to kill a Ryker and I wouldn’t blame them. Kinda makes you wonder why they all don’t just gang up on Ryker Corp?

But me, I haven’t done shit. Why would he want to kill me so bad? Sins of the father and all that I guess. He doesn’t wait for a ‘go’ signal from the Major, and he would've taken me by surprise, but my mama taught me well: To look everywhere, all at once. And I do.

I feel time stand still, like it’s alive.

Mine. This clone is mine.
I'm so conditioned, so trained to react to a man in black coming at me, it's instinct. I'm no longer thinking. Before anyone can say Ryker, Dawz falls to the ground: Dead. Broken neck. Crowd’s quiet now. Frozen. I’ve shown them a taste of me, but I not stupid enough to think they’ll be bringing me pies, and sending me Christmas cards. Huh. It’s probably not even called Christmas anymore, though. It’s probably called Ryker day or something dumb like that. I laugh at my own inside joke, but now it looks like I’m laughing over Dawz’s dead body. Even the Major looks at me funny. Fuck.

“Clean this shit up, Ridomie,” the Major orders, still pissed with Ridomie too.

Ridomie glares at me as he picks up Dawz’s dead, lifeless body in one swoop (could have been one of his brothers for all I know) and carries him off like a sack of potatoes. Like he doesn't matter.

The Major chooses that time to remove the long black jacket he wears, revealing a set of pipes I swear he forged in the depths of Mordor. Yeah, ‘cause the Major has to have somehow used an evil, other worldly force to make muscles that size. Like Fuck. I mean like wholly fuck!

I knew the Major would be large underneath all of that clothing, and from the sheer, adept manner in which he tossed me round like a rag-doll, but seeing it is a different experience than imagining it.

Take four of the largest football players imaginable, and glue’em together: That’s his torso. Fuck! If I’d have known he was made outta steel like that, I would never have been a little fucking shit this morning, or ever, probably.

“Ryker,” the mammoth man says, his voice telling me he’s still fucking irritated with me.

"Uh, yes sir."

“Since you don’t seem to be takin’ any of this seriously, we’re gonna play a little game — a game to help you see that this,” he gestures around him, and I know he's referring to everything. To my new life. “This ain't a fucking game. You have yer new friend Ryker here to thank fer this lesson,” he tells everyone else. “I give my permission to thank him as you like.”

Removing the leather band at his wrist, he places it carefully into his jacket pocket, and nods at Ridomie to relieve him of his affects.

Genially, he jumps into the middle of the crowd below: Fierce, confident, an unmoving force. The crowd parts for him, like the red sea for fucking Moses. He looks like the eye of the mother fucking tornado.

He smiles, crazy-like, then quiet, he hisses one word that sends shivers down my spine that I’ll likely feel for the rest of my life.

“Run.”
The Ryker that Dies for Clones

Clones scatter in every direction as I watch the scene fascinated. The Major lowers himself to the ground mimicking the statue of Atlas. Four clones pounce on him. Then four more, then four more, four more, four more until he’s covered in them.

There’s a low hum that grows, then an impact in the air and all of the bodies on top of him fly in a radial arc, outward from where the Major stood. Then, he runs. The Major is a blur, a flying burst of energy, until he’s gone, seemingly out of existence.

Below there’s devastation. Clones, at least thirty or so, dead, others moaning in pain, some mutilated beyond repair. Some, who were further away from the blast, walk around disoriented, and the uninjured help the injured.

The dead are left.

“Come with me, Ryker,” his hand, Ridomie's hand, grips my shoulder; I throw it off.

“What the hell is this?”

“War.”

“War? Why are we at war with the Major?”

“Because you… Do you really want me to answer that? Just come with me, please, Ryker.”

Least I’m back to 'Ryker.' “But we need to go after him.”

“We can’t. He’s gone, Ryker. No one knows where he goes when he runs like that.”

“But I thought… Can’t you dudes time travel and shit?”

“No, none of us can travel, that is unless you can?”

Well that’s not right. They’re supposed to be able to time travel — my mama’d said so. I shake my head; Ridomie thinks I’m answering him.

“No, then,” Ridomie confirms out loud.

“Hey Ryker,” a clone approaches us surrounded by a mini-horde of other clones. They all look similar. Not identical, just alike. They all have some shade of brown hair, half-shaven heads and dark eyes. And they all want to kill me. Definitely. How do I know? It’s a talent of mine: Both the knowing when people want to kill me, and having a following of people who want to kill me.

“This is your fault. You got us killed.” He doesn’t mention Dawz or Brodix, but I know they’re included.

“No. This isn’t my fault — this is the fault of the Major and his crazy light beam thing.”

He says nothing, but I don’t think he agrees.

“Ryker, let’s go,” Ridomie hisses at me.

“Wait. I want to explain myself to these assholes.”
“Who you callin’ an asshole, Ryker?” the dude says to me. What happened to 'Master Ryker'?

“You. Asshole!” I say back.

“Ryker, now.” That’s Ridomie.

“No. Do you even hear this guy?”

“Ryker!” He grabs my arm. “I mean, please.”

He looks at me with grey eyes that look silver with the way the strange orange sun’s hitting him. They look desperate. He really doesn’t want us to fight. He’s knows I’ll kill them, he’s asking me not to kill them.

“Fine. Let’s go.”

We run, together, but I’m the one following.

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So now I’m in a fucking cave. “Ridomie, why are we in a fucking cave?”

“Because we need a few minutes to plan, Ryker. We’re hiding.” He sounds irritated, but I don’t know why. I’m the one who should be irritated, because I’m the one they want to kill. Not to mention, he did nothing — except bring me to this cave. Least he’s calling me Ryker again. I’ll take that as a good sign.

“Plan what? I can’t kill anyone because you don’t want me to and the Major, I have no fucking clue what to do about him.”

“Quit behaving like that. You got us into this mess.”

“Quit behaving like what? Are you seriously agreeing with those assholes? How is this my fault? And us? There’s no us. You can leave any fucking time, I’m fine by myself.” Always have been and always fucking will be.

The cave is dark, but Ridomie’s standing at the mouth in the wake of the sun behind him, and light shines in from a large cavity above us as well, but it’s minimal and only allows me to make out his silhouette. My mind adds the rest, already knowing him. Ridomie looks exactly as strong as he is and yeah, all the clones look strong, but he looks stronger. His black hair makes him stand out from the rest of the clones and when he stands like that, it’s like he is the mountain whose cave we’re taking refuge in. All together, his frame, his hair and his powerful presence, makes a combination like wild horses.

I hope he doesn’t actually leave. I don’t know why I say stupid shit like that. Or maybe now I do — I’m a Ryker idiot, plain and simple.

He turns around and now I make out his eyes; two sliver orbs, glinting at me and I stifle a breath hoping he doesn’t notice me staring at him. My mama has grey eyes, but her’s and Ridomie’s are nothing alike. “I’m under orders not to leave you, Ryker.”

“That Bastard! The Major put you up to watching me. I was fucking right! You are my babysitter.”


“I told you, I’m no Captain. You be the Captain, I’ll be your first Lieutenant. What should we do,
sir?"

He looks around panicked, like anyone could hear us all the way out here. “You can’t call me that Ryker and I already explained why you’re the Captain.”

“Yeah, yeah. I’m a Ryker. Blah, blah, fucking blah. But if I’m a Ryker, why can’t I decide what I’m going to call you, huh?”

“Because even you’re not above all the rules,” he answers without thinking.

“See? First thing you've said all day that makes any sense.”

He scowls at me. “You’re the stronger of the two of us, even if you weren’t a Ryker.”

“You did pretty well against me upstairs,” I fire back.

He looks like he wants to throttle me. “You can’t be my first lieutenant, Ryker. The end.”

“Yes, sir.”

“Stop, that.”

“Yes, Ridomie.”

“Ryker! You’re the most infuriating…argh! We’re wasting time.”

“This ‘game’ is a waste of time. Why would the Major declare war on his own army?”

“Part of this game serves to weed out the weak.”

“That’s terrible. He treats them like lame horses.”

“Them? Figures.” Both things are said under his breath, like they're not meant for me, but I hear and I get it. I’m thinking about it all wrong; it’s no longer me against them. I don’t even think it’s these particular clones that chased me my whole life. Nothing adds up on that end. The one’s I’ve got the beef with, are probably a closely guarded Ryker secret. Those clones are way more than these clones. Faster, stronger, better.

“What else is this game about?”

“You. He wants to see what you’re made of.”

The way he looks at me when he says that makes my heart beat faster, and I’m staring at him again, like he’s a fucking miracle for being there. Fuck. What is it about this guy? Guys like Vallee (don’t tell Ridomie), I want to fuck, but guys like Ridomie, I want to poke, so he’ll chase me. I figuratively poke him.

“I’m not doing it. If you want a plan, make it your damn self. Since I’ve got here it’s, Ryker do this and Ryker do that. Fuck you all.”

Ridomie looks like he wants to punch me in the face for wasting his time, and not coming up with a strategy. What he doesn’t know about me is that I fucking invented last minute strategies. I don’t know what a Captain does, or how to win a ‘war,’ or even how to play this stupid ‘game,’ but when those kids find us, I’m sure I’ll think of something.

He’s having a hard time restraining himself this time. I think he’s about to break. I don’t get the
chance to see what he’ll do though.

“Hey Ryker. Think we wouldn’t find you here?”

I look back at Ridomie and wink before I put my hands up to gesture towards the fifty some odd clones and their ‘leader.’ I’m unarmed and won’t fight, they get my message. I allow two of the clones to grab me.

Of course, Ridomie is more pissed that I’ve let them grab me; he must not have understood my wink and thinks I’m just a lazy Ryker Fuck up. He’ll see.

“Huh. That was easy. Looks like you weren’t anything special to coo over. Don’t know why Lord Ryker’d waste his time with DNA like you,” the kid says.

“Let him go now, Rex. He’s mine…to handle,” Ridomie says.

“The Major also said we could do what we want with him. His orders trump yours. Sorry, sir.”

“And the Major's orders aren't going to mean much to me when I pound you into oblivion. I say to take your hands off him, now.”

“He killed Dawz, it's his fault Brodix is gone. We thought you’d be on our side over this.”

“I’m not. Dawz committed his own incineration you guys are about to do the same. Brodix was lost on a mission; it happens. Even Ter-X knows that,” he says nodding a clone I have to assume is Ter-X. "You can’t beat him and I won’t stop him this time if he retaliates.”

Ter-X may 'know that,' but judging by the look on his face, I think it's a little too soon to ask him not to try killing me.

“What’s wrong with you Lieutenant? He shows up and you take his side over ours?”

“He’s a Ryker.”

“A Ryker we’re being given the chance to kill.”

“And what if you don’t kill him? When this is over, he’ll incinerate you for this, if he doesn’t snap your neck first. I've seen him fight, he can take all of you and I'll help him.”

What the? Ridomie did shit to help me before, but suddenly, he’s jumping to my defense? I understand it’s more likely their defense, because he’s right: with his help, I can destroy these assholes, but I can see he genuinely wants them to let go of their vendetta against me. He’s even lying for me. I think I’ve made it pretty clear to him what I feel about incinerators.

Okay, it’s time.

The two kids that have me are child’s play. They have my arms, so unfortunately for me they come with me when I roll out of the cave’s entrance and go hurtling to the ground below. Fuck that hurts, nothing breaks, we land at the top of a grassy plateau. Ridomie, Rex and the rest of them follow, jumping a whole lot more gracefully down.

I plough towards Rex, dragging the two guys on my arms with me, swing them up and forward with ease, and send them hurtling towards Rex. I knock him down like a lone bowling pin and he’s sent flying into the men behind him who fall like dominos.

From there all hell breaks loose. Clones pour over me for what I did to Rex and one by one I keep
throwing them off me, but of course they keep coming back, ‘cause they’re not hurt enough to stay
down. I don’t know what won’t kill them, only what will, so I’m being careful.

Ridomie’s shouting orders like a maniac that no one’s listening to, but at least they’re not attacking
him. Huh. They right out refuse to attack him, like they’re scared to, but they’re not afraid to
disregard his orders, that’s fucking strange.

Ridomie’s working hard to get to me and he has no compunction throwing men too. Ridomie’s
stronger than these men and he knows how to fight and he knows their limits. The ones he gets rid
of don’t get up.

I couldn't tell you how long this goes on for, but my muscles burn with fatigue for the first time,
ever. I love it. It feels, good.

“Hello again, Ryker,” I hear. It’s Rex and he gets a few hits in on me, but I’ve got two fucking
guys on me at the moment.

Where the hell’s Ridomie?

This battle would be over in an instant if I could just kill them, but it’s not about killing. I’m not
their enemy and I won’t be, no matter how much I’d like to kill them at the moment.

This is what these man-children know, they’re always at war, this is their life.

We continue to fight them to a point where real exhaust actually begins to settle in my muscles.
Not used to it.

“Here it is Ryker!” Rex is over me and ready to lay into my face, probably before snapping my
neck. He lands the first punch, I want him to – it'll make him feel better to get a few hits on me. I
know I'd want to if I were him. He's still punching the shit out of me when I feel it. It’s an impact
in the air. Everything seems to get thick suddenly, like when you’re making sauce from milk and
butter. The others don’t notice. Just me. But Ridomie looks up; he’s been keeping one eye on me
this whole time and notices me noticing something, but his curiosity quickly turns to rage at what
I’m letting Rex do to me. A decent punch to my upper lip reminds me that I’m having the shit
kicked outta me, I've long forgotten.

The sound grows. It's familiar. Shit. Suddenly, I know what it is.

Gathering the strength I have left, I throw Rex into a pile of clones then throw myself at the space
in mid-air where I know he’ll appear. I grab the Major out of thin fucking air, and drop us to the
ground like a bag of rocks.

“Fuck! Run!” I shout. I’d acted without thought. I hadn’t thought through the consequences of
pinning the Major, which is exactly like sitting on a bomb. I won’t be able to hold him long; he's
going to kick the tar out of me. I might be able to handle clones for a time, but I can't seem to
handle one Major. Hell, I didn't do so great against one Ridomie either.

As soon as I have him, I lose him. I’m just able to see the look of utter fucking shock on his face at
what I’d done, before he throws me against a thick, tree. I feel the impact of the sharp tree bark in a
long line up my back. I drop to the ground like a sack of rocks, letting the pain course through me
as it paralyses me momentarily.

Then he does something strange.

When I’m finally able to find my balance and clamor back to my feet, he’s pounding the shit out of,
Rex. He could have just snapped his neck, I realize, and feel a strange sensation of joy at Rex
getting a beating instead. He’s lost in some kind of ‘Major’ rage. Blow after blow on Rex’s face,
while everybody, including Ridomie just fucking stand, and watch.

So much for fucking clone solidarity. No one's willing to touch the Major. When I fuck up, they wanted to kill me, but the Major — he can happily pound the shit outta anyone he wants, and no one lifts a finger. Looks like this one’s up to me.

I throw myself at the Major’s back, pulling the three of us into a strange, tumbling summersault all the way down a long fucking hill. The Major holds tight to Rex, and I hold tight to the Major. We roll awhile, and I finally manage to free Rex, and throw him to the side, leaving him a bit stunned. I proceed to hold the Major back from going after Rex, again. “Stop this fucking madness! What the fuck is wrong with you?” Well, least my flippant mouth gets me his attention, and distracts him from going after Rex again.

The look his on his face is his cold, fire look that should have told me to stop, but I don’t. “You’re fucking killing them.”

“That’s right. Am. Don’t matter. They’re just clones,” he says like he believes every word, but I sense an undercurrent. He’s taunting my morals at the expense of lives. Dick! Words aren’t going to get my point across, so I lunge at him. He smiles, like he’s proud. Pisses me off more. "We're at war, son. You have to realize we're at war."

All the while, the clones stand on, not doing anything. I could sure use a fucking hand, since I’m getting the shit kicked outta me, now. For real.

We both know I don’t have a hope in hell of defeating him, not to mention, he feels stronger than he did this morning, more like when I first laid eyes on this guy, but still I fight with wild abandon as if I do. I’m not one to fight losing battles, but right now it’s not about winning; it’s about hurting him as much as I can. It’s also about fending him off, so the others can get away, which they’d better fucking do soon. Eventually my endurance is going to wane, and he'll reach up to my neck and snap it. Fact, I don't have much endurance after that clone picnic Ridomie and I just had.

He knows it too. I’m in for another surprise when, instead of breaking my neck, he sends me flying across the field, and into a batch of clones that, really fucking deserve it since they stood there doing shit the whole time I got beat. I don’t have much time to ponder that, as another sense takes over, and I feel something in the air. Again. Fuck.

It’s like everything has slowed down for me.

When my mama'd come no one could see her. It took me a long time to even come up with a plausible idea, but then I figured it out. The running. It's not just running they can do, they can move fast when they want to. I can do it too, even though I wasn't taken to doing it on Earth. It's more than a bit weird to look as if you appear out of nowhere. But I'd figured out that when we do, we can't be seen, not by anyone on Earth anyway.

It's why I recognize it right away, with this new thing. I'm the only one who can sense it. No one else can. Even among the fucking knives...they're the butter kind and I'm the one that can slice through fucking granite.

The clones move with me. They can move at my speed, but this is a new thing, the thing I sense is outta their reach. Outta their range of comprehension. But they only slow, not freeze like the people on Earth with running, and I know what's coming. Like before, I fucking dive. I’m not letting anymore of them die.

If he does that freaky ass shit to us again, we could all die, but if it’s just me — well — I don’t
think that I will die, but I don’t know really. It’s a leap of faith, but at the moment, I don’t have a thing to lose. It’s my life, and I can choose to do with it what I like. It would be worth it to me to die saving these man-children. Whether it’s the right thing to do or not it’s what I want to do. If I live, and they don’t, I’m not sure I’d like myself much after that.

I land on him, just as he unleashes his power into the air. I feel the impact, but like a lid on pot of popcorn, I take the blow. Just before I’m thrown, I see the ‘oh shit’ look in his eyes. He hadn’t expected me to fucking do that. He’d miscalculated. It’s too late though, I’m flying through the air, and just as quickly thud to the ground. For a moment I can’t fucking move. It’s scary, ‘cause I know I’m still alive — as shocking as that is — I think I’ve gone and paralyzed myself.

Ridomie is the first to come to my aid. Don’t know where the fucking Major is. “Ryker! Ryker! It’s me. Can you hear me?”

I slowly — fucking painfully — nod my head.

“Shit! Ter-X, go get me something to clean his face off with. Heli-o, see if you can find me some Rykortisol.” After he finishes shouting orders, he crouches down; I attempt to sit up. “Just sit tight.” His voice is restrained, like he wants to say more, and like he’s fucking pissed at me all in one. He’s always pissed at me. I don’t think he likes me all that much. I get the strong inclination he wants to heal me, so I’m well enough for him to fucking beat on me himself.

Not listening to him, I sit up anyway. “The Major.” I turn to spit blood out of my mouth. “I have to stop him.”

He stops me from going anywhere by putting a hand under my head, and the other to my chest. It’s not hard for him to do in my current state. “He’s gone. You sent him into retreat, Ryker.” He still has the same tight control over his voice, this time like he’s keeping reign over his breathing. “You’re staying right here, ‘till I can fix you. Fucksakes, Ryker! Of all the stupid fucking stunts!” he swears like a trucker, but from the stunned looks from the others surrounding us, I get the feeling that it’s quite the feat getting Ridomie to swear.

He really is pissed at me. What can I say? I suppose it’s a talent of mine.

I try to say something back, but end up coughing up more blood instead. He helps me turn, so I can spit. It feels like I’m dying, my life force is slipping away.

His glare deepens, and he continues to stare at me, like he wants to fucking throttle me, but says nothing. The Major’ll probably kill him for letting me do something so stupid.

When the others return, they hand him something that looks like a needle, because it is in fact that, a needle I mean. Next thing I know he’s jabbing me with said needle hard into my thigh. “Jesus, fuck, Ridomie!”

Instead of saying sorry, like he should, he gives me a ‘you deserve more than that’ look, and I’m seriously getting ready to pummel him. I feel like a small child being chastised for misbehaving. What the fuck is his problem, anyway? I’d just fucking saved all of our skins. So I have a few cuts and bruises, and possible internal bleeding of my fucking organs? I’m alive to tell the tale; though just barely, I suspect.

Smart enough to sit quietly, I allow him, his none too gentle administrations. I curse at him a few times as he wipes blood from my cheeks, and lips. I have blood down my arms from rolling attached to a boulder known as the Major. My shirt is a devastation, barely in tact enough to be called a shirt and I’m bleeding underneath it, but he leaves that alone focusing mostly on my face,
like he can’t fucking look at it covered in, so much blood.

Soon as whatever the fuck was in that syringe starts coursing through my veins, I feel like fucking wolverine. Everything that’s hurting from within begins to heal, the pain in my body dissipates rapidly. I’ve still got some healing to go, but I can move a helluva lot easier, and I sit up on my own wriggling free from Ridomie’s hold on me. He’s still staring at me wide-eyed with a scowl fixed permanently on his face.

The others have gathered round too, none of them looking like they want to kill me anymore, well, save Ridomie that is.

The one, Rex, who had been viciously intent on snapping my neck before, steps forward. He looks humbled now, considering me honorably. “I was wrong about you, sir. I will fight with you from now on, if you’ll let me. I’d be happy to call you Captain.” He looks a little shaky though, like he’s expecting me to kill him. Probably is. “Unless you want me incinerated, I’ll go immediately.”

Fuck that. “No one’s getting incinerated today. Course you can fight with me, with us,” I say looking to Ridomie. “We fight together,” I tell him strong, and plain. He smiles, relieved.

“When the others hear of this, they’ll join us too.” Rex is light hearted now, pride beaming from his chest. Guess it’s because he’s pleased the ‘Ryker Prince,’ or however the fuck he thinks of me now. “What are your orders, sir?”

I’d really like them not to call me sir for starters, but I don't think that's what he means.

I look to Ridomie — he’s still mad at me — but I don’t have a fucking clue at the moment what we should do next, so I’ve got no choice but to beg for his help. Besides, I think I’ve already said plans are not my forte.

Relaxing his scowl minutely, he answers for me. “Let’s move who we have to the South wall. We will regroup there. Captain Ryker needs a bit of time to recover.” I move to protest the title again, but a quick look from Ridomie silences me. I’m not sure what I think he’ll do to me – I already know I’m the fucking Ryker here and what that means, but something about him quells me.

“Yes, sir.” Rex salutes me. I roll my eyes.

Moving to stand, Ridomie stops me. “Everyone move ahead. I need to speak with our Captain. Alone. This won’t take long.” I really don’t like the sound of that. He’s very foreboding. Why do I feel like I’m about to be wrung out? With a final salute from everyone, they’re gone, running. I’m left, alone with Ridomie. A very pissed off, I’m going to make Ryker pâté Ridomie. He helps me to my feet, all the while, under his fierce scrutiny. I ache, but it’s amazing, whatever it was he shot me up with, is working wonders. I should have been hospitalized. “Wow, thanks, I feel —”

He grabs my wrist, and snaps it like licorice, whipping me around to face him. “What you did was stupid.”

I scowl at him. “I got the message the first time. I don’t regret it.” I keep my eyes hard and unmovable.

“No. You don’t understand. You could have died. If I hadn’t got you the Rykortisol… You have no idea how close…’’ his voice cracks.

“I sacrificed myself for them all. I wanted to do it.”

“Yes, sacrifice yourself for children who would have killed you in a heartbeat.” His eyes are
intense. “You are a very important person, Ryker.”

“I’m one person.”

“I've… I've never seen anything like you before Ryker. You can't die. Especially not for clones.”

It’s taken me a whole day, but I get it now, clones are used to not being people; Ridomie thinks he’s not people. I'm still holding his hand, so I squeeze it, he's close enough I can smell him (musky man) and I like it. Ridomie's the hottest guy I've seen so far. Too bad he’s got a boyfriend, or I’d be all over that.

“I will admit that though your actions were foolish — incredibly foolish — they worked in your favor. You have shown them something they’ve not seen before: A Ryker willing to die for them. They are yours now, they’ll fight to the death for you.”

I don’t want followers, or people to die for me. I just did what I thought was right.

His eyes soften as he appraises me again. “Are you still, hurting?” He reaches to the place where he'd wiped blood away from my cheek.

I turn away from his touch, not wanting to appear weak and grab my hand back, needing some distance. I don’t want anymore fussing on my account. “I’m fine,” I tell him with more authority than I've been showing. “And don’t worry, I’ll make sure you don’t take the blame for this. I’ve figured out you're responsible if I die or do something stupid.”

He looks like he wants to protest reaching back for my hand, but then — like he’s reprimanded himself — he pulls back. He gives one firm nod. “We should catch up with the rest.”

“All right. Lead the way.” I'm not able to keep the sarcastic tone out of my voice.

He places very steady eyes on me, and adds, “you may be fine now Ryker, but pull a stunt like that again, and I promise you won't be.”
Crazy Beautiful

Chapter Notes

Thanks again to everyone for following along with this story. It means the world to ol Mock!

Damn, Ryker. He needs a leash.

Okay, I’m just pissed. I can’t deny it anymore; I have feelings for Ryker. One of those feelings is definitely hatred. I hate him more than I’ve ever hated anyone.

I hate him especially because, for several moments, I really thought he was going to die. I’d acted without too much thought, getting him what he needed, wiping blood—too much blood—off his cheeks. Rage built and I wanted to kill the one who’d done this. Yeah. I wanted to kill Major Ryker. He’s healed…enough, but it’s not enough.

I’ve never felt like I’ve wanted to kill Major Ryker, or anything negative whatsoever toward him. I’ve always honored and respected Major Ryker. He’s a rough, strict man, but a good one. Fair and kind—he only killed clones when it was important, necessary, unavoidable. I even understood why the clones today had to die: Briggland Ryker must be trained. He doesn’t know who he is now, but he’s a member of the most important family in the history of the universe and they will need him one day. We will need him. I don’t hate Major Ryker for killing my brothers today, but I do hate him for hurting Briggland even if it was Briggland’s own idiocy that got him hurt.

I was reminded today how viable Ryker is, no matter how indestructible he might appear and there’s no way I’m letting him come that close to death ever again. I’m keeping both eyes on him. I’ll make sure I’m always at least two steps behind him; he goes nowhere without me. I’m not taking the chance of him doing something stupid when I’m not around. He’s Briggland Ryker, he’s likely to do stupid any time the mood strikes him, because he’s so damn arrogant, he thinks nothing can happen to him.

When I thought he was going to die, well, I’ve never felt that way about anyone. I’ve seen my brothers head into the incinerator, burned alive, and while there’s nothing like that, and it is every bit as horrible as it sounds, I felt just that much worse seeing Ryker at death’s door and I hate myself for it.

I shouldn’t care for him more than I care for my brothers in arms; I shouldn’t care for him at all. Problem is, I want to spank the blazes out of him as much as I never want to see him hurt like that again.

“You want to hurt me don’t you?”

“What are you talking about, Ryker?” I snap. How could he know that?

“I’m sorry.”

“Stop apologizing to me,” I snap again. I can’t seem to stop myself. It’s all wrong. How I feel I should act around him and how I’m actually supposed to act around him, conflict. I want to knock
some sense into his thick Ryker skull and yes, he’s right, I do want to hurt him, but I can’t very well do that now can I?

“Well…I want you to forgive me.”

“Why do you care if I forgive you? Damn it! Ryker. You’re not supposed to be apologizing to me.”

“Yeah I am. You’re my friend Ridomie. Or is apologizing to friends a crime here?”

We (Ryker, the clones we fought before the Major showed, and I) have positioned ourselves within the rocks at Terrace Orion. It’s a rocky plateau with more caves we can find cover in if the Major comes back, that’s still within the large bounds of Ryker Corp; which takes up half a planet. Yeah, seriously. Didn’t I say Ryker’s are arrogant? They had to have half a planet all to themselves and an army to fill the space. Only a century ago, war sieged our planet. Many wanted the riches of our atmosphere for themselves and thought to challenge the Lord Ryker’s clone army. Lord Malvrick Ryker was finally able to prove that he was indestructible, but the Rykers have not forgotten. They grow and improve their army every year.

“We are not friends.”

“Do you really hate me that much? I said I was sorry. C’mon. Lemme make it up to you Ridomie.”

“You can make it up to me by never doing that again.” I don’t mean to say it—it just slips out, I swear.

“Awww, see? You do care. That’s gotta make us something.”

“Yes. I’m your First Lieutenant and you are my Captain. I care only because, if you die, so do I.”

“That’s harsh. You cut me deep bro… You cut me deep.”

Yes, he’s speaking nonsense, but I can’t stand the look on his face; he’s hurt and Ryker hurt I like about as much as I liked the thought of him dying earlier.

“You’re a real dick, Ridomie. I’m getting a new First Lieutenant. You’re fired.”

“Fire? Where?”

“No, not fire. Fired. As in your time at specified job has ended.”

“What are you talking about Ryker?”

“Never mind. Just, if you hate me so much you don’t even want to be my friend, I don’t think I can have you as a First Lieutenant.”

“I never said I didn’t want to be your friend, I said we’re not friends—we can’t be.”

“Cause I’m a Ryker.”

“Yes.” Finally he’s getting it.

“That’s fucking stupid and you know it. You agree even if you’re too afraid to admit it.”

“What did you say Ryker?”

“That you’re afraid.”
“I’m not afraid.”

“Are.”

“Not.”

“Are.”

“Ryker!”

He laughs at me. “You’re fun when you get mad like that.”

“I’m going to be really not fun in a moment.”

“There. That’s the spirit! Tell me how mad you are at me — though I think I kinda know — it helps to get it all out. I think it’s supposed to be healthy or some shit.”

“You arrogant, Ryker, brat!” I pounce on him and the men around us have a new show to watch. We tumble around on the ground, me trying to kill Ryker, after trying to convince Rex not to kill Ryker, only hours ago. Even in his weakened state, Ryker’s having the time of his life, laughing and blocking my punches like this is some kind of fun match.

I want to bite his neck; make him submit so he’ll bloody well listen to me.

“Here. I’ll let you punch me,” he says, obviously deciding that I’m not going to land any punches.

“Don’t you dare, Ryker. I’ve out smarted you before, I can do it again.”

“I learned from that fight though. I don’t think you will, punch me, that is.”

Now I want to punch him more. He is strong and smart, as much as I hate to admit it, but I won’t give up. I attack him fiercely, and use my skill to flip him over and slam him on the ground. He stops squirming and stares up at me smiling his crazy beautiful smile and letting me pin him by the wrists to the ground. I know he can easily get out of my hold, especially since I’m too mesmerized by his eyes to move right now, but he doesn’t fight and just lies there staring back at me.

I’m panting and breathing on top of him—on top of him! And I’m getting hard. I want to mark him. Fuck him in front of everyone so they know. I hope all the clones are looking right now. I wouldn’t know, I’m too focused on Ryker to care, but I want them all to look. I’m on top; no one else should be on top of him, a Ryker, yet I'm on top. Ryker is mine.

“I give. I give. Go on. Fucking punch me. I deserve it…For scaring you like that. I wouldn’t want me to die either if I was you.”

He’s got a bit of blood on his face, just under the fringe of his long, golden Ryker hair. I reach and sweep it to the side, so I can see where he’s hurt and bleeding. Is it some blood I missed from when he’d got hurt by the Major? Or is it from our scuffle? Those two things are entirely different. “Why’s that Ryker?” I say softly.

He sits up suddenly and grabs my wrists and I’m immobile. “Because I’m fucking awesome,” he says laughing his rich laugh; it makes his azure eyes sparkle, I can see, I’m really close. Too close.

I glare at him.

“Okay, okay. I get it. I’m being an ass, but say you’ll forgive me anyway.”
“No.”

“I’m not letting you go then. We’ll have to sit here like this until the Major comes back. How long do you think that’ll be?”

“Let me go Ryker.”

“Nope, not going to.”

I’m embarrassed beyond belief and feel the blush creeping into my cheeks. I can hear snickers of laughter from the guys around us; I turn my scowl to them briefly then back to Ryker. “Now, Ryker.”

“Are you telling me, a Ryker what to do?”

“Let me go.”

“Say you forgive me.”

I’m still staring at those damn eyes of his. I’ll deny to the day of my death that they have any affect on me, but the truth is he’ll probably get anything from me because of them. Like now.

“I forgive you, Ryker.”

Now he’s smiling like a lunatic. “Good.” He stands us both up and lets me go and I’m left wondering what the hell just happened. He dusts off his pants, still happier than the orange sun and I’m left with the ghost of the feeling of his hands around my wrists staring at him dumbly.

“What now, Captain?” he asks with that mischievous sparkle. I shake my head and give up arguing with him.

“We gather the rest and spread out into even teams and try to stay alive until dinner.”

“That when this ends?”

“Yes.”

“How many didn’t decide to come and kill, Ryker?” I ask Rex.

“Not too many,” he says shamefaced, as he should be, which reminds me.

“We can discuss punishment for that later, for all of you,” I inform everyone standing near. "You all disobeyed me."

“Yes, sir,” they all say.

“Hold up, Captain.” It’s Ryker again. Who else would it be? “The Major said they could. I’d have wanted to kill me too. We’ve sorted out our beef, I say we let this one go.”

“No, Ryker.”

The crowd gasps; I’ve just said no to a Ryker. Damn it. I’ve just said no to a Ryker.

“Is there something I’m missing?”

“Yes. They were raised better than this, I know, I was raised with them. If you show them mercy in
this, how can you expect they won’t gut you in your sleep?” Yes I am aware of how hypocritical I sound now considering some of my own opinions on the matter. But they were trying to kill him and not much else makes sense after that. Not to mention he almost died and all I want to do right now is take Ryker far, far away and stand watch over him.

Ryker loses the young quality he has and takes on a face I’ve seen on the Major many times. It’s a look of wisdom, of a man who knows something many people don’t, but instead of flaunting it — like Ryker’s usually do — he is humbled by the knowledge.

“We have all paid a price to be here, but I know these men will stand beside me because they choose to and not because they are afraid not to. I am content with that bargain.”

Who is this guy? Seriously. Who is he?

I still think I should punish them. I can’t exactly say this to him, but it's mostly because they disobeyed me. There should be a consequence for that, but Ryker has spoken. And I'm starting to believe that even if he weren't a Ryker, I'd still follow him into Death Valley, still find a way to give him everything he could ever want. I still sigh long and suffering. “Okay, Ryker.”

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For the first time ever playing this game, the Major doesn’t come back. Even when it's time to eat, the Major's not there to dismiss us, so Ryker takes it upon himself to taking our word for it that the game is over. I haven’t known Ryker for long, but his actions don’t surprise me from the little I know of him; he’s the kinda guy that does what he thinks is right and best and logical. And if he can't figure out what qualifies under those qualities, he just does whatever he wants. The clones listen to him though, not wanting to disobey their new 'leader' who also happens to be the Lord Ryker's first born.

“Where to now, Ridomie?”

He seems to think he needs to wait for me before he goes anywhere. It’s not exactly true, but I am supposed to keep an eye on him and since Ryker does tend to wander off, I don’t tell him otherwise. “We need to wait here, Ryker. The Major is pissed at us, remember?”

“When isn’t that guy pissed? C’mon, let’s go get some food, I haven’t eaten since yesterday,” he whines.

That’s conflicting for me. The same instincts that tell me not to piss off the Major, are telling me make sure he’s fed. It’s an easy decision. “Fine, Ryker. Let’s get you something to eat.”

His face lights up and he follows behind me. He shouldn’t be behind me.

The Mess Hall is packed. There are clones from all different G-batches here. All of them look our way as I lead Ryker to the food; I wish they’d stop looking. I know they’re just fascinated by the new Ryker, but I don’t want them to be. I want their eyes back in their heads and away from him. It makes it worse that I can’t claim him. If I could, it would make this aspect better — I wouldn’t have to worry about another clone moving in on him. But all of this is crazy thinking anyway, those rules only apply clone to clone, not clone to Ryker. No one can claim a Ryker, but he could claim one of us. It pisses me off.

“What is this stuff?”

“It’s food Ryker.”
“It don’t look like food to me — except for maybe that, I’ll have one of those,” he says pointing to an apple. I love apples. They’re my absolute favorite thing. Often, I’ve polished off a bowl of apples in one meal hour. My eyes light up, loving that he’s chosen something I love. Of course I read way too much into it. I pass him an apple.

“Thanks, what is it?” He crunches into it right away, barely able to contain his hunger. His eyes scrunch in confusion as he looks at it again. “It tastes like a fucking apple.”

“That’s because it is an apple.”

“But it’s all purple and shit. Apples are red, green, yellow, or a combo of the two, but not fucking purple.”

“Maybe on Earth, but you’re on Cyntripien now.” Am I ever glad he’s on Cyntripien now. Just the thought of him on Earth and far away from me — I don’t like it.

I grab several more apples, some eggs, ham, and a whole bunch of items I think he’ll like.

“Don’t tell me, that’s fucking green eggs and ham,” he says laughing.

I give him eyes that say ‘what are you laughing at?’

“Never mind it’s an Earth thing…this book…never mind.” He’s quiet after that, finishes off his apple and takes another along with a slice of ham. He’s so hungry, he can’t even wait ‘till we get to the table, so I pile several helpings onto four different plates. Feeding Ryker’s going to be a job in and of itself.

I look out at the sea of tables to find one suitable for Ryker and I. I don’t want him to sit with anyone since he’s not properly mine and he’ll never be properly mine. The only way I can have him is if I hoard him and that isn’t an option right now — most of the tables are full. I decide on a table with clones in my G-batch, I’m pretty sure after what they’ve witnessed today, they’ll think twice about looking at Ryker and they won’t dare touch.

I sit him on the side of the table where there are less clones, just Rex, Ter-X and Heli-O. It’s very much understood that I’ve placed him there and he is taking direction from me. I’ve already given up trying to make it look like I’m not. I nod to the plates and Ryker takes one, also at my direction, and I can do nothing but stare at him as he eats. I can’t help it, I want to make sure he’s okay, I want to make sure he gets enough to eat, I want to make sure no one else touches him…

He’s either oblivious to my staring, or ignores it.

"Hey, uh, you're Ter-X, right?" he says to Heli-O.

"No sir, he is," Helio-O says. "Ter-X is my twin."

"You dudes all look a little too fucking alike and now I've got twins to deal with? Okay, you're going to have to forgive me. Anyway, Ter-X," he says turning to face Ter-X, "Brodix was your friend. I'm fucking sorry about Brodix."

Ter-X stops eating for a moment. "Brodix was, he was my mate."

"Your mate? Like 'life partner?' That what that means?"

Ter-X nods his head solemnly.
"Shit. I'm so fucking sorry. I meant what I said, I'll get him back. Um, I'm a little fuzzy on the 'when,' but I will get him back…somehow."

Figures. Ryker has no plan and no idea how he's going to do that. Ter-X nods. "I know now if you say this, it will be. I will look forward to his return. He would want that – he liked you."

That sets my teeth on edge. I know exactly how Brodix liked the new Ryker. Maybe it's not such a good idea he comes back. I might kill him. He starts talking to the other guys and immediately has them all in love with him. I hate it. I scowl the entire time. When I see he's finished one plate, I replace it with another — he doesn't notice, he's too busy talking to Rex. Rex — the one that wanted to kill him only hours ago, but now he can't get enough of talking to Rex. I should punish Rex anyway, for talking to my Ryker.

“ Aren’t you gonna eat, Ridomie?”

That’s Ryker. “Huh?”

“ Eat,” he laughs. “ You haven’t touched a thing, but you’ve given me two plates.”

So he had noticed. That perks me up a bit. I eat something, an apple of course and try to relax a bit. I eat some other things and try not to wallow so much, but I’m in a constant state of anger. All the clones are fawning over him and Ryker loves the attention. His sunshine is catching though, and every time he looks over at me, I smile. He moves his Ryker blonde hair out of his eyes. He’s beautiful. I sigh.

Suddenly, Ryker freezes.

“ There you are boy. I’ve been searching half the fuckin’ Corporation for you.”

“ I’m eating.” Ryker glares at his uncle who’s come out of nowhere, though maybe I’d have noticed him if I hadn’t been making goo-goo eyes at Ryker the whole time.

“ Yer done eatin’ now and comin’ with me and after we’re done Ridomie, yer meetin’ us back on the field — I believe the two of you owe me some hours.”

“ Yes, sir,” I say without hesitation. I’m not nearly as brazen as Ryker who hasn’t moved.

“ Why should I go anywhere with you?”

“ It weren’t an invitation, it were an order. Move.”

The sun is gone from Ryker’s face, replaced with fierce anger. He pushes the table out making a big scene and knocking everything over. The part in me that wants to protect him from the Major’s wrath automatically takes guard; it’s the same part of me that wants to control him. “ Stop it, Ryker,” I hiss at him.

I close my eyes. I’m not even going to say it, we all know by now — I’m not supposed to talk to Ryker like that. Major Ryker’s going to kill me. Nothing seems to be happening the whole time I’ve got my eyes closed, so I take the chance and open them.

Ryker’s looking at me.

“ Fine. I’ll go with you, sir.” He’s still looking at me, but not talking to me when he says that. The Major nods at me. What the? He should be sending me to the incinerator, not thanking me. The Major spins on his heel militantly and walks off expecting Ryker to follow him. He does, but he
brushes by me reaching for another apple. “One for the road,” he says winking at me. He walks away and I’m left with my mouth open, staring at his arrogant ass, as he walks away, pointing and waving at different clones like the hero he is.

“You’ve got it bad for the kid.”

I turn eyes on Heli-O like I intend on killing him. “He’s not a kid. He’s a Ryker. I can’t have it bad for him.”

“Of course, sir.” He’s sarcastic. Heli-O and his twin, Ter-X, have always been like that. Ter-X, Heli-O and I were raised together; it’s not like Vallee and I. Vallee is younger and from a different G-batch. He was raised like us, we all are now, but we’d left the Mother’s nursery by the time he had come to it.

Rex is a little more sympathetic. “What you going to do Ridomie?”

I guess they all know — least the ones in my G-batch know. They know me. I stop trying to deny it. “I don’t know…I just don’t know.”
“Where are we going, sir?”

I get a grunt in response, so I follow silently behind him. He clearly doesn't give a shit that he almost killed me. All part of my ‘training’ I suppose, which is fucking shitty. I was dumb enough to fucking think that maybe the Major cared about me more than he lets on, but being okay with my possible death is about as far away from caring as you can get.

Down the maze of white halls in Ryker Corp. we go. We’re a long way from Kansas when he finally stops before a door, looks at me significantly, then to the door in; we both watch it slide open. What was that all about?

I’m surprised to find Derco in the room behind the door. He said he didn't want to see me for four weeks, guess someone missed me. He's still in white, only today his jacket is long, to his knees. The white pants have creases in front (does he have an audition with a mafia from the fifties after this?) even his leather shoes are white. It's a far cry from the Major's attire (rough, military style and almost all in black) but he's still threatening, if not more so.

His face frowns at me, his azure blue eyes look me over from head to toe. “Lexington!” he says. “What did you do to him?”

I haven't seen myself yet, but I probably still look like shit. Everything works, but I'm dead tired. Even scuffling with Ridomie was tough and I'm glad he didn't call my bluff. I'm not sure I could have taken him in my state. “Was testin’ him. Wanted to see if he really is the miracle blood you needed.”

There’s a pause in which Derco seems to consider him, until he finally settles on a pleased expression. The same expression one would give their dog had he brought back the squeaky toy his Master had thrown for him. The Major can't really be his bitch though? Can he? I have my own problems with the Major, but I'm kinda hoping he turns out to be the hero in this fucking gong show. Right now, it's not looking that way. “And?”

The Major nods, bitterly. His teeth clench. "The kid's what you want and more."

I want to interject that I don't appreciate being talked about like I'm some lab experiment, only I am a lab experiment. Saying any different doesn't make it less true. Might as well call a spade a spade. I could still tell the both of them to fuck off, but even that's not going to feel gratifying at the moment. I have a bad fucking feeling about what's going to happen. Better to keep my mouth shut.

“Excellent.” Derco turns to two clones. They look, older than the clones I'd just been chilling with. I can make this distinction now after spending the day with a whole bunch of clones. These clones physically look like them, but I know they're nothing like them. I like Ridomie's phrase: brothers in arms. The clones I was with today are my brothers in arms. These are not. They're harder, colder, more like drones. Does the brainwashing process delve deeper with age? I don't know.

“Place him in the chair,” he orders. The two clones respond immediately and grab me without another thought.

I fight in their grip and my way out of their grubby hands. “I will comply,” I tell Derco. “I’m here now. You have me. I’ll seat myself.” I don’t say it nice, but it’s all shit he wants to hear. He let’s my errant attitude go.
It doesn’t stop him from studying me — he’s trying to decipher if I’m lying. “You are nothing like your, mother then. She would not stand for this.”

Is he trying to insult me? Rile me up? Either way, in proper Briggland style, I mouth him off. I’ve had enough – I can’t take much of him. This guy really gets under my skin. “I don’t like it much either, but I don’t see much choice. I like to think of it as a pick your battles sort of thing. Besides, maybe I wouldn’t stand for whatever this is, if I knew what the freak you were doing.” I mean it as a threat, and a promise. I may have to forfeit this battle, but I am going to win the war.

He laughs like I’m some little kid making a joke. “Very, well. Sit.”

I do, and from there things are fucking anti-climatic. A dude wearing a funny outfit takes a sample of my blood, he takes five samples actually. They gonna leave any blood for me?

The dude taking my blood resembles the other men, the clones; same dark hair and eyes, but he’s different. It was as if someone took the air outta one of the men. He looks younger, but I want to say he’s older even if I’d also say it looked like he had missed puberty all together, but his face is too sharp, and chiseled to be mistaken as the round face of a boy.

He’s a clone that ended up wrong.

I stare, can’t help it, so I suppose I deserve the slight glare I’m being given – trying not to make it too obvious that he’s glaring. He doesn’t say anything—he’s probably not supposed to complain, I am a 'Ryker' after all.

I marvel watching as the needle bursts through my skin a sixth time. I didn’t get to see when Ridomie’d done it to me earlier.

“Yer not indestructible, boy,” the Major says, figuring me out. "Didn’t you think we’d figured on how t’get a needle past that thick skin of yours in all this time?” He laughs, I narrow my eyes. “Now if only we can get through yer thick Ryker skull.”

I ignore him, not in the mood and go back to watching the blood go into the little tube. When the wimpy clone steps away, I hop up and move to leave.

I don’t make it two steps.

I get to experience his full strength in a way I do not like as he pushes me back down into the chair I’d just vacated – he's fucking strong. Stronger than me. He slaps me across my bruised lip, and proceeds to seethe at me. “You will go when I release you, not before,” Derco says enraged. I make an effort to wiggle out of his grasp, but I’m not going anywhere — I’m not used to being weaker than anyone. Without taking his eyes off me, he belts out instructions. “Everybody, out. It would appear my son and I are in need of a little discussion on respect.”

I almost can’t believe my ears when the Major speaks up on my behalf. “Don’t do this now, Derco. He’s pretty beat up. He’s weak. He owes me some hours anyway. I’ll add this to his tab.” That makes me shiver a bit. The Major knows exactly what Derco has in mind for me, and is trying to prevent it.

“Good. It will make my job easier.” He looks at the Major, challenging him to oppose. The Major challenges him with his eyes — but only for a second – before stalking out of the room altogether. Whatever Derco is about to do to me, he's too much of a fucking coward to watch. Some of me is glad ('cause do I really want anyone watching?) and the other feels pissed off about it.

Everyone leaves. Derco and I are alone. Clearly he doesn't fear me if he feels he can be alone with
me.

Fuck.

“You, my son, need to learn some respect for your elders, specifically for me. I do not know what you have been up to all this time on that emaciated planet we once called Earth, but here things are different. Especially for you. You will learn to obey me, without your self-righteous attitude. I own you.”

He's calling me self-righteous? Really? That’s fucking rich. I cock an eyebrow at him, calling him on that one.

He knows what I mean. Doesn’t give a fuck.

I move to block him as he moves to slap me across the face again — I’m not getting hit there again. Christ! Wasn’t he the one on the Major’s case earlier about me being all roughed up? He’s one hypocritical son of a bitch, that’s for sure.

“Move, your hand,” he says calm, and slow in a way that’s frightening.

“I’m not letting you hit me,” I tell him pretending I’m not terrified.

“You will, and if you do not, there will be steeper consequences. Do not make me whip you within an inch of your life within your first days here. I will relish in doing it.”

On Earth I looked for pain, wished I could feel pain. But now I'm thinking that the grass is always greener. 'Cause now that I've got access to all the pain I could want, I don't want it so much. Not the kind of pain he's talking about anyway, his voice scares me, actually fucking scares me. I move my hand and feel pathetic as my lip trembles with the mere thought of being hit by him again. Because I know it's coming.

He belts me full across the face, blood sprays from the-hit-once-too-many-times cut in my lip. I get a little starry-headed this time. He has a heavy hand, heavier than the Major’s by far. I realize now how gentle the Major actually is with me and it's something to hang onto as I barely remain standing.

Self-preservation instincts kick in, and I know I’m out numbered. I had been very lucky before when I’d caught Derco off guard. Very. I’m all fucking ears now, to what he’ll say, and I decide it’s in my immediate best interest to fucking heed his warning this time.

“I am not just anyone. Not only am I the Lord Ryker, I am your father. Hate me all you want, but you will show me respect. Am I clear?”

“Yes, sir.”

He hits me a-fucking-gain and I've got tears in my eyes. It's embarrassing. What the fuck did I do that time?

A little more starry-headed, I see two of him, and it’s really pissing me off. One of him is enough — trust me. I keel over, half way to the floor. I won’t fall over though — I won’t. It’ll be my one fucking victory.

“Wrong answer. It's yes Father. Let’s try this again. Do you understand me, Briggland?”

Yes, you fucking Bastard is what I want to say, but right now, I'll swallow all my Ryker pride. I
want out of here. “Yes, F-Father.”

White. But he’s all in white. Pure. All in white.

“Good boy. But tell me one more time, just to make sure I know you understand?”

Man, I want to punch him in the face — give him a little something to make our faces look a little more alike. “Yes, Father.” I can’t hide the hint of sarcasm that creeps into my voice. He knows, but he leaves it, loving that he’s making me do something against my will, and relishing in the control of it.

“Well, done. Was that so hard?” He arches his perfectly shaped hawk brow over his perfectly shaped azure eye. He’s fucking testing me.


“No, Father,” I say through tight lips. I pass. He smiles wider than the universe.

“Good. Now that is all cleared up, I shall administer your punishment for disobedience, and we can put this bit of unpleasantness behind us.” From under his long white jacket, he produces an ugly looking whip.

Pristine.

It’s shiner than any whip I’ve ever seen — though to be honest, I’ve never seen one in real life, just in movies, ‘cause who carries a fucking whip with them? That thing looks evil, and I can tell it would fucking sting just by looking at it.

“Remove your shirt.”

Now I understand why the Major was trying to fight this. I’m way too fucking weak to handle anything like that whip right now, but the fucker knows exactly what he’s doing.

I begin to panic. It’s wrong. White is wrong on him.

“But F-Father.” I struggle to say the ‘correct’ appellation. “…you said you wouldn’t do this if I let you hit me.” I sound like a huge pussy.

“I said that I would not whip you ‘within an inch of your life’ — and since you obeyed I will reward you by keeping my word, but you are still going to be punished.” He stares at me meaningfully, still smiling, elated at what he’s about to do. “Consider yourself lucky. Clones are incinerated for less—being punished is an honor, it means you are valuable.”

I want to say something sarcastic about that, but he can’t wait for the violence, to hear me scream; I can see it in his eyes. I’m not going to rile him up at this point. I should have expected it when he pulled the whip from his jacket. I mean only a sadistic bastard carries a whip on his person. Am I right?

And so does the man who sired me. Fucking, goody.


I’ve only got one option right now if I don’t want this to happen. I don’t like it much, but I’ll do anything. So I beg. “Please. I’ll obey you. I’ll stop being a cocky asshole—to you at least. I swear. We don’t need to do this.”
He pauses, and is thinking about how to word what he’s about to tell me. I shouldn’t have wasted my fucking begging on him, for a second time. Once again it's useless. He’s been waiting for an excuse to beat me and I’ve fucking given it to him.

“I want to teach you this lesson, it's important. I want to hear you scream. I hope you'll beg me to stop. I hope you will learn to be wary the next time you are in a land that is foreign to you, with people whom you know nothing of – nothing of their customs, nor their rules,” he clucks sadly as he measures my soul. “You must always learn the game before you being to play. Or you will lose. And you have, beginning with the skin on your back—remove your shirt. Now.”

I only remember flashes.

Glowing malachite eyes look at me, angrily. Then the sound of a familiar voice, “is he, coherent?”

“Barely.” I hear the rough voice of the Major. “He’ll live. Just unhappily for a couple of days.”

I pass out as I feel one of them lift me onto a large shoulder. When I become somewhat coherent again, I’m face down on a bed and I hear voices drift over me. “I think all of the clones in Ryker Corp. know, Ridomie,” the Major growls. ”You’d better fucking hope, Derco and Derek never find out.”

Find out what?

“I don’t want to feel this way,” he says angrily. “Please. Make someone else his First Lieutenant. I can’t do it.”

He doesn’t want to be my First Lieutenant? Fuck him then. Is this because of the whole ‘I think his boyfriend is hot’ thing? ‘Cause that’s fucking stupid. Is he really that possessive and jealous? I know I should probably be torn up over how my new ‘Father’ treats me, but I'm just not. I couldn't care less about that. I’m more angry about Ridomie; I thought he was my friend. But he's just a dick like everyone else.

“Yer his First Lieutenant. End of discussion. Deal with it.”

There’s a long silence after that, but I can feel the heat of the anger burning from both the Major and Ridomie. Who needs an incinerator? And I’m probably adding to it — I’m burning with pain and I can’t wait to punch Ridomie in his stupid face for being such a jealous asshole.

As I lie here, I wonder why they’re not moving to do anything. I’ve never been injured to this extent before, but I’ve seen it happen on T.V. Shouldn’t they be putting some kind of anti-septic on me, or something?

“Wow. Look.” The Major picks up one of my arms, twists it, gently, so they can look at the markings on the underside of my arm and ghosts his finger down the line. “That’s where the whip ended.” Several times in fact. That's left unsaid, but understood. “Those were redder before, s’almost gone now.”

“He heals fast, even without Rykortisol — still looks like someone took a meat tenderizer to his back, though.” Ridomie’s voice sounds worried, but I don’t know why he fucking cares. He hates me anyway. "Can we, can we give him some Rykortisol?"

“We’ll clean him up,” the Major grunts, short, like he doesn’t want to talk about it too much. "I've been told he's not to have any Rykortisol." I hear his boots as they leave the rug, and meet marble. I feel the bed indent beside me.

“Man, Ryker. You just had to go and lip off your father, didn’t you?” His hand caresses my cheek, the one facing up, cause I’m lying on my stomach with my face lying on one side and I’m fucking confused. Why’s he being so nice if he hates me? I’ve no energy to stop him, so I enjoy his soft touch — haven’t got too many of those in my time. The hand moves to brush my sweaty fringe out of my left eye.
I hear boots on marble again, the Major’s back. “Here, clean him up then let him rest.” A bowl of water sloshes.

“Yes, sir. Sir?”

“Yeah?”

“I’m sorry. I’ll take good care of him.”

What? Oh I get it. He feels sorry for me, ’cause I’m all beat up. Fuck him. Fuck everybody. I feel the Major’s eyes on me one more time (I know they’ve gotta be his, no one else’s eyes feel like his). Then boots on marble again. A door closes.

Ridomie starts in on me with that fucking cloth, and I whimper. I know he’s being as gentle as possible, but there’s nothing for it. It hurts like something else. Don’t they have something more high-tech than fucking soap and water? It’s the future — that’s the first question I’m asking, when I can.

Thankfully, I pass out.

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When I wake up, I don’t know how long I’ve been out and I feel like a god damn truck’s hit me. I try to sit up; mistake. “Owww! Shit!”

“Ryker?”

What the hell is he still doing here? Ridomie comes into view as I continue to sit up, wincing and complaining all the way, but I do it.

“Easy! Your back.” His voice is firm, but I don’t fucking listen. “Ryker! Just stay there, okay?” he says like a question, but it’s an order. Again, I don’t listen. I push his hand away when he tries to help; that irritates him. “Do you remember what happened?”

“Yeah. I got beat for lipping off my father,” I say all pissed off, because I’m pissed off at him, but he doesn’t know that, yet. He looks at me a little shocked, probably because he can tell I’m pissed off and he doesn’t know what to do about it. I’m a Ryker after all — maybe it’s time I start acting like one — especially if he’s going to act like a douche. I get up, painfully.

“Ryker, stop. Where do you think you’re going?”

“Does it matter?”

“What are you talking about?” He rolls his eyes at me. “You’re not going anywhere, Ryker. Look at you.”

“I’m fine.” I need to get the fuck out of here. I can’t look at him. I play over what I just said and realize I’m acting kind of like a chick. But let’s face it, I’m hurt — I thought we’d been through something together and, well, I’ve never had a friend like him before, okay? He’s…there’s something about him. I wanted him to like me, but he’s just my babysitter because the Major’s making him.

“You need to rest, get back in bed. Your father will expect you in classes tomorrow. You’ll have to go.”
“Don’t get your panties in a twist, Mama.”

“Ryker…” My name sounds like a warning, but something’s under it, like maybe his lip trembled, or something, but why would it do that? I’m imagining it. Must be.

“Look, you weren’t the one just got turned to dog food.” I’m not going to cry about it and I really don’t care, but I know he’ll think I care, so I’ll use it if I need to — to get him to shut the fuck up and maybe leave. I turn around to face him, and that’s when I realize: Shit, maybe I’m wrong about something. His eyes are red rimmed, and glossy with unshed tears — or maybe a few had found their way down his face, I can see the tear tracks, still wet. I notice now, how badly he’s beat from our mini war — he’s healed some, but still got a bit to go; bruised from head to neck, from what I can see and probably a lot more under his black clothing. Something prickles inside me, I don’t like seeing him like that no matter how much of an ass he’s being.

I’m drawn to him. I walk over, reach out and touch his face like he had mine before. “You’re hurt.”

He smiles, brighter than their strange orange sun, Ridomie doesn’t smile too much, not many do around here. “I’m hurt? You should see yourself.”

I take my hand away. It breaks the spell of the moment, and just like that we’re fighting again. “You can’t do that with your father. He rules us all. You must obey him.”

“Fuck that.”

“Hey, I’m just looking out for you.”

“Oh, yeah. I know all about that. You look out for me because the Major ordered you to. I heard you and the Major talking.”

“What did you hear Ryker?”

I should tell him I don’t have to tell him because I’m a Ryker—that would really piss him off. I don’t though. “I heard you ask him to transfer yourself out of my service.” That feels more satisfying.

“Well, yeah. But Ryker, it’s because…”

“You’re a possessive freak. You dudes are all fucking weird around here, fucking your brothers. I don’t want any part of it, so just…Just fuck you Ridomie!” I’ve lost it. I’ve completely lost it and I don’t know why I’m getting all worked up over this, because why should I? I really don’t care if people want to fuck their brothers — it’s not like I have to. But I’m mad at him and I can’t seem to control what’s coming out of my mouth.

I can already see his grey eyes are breaking like stones do, he’s not even angry, just really, really hurt and I don’t get it. He hates me. Why should what I say hurt him? Maybe he’s worried I’ll incinerate him. “Don’t worry, I don’t care what the fuck you guys do, I won’t have you burnt alive or anything like that.”

I don’t like the way he’s just standing there like that. Now that I’ve said a bunch of stuff I already regret. Ridomie’s frozen. Shit, he probably wants to leave, but can’t leave. He says as much. “I-I’m supposed to stay with you, sir. Major’s orders.”

“Jesus Christ. You sound like everyone else around here.”

That reignites something in him. “Everyone else around here? At least everyone else around here
knows the rules.”

“Because everyone else is a fucking clone! Do I look like a fucking clone to you?”

He doesn’t say anything to that for a long time, but I know I’ve gone too far and I’ve fucking hurt him beyond repair. “No, sir. No sir, you don’t,” he says in the saddest voice I’ve ever heard.

I should stop there, we’re back to ‘sir,’ but I don’t. “Good. I’m glad we’ve fucking cleared that up. Now I’m going to go and you can go do whatever it is you do. I don’t give a shit. Just stay out of my way.”

“Ryker…Sir, I’m supposed to look out for you,” he says for the third time.

“Maybe, but there’s just one problem with that.”

He squints his eyes together trying to figure out what I’m talking about, he won’t, but I’ll tell him. “You’d have to catch me first.” I give him a final ‘fuck you’ look then I run.

I don’t know if he runs after me, I don’t look behind.

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I don’t know where I’m going. It’s been about an hour though and I’m getting kinda bored. I haven’t been restricted to anywhere in particular – damn Ryker’s are so arrogant they think I won’t run away do they? Maybe I will. That’ll fucking show them. I will eventually; I would now, but I can’t. I’ve got to find my mama. That’s who I should be thinking about now, but all I can think about is fucking Ridomie. It’s why I never make too many friends in the first place. I don’t like getting attached to people; I always get ripped away from them sooner or later. But something in me had latched onto Ridomie right away and I thought we could be friends. Maybe fuck even. Just casually — I don’t do relationships. Never have. Well, except for that one time, but it was a fucking disaster that I don’t like to remember. I’ve had plenty of offers, of course. But I didn’t want any of them. Then I take one look at Ridomie and I…I don’t know what happened, but it was stupid.

Course, as I’m wondering aimlessly around Ryker Corporation, my back throbbing. I don’t approach anyone and no one approaches me. I must have my ‘fuck you’ look still on. I’m sure no one wants to talk with a displeased Ryker. I also feel fucking bad about what I said to him. Even as the words were coming out of my mouth I hated them, but I kept saying them. I was hurt, but it didn’t stop me, never does when I just let my temper fly. I’m bright as sunshine until a little cloud settles over me. Fuck. I’ve got to do what I hate. I’ve got to apologize. I over reacted; I know it.

Ridomie doesn’t have to be my friend, it’s probably better that way anyhow. One less person for me to say goodbye to when I leave; just like always. I’ll go back. He’s probably still there, following the Major’s orders like a, like a clone.

Shit. I called him that too. I’ve spent half the fucking day convincing him I’m not like all the other Rykers, but I am and if he already didn’t hate me enough for that, he will now. I gotta at least try to make it right. I turn around. Fuck. Hopefully I can find my way back to my room.

I twist and turn down hallways looking, but whoever the fuck designed this place didn’t make it fucking easy for newbies. That’s when I hear noises coming from beyond a door at the end of the hallway. It sounds like someone is in trouble—there’s a gagging sound—someone’s being choked to death. Without another thought, I rip open the door.

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I don’t bother chasing after him. If I do, I’ll kill him with my bare hands.

I was hurt at first, but the more he spoke, the more I wanted to reign him in — he shouldn’t be speaking to me like that. At least that was my thought, but we all know it’s not true. He can talk to me any way he likes. That counter thought calmed me down some.

But when he ran out like the Ryker Brat he is; I lost it. He disobeyed me. Rationality played no factor after that. Sure I was trying to make it out like I was asking him to stay, but inside I was ordering him to, and he just walked right out, still hurting I might add, after he’d told me off. I hate everything I’m feeling, but I hate Ryker the most. And no I don’t hate him for what he’s said — I’ve seen too many of his actions today, I know he didn’t mean any of it.

That was all ‘brat’ talk. It’s what brats do to call out a top. As impossible as it sounds, Ryker is a brat — at least he acts like one. Nothing makes sense anymore.

“Everything, okay, sir?” Vallee looks at me like I’m liable to tear his head off. I probably am. I’m mad at the world, but mostly I’m mad at myself. Mad for thinking anyone could be anything different, and disappointed in myself for not being able to comply with the world I live in. I wish I could be normal.

“Fine. I'm fine.”

I hope he’ll leave it at that. But he’s Vallee, so he doesn’t. Instead he advances on me. “C’mere. I’ll make you feel fine.”

We’re in a hallway; it’s sometime past dawn. People come down this hallway, a lot — it’s on the way to the Mess Hall. The others have lost all sensitivity regarding sexual acts in the hallways, but of course, Ridomie is different in that regard too. I like some semblance of privacy, even if it’s only inferred privacy and even if that hasn’t been the case lately. There’s no true privacy around this place. I’m not keen to have sex at the moment, especially in this hallway. I can only think about him, and why I should walk back up to his rooms and wait for him — I know he’ll be back.

I usually advance on the men; they don’t advance on me like this. I need them to know I am the Alpha; that I’m next in command after Derek Ryker, which, don’t get too excited for me it’s not as prestigious as it sounds. It’s more a ranking amongst the clones. An unofficial rank they gave me. It means nothing to a Ryker. The Major treats me pretty decent, when I can control my temper and flippant tongue. He’s picked up on the other’s willingness to follow me, and uses it to his purposes.

It’s just the way goes around here. I understand, why. There are ways of making people comply, but like me, the Major would prefer to achieve compliance without killing. He does kill.

It’s not that I want it — the title — but it’s served more good than harm, thus I’ve had to fight to keep it that way. Around here, sex usually does the job. Any man you can Top, you rule around here. That’s how it works.

I top them all — all except Rykers.

Which leads me back to: what am I doing crushing on a Ryker in the first place? Yeah, I’ve at least got myself to admit to that much; I’ve got a mild crush — extremely mild — crush on Ryker. Never mind he’s all I can think about, and even though I’m mad at him, I can’t wait to have him in my sights again. We’ll have to be in each other’s presence a lot, since the Major’s not budging on this whole first lieutenant thing. We have to make up at some point.
Back to Vallee. Now that I can see he’s attempting to make moves on me, I’m going to have to take him whether I want to or not. Vallee is a bottom, to begin with, bottoms don’t usually advance — not because they can’t, but because they don’t prefer to. Any brat that does is testing, any bottom that does, well it could be anything. Either way, bottom, or brat doesn’t mean weak, if anything, it’s just the opposite.

As he advances, I grab him by the throat, and drag him to a nearby supplies closet. Like I said, there’s no true privacy around here, which is why the word to most is foreign, but the closet gives the ‘idea’ of privacy.

He looks stunned. This did not go how he planned, which sets my feelers on edge. Had he been trying to top me, just to top me? Is my mood just an excuse? I am a bit paranoid at the best of times, but it usually pays off.

Either way, I’m going to show him who the alpha is.

“Be careful what you wish, for,” I tell him eyes dead serious, mouth snarling. He’s picked a bad time. I’m still angry. Mostly at myself, but if I’m honest, and I usually am, I’m pissed at Ryker. More than pissed. I hate what he said even if he didn’t mean it. Not him, never him, just what he said.

I already believe in him. I already want to stand beside him in a way I’ve never wanted to stand with another, but what he said is true whether he believes it or not. A clone can never be with a Ryker because clones aren’t people.

But he’s the only thing I’ve wanted. Ever.

I don’t care I don’t own clothes, or shoes, hell, technically I don’t own my own dick. But Ryker I want. I want him. I want to own him.

I’m never going to get anyone to believe we’re people. Not even the clones themselves believe it. To speak of it, is blasphemy. I might as well call a mutiny on Ryker Corp. itself.

My anger spikes more. I imagine Vallee is Ryker. What I’d like to do to him and his smart mouth. I can see the fear in Vallee’s eyes already. I haven’t even done anything yet, and I already have him at heel.

But I wouldn’t have Ryker yet. No. He’d still be fighting me with those azure blues of his, trying to light me on fire. I’d grab him by the collar of his shirt, and slam him up against the wall. Hard.

“Ugh, sir…I’m sorry…fuck…’ someone’s pleading under my hands. I don’t know who he is anymore, Vallee, Ryker, it all blends together in my head until all I see is the object of my desire. He only thinks he’s sorry now, but I’m about to make him more sorry.

He’d — Ryker — would still look on at me defiantly; daring me to do whatever it was I planned to do. He’d have a dirty mouth just like the one that speaks to me now, but it would be ten times dirtier. I’d backhand him, hard.

“Ohhh… Sir? I’m sorry. May I make it up to you, sir?”

There is only one person that can make anything up to me. Ryker. And I will, I will make Ryker make it up to me.

“You may.”
Still gripping his collar, I push his head to my crotch. He’s not scared anymore, well, not entirely, there’s a small element of fear there, one I only employ at moments like these. Though not usually to this extent. I am beyond where I usually take this, far beyond. But I’m beyond too. I’ve allowed my emotions to get the best of me.

Vallee smiles up at me, grateful for this moment. They all are. Happy I would take the time to teach them. To control them. Control is love to a clone. He unbuckles my green fatigues, and pulls my underwear down just enough to pull out my cock.

I close my eyes.

Vallee’s long gone, and I’ve got Ryker below me.

Only he wouldn’t be smiling up at me. He would still be pissed, but in a subdued sort of way now. He would accept what he would have to do to me, and he would both love it and hate it at the same time.

His hot mouth is on my cock…in my mind, it’s Ryker’s mouth. My hips jump forward. “Ohhhh… fuck…” He always makes me swear. I push my pelvis forward, into the hot mouth, Ryker’s hot mouth, and I can’t control anything. I grab his hair, long blonde Ryker hair in my hand, that I use it to control his head. “Fuck…sooo good.”

A pair of lips smiles around my cock. I’m about to release into his mouth, his dirty, dirty mouth, and then we’ll kiss and make up, and I can pet his hair nicely, snuggle him and he’ll tell me how much...

I’m taken over the edge now, and I’m beginning my release into… Suddenly I’m looking into two azure blue eyes.

“Ryker?” The door to the closet opens right at the moment of my climax, and it can’t possibly be any worse, I’m releasing into Vallee’s mouth, and Ryker, the object of my, my everything, is at the door, a look of horror on his face. He looks like I’ve just punched him in the gut.

“I’m sorry. I heard noises. I was coming to help. Fuck! I’m sorry.” His sentences are short and choppy; he’s fumbling, face red, and he’s leaving.

“No! Ryker wait!”

Meanwhile Vallee’s eyes go wide. He’s heard the name Ryker, and he doesn’t know which Ryker I mean, though he should be able to guess. There’s only one Ryker I’m this casual with. He gets up as I put my cock back in my pants, and zip while I run. Calling a quick ‘thank you’ at Vallee by way of dismissal, and also to confirm that all order is restored between us once more, and I leave him to stare after me in shock; relieved I didn’t make him come with me.

No clone ever wants to invite the wrath of any Ryker. He doesn’t know this Ryker like I do, though I wonder how I suppose I know him, so well? It’s not like we’ve spent any significant amount of time together, yet I feel like I’ve known him, before I’ve known him, if that makes any sense.

Thankfully Ryker doesn’t run like he had before and I catch up to him quickly. He must have wanted me to catch him.

“Ryker!”

He turns, complete embarrassment over his features. It only hits me now that he could only be embarrassed at all if he felt he was intruding on something private. A word almost foreign to
clones, but a word I wished they knew. Ryker does, and a little bubble of hope reaches the surface gurgling happily there. My brain runs wild with assumptions. *Sex isn’t something he was used to seeing everywhere, couldn’t be. No clone would act like that. In fact, they’d watch, join, or simply carry about asking me what they’d sought me for.*

Not Ryker. He stumbled upon us by accident. *Stumbled* upon us, and was embarrassed, *embarrassed* by what he saw. It’s a beautiful thing. A trickle of shame courses through me. We are in no way together, we don’t live in a world where it’s remotely possible, but I never wanted him to see me with another clone like that. I know he already assumed Vallee and I are mated, but we aren’t and I want to make sure he knows.

“Fuck. I’m sorry, Ridomie. I didn’t mean to fucking intrude. I heard noises, and I thought someone was in trouble. I came to help. Jesus, Fuck!” He runs a hand through his strangely cut hair, making it run even wilder than before. There’s so much of it. His face is red as an onion; he turns to leave again. I have to jog a bit to keep up.

Now he, a Ryker, is apologizing to me and it’s not the first time. This can’t get any worse. Not particularly feeling like wanting to explain to him in this moment that he shouldn’t be apologizing to me, I go with: “It’s okay, Ryker. Just, slow down, would’ya?” Not that I can’t keep up to him, but it’s hard to have the conversation we need to have at the speed he’s walking.

He does still looking like he feels horrible for interrupting an intimate moment between lovers. Though I don’t how intimate one can get in a supply closet. His continued blushing is rather cute. I’m staring at him, again. I stare at him too often, mesmerized. He’s absolutely beautiful, and I can tell he has no idea just how beautiful.

He’s somehow more perfect than the other Rykers, but I realize I’m bias. He has their strong Ryker chin, and striking nose. His eyes are the same azure blue color of his father’s, but unlike Lord Ryker, whose eyes are always locked in a dangerous, astringent beam, he has a soft, kind quality to them — a quality that promises something real, and good. He has hair like them, shimmering, shiny blonde, but it’s cut funny – shoulder length, straight, all of it the same length, with no part of his head shaved. His build is every bit as lean, and muscular, and he’s tall, like the rest of them, larger than life like the rest of them; from the outside looks just like the rest of them.

But I know he’s not. I’ve seen him in action, I’ve felt him and I…

He’s beat up, he still looks like shit with all the markings his father left him and he’s still beautiful. In fact, he’s more beautiful with them. The only thing making me angry at the sight of those markings is the knowing that I haven’t given him the marks.

*Ryker would be beautiful covered in my markings. “Really, it’s nothing you need to apologize for.”*

There. Not exactly telling him not to apologize, but implied. More than implied. I’d said the word ‘apologize’ in my sentence. *That’s not the truth, Ridomie.*

“I should apologize to your boyfriend too.” He’s practically shaking. He's done too much, *running* in his condition wasn't bright. Instinctively, I reach and grab his hand. I shouldn’t, but well, I’m damned as far as he goes anyway. I have to talk with him about what happened on both counts. And he cannot give an apology to Vallee. The poor guy would request to be executed.

“No. Not my boyfriend.” I smile at him. He frowns. It doesn’t soothe him like I think it should. I am aware I’m still holding his hand and that he hasn't pulled it away.

“But? I’m so fucking confused.”
“Dominance issues.”

My answer only confuses him more. I try again. “You know, when another man threatens your position?”

“Yeah, but Jesus Ridomie, I'd of just fucking knocked that guy into next Tuesday, not make him... Fuck! Is that what happens around here? Jesus.” Ryker is now having a full-blown conniption, and I realize just how bad I look to him.

I can’t do anything right when it comes to Ryker. I’m speechless now, staring at him, knowing I’ve made a complete mess, and all I can think is ‘what’s a Tuesday?’ as I hold his hand, and remain dumbfounded. His look softens, feeling like he’s hurt my feelings of all things, picking up my hand, the one I used to hold his, and rubbing it before he puts it by my side, pulling his hand away leaving it empty. I know that’s supposed to tell me whatever just happened is okay. He knows we’re different from him. Knows there are going to be things he encounters here that are normal, everyday to us, but new for him.

I just wish I hadn't of been the one to introduce him to that little tidbit.

“What’s the deal with the brooms and mops? Don’t you have like, fucking robots and shit, to clean shit in the future?” I think it’s some sort of a joke, but I have no idea if I should laugh, or if I’m supposed to teach him about something. So I ask, “robot?”

Thankfully he’s laughing. “Never mind.” He shakes his head. “But I’m glad I found you.”

His cheeks go red again. “Well, I’m not glad about how I found you, but I wanted to talk to you; I mean I was looking for you and got fucking lost. I was a fucking dick earlier.” He runs his hand through his golden hair, frustrated. "Look Ridomie, I’m a natural born asshole and I say lots of shit I don’t mean. I’m really sorry about before. I take back everything I said — I was just pissed at you for not wanting to be my First Lieutenant, which is fucking stupid because I didn’t want to be a Captain in the first place. Then I thought it was because you were mad at me for eye-fucking your boyfriend, but now you’ve told me he’s not your boyfriend, so it’s probably only because you hate me, or whatever — that’s your business. I’m just hoping you’ll fucking forgive me.”

Whoa. Ryker’s said a mouthful there and half of it is garbled nonsense. I try to make sense of some of it. “Is that why you called me a possessive asshole, Ryker?”

“Yeah. But I mean, before, when you were pissed because I was talking to Vallee, I mean, you were right?”

Nothing makes sense to him; nothing makes sense to me either.

I shake my head. “You’re right on one count, Ryker, I am a possessive asshole — just not over Vallee.”

“Does that mean you’re not mad at me for calling you all those names? Am I forgiven?” he says giving me the eyes that will be the death of me.

“There’s nothing to forgive — you’re a terrible liar. I knew you didn’t mean any of it and that you were just being your stubborn Ryker self,” I say lightly and I actually smile. Something about being around Ryker is making me want to smile all the damn time.

“Look, I’m also sorry the Major’s making you be my First Lieutenant when you don’t want to be. I’ll try to make it easy for you.”
I give him a meaningful look, “right, Ryker. So far you’ve almost died, been beat half to death and have told me off more times than I can keep track of.”

He laughs and smiles his crazy beautiful smile, “yeah, okay. Well, I can’t make it too easy.”

“And I do want to be your first Lieutenant. Let’s add eavesdropping to your list of grievances. You’re half dead, you hear a snippet of conversation and you assume the worst.”

“Yeah, yeah, I know — eavesdroppers seldom hear things they want to.”

“That an Earth saying?”

“Guess, so.” He’s pouting. “But you really do want to be my First Lieutenant?”

“Yes.” I want to be much more than that. “I thought you wanted me to be your Captain?” I tease.

“I do, but you won’t seem to budge on that one, so I’ll take what I can get.”

“Why Ryker? Why do you want me to be your anything, anyway?”

“Awww, jeez Ridomie. You gonna make me say it? You are, aren’t you? Well, it’s because I like having you as a friend, okay? I’ve never had a friend like you before, I mean, I’ve had people that may consider me a friend, like I consider you, but you know, not the other way around too.”

I find that hard to believe. “Never?”

“Yeah, never.” He doesn’t want to say why, so I leave it be.

“We’ve been over this Ryker — it’s not that I don’t want to be your friend, it would be extremely inappropriate.”

“That’s inappropriate, but getting blown in a broom closet isn’t?”

I don’t follow his line of reasoning. I can tell he’s got a sarcastic undertone to his words, but what he’s said is exactly true. He must see it on my face.

“Oh God—it is that way, isn’t it? Man this place is different.” He shakes his head. “Forget it Ridomie. Can we just fuck appropriate and be friends? If you don’t say yes, I’ll get down on my knees and beg you — how fucking inappropriate would that be?” he smirks.

My eyes go wide. No. Ryker cannot get down on his knees in front of me and not just because of the reason he’s thinking, though there is that reason too: Ryker’s don’t kneel before clones. “Fine, Ryker. I’ll be your friend.”

“You make it sound like such a hardship.”

“It is a hardship — do we need to list the reasons why again?”

“No, no. I remember, but you’ll be happy to know I’m swearing off trouble. I’ll be a good little Ryker from now on.”

“I’ll believe that when I see it Ryker.”

“No, really. I mean it. And if I’m not you can do to me whatever it is they do to misbehaved clone around here.”
“They incinerate them.”

“Really? That’s it? No creativity. I’m disappointed.”

“Well, that’s what Lord Ryker does, anyway.”

“There’s got to be something else.”

There is, but there’s no way Ryker would let me do it to him. “I don’t think you’d want to be on the other end of my version of ‘clone’ discipline.”

“Maybe I do? C’mon, what is it?”

“I spank them.” It’s a technique they used in the Mother’s Nursery and since it worked well then, I kept it.

“Hmmmm…That sounds kinky.”

“I promise you, it’s in no way kinky. It hurts.”

He thinks on that. “As much as this hurt?” he says referring to his back.

I shake my head.

“Okay. You can do that to me if I fuck up. I’ll let you. I’m the kind that needs incentive.”

He did not just say that. “I’m not spanking you Ryker.”

“Oh you’ll want to.”

Want to? I already have wanted to, many times. “I thought you were swearing off trouble?”

“Everyone’s bound to have a relapse every now and again.”

“You’d better not, Ryker.”

“Yeah, or you’ll smack my ass,” he says wagging his eyebrows.

“I will not.”

“Will, too.”

“Ryker!”

“See? You want to right now.”

Aside from the fact that he’s right, I can’t do that to a Ryker. But how I would love to with this one. “You’re delusional. You’ve been whacked too many times by your father already, I think you should go lie down. You still don’t look so good. You’ve been running and you shouldn’t have done.”

“That an order, Captain?”

“Ryker…”

“Okay, I’m going, I’m going. But Rye?”
“Yeah, Ryker?”

“How the fuck do I get back to my room?”

“Don’t worry, I’ll be escorting you. You can’t be trusted to your own devices, obviously.”

The whole walk back, all I can think about is spanking Ryker’s ass and him saying I could—it doesn’t mean I can of course, but I can still fantasize about it.

When we’re back in his room, I make Ryker let me check his back. It doesn’t take too much urging; he seems to be happy about something. Ryker always seems happy about something, but right now he’s giddy. I’m suspicious.

His back is doing well. It still looks like he spent too much time out in the sun and is probably sore, but he’s not complaining about it, of course.

“Lie down. I’ll go get us some more food.”

“Yeah, yeah,” he says, planting face first into the pillow on his bed, exhausted. “Get me some more…Green eggs and ham.”
"Fucking look at you. I didn’t think it would ever happen to you of all clones. You're hoping new Ryker will take you."

If that's what he thinks, he doesn't know the half of it. "Watch your mouth Rex." I glare at him. He knows better. He was *raised*, like me.

"Sorry, sir," he says a little too sarcastically for my liking, fixing his floppy, brown hair. He continues to stare at me with a goofy grin on his face, not about to let the topic go, and trying to figure out how to best phrase it, so I'll talk.

I remain quiet, stewing a little, trying my best not to think about Ryker, but he's all I can think about and it shows up on my face. I’m scooping food on a plate quickly, so I can get back to him.

I still hate him — some.

He stirs more violence in me than usual; I have no control over the way I feel. I hate that I like him. More than like him. He’s fast becoming my whole world.

I work continuously to squash the feelings I have with no success. Rex reminding me of my obsessive infatuation, doesn't helping to quell my now constant bad mood.

I can’t like him. He and I would never work. He’s a Ryker, and I’m a nobody.

Rex laughs and stuffs eggs into his mouth with his fingers as he puts more ham on his plate. I grab Ryker more apples. "Well you like him don't yah?" He tries to make it an innocent question, like he’s talking about just anyone of us only, it’s anything else other than 'innocent' and Ryker is more than just somebody.

Especially to me.

"Of course I like him, he's *good,*" I mumble it not able to lie, or misdirect him to save my soul — he knows me too well.

"No, no, no — nice try, Ridomie. You know what I mean." He arches his brow.

"Drop it."

"Not even a chance," he says. "I've been nominated by the group. You've been edgy since the new Ryker got here, Vallee especially is worried about you."

I don't like to hear that. It makes me feel like I'm failing them and I know, I've been especially unfair to Vallee.

"You need to talk to someone. C'mon, we were *raised* together, I'd really like to be there for you."

In a place like this, being who we are; owned creatures, the lowest of life forms, the simple act of 'being there,' is important to us. It makes us feel like we're something. Someone. That breaks me; I indulge him.

"I do find him, attractive, all right? But that's it, he's a Ryker and I'm just a clone. Besides, you of all people know how I feel about Rykers."
"You were awfully worried about him when he was injured, more than I've seen you worry about some of our own," he has a little singsong in his voice.

"Because he is a Ryker, and he was dying," I hiss at him. "Lord Ryker would have had us all incinerated if I'd have let his first born die."

He smiles at me raising his brow in a manner says, 'yeah, keep telling yourself that.'

"It doesn't matter anyway. It's not like we can mate. Rykers don't mate with clones," I say as quiet as I can. The mere idea is enough to get me thrown into the incinerator. But Rex is right, it does feel good to talk about it, makes it feel like maybe, well, maybe.

"This one is different. He isn't like the other Rykers Ridomie. The guys think he could change things around here."

I freeze and have to remember to breath again. That's not going to be good for Ryker if word gets back to his father that the clones think he could change things. Lord Ryker is not for change. He likes how things are now – his way. "You shouldn't talk like that," I say even though I agree.

"But it's true. He was willing to die for us, word has spread, many of the clones want him to lead us. We have worth to this Ryker, he's one of us. If this can happen, anything can. You two will make good mates. You are the only one strong enough to match him."

Ryker shows up and in just days, he's turned everything topsy-turvy. He's one of us. That has entirely different meaning than if Rex'd said anything else. It means they think Ryker would rather be a clone than be a Ryker.

"How many think this?" This is dangerous thinking.

"Our G-batch, the ones who were raised with us. The one's there today to see him in action. Word's spread though and some of the others —"

"You have to stop them, do you hear me?"

"But, we thought you'd agree. We thought you'd want to follow the new Ryker too."

I do, which is why I have to stop them. "This must stop. That's an order. Anyone I hear talking like that can report to me for discipline, am I understood?"

"Yes, sir." Rex is subdued, the excited hope washes out of him; it kills me. "I'll stop them, but if enough of them – "

"Are you insane? There will never be enough of them. The ones who were not raised still out number those of us who were."

"We are stronger."

"Not all who were raised like us will follow the new Ryker," I say quietly, looking around. Just the breath of rebellion is likely to get us incinerated. "Enough, Rex."

He sighs. "Fine. I'll be quiet. I'll stop the others talking, but you have to promise me something."

"I don't have to promise you anything and you still have to do what I tell you to, or has all this sideways thinking, twisted your brain?"

"Huh. Well maybe it has. I can't help it, the new Ryker's so exciting," he's smiling again. "Even
some of the Tops hope Ryker will take them, maybe even to his bed."

The thought of Ryker 'taking' others, drives me insane. My jaw tightens, and my eyes narrow. Ryker’s right, I’m a possessive asshole. My instincts have decided he’s mine even if I can’t have him. I want to tell them all to stay away from him, but I can’t do that either. One day, Ryker’s going to fuck one of them, some of them and with the way my blood's responding to Ryker, I'm liable to kill them.

Rex can tell. "Don’t worry Rido, he'll choose you anyway. You'll mate and you won't have to worry about the others."

"What do you want me to promise you?" I snarl. I need the distraction as my blood heats. Ryker's not going to choose me and even if that were a remote possibility, it's not what my blood wants. It wants to take Ryker. Mine.

He looks a bit scared to talk to me now. He should be. "Promise me you'll tell him how you feel. This Ryker is different…” he trails off looking past me, the color drains from his face. I turn to look in the same direction he is.

Ryker's heading straight for us.

But not my Ryker; Derek Ryker. All clones fear him and they should. He seldom has clones incinerated, but there are worse things than death and Derek is an expert at those things. Death is too easy, he told me once. He prefers to play and teach. After all, what use is a lesson if the person you took the time to teach was dead after? He ensures we know our place, that we're nothing and delights in watching us cower, and scrape at the floor to please him. That can only be achieved, he said, if you allow the creature to live. New creatures are unaware of the dangers, they couldn't possibly know who to listen, to beg, to grovel for. But tortured creatures can be broken. They live to fear and spread that fear to others.

His entourage, Roco and Stephan, stand quiet and wait for orders. He has an odd affection for them; they worship him. Not like comrades, or long time friends, but like pets to master, master to pets.

Derek looks down upon us smiling viciously at Rex. He pushes his long, blonde, Ryker hair back, letting it show off the cream of his scalp on the one side, the shorter, chin length pieces feather to the other side and looking regal. He preens like a peacock as we stand at ridged attention. His hair's not nearly as long as the Lord Ryker's, not even close, nor does it come anywhere near the length of the Major's, but his hair is longer than any clone's. As if Rykers need yet another thing to give them status.

Instead of greeting ones as lowly as us, he looks us up and down, decides things, like where to lay his whip first and who he’d most like to do that to, today. When he finally speaks, it’s not to us, but we both jump all the same."

"Him. I like him. I’ll have him tonight, and maybe him tomorrow,” he tells his cronies, pointing at Rex who does his best to remain stoic. I don't dare say a word, or it'll be both of us, now. On another day, it will be me anyway. We all 'get' a turn; I've had plenty and still have the scars to prove it – oh yes, he cuts deep, deep enough we can't heal fast enough to avoid scarring.

It’s an unwritten code amongst our lot not to protest when Derek takes one of us to his rooms. We've long since learned that he won't trade you for your comrade, he'll simply take both to play with; nobody wins that way. It’s a small joy when one of us can escape his torture.
When my turn comes, and it will, I’ll want one of my brothers to escape, as Rex will want me to escape now.

His two pets grab Rex and I watch, nothing I can do, as he’s frog marched out of the Mess Hall.

"Whoa, who the fuck is the douchebag with all those dicks up his ass?"

I’m too transfixed to notice him, even though I always notice him. It’s testament to how much I hate his brother. Derek’s everything wrong with the world. “What are you doing here Ryker?” I snap. Can’t he do as he’s told even once?

“He can’t sleep. Thought we could eat down here. I think I’m beginning to find my way around this place,” he says extremely proud of himself and I can’t help smiling.

He takes a plate from me that was meant for him anyway and we head to a table. It’s just past dawn and there aren’t too many people around. He slides a chair out, taking the seat beside me rather than across from me. Why did he do that?

Brigg — Ryker has the dirtiest mouth I’ve ever come across, and while I chastise everyone else for it, I can do nothing but blush at his. Besides, he’s a Ryker, and can do what he likes.

Why’s it, so hard for me to remember that when he’s around?

I laugh at his crudely phrased question and give him a quick once over, before I speak. He looks like he’s healed some more already, looks out of pain.

"That, was your brother."

"Fuck me." He runs a hand through his hair just as his brother had done but it’s different, like he doesn’t realize he’s doing it. "Is there anyone I’m related to here who isn’t a huge dick that thinks he owns the whole god damned world?"

He still doesn’t get it. "Rykers do own the whole world, and everybody in it."

That concept is confusing for him, but he shrugs off what I say, like he thinks I must have been using an expression. "Well I’m fucking famished."

I want to laugh; everything he says to me is musical and funny and cute, but instead I scowl because I hate that he can’t be mine.

“Always. I’m fucking grouchy the minute I’m without food too long. You need to keep me well-fed Ridomie.”

"Noted."

I study his beautiful eyes, watch as the azure blue color swirls around his dark pupils. I follow the contour of his jawbone down to his lips, red, and worried looking.

He clears his throat. “Ridomie, did I do something to piss you off?”

I must be glaring at him, because I am mad, but not at him, at the world for being so unfair. How does he read me so well? “No.”

“I dunno know, you seem, upset.” He smiles his crazy beautiful smile. “Wanna tell me ‘bout it?” Wanting me to confide in him like I did Rex. But I remember he’s not Rex. He’s not one of us, he’s more than us; more than any of us. Including any Ryker.

I hate that he’s, so pretty. I hate that I want him, I hate I can’t have him. I don’t want to talk about
what’s on my mind, most especially not with him. My whole existence, I’ve believed the world was wrong, hoped it was wrong. People hold steadfast to some crazy idea of what it means to be a person, not because they’re right, but because they’re scared.

I thought the world could change, if only they could see what I see. But it won’t and as soon as I came to realize that, it stopped mattering to me, so much and I could live like I was, like this, get by.

But that was before. Before now. Before him. Ryker.

Now it hurts, it aches. Looking at him makes me want the world to be different again. So much. Hurts. Suddenly I can’t be here with him. “Eat,” I bark at him and stand up. “I have to go.”

“Where are you going?”

I need to get out of here. It would have been better if’d just ignored him, left him, but I stand here too long, just staring at him. Staring. God he’s beautiful. I want him and I can’t have him. Want him.

He blushes feeling the intensity of my gaze and looks down. Now things are awkward. What if I just told him like Rex said to? Would there be any harm in that? Tell him. Just tell him.

“I have to go check in with the, Major,” I lie. Well, it’s a partial lie anyway. I’m going to try again, to get switched off of Ryker duty. My heart can’t take it. I know I said we’d be friends, and I’ll be his friend, but I’m not going to live in his pocket.

“Well, wait and I’ll come with you.”

When I don’t move, he tilts his head to the side and says, “please?” ever so sweetly. His eyes look sad, just for a second and I can’t stand it. I sit back down, but I won’t look at him. I pick at the items on my plate and pout. “Hurry up and eat, Ryker.” Now I’m more than pissed, because I know what Rex was talking about, the thing he was too afraid to say. Mates he’d said, because the real thing was too dangerous to say out loud. An idea, so crazy, Rex probably isn’t sure he believes it himself. I’ll do absolutely anything for him. For Ryker. Anything. It’s over.

I’m in love with a Ryker.
“Let me see your back, kid.” I can't believe I'm the one making sure this kid's getting sewn back together.

“My back is fine.”

He's gotta be the mouthiest kid in all the fucking galaxies. He's never going to learn is he? “That's the shit that got you beat in the first place.”

“Yeah, well you’d be grouchy too if you were me.”

“Quit feeling sorry for yourself.”

“I don’t feel fucking sorry for myself.”

“Yer lucky yer in the state yer in, or I’d knock you flat myself.” I say it, but I don't know how true that is anymore. Something happened. When I saw him getting beat on, by that clone, I fucking lost it. Was like I was possessed. I wanted to kill that clone and make him suffer before I did. Took everything to pull myself away, then I done near killed the kid myself. That. That did something else to me and I ran. If I killed him, I didn't want to see.

I was so fucking grateful, when I saw that he'd somehow managed to survive, then immediately back to being pissed off at him. How could he do something so stupid? I would have spanked him for that if Derco hadn't already beat his ass; maimed him is more accurate.

“Let me at your back, and I’ll be quick.” That's almost a question. I'm starting to get soft on this kid.

“Fine.”

He lifts his shirt over his head, much of the mangled mess has healed over, but it doesn't look pretty. Derco went too deep on some of the marks for them to ever heal right. He might have a few scars on his back. It takes skill to scar one of us. Derco takes pride in it. Looking at them is pissing me off, I want to kill my brother. I need a distraction. “What did you do to piss Ridomie, off?”

“Fucked if I know-oww!”

I put pressure, ever so slightly on one of his wounds. I've had enough of him disobeying me. “Watch yer mouth, kid.”

“Yes, sir.”

“Christ Almighty. You think this would sober you some — as wiley as yer mama you are. Put yer shirt back on, you look fine. Healin' good. You can go to classes today — might be a bit uncomfortable, but hopefully that’ll teach you to mind yer elders.” Whether he deserved it, or not isn't the issue around here; it's what he can expect for pissing Derco off. He needs to learn how to toe the line with him; like I do. "I want you and Ridomie at the fields straight after. I have a few jobs for you. You owe me hours, don't think I forgot."

“Classes? I’m going to be in school?”

“Everyone’s in school here — forever. There’s not much else to do when they’re not fighting and a
lot to learn. Ridomie will show you where to go.”

“Yes, sir. He wants to talk to you.”

I'll bet I can guess what and I'm not having that discussion with him again. “Tell Ridomie he’ll have to wait. I got somethin’ t’do.”

“Okay, but I don’t think he’ll be very happy about that.”

“I don’t give a flyin’ fuck what will make Lieutenant Ridomie unhappy, or happy.”

“Okay,” he says holding his hands up in surrender. “I’m just saying is all. Can I go now, sir?”

I let my eyes burn their way up and down his body a couple of times. I don't like the way the kid looks. Vulnerable. “Get outta here and stay the fuck out of trouble, y’hear?”

“Yeah, yeah! Jesus! You’d think I was fixing to burn the place down or something—”

“Out! Out!”

“Wait Ryker, I need to…”

“Don’t go in there. He says he’s got shit to do, so you gotta wait.”

“Fuck! Fuck! That’s typical! Typical of you Rykers.”

I freeze, because, in this whole time I hadn’t heard Ridomie swear like that, like totally going off kinda swearing. Sure, I haven’t been here all that long, but to me, two days is a long time to go without fucking swearing. I can’t even go one sentence without it, but that’s probably fucking obvious by now.

“Calm down. I can’t take anymore fucking yelling. Jesus Christ! You’ve been a grouchy fucking asshole for the past hour. What’s your problem, Ridomie?”

“I’ll tell you what my problem is — you’re my problem. I was living my life fine until you came along.”

“Me? What the fuck did I do? I’ve been good.”

“For a couple measly hours, Ryker — anytime now you’ll be off pulling the next pain in the ass stunt and I’ll have to stick my neck out for you.”

“Yeah, probably. So let’s go enjoy our trouble free time — there’s gotta be something to do around here besides get into fights with people. Apparently we have to be in classes today?” I won’t even deny it. I’m a magnet for trouble — it follows me around, literally.

He’s quiet for a minute then. “I want some Ryker free time before classes.”

That pisses me off more than the other stuff — the other stuff doesn’t sound nice, but it’s true. But him not wanting to be with me? That’s plain mean. I don’t see any reason he shouldn’t want to be with me. I'm awesome. “Fine. Have all the Ryker free time you want.”

“Wait. Where are you going to go?”
“None of your fucking business. You don’t want to hang out with me, that’s fine, but you’re not my keeper, I can go where I want.”

He’s grinding his teeth. He knows it’s true, but he doesn’t like it. “I need to know where you are.”

“Fuck, you.”

I swear I hear him growl, but I can’t be sure, I’m walking away. I don’t bother running. I’m not in a hurry.

“Damn it. Ryker! Wait!”

I don’t. He catches up with me and walks beside me; I don’t talk to him. I’ve already begged him to be my friend once; I won’t do it a second time. I set my eyes straight ahead and narrow my brow. “You’re like a fucking chick, Ridomie.”

We walk at a hurried pace in silence for a time, both of us seething, I’m leading the way, but I have no fucking idea where I’m going, once again. I decide to try to head outside. It must be mid-morning by now. I’m sure I’m supposed to be somewhere…

“A Chick?”

“Yeah, like a girl.”

“How am I acting like a girl?”

“They do have girls here, don’t they?”

“Yes. How am I acting like one?”

“Cause your emotions are all over the fucking place. One minute we’re cool and the next you hate me — make up your mind.”

“I don’t hate you… It’s just, I need to fuck something.”

“Oh? Is that all?” I completely understand, I need to fuck something too.

“Yeah. Us clones have hyper sex drives.”

I get what he’s saying; earlier with Vallee wasn’t enough, but he doesn’t seem to want to bring that up.

“Why didn’t you just say so in the first place? No wait. I get it — the whole I’m a Ryker thing. You’re probably not supposed to leave me for any reason, now I can see why I’m getting on your nerves. Well, I relieve you. Go forth and fuck, just hopefully you’ll come back and get me before classes ‘cause I really have no idea where to go for that.”

“You’ll go hang out in your room?”

“Yeah, sure.” Nope. Not a chance, but he can think that if he wants.

“Ryker, I can’t let you go off on your own like that.”

“My father didn’t seem to be worried about it.”

“But the Major did.”
“Fuck the Major.”

“You’ve only seen what your father does to you for talking like that — don’t find out what the Major will do — you won’t like it.”

“Look, I said I’d go hang in my room, all right? Happy? I probably could use yet more sleep. I’ve never had to sleep so much in my damn life.”

He stares at me a moment. “You’re lying. You’re not going to go back to your room. Don’t bother Ryker, you’re the worst liar ever. Come, follow me.”

Maybe to him I’m the worst liar ever. I’m actually a damn good liar – kept my secrets all these years, but to Ridomie, I’m an open book. Apparently. I follow him and end up where I hadn’t planned on going: My room. Third time’s a charm I guess. He opens the covers and tells me to get in bed when we get there. I do, but only because I am tried. I remove my black shirt and begin to undo my pants.

“What are you doing, Ryker?”

“I sleep in the buff. Remember?” I say suggestively. He blushes. Ha! I made Ridomie blush. I continue to undress until I’m naked. Serves him right for bringing me to my room like I’m a little kid. I can see him staring at my cock; I have a nice cock.

“Good, sleep for a bit. I’ll wake you when it’s time to go,” he says. "You still don't look so good, Ryker."

I ignore all his fussing. “So you sure you’re not going to go fuck something?” I kinda want to know now. I know he doesn’t have a boyfriend now, if he needs to fuck something, it should be me.

“I’m sure Ryker. I’ll be in the other room. I’ll catch a few z’s too, you've exhausted me and come get you in a couple hours.”

“Or…” I open up the covers to reveal my awesome, perfectly chiseled body. Who in their right mind could resist this?

His eyes go wide with horror. I’ve never in all my life got that reaction, from man or woman. “Are you…do you want me to…relieve you, sir?”

“What’s with all the sir stuff again? I thought we were past that? And way to make it sound all fucking clinical, that's so not sexy Rye. Yeah, I want you to 'relieve' me. We can relieve each other, you know, since you can’t leave me alone and go fuck someone else and you seem to want me to stay locked in my Ryker tower.”

He swallows hard. “Okay, if that’s what you want.”

“Well don’t sound too fucking excited about it.” I close the covers.

He didn’t sound too thrilled in the first place, but now he sounds disappointed I closed the shop down. “Sorry, Ryker, I, you just surprised me. Clones are used to that sort of behavior, I got the impression it was different on Earth.”

“I’m still a dude, aren’t I? Somehow, I don't see that changing much no matter how many years have past.”

“Right, a dude,” he smiles. Thank the fucking lord. It’s hard to get him to smile, but it sure is
rewarding when he does. Ridomie smiling is like fucking Christmas. It makes me smile too and I pull back the covers again moving over to make room for him to climb in. I’m fucking excited, Ridomie may be a sour son of a bitch, but he’s fucking gorgeous. I’m glad he’s not with Vallee — I want him. No matter which clones I’ve seen today, and I’ve seen a lot, my dick got the hardest for him. It's hard as ice right now.

He approaches me slowly, like he can hardly believe this is happening; he’s staring at my amazing cock. “Yeah, I know. It’s something, isn’t it?”

He scowls at me, but he kneels down in front of it instead of climbing on the bed. “It is the nicest cock I’ve ever seen, I’ll give you that Ryker.” He ghosts his hand over it and I get two kinds of tingles — the I’m-so-horny-my-cock-is-ticklish tingles and the warm and fuzzy tingles through my whole body at his compliment, because I just know Ridomie’s not the kind to say something to a Ryker just to placate me.

This may be my first clone rodeo, but I’ve already figured by the way I get treated from the other clones that the way Ridomie talks to me, he’s not supposed to, but he does anyway. I like it. Makes me feel like I can trust him. Sure the other guys were willing to kill me earlier, but I’ve come to know the difference between practice andlife at Ryker Corp. All the rest of the time, clones jump to get out of my way. It's all, ‘yes sir, Master Ryker, sir’ and ‘how can I help you, sir.’ But not Ridomie. He actually told me off — I don’t even think he realized it when he did that, I must bring it out in him. I can be infuriating.

But back to my awesome cock that's about to get sucked. Ridomie’s staring at it. Touching it. I’m in heaven. “Mmm… Come on up, Rye.”

Understanding dawns in his eyes; I’m fucking experienced at this sex stuff — yeah, I’ve done it a time or two meaning a whole fucking lot. His body seems to go ridged, though I don’t know why, it’s not like he’s not had sex a thousand times and besides, for the millionth time, we’re dudes with over active testosterone. Lots of sex comes with the territory.

He pulls his hand off my cock. "Would it be okay it we didn't?" He swallows nervously and I get it: he's not supposed to decline a Ryker sex, but I'm not a Ryker. Not really, not if being a Ryker means making people have sex with you. Rape. I don't rape people.

"Of course it's okay. I mean I won't pretend I'm not disappointed. But if you're not keen on me, I get it; fucking surprised — no one's turned me down for sex before — but I get it. Sort of. I’m sure someone around here will want to."

I expect his face to relax, but it doesn't, it gets more angry and pissed off looking. "May I go now, sir?"

And it's back to sir again too. I give up. I just don't fucking get this guy. He's sure lucky he's pretty. "Yeah, Rye. You are 'relieved,’” I say thinking about how I could have relieved him, he's totally missing out.

"I'm not going far, I'll just be in the anteroom."

A lot of good that's going to do me. Soon as he's out the door, my hand is on my magnificent cock and I imagine what I could have done to him if he hadn't been such a cock blocking asshole.

I would have stroked my cock while he took off his clothes, it's not fair, Ridomie's seen me in the buff, but I haven't seen him. I bet I know how he'll look, his muscles all large and ripply.
I already know how possessive he is, I bet that would show up during sex as smouldery, domination. He'd climb on top of me and bite my neck, make me his. I bet his teeth could actually cut clear through my skin – I'd like that.

"Mhmmm," I moan loud hoping he'll hear me. I bet he has a cock almost as nice as mine; thick, and wide with a kissable head. Fuck fantasy Ridomie's hot.

I pump my hand over my own large Ryker cock and pretend it's his. I picture him looking down at me with that sad brooding look of his, only now it's infused with his rough anger. "Jesus!" I say way too fucking loud, as I come in long white ropes all over the sheets.

Sleeping is easy after that.

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I touched Ryker's cock. He offered it to me and it pulled me to it, I swear it did, via its own magical powers. It's every bit as smooth as it looks, I didn't think they made skin that nice yet.

My own cock is trying to burst from its skin, I've never had a hard on like this before. I didn't think I would make it out of the room. I have to rip my fly open, fast; it hurts, and grab hold of my aching member. All I need is the visual of naked Ryker. As if that's not enough, add my hand touching the velvet skin of his cock and it doesn't take me long; I'm coming into my hand.

Panting and still breathing hard, I hear a delicious moan from the other side of the door. Ryker's masturbating too. Should I go help him? Creator knows I want to, but if I do there's no going back for me. If I fuck him, he's mine, I'll kill anyone who looks at him for too long. No, I won't go in, but I can tug another one out, easy.

I use the cum from my orgasm as lubricant and it feels better than it did the first time, especially with the sounds of Ryker's moans from beyond the door, like I need anymore stimulation. I want him so bad it hurts, every second of what's becoming everyday; this is making things worse.

I hear him cry, "Jesus!" and I picture what he'd look like coming with my cock up his ass, my marks all over his body.

I come a second time, harder than the first, but unlike Ryker, I keep quiet. I'm still just outside the door of his bedroom, in the anteroom. Of course Ryker has to take it to another level and start talking about fucking someone else, about his sexual escapades, like they're no big deal. But they are a big deal and he almost saw just how possessive I could be.

The thought makes me want to destroy every living thing that comes into contact with him.

Damn it! I'm screwed. I might as well have fucked him, it isn't going to be pretty when that happens. It can't happen. I grab my hair and almost pull it out, I punch the wall and spider the marble, I throw a chair across the room.

Everything's a mess. Everything's upside down. I hate Ryker because I love him. I want him to be mine, I want to make sure the world knows, so they don't get within three feet…

But what I want doesn't matter. I'm not supposed to have dreams or desires, not supposed to fall in love with people. I'm a clone. I'm nobody.

Nothing.
Bullies

Here I am with a fucking book bag even — filled with texts, and some sort of strange looking iPad. I was even assigned a 'locker' in the change room (for a place that wants nothing to do with Earth, they sure have a lot of 'Earth things'). Had no clue what the locker was for at first. It's not like my book bag is going to weigh me down. I can carry a lot in one bag. Ridomie told me it's for hanging up my school suit, so I don’t wrinkle it when I change into my battle gear, other wise known as black shirt, and green army fatigues.

Now I’m all dressed up in a suit. I look good in a suit, but I don’t like wearing them. Too confining and hot. Ridomie looks good too; that guy is pure sex on a stick, I wish I could convince him to have sex with my stick, but he’s still fucking cock blocking. Maybe I'll just have to try a little harder.

“Can you manage on your own for a minute? I’m going to run to the washroom,” Ridomie asks.

Speaking of cock-blocking, things have been a bit tense between us since the whole cock-blocking incident. It’s a bit weird and awkward, for him, though I’ve no idea why — I couldn't care less, it’s only sex.

“Yeah, Mama. I’ll be fine,” I say fucking sarcastically. He acts like I need constant vigilance.

“You need a leash, Ryker,” he mumbles as he walks away, his ass very pronounced in that tight suit, which I watch walk away for as long as I can.

That's what I'm doing when it happens, closing up my locker, minding my own business (distracted by Rye's ass); still hear him though. He slams my locker door shut for me and I turn to set a steel-burning glare on him. I recognize his eyes first; his condescending tone second, since it's just like our father’s.

“Hello, Brother,” he says.

“Fuck you.” I don’t like this guy. I may be an asshole sometimes, but this guy is a first class douche bag. I can tell.

He sneers and grinds his teeth together, probably not used to being talked to this way, but he’ll have to get used to it. He’s flanked by two clones. Bodyguards? Who the fuck knows? I do know he thinks he's fucking important.

“Derek, Ryker.” He holds out his hand, as he smooths back his shoulder, length, wavy blonde Ryker hair with the other, the cream of his scalp mocking me and smiles at me like a ken doll come to life.

Are you kidding me with this shit? Related to yet another douchebag. I shake my head. What was Mama thinking?

Attempting to be polite (not keen to attract the ire of my father at this precise moment in time) I tell him, “Briggland, Ryker, but I think you already knew that.” I don’t extend my hand in kind and turn to start walking away.

Nope. Not going to get away, that quick. He pushes me up against my locker, my abused back hits metal. I'm mostly healed by this point, but it still feels fucking bruised.
“I don’t like you,” he says, curling his fingers into my shirt collar, using them to hold me in place. He’s strong, not stronger than me, but let’s all keep in mind I’m still a tad beat up from yesterday, which was a long fucking day. Cyntripien days are a lot longer than Earth days.

I forget about not pissing anyone off and laugh, daring him to just hit me. “You don’t like me? Breaks my heart, it does.”

“You do not realize where you are. If you did you wouldn’t speak to me in this manner.” Apparently he left the ‘King’ out of his title when he introduced himself.

“Oh, yeah? Why don’t you tell me then?”

“You’re on Ryker turf now.”

“Thanks Captain Obvious. And incase you missed role call, I am a Ryker.”

“You are not a Ryker.”

“Look, is this conversation going somewhere? ‘Cuz I really should get to class — don’t want our father to — ”

Derek swings me around like I’m a bag of feathers, and slams me into a wall I’m pretty sure is made of something indestructible, on the other side of the locker room. I try not to let it show how much pain I’m in, but fact is, it is fucking painful. I scream before I can stop myself. The pain stirs me. Stirs the power deep inside me, the power I’ve always kept buried. I want to unleash it, just like I used to in the bars on Earth. I want to pound him, just to pound him. Though of course I also want to pound him, because he’s currently pounding me too.

I let loose and lunge at him, he strikes back until we’re both pounding the shit out of each other. There are other clones around us, they watched on as Ryker brother to Ryker brother we bantered, but no one’s going to get in our way now; they’ve been trained too well. The two of us will have to fight to the death; I’m going to kill this guy.

“Ryker! Somebody, stop them!” That’s Ridomie’s voice. Oh good, he’s back from the can just in time to see me beating the shit out of my brother. But what the fuck is he doing?

No one else is stupid though, so he’s on his own if he wants to stop us. I think he’ll grab for me, but he doesn’t, he tears Derek away from me instead. His actions prompt me to stop and I turn to watch, as he lifts Derek up and away and shoves him towards his two bodyguards as he tells them, “here take this.” The look of rage on Ridomie’s face is unmistakable; he wants to kill Derek just as much as I do, maybe more. He turns, but he’s still close to Derek like he wants to make sure he stays away from me. “Are you okay, Ryker?”

Derek’s just as stunned as I am for a moment, but he regains his senses fast and shoves at Ridomie knocking him off balance, easily. He begins to smoothe out his school jacket like it’s infested with Ridomie fleas.

Ridomie’s eyes close then open, as dread washes over him. He fucked up. He fucked up big time and he knows it. He straightens up like he would for the Major, preparing to deal with the consequences.

“How dare you treat me like that.”

“I’m sorry, sir. I’ll report to the incinerator at once.”
What? Fuck no.

I don’t need to say a word though, Derek smiles a creepy, manic smile. “That would be easy, wouldn’t it? Just throw your worthless life into the flames?” His voice is calm as he clucks at Ridomie. “No. I think not. I want payment for that little act of defiance. You won’t do it again, I assure you that. We’ll make it better.”

“Yes, sir.” Ridomie’s not breathing right.

Fucking prick. “Lay off. He broke up our fight, since when is that a crime?”

He finishes readjusting his sleeves; I can’t help but notice that he is a stunning creature, I guess all us Ryker’s have looks, but this one’s ugly on the inside.

“For years I’ve had to listen to Briggland this and Briggland that from Father. The prodigal Ryker whose blood would produce an army of clones, so indestructible, they would surely protect the Ryker line for the next hundred thousand years. But you’re no prodigy and you’re no Ryker. A Ryker would know that it is a crime for a clone to touch a Ryker like that. I could incinerate him on those grounds alone and the way he talked to me? I could I incinerate him twice.”

“No one should be incinerating anyone. It’s just plain wrong.”

He wrinkles his nose. “What on Cyntripien are you talking about? Of course it’s not wrong. In any case, I’m not going to dispose of your little lapdog, who’s clearly grown too much fondness for his Master. I am going to punish him, however.”

Obviously he's not so good at reading people. Ridomie’s not fond of me at all; I’m just a thorn in his side. “Yeah, we’ll see about that — I’m not letting you touch him.” I pull Ridomie, who is still fucking stunned over his own actions, to me and behind me. I have to protect him now.

“You, dear brother, haven’t a thing you can do about it. Father allows me to do as I please and it would please me to have fun with this one. I have a particular affection for this clone — he’s feisty, he’s the only one who always fights back. They seldom fight back, did you know? No, of course you wouldn’t know, you’ll just have to take my word for it.” The mirth on his face would be catching, if it was about something normal and not fucked up like how he’s going to beat on Ridomie later and him talking about ‘them’ like they're dogs. Hell, you shouldn't even talk about dogs like that.

I glare at him because he’s probably right, I probably can’t do anything about it, doesn’t mean I won’t try.

“Very well then, Lieutenant Ridomie, I want you in my quarters for the evening. Find someone else to watch your ‘charge’ for the night. My brother is unfortunately still a Ryker in name, even if he isn’t in spirit. Uncle Lexington won’t stand for him to be left unattended.”

“Yes, sir. It will be as you say, sir.” Fucking Ridomie. And he tells me I’m trouble…this is a certified shit show. I don't know what Derek plans on doing to him, but I know by the look on Rye's face, it's not good. I know Ridomie well enough by now to know he doesn't scare easy, right now he's fucking terrified.

Since arguing won’t get us anywhere, I don’t jump him again, but I do make a silent promise that I’m going to break his face. He doesn’t have to signal to his henchmen, they follow him without a sound, proud to do so. I stare after them. “What a bunch of dicks.”

I expect Ridomie to agree, but he’s silent; he hasn’t moved much in the past five minutes come to
think of it. When I turn around, Ridomie’s on his knees. “I’m sorry, sir. Master Ryker is right, I
have become too familiar with you, let me make it up to you.” He grabs hold of the belt of my
pants and begins to unbuckle it.

Now I’m caught in the middle of a fucking dilemma. I would really like Ridomie to suck my cock
— I know what he intends on doing — but the reasons why he’s doing it makes so that my morals
say I should stop him, while I still would like him to suck my cock, morals or no. Fuck I hate
morals.

I run a hand through his spikey black hair’till I touch the shaved part of his scalp, like I’ve been
wanting to do a while now, Ridomie is a beautiful man. If I ever did decide to settle down, it
would be with a man like Ridomie. He’s smart, confident and I know he likes to be in charge even
if he doesn’t know it yet; clones probably don’t realize they can be in charge. But none of that
matters, because I can’t settle down, once I find my mama, I’m certain we’ll be running again.

My mind says I need to stop him, while my cock says, just fucking let him suck on me for a little
bit Ryker. He’s got my pants undone and my cock springs out of its confines quickly since there’s
no boxers keeping him at bay—what’s the deal with the no fucking underwear here?

He’s staring at it again like he was not so many hours ago, ’cept now I can see: he wants to do this,
he yearns to do this… So what was the deal with last night?

I run my fingers over his cheek and turn his face up to mine, it kills me to have to do this, fucking
 kills me, but I can’t let him think he owes me. If anything, it’s once again because of me he’s in
this mess at all — he can still suck me off, but only if it’s because of what’s in those grey eyes and
not because he’s making amends for being a ‘disobedient clone.’ “You want my cock, Rye?”
“Yes, sir. I do.” His eyes look away from mine.

He’s pissed off now (a good sign), but for once I don’t think it’s at me. He pushes me and my cock
away — very un-clone-like according to Derek — turns to the bench, puts his head into his arms
and starts to cry.

Yeah, cry.

Tears and everything.

Sighing, I do up my pants and kneel beside him. “It’s going to be all right, Rye. I’m not going to let
him do shit to you and you don’t owe me anything — we’re friends.” I card my hand through his
hair again, because I fucking like it and I think I should get something out of this deal. I stopped
him sucking my cock ’cause I know it wasn’t for real and just because he thought he owed me
’cause I’m a Ryker, I should get to touch him. I should get a fucking medal for my willpower
alone.

I start laughing. “Man, he doesn’t know anything, anyway. He thinks you’re fond of me. I can’t
even get you to want to suck my cock…”

That makes him whip his head up, grab the inside of my jacket and pull my face close to his — I
can see every bead of sweat on his forehead, every blood vessel in his grey eyes. There are others
in the locker room still, getting ready for wherever they need to be, but I don’t really notice them,
it’s like there’s no one here but him and me. “I am fond of you Ryker. Extremely fond.” The words
are hard and threatening.

“O-okay, Ridomie. I believe you.” We both stand up together, his eyes burning into me; mine
subdued and tamed. “Should we…you know…go to class?”
He nods, still staring at me like he’s waiting for me to do something — fucked if I know what, so I reach to the other side of the bench and grab my bag of books where I left them.

I sling my book bag over my shoulder, wincing a little bit when it makes contact with my abused back — it’s tender enough to remind me to at least try to stay the fuck low today.

Ridomie snatches my book bag from me.

“What’s the deal?”

“It was hurting you.” His voice is tight, like he’s holding something back – everything back – and it’s killing him.

Maybe he still feels the need to make up for his actions, despite me telling him he doesn’t need to. I’m not this universe’s run of the mill, self-righteous Ryker, guess it will be some time before everyone realizes that.

“Sure, Ridomie.”

“I wasn’t asking your permission, Ryker.” His voice rings with authority, very different from the repentant clone attitude. This guy confuses the fuck outta me.

I shrug and rub the crook of my neck trying to decide if it's worth it to pursue him. I don’t get the chance, he walks off and I chose to follow him.
"So, how does this work exactly?"

His fluid voice brings me out of the torment I’d been drowning in since this morning. I can’t think straight, or breathe right. I have to report to Derek Ryker tonight, and he won’t just want to play, which would have been enough. He’s angry. I treated him like he was nothing more than a low-life clone. Just like me.

I don't even know why I did it. It's not like Ryker can't handle this brother, he's strong enough even in his weakened state, but I saw Derek's hands on him and lost it. I'm losing it. “How does what work, Ryker?”

"This. School," he says. "Is there going to be a teacher?"

"That's Randayo. He's the instructor for this class. In here, he's in charge, but that wouldn't be the same on the field. He'll be here, soon."

"Yeah. You guys have a lot of fucked up rules like that. What does he teach us?"

"Anything from Ryker law, to Ryker history, it depends on what our purpose is as a clone. Some clones get cleared to learn the sciences, but those ones usually aren't cleared for battle anyway and can only work in the lab. Rarely does a clone meant for war, clear to learn the sciences."

"So like the skinny dude that took my blood earlier? No offence, but he didn't look like he grew right."

"Guess that's one way of looking at it," my face twists in displeasure. I've never been fond of those clones. "When they were born their genes missed the epigenes that make them grow big. They're really smart, but not good for fighting. We don't associate with those clones."

"Why not?"

I shrug. "Don't know, just don't."

"Don’t tell me there's cliques within clones. Jesus Christ Ridome, you guys should really stick together."

Ryker's right. And it's not that some of us don't want that, it's just the way, with no way to change it.

Randayo isn't from my G-batch and he's not one of the clones who were raised like me, so he's different. I can still top him, I'm stronger, even though he's older, but I try to steer clear of ones like Randayo, since it sometimes causes unnecessary trouble, ending in a clone or two's incineration.
The *unraised* think differently than the *raised* and while he might obey me on the field, he wouldn’t hesitate to put me in my place when I’m in his domain – there are constant battles like that between clones. I’m not often put in charge of ones like Randayo and that’s good. I don’t like it. *My* men are different and I hate to say it, but more Rykerian even though none of us truly are since we’re not people. The *unraised* are colder.

They are still clones though, same as us. No Ryker would make the distinction between the two, other than *unraised* is just a different make and model than *raised*.

I realize now though, that’s not true either. One Ryker would. *So that’s what hope feels like.* That doesn’t make me smile like it should. Hope like Ryker is easily crushed in this place. What will Ryker look like when the innocent vibrancy dances right out of his eyes? I never want to see that happen to Ryker. I *hope* I’m long incinerated before that.

“What the fuck is wrong with you?”

“Nothing,” I snap. “Sorry.” I wince — I can’t keep treating him like he’s one of my men.

“I think something *is* wrong with you. You’ve been acting funny since dickface. What did Derek mean when he said you would be spending the night in his rooms?”

Half of me hoped he’d ask that; it would show his character, yet again and prove that it’s real and not something my imagination conjured. But him asking means I have to tell him, else he’ll go to Derek demanding to know; I can’t let him do that. If he threatens his brother, it might make Derek mad enough to go to Lord Ryker over this, and I’ll be incinerated for sure.

If I do tell him, I might get the same result. Either way I lose. *Damn it, Ridomie.*

I know better than to handle a Ryker like that, but when I saw him with his hands on Brigg-Ryker, I couldn’t think of much else other than to get Derek's hands off. I didn’t want him touching Ryker.

I don’t want anyone touching, Ryker.

We’re already sitting at the same table, but Ryker decides to slide his chair to mine, so close our knees touch. I should move away, but I can’t. Screw it. I just let it happen and the relief I feel touching him is overwhelming. *Is this how it feels to be with your mate?*

"I want an answer. Now Rye,” he says as he leans his head back into interlaced hands. I can imagine what he might have looked like, sitting there in his leather jacket, white t-shirt and funny, holey pants. He’s used to a relaxed demeanor, not the ridged, clinical posture of Ryker Corp. He looks sexy in his school jacket, of course, Ryker could make anything look good, but it doesn’t suit him as much as the clothes he’d been wearing the first time I saw him did.

I sigh running a hand through my hair, frustrated. “He’s going to punish me, all right? But it’s not like I don’t deserve it.” I wince a bit, because here it comes, here it comes. Ryker's going to lose it, go ballistic.

“In his room?” He's calm, cool and collected. I'm, disappointed. Can't help it. *You're so stupid Ridomie. Stupid, stupid.* My brain's gone just as sideways as Rex's. I was actually starting to think Ryker cared about what happened to us. *To me.*

I try to hold back my disappointment as I answer. “He has always punished us in his quarters.” I swallow hard. My lips are going dry. Is it hotter in here? Thinking about it is terrifying, even to me.

“How does he punish you?”
For me, talking about it, just thinking about it, furthers my rising dread. “I don’t want to talk about it, if that’s all right with you.” Derek’s punishments involve sexual tortures that with the right lover can be amazing, but with Derek, they’re cruel and terrifying.

But as a bizarre twist, he never forces us into sex. We are always given choices – if they can be called choices – you always leave disgusted in yourself over the things you begged him to do to you and that's what stays with you, haunts you.

I guess the look in my face and the way I'm acting is enough for him. Now Ryker reacts. His eyes swirl with anger, his fist drops to pound the table, all his swagger gone, and replaced by rage. “He isn’t going to fucking touch, you.”

“Leave it alone.”

“Nope. Fuck you Ridomie.”

“What I did today, it was, so far beyond inappropriate, I’m grateful to be punished.” It’s the truth. When the alternative is death, punishment seems like a pretty good meal, because as much as I don’t like the rules here, I still chose life.

“Grateful to be punished? That's insane. Fuck, all your brains are washed good, aren't they?”

In some ways this is kind of fun. He really doesn’t know anything about, ‘here.’ I enjoy teaching him; I just wish it were other subject matters than violence, blood and death.

“Lord Ryker wouldn’t bother with a disobedient clone, not when he can make a new one. Lord Ryker would have had me executed on the spot. Derek doesn’t believe in killing clones; he would rather teach them lessons.”

A shiver runs down his spine. He’s quiet, for a moment, thinking things through before he answers. “So if I stir things up with Derek, he goes to Lord Dickhead, and you die. I say nothing, and you get punished, but you live. Is that about right?” He looks ready to crush something and I feel warm and tingly inside. I love that he wants to defend my honor. I love him. And I can't help, but feel it should be me defending him, protecting him, but Ryker, he's bringing something new to the table, to all the tables. He's strong and smart and everything, why couldn't he protect me too? Why couldn't we protect each other?

“That's right,” I say. I can't help being happy, to finally get this reaction. Once again, I can see how much different he is from the others and that difference is even more beautiful than he is.

He goes still like a statue, for a long while. We're still waiting for Randayo to show up, who's taking a lot longer than usual. The class is getting a bit restless, I may have to assign someone if Randayo is any longer.

Ryker's thinking so loudly, I can hear him running the scenarios through his mind, only to come up with the inevitable conclusion: He can do nothing about my predicament. He looks at me with cold, decided eyes. “I'm going to break his face.”

After his revelation, Rex comes stumbling in the door. His left foot doesn't seem to be working right, Ryker's chair slides out noisily and he's first to assist him. “Rex?” Ryker says, but he looks back to me with the real questions in his eyes. He knows Derek did this. Is this what's going to happen to you Ridomie?

I run up and grab the other side of Rex. I'm used to seeing clones like this after Derek, though it's not something you ever really get used to. Rex is beat almost to death. Don't even know how he
made it here other than the will not to be incinerated. He's also somehow managed to dress in his school clothes, but I'll bet he wants nothing more than to get the damn clothes off of him and take a hot shower, that will never be hot enough to scald the dirty feeling away, the one you get after being used by Derek.

"Ri…Rido, have a m-message," he whispers, his voice too hoarse (from the screaming you do when you're with Derek). "Randan…Randayo's not coming," he slurs.

"He's not?"

"No. D-dead. After M-maaaster Derek Ryker was finished with me, he s-sent me on an errand for him, one he was supposed to do for the Lord Ryker, but he got me to do it. I had to…I had to…" he's crying and can't get it out. I know what he was going to say though. He probably had to be the one to push him. It's always like that. Clones talk of the day of their incineration and how their final duty to Ryker Corp., will be a proud march into the flames, but it's never like that. They're always pushed, begging for their lives. It's always horrible, every time.

Derek likes making us do that, as a way to teach us. That's when he does enjoy killing clones, when he thinks it will teach others of us.

Ryker is beyond himself. This is more than he's ever seen, I know it. But he's not 'brat' Ryker now, he's the Ryker I saw when we were in the fields together, the one who's ages and ages old, the leader, the one we all follow.

Except, he still talks like bratty Ryker.

"Fuck that fucking dillhole, Rex. I'm sorry, so sorry my family's full of a bunch of Ahh! Jesus Christ. What happens now Ridomie? If that other dude's fucking dead does that mean this 'class' is cancelled?"

"No, someone will come. We should wait Ryker, or there'll just be more, trouble."

He doesn't even issue a response to that, chucking his head to the side, communication that we get Rex off his feet. The other clones stand around awed. The clones are mostly, raised, they usually like to keep us together, but I note a few unraised in the audience. Watching. We sit Rex down and Ryker checks him over. "Can we, uh, shoot him up with that shit you did me?" Ryker is finally learning something about here, for every action, there is a firm and brutal consequence. He doesn't want his actions to result in a clone death so he's caring enough to ask me. I smile.

"Rykortisol? No. Not for this, he'll have to heal on his own. We can only use Rykortisol in battle."

"But look at that foot. What if it heals like that?"

I don't even want to say it, but he gets it. "Then he'll be put down like a fucking lame horse. Jesus. Okay, that's not happening." Ryker takes off his jacket and then much to my dismay, he removes the white shirt underneath. I look to all the other clones with a look that tells them all to fucking look away. Even the unraised obey me.

Ryker starts ripping his shirt into shreds. "One of my foster dads was a doctor, I learned a few things. I mean, I have no fucking idea how to set this foot if it's broken, hopefully it's just torn fucking tendons and shit, which is still shitty, but at least I can rig you up a foot brace."

Ryker presses around Rex's foot with Rex biting his lip trying not to scream. "Doctor? Is that like a medic?" Rex asks, slow and labored.
"Probably. Can he go see one of those, Rye?"

I can almost feel what the other clones are thinking right now, both because a Ryker keeps asking me for things and because of his casual address for me. "We have to ask permission. We can ask the Major when we train with him. It's risky though, Ryker." I don't feel comfortable explaining it to him in front of all these clones, because of the way I'll come across: Like I think it's wrong, because I do think the reason we hesitate in seeing a medic is wrong. Sometimes going to a medic is death for a clone. Medics make a prediction on whether or not the injury will heal or not, they only intervene if they think there's a chance. If they think there's no chance, that clone is immediately incinerated. Sometimes they're right and sometimes they're wrong, most clones don't want to take that chance. They usually wait and see. But it's six of one, half a dozen of the other, because what if the medic could have helped heal something (like simply setting a broken bone so it will heal straight) and the clone decided not to go on the basis they he 

"Fine. I'm going to make you something that should help you walk, unless it's broken. It will still hurt, but it will get you by until it heals. It shouldn't take long for it to heal with our super sonic healing powers," Ryker says.

I smile (again) admiring Ryker. He doesn't fucking know what will happen to Rex, he's just doing what this Ryker does: Giving him hope.

Ryker takes a long piece of what was his shirt and wraps the middle of the long strip around the ball of Rex's foot. He takes the two long pieces on either side and crosses them like an 'X' across the top, then winds them around his ankles twice, winding the rest of the material up Rex's calve. He finishes by tying a small knot. "There, try that."

Rex stands up and tries walking on it. Clearly it hurts, along with the rest of his body from whatever else Derek did to him, but his foot doesn't look twisted anymore. "Thank you, sir. This will help."

"Okay, but fucking stay off of it. Ridomie and I will help you."

"Yes, sir." Rex sits back down.

I grab up Ryker's school jacket. "Put this on, Ryker," I whisper as quietly as I can into his ear. I don't want the other clones to hear me.

He's confused, but he doesn't question me, probably (wrongly) assuming it must be yet another thing he doesn't know about our world, when really, it's just because I want as much of his skin covered as is possible. He's putting his jacket on, just as another clone walks in. I know this one. Unraised, older, quiet, keeps to himself as much as they'll allow: Andera. Not many clones manage to live as long as Andera, so there's a certain amount of respect ones like him garner on that quality alone. Sure I out muscle him, even at my younger age, sure I technically could try to Top him, but I would never. The respect I have for ones like Andera, trumps all of that. Of course there are others that don't care about things like that.

Andera's got the coldness of the unraised, but in his case, it doesn't make him 'bad,' it just feels different from what I'm used to. There's a certain amount of pride us raised by the Mothers feel. We sometimes come across as arrogant, but it's just that we feel bad they weren't raised like us. I cherish the time I spent with my mother.
"Take your seats everyone. Master Ryker, I was told you would be in my class and while it doesn't bother me in the least, I must report to the Major about your state of dress…or lack there of. I'm sorry."

"Don't be. I get it; you just work here. I can handle him. Teach away, teach."

Damn Ryker. It's only our first class and he's already in trouble. I should spank him, for his own good.
I'm in the twilight fucking zone.

When I asked Ridomie when classes end he said: "When they end."

When I asked him when lunch was, he asked me what a 'lunch' was and when I explained it's a midday meal, he asked me why I didn't just ask about midday meal. That's what they call it here.

Point is the trend fucking continued and it made me think back over the other times we've had to be somewhere. Everyone seems to know when they're supposed to be. Of course there's still such a thing as 'late,' which Ridomie and I were for the Major and which we apparently owe him 'hours' for, in the amount of five days, which really fucking scares me because these Cyntripien days are a fuck load longer than 'Earth' days. Not sure how much, just know they are.

They still seem to measure time, in hours, days, months, years, but there are no clocks anywhere. Clearly my 'watch' isn't a fucking watch. No. Time seems to be part of them, like breath, like blood. Humans can sense, can see a fucking flower, Clones can sense time.

*If they can do it, how come I can't do it?

Until I answer that question, my fucking watch is Ridomie.

He's a lot more than that, he's also my freaking Wikipedia (since there's no such thing as the internet here either). And I've already devised I'm going to learn very little in 'school.' It's a complete joke. Each 'teacher' teaches what they feel like, within a subject of their choosing, there doesn't seem to be a curriculum. I've been grouped in with the clones deemed for war, like Ridomie. I'm sure there's a reason for that, couldn't tell you what it is.

We have a few 'teachers' and somehow, they all did end up teaching us different topics, but sometimes the same subjects and all of them deemed it important we start back at the beginning on account of me. Man, I'd fucking hate the kid we had to learn everything all over again for. Guess
there's one plus to them all being programmed to worship the ground I walk on.

When we're not in classes, we're in practice, which is all the rest of the fucking time, until 'evening meal' (that's dinner). And none of it ever ends. There's no 'getting out for summer,' or 'Spring break,' it's just all the fucking time.

Doesn't matter anyway. It's all a bunch of bullshit and clearly just to keep the clones busy and I've already come to the important conclusion: If I really want to learn shit about this place, I need to learn what they're not teaching.

We have another round of practice with the Major after we eat and it can’t come soon enough.

I need to fucking punch someone.

We keep Rex with us, letting him use us as crutches, so he doesn't use his foot too much. He says it's already feeling better, which gives me more hope it will actually get better, but I'm still ordering him to stay off of it. We arrive at the same field we were in on the first day, I stand alert, looking for him. My fucking brother.

I don't know if he'll be here. He wasn't here the first day, when we ‘played’ that fun little war game with the Major, but by the nervous way Ridomie is acting, I have a good feeling he'll be here today. I may not be able to say anything to Derek about this, or change his mind about punishing Ridomie, but I can break something of his, something he really likes.

Like his face.

I scan the field, but no sign, or trace of him. Ridomie is at my side. He's not himself, not really. He’s trying not to shake like a leaf on a tree on a windy day. Guys like Ridomie don’t get scared like that. The guys like Ridomie I know, laugh in the faces of guys like Derek.

‘Cept for here in this fucked up place.

I don’t spot anything, or anyone of importance, but the Major spots me, and thinks me to be of enough importance that he calls me over. "Briggland. Get yer ass over her, now."

Fuck.

I’m most likely in for another lecture of some kind. I don’t know what I could have done between now and the last time I saw him that might have pissed him off. Everything pisses that guy off and it seems like his favorite thing to do is tell me about it.

I'm wise enough about how it works now, that I make my way over to him, leaving Ridomie to take care of Rex. “Hello, sir,” I smile, like I couldn’t be happier to see him. He knows though, knows I’m being a sarcastic fuck. His green eyes pierce me in a way I do not like. Yep. I’ve done something.

“I heard you met your brother.” It’s a clean statement loaded with accusations.

“Yeah, but I don’t prefer to call him that.”

He arches a brow at me, and I can tell he’s deciding whether or not to bother whacking me upside the head for not responding to him with the correct appellation. It’s only a fraction of a second shining in his eyes, but I catch it, and correct myself quick. I don’t feel like being ‘disciplined’ in front of Ridomie again. This is humiliating enough. Ridomie can hear every word even from a distance, since the Major's not quiet.
“I mean yes, sir. I met Derek, sir,” I say that a little more begrudgingly than I ought to have, but he lets it go. I seem to amuse him somehow.

He shakes his head at me. “Stay away from him. Y’hear? I mean it Briggland. Don’t go courtin’ his kind of trouble. I promise you it will be the kind of trouble you can’t handle. Like with yer daddy. Understand?”

I set my jaw tight, to prevent myself from retorting with any of the many questions and responses running through my head. None of them what the Major would want to hear, which would be the standard ‘yes, sir.’ Nope. Can’t for the life of me say it. I remain quiet, my azure eyes dark.

“Briggland,” he snaps.

His irritation doesn’t get under my skin this time, cause I realize: The Major is concerned for me. He didn't seem to care that I almost fucking died, during his stupid game, but none of that matters now because, well, *he cares.*

No matter what he says, or how he tries to act like he doesn't, he cares. I don't know why he does, but it's kind of nice. I've been getting the impression I'm not much of a concern to anyone here, most notably my father. My father doesn’t care much about me, except for the fact that I am a Ryker and he needs my blood, to study and probably to enhance his clone army, or whatever (it's not like I can stop them). I get that. He's concerned about me as far as how I make him look and what I can bring the Ryker line. After that, he doesn't give two fucks. But the Major does and now I fucking feel like I owe him respect of some kind. I don't know why, it's not like I asked him to care about me.

My face must give away my thoughts cause he adds, “yer word, Briggland. I want yer word.”

I’m not fucking making promises like that—*ones that tarnish my fucking soul.*

“No.”

The Major hits me hard upside the head and it feels like bells ringing all around me. Knowing better now, I refrain from nursing the side of my head like I want, 'cause he’ll just tell me to take my hand away anyhow. That guy sure knows how to pack a world of pain into one innocent little smack.

I'm stubborn enough, to hold my ground. “No, sir.”

He looks like he’s about to kill me, and I feel some of the fear I should feel; I wish I hadn’t just lipped him off. *Again.*

"Briggland. I’m goin’ to say it once and I’d better not have to say it again. Yer not to go near him, y'hear?" He's using patience I suspect is unknown to the Major. Why hasn’t he spanked me again?

"You can't stop me. I don't care what you do to me." Yeah, I know, I'm the brazen sort.

Grabbing me by the collar of my black shirt, he drags me several miles down the field in a blink. Most likely to my death, I expect. "What in blazes has got intah yah?"

"He's going to hurt Ridomie tonight, and since I can't stop that I’m going to hurt him. He also fucked up Rex. Someone needs to end that guy."

“Briggland, yer not gonna be able to save every clone from Derek's wrath. Ridomie can handle much worse than a night with Derek. He'll be fine and so will Rex. 'Sides, it'll be worse if you don't
let it happen – it'll make the two of' em angry, they'll retaliate."

The Major’s brain has obviously been fried having been a 'Ryker' for too long. None of this is okay and no one does anything about it; no one cares to, is more like. I say nothing because there is nothing to say to. Instead, I let the disappointment show in my eyes. I have no fucking idea why, but I expect more from him. It's obviously more than he has to give. Dick. This whole place is full of dicks.

He sighs long and heavy, like maybe too many people expect from him what I do. "Too many people saw what happened. Derek won't blink an eye if he feels order has been restored, but if Ridomie isn't punished, Derek will involve your father and Derco will simply incinerate him. That what you want?"

"No, sir."

"Yer gunna have to trust me on this kid. Just let it happen. The best thing you can do is leave this alone. It's the way of things here."

I don’t care what their ‘way’ is. "But he didn't do anything! It's my fucking fault, he was defending me!" Stupid, stupid tears are there, I wipe furiously at them, not wanting the Major to see me fucking cry, but I'm so damn frustrated.

The Major goes quiet, but I can see he understands and that is something. I can see why the clones seem to revere him, as much as they fear him; I was wrong before; he does give a fuck, at least one. There's a spark of something in his heart for these boys, the man children, the expendables. His answer is still the same.

"Yer just gonna have to trust me," he says again, but softer. "Do not openly attack your brother, neither. That's a sure way to have Derco on your ass. Now do I have to make you sit out, or are you gonna behave yerself?"

"So he is going to be here –"

"Your. Word," he takes the time to articulate.

If there's nothing he can do, it's fucking hopeless. "No, sir. You don't have to bench me. I'll behave."

He crosses his giagantic arms (I secretly hope I get as big as him someday) and looks me over. "How's yer back?"

"Better, sir."

"It's a good thing you can heal fast, I have a feelin' it ain't gonna stay fine long."

"Speaking of, I don't think Rex can participate today. Is there something you can do for him, at least?" I'm fucking pissed that he can do fuck all for Ridomie, but I'll take what I can get.

"Don't ask fer much, do yah, kid? And I'll decide who can and can't participate."

"He can't use his foot, sir. It'll be destroyed if he uses it for practice, then he'll be fucking incinerated. This place is fucked up, you know that?"

He closes his eyes then opens them again. "I'll help Rex, but I want something in return."
"Behave, I know. I will, sir. Promise. I'll be so well behaved, you'll forget it's me."

Liking the response he gets he adds, "I'll sweeten the deal. Start doin' what I tell yah and the first time and not only will you avoid getting spanked, I'll forget about the hours, both you and Ridomie owe me."

Holy fuck. I think someone's abducted the Major and is impersonating him. Either way, I'll take it. "I'll be an angel, sir."

"Deal. Get someone to take Rex to see the medics, Major's orders."

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I think Ridomie's going to be happy when I tell him I was able to get the Major to let Rex to see medics, but he wasn't. He wasn't mad at me, not really, but he did look at me like I was a dumb fuck. I get it. I don't know much about their world, I obviously did something wrong, but a medic's like a doctor, that's gotta be good, right?

Last thing he said to me about it was, "we have to ask permission. We can ask the Major when we train with him. It's risky though, Ryker." I risked my ass convincing the Major to help, there was no risk to him at all, still isn't. I don't get what crawled up his ass. Everything I do, seems to be the wrong thing in Ridomie land.

Anyway, it's too late now. Rex was carted off by a couple of clones.

Derek's a no show when it's time to start today's lesson with the Major, or so I think, until he decides to stroll in while the Major is going over some drills with us. I wish I could say something stupid like 'you don't own the place' expect he kinda does. He smirks at me; knowing what I’m thinking, and saying without words, that it’s on his ‘to-do list’, to own the place I mean.

The Major’s on his ass right away and it’s a beautiful thing to witness. Must be my god damned birthday. "What makes you think you can stroll intah my class, half hour late?" he growls a growl I wouldn’t want growled at me.

Non-pulsed by our uncle, or being called out in a group of clones, he merely smiles as pleasantly as he can manage and speaks to the Major like the Major’s a young child.

Huh. Maybe I don't have to do anything to him. Talking to the Major like that is a sure way to get murdered.

"I had matters to attend to, Ryker matters. Besides, I run my own crew, it’s not like I need to be here," he tells the Major, as if it excuses him. I don't miss the underlying message, 'I'm better than they are. I don't follow their rules.'

"And as I've told ya time and time again if you need to be excused, you can run it by me, and I’ll tell ya if it’s a good enough reason to show up late. I let you out last time, I made it clear enough you were supposed to be here today. Furthermore, if I ask yeh to be here, it don’t matter if you're running ten crews, its important enough."

He smiles at the Major, but it’s easy to see from his eyes that he'd much rather have the Major eviscerated. "Is that clearer for you, First Officer Ryker?"

He clears his throat uncomfortably, unable to refuse the Major's glowing green eyes even if he could refuse the Majors words. "Yes, sir," he says, attempting not to show how much it bothers him, being chastised in front of the very people he feels so high above.
He doesn't seem it now.

The Major just took him down a few pegs. And he’s not done. Fuck. This is the best day of my life. I'll pledge my life to the Major for this alone. "This'll be the last time you show up to my class late, y'hear? You know how your father feels about education, and training alike."

Derek's face pales with nothing, but his shiny Ryker hair to brighten it. So he's scared of our father, too. Good to note. But it reddens when the Major finishes with, "do it again and I'll happily tan your bare hide right here with all these clones to watch. Am I understood?" Bet he doesn't think they're nothing now. The Major’s got his calculating look on and I swear to Jesus no one's breathed for an entire minute.

"Yes, sir."

"Good and one more thing, since we're already interrupted. Ridomie," he begins casually, but takes a step toward Ridomie, a dangerously, possessive step. It sets my fucking teeth on edge. I immediately don't like someone that close to Ridomie, looking at him like that. Something must betray me, 'cause the Major looks at me with a 'do, you want my help or not?' look on his face. Holy fuck. The Major's pulling through. I don't know what he's doing, but he's doing something. I reel in the strange possessive urges. What the fuck's wrong with me anyway? I don't own Ridomie. Isn't that the number one problem with this world? I don't need to fucking contribute to that, but fuck, fucking tell that to whatever it is making me want to vanguard him. Feelings I haven't felt at all yet, even when I saw him fuck that kid. Something's changed. I don't know when it happened, just that it has.

"Been meaning to make this official." The Major's abrupt yet slow cantor makes Ridomie’s eyes go wide. He hasn't caught on yet like I have. "I claim this clone. He's mine."

"You can't do that, he's mine tonight. This clone owes me. He needs to be punished," Derek says.

Without looking back at Derek, the Major slides one of his meaty hands into Ridomie's hair, his thumb stopping just above his ear grabbing a little harder than is necessary. I know what that fucking feels like. The Major also sets a burning glare on Derek. "I can, you I can. I outrank you a thousand fold. He's mine, now; it's done. If he owes you punishment, I will administer what you deem fair."

As the Major predicted, Derek's pissed. Ridomie's confused, but his brain is catching up.

“But Uncle –”

The Major gives his a look that melts skin. He quickly changes his address, and his manner of speaking. “Major, sir. This clone needs to be punished, severely. He is belligerent, and forgets his place. My father will be disappointed if he hears just how out of hand this one is.”

Yeah, we all know who your Father is, dickface.

“That, so boy?” The Major’s eyes take on a lascivious quality, as he turns back to Ridomie’s face. For a moment, I believe he wants to lick cream off Ridomie’s naked body; my body tenses. I don’t like him looking at Ridomie like that. Ridomie shivers, fearfully. He bites his fucking lip, and I want to punch the Major in the face even though I know he's just fucking helping.

"I think I can do a fine job of punishing him – you saying I can't soldier?"

"N-no, sir." Even Derek's affected by the Major's little show. There's only so far Derek will go to defy the Major and that's something.
The Major turns, still with his hand in Ridomie's hair, making Ridomie have to follow wherever the Major turns, or lose some of his black hair, and maybe the skin of his skull with it. Ridomie winces, gritting his teeth against the pain. “This clone is mine,” he states for a second time. “And I claim him as such. Any matters concerning his behavior are to be brought to me. Is that understood?” He slams Ridomie to his knees like a rag doll and Ridomie drops knowing that’s where he's meant to be. His knees part slightly, arms limp at his sides, and eyes looking down at the Major’s feet. It looks all wrong. The Major's still got him by the scalp.

“Yes, sir. But I can't believe it. You're taking a clone?” Derek looks utterly shocked. “I was sure you’d never take anyone, not since –”

“Shut that trap of yers now, or your daddy will have to do with one miracle son, an’ I don’t care what he does to me for it. You ever speak her name, I’ll kill you.” The chill coming off the Major’s threats, so cold, Ridomie shivers again, and Derek who apparently does value his life, backpedals.

“Of course. My apologies, sir. I only meant to wonder, why this, clone? Why is he so special?”

It doesn’t take a rocket scientist to figure out the Major didn’t want Derek talking about a lover a female lover. And from my estimation that lover's the one that broke the Major’s heart. Bad. I mean, I’ve never truly been in love with anything in a romantic way. Hell. I’ve only ever loved my mama period. I’ve heard people talk about love often enough, and I know what it does to people; how it has the power to both build, and destroy a person.

That’s how the Major looks now: Destroyed and damn angry about it.

Poor Ridomie's still kneeled on the floor through all of this staring at it, trying not to quiver. His black hair disheveled from where the Major's pulled on it, his hands putting on a front by holding perfectly still, even though I can tell he itches to pull the Major's hands from his hair.

It fucking appalls me that this is some sick, and twisted version of normal here on planet Cyntripien. That Rykers can claim clones as their own personal sex toys. ‘Cause that's exactly what the Major's doing, but right now, I'm fucking grateful for the rule if it means the Major can keep Rye away from Derek.

“Not that it’s any of your damned business, but this one’s useful to me. He’s the one I named.”

Named?

I don’t fucking know what that’s supposed to mean, but Derek does, and it’s all that matters now. He nods. “Yes. I remember something about that.”

"Besides that," the Major adds for good measure. "I'm sure you've experienced what he can do with his mouth. I want it just for me."

Really, really, want to punch the Major now, but I ball my fists and remember what Rex looked like. I want that to happen to Ridomie less. The Major knows what he's doing. Doesn't he?

He looks to Ridomie, sneering, never taking his eyes from him as he asks the Major. “Yes. I seem to remember this one’s talents. You're right, he's a good cock sucker. You will punish him then?”

So many people I want to punch. Poor Ridomie's blushing.

“I will. How would you like it done?”
"Are we really fucking doing this here? Hasn't Ridomie been through enough?"

"However you deem fit, sir, but I do want to see the final product, to make sure it's done."

"Okay. Ridomie, you'll report to my quarters tonight when it's time."

"Ye-yes, sir."

I expect Derek to kick him, or at least smack him in the face as our Father seems, so fond of doing to me, but he doesn’t. He looks at him, most likely wishing he could, but keeps his hands off him.

Once a clone is owned, he’s owned I guess.

“’You’re lucky, Clone. I had something extra special in mind for you… Guess I’ll have to use my talents elsewhere.’"

It’s the first time in the conversation Ridomie's broken form. The fire I’m used to seeing burns in his eyes. He’s not the piteous being he’d been a second ago. He doesn't want someone taking his place and he's pissed about it.

Fucking stupid, Ridomie.

*Emotions are weaknesses. People use your weaknesses against you.* Derek's the kind to do that.

“Don’t like that, do you?” he says to Ridomie. “There’s only one reason why someone doesn’t like something: Because they think it’s wrong. You think it’s wrong what I do to your kind, don’t you? You think you matter. Well, you don’t. You are nothing and will never be anything. You’re not even a person.”

Those words are enough to utterly crush Ridomie. It's like everything he doesn’t want to be true, just became true. He's always known it, but hopes that someone would finally fucking tell him that this world’s fucked up ideas were fucking garbage, 'cept they didn't. They confirmed his worst fear. All the hope falls out of him.

“Enough, Derek.” That's the Major. Then the Major does something next that makes me question his sanity. "Ryker, pair with your brother."

Ryker means me. *Partner with Dickweed?* Does he realize he's just handed him to me on a silver platter? Because he said no open attacks. With Derek and I *partnering* that leaves a whole world open.

Yes, of course he does. The Major has reasons behind everything he does. I can't help it; I fucking smile not even trying to hide my serious pleasure. Ridomie looks up at me with those eyes that say *'don't fucking do shit, Ryker.'* Except he wouldn't have sworn, Ridomie almost never swears, and when he does, you know shit just got real. In return I give him my ‘*I don't care what the fuck you say right now. This is happening,*’ eyes.

He won’t dare say a word against any Ryker in this moment, but I know he probably wants to stop me bodily. In the least, spank my ass.

The Major, still mightily pissed, and now pissed at Ridomie for real, grabs him by his wild hair using it like puppet controls to lift Ridomie from his knees. Ridomie’s face goes beet red – ’cause that shit hurts, and it’s embarrassing.

I want to grab Ridomie out of the Major’s clutches, but the only thing stopping me is because I
know that’s a really bad fucking idea right now. He drags Ridomie away, not even leaving us with an exercise, just leaving us with whatever animosity has been left from this morning, hell, since I met the kid.

I walk demurely up to Derek and greet him. "Hey fuckface."

His eyes lose the threatening glare he’d given Ridomie, and transform back to the evil glint I’ve already grown used to. "This is preposterous. Well, come along, then." He ignores my crude language, but I know he doesn't like it.

I follow him to a place seemingly out of sight from the others. It's a far distance away, and I quickly gather his intentions are exactly like mine. We both turn to look at each other; Ryker vs. Ryker. We both want to kick the living shit out of each other.

"I think there is something you do not understand, so I'll make it plain for you. You are the lowest Ryker on the totem pole here, and you need to start acting like it."

My eyebrows draw together, to say ‘yeah right,’ without the words, but I add just in case he doesn’t understand my facial expressions. “Unlike you, I bow to no one. I think you have the wrong, fucking, Ryker.”

That’s what does it. We'll all remember later than I didn't start this, I hope.

He lunges at me intent on separating my cocky head from my insolent body. Instead of stepping away from him, I step into him meeting him head on. We clash, grabbing each other at the shoulders. Because we both try to throw each other and can't, we end up in a weird tumble on the field rolling around, one on top of the other, with the person on top switching back and forth.

He’s shouting threats at me without obscenities, and I shout obscenities at him without threats. We get just as many hits in on each other, like before in the locker room, ’cept now, even with just a few more hours to heal, but back is better and I've got more energy. This fucker is strong, I have to admit, very begrudgingly. He can tire me out, and it appears that I am having the same effect on him.

Neither of us will admit this of course.

The Major calls an end to practice, we don’t give a shit. We continue fighting until we are pulled apart by Ridomie, and the Major, of course, the Major on Derek, Ridomie on me. I’m sure both of us look like shit, still staring each other down, trying to kill each other with eyes alone.

I shrug off Ridomie, and Derek does the same with the Major. He dusts himself off —though I don’t know why, no amount of dusting is going to remove the dirt from his blackened soul — and I formulate an idea. I’m not going to get to break his face, so I settle for something else.

Ridomie’s behind me, his eyes glued, watching my every move. The Major’s are too, but he doesn’t look as concerned, so much as disappointed. If I didn’t know better I would say the Major had hoped I’d get more hits in than I had.

Derek is still looking at me disgusted. Others have piled out heading to the Mess Hall, and far, far away from the mess they can feel brewing here. Derek, deciding he’s had enough of me for one day, turns to leave. Schooling my face as best I can, still breathing hard, I call out loudly, “wait, Derek.”

He turns back, vaguely intrigued.
“Where I come from it’s customary to shake hands after a match like that. It means I defer the match to you. You’re the winner.” Yeah, I’m fucking lying. Sometimes lying is necessary. Besides, he needs to know something about me: I’m dangerous too. Don’t fuck with me and don't fuck with people I care about, else I’ll do anything necessary to get the job done. Even lying.

I don’t really think he’ll fall for it, but he does. He holds his hand out for me to shake. I fucking smile. Ridomie figures me out just a second too late making an attempt to stop me. The Major figures me out too, but does nothing.

I grab Derek’s hand, and fucking crush it. Derek screams, “you broke my fucking hand!”

Releasing it proud, I stand triumphant looking at the limp appendage, until I’m pulled back by an enraged Ridomie. “That was stupid, Ryker! Stupid!”

The Major doesn’t look unhappy, but he puts on a face like he cares, and begins ordering Derek’s minions to take him down to the medics.

I don’t care. I don’t care that his fucking hand is now a bag of bones, but for some reason, Ridomie’s little, yet very severe sounding admonishment guts me. I look at him wide-eyed, completely forgetting I just crushed the hand of my supposed relation, too focused on the shear disappointment I see there.

“Ridomie, take him the fuck outta here, and remember to be at my quarters tonight.”

He gives a subservient, “yes, sir,” only turning his eyes away from me for a second before they lock back on me. Without another word he grabs my hand, and drags me with him.
My mind is reeling.

I don’t know what to say to him. There’s a ton of things running through my head. But at the top of the list is the thing that shouldn’t be running through my head… Yet it is and I can’t stop it.

*Declaration.*

What Briggland — damn it — Ryker did is as good as a declaration even if it is a declaration that only sits between him, and I. No scratch that. Even if it's one that sits entirely in my own mind. A Ryker just wouldn’t make a declaration like that to a clone. Would he? I know Brigg – ugh – Ryker, doesn't know our ways, I get that now, but this is something more than that, more than ways, social constructs. This is about blood.

And he did something for me. *Me.* Reduced Derek Ryker’s hand to nothing more than a bag of rocks…For me. Ryker is no ordinary Ryker. He’s not from here. Maybe he doesn't even realize what he did, even if his Ryker blood did it. The others could figure it out eventually though…when they hear rumors…and what a statement that is amongst clones… I mean, sure, he's saved other clones, he helped Rex, but he stuck his neck out for me specifically. And that's not the only thing.

His eyes. His eyes and the almost growl when the Major was touching me – possession. It was pure possession. The clones who find their mates say your mate's blood calls to you, sings for you. I could suddenly sense him, sense his hot Ryker blood and it was…well I don't know that there's a word other than euphoric. I felt drunk, like I’d just drunk a fresh batch of Turmulon. It's addicting like it, too. I wanted more. I want more. It makes you do things, like break your brother's hand.

Thankfully, to Derek, it will look as if Bri—Ryker was unleashing his all too irascible temper on him; Derek doesn't pay close attention to the ways of clones. Just enough to suit his purposes. Hell, I'm not even sure the others will recognize it in this case. The Rykers they've been *raised* knowing would never make a declaration to a clone, blood, or no. Claiming a clone is one thing, that's just another, still deeper way of telling a clone you're his property. What the Major did, the claiming, tells everyone that I'm his slave and just his. For sex. A Ryker can claim as many clones as he likes that he doesn't want to share with family members and that he doesn't want 'tainted' by other clones. It has nothing to do with the Ryker caring about that clone and everything to do with the possessive nature of Rykers.

Stephan and Roco are Derek's. We're not allowed to touch them.

But a declaration is so much more. It's what clones do when they want to mate.

The Major. Speaking of him, I've never known him to go out of his way for anyone like that. I know what he did. Took me a moment to figure it out, mostly because while I understood what was happening, I didn't believe it. Still don't. And I don't for a second believe he did it, *for me*, no. No. He did it for Briggland. Damn it. I mean Ryker. He did for Ryker.
And Ryker. I could tell he didn’t like the Major’s hands on me. Oh yeah, there was that too along with the way he looked at me, at the Major’s hands on me. Not like he was pissed at the Major’s rough handling of me, but like he wanted to be the one to do it.

Which is yet another problem: Ryker must be a Top. All this time, I’ve been talking myself into Ryker being a brat, because that’s how he acts, and that's what I want, but I’ve known the truth deep down. Rykers are never brats or bottoms; they’re always tops. They’re not genetically wired to be anything but.

Putting it all together, it sounds like this in my head: Ryker’s a top, and Ryker’s a Ryker, so even if I weren’t a clone, and in some alternate universe we could be together, we couldn’t be, because our sexual preferences absolutely do not align.

When did my life become, so complicated? Again: When Ryker walked into it. More like when I decided to fall in love with him — but those two events happened simultaneously anyway. Why oh why did I have to fall in love with a Ryker?

Ryker. He's my problem and my solution. The Declaration he made was unintentional, it had to be. The Major will tell me so himself during our fake meeting tonight.

Maybe…maybe he was just being a hero, like he did that day for the clones. Yeah. Something like that. To me, when I add up all the pieces, it's a declaration, to him, it's just another day being Ryker.

But the feelings that had raced through me in that moment…It was like I’d always dreamed it would be, like all others who had mated said it would be. The churning, the pumping of my blood, as my heart stopped and started again, the catch in my breath when I couldn’t stop looking at him…

No. None of it’s real. It’s all just cruel fantasy – what I want to believe.

Because I realize, I don’t care if I’m a top, and he’s a top, I want him anyway – anyway I can have him, as long as he’ll want me, however he’ll want me.

“What the fuck is wrong with you Rye? You look like you’re having a minor fucking conniption over there.” His voice is freaking out, like maybe he thinks I’m deciding what to do with him. I’ll never be able to forget that he’d given me permission to punish him like a clone, even if I’ll never do it. Like I could ever lay a hand to a Ryker, any Ryker. Even him. I know I’m giving him a lambasting sort of look, but I'm only realizing now just how seriously he takes my admonishments. I can't figure him out. He doesn't make any sense.

I want to tell him I love him, in return of his gesture, but since that’s out of the question, I say something stupid instead. “You don’t know what you’ve done. Your father’s going to kill you Ryker.” It’s true, and I’m crazy worried about him. I should be thinking of Rex right now. Even if he survives the medic, if he bumps into Derek, it'll be game over for him, especially with Derek as pissed as he looked, but I'm not worried about Rex right now, just Ryker. He's already suffered because of his father, but I suppose I better get used to this. Ryker is lippy, and cocky, and just plain belligerent – he’s going to receive many beatings before he begins to comply. We are seated now, and I’ve made sure we have food, but neither of us eating. When I see his eyes wince at my rebuke, I feel even worse about it. I really shouldn’t be speaking like that to him, and he really should punish me for it.

I can’t seem to stop myself. I give up on trying — if I’m incinerated, I’m incinerated.
He answers me as his sarcastic self, despite my chastising. “Don’t give a fuck, Ridomie. It’ll be worth it.”

Shaking my head. “No. You can’t do that. You can’t stick up for me Ryker.” I can’t take him getting beat like I know his father will beat him. Not for me.

“I can stick up for whoever the fuck I like.” He lays his keen azure eyes on me, and I want more than anything just to say thank you, but it will lead him to think I'm okay with it and I'm not because I know how much trouble he can get into — how much he will get into for brutalizing his brother like that.

“Not here you can’t.” I look as serious as ever, worried, and frantically looking around, like maybe someone will jump out and do something about his bravado right now. No one's looking at him. Meaning only clones are. All the nobodies, like me, but no one important, like Rykers. Though even the 'nobodies' can cause trouble if they think it will get them somewhere. I've known clones to do crazy things trying to achieve status, which they'll never have. Their foolhardy attempts always end in incineration for one of us. They never learn.

I look down at my food and want to change the subject, but I know we have to talk about this. I pick up my spoon to mechanically shovel food in my mouth trying to act like all is normal, like he didn’t just proclaim (even if it's just to me) that I am his. And if it’s true, well it’s only customary amongst clones to show something in return, a sign that says I want to be his back.

If I had it my way though, I’d want him to be mine. Of course I’d be his too, but being able to say ‘he’s mine’ is different. I want to mark him, publically. Physically. Preferably by putting something where everyone can see, so they know not to touch him. Fuck him where everyone will see me fuck him. They can all know that my cock belongs in his ass and not his in theirs. They touch him; they die.

But none of that can ever happen, so I’ll settle — settle for being his.

I decide on a fairly submissive gesture. Just because it's not me, doesn't mean I can't do it. I have to submit to Rykers all the time, I'm good at it even, at fitting in and making them think I'm what they want. Usually. Just not with this Ryker and not today in general really. Attempting to back peddle from my very non-submissive attitude, I let my thigh fall against his thigh, and bow my head, just slightly, only enough to be just in range of lower than his eyes, but I still look into his and any clone and even any Ryker should know what this means.

It's not what I want to do though. I want to lay my hand on his thigh, in a claiming way, and I have to fight my instincts to just leave my thigh, as the only thing touching him, an offering rather than a taking.

I hope he'll put his hand on my offered thigh. Then I'll know if he meant his actions as declaration, or if he was just sticking up for me, as a friend.

He does call me his friend often enough. It grates me every time. Friend. I don’t want to be his friend. Nothing like friends.

My instincts get harder to fight. I look at him and wait for him to say something back, to do something. I give him my fiercest look, not even sure what I'm trying to say to him.

Then, he bows his head.
He does it like it's the most natural thing in the world. *Instinct.* His eyes are at a level far lower than I'm able to take mine, they're practically looking at the floor. I over heard what he said to his brother, he bows to no one, but he's bowing to me right now. A clone. A nobody.

It's my complete undoing and I can't fight my instincts any longer.

He looks vulnerable, way over there…directly beside me, it's still not close enough. Without my hands on him and covered in his brother’s marks instead of mine, he feels far away. My blood heats to another level thinking about it. All of it culminates together, and it calls to me, reaching for that place inside of me that wants to take him, make him mine.

The bowed head, someone else marks on what my every instinct tells me is mine, so close, but out of reach...

Screw it. My hand reaches down, and clamps onto his thigh.
I'm Not a 'Relationships' Kind of Guy

Chapter Notes

Announcements:

So y'all don't think I've died, thought I'd better tell you, Mock is going away for 10 days! My hubby is taking me away for my birthday (he's so lovely) so I'll be basking in the Fijian sunshine, only apparently it's raining there right now, which means I'll likely write some while I'm there.

I had planned to get a chapter of GUW and of WW out before I leave, but my time has been short, so I can't promise, but I will do my best to get at least one out. Was easier to get some of this story up, so here you go!

So no posts after Friday, but I will resume soon as I get back Dec 3rd.

I feel a hand clamp down on my fucking thigh.

Suddenly, I become aware of the fact that our shared proximity over the short time I've been here has become, comfortable.

We’ve sat together at a few meals, and sometimes we've ended up, close. I never thought anything of it. I’ve noticed that amongst certain clones, the propensity for affection is high, despite the way they're treated by Rykers, though it's definitely not all of them; some clones seem, colder. Different.

Ridomie's hand on my thigh feels, good. Soothing. Ever since that fucking show the Major put on, I've felt fucking agitated and weird, but him touching me like he is, calms me down. It's reassuring, a comfort I didn’t know I needed until this moment. I like it there too much to tell him to remove it.

I look up at him, not sure if I should say something. It feels like something important has passed between us. He smiles with eyes that are shining, glazed over like he might cry.

Yeah, no way I'm moving his hand now. I haven't seen Ridomie happy like this yet and after the day we've had, we both could use a little fucking happiness. This whole place could. "So what the fuck was that with the Major Ridomie?"

"The Major claimed me."

That word fucking irks me. Claimed. I don't want Ridomie to be 'claimed,' for reasons that have nothing to do with that you shouldn't own a person. Like I might be, I dunno, jealous. Which is stupid. I don't get jealous and I don't get into relationships. Ridomie and I can fuck, sideways, upside down, inside out, you get the picture, but I'm not getting involved with him, or anyone. Tried that once recently, against my own Ryker code and it was seriously fucked up. "I don't know what that fucking means," I say like an asshole. The whole 'jealousy' thing is pissing me off; none of it's his fault, but I take it out on him anyway.

I feel worse because he hasn't stopped smiling. His voice gets low. "Well, technically, it means I belong to the Major now. When a Ryker claims a clone, he's supposed to devote himself to that Ryker."
Ridomie's trying to tell me something without telling me something. It clicks for me, because all clones are devoted to Rykers, but he means that in an entirely different way. "Are you the Major's sex slave now?" I don't know why, but I'm fucking outraged. I know why I should be outraged, no one should be a sex slave (unless they want to be) but that's not why I'm outraged.

"Shhh. Not really Ryker. It was just for show. 'Cept the clones don't know that, which means my sex life will be nil, until the Major decides to forsake me."

"He can do that?"

"He's a Ryker."

Guess that's the answer to everything around here. Ryker's can pretty much do what they want.

"It wouldn't be a good idea for him to do that now, not with Derek as pissed as he is."

*Good. It didn't bother me before when I saw Ridomie and Vallee in the broom closet together, but right now, well it fucking bothers me, okay?"

"You know the Major's not actually going to use me, right?"

"I, I'm not worried. Do I look fucking worried?"

"You just look…never mind."

Thank fuck Rex comes walking into the Mess hall at that moment and yeah, he's walking. It's a slow walk, but it looks halfway normal. He's smiling and I'm fucking relieved. Ridomie will be relieved I'm sure, but right now he's looking at Rex as if Rex is a dog trying to steal his bone, his hand on my thigh gets tighter.

"Hello, Master Ryker." He doesn't even bother saying hi to Ridomie. Ridomie doesn't like that; he notices and changes his demeanor.

"What the fuck happened? Your foot okay?" I ask.

"Yes, thanks to you. Nothing's broken, just some torn tendons that are almost done healing. The medic said I'll be fine by morning, but to keep it wrapped. He offered a new wrapping, but I opted to keep the one you gave me, sir. I am honored and will wear your wrapping proudly. I'll wash it and make sure to return it when I'm done."

Return my shredded pieces of shirt? "Uh, you're welcome and no need to return the, er, wrappings. Keep'em."

His jaw almost drops. You'd think I just told him he won the lottery, only he probably doesn't know what a lottery is. "You mean they are…mine?"

"Sure. All yours, Rex." He's acting like a fucking house-elf.

"This is…this is unprecedented," Rex says.

Oh fuck. Fuck me. *What did I just fucking do?* Whatever I did, I'm afraid to look at Ridomie and I don't really need to, I can feel his eyes lasering into me.

Rex sits down across from us, not waiting to be invited; I think I just fucking knighted him or something. "We don't own anything, Ryker," Ridomie fills me in. "Rex is now the first clone to own something. Ever."
I groan into my hands. I've learned enough to know that doing things that are different are bad, like get someone incinerated bad, but I can't fucking take my 'gift' away from him. Look how fucking happy he is. "This place is fucked up, you know that?" I say it to both of them.

Rex notices where Ridomie's hand is. "Are you two—"

"Didn't you run into, Derek?" Ridomie cuts him off.

Rex's face falls, he knows he's pussed Ridomie off and I'm sure no one likes to be asked if they've run into Derek. "No, sir. Was I supposed to?"

"He was sent to medics, we were hoping you'd miss him," I add for Ridomie.

Rex gives Rye a meaningful look and Rye shakes his head. Am I fucking missing something?

Fuck them both. I decide to start eating. I need a break from all this clone crap. I'll eat and then I'll go do whatever the hell I want. See if I can find a place to think that's not contaminated with Ryker bullshit.

They start eating too and it's the four of us eating in silence: Me, Rex, Ridomie, and Ridomie’s hand on my thigh. His hand tightens to the point of it hurting. I want to stab his hand with my weird looking fork, until I feel my fucking dick harden. Fuck balls. I fucking like having fucking fingerprints etched into my thigh. Never had the chance to discover that before.

I suck wind and know there might have been hope that I could remove his hand before, but now, if I want it off I’ll have to pry it off and I don't want to pry it off. I want it there.

That’s when I know: This is a claiming. Some kind of claiming. Not quite like with the Major, something, deeper. But whatever it is, he's staking ownership of me.

I can't fucking believe it. This must be how Dr. Phil feels when he has a breakthrough with a patient (if you can call his T.V. guests that). Because if Ridomie's feeling brave enough to do something like that with me, a Ryker, maybe I am getting through to him. Maybe he's giving up on all that Ryker-Clone bullshit.


The tension at the table builds until finally he looks at me and I can see everything. It's all written in his angry grey eyes: He wants me away from Rex.

But, I'm letting him etch fucking brail into my thigh, aren’t I? Shouldn’t that be enough to satisfy his fucking jealous rage?

It's not and he can't control himself any longer. Too fucking riled up to finish his food, he stands from the table, thankfully pulling his fucking hand from my thigh, pushing his food at Rex, and walks out of the hall.

I look at Rex, by way of apology, yes, that’s right me fucking apologizing for Ridomie’s shit, and go after him. I catch up with him outside the hall. He’s walking, so he probably wants to be caught even if he doesn’t know it. I have no idea where he’s headed. He still hasn’t stopped. “What the fuck was that Ridomie?” I yell after him.

He stops for a second, cocks his head to the side indicating he wants me to follow him, and runs.

I have no problems following him, but my own anger is growing at his evasiveness. Seriously. I wish he’d just fucking say whatever’s obviously on his mind.
He leads me to outdoors. I don’t know that I’m allowed to be outdoors without express permission from someone and it’s the first time I actually care. My father doesn’t seem to care what I do, so long as it’s not piss him off, but the Major’s given me the impression he’d like to know where I am at all times, or at least be able to have a reasonable guess; class, Mess Hall, my room… And I fucking owe him, two-fold. Does bring to mind just another fucked up contradiction. Rykers rule all, but don’t have as many freedoms as clones. Least not me anyway.

But this seems important, so I follow. Ridomie tends not to do things that might piss off the Major anyway, so I decide to assume this is going to be Kosher with him.

Where we’re standing gives us the semblance of privacy when in reality, privacy doesn’t exist in this place. We’re outside, still on Ryker turf, but it’s a slightly wooded area on this side of the corporation, with the ocean on the other. This is the way you'd go if you wanted to reach the first major Cyntripien town, Trion Ansari, which I'd recommend running to, if you’re a clone or a Ryker, or it's going to take you days. Learned me that in school.

Also learned in ‘school,’ that Rykers and clones are the only ones who can run. Guess the primo genes don’t get dished out to the ‘common folk,’” around here.

“What the fuck is wrong with you Ridomie?” I repeat.

He’s breathing hard, but not from running. “I had to get out of there. You don’t understand, and you can’t.”

“Quit being fucking cryptic, help me understand Rye,” cause otherwise, I'm just going to think you're as moody as a fucking woman.”

"Women aren't moody. They're beautiful. You shouldn’t say that Ryker."

"You mean you've actually seen a woman around here?" 'Cause I haven't. Not a stitch of vagina in the place, just one big sausage party.

His grey eyes are sending a new message, one I can’t decode. “There are women here,” he admits, and I almost launch into an interrogation about that, ‘till I figure out he’s trying to lead me off the first scent. He doesn’t want to talk about what just happened, more than he doesn’t want me to know about these hidden women.

But this is a lead I will have to follow. My mama could be one of those hidden women. I’m not going to pursue it now though, would be too obvious why I wanted to know. I can trust Ridomie, but I’m learning, there are eyes, and ears everywhere in this place.

“Fuck. Whatever. I couldn't care less about that right now. I want to know what that was back there, with the hand and the being pissed off. I know I’m a dick, but I’ve been trying real hard not to be and I’m still getting my ears balled off and you keep throwing fits.”

“I’m not throwing a fit Ryker.”

“Yes. You are. Come on — just tell me, tell me why.” I feel my thigh throbbing as the blood pumps faster through my veins. A mark. Ridomie’s mark.

“I wish I could tell you, but it’s not that simple. Can we just leave it at, I had to get away from Rex?”

I’m no fucking fool. He didn’t just want to get away from Rex, he wanted to get me away from Rex. Everything makes sense, and I wished it didn’t, so I could go my blissful ignorance. I wish I’d
I listened to the Major’s advice, and was more careful about what I attempt to find out.

I stare for a moment too long, and he knows… Knows I’ve figured it out. His face goes red, not knowing where to look, so he looks at the sky, then the grass, then Ryker Corp., anywhere, s’long as it isn’t my face.

Now shit is super awkward. My throbbing thigh reminds me what he’d been doing in the Mess Hall, and my dick reminds me that sex with Ridomie would be just what the doctor ordered to cure this bad case of awkwardness between him and I.

And I know I’m an ass because I want the sex I know he’ll offer me, but without the feelings bullshit. I don’t do relationships. I’ll fuck him, nothing more, but now that I can see just how much more he wants from me, well even I’m not that much of a dickhead to fuck him under those premises.

Maybe we can come to a compromise? Hopefully for my dick’s sake, ‘cause he’s already awake and I’ve already been cockblocked by Ridomie more times than I can count.

Right. Fuck. Truth is, I’m likely going to break his heart, and he’ll never speak to me again. I’m too selfish for that. I need him. I don’t know how long I’ll be trapped here and I fucking need someone I trust, a friend. Can we be friends with benefits? We are dudes. That’s common in any universe, I’m sure of it. How do I approach this with him? That’s the real question.

“Look Ridomie, I can’t…we can’t…” Fuck. There are tears in his fucking eyes. I move closer to him. I want to wipe them away. Instead he swipes my outstretched hand from his turning face, and wipes away his own tears, like he hates them for being there. That's not all he hates though, Ridomie hates a lot of things. Except me.

“I know, and I’m sorry,” he says dutifully. Dutifully. “You’re a Ryker. I know. Rykers and clones don’t mix. Like your brother said, we’re not even people. I shouldn't have marked you like that and I shouldn’t have these feelings for you. I want them to go away, but they won’t.”

Fuck. That’s why he hasn’t just told me and it’s the same reason his emotions are up and down. He thinks I’m not going to be with him on account of his status, or lack there of. That’s something needs to be corrected, pronto.

“Jesus Christ Rye, that’s not why. I've fucking told you before, but I'll say it 'till it get through to you, I don’t think like they do. I’m not from here. It has nothing to do with that whole Ryker, Clone bullshit. I don’t do relationships. Never have I…” Fuck. I'm not about to go into my failed relationship with him, so I'll have to tell him my other reason, about my mama for him to understand and I don’t want to talk about my mama. But now he’s looking at me with red eyes, and I find all I care about is getting rid of those God damned tears, and that look that says a little part of him is dying.

Fuck.

“My mama left me on Earth for a long while. She moved me place to place never letting me stay in the same place long.” And I'd say I'd never stayed in the same time for long either. I can't say much more than that. He'll just fill in the blanks, and do some wondering about that. See how it feels. But I have to add just a bit more to make him understand my reason — the original reason for my no relationships policy.

“Growing an attachment to anyone was just not on. It was too fucking painful, okay? I did it once, grew and attachment I mean. Still fucking haunts me to this day.” There. The thing I’ve never told
anyone, he knows now. Step one of forming a fucking attachment, *I know*, fucking trust them with your private shit.

I just broke a rule, my own rule, but I did it for his sake. Because truth be told, I’ve already formed an attachment to him. He’s my friend, my best friend. Only friend I got now. I know I’ll be gutted when I have to leave him here, but gutted is worse than devastation, and falling in love leads to devastation type feelings, I’m just not into. Nope. No falling in love here folks.

“I don’t understand, Ryker.” His voice is broken. My bit of the truth and little unveiling of myself did shit all to make him feel better. “What are you saying?”

I let out a heavy sigh. “I’m saying we can fuck, but nothing else. I’m not a ‘relationships kind of guy.’” He has to understand that. I haven’t seen a television set here, yet, but I’m pretty sure that clique, sitcom saying, has to have have context here.

He brings his head up, eyes wide. “So you’re saying, just sex and nothing else?”

I seize the day, back on solid ground with footing I can handle. “Yeah! You’re fucking attractive Ridomie! Shit, you’re, so fucking beautiful it's hard to keep my hands off of you. You make my dick ache. I wasn't just asking you to help me out, I really did…do want you to suck me.” We’re close enough, I grab him and pull him to me. I think he’ll fucking love this shit, have him over the moon.

It doesn’t.

He tenses up. Something’s wrong again. “What the fuck do I do now, Ridomie? Don’t tell me you don’t do ‘just’ sex. I saw you in that broom closet.”

Still tense in my arms, he shakes his head, not making any attempt to move away from me. “Nothing, it’s just…” I recognize that look. I’ve seen it on his face all too often. He’s fucking disappointed with something. For once it doesn’t look like me. There's always the chance it could be me, not ruling it out, just doesn't appear, so.

He looks down like he’s deciding something then back up to my eyes. His grey eyes have a new look in them. He’s pushed whatever disappointment he’s feeling to the back of his mind and is attempting to forge a new feeling. I know that new feeling well, and it's ever more clear what he wants, as I feel his cock harden against mine – which has been hard a good long while.

Call it an amazing ability, call it asshole, but I can have these heart wrenching type conversations and still maintain an erection.

“Hello,” I say to Ridomie’s cock. “Now I see why Ridomie’s been, so moody. He needs someone to take care of you properly.” Ridomie’s responding, but not as much as I’d like. He seems all hesitant and shit. But I’m a crude mother fucker, so I take it to that place, trying to break him out of whatever stupid lingering thoughts he still has, causing him to hesitate. I lean down to his ear, and whisper, “would you like that, Rye? Like to stick your dick far up my ass?”

I get opposite to what I expect. He pushes me away and looks confused as fuck.

“What the…? I don’t get you Rye, I thought this is what you wanted? I know it’s what I’d like,” I add, pouting, in case he thinks I’m just doing this shit to prove a point, the point that I don’t fucking care if he’s a clone.

“I… Ryker… You’re Ryker. A Ryker. You can’t… You don’t…” He’s sputtering now, going on again, about Ryker vs. Clone nonsense.
“Stop it with that shit. How many times do I have to tell you?”

“No,” he cuts me off. “It’s not that. Well there is still some of that, but Rykers don’t… They don’t bottom,” he mumbles. I catch it anyway – super hearing and all.

“Ryker’s don’t…?” Okay, now I’m fucking speechless. No wait, I got something. “Are you calling me a fucking pussy, Ridomie? Cause that’s what it fucking sounds like. If I don’t measure up to your idea of a Ryker, then go back to sticking your dick in that other kid’s mouth, and fuck you.”

“No, Ryker. That’s not what I mean, really. I’m really making a mess of things.” He runs his hand through his hair, “this isn’t me.”

There’s a long silence. He’s thinking. I’m thinking. Can’t tell you what he’s thinking, but I’m thinking I’ve had enough of this shit, and am feeling conformation of my no relationships policy. This is the shit that happens when two people climb aboard a ‘ship’ of any kind. Be it friendship, or anything else, disagreements happen, fights ensue, egos get bruised, hearts broken, and apparently dicks fucking ache, because by the look of it, the ‘fuckship’ has sailed. I think I'll go pick a fight with the Major, just so I’ll have something to punch.

I'm still holding him and I can't help but feel he's letting me. Ridomie's not the kind to be held. Looking at him (we're eye level), into his stormy grey eyes, and I let my forehead slowly make contact with his; I wanna kiss him, want him to kiss me, but there's no way he'll make the first move, so I take the fucking plunge.

I realize as soon as our lips touch that I've never kissed someone like Ridomie before. It's like kissing soft rocks. He's so solid and just there, nothing's ever going to take him down. It's just a press of our lips together, my top lip nestles over his bottom, then I slowly peel away, as he sucks gently at my top lip.

Then we stare, like we both don't know exactly what just happened, but we do know we both liked it. And I don't know what the fuck Ridomie feels, but it's like I've been found. I feel funny too, like my blood is…glowing. I know, I know, how does blood glow? But it is, like it's bright inside of me. It's not hot, just vibrant.

I've gotta…gotta have more of that. I go in for more.

Much as I've never kissed someone like him, he's never kissed someone like me. He's the immovable mountain and I want to move him. I go off like a firecracker, kissing him more pushing toward him, our mouths meeting over and over, our necks having to move and twist to accommodate our lips meeting. For awhile, it's me practically kissing him in an onslaught, countless missiles thrown at him he catches quick not wanting to miss a single one, until suddenly, he pushes back.

He grabs both my hands and pins them behind my back, locking them in his one fist as his other hand slides firm into my hair, holding my head, so he can kiss me solid and proper…and I just take it. His hold's firm enough it's not an easy escape, if I struggled hard enough, sure, I could likely fight my way out, but why the fuck would I want to? This is damn hot. Ridomie can hold me down and fuck me anytime he wants.

I get more kisses, his mouth sucking at my top lip and kissing them both in intervals, like he's trying to get tiny tastes, like licking a chocolate bar. Then there's tongue. Ridomie's tongue teases at first, he's not being apprehensive, he's playing, getting me to chase him with my mouth, once, twice, then he's in. His tongue weaves into my mouth and around my tongue and then it's like he's eating me.
We're like that for I don't know how long (I should, should be able to sense time like I can smell apple pie, but I can't) 'till finally, he releases me and we're both star struck momentarily. As if just realizing what he's done, he takes several steps back and frantically runs a hand through his hair. "Damn it, sorry, Ryker I…I don't know what came over me, I…I shouldn't have done that."

I step toward him, he steps back. "Of course you should have, I fucking loved that Rye, that was something else. Let's do it some more."

"We can't, Ryker."

"Why not? I know the Major's got his fake claim on you and everything, but I know it's not real. Solves a problem for you too, we can fuck, you don't have to wait for the Major to 'forsake' you, or whatever." I try stepping toward him again, but it's like I've suddenly developed flesh-eating disease, he doesn't want me coming near him.

He looks like he wants to rip his hair out. "Am I too much for you?" I ask.

Shit, I just fucking pissed him off. "No, you don't get it Ryker, but I do, I get it now. I don't know how it's even possible, but it's true, you're my...and I'm your...I'm in love with you, Ryker." He looks like he wants to punch something (probably me). "Even without your ridiculous policies, and even if you don't think like 'them,' we couldn’t be together even if we both wanted it. You may not be from here, but it doesn’t excuse you from this world’s laws. Your father would never allow us to be together in the capacity that I’d...Ryker you're my...never mind."

I don't know what the fuck to say to that, so I go with knee-jerk. "Hey! If I did want something, I’d have it. I could give a flying fuck about this place, or my father. In fact soon as I find out what’s happened to my mama, I’m leaving."

I can see the pieces of his heart breaking. "Leaving?"

"Yeah, like I said. I don’t stay anywhere long. I can’t. I don’t really know why, just that I can’t." I look at him meaningfully. I really don’t want Ridomie taking offence to the way I do things, which I know — it means I do care about him, at least some. But love Ridomie? I. Well I can't say I do love him, but I can't say I don't. It's confusing. The way we just kissed fucked me up. I'm changed. I'm, having trouble looking into his grey eyes as they fall apart.

Now it’s not just his heart that’s breaking, he’s breaking apart. It doesn’t seem right. He looks too strong to break apart. “But you just got here,” he says so quiet, even I almost didn't hear it.

Fuck. He really is in love with me, isn't he? Least, he believes he’s in love with me. And I don't like that look, the one that's saying he's likely to walk into the incinerator, without being pushed. “I only came here in the first place, because I need to find out shit Rye. I wanted to find out who I am, I know that now and, well, it's not so good. I also need to find out what happened to my mama. My father — Lord Dickhead — has implied she’s dead. I have to find out for sure. Once I know, there’s no need for me to be here.” It's true. I'm done with Earth, not going back there, but maybe I can start a new life here in Cyntripien. I'm sure if I suggest it to 'my father,' he'll be happy to get rid of me. He's got my blood now.

Because I don’t expect it, Ridomie’s fist makes a connection with my face. Shit. He can punch hard. Was he holding back before? The world spins, but I still see his next punch coming, and block it by grabbing his wrist. That doesn’t stop him long. He kneels me in the gut, low enough that he catches my poor, hardened dick (yeah it's still hard, especially now) at the head. Fuck! That
hurt. It wasn’t a nut shot, but it didn’t need to be, I still drop like rocks.

There’s an unwritten rule on Earth that you don’t punch another man in the nuts. Either that rule doesn’t exist here, or being kneed in the dick isn’t included in that rule. In any case, I am going to fucking punch him in the nuts when I get my breath back. I’ll show him no rules.

But I’m all talk, I don’t really want to punch Ridomie, especially not in the nuts. I see his fist coming up again, but I plead this time instead of making any attempts to block him. He can hit me if he needs to. I really don’t want to hurt him, and I know I will if I start punching him. Don’t get me wrong, I would hit him if I felt justified, but I don’t now. I know he’s most likely heart broken over not snagging me, as his boyfriend. I say so. “Rye, please. Stop. I know your heart is broken, over not getting the Ryker love, but…” That time he clipped my jaw.

Finally he stops beating me long enough to speak. “You arrogant, Ryker, asshole! Me punching the shit out of you has nothing to do with what I feel for you, which by the way I really wish I didn’t for so many reasons! I’m trying to knock sense into that thick Ryker skull of yours!”

I want to take my shirt off, so I can wave a white flag, but then I remember my shirt is black now.

He's breathing hard, looking at me, disgusted. "You have no fucking idea and you know what? You are just like them if you leave."

I know Ridomie well enough to know that when he swears, shit just got real, but what he said is a fucking insult. "Fuck you, Ridomie," I say pushing him off me. It's not hard when I'm trying and he's done with beating me, physically anyway.

"They're depending on you, you...you started something here, Ryker. You can't just leave. You give them, hope."

"I wasn't trying to start anything and I'm nobody's savior. You guys don't like what you have?" I shrug. "Rebel. There's enough of you. I think you should do it, this place is fucking bull shit, but I never said it was my problem."

"But you saved us. You helped Rex. You treat us like, like..." He can't say anymore. If Ridomie ever had any hope, what I just said crushed it, snuffing it out like a flame. I can't. I just can't.

"Rye, I –"

We don’t get time for more than that. I hear a voice from behind me I hoped had long forgotten about me, but no such luck.

“There you are, boy. I’ve been lookin’ all over the damn place for you.”

I’m grabbed by the skin of my scalp, his favorite thing to do. “You ain’t supposed to be out here. You’d think you’d be smart enough to lay low after what you just did to yer brother.”

The memory brings a smile to my face, even through the pain, the pain of seeing Ridomie crushed like a bug, which by far trumps the pain of his hand in my hair, but that fucking hurts too. "Um, I'd like to point out for the class that, that kid is my half-brother, unless you're going to try and convince me that my mama slept with my father more than once. I even question the first time, sir."

I've never seen the Major look as mad as he does now. He actually lets go of my hair. Probably because if he had kept holding onto me, he would have ended up crushing my skull. I'm not stupid...er, or I guess that's a bit controversial right now, let's just say, I'm smart enough to figure out why the Major's pissed at me for saying what I said. "It was her, my mama, she's the one Derek
was saying earlier –"

"Don't talk about her. Same rule applies to you as with him," he says, but there's none of the same malice behind his words as there had been when he'd threatened Derek. "She's my wife," he adds which shocks the hell out of me.

And he'd said is his wife, as in present tense, as in he hasn't even forsaken her as such yet.

As in, she's alive.

And I get it. His brother fucked his wife, my mama, which resulted in me being made. I shake my head. "No wonder you hate me."

"It's why, why I wanna hate you and her, but you're too much like her."

I can fill in the blanks there too.

Ridomie's here the whole time, quiet, watching our little family fun moment. Normally, I'd say I'm not into this shit. I've never had family and it always looked so stupid on T.V. Not to mention my family is fucking twisted, I want to end most of them, but the Major isn't one of them. Sure he didn't come out and say it, but he's basically admitted to not hating me and it feels fucking good.

Ridomie should get his men to focus their hope on the Major, because that's what hope is to me.

“Look at you. Yer almost as bad as after the first beating you had."

“Yes, sir.” I give him a cheeky smile.

He can’t look at me anymore, so he looks at Ridomie. “Ridomie, get out of my sight, before I hide you right here. I’ll return Ryker to your care later,” he says still thinking I need a fucking babysitter.

“Yes, sir,” Rye sounds chagrined. I bet Ridomie's just as happy about that as I am right now.

“And you, yer comin’ with me” the Major says, and I'm certain he's not fixing on bringing me to a family fun park. Then, his hand weaves its way back into my hair.

Joy.
Best Part of Me

I’m gonna fucking kill this kid.

Either that or teach him to be a little more fucking thoughtful ‘bout the shit he stirs up. He’s required for another blood draw, then he’s going for a haircut ‘cause I can’t stand him looking the way he does and neither can his daddy. He should at least look half decent for the next time they encounter one another, maybe Derco will go easy on him. Right. In any case, he’s one of us now whether he wants to be, or not, and it’s time he learns that.

I heard what he said to Ridomie. The part ‘bout how he’s leaving. I find it funny that he thinks he can. Doesn’t he think I would have left long ago if that were possible? Derco will search the fucking galaxy for him, like he did the last time.

Once Derco gets his claws in you, there’s no way to pry them off of you. He has his ways. He usually finds ways of self-imprisonment, so it's you keeping yourself locked here.

“Major, I’m sorry! Would’ya just let me go, please? I’ll come with you quietly,” he pleads from under my hand while I have his scruffy, Earth-cut hair weaved within my fist.

“Maybe next time, you’ll think twice ‘bout not being where yer suppose ta be when I come lookin’ for ya. I expected you in the Mess Hall, not half-way across the forest.” I have no mercy for this kid. He’s been never ending trouble for me since he got here and I’m a bit pissed at myself for the soft spot I seem to have developed for him. I keep doing things for him, almost against my will, like I did his mama.

I storm into the lab with my writhing, pleading cargo, throw him into the chair, and set eyes on him like I intend to roast him if he, so much as dares to move. He gives me my same look back at me; only instead of flinching – like he does to my look — I deepen the intensity of my gaze, ‘cause I invented that shit, he wisely looks to the ground.

No one’s here this time, ‘cept us, and the lab techs. I wonder how I got stuck with this job, as the kid’s bloody keeper. I glare at him the entire time, as the rat focuses on his arm, trying to get him to clue into the fact that we shouldn’t be talking about shit while we’re here.

“What you going to do to him?” he asks in front of a dirty rat clone that will tell his father everything about this conversation in a blink if he’s asked. Stupid boy. He’s too trusting. He needs to learn a thing, or two. Being on Earth’s made him soft.

I respond and make it good. “Shut up boy. I’ll do what I like to him and I don’t need yer fuckin’ counsel about it. He’s mine now.” I look between him, and the rat, as the rat focuses on his arm, trying to get him to clue into the fact that we shouldn’t be talking about shit while we’re here.

His body tenses. He cares about Ridomie far more than he should. Far more than any Ryker should care about anyone and I’m not just talking clones. As if the boy needs another weakness. He already has, so many. He’s easy prey for a man like Derco.

He does shut up, and it’s a bloody miracle. After the rat takes a sixth helping of blood, I start to get a little irritated. I don't like watching them take so much of his blood. I don't like them taking his blood period. Not to mention having his blood on the outside of him, in such large quantities,
makes me feel funny. Draws me to the boy, more than usual, somehow. Something's not fucking right. “How much longer ya gonna be, boy?” I say to the rat. “And jus' how many fuckin' samples do you need?” I'm not even sure why we're having another blood draw so soon anyway, Derco's going to bleed the kid dry if he's not careful.

The clone looks his malformed Rykirian face to me, his larger than they're meant to be teeth bucking out over his bottom lip, his scrappy bent posture closing over himself. “Done now, sir,” he lisps out.

“Good.” I push the rat aside and descend on my nephew. He puts his hands over his head.

“Sheeeelllllllllllllllllllllllllllll, sir. I’ll come with you. I won’t be a lippy, asshole.”

Yeah. For five minutes if I give into him now. I can’t play this game with him forever. He needs to learn to obey me. “Move yer damn hands now, before I have them flailed till the skin is gone.” I make a mental note that the Kid needs to learn to deal with more pain. There’ll be plenty of it in store for him if he kept acting like a shithead.

He knows by now I don’t make idle threats; he removes his hands. I can see he’s scared of me. Just a bit. Good.

Making his fears come to life, I grab him again, by the hair — harder this time — and drag him to the next destination. Once there, I sit him in another chair, and take up a seat of my own in the corner. This time, he doesn’t even attempt to hide his soothing of his scalp. It’s probably hurting pretty good by now.

“What we having done then, young Ryker?” Chaelis the barber asks the wrong Ryker.

“I don’t want my hair cut at all,” he answers, still as mouthy as ever.

I stand up, and walk over to the two of them, Briggland cowers, but he doesn’t cover his head.

“Well, yer gettin’ it cut.” I place my hand, right where he doesn’t want me to, on the top of his head he winces, but I surprise him by being gentle this time, as I run my hands through. What I say next is a whim even I don’t quite understand. “I want all of this side gone. Bald. The other side is to be left long, and long on the top, too, just like mine. It will flow down to just past his shoulders, no longer. I hold you responsible to see that it does not pass this length, as long as I live, and if I ever see it longer than mine I will have you whipped within an inch of your life.”

Chaelis responds with a dutiful, “yes, sir.”

Brigg looks at me, utterly shocked, to which I smoothly reply, “you’ll do well to remember that boy, unless you want someone payin’ fer yer negligence.”

His blue eyes turn black. “What if I don’t want my hair like that? What if I don’t want to look like you?”

The kid is pure challenge, but the Major is always up for a challenge. “Don't remember askin' yer opinion. Besides, it’s too late for that kid. You already look like, me.”

The questioning look he gives me next is amusing and I can’t resist. “You should be happy, gives me less to grab.” I flex my hand at him to make my point. His face gives way to a sarcastic smile. I go back to my corner, and watch as Chaelis removes half of his crowning glory. The boy is horrified to lose, so much of his hair. For a reason I can’t shake I need to have him washed of his Earthling identity. He’s one of us now, and I’m going to ensure he knows it.
When Chaelis is done there is a pile of precious Ryker hair on the floor, which is also Ryker DNA. I trust no one with such a prize. “Sweep all of that up. Put it in somethin’ for me. I’ll be takin’ it with us.”

“Of course, sir,” Chaelis jumps at my command.

Briggland's horrified with what he sees in the mirror in front of him. “This is the worst hair cut I’ve ever had. It’s looks like I’ve been fucking butchered, sir!” He attempts to splay what’s left over the side that’s been all but scalped. I move to stand behind him, and fix it back into place over his left shoulder. “See that it’s the only hair cut you’ll ever have.”

He sits in silence a small moment, allowing me to put the hair back without fuss before he asks, “why not longer than my shoulders?” It’s a pure question. I’m almost shocked at the lack of cheek in his tone.

“Because mine is longer than my shoulders.”

“Status symbol?”

“Yes.”

He nods, and sighs. “All right then. That should be easy enough.”

Since when did this boy become, so agreeable? “What the fuck is wrong with you?”

“Nothing!” He puts his hands out in front of him. “Jesus Christ, Major. I decide to shut my fucking mouth for once, and I still get my head bit off. Can’t fucking win around this place, can I?”

There he is. I almost say ‘that’s my boy,’ but he ain’t my boy as much as he fucking acts like it. I laugh at him, instead of reprimanding him for his dirty mouth. I gotta say, this kid’s been a form of amusement for me if nothing else. I wish I could hate the kid, but I just don’t. Fact: there’s something about him I admire, like I can see the good parts of me in him.

Chaelis puts the last of the hair in a container, and hands it to me. I thank him, and signal for the kid to follow. It’s not long before the little idiot starts flapping his gums again. “Major, I need to talk with you. It’s important.”

“I thought I’d already closed the topic of Ridomie?” That’s my last fucking warning to the kid. After that I can’t promise I can hold back anymore on what I do to him.

“It’s not about Ridomie. I want to talk to you about my, mama. I know she’s alive.” Like that’s better.

Now he does get slammed up against a wall. My forearm is under his neck, choking him enough, so no more foolish words can roll off his insolent tongue. “You stupid, boy!” I hiss at him. “The walls have ears around here, you have to stop fuckin’ talkin’ about her.” I release him with a good knock to his skull.

“I won’t. Not ’till I find out what happened to her.” I realize what a mistake I’ve made, having his hair cut like mine. Right now I see me at his age still thinking like I could do something about this fucked up world. It haunts me.

“Yer father told you. She’s dead. Leave her that way.” I let him go, he drops back to the ground.

“No, she’s not.
“She’s dead to you. That’s all you need to know.”

“You say it. Say she’s dead and I’ll believe you.”

“Why you lippy little, Bastard.” I lunge for him.

“Say it. Say she’s dead,” he says again, making no move to stop me lunging for him; least he’s learned one thing. I should lie to him, but I fucking can’t. I loved my own mama almost as much as I love his mama. ‘Cause it would be a lie that she’s dead, the biggest there is.

He’s backed against the wall again; I’ve got my hand under his chin this time, but cutting into his airway all the same. This kid’s had me all figured out all along. All fucking figured out. I give in, but he’s not going to like what I have to say. “She’s not dead in a literal sense, but she ain’t living no more, that’s certain. Do ya feel better now that yeh know?”

“What the fuck has he done with her?” His eyes are blazing. He looks like my daddy now, and I know that look. It’s a look that says he’s liable to tear this whole place down to search for her, if I don’t do something to appease him.

Fuck. Fuck. It’s always fucking gotta be me.

“I’ll show you, but then no more of this. Promise, me.”

“I don’t make promises I can’t keep.”

“And I don’t deal with disobedient little boys. Get out of my sight.”

“Wait, Major, I’m sorry. I’ll do anything, I just want to see her.”

“You’ll stay away from her, and you’ll shut up about her if I show you she’s okay?”

“Anything but that.”

“No deal, then.”

“Fuck! Fine! I promise.”

We arrive at his rooms, and I open the sliding white door, pushing him inside. “You’re a fucking mess, and your father’s going to beat you to a livin’ pulp once he finds out about Derek’s hand. It’d be a good idea fer you t’rest.”

“But you said you’d take me to see my, mama.”

“I did, and I too never make a promise I can’t keep. You’ll see her. On my terms, not yours.” I gotta find her first.

“Yes, sir,” he smiles despite the disappointment I can see there. I can understand it, but the kid needs to learn to deal with disappointment, there’s plenty more in store for him. I push him towards the bed, and make him sit on it. Crossing my arms over my chest, I study him up and down. He really doesn’t look so good. I was planning on spanking his ass once we got up here. Truth be told, I paired him with his brother, so Brigg could rough him up a bit, not break his fucking hand and he should be punished for that, but with the way he looks combined with what his father will do to him, I’ll save that for another day. Fact, I wonder if I should send Ridomie up here to look over him. I know they ain’t getting along so good, but he’s the only one I can trust. He’ll die for the boy.
I make my decision, uncrossing my arms, and move to his drawers to grab him something more comfortable to wear. He's not leaving here tonight. “Here, put this on and get under the covers. I’ll send someone with food for you.”

“What? Major, I’m fine. This’ll be healed within the hour. What about the rest of my classes?”

“I think I’ll be the judge of that. Since when you been this badly broken in such a short time?”

“I haven’t.”

“So how do you know how quick you’ll heal?”

“I don’t. Not exactly, but Major –”

“But nothing. You’ll do as yer told. You can miss classes the rest of today. You're staying here on my orders.”

"This is bullshit. Is this some kind of punishment?" he grumbles, sliding out of his fatigues and into the white sleep pants.

"I was going to spank your ass red, but I think your daddy'll have plenty to say to you about breaking your brother's hand already, so be grateful an early day is all you get."

He's got the sense to look chagrined.

I give him a level look. "I expect you to be in class, on the field, at practice or here. Anywhere else, you ask. Me. Understood?"

"That's fucking unfair. Clones get to go wherever they want, but not me?"

I know what he's saying. We consider clones the lowest of the low. He wondering why we're giving the 'not-people,' more privileges than him. But it's not about privileges, it's about worth. "You ain't a clone, Briggland." I put my hand up to stop him saying something stupid, something I might reconsider spanking him for. "Like it or not, there's a difference in this world, son. Now, are we clear, or do we need to take this chat over my knee?"

"We're clear, sir."

"Rest, y'hear?"

"Yes, sir."

I leave him at that. I got other shit to do.

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“He’s asleep, Major. I brought him more food and sat with him as you commanded, but he never woke up to eat it.” Thankfully. I put it off as long as I could. I had classes then a practice that I lead, then I went up to Ryker's room. I was relieved when I saw him passed out cold. I don't know what I'm going to say to him when we do have to speak. He rejected me.

I knew it was going to happen, the rejection. We shouldn't have kissed. My heart soared, then it broke, because Ryker is my mate, but there's no way we actually can mate. "He didn't quite look right. A bit pale."

“They took a lot of blood from him today,” the Major says gruffly. "Anyone come by the room?”

I knew it was going to happen, the rejection. We shouldn't have kissed. My heart soared, then it broke, because Ryker is my mate, but there's no way we actually can mate. "He didn't quite look right. A bit pale."
I shake my head. “No one, sir.” It's just that for a moment, when my hand was on his thigh and I was marking him and he just...just let me, everything seemed perfect. Possible. He didn't take my had away, he left it there and I let myself believe that somehow, he'd find us a way.

That's all on me. I know better. I know better with the rest of it too.

I was wrong to get mad at him like I did. It's not like he should be obligated to help us. We're just clones. Even if we were somebodies, he's still not obligated, it's his life to do what he wants with (like finding his mama) – that's all I want, to do what I decided, I'm a hypocrite for telling him otherwise. It was just so exciting to think that maybe...maybe. I was delusional. I actually believed he wanted it that someone other than me, a somebody, saw what I see.

None of that matters. I was the idiot for hoping in the first place, for thinking anything was going to be any different. That someone who could would even want to help clones. 'Cause Ryker, my Ryker is really the only one who could kick start something like I'm thinking.

“Good,” he grunts. “Now get on yer knees.”

My eyes open wider at the Major’s command. He’s never asked that of me. I don’t think he’s asked that of any clone, and for a moment I worry that he really is going make me do all of the things Derek is capable of and more.

We are in his rooms, his private ones. The Major’s décor is simple. Whites, and dark browns in his sitting room. We are in the anteroom, I haven’t seen his bedroom, and hope I’m not going to. I will of course, if that’s what he wants. It was a wonder I’m not more attracted to the Major as it is. Until today. He and Briggland look much more alike than Brigg and his father do.

I set my eyes are set on the Major who's looking at me like he wishes he could roast me with his eyes. He did promise punishment, one that I knew he’d deliver, I’d just expected something more the Major’s style. Not this.

On my knees is Derco’s style. He makes you do things while crawling, or standing on them.

I obey him, sinking to my knees. “Take yer shirt off.”

Swallowing, I do so, quickly. I know exactly how much patience the Major has, and it looks like he has even less of it right now. I’m sure Ryker expended every last drop of it earlier.

He picks up the thing he's got lying on the table, an ugly looking whip, and comes to stand in front of me where I can see it. “I have to mark you.” He seems regretful. Doesn’t he want to punish me?

“I understand, sir. I deserve it.”

“I’ll be the judge of what you deserve.” His voice becomes a low, foreboding tone, and I shut my mouth until, and if I'm asked to speak.

“I know you know better, you aren’t prone to these kinds of mistakes. What happened?”

Now I'll have to say it, and he'll know. He already knows though. “He was touching him, Major and I lost it.”

The Major knows enough about clone subculture to know what I mean when I say that and to know what can happen when someone touches another clone’s mate. A number of different scenarios can happen, the worst being death, which is just one reason a clone is careful around someone’s mate. Rykers are not included in this of course. Derek and Lord Ryker take clones all
the time, never caring about our system of mates. It's not easy for the pair; it's hardest on the top, but they usually get by, so long as they've made their mating official.

Ryker and I hadn't consummated our bond (still haven't) and my reaction was based on that. Him being marked mine would soothe my pounding blood. Not that I'll ever like anyone touching him, I accept that now (and it's weird – I've never felt like this before) but it would be better if I had already made him mine. It would better if I could make him mine.

Except there's this obvious conundrum in, which a clone cannot own a Ryker. Try telling my instincts that.

I'm ready to pay for my crimes. All of them. I shouldn't have touched Derek like that, or any Ryker, I certainly shouldn't have fallen in love with one. I hope the Major will hurt me good, beat it out of me.

He looks at me in utter disbelief. Yeah, that's right, Major, a worthless clone just admitted to wanting to own a Ryker. Never mind the whip, he's going to send me down to have me incinerated. Even the Major has his limits with clones.

“What nonsense you talkin’ boy?”

“I’m in love with him sir, with your nephew, I found out today he’s my mate, least that's what my blood's saying, so please beat it out of me, or kill me. I beg you.” I look up at him with brave eyes, meaning every word. I either want to be out of love with him, or be dead. For one very brave moment anyway.

“Where’d you get such an asinine idea from? You can’t love a Ryker.”

“I know that, Major!” I yell, but not at him, more at the frustration of it all. Still, he doesn’t take kindly to it. And it doesn’t answer his question.

“Watch yer tone! Fuck! Startin’ to think I’m losin’ my touch with the amount of attitude I’ve had t’deal with in the past forty-eight hours.” He looks as frustrated, as I am. Rightfully, so.

“I’m sorry, sir. I don’t mean any disrespect, it’s just, I don’t want to be in love with him. Not because he’s not worth being in love with,” I’m quick to add, “because, you know, well because.” He knows. I don’t have to say the words, couldn’t if I wanted to. I hate admitting I’m not a person, even if it’s true.

“No. Don’t ‘spose you do. Fuck!” he yells throwing the whip across the room. “That’s not gonna do shit to you. It’s not like I can beat somethin’ like that outta yeh.”

I’m still on my knees, still shirtless as he decides what to do with me. Not even the Major can help me. I’m screwed. “Yer gonna be killed if this is found out. Derco will have nothin’ t’do with a clone mating with his golden child.” For some reason him saying that means a lot. I can read between the lines. He’s saying he doesn’t want me killed; he values me. It means a lot to be valued, especially by a guy like the Major.

I look up to the Major. A lot of us clones do. Even Briggland does, though he’d be loathe to admit it out loud. “I know, sir. Maybe you should just get the inevitable over with.” There are tears in my eyes. “Could you please tell him for me? Tell him I’m sorry and tell him I love him.” This is what free feels like. Brigg will never know it, but he brought me hope and freedom before I died.

He looks at me like I’m crazy. ‘I’m not killin’ yeh Ridomie. I’ve invested too much in yeh. Yer stayin’ alive. ‘Sides, don’t you think Briggland would be a mite bit upset if I were t’off yeh, just
after savin’ yeh from Derek’s clutches, like he begged me to to?”

If he’s trying to tell me something, I’m missing it. “I don’t know, sir. I think we’d both be better off if I just wasn’t around.” It's not like he said he loves me back.

He’d saved Rex too, what he did for me was nothing special.

“I’ll decide what you’d be better off doin’. I don’t want t’hear you talkin’ like that again, solider, y’hear?”

I swallow. The Major is one scary force. I don’t doubt for a second he’d follow me into the afterlife, and make me regret it if I decided to jump into the incinerator by my own volition. “I hear you, sir.”

“Good. Solves one problem, but leaves us with a whole host of others.” He thinks for a time then tells me, “I still hafta mark, yeh, so we’ll start there. I’m going to punish you too, good and long. Derek will check, even if I’ve ‘claimed’ you. He won’t touch you, but he’ll risk lookin’ at you.” He moves across the room to retrieve the item of doom. It’s not the worst he can use, but I’ve felt that whip before, it’s pretty bad. I ’m already beginning to tremble.

“And the rest of it, Major?”

“Fucked if I know. Fucked if I know anything, anymore.” I don’t know what he means by that, but I know our conversation is over for now. “Sorry, Ridomie. This gonna fuckin’ hurt.”
The Two Yahoos of Ryker Corp.

It already feels normal, being here. Not sure if I should be creeped out by that or not. One thing's for sure, I got so much damn sleep yesterday, I feel fantastic. When the Major left me, I hopped out of bed. Wasn't brave enough to gallivant outside my room, but got out of bed just to make it feel like I was doing what I wanted. Truth be told, the Major was right. I was feeling dizzy and tired, that kid took a fuck load of blood from me. Probably would have took more, but I like to believe it was because the Major said something to him, he didn't.

Today, I feel great though. One hundred percent. My back, which likely would have taken a human weeks to recover, feels fantastic. I'm even ready to talk to Rye.

Least I thought I was, 'till I see him. He looks like shit.

The Major must have beat him raw last night. He's moving gingerly, actually, he's barely moving. He's pale. He doesn't look hungry in the least, yet he's sitting in front of food, staring at it. I should probably stay far away from him now, but I can’t. Him and I are stuck together whether we wanna be or not. Through the good, the bad, the awesome, and the shit.

And the shit times are on the horizon now.

He’s staring listless into space looking like he wants to cry, but he somehow holds the tears back. I don’t like to fucking see Ridomie crying or even wanting to cry for that matter. Time to turn on the Ryker charm. Cheer him up.

I sit my ass down right next to him saddling the bench like a horse. I’m careful not to touch him – I know he’s bound to be sore in places from being beat — and I smile like no weird shit has happened between us. Like him telling me he loves me.

He turns his head to look at what’s dared to sit so close to him. He attempts a half-smile when he sees it’s me, but that’s all I get. I’m a greedy Ryker though; I want more. I nudge at his cheek with my fingers.

“Hey Ryker,” he manages. His voice is hoarse, most likely from screaming.

“The Major was hard on you last night, I’m sorry.”

“I deserved much worse.”

If he weren’t already beat, I’d beat him myself. Besides, we’ve already been on this fucking Merry go round. I’m not getting into that with him today. Picking up his strange looking fork, I use it to pick up some eggs. Instead of feeding them to him like he thought I was going to, I put them in my mouth. “What are you doing, Ryker? That’s my food,” his voice isn’t strong enough to protest too loudly.

“Well you’re not eating it. Can’t let it go to waste.” I set the fork down, and pluck up a piece of meat my fingers. He scowls at me, but lets me. “I want to eat, I got this because I know I need it, but I’m… I’m sore.”

“Can’t we just get you some of that Rykorsit’s what’s it?” I hold a piece of meat up, for him this time.

He takes a bite gratefully, and swallows before answering. “Not ‘till Derek’s seen me. This was
done for his benefit,” he tells me quietly, while looking around in hopes no one of importance can hear.

The mess hall is particularly quiet this morning. Probably because it’s later than usual, but there are some clones scattered here and there. Enough that this can’t be considered too private. Rye and I don’t have an early class this morning, so I took the liberty of sleeping in. I’ve never needed, so much sleep in my life. Makes me realize more and more just how easy life was on Earth for a guy like me.

I feed him, and me, some more of his food. He seems to like that I’m sharing his food despite his earlier protestations. He also seems to need something more. On instinct, I reach my hand to the long strip of dark hair he has trailing from the top of his scalp to the nape of his neck.

I love his hair. Speaking of which, I wonder what he thinks of my new do? The Major’s new orders that I keep the bit of hair I have left shoulder length, suck. I liked having my hair long. *Another strange hypocrisy.* Clones can have their hair any way they like, as long as it’s not blonde. They can streak it any way they like, cut and shave it anyway they like, with only the one restriction on length. Almost as if to say it doesn’t matter much what you do you’re still worthless.

For me, the many restrictions demonstrate my value. I matter enough to have restrictions in the first place. Fucking weird.

We sit in silence, me stroking his hair, him eating the food I feed to him. It begins to feel like a ritual, like I’m taking care of him, but in a different way than he takes care of me.

When he took care of me, I felt like treasured property. That’s a fucking weird thing to say, I know, just like everything else here, but I have no other way to describe it. Other weird thing, it didn’t bother me in the least, not when it was him. Not like when my Father claimed to own me. Difference is, I trust Ridomie not to do evil shit. *I like Ridomie.*

Even now the tables are turned, I don’t feel like he’s my property, not exactly. I feel like he’s mine in a different and opposite way. I’m taking care of the one that owns me I realize, and I look up to him.

 Fuck. It’s fucking happened without me realizing it’s happened. I’m starting to care for Ridomie in a strong fucking way. *I belong to him whether I want to or not.*

I know how this works, and I know it can’t be stopped. Even if it can, nothing’s tearing me away from him right now. He needs me to look after him, and I fucking will. I continue feeding him, and the act is turning me on bit by bit. *Stupid Fucking cock of mine.*

I’m close enough to smell him and smell the dried sweat that he hasn’t washed away from last night — he hasn’t showered. I also smell the dried blood and it’s driving me fucking, crazy.

Maybe after this little show for Derek, we go shower together. I don’t mind skipping class. If I got to hear anymore Ryker history about how we came to own the planet, etcetera, I’m going to stab myself. I don’t really care to be brainwashed with that bullshit. I just want his cock in my mouth.

Ridomie’s more than just sore, he can barely move, but he doesn’t have to move for that. I can make him feel good, better than any Rykortisol shit.

Apparently unaware of my increasing lust, he swallows another bite looking sad grey eyes at me to tell me, “I really like your hair like that, Ryker. It suits you.”

“Thanks.” Now I swallow, but I’m not swallowing food, I’m swallowing my own thick saliva, as I
realize what his being pleased with me does to my cock: Hardens it further. I’ll never cut my hair
any other way again and that’s got nothing to do with the Major’s orders.

“Should we get some more? You seem hungry this morning.” He lifts his arm enough to push his
plate to me, suggesting I go get us more.

Yeah, I’m fucking hungry all right, but I don’t want eggs, maybe some sausage…

“Ryker?” his voice croaks a little more demanding. ’I’d get it for us, but, I think I’m going to fall
over.”

“Oh, uh, yeah. I’ll get us more.” I get up quick, discreetly adjusting my pants. He’s smiling now at
knowing I’m going to get another plate for us to share. I get some vegetables this time, lots of
tomatoes (cause I fucking love tomatoes), some cucumber, and some other weird looking shit I
don’t recognize, but I get it in case Ridomie likes it. They have some stuff like on Earth, but other
stuff that’s nothing like Earth. Even the stuff that’s like Earth isn’t really just like Earth’s, it’s just
close enough for me to call it what I did on Earth. Like their weird fucking apples — Ridomie
loves apples, I get him a couple of those.

I bring the plate back, and almost drop it. Fucking Derek’s there. I’m starting to learn I gotta keep
my cool around that guy. He is dangerous. The Major’s done a lot to keep Ridomie alive. It’s a
very real threat for him to be executed. More and more I’m realizing what Ridomie means to me,
and I’m not letting him go easily. No more stupid shit. I have to use the brains I know I have.
 Doesn’t mean I can’t be a little cocky.

Strolling up to them, I play aloof. He knows we’re ‘friends' though, or whatever Derek refers to that
kind of relationship in his head, so I don’t have to play too stupid, but I know the Major did
something big in class, something that meant to everyone else that Ridomie is his, which I suspect
is the only reason Derek doesn’t have his hands on him now.

Ridomie is looking unusually tense, and vulnerable today, I know I’ve got to be his strength.

Where the fuck is the Major when you need him?

“Hey, Derek. How’s the hand?” He’s flagged by his crony clones, of course. I look down to the
hand I crushed, and to my dismay, it seems in complete working order.

He flexes it as if to prove it’s fine, and that I can’t truly hurt him. Maybe not right now, but I’ll find
a way. “I don’t have time to waste on you today, brother. Father has already promised to deal with
you later, I just came to see that justice was served. Let’s see and be done with this. I have things to
do.”

I want to stop Derek from violating Ridomie’s privacy like this. I can tell he’s humiliated, but I also
know this was the reason the Major hurt him in the first place. We have to allow Derek to see, so
he’ll hopefully go away.

Slowly, gingerly, Ridomie removes his clothing, starting with the black jacket he's wearing today
(is he cold?). He can’t show weakness, and he’s having a hard time of it. I want to help him, but
know I shouldn’t. I hold tighter to the plate with the food to stop myself rushing to his aid.

I have to hold my breath when I see what the Major’s done to him. It’s like the Major had
attempted to de-skin his entire torso and back. I can see, just barely that they were meant to be whip
marks, but there are too many melded together to really say for sure. It’s just a red, raw, puffy mess,
sticky with the infection threatening to grow if he’s not looked after soon. Some of his skin has
come away with his shirt and some of the wounds have re-opened, and are bleeding anew. Even
his fucking arms have markings.

For a moment I hate the Major, but then I remember this has saved him a worse fate – and bought us time, which I'm now realizing there's not much of here. In a place where time is a sixth sense, every minute is borrowed and the clones know it. They could be incinerated at anytime.

He looks Ridomie over inspecting his body. Both our eyes catch something at the same time, something I hadn’t noticed earlier with his jacket covering it. Careful not to put his hand on Ridomie, he points to it. “Ah, the Major’s mark. So he does own you now.”

On Ridomie’s neck is a vicious looking bite mark. It looks to have bled for a long while before closing up, well 'long' as is considered by Cyntripien standards. I don’t like that mark. It looks wrong on him. Not to mention, it’s far too intimate for my liking. What else did they do?

“Pants, too,” Derek instructs not satisfied.

Ridomie does as bid without protest as I restrain myself from not punching Derek in the face. I don’t know how he can move looking like that. I can’t take it. Eyes are on us from all around the room, watching Ridomie’s disgrace. He must be beyond embarrassed by now. But he’s just a clone, and he can’t say a damn thing. I can though. “That’s enough, Derek. You can see the Major’s beat the living shit out of him – can’t you just leave it at that?”

He turns to smile at me. “My dear sweet, brother. I’m going to teach you a lesson here, I hope you won’t forget.”

Not having received an order from Derek to stop, Ridomie continues removing his boots, so he can remove his pants. When he's finished, he stands in nothing but his socks and boxers waiting for whatever orders Derek will give him next.

“This here is nothing. He is nothing unless I make him something. They do what we say, and if they don’t, I like to see that they are punished, and humiliated. Father likes them dead, but I find no pleasure in killing them. When they are dead they cannot suffer.” He gestures to Ridomie. “If I let this go, his marks will fade and in time he will have nothing to remember this little lesson by.” He looks meaningfully at Ridomie, his body bare and battered for the entire mess hall to see. Ridomie’s pale face is red with shame and I’m fucking sure he's going to remember getting every lash anyway. I fucking do.

“But the embarrassment, and the humiliation will live on. It will scar his mind forever. It is far more powerful than these marks will ever be.” He gestures to the markings that continue down Ridomie’s legs, and bruises on his ass. “They will aid the lesson however. No one likes to be seen with such a shame written over their bodies.” He looks to a random clone in the mess hall. “You there. Come. Gather his clothes, and take them to the barracks.” The clone, it looks like Juy (we had class together), jumps to obey. He gives a discreet apologetic look to Ridomie as he gathers Ridomie's things, and scampers off with them.

Ridomie is left naked for all to see the punishment he endured on his beautiful body. I can’t help looking at his cock hanging out for everyone to see.

And I don’t fucking like that. It’s not hard by the way. Ridomie’s not enjoying this one bit.

“There, you can walk back through Ryker Corp. to get your clothes. I know what you think you are, you think you're their leader. You think they look up to you. But now, everyone will witness their treasured ‘leader’ and his disobedience. They’ll see you’re not really a leader at all, just a worthless clone who can’t follow the rules.” Satisfied with the mortification he can read on
Ridomie’s face, he turns, and leaves, his clones following him like a couple of shadows.

I immediately move to cover Ridomie with my body, standing in front of his front at least. I don’t want anyone looking at his cock. Ridomie looks like he wants to curl in a ball and die. I’m not going to let him. I reach to put the food down on the table, but before I set the plate down, I grab the fucking tablecloth off and attempt to wrap it around him. He shrugs it off. People are staring, and I glare back at them, my best Ryker glare telling them to mind their own damn business. No one dares challenge that glare. We are not on the field, and I am beginning realize what that means, and how to use it for my own devices. You ain’t a clone Briggland. Like it or not, there’s a difference in this world, son.

“He meant for me to walk, naked Ryker. Not run either. And that’s what I intend to do.” His voice is still hoarse, and his eyes show defeat, but there is a little of the Ridomie pride leaking through. He’s different today in more ways than one. He looks me straight in the eyes. “I accept my punishment, it was worth it. I’d do it again.” He puts a lot of meaning into those words and I get it. What he did, he’d done for me, he’d do it for me again. Even if I’m the asshole that he’s in love with, who never fucking said it back.

Well I’ll be fucked if I let him do this alone.

I immediately begin taking off my shit too. “Ryker, what are doing?” His voice is nearly hysterical, I can hear his heart beat speed up. He knows perfectly well what I’m doing, and despite him being naked and fucking beat up he tries to stop me.

But I will not be stopped.

He’s too sore to properly stop me anyway, I know this and take advantage of that knowledge. It’s taking great pains on his behalf to do what he’s doing now. I know he doesn’t have much strength left. Especially when he begins pleading, “Ryker please.”

Fuck his pleading.

My boots are off, and so are my pants, and socks. Poor Juy has just returned through the doors only to be greeted by another Ryker with clothing for him. “Here, Juy. You know what do with these, buddy.” His eyes bug out, but he doesn’t dare question a Ryker. He runs this time.

I look back to Ridomie, pleased with myself, thinking he’ll be pleased with me too. But I’m wrong, more wrong than I’ve been in my life.

His two grey eyes look like smoke stacks, and they are smoldering into me. Not in a good way either. More than that, the entire room is looking our way with awe, a creepy awe.

As I look around I slowly realize that none of these guys are from our crew, the ones I fought with that day and the ones I usually fight with in practice and they actually haven’t seen my naked body in all its glory like this.

And if I were to measure a guess, I’d say being Ryker has something to do with it too. It seems to have something to do with everything.

I give a small wave, and signal for everyone to turn back around. I didn’t undress to be oogled though I guess they can’t help it, I do have a pretty studly body. No one listens to me this time, and I decide I may have to impress upon them the dangers in not obeying a Ryker.

Before I can do anything, like give them the patented Ryker glare, someone is grabbing my arm. It’s Ridomie of course. “C’mon Ryker. Let’s just get this over with.”
I let him drag me along, and not able to help myself, I give another wave to my adoring fans.

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Our little walk over to the barracks is fun though not quite as eventful as I would have liked it to be. We only see a scant few clone guards – whom I wave to of course – as Ridomie uses the last of his strength to drag me with him.

I’m in no rush, having the time of my life. Being naked in public doesn’t embarrass me. This is the most fun I’ve had since I got here. Seeing the looks on the faces of the clones we do see is priceless.

At the back of my mind is the hope I don’t run into my father, or worse the Major, but I’m finding it hard to care too much. I do notice the increasingly dower look on Ridomie’s face. I wonder if it’s the pain. Maybe we should forget about clothes, and make our way over to the Medic. I say so. “Those don’t look so good, maybe we should go over to Medic’s first…” I’m cut off.

“No,” he grits out in his hoarse voice. “We’re going to get you clothed first. Then we’re going to talk about this little stunt you’ve pulled.”

Little stunt I’ve pulled? And why is he only concerned about my clothes?

I give him an incredulous look, followed by a now becoming standard, “what the fuck Rye?”

He says nothing, and continues to walk. I realize only now, he’s been this quiet since we left the mess hall. He’s not having as much fun as I am and he’s not just upset because of our situation; he’s pissed at me. I’m not used to this ‘people-who-care-about-me-thing.’ People who care about you get fucking mad at you all the time — the Major must care about me a ton, maybe the most, if that’s the case. It’s a close race between him and Ridomie.

This walk has suddenly become really fucking long, and nakedness has lost its thrill. I just want to be dressed now, and back to looking after Ridomie. Wish I’d brought that plate of food too, my stomach’s growling. One plate of food isn’t enough for two growing Rykerians.

Finally, we reach our destination, and now I’m fucking apprehensive about heading into a closed space with Ridomie. I could probably rip away from him easily considering the state he’s in, but that would hurt him, and I don’t want to hurt him anymore than he’s already hurt.

I follow him instead.

It’s a long building with many rows of beds. The beds are stacked even, so more beds can fit on top of beds — like multilevel bunk beds. For a moment, I forget that the two of us are naked, and imagine what it would be like to have to live in here with several hundred other clones. Absolutely no privacy, and not even a place to keep personal items, no place to really call your own, ever, which would fucking suck. Every man needs a castle.

I know now, clones don’t have personal items, not if shredded shirt pieces are the only thing a clone has ever been given. They’re slaves to the Ryker Empire. Owned like property, without consent. Do what you're told, or die, or worse. Now I know there's worse.

Ridomie leads us over to one the beds at the top of the room. This bed doesn't have beds stacked on top of it. Somehow that seems better. On one of the beds, in two neat piles sits our clothes.

Still dragging me by my arm he proceeds to sit down on the bed, and pull me with him. I don’t know what's happening, so when I end up upended over his lap, I’m completely fucking surprised.
He tells me to, “stay still, Ryker.”

I know what he’s going to do, I’ve told him he can, but now that’s he’s decided to, I want to move away. I can move away, but I don’t want to fucking hurt him, so I stay put. The room isn't empty. There are clones here and there and they are all clones I recognize. That means something. We're usually around the same clones. With the sheer number of them here, you'd think you'd get lost in an endless clone sea, but it's not like that. We tend to stick in a pack with the occasional 'outsider.'

I've already learned from Ridomie that there are different kinds of clones, like with the lab rat dude, but there are more differences and right now, I know Ridomie feels mighty safe around these clones in particular for him to dare to spank a Ryker in front of them.

His arm winds back, and for a hurt guy, he packs a pretty powerful swing. I’m so refreshed today, all that sleep helped my body heal even faster than it would have on its own. My ass can take it, but man, it fucking hurts. He’s right; there’s nothing kinky about this and I want it to stop pretty fucking fast.

“Jesus Christ, Ridomie! What the fuck are you doing?”

He answers by slapping my ass more. Each cheek is getting warmer, and neither feels too good. Thankfully he stops when it gets to the point where actual tears are coming to my eyes, and I’m having a hard time remembering why I said he could do this to me, and why I’m not moving away.

Oh yeah, ‘cause I might hurt him, but he doesn’t seem too concerned with hurting me. I reach back just like a little kid who's being spanked by his mama to cover my ass from being hit anymore. This is strangely more personal than my father’s punishment had been. It hurts a helluva lot less, but reaches deeper.

“Move your hand,” he tells me calmly, and full of purpose.

“Aw fuck, Ridomie, no more, please.” I’ll beg him if I have to.

“Now.”

I do, begrudgingly, and brace myself for more hits, but they don’t come. Instead he rests his hand over top of my heated ass and leaves it there as a warning. My ass prickles with sensations that are both pain and something else that’s, while not altogether unpleasant, I hesitate to call it good.

“Do you know why I’m spanking you?”

I want to respond with ‘because you’re an uptight asshole who doesn’t see the fun in parading around Ryker Corp naked,’ but I decide for my ass’s sake, not to say something I know will get it smacked again.

“Because you can’t hit my brother, so I’m his stand-in?” I try. Okay that wasn’t any better than my first smart-assed idea, but I have no fucking clue why he’s spanking my ass. The guy didn’t have enough energy to eat not ten minutes ago, let alone pull me over his knee. He must have healed some already. Glad I didn’t get him the Rykortisol earlier.

I get whacked for that answer of course, a few times. “OW! For the love of fuck, Ridomie, I don’t know! I swear!”

“Try again, you’re a smart boy.” He stops, giving me a few more minutes of respite before he starts in again. I know he’s going to whether I give him the answer he wants or not.
I do think about it now though, and it doesn’t take long for me to recall when he became all grouchy – when I took my clothes off. I don’t get it though. Why would he care about that? “Is this about me taking my clothes off?”

“Yes.” He begins anew with smacks that seem harder, probably because my poor ass can’t take anymore. I even have to put my hand back again, and am thankful when he moves my hand out of the way for me this time, holding it to the small of my back.

_I can take this, I want to, for him._ I have no problem with my nakedness in front of people, but he does. Something inside him wants to punish me physically for it. He’s got to get it out. I don’t doubt it’s a punishment, but it’s also like… _marking me._

We’re not even an item, Ridomie and I. I even told him we never could be last we talked, but here we were doing things that friends just don’t do. I think this makes us more than friends.

Finally he’s finished. I don’t move, hanging limp over his knees. He rubs his hand over my heated ass in a soothing manner now. It’s a bit like when he had his hand on my thigh, only not as painful, and it’s not just soothing me, it’s soothing him. “I know you didn’t mean it, but you have no idea what it’s like for me, on this side of things. I, Ryker, you can’t test my… you can’t test this side of me. It makes me want to do things to you — hurt you. Take you down, and have you bend to my will.”

He’s finally allowing himself to say the things he’s held back all this time. I feel it best I stay quiet and let whatever hunger possessed him moments ago, die down. “Do not do that again — parade yourself in front of others for them all to see, no one should see you, _but me._” His words are said with absolute authority, all but the last two, which were whispered. Like he still doesn’t really believe them.

I wait another few minutes until I think I’ve calmed the savage inside him with my silence, and submission, to ask, “if I promise never to do that again, can I get up now, Rye?”

His hand stills on my most likely red ass, and for a moment I think he’ll start again. He doesn’t want to relinquish the hold he has on me right now, but he does eventually. Reluctantly.

I get up surprised at the damage he was able to inflict on my ass in the condition he’s in. They make Ryker clones strong, they do. I rub my sore ass now that I can do so, and he frowns at me. “What?” I have a lot to learn about their manners here, apparently.

“It’s bad form to show weakness after a punishment.”

Oh. The Major never lets me rub either, but I didn't know it was a ’thing' here. “Sorry,” I say sitting beside him instead, wiggling my sore ass into the cold covers a bit trying to give it relief. I’m not really — sorry I mean, but if he wants me to be sorry, I will be. _When did I get so fucking sappy?_

I can see how exhausted he is, but like he said, it’s bad form to show weakness after a punishment, so he’s not showing weakness as best he can.

Screw that, shit. I stand up again, moving our clothes to the floor, and pull the covers out from under him, by lifting him slightly then placing him back down under them. I only cover his legs, which look far less battered than his upper torso, and back. I don’t think he’ll want those areas covered. The blankets are going to stick to him as it is, it'll be worse up top.

I take up space on the bed beside him, holding his hand, and cupping his cheek as my ass throbs. “Let me take care of you now, please, Ridomie?”
He nods into my hand. “Okay, but Ryker?”

“Yeah?” I answer ready to give him anything.

“Please put some clothes on.”

I smile and nod. I get dressed watching him the whole time. Part of me thinks we should talk about what just happened, but another part of me, a bigger part doesn’t. Maybe we don’t need to. Maybe we just let shit happen. Maybe I don’t do this like I’ve done things before.

*Maybe this time I don’t have to lose someone I care about.*

That’s a lot of fucking maybes, but for once, maybe sounds a fuck lot better than a flat out no. Once I’m dressed, I tell him to lay low for a bit. I don’t tell him where I’m going, but I’m going to get some more food, and hopefully have a fucking word with the Major or two.

I need him to excuse Ridomie from shit for at least the morning, unless I can have something to heal him.

I don’t get five feet out the door without head on colliding into the man himself. He spins me around, and I walk right back to where I started.

Ridomie’s not sleeping yet, just lying there, thinking. He does more thinking than he should, when he should do what I’m doing now, and decide to let things flow. “How’d you know where to find us, sir?” I ask as he begins to work on Ridomie, shoving a needle into his arm, and releasing the green liquid into his vein. “It’s not hard t’put a trace on two yahoos paradin’ naked round Ryker Corp. ‘Specially when one of them is a Ryker himself. The whole damn place is talkin’ about you two idiots.”

“It wasn’t our fault, sir.” I’m quick to defend, “Derek took all of Ridomie’s clothes.”

“Yeah? An what’s yer excuse?” He arches his eagle brow at me.

“I don’t got one I guess, but I think I should get points for solidarity,” I say seriously. Jesus Fuck, can’t someone see how cool what I did was?

“Don’t worry Major, he won’t do it again,” Ridomie speaks up.

The Major looks between the two of us skeptically finally deciding, “I don’t even wanna know. In fact I’d much rather stay out of whatever the fuck is going on between the two of you. But you,” he says pointing to Ridomie, “need to be in shape enough for tonight’s practice in the dark, and you,” he says pointing to me, “need to be in yer first class ten minutes ago, so move.”

“But Major…”

“Ridomie, don’t need nobody stayin’ with him, now move yer ass before I drag you outta here with what hair yeh got left.”

“I’m going, I’m going,” I mutter, but as I walk by I get walloped, hard on my already sore ass. "Ow, what was that for?"

"Is this one of yer specified locations?"

"No, sir, but it should be. Can we add it?"

"If you think I'm rewardin' poor behavior, think again. Start listening, then we'll talk. Until then,
no."


“What was that?” He calls after me, not letting me get away with anything.

“Yes, sir.”
Chapter Notes

We are in for rough water ahead as the story gets meatier. Our heroes will be hit with one thing after another. Some fluffy bits in between, but far more drama. Just thought I'd warn.

Thank you to Vetur for another great nickname (Deredick). It got edited in!

"Shit that stuff works fast, you're practically healed, Rye."

I spanked Ryker and all I can think about is spanking Ryker again. It was, exhilarating. It's not like I've never given a spanking, I've given plenty, but never to my mate. The thought of Ryker being my mate is still preposterous, but that doesn't make it any less true. "You remember I used Rykortisol on you?"

"Yeah, but you looked bad. Worse than me."

"I thought…the same, that you looked worse than me." Thinking the same as Ryker makes me smile.

"Guess we were both just as bad as the other. So, we ever going to do something fun? I don't feel like going to Ryker Brainwashing Academy today. Let's ditch."

"The Major's going to kill you. Us."

"Naw. I'm home free for a bit. I'm pretty sure the Major's not going to hand out punishments until my father has for me breaking Deredick's hand and I plan to capitalize on that. Besides, I think he's really starting to take a shine to me."

Can't argue with the last part. The Major has taken a shine to his nephew. During the night practice, I caught him watching Ryker, admiring, proud. The Major even cracked a quarter smile, told him 'good job,' and tousled the hair Ryker has left, before he sent us off to showers. The Major smiles less than I do Well, less than I used to. We both smile more with Ryker here.

Which was funny. Ryker looked like he was going to pass out, just as shocked as you'd expect him to be with the Major being nice to him, then of course he's bragging about it today as if it was inevitable. Also last night, the Major pulled me aside to fill me in on the places Ryker was permitted to be with instructions that I was to make that happen. "Forget it Ryker." I go back to shoveling food in my mouth and admiring Ryker. That new hair cut. Makes my cock so hard. I've got no choice but to rub one out later. No way the Major's going to fuck me (nor do I want him to) what I want is never going to happen. Ryker knows how I feel now and he's done nothing about it. I was wrong to think he was making any sort of declaration and it was stupid to say anything.

"Forget it Ryker? Fine. You don't want to come, I get that. Just because he won't spank my ass, doesn't mean he won't spank yours, but I'm not going to 'class.' Enjoy your-fucking-self though."

Cocky. Ryker. Brat. "The Major can change his mind at anytime. You're being stupid. Trust me when I say, you want to be in class."
"Thanks for the tip. You go, I'll get your notes."

"Ryker."

"What are you gonna do, Rye? Spank me?"

Least he has the sense to say that quietly. "No." I want to, believe me I want to, but what I did was a mistake. In that moment, I couldn't help myself anymore, especially with him parading himself, naked, none of my marks on him, for anyone to see. It drove me crazy. Spanking him was the only thing that could calm me, other than fucking him, which I might have done if I'd been less beat up. Was a good thing I was beat up. "I'm going to leave you to the Major." I want that more than anything, but I can't do that again, the first time was stupid enough. I'm lucky only my guys were there to see. They all think I'm about to be incinerated at any moment. Maybe I am.

"The Major and I, we're like this now," he says crossing his middle finger over his pointer finger.

"He'll still crush you like a bug, Ryker. You're not going anywhere, but to class." I think that's going to be the final say on the matter, but hoping is more like. I don't feel, comfortable exactly, telling him what to do, even if…well, even if.

He gives me a cocky smirk. "If you want me in class, you're going to have to make me."

I give him a dark look, my patience running thin, I know he's challenging me. Just because he's a Ryker and just because we can never mate, doesn't mean my blood doesn't fume at his disobedience. That's how it works, at least with clones. I don't know about Rykers. Rykers don't 'mate' exactly. Not from my knowledge. So while I feel all these feelings there's no way to know if he feels anything beyond lust. Talk to him dummy. Yeah, 'cause that went real well the first time.

To my utter surprise, the look I'm giving Ryker appears to be working. Some. "C'mon Rye. I wanna."

"Stop whining."

"Please? Pretty please?"

He looks his big Ryker blue eyes up at me, they're pretty hard to resist, but I do. "We're not missing classes. You forget, while you might get off with a mere spanking, I could be incinerated."

"No way, not buying that. You 'belong' to the Major now. He won't incinerate you."

"Ryker—" I'm about to attempt a stern reprimand, when Hark-io comes up to us, he looks pale.

"Hark?"

"I, I just came to say goodbye. My incineration is scheduled for after midday meal. You've been good to me, sir. Thank you."

Hark's a younger clone. Raised, most of us are raised now, not from my genetic-batch, but I still care deeply for the kid. We had the same Mother. My guts churn and I want to throw up, but there's nothing I can do, 'cept be strong for him. I don't want him to be scared. "You will be brave as you perform your last duty for Ryker Corp. I know you will be." I stand up and hug him.

"Hold on a fucking minute. I don't get it. You're just going to 'report for incineration'? Run away, dude. You got nothing to lose."
Ryker has so much to learn. "Tell him Hark. What will happen if you run?"

Hark looks at me like I'm crazy. Some of the clones have had interactions with the new Ryker, sure, but much of what they hear are rumors. It's hard for any of them to know what to believe. The information I'm asking him to tell is information a Ryker should already know. Hark trusts me and tell him anyway. "If I do that, ten of my brothers will be incinerated in my absence. If I'm caught, which is likely, I'll have to watch before I go too. No. I have honor, I won't allow that to happen. I will go."

"What did you do? I'm sure something can be worked out."

Hark-io looks at me, again. *Is he for real?* Word about the new Ryker and his ways has spread through the clones like wild fire, but it's still something you have to see to believe. "That's very kind of you, sir, but nothing can be worked out I'm afraid."

"I'll be the judge of that. Tell me, now."

"D-Derek was mad that Rex's foot healed so nicely. I think he'd been hoping for Rex to have to face incineration."

"What? Why?"

"Sorry, sir. I don't know."

"So he's pissed that he didn't get to lame the horse and watch him slowly sent to his fucking doom, so he teaches Rex a lesson by sending you instead."

"I think, so, sir."

"No. This is fucking horseshit. Ridomie, do something."

"There's nothing I can do Ryker."

We stare at the other for an amount of time that feels immeasurable, but it's only thirty seconds. "Um, sorry to drop the news and run, but there are a few more goodbyes I want to say."

"Of course Hark. You will be remembered, well."

When he's gone, Ryker loses it. He violently slides his food tray sideways and it clatters to the ground, food splatters everywhere. "You will be remembered?" he mocks. "I can't believe no one does anything. None of you can see how brainwashed you all are."

"Shh. Be careful what you say, Ryker. You're going to get more of us killed. Why do you care so much anyway? Thought it was our problem?"

"It is, it's just frustrating to watch."

"Oh yeah? What would you do if you were us?"

"That's easy. I'd start, by killing me a couple of Rykers...just uh, hopefully not the best looking one, or the Major. He's not so bad once you get to know him."

Speaking of Rykers you want to kill, Derek comes waltzing into the Mess Hall, glee all over his face. "Good morning Briggland, such a nice day, but a little cold. I think I'll spend some time by the fire, around midday."
"We already heard. Why do you have to do that? I know your real beef is with me. This payment for your hand? Here, break mine, but don't kill the kid – he doesn't deserve it."

"Oh no. Payment for my hand will come in the form of Father dealing with you and me watching. He's already said I could."

"What do you have against Rex?"

"He's a terrible bottom."

That's because he's a top.

"But not like our friend Ridomie here. Can't disagree with Uncle Lex, this clone here can give good head."

I'm just a good actor. I don't want Ryker thinking I'm a bottom.

"I've got something special in store for our Ridomie. Don't you worry. He won't be lucky enough to be incinerated though. He might even beg for it when I'm done."

Ryker's getting increasingly agitated. "Name your damn price, Derek. Do I have to fucking beg you?"

"It's funny how much you care about them. Maybe I should be taking you under my wing, big brother. Teach you all about being a proper Ryker."

That's a scary thought. If anyone could do it, turn Ryker, Ryker, it would be Derek. He has ways.

"One day I'll own all of this," he says spreading both hands open, to everything. "That will include you, brother."

Ryker's practically growling, it must take all of his restraint to hold himself at bay. "Thought I was Father's golden child? Thought it was Briggland this and Briggland that…you said so yourself—won't it be me that owns you?"

"Yes. You were. But how quickly you've managed to demote yourself. It was quite the feat, just a few days and now all you mean to Father is blood. I'm sure Father will tell you himself, eventually, but he has matters far more important than you to attend to."

"Look. I don't give a flying fuck who owns Ryker Corp. If you want, I'll wrap it up with a fucking bow for you. Just let the kid go, Derek."

"No. Don't think I will. Order must be restored. You don't understand this yet brother, it's up to me to teach you."

"I'll learn whatever the fuck you want, let the kid go. Please."

Wow. Ryker really is begging. For a clone. In front of everyone.

"You embarrass yourself brother and disgrace the Ryker name with your behavior. Ask me again and I'll send another, starting with his G-batch." He nods at me. "I'll send one each time you ask in fact. Really piss me off and I'll change my mind about not incinerating him, find a way to send him into the flames despite the Major's claim on him."

Ryker's eyes look panicked. His eyes are asking me, 'can he do that?' I'm claimed by the Major, so I don't think so, but I honestly don't know. Derek does seem to find a way of getting what he wants.
It helps that he's Daddy's boy.

"Don't worry big brother. Your little pet is safe for now. That's right, your pet. Because I'm not stupid enough to believe Uncle Lex has given up on loving your whore mother enough to claim a clone. I know he did it for you."

Ryker looks like he's going to fall over. He also looks like he's going to tear Derek apart.

"Ah, ah, ah, remember. I'll incinerate clones. And I will get what's owed to me from him," he tells Ryker referring to me again. At least I'm a 'him' today and not an 'it.' Derek doesn't like to use our names unless he has to. "Behave and I'll give you a good long time together before I take him. I don't plan on making it easy for you though. I plan on making your life a living nightmare."

"Thanks for the memo, got that myself Captain fucking Obvious."

"You're fun. I might like to have you myself."

"We're brothers. Where I come from, we don't fuck our siblings."

"Half. Half-brothers."

"Not different, but at least we agree on something."

Derek's smile is ugly, beautiful. "We're finally getting somewhere, I can feel it. Sadly, I must go, but I would like to invite you to attend the incineration today. It's bound to be a real scream."

He doesn't wait for Ryker's answer. Derek walks; his cronies follow.

"J-Jesus. His puns are worse than in some of the Bond movies—fucking love those movies though."

Ryker's not right. "What are you talking about, Ryker? You okay?"

"Yeah. Fine."

Is he really going to make me do this? Because he's not fine. I can't let him go on with his day claiming to be fine when he's not. Can't. Physically can't. I'm in tune with my mate, even if he's not in tune with me. I have to take care of him. Biologically driven to. "One more time Ryker," I hiss in his ear. "What's wrong with you?"

My strong voice calms him down; relaxes him. His eyes look down. Damn it. A submissive gesture. He's not supposed to do that. If he were anyone else, if he were a proper mate, a clone, I'd reach out and pull him to me, kiss his crown, smooth his hair—then fuck him stupid. Fucking usually makes us all better; spanking works too. I can't do any of these things to Ryker.

Thankfully, he answers me and I don't have to stand there feeling so damn helpless. "I can't fucking stand people saying that."

"What Ryker?"

"The Major. I know it's true. Told me himself, but it just doesn't make sense."

"What are you talking about Ryker?"

"My mama, okay?"
"What did your mama do Ryker?"

"I don't...I don't know. It doesn't fucking add up. The Major and her, they were married, or are married I guess. As the story goes, it didn't stop her shacking up with my 'father,'" he says in air quotes. "I want to say, my mama's not a whore, but of course that's fucking typical. It'd place me in the denial category. That's not me Rye. I don't deny things. If it's true, it's true, no matter how horrible—but I just can't seem to wrap my head around this one."

"It's hard hearing things we don't like, Ryker. Maybe once you get used to the idea. I don't know his mother, or what really happened—only have clone rumors to go, not so reliable. It's the best I've got to offer in terms of solace.

"Fuck you, Rye. I fucking know that." He shakes his head. "Something's not right. It doesn't add up and before you say anything else stupid, think about it. Just fucking think about it, okay?"

I'm not sure what I'm supposed to be thinking about, but if it makes him happy, if it stops him from going a little bit more insane, I'll do it. I'll do anything for him. I nod. "I will Ryker, but I won't lie to you either. The Lord Ryker doesn't lie. He wouldn't say you're his son if you're not."

"First fucking time for everything, I say."

I doubt it. "Maybe there was a good reason?"

"That's what I'm thinking, but why's the Major so mad at her? If he knows her, really knows her, he's gotta know what she's really like, that she'd never hurt him on purpose. Or maybe it's not a good reason, just a reason, maybe Derco raped her? Maybe that's why she took off."

"Wouldn't she tell him that, Ryker?"

"Not if it was important enough not to."

"For your sake, Ryker, I don't want it to be true either, that your mama would do something like that, but what could be more important than telling him that?" I hate being contrary, but I won't placate him. I know he doesn't want that.

"For the record, I don't want it to be true that she was raped either. You know that's wrong, don't you Rye?"

I do. I'm just not used to other people saying it too, or talking about it like it is.

"Anyway, one thing's fucking certain, I'm definitely not going to class now. We have to talk to the Major and stop this incineration from happening."

_He's never going to get it, is he?_

"No, Ryker. Just, no." I can't let him cause more trouble. I have to save him from himself, even if it means my incineration.

"I'll make you a deal, Rye. We talk to the Major. If he says there's nothing we can do," he sighs. "I'll leave it."

That's hard for him. He really does feel responsible for Hark-io. "Fine, Ryker, but he's going to kick our asses."

"No he won't. Trust me."
"I'm gonna kick both yer asses. Why aren't you in class?"

"We're fighting an injustice, sir." We had to come all the way to the Major's office to find him. Like Ridomie warned, he's pissed and I get an 'I fucking told you so,' with his eyes.

"What injustice is that Ryker?"

But see? The Major is humoring me. I shoot Ridomie a smug pair of eyes. "Derek's killing clones."

"And the sun is orange. Get out. Get to class."

"Please, sir. The kid didn't do anything. I-it's my fucking fault again, okay?"

"Then you need to stop doin' stupid shit, kid. You startin' to get it? Actions have consequences. When you don't know the consequences, be wary the actions."

Yeah. Starting to get that. On Earth, the consequences weren't nearly so steep. Man. Earth doesn't know how good they have it. He's looking me over, deciding something. "I hate to do this kid," he says like he actually is and is surprised as I am that he is. "But you need to learn a lesson. Ridomie, you're coming too, as punishment for not being able to do as I asked and keep him out of trouble."

"He won't obey without force, sir," Ridomie says, throwing me under the fucking bus. Some friend he is.

"Use, force."

"You can use force with me, baby," I say hoping to embarrass the shit out of him and because, fuck. I want him. It works, kinda. He's embarrassed. Serves him fucking right. Bet his cock is hard though. Mine is.

"Enough, Briggland. I hope after today, you'll cease bein' a smart ass…in the least tone it the fuck down."

"Why? What's happening today?"

"You're going to the incinerator. Maybe after you witness Hark-io's incineration first hand, you'll realize this ain't a fucking joke."

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"He won't kick our asses… Trust me… What you got to say now, Ryker?"

"Shut the fuck up Ridomie."

The Major, not trusting Ryker, escorted us to our next class, since we missed our first, promising to find the instructor on the way and let him know he's been given permission to use any means necessary to keep Ryker in line. So we're waiting and Ryker's picking at the hem of his school jacket.

"Least I'm going," he pouts. "Gives me time to come up with a plan."

"There's no plan, Ryker."
He's pissed at me, pissed at himself, pissed at everything. I don't want him looking like that, like he's been dragged down by this place, like his special Ryker light is already being sucked away. That's when it happens again, like when I spanked him: Instinct takes over. Suddenly he's not a Ryker, I'm just a clone with my mate and he needs my care. Damning the consequences (which we're ironically trying to teach Ryker to abide) I brush my knuckles against his cheek. "Be a good boy and I'll take you somewhere fun, later."

He perks up. "Fun?"

"Yeah. It's...it was my happy place." Before you.

"Does this place involve fucking? I wasn't kidding Rye. You can use force with me, baby," he leans over to whisper in my ear. "I want you so fucking, bad."

A rush of endorphins, zings through my body and yeah, I do want to use force with him. Bend him over when I want, use him, stick my cock in him, claim him, kiss him dizzy, but we can't. Can't do that. I'm happy enough hearing him say that. He wants me. He wants me too.

I don't get to say anything back. Andera walks in. "Take your seats, take your seats. Get settled. Pull out your history books."

"Fucking goody," is the next thing Ryker whispers in my ear.

"Is there a problem, Master Ryker?"

"Yeah I have a problem. This is all bullshit. You all know that right? They're just keeping you busy, 'till they need you to get their fucking rocks off, or they're done with you."

"Master Ryker, I'm going to have to ask you to behave yourself. The Major has instructed me to send you for discipline if you are disruptive."

"I'll behave, sir. Proceed with the lesson." He looks like he wants to burn the place down.

Andera isn't comfortable being called 'sir' by a Ryker. "I thank you for your compliance, young Master Ryker. Today, we're all going to help you with Ryker history. I think you'll change your mind. I think you might even be pleased."

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I don't want to see.

We're walking with the Major, Ridomie and I, that is and I don't want to fucking see this. But I have to. Something's telling me I have to see this, for reasons that have nothing to do with the Major's orders.

I already know it's going to be horrible. I don't need to see it for that, even though the Major thinks I do. He thinks I need to learn a lesson. I have. No fucking with Derek. Heard that loud and clear this morning

Seeing this though...this is going to be different. This is going to change things forever.

I can feel the heat build as we approach the end of a short hallway. Two thick clones stand outside of the metallic doors that slide apart, only doors in this place blacker than Satan's heart and a terrible feeling builds in the pit of my stomach.
"Unraised?" I ask Ridomie, referring to the two clones at the doors.

"Unraised," he confirms.

The doors slide apart. We walk into a hot summer's day, 'cept there's nothing summery about this place. Summer is supposed to be full of happy times, bright lights and butterflies. This place is dark and red—looks like what it might if you walked into hell. It's been carved out of the side of some sort of volcano, least that's what we would have called this on Earth. There are countless shelves carved out of the rock with zig-zagging stairs, leading up to each level. The Major leads us up several flights, 'till we reach the top shelf where there's a line-up of ten men, all clones, all attempting stoic, but I can see them trembling, whether they're raised or unraised. Sweating. Yeah, you sweat in here too. Instantly. You can barely breathe it's so fucking hot. Each one of us is dripping.

They're scared, not even paying attention to the fact that two Rykers are here, since they're a bit distracted. Not for the first time, I get the impression that they're just children, in the bodies of men. They're sending fucking boys into the fire.

Even Ridomie looks uneasy. Don't blame him. I am too. This place reeks of death and horror. I want to fucking go. "You're not being incinerated, Rye," I whisper to him.

"I know, Ryker," he snaps.

But Hark-io is. I can't even imagine being him right now. Standing there. Waiting. Waiting to walk off the edge of a cliff. The height alone is scary. Never mind the boiling, flaming, magma that you're made to jump into. And the flames are high. High enough, just walking towards the edge is enough to melt your skin. Yeah. Just walking up to it fucking hurts. I have to step back at a point, can't go any further, no wonder it's impossible to just mosey on in. Fuck.

I swipe tears. I don't even know these kids, but this isn't fucking right. It isn't and no one's doing shit. I'm sure these kids didn't do anything, that the reason they've been send to their death is something just as stupid as the reason Hark's been sent. No one deserves to be thrown into flames.

There are four larger clones, two raised, two unraised, if my assessment is correct, watching over the line, which Hark is fifth in. One of the 'gatekeepers' holds up his hand.

"All right, we're going to get started. One at a time. Come as soon as you're called."

What is this? A fucking doctor's office?

I don't fucking get it. These ten could easily take the four. Guess that's where stellar, Ryker brainwashing comes in. When you've been raised to think you're a slave, you grow up as one, think like one, you don't even fucking question terrible shit like this.

"Sweedz." That's the first clone called. He starts off fine as he walks toward the flames. He walks with poise, purpose, duty 'till he reaches the half-way point. I didn't even make it that far and it got too face-melting hot for me, the half-way point must singe your arm hair, must make you want to scream, 'cause that's where he starts begging. "N-no…please…please I can't. Don't make me do this. S-s-someone, help." None of the words are yelled, which makes them sound that much more desperate. He falls to his knees, still looking on with terror, toward the roaring flames.

"C'mon Sweedz, don't make this harder," one of the guard-type clones, says. "Go with honor."

Honor, huh? First you need to be entering an honorable death. Least let him fight for it.

"No. No! I can't." Now he's yelling. Sweedz gets up, turns around and makes a run for it. Yeah! I
want to cheer him, but I stay quiet. I assume these guards were picked for a reason and I'm right. They're fast as they are strong. It only takes two to drag him back, fighting, kicking, crying… *pleading for his fucking life.*

I turn to the Major. "Do something!"

"I can't, kid," he says, irritated, but not at me. I don't think he likes being here either. "Remember what I keep sayin' about consequences? Unless we can tear down the place, ain't nothin' we can do about these ten. Let it go, son."

I watch them drag him to the edge, but I don't let it go. Can't. It's horrible. Worse than I imagined. The sounds he's making; desperate keening mixed with blubbery pleading and his final wail as he's thrown like garbage into the incinerator.

It doesn't end there.

The smell. We can all smell the charcoal like stench of his skin, as it already starts to burn on the way down, mixed with the sulfurous odor of burnt hair. His wail can be heard as he falls, 'till he reaches the flaming, magma below, then it's blood-curdling screams, as poor Sweedz's body begins to bubble and he burns still very much alive. *Why's it taking so fucking long?*

It seems to take forever and I'm sure, makes the wait that much more agonizing for the clones still waiting their turn. They barely wait 'till Sweedz's wails turn to hissing gurgles, before they're calling the next.

I can't. I can't watch anymore of this, just doing nothing. I notice that Derek isn't here like he promised. At least Hark-io won't get heckled, made to feel even worse, his last day on Cyntripien. That's something.

"Indaigo," is called next.

"Wait! Fuck, just wait!" That's me.

The big gatekeeper dude that called Indaigo, holds his hand up halting him, when he sees that me, a Ryker, has called a stop to this fucking madness. "Ryker," the Major says.

"I know, okay? I get it. I get that this is going to happen, but let me give them something. Fuck, please?"

I shouldn't swear, because the Major hates when I do for some reason, even though he swears like a fucking trucker and it won't improve my chances of getting what I want. He folds his arms over the other and nods. "You will all hear Captain Ryker speak," he says using my field title.

I bear the heat to approach the nine left, the sweat dripping off my body in buckets, my skin feeling like it's going to blister; Sweedz is finally quiet. I appraise them, seven *raised*, two *unraised*. I'm still not sure how I come to that conclusion.

I can tell you, that *raised* or *unraised*, none of them want to die like Sweedz did.

Then it occurs to me. They don't have to.

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I don't know what he's up to and neither does the Major. We both want to see and we both want to get out of this place. It makes everyone's skin crawl, except maybe Derek's. He often comes down
here, even if he's not responsible for half of the incinerations. Sure he sent Hark today and Randayo the other day, but that's a bad mood for Derek; he really does prefer torture; which is why he likes to watch, but he prefers torture where the being is left living at the end of it, or as living as you can call it, after Derek's finished with you.

Ryker is something else right now, more than a captain. He's like the Major of his own army, the way he's pacing, appraising them; the way they're looking at him—like a lifeline. Ryker's gained some popularity among the raised, because he's spent the most time with them, the unraised have yet to learn about new Ryker. But whether they're raised or unraised right now they're all looking at him like he created them.

The men are still trembling, as they all do before incineration, no matter how big, or how brave, but now is different from all those other times, from all the times I've witnessed an incineration. These men will die with the thing Ryker's able to give like rain: Hope. Hope in their hearts for something better, for those they're leaving behind.

"I'm sorry," he begins letting his tears fall, not bothering to wipe them away, bearing his soul and giving them, him. "I have failed all of you. I cannot save you this fate."

Their faces fall, but the hope is still there, none of it washed away. "I would have loved to have fought with each of you, it goes without saying that you are all formidable fighters. I know it, even if I haven't seen it. I'm grateful to you all; you've all fulfilled your obligation to Ryker Corp."

He looks at them, deciding something and I'm pretty sure he's making this up as he's going along. Doesn't make it any less meaningful to these clones. "Kneel, standing on both knees," he instructs and they do, so with only a little hesitation. "Where I'm from, this is how we knight a person. I hope," he says the last part quietly.

"A knight was someone who lived by a code: Chivalry. They defended the weak, were compassionate and truthful, but most of all, they fought with honor. They were a kind of warrior, you could say, like all of you and were held in high regard. Today, I want to knight each of you, because you all deserve such a title."

"B-but, but sir, we have no status, we're not even people. We can't be knights…c-can we?"

"Not today. That changes today, because I say so and uh, I'm a Ryker, I would know."

I smirk to myself.

"Today, I award you with the highest status there is, as knights of my round table. Once the ceremony is complete, you will stand, you will be a knight and after you walk to your death, with honor, I grant you, your freedom."

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"I've never seen anything like that, Briggland," the Major says to me. We're outside the doors of the incinerator, none of us able to stay inside, none of us able to leave just yet. It's too fucking chilling in there and I hope to Christ I never have to walk beyond those two doors again. Call me a coward, but I don't think I can do it. I feel haunted down to my core, a feeling that's increased by standing here and more so with the thought of going back in there.

I'm still crying, can't stop.

They all jumped. Together. They still screamed when they hit the fire, no living thing couldn't, but they didn't beg for their lives and they walked with heads held high; that was the win. I half
expected a Braveheart moment, with a huge 'Freedom' cry, but these clones aren't there yet. Not
even close. I don't think me giving them their freedom, meant as much as me giving them honor.
Honor, they seem to have some concept of. Don't think they'd even know what to do with freedom
if it was given to them for real.

"C'mon, kid. Stop cryin'. You did good. You did real good." The Major pulls me to him and I
freeze. I can't fucking believe he's…hugging me, sorta. I'm not hugging him back, he's just got his
arms around my shoulders and kinda squeezing. I don't think he's done this before, but neither have
I, not with a paternal sort of figure. I act aloof, like he's not really hugging me and like this happens
everyday with the Major, though I'd bet my life it doesn't.

"They're still fucking dead. That was all just lip service."

He whacks my ass hard for swearing and probably for what I said. "Enough 'a that. What you did
for them was good, was all you could do. I'm proud 'a you, kid."

I pull away and look at him, fucking stunned. "Y-you are?"

"Yeah. Am and you know," he says slinging one arm around my shoulders, dragging me along and
away from the incinerator. Ridomie follows, looking just as surprised as I am at the Major's
behavior. "I like it—Knights of the Round Table. Never heard it like that, but they have knights on
other planets, you know, besides Earth."

"They do?"

"Yep. Maybe we could start yer own division. If you behave yerself, I'm sure I could convince yer
father to approve it, in time that is. Would you like that? You could run it how you want, under my
supervision of a 'course."

I told Ridomie I was leaving, soon as I found my mama and I meant it, but after today, I just…I
can't. I might have been able to before, but even that's a big fucking, who the fuck knows, because I
had to of started caring well before today, to care that fucking much today. What I did today was
small in comparison to what I could do if I stayed. This place isn't a bed of roses, but neither is
anywhere else and I'm tired of running. I want to belong somewhere, always have. I've never tried
staying anywhere before. Even the place I was before this was somewhere I'd come and go from.

More important, I've never had such big reasons to stay anywhere, there was always bigger reasons
to leave. Here's different. People need me here. And…well…I don't know the Major well, but I
know he doesn't smile like that for just anyone—his whole fucking face smiling, teeth and all.
Even Ridomie's wigged out by it. I couldn't say no him if I wanted to and I don't, want to that is. I
want to say yes. I'm sorry, Mama. I want to hear him say he's proud of me again. Can't leave with
you this time, Mama. This time, you're too late.

There's another big reason too.

"Yeah, I'd like that sir, only I might have to change the name a little. There might be some sorta
copyright on it, possibly."

Rye.

"Don't know what that is either, but call it what you want."

Ridomie. I don't let myself look at him. Don't need to. I feel him looking at me. Feel him. Just feel
him all the time.
"Yeah and, uh, maybe, I could, like, you know, do extra hours with you or something if I'm gonna do that?" I don't know anything about running a crew. I'm sorta running one as is, but it's Ridomie doing all the real work.

"Yeah kid. We'll do that."

Now I let myself look back at Rye. He doesn't know how I feel, because I'm such a fucking dillhole. He told me he loved me and I told him I didn't do relationships. *Fuck. I'm a Ryker dick.*

I'll tell him though and now that I'm staying, I'll tell him everyday.
Ryker Blood Is All

Chapter Notes

Don't know how many of you like "writing Trivia" but this particular chapter has been re-written at least seven times, since I wrote the original. If I don't have it this time, don't know I'll ever get it just right. It's important to the story, s'why I nit-picked!

Hope you enjoy.

The Major's so damn happy after what I did, he tells us (Ridomie and I) we have to attend his practice, now, but then we can have the free time we wanted originally. Ridomie's fucking impressed, I can tell. Told him the Major fucking thinks I'm something.

I'm more excited about the free time than I've ever been about anything. Ridomie promised me a surprise. A fun surprise and I'm stupid happy to collect. I need something good after that whole incineration bullshit, but let me tell you, it's got a whole new meaning. I've got a whole new purpose.

We're only half-way through practice when a clone I don't recognize, bounds in and says something to the Major. The Major's face goes dark, his eyebrows press together as firmly as they can and he calls me over via the grunting of my name. "Sir?"

"You're to report to your father's office."

Oh. Oh snap. The Major doesn't look that much better right now than he did in the incinerator earlier; his anger turns on me. "You just had to go and fuckin' break his hand, didn't you? Didn't you? You know what? You deserve everythin' you get."

For a moment I'm confused. The Major's been…fuck, he's been nice to me since the incinerator, but now, it's like how he was when I first got here, only I spot something he can't hide, though he's trying to real hard. Panic. There's panic in his malachite eyes. He's worried about me. He's doing that thing I've seen Earth parents do, where they're so worried, they get pissed off, only he's doing it the Major style. I decide to Briggland him back. "I regret nothing. He deserved it."

It works. He's more mad. "He's a sadist, Briggland. He likes hurting people — looks for reasons to. This will make him giddier than a little boy on his birthing day. Probably been looking forward, savorin' it. Was a stupid thing you did."

My father beat me half to death for something smaller than this, what's he doing to do to me for breaking his precious, Derek?

Not even the Major can save me. He cuffs me lightly at the back of my head, barely even putting the old college try into it and signals for Ridomie to come over. "Sir?"

Now he's giving me Ridomie? Am I going to die? "Escort him out," the Major says, not wanting to look at me anymore. Ridomie looks real fucking confused, but does as ordered.

"What's going on Ryker?" he asks once we're back inside.
"My father wants to see me."

The blood drains from his face, his whole body tenses. He feels just as helpless as the Major. “No matter what happens, I’ll look after you, okay?” His hands are on me, he’s pulling me to him, but I shrug away from him. “I’ll be fine, Ridomie. It’s not like I’m gonna be executed.”

He gives a tight nod realizing I’m right. Something else I learned, but this time from the Major: Rykers don’t kill Rykers.

Of course, there are worse things than death. Not stupid enough to voice that out loud right now. Ridomie looks terrified as it is, yet I’m the one going to get beat to death. Figure that one out. This time, he doesn’t take no for an answer as he pulls me to him in a tight hug. I have no choice but to let him, or cause a scene. I feel he’s being a little dramatic, until he has to pry me off of him.

Okay, fuck, I’m scared. All right? I have to march into the sadistic fuck’s office, alone. Yeah I know I have Ridomie, but there’s nothing he can do to help me at the moment, now can he?

*Can he? No.*

I take a deep breath after my mini-freak out. "I’ll be fine, Rye. Just another…just another day in the trenches."

He nods again, not able to speak and I head for my father’s office. *Time to face the music.*

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I’m admitted to his office with a subdued sort of air, the doors slide apart for me. I still don’t know how that fucking works. They must sense me coming or something.

Everything is just as white, and just as clean as I remember it. *Fucking perfectionist.* Probably has some clone dust and polish every hour to have it this fucking gleaming all the time.

I mistakenly thought we’d be alone for this impromptu meeting, but we aren’t. Derek’s here, which I guess isn’t all that shocking in itself (and now I know why he never showed for Hark’s incineration), but what has my body tingling with dread, is the state he’s in.

I’ve never seen him, so badly beaten.

Derek is always immaculately kept — like some sort of porcelain doll of Derco’s. If I didn't know better, I’d swear he was kept on a life-sized doll shelf at night, so as not to break any of his perfect, Ryker features. Some little girl brushes his hair to perfection, and never takes him to play outside.

But not now. No.

That little girl’s older brother got hold of him and all but broke his damn head off. His shirt is folded, neatly over his arm in a poor attempt to maintain his dignity. *Only how can you do that half-naked, with fucking bruises all over?*

His eyes are red as red. Redder than. He’s been fucking crying. I didn’t think Derek knew how to cry, or could…didn’t think he felt any emotion besides anger.

His lower lip is badly swollen, and cut, most likely from being hit repeatedly with that large ass ring of Derco’s. He has lash marks all over his body in the places that are visible, and ones that carry on down to the places I can’t see. Ouch… I know what that feels like.
Even his perfect blonde, Ryker hair, is badly disheveled. I can’t believe it, but I actually feel sorry for the kid, even if I know he’s not going to be sorry for me in a moment’s time when I’m looking at him from the other side of the mirror, as he watches like he promised and enjoys.

He looks completely miserable having to sit in a chair after a beating like he’d just endured, even if it is soft leather. He stares aimlessly at the floor. The worst part is knowing that if he’s willing to do that to Derek, what he does to me is bound to be worse.

My father notices me staring. “I do excellent work, don’t I Briggland?”

*What do you fucking say to that?* Thankfully, he's just being a rhetorical fuck.

“Tell your brother why you were punished, Derek.” Derco speaks in an upbeat way, like he’s excited to hear the answer. I stand corrected. He’s a *sarcastic, sadistic* fuck.

His breath shudders before answering, like he’s as scared of fucking speaking as he is of not speaking. Barely able to believe it’s him, I stare wide-eyed, hanging on his every word. “Rykers do not fight with Rykers. We are family, and we must stick together, or we will all fall.” It looks like it pains him to say that far more than the beating he’s received. I think he really wishes we weren’t ‘family.’ “I’ll do, better Father — I promise!” Yeah, right. He couldn't care less about me, so long as he is in his father’s good graces. *Big fucking surprise there.*

Derco looks at his boy. “I wouldn’t doubt it, for a moment.” That small vote of confidence seems to bring a bit of life back to Derek, until his father lets the other shoe drop. “Of course, if you prove yourself to be entirely worthless, I can always make another son, and you can join Briggland for the next century training new recruits.”

That’s enough to send Derek to the brink. He balls up his fists, not saying a word.

“Why don’t you take a seat, Briggland?”

I obey the order instantly, knowing I’m way outta my league, here. He wants to impress upon me a few things. I can sense it. “Something has come to my attention, an oversight, I intend to correct.” His words speak to me, but his tone seems to relay unspoken words to Derek.

Great, I’m in one of those conversations where everyone knows shit except me.

“We have a mantra in our family, one you are unaware of, but one Derek knows better than to disregard. We do not do…*this,*” he says gesturing at the animosity between Derek and I, “in our family — we are Rykers. You both disgrace the name with your childish insolence.”

Many things go through my head. At the top of that list, I want to ask him if he remembers that until recently, I barely knew what a Ryker was. I don’t know what mantra he’s referring to exactly, but whatever it is, I’m not participating.

“And while I believe a healthy rivalry between two brothers is good, at the end of it all, I expect the two of you to get along. Do you think it was easy for your uncle, and I?” He shakes his head, remembering, not expecting an answer. “No. We’ve been through our share of fights, and disagreements over the years, but we’ve always reconciled, because we care for one another. We care about this family, and its longevity. We only have power as long as we are a unit. When that unit fails, so do we.” He lets that little black curtain fall over us before he continues.

He’s delusional. I think he really believes he and the Major are reconciled. *Somehow, I don’t think the Major’s ever forgiven him for sleeping with his wife.*
"I can give the two of you power beyond your wildest dreams, but I have to know that when I hand over Ryker Corp. to my sons, that it will not be burnt to ash by the two of you fighting like common-folk DNA."

I put up my hand like I’m in school, because much of this speech is lost on me. He nods in my direction allowing me my question. “Not to be rude, sir, but what is the Ryker Mantra?”

At that he smiles, as if he believes I’m actually interested in learning this garbage. I’m just trying to keep up with this conversation. And appearances.

“I’m glad you asked, Derek, what is it? I believe you’ve screamed it over the past several hours loud enough. Tell your brother, he'll need to know for his turn.” He still looks displeased with Derek. That’s something.

“Ryker blood is all,” his scratchy voice scrapes out.

“Yes. Ryker blood is all. It's all that matters. In other words it is the only true thing we value. We must take care of the things we value.”

Okay, now I can’t help myself. “Really? Is that why you beat the shit out of us?” I think he’s going to be mad, like the Major would have been if I spoke to him like that, but he isn’t. I don’t get him; can’t predict him, and it’s as unnerving as it is being in the office with Derek all fucked up like that.

“I do not punish you two senselessly. You are punished with an important purpose in mind. The purpose. You're not just anyone. Someday, you'll inherit the world. You have to be the right people, I'm making you the right people. The bickering and fighting between the two of you is mindless, and infantile. I will not have it. I simply will not, and if I have to beat it out of you, that is what shall happen.”

Fucking hypocrite, is all I hear.

“A Ryker does not seek to harm another Ryker,” he adds.

“You could have fooled me. That’s all you’ve been doing to me since I’ve arrived.” I can’t believe I’m sitting here getting fed this bullshit.

“But it’s true. We do not seek to harm each other. Control, now that's another matter entirely.” His eyes light with the glee of that feeling.

“We can harm to control then,” I clarify. It seems this 'mantra' as he calls it, is open to interpretation.

“No, no, no,” he chides as if talking to a small child. Guess I am to him. “There may be instances that call for a little, discipline, but we never seek to harm. A Ryker may punish another Ryker, but not harm – there is a difference.”

Yeah, I'm well aware of the difference between a beating and discipline. It's him that's not. I don't bother arguing though, nothing's going to change his mind and he'll just be more pissed.

“Derek will succeed me some day,” he announces. “And do you know why?”

Do I care? “Enlighten me, sir,” I say sarcastically.

“The strongest Ryker gets the throne.”
Not surprising from what I've gathered about this place. I figured on that, but it just doesn’t add up. ‘Cause I know who I’d bet on in a fight between him and the Major, and it isn’t Derco just, so as we’re all clear. *Doesn’t make fucking sense.*

He snaps his vicious eyes on me like he’ll tear me apart if I look away even for a second. “You, my dear son, have a weakness do you not? And I’m not talking about your misguided affection for clones, something we’ll address in time. A physical weakness.”

Physical weakness? What weakness do I have that Derek doesn’t? I haven’t fought him in a real battle yet, but I know at full strength, I could kick his ass.

Derco opens the drawer to his desk, and pulls something out. It's a thick leather bracelet with the Ryker emblem embossed into the front of it; simple leather ties in the back. Nothing high-tech about it, a lot like the one the Major wears.

It looks old, like maybe it was an heirloom. He flips it around, so we can all see the back of it. Attached is a flat, shiny piece of stone, black as night.

“Moldevite,” he sneers. And I remember.

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It had the feel of an old abandoned warehouse. I couldn’t tell you why I thought that at the time, since I couldn’t see anything being blindfolded as I was. It was completely dark in the little room that held me.

My hands were tied — tightly bound at my wrists in prayer position with simple a Earth cord — and my feet were bound at my ankles in such a way, that I was forced into a crouching position with only the flats of my feet, and the curve of my buttocks touching the ground.

My mouth was covered in duct tape. I could feel its stiff, glue like texture against the parting of my lips and imagine how painful it would be to remove. Why couldn’t they have just used a gag of some sort? Duct tape was archaic and also demeaning. *That's why they used it. Definitely.*

I shivered as I crouched, blind in the cold little room, knowing I was alone. *They needed all of their men for the one that was coming.* I was scared, but I wasn’t going to tell them that. I didn’t want to die. I was only ten-years-old.

My right eye hurt — but I was counting my lucky stars. The man punched me hard enough that the whole right side of my face should be smashed in… I was sure of it, if I was human.

Wasn't often I felt pain like this. Before they tied me up, they threw me around the room in a way that would have killed a normal ten-year-old boy, leave him unconscious at least, but not me. *I wasn’t a regular ten-year-old boy.*

There were a lot of men this time.

Twenty-four. My mama taught me I should always count. All were dressed in black from head to toe. All sent for the same purpose.

*Me.* To find, and capture, me. To kill me.

Lucky day for them. They caught me, but couldn't kill me yet. They had to wait 'till she came for me – they wanted her too. Wanted us both dead. Before they left, warning me they'd be back soon, they stuffed me in this little room. It felt hidden. It felt small. I was worried she wouldn’t find me.
Mama.

It was, so quiet, I could hear every one of my breaths. It was hard breathing, through my nose. *Stupid duct tape. Fucking hate duct tape.* One tear escaped my left eye – the one that wasn’t swollen – and I sniffled a bit. That was the only weakness I would allow, as I steeled myself. *She might need me.*

I heard running, then opening of doors in the hollow, metallic sounding hallway. It sounded like one person, but I couldn’t tell for sure. Usually I could. My hearing’s exceptional —better than the rest of the Earth’s I’d learned — ‘cept then, all tied up in that little room, then it was muffled.

I wondered if something in me was finally damaged from all the brutal treatment. My body was tough, but not indestructible. I had to have some sort of weakness; just hadn't found it yet.

I knew it was her coming down the hallway. Knew it had to be her. They would have never come back alone. They would never just send one person for me. I was worried that she wouldn’t find me where I’d been stashed. Open close, open close, closer, and closer to the door I was behind. I wanted to shout but the fucking duct tape prevented that.

There was nothing I could do. Couldn’t break from my bindings, even though I was only tied with cord. *All my usual strength gone.*

Normally, I could break through cord, but I couldn’t break through this cord. I whimpered in the utter darkness, my anticipation growing. *Find me, please find me Mama.*

Finally the door to my little prison opened, I couldn't see her because of the blindfold, but I could sense the artificial light pouring through the open doorway.

I relaxed as the familiar scent filled my nostrils. *Mama.* My breathing slowed and relaxed, as much as it could with me having to breathe out of my nose because of the stupid duct tape.

She was here. *She came for me. She always comes for me, when it's important.* She ran up to the little ball that was me. “Oh baby. I’m so sorry.”

Couldn’t help it, began crying, just a little. There’s something about when you’re scared then your Mama shows up…you cry. Like it’s instinct to release your troubles onto Mama.

She removed the blindfold quickly after telling me to close my eyes. The light wasn’t terrible, but it was enough to hurt my eyes after being in the dark for so long. She undid my bindings with her bare hands and, as I uncurled, she gasped.

I opened my eyes, squinting a little until they adjusted to the pale light coming in the doorway. *What? Was there something wrong with me?* Couldn’t figure it out, didn’t know anything then.

“Moldavite,” she said. She grabbed something from round my neck, a leather throng, and sent it sailing off into the darkness.

It felt like earmuffs being pulled off. All of my senses that had felt muted while the necklace had been on, instantly flooded back. “Sorry baby, this is going to hurt.” She ripped the duct tape off me, fast and in one pull. I did my best not to cry out, for her sake.

“Come, grab onto me – tight – we’ve got to run.” To us, running wasn’t just a modality of transportation faster then walking. Running meant flying. Running meant freedom. Running meant life.
I could run even then, but she was faster than me, so I latched onto her like a koala and she carried me.

We ran down the empty corridors of the metallic warehouse. It was a maze of hallways. I was surprised to see that none of them were guarded. In fact, there wasn’t a soul in sight.

We made it to the outside of the building, my head buried deep into the folds of my mama’s jacket. I treasured our time together knowing it would be short, even if it had to be like this when we were together. I no longer held the illusion that maybe this time we’d be together. We never would. We never would.

Her feet touched grass, and I could hear the muted sound of her boots padding out into the night. The warehouse backed onto a large field that was surrounded by lights reminding me of a soccer field. It made me think that where we’d been might not be a warehouse at all I’d never have the time to find out. Some shit just doesn't matter when you're running for your life.

It was quiet. Too quiet; nothing but crickets for the soundtrack of this adventure — my mama wasn’t fooled though. “I’m going to have to hide you Briggy, I promise I’ll come back for you,” she said as we ran.

“This is horseshit. I'm big enough. I want to help. I've helped before.” I said.

The look she gave me made my Ryker blood run cold. “Not now, Brigg. You do as I say little boy. Don't be stupid.” Even without seeing each other often, Mama wasn't afraid to discipline me, or be harsh and I knew it. She needed me to obey her, immediately. If I didn't, it could mean death. But I was being a fucking smart ass as usual. No surprise there.

"Yes, Ma'am."

Soon enough, we were in a space still covered by the back of the building I'd been hidden in. Lights filtered backward several miles out. Trees scattered themselves throughout the large space. Mama cursed under her breath (her mouth's as dirty as mine is) as she peeled me harshly from her body and set me down on the pavement. I could tell this was not where she intended for me to be. She wanted to do this alone, but they’d left her no choice.

From out of nowhere, black clad bodies sprouted to life. They popped out from the sky, and flawlessly landed on the ground till they surrounded us.

Twenty-four.

I looked at my mama’s face and for a moment I saw fear in her eyes. I’d never seen fear in her eyes before. We always made it out alive, and she’d always seemed confident we would. Something’s not fucking right.

“Briggland, you’re going to have to – ” Mama never got to finish that sentence, the first man ran at her. She quickly put an end to his life.

I stayed close to my mama as man after man ran up and attacked us. I tried not to get in the way of her fighting. I knew what she would want me to do, and I obeyed flawlessly, wanting both to please her, and make up for being a little shithead. But there were too many.

The inevitable happened, and we were separated in the crowd of black clad men. One reached out trying to grab for me. “Brigg! Look out!” I heard Mama’s warning in time. I ducked, and got down on my hands and knees. I was able to crawl out from beneath the mob undetected as they all scrambled, looking for me.
“Run, Brigg. Run!” When I heard my mama’s desperate plea for me to run, I knew she’d decided she was done for.

There was no fucking way I was leaving her.

I remembered what I had seen my mama do so many times in the past, and wondered if it could work for me too. I wasn’t an experienced fighter, but I knew I was strong. At ten, my strength hadn’t yet reached my mama’s, but I was sure I could match these men, in the least give them enough trouble, it might help mama.

I ran back, and grabbed one by his ugly black outfit. I decided an old fashioned punch to the nuts would have to do. I wasn't so tall then, but I was tall enough for that.

The man went down like a sack of potatoes, but I knew I’d have to take this further. It was him, or me. With another punch to the underside of his jaw, it broke beyond repair. I saw teeth fly out of his mouth just before his head hit the ground.

It all happened so fast; I was already at another one, then another one, then another one…until finally I reached the four left surrounding Mama.

The blood on my hands filled me with rage, fuelling my need to destroy them. “Get your hands off of her, now.” I gave them their only warning.

To my surprise, they actually looked scared. Guess they’d seen my brutal, and callous treatment of their friends. One of them actually let her go, and ran away. The three left looked at me like I was a crazy, psychotic, demon child. Not too far off.

Mama used the moment of distraction to throw the three of them off of her. I grabbed one, and she handled the other two in the same methodical way a long-time mechanic puts together an engine: Without thought and with precision. I took care of the man before me like a total newb, marveling at her grace. My mama's a lethal fucking weapon. As quickly as they had come, they were gone.

All dead. All scattered over the ground. Then, my mama cried. I'd never seen her cry before, ever. Not even when she was leaving me. She sobbed and she pulled me to her, bringing my blonde head to her chest. She didn't have to say it for me to know. She didn't expect to us to make it this time.

Then she walloped me twice, hard, on my clothed backside. "Don't you ever argue with me again and when I tell you to run, you run."

Man did I feel shitty. My mama, the super hero of the galaxy, crying over what she thought was going to happen to us. But as if I'd ever leave her. I was sorry for the first part, but not the second. "I'm sorry, Mama."

Her head came up sharp. “Did you count'em Brigg? I think there's one missing.”

Yeah. I counted… Fuck. No I didn't, not the corpses, then I remember, one ran away. I caught the movement and so did Mama; she tried to whip me around in time, but he had that extra second on us, enough to swing the hard thing in his hands and hit my right arm.

It felt like what getting hit with a stick of marble might feel like to a human. Wish it were marble, that would have shattered against me. This stick didn’t. Instead, I felt my arm shatter. Up until then, it was the worst pain I’d ever felt.
Mama could handle one of those assholes easily though and I think that even he knew his life was forfeit. Can’t remember my mama dealing with him, only that she did. I'll never forget the screams though. Screams that went on, and on. Screams I didn’t find strange until I felt gentle arms around me. I barely heard her whisper in my ear. I couldn’t see. Couldn’t feel anything beyond the searing pain in my arm. The screams went on long after the man should have been dead. *Didn’t she kill him?* Why was there still, so much screaming? “Baby… Shhh…We’re going to make it all better… Shhhh…Baby…Briggy…” She put a hand over my mouth. The screaming stopped, as I bit into her hand. I looked to my left, the man was there, dead.

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Moldevite. My weakness is Moldevite. I hoped to never see that shit again and here he is, holding it out to me.

I must be as pale as Derek.

“I see we understand each other. This is for you.” He gestures for me to come forward. I have to take the evil thing from him.

Having it in my hand, so close is bad enough, but it’s not touching my skin yet. I don’t want it to… I can already feel the crawling.

“Put, it on.”

“No…Please, sir,” I breathe, staring at it. Derek forgotten, I’m transfixed at my own little shop of horrors.

“Obey me. Put in on. Now, or I can make it worse.” I believe him and I’m in no position to retaliate.

With only the straps of leather to keep it on, it means willingly putting in on my person, and willingly keeping it on my person. I put on the bracelet, and as soon as the Moldevite comes into contact with my bare skin, I feel my strength mute. It’s not gone though. It's different from when I was a kid.

Was like what happened to someone back on Earth, back in time, when they got old. You have hearing; only it gets dimmer. You have eyes, only you can't see as good. I bet I still have enough juice to take out most clones, so long as they're one on one in a fight, but the Major, whom I’ve proved a worthy opponent of at times, I won’t stand a chance against him with this bracelet. Ridomie will be…challenging. I won’t stand a chance against Derek, but I think that’s the point.

I don't like it… This loss of *power*. I need to feel the rush, the strength. My body craves it more than I knew. It’s already driving me crazy. ‘Okay, I get your fucking point,’ I want to say, but don’t.

“Good. If it weren't for your weakness, you would inherit all of Ryker Corp. Your blood is better than his, but you've inherited a flaw. Instead you will keep that on to remind you of your place in our family. Above the clones, below all living Rykers, this includes your brother. You are beneath him. If I catch you without it, you and a clone of my choice will receive the beating of your lives before that clone is incinerated.”

Fuck. I hate threats like that. Asshole has me figured out. And all I can picture is Rye being thrown into the flames.

“As you can see, it is easily broken. If I were you, I’d see that you take care of it.”
Yes, he would get me to take care of my own imprisonment. He looks to Derek. “On that note, you are meant to be a leader, not a bully. You are not to taunt, or harm your brother,” he snaps his head at me. “And neither are you. Am I understood?”

“Yes, father,” Derek and I both say in unison.

“May I be dismissed? I have practice to get back to,” I try, ’cause seriously, I need to get the fuck outta here. The room feels, weird and it would feel good to pound something.

“No, I don’t think so. You won’t be able to attend practice any more today, I’m afraid. Maybe not even for the week.” A long, perverse smile spreads onto his face. He’s positively giddy. *Derco’s a sadist, he likes hurtin’ people.* And I know I’m well and truly fucked. “Now. Time to show you what a real beating feels like.”
Like Father, Like Son

Chapter Notes

Y’all make ol’ Mock feel real good. I’m so happy that people are actually enjoying my original work. Thank you so much!

I've been especially excited for this chapter, another chapter that's been written and re-written several times over the years. I don't think the events are going to be a surprise to anyone, I left many clues...I wanted everyone to know/not know if that makes any sense, now you'll know.

There are some other clues in this chapter, for other things that happen in the story. So read closely ;-) I don't make everything obvious in this story...it's a thinking story.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Cew go get… da Major?” I can’t believe I fucking said that, or I guess tried to say that. It sounds all fucking slurred, I don’t know if the kid understood me, or not, but he runs off pretty quick and I mean run as in Ryker running.

Didn't make it far. Made it out of my father’s office, but can't seem to make my limbs move further than that. It's a wonder I'm still conscious. Derek's long left. Fucker. Didn't fucking bother to help me. After he watched our father beat me almost to death, he practically stepped over me and went on his merry little way. Here I actually felt sorry for the kid. Still do. I can see why he's fifty shades of fucked up. I was left to try to make it back to my rooms where I’ve been sent until tomorrow, ’cause apparently I’m expected in class after that. Thing is, I don’t think I can walk, never mind learn Ryker shit.

Anyways, that’s a problem for tomorrow. Right now, I need to get out of this hallway, because Lord Ryker says if he finds me anywhere but my rooms, he’ll incinerate five clones — guess Derek must have let it leak about my opinion on incineration and clones. Still can’t believe that’s a thing.

I can’t walk any further; my body just won’t let me. I collapse on the floor and hope the Major’s on his way to come get me. A few clones surround me, and I hear, “has someone gone to get the Major?” And “Yeah, Seng, I think.” Don't know who that is. They're all afraid to touch me, so they just form a barrier around me. I hope to fuck Derco decides to stay in his office.

I don’t have to wait long ’till there are hands on me and I moan in pain when my shirt’s peeled back “He made a corn-fucking-maze outta his back. Fuck!” Muttered, low, through grit teeth, but it soothes me. It's the Major. I let myself go slack, knowing I'm taken care of now, for the time being. “Go get the medic,” he shouts at someone, “and tell’im to join us up in the kid’s room.”

I feel two strong arms lift me. Instinctively, I struggle. “Enough’a that,” he orders sharply; I settle immediately; got no more fight left in me. He could kill me now, and I wouldn’t give a flying fuck. “There now. Upsie, Daisy, lil’ Soilder,” he says. Familiar words.

He lifts me to his chest. My arms hang limp. One of his arms is under my bottom, and his other steady round my waist.
“Watch m'leather.” I tell him, so he knows not to bump around my bracelet too hard. It can’t come off.

He laughs his grumbly laugh at me. “Thankfully that ugly piece of Earth cow hide is looong gone.” He thinks I’m talking about my jacket. I don’t correct him. I'm out of it — I really fucking am. Can feel the steady, sure sway of the Major's hips as we trek down the corridors. I wish I could walk, this is almost worse than the beating my father'd given me, being carried through Ryker Corp. like this. All of it hurting more, cause of that damn stone touching my skin.

As we get closer, to my rooms the Major stumbles. The Major doesn't fucking stumble. "What the fuck?" I feel the rumble of his words come from his chest. He stops moving full on, I can almost feel an edge of panic growing in the Major’s aura.

If I were any more coherent, I might be worried about that, ’cause it's not too often the Major panics.

Finally I feel him set me down on my bed, taking care to put me on my front. I can feel the anger peeling off of him. He’s slowly gone from panic to anger. Did I do something? He can't blame me for this can he? I’m more confused when I feel him searching around my body for something. "Where is it?" he demands.

"Wha’?" I don't recognize the gruff sound coming from my own throat. My father also found it necessary for me to scream the family’s mantra as he beat me bloody.

"The Moldevite, where the fuck is it?"

How does he know about the Moldevite?

"Wrist," I say not moving. Now that I'm on my bed, I can't think about anything 'cept for sleeping, and not puking. I'm fading. His hands lose their urgency, and slowly find their way to my wrist. Holding up my hand, turning it over once, twice.

“Impossible,” he whispers. He rips off the leather band Derco made me tie to myself — the Ryker crest — and I immediately feel power surge through my veins. My eyes open, suddenly feeling more alert, the nausea subsiding. Instantly I begin to feel healing taking place, and I know I need to get that fucking bracelet back.

I'm just having the thought as the door opens and admits Seng. I’m on my front, and not willing to move despite how much better I feel. I can't see what's going on behind me; just hear a cacophony of noises. I don’t know what's going on, but one word rises above the tenor. One word changes the world, one word makes everything make sense.

“Moldevite”.

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“Moldevite,” I say and I'm fucking pissed. ‘Cause how the fuck does Dess’s boy have the same malady I do? And where the fuck did Derco get a piece of the stuff on such short notice? I just fucking told him.

“I need… I need…”

My attention snaps back to the boy who I'm starting to look at a little more carefully. “What? What do you need?”
“The bracelet…not supposed to take it off.”

Of course not, I figure it out quick. The Bracelet itself isn’t unusual, all us Ryker’s get one eventually. Was the stuff under the bracelet, made it ‘special’. I give him back his bracelet, wrapping it round his wrist, and tying it. As I tie it, pictures flash in my brain. Pathways began connecting. Shit both makes sense, and doesn’t make no fucking sense.

I don’t know how it's fucking possible, but Briggland’s not Derco’s fucking kid.

He’s mine.

My heart's beating clear outta my chest.

Genetic defects in Rykers can only be passed down father to son — they’re usually filtered out in the lab, but if they aren’t, they always end up in the offspring. I knew it would happen to a child of mine. Knew any of my children would get my disease if we didn’t grow him or her in a lab beaker to begin with, before transferring him or her over to Dessa’s womb.

Dess and I decided to have one the natural way. The old way. Only, Dess never knew about my malfunction. She never knew, ‘cause I never fucking told her, okay? I tried to find a way to tell her, but couldn’t, afraid she’d leave me for Derco. I know that wasn't right, but I never claimed to be fucking perfect and was even less, so when I was a little younger. What I did was a fucking stupid thing. I kept trying to make babies with Dess hoping for the best, that by some miracle no child of mine would inherit my disability.

But one had.

Briggland. My son.

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The deformity I have was an accident; no one plans on their baby having a dysfunction. It's why people apply for supreme Ryker DNA: To make perfect kids. But my own mama had been on the run with me when I was inside her.

She’d lived too close to a whole fucking cave of Moldevite. When I say too close, I mean she lived in the fucking cave for a few weeks. Was all it took. It didn’t affect her. Wouldn’t, and couldn’t.

It affected me, 'cause I was too weak at the time — probably the only time I’ve ever been weak — when I was a fetus.

Ryker fetuses have the same problem as any other fetus, a lot of shit can go wrong, but if they make it, they’re indestructible.

Mama knew she was in a cave of energy potent Moldevite, what she didn’t know was that she was pregnant. With me.

That's how I turned out tainted. Defective and now my son is too.

Fucking bugs in both my eyes – I don't know why I'm tearing up. Happiness? Anger? Frustration? Maybe all of it, but anger's at the top. Derco and I are going to, have a little chat about how he’s not touching my son like this again. Ever.

“M-major? The medic couldn’t come. I attempted to explain the situation to him, but he said he was doing something for Lord Ryker. He sent me with these items. Do you want me to work on
him for you?”

No I fucking don’t. I don’t want anyone to touch him, but I have to fucking talk to Derco right fucking, now. Without thanking him, I issue more orders. “Go get Lieutenant Ridomie. Then you are relieved.”

“Yes, sir.” He skitters outta here like he’s going to catch fire.

I'm left with the kid. Stubborn kid. My kid. Now at least I know why he's, so fucking stubborn. *Comes by it naturally.* I start to work on him, cleaning him up, patching him back together, as best I can, ‘till I acquire permission from Derco to heal him proper. With Rykortisol. I'd give it to him now, but no sense in healing him to have him beat again.

It doesn’t take long for Ridomie to get there.

“Major, what the…Oh Ryker.” He clutches at his heart like he’s keeping it from falling outta his chest.

“I know he looks bad, but he’s gonna to be fine. I need you to take care of him — no Rykortisol for the moment.” He knows what I mean — that I have yet to talk to my asshole brother. He nods taking the cloth from me I’d been using. Brigg doesn’t make a sound — he’s passed out — thank fuck.

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“What in hell is going the fuck on?” I storm through the doors, my temper at an all time high, which is saying something.

Two of Derco’s guard’s, reduce to Doberman-like behavior, growling at first then flinching minutely in my direction when I look at them. They don’t move though. Wouldn’t. Not unless I advance on Derco, or he gives the word. My fucking arrogant, brother sits at his desk, the king of the world as always, expecting this meeting.

Probably been waiting—hoping I’d figure it out long before now.

“Hello, Lexington. Problem?” He cocks his solid chin in my direction daring me to say what I have to say. He knows what I'm going to say, but wants me to say it. It's his way of playing a game.

But most important, he wants to see if the knowledge will finally break me. It almost did.

Not because Briggland being my son is bad news (it's the best fucking news I've been given, my life over) but because of what Briggland being my son means.

*She didn't fucking make a baby with your brother. She did it with you, numbskull.* I don't fucking know how, but somehow she did.

That's why my sanity's currently hanging by a fucking thread, and I don’t know that I’m all that sane to begin with. Fuck him. I’m saying it. “Moldevite.”

“Moldevite? No, Brother. I do believe it is more than just Moldevite.” His azure blues tell it all; they darken into slits of pure abjection. Even his smile is what nightmares are made of.

And at the same time, his body lights with joy.

Me? I’m shaking with rage, doing what I can to prevent my hands from rightfully finding their way
around his throat. My brother has much to atone for. Not that it'll ever happen.

“He’s my son.” I don’t know if it’s a statement, or a question. He can fucking figure that out.

“Biologically, yes.”

“You lied to me.”

He shakes his head. “I did not lie to you. You accused me of many a thing, I neither confirmed or denied, just allowed you to go on thinking what you decided to think in the first place. It was always your worst fear, we used it against you.”

I still call that a lie by omission, but I’m never going to win that one with Derco. He’ll disagree and we’ll be here all fucking day arguing semantics. I point out other discrepancies. “But you keep calling him your son. You got him to call you father.” I'll never fucking allow that to continue.

“Of course I did. That is what I was promised by your whore.” I ignore him calling my wife a whore. She is a whore.

“It wasn’t her promise to make. I’m the Ryker between her and I. I decide that shit. He’s my son, and I want him. You already have your Golden Child.” It’s not something I need to think about, he's my son. I want him. I'm fucking embarrassed I didn't figure it out sooner. My body had. It's why I'm so drawn to him. I already knew we shared blood, Ryker blood, I thought it was that, but it's not.

It's because we're father and son and I was too fucking bitter to see it. There's a strong pull, Ryker blood to Ryker blood, but your blood's pull to your Ryker offspring is far stronger than any other relationship. It doesn't always mean good things though.

“That I do.” He taps his lip with his forefinger pretending to think. He doesn’t need to think about nothing, he’s already got this whole chat planned out.

“What do you need him for anyway? He’s got a genetic imperfection, like me.” I don’t want him claiming my son. He’s mine. Mine. Rykers are very possessive with their shit.

“Yes. And yet you have proven extremely useful. You are both still Rykers, still powerful despite this weakness,” he points out, and I can’t argue with that.

“Just cut to the chase, Derco. What do yeh want from me in exchange for him?” I will give him fucking anything. He can have Dessa.

“I would think that would be obvious, I want a clone of your son, without the imperfection. I want a new one, and if he’s better than, he can replace Derek as my heir. When I have one of him, a perfect one, you may keep the defect.”

“You already have his blood. Isn’t that promise enough?”

“But I do not have another Briggland yet. A perfect Briggland.” He stresses again. “He continues to give me the blood I need until my mission is complete, and you can have him back.”

“And if I say no?”

He shrugs. “I will take the blood without your permission, and I will keep him away from you. You know I can. Don’t make me do that, I’d rather not. You know how I like to keep the family together.” He does, as fucking strange as that sounds. It stems from our Ryker history.
“You’ve already been takin’ his blood, I don’t see the harm in yeh takin’ some more.” It's my way of agreeing when I don’t want to. It's not really a yes, or a no, but a 'I'll allow this for now.' While he’s being so agreeable, I move onto other topics I want to know. “Did yeh know, the whole time? Or did Father put yeh up to this?”

He continues to smile his slithery, predatory smile, enjoying every minute of this, knowing what I’m referring to, causing me to wonder if maybe his reasons were simply to harm me.

“I didn’t know the whole time,” he looks at his perfectly manicured hands pretending to be interested in them, pretending he has to think about what he has to say again. “But I knew there must be some reason Father named me as his successor instead of you. After all, technically, your blood is purer than mine. I knew he knew something about you I didn’t. Though I never in my wildest dreams suspected your powers extended to time travel. I didn’t know we were already like her inside. ” He taps his chest.

“Why did you two hide him from me?” Nothing can hide the hurt in my voice, so I let it bleed out.

“As to her motivations? No idea. She wouldn’t tell me, but it worked largely in my favor—what is that ancient saying? Don’t look a gift horse in the mouth? Yes, I believe that’s it.” He waits as if he’s just made his chess move, and he’s now waiting for me to make mine.

I have to ask the question I hope I know the answer to, but want to hear it from him. Derco is a strange creature. Yes he would act to manipulate and deceive you. He’s not the ‘honest’ kind of person, but when asked an outright question, he feels too untouchable to have to lie about it. I know he’ll answer me in true if I ask him outright. “You and Dess. You didn’t fuck, did you?”

“Don’t be crude,” his says. “I had a go with a woman one time. It was sloppy, and dissatisfying to say the least. I much prefer a hard, pert, ass under my hands,” he hisses — he’s fucking imaging it right now.

“You don’t even like to fuck women?”

“Not even a little bit,” he snaps at me exhausted with the whole thing. “In fact, now that I can make people, I see no use for women whatsoever.”

“You know they have uses Derco,” I say to calm him before he becomes enraged. He hates women, but he knows we do need women, even if he would like to think otherwise. He didn’t have the best relationship with his mama and ended up killing her, execution style. He took her blood for safekeeping.

“So tell me, what do you plan to do about it?”

“Not a damn thing.” What can I do? My fists are turning white. Derco has me by the balls. This whole fucking thing is just to mess with my head anyway. Derco likes to play these games and she fucking knows it.

“You see? It’s as I thought. In my defense, I really didn’t try all that hard to hide anything from you. I hoped you’d figure it out. Whatever her reasons, she was desperate enough to come to me, and we all know how she feels about me, well, we all do now.” He smiles viciously. “There’s something you want though, and it seems I am at liberty to give it to you. Go on, ask.”

“No use in askin’ anything from you. Yer not good t’yer word. Like when you said you’d give me, Dess,” I point out. It's still a spot of contention between us, least for me.

“I believe what I said, was that she would remain alive. I did not say I would give her to you.
Besides, that would infringe upon the bargain I made with her,” he says. “Come, now Lexington, you desire something. What is it?” he prods again. He already fucking knows what I want, and he wants to give it to me to soften any hard feelings that may have formed between us in light of this information.

No chance of that happening, but yeah, I do want something and I wouldn't fucking ask if it was just for me, but I will ask for Briggland’s sake. I want him to stop laying his whip to my boy. ’Cept I know Derco likes to hurt him, as much as he likes to hurt me and if he knows just how much I don’t like seeing my son lying there fucking broken, he’ll know what to use against me, to get me to do more shit I don’t want to do freely.

So, I ask it different.

“I want to take over his discipline. I need to,” I keep my voice gruff, and distant from the topic. Insinuating my Ryker heritage is making me need to control him.

“Ah, finally becoming a proper Ryker, are you?” He seems genuinely proud of me.

Inside I want to punch him in the teeth, ‘cause I hate that it’s fucking true. I’m no sadist like Derco, but I am a possessive, controlling Bastard. “Yeah. Guess, so,” I agree reluctantly. Least I know he’ll understand, and respect that.

He nods, knowingly. “You want to see what it feels like, Lex. Having ultimate power, and control over someone. I can understand that — you feel compelled. In fact, you have been for some time. I have watched you two.”

Wait. Is that true? His comment fucking scares me, ‘cause I don’t realize how bad my needs are. I don’t want to be like that, like him, or my father – but I know the Ryker blood runs through me every bit the same it does theirs. With me it’s worse. I've got twice the Ryker blood they do.

It infects me, like a disease. It can grab hold of me… It has in the past. I've worked hard to curb those tendencies, but it’s strong, and maybe I don’t have the control I think I do.

He carries on unaware of the conflict going on inside of me. “I really thought you would figure it out a lot sooner. He looks nothing like me. It’s quite amazing, actually. Amazing how much the two of you are alike. It’s almost as if he were your clone. Derek picked up on it immediately,” he adds, proud. He’d never replace that boy. Us Rykers fall in love, whether we want to, or not. He may not treat him nice all the time, but he loves Derek and is just as possessive of him as any Ryker Father is over their offspring. “He’s not even that much like that little spit-fire you are so in love with. Love really has blinded you.”

Derco does have a few points. What do I have to say for my ignorance? Suppose it's more denial than ignorance. The clues have been there, and I had been noticing things on an unconscious level for a while now. It just seemed im-fucking-possible. It also seemed like something too good to happen to me. The kid I always wanted.

“When do you plan on telling, him?”

“Tell, him?” I squeak. Yeah, I guess someone has to tell him, but fuck, how? Not that I think he’ll be disappointed, it's clear he holds no affection for Derco, but…it's just fucked up.

“Yes, tell him. The boy is smart. He’ll figure it out, just as you, and Derek have.” He watches as my insides twist with discomfort.

“I don’t understand, why tell him you’re his father in the first place just to tell him otherwise
now?"

“I’ve already explained this to you, and you should be able to figure this out well enough on your own.” He shakes his head frustrated. “His Mother gave him to me in exchange for what she wanted—to be kept in confidence between the two of us—like an adoption for lack of a better term. Officially, I am the boy’s father even if I did not sire him.”

None of this sits well with me, I’m sure Derco can see the rage building in my eyes. Not that he’s threatened by it, but he does strive to keep a measure of civility between the two of us. “You are correct in that she did not have leave to do this, you are a Ryker, and the Ryker has final demesne in the happenings of his offspring. Only here we have an unusual situation; A Ryker vs. a Ryker, and seeing as I am the Lord Ryker, I have the authority to make that decision for you.”

If he’s trying to cool my anger he needs to try harder. I’m not pleased that I was lied to, betrayed, then virtually had my son stolen right from under me.

“However, if you are willing to abide by what I want in regards to him, I will return your parental rights, all of them. He will be your son in every way. This will please you, yes?”

His way of forcing me to happily comply.

"It will have to do, won't it?" Not like I'm going to get anything more out of him, unless I use force.

“I don’t care whose son he is, so long as I get one of him. A better one. Maybe several hundred better ones of him…” He drifts off to thinking about all of the possibilities.

“What about what the boy wants? What if he don’t want you makin’ armies outta his blood?”

“He’s a boy. He’ll do what he’s told and he’ll come to see our wisdom in time."

I've heard those words often enough from our own father. And fuck, I don’t like that this had suddenly become a ‘we’ venture, but realize, as long as I don’t try to stop him, I’m assisting him, so I keep my mouth shut.

“Now then, consider your parental rights restored. I shall not deal with the boy anymore, and he will be your sole responsibility, unless he's being particularly unruly. I'd keep him in line if I were you. You can’t have it both ways Lexington, you will have to tell him. As much as it would be fun to watch his reaction, if you leave it for him to figure out, it will not bode well for family relations.” He looks at me pointedly saying without words that I had better make sure it doesn’t get to that point.

This is a fucking pain in my ass—if they'd just told him, and me, the truth in the first place... Story of my fucking life, Derco and Dessa making messes that I have to fucking clean up. “How would you suggest I do it?” I ask on a whim. I haven’t asked Derco for brotherly advice since he’d slept with my, well since I thought he’d slept with my whore of a wife.

Yeah... She’s still a whore.

I still haven’t forgiven him, but he can tend to be insightful on these matters. He’s been a Father for sixteen years, I’ve only been a Father for sixteen minutes. He smiles, thinking we're in rapport, even if we’re the furthest thing from. “We haven't had a family meal, since we brought our dear Briggland home, why don’t we formally tell him, together? Derek and I will help you.”

I’m sorry I asked.
“He’ll hate that. You wanna see the dining room demolished?”

He laughs, fucking happy about all this. That's why even I fear my brother at times; he's so damn unpredictable. “Yes, I know. He’s going to explode passionately like his irrationally charged father no matter how he’s told. I merely suggested it because at least we’ll be together when he receives such important news. It will be something he’ll always remember.” He arches a fine Ryker brow at me, and I have to say, I don’t know that his idea is a bad one.

I do know it’s not a good one either.

“I’ll take it under consideration.” I almost laugh at the thought of what would happen if I told Briggland over evening meal, his daddy wasn’t who he thought he was. Speaking of the kid, I have to get back to him.

He taps his fingers on his desk, contemplating something else. “You’ve got minor problems, Lex,” he tells me half-heartedly. “I’ve got exploding fetuses to deal with.” The words are muttered to himself, and I pretend not to hear him. But I did fucking hear him, and my blood runs cold. Exploding fetuses. They all exploded, but one worked. Somehow, Briggland worked.

Sensing this meeting is coming to a close, Derco snaps out of his thinking and prompts me toward leaving. “Well, if that is all, you should go now. Your son is yours once again, and I will not touch him — as long as you keep him in line that is. Actually, I am relieved to give you this duty. As much as I love handing out a good beating, it was taking far too much of my time. However, he will show me proper respect, or I will be forced to take him in hand, again. Though you’ve never had problems keeping our youth in line, have you? I know I’ve got nothing to worry about.” He smiles a fucking eerie smile. “I do hope I shall get to witness the fireworks with my own eyes. Your son is a wild one. Like you. This is going to be a lot of fun.”

There is a long silent pause between the two of us, in which I glare at him trying to decide between asking and demanding I be allowed to administer some Rykortisol to Brigg.

Turns out I don’t have to ask.

“Spare, me.” He twists his chair back and forth trying to taunt me a little whilst he speaks condescendingly. “I know you want to heal him, and you may, but, he leaves the bracelet on while he heals,” he adds, sealing the wax on the end of a plan well executed.

Asshole. He knows Briggland won’t heal as quick that way. He’ll still suffer some—at least a week and a half in my estimation, but I can do as much about that, as I can about clones getting incinerated. Instead I make decisions. Plans. ‘Cause if it’s one thing Ryker’s are territorial over it’s their kids. I don't fucking like him telling me what to do with my son.

The kid I’ve grown, real fond of.

Damn the Ryker mantra. Damn Ryker code. Damn everything. If he touches my son like this again, I'll enjoy killing him with my bare hands.

Chapter End Notes

I will do my best to post 2 more chapters tonight...at least one more.
The next bit of GUW is LONG, so I have to work on it over the w/e, but least this story is written and can be posted faster!
Exploding Fetuses

Chapter Notes

Sorry I didn't get this up last night. It was a fucking tense nightmare with the Major telling his stories and the way I want it to read. Ugh. So much editing had to happen and I was too tired to do it properly. My characters, I love them, but sometimes they are a pain in my ass!

I will get to comments from last chapter, promise, but a little tied up today (not the fun kind) and won't be able to answer 'till later. I will though! I swear. I love you all, I really do :-)

Also, now we get into some of the Ryker genetics. You'll notice I might use some of the same terms and processes us humans have, b/c lets face it, we're all humans and it's easier for us to understand this way, BUT I don't use genetics in quite the same way as humans do.

Ryker genetics are going to be DIFFERENT from Human, so please don't try to compare the two. It will only frustrate you. Just enjoy and remember that everything here is entirely made up. Or more accurately, Mock's motto of 50% fact, 50% fiction, k?

When I did this in MHR, I got "helpful" little comments from science majors (PS. I'm a graduated Human Science Major too) telling me how I'd got stuff "wrong," or questions asking me how I'd got to my conclusion based on human science, one person telling me they were disgusted b/c it was so unbelievable as compared to human science. To avoid that, I'm mentioning this now so everyone will know: In the case of For You, I used my imagination and made ALL of this up for how the story is supposed to go after years of careful thought, so yes, it is "right." Why? Because it's my world and I said so. They're not humans, they're Rykers. So just have fun, okay? K.

Love Mock

I remember the first time like it was yesterday.

I saw her in the corridor, resting up against the solid metal door sideways. So beautiful. Our kid would be too. She would hear me of course. Even if I was quiet enough. She let me come to her. Waiting. I could sense the smile on her lips, as I came up behind her. I nuzzled my face down into her locks of flame-like hair, right at the back of her neck where I knew she'd tingle. I relished in the scent of my girl — sweet, happiness.

"Hello, darlin,'" I murmured. "Missed yah." She inhaled deep, sighed then turned to face me. I trapped her in my arms and pressed her firmly into my torso, lighting the pain there anew.

"What did he want?" Concern etched those beautiful features, shadowing all the light I usually saw there. I bit my lip not wanting to tell her, but knowing she would find out anyway, I pulled back from her, and lifted my shirt enough for her to see the marks there.
Gifts from my father. Partly for lipping him off — yet again — but mostly for being a genetic defect. She hissed and pulled further from me, her concern transforming to full-fledged furry. “Lexy… why did you—I’m hurting you.” She was talking about the way I pulled her in and against my markings. She didn’t hurt me though, she made me feel alive, and her — specifically her — pressing against my wounded flesh, made me more so. I wanted it.

More alive. More real. She made everythin’ real.

Tears arrested in her eyes. She was trying not to cry for me, knew I didn’t like it, but she was a woman. *Women do that shit — cry. That’s what makes them the most beautiful.* Men don’t like it because it breaks a man’s heart to see his woman cry. A proper man anyway.

“Shhh… Darlin’… I’m fine.” I reached a hand to her hair, smoothed it back, she stood firm keeping her distance though. I hated my father more for that than for the marks themselves. I didn’t mind the pain, so long as she was close to me.

“What were you gonna tell me, Dessa darlin’?” My voice was uncharacteristically soft, and the combination made her watery eyes light up with her special smile. She came just that much closer to me — still not pressing mind — but closer. She looked up at me, happier than the smiling sun and told me, “I’m carrying our babies.”

Knowing this woman was made of stuff stronger than any rock on Cyntripien, I picked her up, and twirled her around. *Yeah I know, I was clique as fuck then, but that’s what love does — makes fucking fools of us all.*

“Why didn’t you tell me sooner, darlin’?” I put her down, feeling like there was no better feeling.

She visibly hesitated for a moment, formulating her answer, but in the end shrugged. “I don’t know.” When she said that, it should have been my first clue, but of course I fucking ignored it. I was too damned happy to fill my head with worry. Dess only said that shit when she did fucking know, and she didn’t want to tell me the fuck why. I always let her keep her secrets

*Found out soon enough though.*

*She lost them. The babies. She’d been carrying twins and I suspect she always knew she’d lose them. Didn’t just lose them though.*

“It was awful, Lex. They exploded.” I had no idea how to console her, so I did what I do best, and got fucking pissed off.

“What the fuck do you mean exploded?”

“The fetuses, they blew up. I felt them hanging on to their lives. I felt them die.”

I wiped at something in my own eyes — most likely a bug or something — and hugged her tight, digging my fingers, hard, into the flames of her hair. “It’ll be okay, darlin’ we’ll try again. We’ll make other babies.”

She nodded — hesitant like — she didn’t believe a fucking word of it. *Little did I know it was ’cause she knew the truth.* Every time we tried, we would fail. The fetuses died, exploded, when they reached the growth stage, before they reached the second trimester.

Twenty times — twenty fails. We were both blessed and cursed all at the same time. It seemed Dess and I had no trouble conceiving babies. Natural pregnancies are rare nowadays, have been a long time. Hardly anyone did it the natural way anymore, not when they had top of the line Ryker
DNA available, to help them make perfect, genetically evolved babies.

In general, couples have trouble conceiving, like their DNA is no longer good enough. Like it's too damaged to make a baby without the help of Ryker DNA.

The couples who still conceive, ended up having two or more children at a time. In fact, more often it was six or seven babies at once. The birth of a singular child is so rare, it almost never happens. When it does, that child is either highly regarded, starting up old whispers of a creator, of a God, or beaten to death.

For a long time, there hasn't been enough people able to have babies, to keep Cyntripien alive, planet-wide. Had to admit, whether it was right, or wrong, Ryker Corp. stepping in was the thing responsible for keeping our species alive. Good intentions are plastered all over it.

But it's a high price.

Ryker Corp. owns Ryker DNA. Once you used Ryker DNA to make your kid, they're owned by Ryker Corp.

Now of course, it seems awfully coincidental for Ryker Corp. to have such a convenient solution to the magic of life being bred out of the population. But take my advice and don’t believe in fucking coincidences.

They may not have started the population decreasing, but they sure as hell keep it going and make it worse.

People want to have babies. Is still embedded into our genetic code that we have to reproduce to continue the survival of our species. Ryker Corp. simply wanted to give them that indulgence.

Ryker replaced God. We all believed in a creator at one time, but many have forgotten about God-like Creator, when the only thing that seems to be creating anything anymore, is Ryker Corp.

Only thing we still can't control is Mother Nature.

Derco still keeps trying to breed her out, but he can't seem to stop her altogether. People can still have babies without Ryker help, but it's far less likely and when Mother Nature strikes back, she strikes like a clever bitch, giving each couple that can still create life an entire crate of babies instead of just the one, with nothing Ryker Corp. can do about it.

'Cept is works in Ryker favor. It keeps what Ryker Corp. is doing, under wraps. Lets the people think that they're the ones defected. Recently, Derco was even revered, getting credit for the ones who were still born naturally. They claimed it was the Ryker DNA making its way through the population that's responsible for any natural births at all.

To most, Derco's a saint. People adore him. Some even name their progeny after him in honor.

The Rykerians Ryker Corp. helps create are top of the line. Intelligent, strong, good-looking, creative, good-natured.

Natbirths aren’t always something to celebrate. They gave people hope at first – maybe the population was coming back— but when the natbirths could not compare to the Ryker genes, they were looked down on. They were blamed for things like crime, and disease. Some stopped having babies on their own without any urging from us Rykers at all. People have become convinced of their genetic inferiority and thank their lucky stars for Ryker DNA.
Yet another reason to have your baby grown for you — don’t take the chance that you could be contributing a delinquent to the universe — raise a perfect child. Have enough Ryker DNA in your DNA and you too could share our superior qualities. Having your own child is widely considered taboo, an embarrassment.

But within all majorities, lie the rebels.

Some truth rings in Ryker Fool hardiness.

Human DNA had spread and evolved on its own around the universe and evolved to create the alien race that now lives on Cyntripien, with nothing ever matching the superior form of genetics that flows through Ryker veins.

Mother Nature created the first Ryker. For whatever reason, we were given super powers and we fucking abused that power. My daddy decided long ago that meant we were destined to reign supreme over our world, and possibly the Galaxy.

Me? What do I think?

Sure, our blood kicks ass. We're superior to every race we’ve ever encountered. There was even a time I thought my family was right. Agreed with them. There are times I still do… Mostly, I don’t know what the fuck to think anymore.

One thing's certain, since I met Dess, my whole world changed and I decided that whatever she thought we should do, I would do.

Dess and I could have a baby. Not only could we, it was expected for Rykers to be born via natbirth. It might be frowned upon within the 'common-folk' population, but not so for a Ryker. We're the creators of all—just what will our superior blood evolve into next?

Dess had no problems conceiving and she did it, twenty damned times.

We almost abandoned our cause, the cause to tear down Ryker Corp. looking for the answers as to why our babies weren’t viable. It was a new problem, and yet another thing bringing us closer together.

I also remember the fucking.

We ended up fucking a lot — one silver lining I suppose. Only problem with fucking is it produced more babies and for us, more exploding fetuses.

Don’t regret the fucking. And that’s what we did: We fucked. It wasn't ordinary love making. It was violent and vicious and we both fucking loved it. Hated it sometimes too, but loved it. Dess and I liked to rut like animals. Nothing gentle about our copulation. Raw and filled with more passion than anyone else ever had a hope of achieving.

Our last pregnancy was another set of twins, the last set I knew about being ours I mean, just before Briggland. They lasted past the second trimester. We were so fucking hopeful.

But then I was called away.

My daddy shipped me off to a planet a couple of universes over. Mostly cause he was sick of looking at me, but also because he liked to punish me randomly, he knew I’d hate it there.

And I did hate it, but only because it kept me away from Oydessa. I would have brought her with
me too, 'cept the work was dangerous. There would have been too much time I’d have to leave her
alone. Normally it wasn’t a worry, but with her pregnant, and the pregnancy actually surviving this
long… We talked about it, and neither of us wanted to chance it.

When I came back, she wasn’t pregnant no more.

She didn’t say a word about it and neither did I having come to expect it by that point. She wasn’t
even mad at me, but I was mad at me—’cause it was all my fault and I was the only one between us
two that knew it. It meant everything to me, having children. I wanted it bad, but my sperm didn't
even fucking work naturally, because of my defect. If we wanted a baby, we were going to have to
go to my daddy and ask him. We were going to have to grow one first, without my malady. For
some reason, it was a thought that never even crossed out minds, something we never wanted to
consider. Things weren't good for us after that. I was too angry and she was just…not there. I
couldn't bring myself to tell her my secret.

When she fucking told me she was with Derco’s child, my whole world collapsed. I hated her and
it. Together they represented the destruction of my heart and concrete proof—more proof — that I
was every bit the failure my daddy always said I was. Not only was I a genetic defect, but to add to
the list, I was a Ryker incapable of reproducing. The first.

To top it off, Decro and Dessa’s baby was just one. One baby. One miraculous little nuisance.

I secretly hoped that baby would die too, that somehow the problem was Dess and not me, so when
it didn’t I grew angrier still. Especially since her having that baby took her away from me
permanently. I fucking miss her. I hate her and I fucking miss her.

I had to face the truth: It was me. Always had been me. I’m the defect, the reason Dess and I
couldn’t have a baby. I hated the world, I hated her, but I hated myself most of all.

Now I know different. Somehow, Dess’d figured it out. Figured out why our babies kept dying, and
she finally made one of them live.

The best one.

Briggland.

My son.

Huh. My son, Briggland.

I like — no — I fucking love the sound of that.

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“Major? What are you doing here? You’re—”

“I can be wherever the fuck I like, whenever the fuck I want. You just remember that, boy.”
Fucking lab rats and their Ryker superiority complexes—these ones only seem to listen to Derco,
and of course this one is a younger clone. The smaller ‘mistakes,’ as Derco calls them, used to be
immediately incinerated, ‘till Derco realized there was another use for them. What they lacked in
physical strength, they made up for in smarts.

He began testing all clones for things other than perfect genes. He sorted them. Adding Mother
Nature to his resume along with, Father time, and God. Used them as the means to his ends.
“Yes, sir,” he says it all nervous-like. Not the confident (and maybe slightly arrogant way), Briggland — my son — always says it. I smile to myself already fucking proud of my perfect progeny. Well perfect besides the fact he got my stupid fucking defect, but that one's on me; Briggland's still perfect to me. I’ll never treat him like my daddy had because of it.

If I'm going to be real honest, I suppose I’d have to admit that I’ve been fucking proud of him since the first time I saw him in action. He’s a good person and I liked what he did that first day on the field even if I wanted to kill him for almost getting himself killed.

I allowed Derco to influence me and despite my best intentions, I had everything planned our in my head of what I was going to do to the little Derco golden child. I was going to beat him often, and make it known how much I hated him for being. But I couldn’t. He reminded me too damn much of myself from the moment I laid eyes on him and I was reminded of my own struggles at his age, pretty similar ones—getting used to knowing who your real daddy was. I sought to help him without even knowing I was doing it.

I gave him Ridomie to protect him and I looked out for him every chance I got. Now I know why. It was his blood, calling to me. His daddy's blood.

“I want to see the fetuses.” I don’t have to specify, which ones — he knows. I'm asking to see the ones made from Briggland's blood.

My son’s blood. I peacock my chest a little bigger — okay, a-fucking-lot bigger.

“I—I can’t show you, Major.” He immediately moves to shield his face and torso from me, knowing my proclivity for smashing first, asking later.

If I do that, I know I’ll kill the kid, and I don’t want to kill him, much as he's annoying the living fuck out of me. I’m a role model now. Have my son to think about. He wouldn't like it if I killed this clone unless I had a good reason to. The feelings of pride bloom bigger in my chest. My son's nothing like Derek.

“Yes, you can, and you will.” I snap it hard, making him think I’ll incinerate him, if he refuses to give me what I want, right fucking now.

“I-i-iff, I c-c-could I would,” he stutters, terrified.

Without a shred of mercy, I glare at him, en-fucking-couraging him to finish. Wisely he does. “They’ve all e-e-exploaded, sir.”

‘Course they did. For the first time at hearing that, I fucking smile. Fucking music to my ears. But that wasn’t what I’d come to find out, since I already knew this bit of information, I need to know something else.

“Any idea why?” I know, but I want to see if he does — if Derco does.

“It’s the growth hormone. It's secreted early, within the first eight weeks of the first trimester. At that point, the rate of secretion of growth hormone, exceeds the rate of myostatin release in the fetus. The fetus’s cells grow too fast, they eventually explode.”

“Can it be fixed?”

The look he's giving me says that he thinks I'm an imbecile for not understanding what comes so easily to him, suddenly finding his confidence as he sees a weakness of mine in comparison to his. It bolsters the tone in his answer. “Yes, sir. Briggland proves that it can be. The same phenomenon
likely happened with him — we just haven’t figured out how to stop it, or…slow it down.”

Good.

They haven’t figured out how to make the fetuses grow, but I know someone that has.

I reach to pat him on the back. He flinches. *Yeah that’s right you little puke, you may be smarter than me, but I can crush you with one hand.* “Keep up the good work,” I tell him with a smile of my own.

*You may be book smart, but I still know something you fucking don’t.*

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I storm passed Ridomie with my syringe of Rykortisol, and pop it into Brigg’s arm. He whimpers, but doesn’t wake. I don't fucking like that he has to struggle healing with that bracelet on. I want to take it the fuck off of him, but that’s the way it’d have to be for now.

Ridomie and I sit in utter silence for a few hours. Him not willing to leave: Me fucking not willing to take my eyes off of Briggland. My fucking son. Shit. I wish he’d fucking wake up; he looks like death warmed over. I card fingers through what he has left of his hair and try not to cry from sheer frustration. Ridomie's been silently crying this whole time. He loves my son. Not sure what I'm going to do about that. It's too fucking dangerous for Ridomie to love him.

“Why isn’t he healing? It should be faster than this.” Ridomie’s passed the state of regular worrying into bad worrying. I consider telling him why for a moment, but then decide against it. It's best for now if no one knows his weakness. Too many of the wrong people know already.

Besides, I'm a Ryker. My word is law to him. I don’t have to tell him shit, so I pull that card. “He’s gonna be fine, but he’s gonna take longer to heal this time.” In other words, I'm not fucking telling you, so stop fucking asking.

Ridomie must be worried, since he chooses not to fucking listen. “Why? What’s wrong with him Major?”

I set my eyes to stun, and give him the look clones don’t want to get from a Ryker. He gets my meaning real quick, and looks down at the bed. “Sorry, sir.”

“I know you’re worried about him. He will be fine.” That’s as kind as I get. I respect the kid. He’s a hard worker, even if he’s entirely too lippy, he has a heart. There’s always been something different about Ridomie I’ve never been able to put my finger on. He's like everyone else, but not like everyone else. He's the smallest amount different. So small, no one would ever notice unless you spent enough time around him, like I do. Even then, it's more of a subconscious noticing, rather than something you can blatantly 'see.'

I noticed it from the start, when he was just a little tyke. He’s of the first batch of experimental clones we had *raised* by the Mothers; I noticed something shiny coming off of him. Whatever it was compelled to name the kid. He had a different name when I first met him. All the kids called him Kay, the name he gave himself, but it didn’t suit. I decided to change it.

Hey, I am a Ryker; we can do that shit.

Kay isn’t a name anyway; it’s a letter. He deserved something far better, than to be named a letter like he was just another number, like nobody loved him. Clones don’t get named, not important enough, which is why they were always coming up with stupid shit for themselves, or each other.
They got a last name only, which denoted the womb, they were from. There are several wombs in each G-batch, or Genetic Batch.

There are anywhere from forty to one hundred wombs in each G-batch and two to six clones per womb. Clones from the same womb are genetically identical, but epigenetically different. The most common number per womb is four. ‘Twins’ don’t happen often either, but when they do, they tend to stick together for a reason I’ve never figured out. The others don’t. Three, four, five, six…they spread off into their G-batches. Sometimes, they’re even raised by different Mothers. Not twins though, even the Mothers seem to know not to separate them. But regardless, if you’re a clone from the same womb you’re true brothers, blood brothers. Because I know quite a bit about clone sub-culture (because I pay attention) I know that those not from the same womb, but from the same G-batch still consider each other brothers of sorts. Brothers in Arms. A knew phenomenon amongst the raised. I’ve seen this across different G-batches too though, so I’ve gathered that ‘Brothers in Arms’ is not exclusive to particular G-batches, but amongst all of the raised.

Like with the Rykerian population at large, a singular clone birth is extremely rare. It hardly ever happens, but it happens.

Ridomie has no true brothers. He’s the first clone born of one cell, in a hundred years. He's the first single birth from those who were raised. Usually the cell in the womb splits resulting in several identical fetuses. Not Ridomie. Nothing would split from him. He kept all the energy for himself.

He should have been honored to have a name picked for him, ‘specially ‘cause it was me doing the picking, but he didn’t and I know he holds it against me to this day. I knew he hated the name I chose for him. Originally he completely ignored my directive that his name be changed. Within the context of the other clones, everyone still referred to him as Kay. I told him that he was to go by his legal name, and nothing else, forgetting that Ridomie is part of his legal name. Clones still get a file drawn up for them, more for keeping track of them for scientific reasons. They get to register the name they picked for themselves along with their surname, since many clones have the same surname (same womb) and we need a way to distinguish on file. Didn’t take long for it to spread that ‘Kay’ was going by his last name now as only he could, which is why it didn’t cross my mind when I’d issued the order. Many clones have the same last name, coming from the same wombs, but not Ridomie.

Had to give it to the kid for being clever like that, not to mention the balls that took. It wasn’t everyday a clone showed such blatant defiance to a Ryker like that.

Normally I’d have been pissed, but I found it too, heartening. In the darkness that was Ryker Corp., it was nice to see someone standing up for himself. In the land where everyone was the same, it was like…like an anthem. Individuality.

I let it slide, and even began calling him Ridomie. I save his special name for two times. When he pisses me off, and contrarily, when he does something really impressive. Either way, it’s for times of strong emotion.

“I will stay with him, sir, if you have other things you need to do.”

Yeah, I'm sure he would like to have alone time with him. I know what clones like to get up to with one another, not that I think he'll do that now, with Briggland all half beat to death. I'm just thinking about these kinds of things a little more carefully, now that I know of my more intimate genetic relationship to the boy. I don’t know what I think of the growing love I see between the two of them. I have reservations that have to do nothing whatsoever with what I think of clones, more with what my brother thinks of clones. I can only hope my son ends up with a person like Ridomie,
but it’s a bad idea to allow it to go too far for other reasons. *More dangerous reasons than broken hearts.*

Derco approves of the way Derek uses the clones for his sexual needs, and he would also allow that for Briggland.

*But I know my Briggland ain’t like Derek.* I’m not sure Derek loves anything, but his daddy. He didn’t even love his own mama; had her executed like his father did, only Derek was just a little thing. Seems worse somehow.

Don’t know what my son feels for Ridomie, but I know he’s the kind to fall hard – like I did for his mama. And if he's anything like me, and he is, he’ll wear his heart on his sleeve. Derco will have him figured out, and he won’t hesitate to kill Ridomie if he thinks Brigg is too romantically involved with him. Rykers are not allowed to fall in love with clones. Clones are not to fall in love with Rykers.

Above all, Brigg doesn’t need another weakness. The one is enough already; I would know.

I look down at my broken son before I shake my head at Ridomie. “I do need to leave, but I’m gonna stay for a bit. And you better be fucking careful, Saige Ridomie.” I use his full name to get his attention. “For all intents and purposes, I’ve claimed you.” Even in hindsight, that was a good fucking move I can thank my son for. "I need to see you start actin’ like I have.” Speaking of which… “As a matter of fact, meet me in my quarters at curfew.” No, I’m not going to have to beat him again, least not tonight, but it would be good to have him be seen going to and coming from my quarters more often.

He swallows. "Yes, sir."

I'll have to leave my son at some point though, there’s someone I have to find. I promised Briggland I'd find her for him and I've been gearing up to do it, even half-heartedly began my hunt for him, but I just don’t want to be anywhere fucking near her. I might kill her. I know she'll let me —’cause it's the only way anyone can kill her, if she fucking lets them.

But now, I've got to find her whether I want to or not; nothing to do with the promise I made my son. Somehow, I'm going to have to fucking face her.

Because of my abilities, time seems endless. Rykers live a long time, so time is not something we worry about.

This is a first for me, feeling like the world is about to close in on us. All of us. It feels like time's coming faster, a head long rush like the waves of the open sea. Dess. She’s got answers, she's the only one with the answers we need.

I need them now. Yesterday. It might already be too late.
Here is finally, the 3rd chapter of the 3 I promised. Sorry, ol' Mock's been a busy bee!

This chapter is almost 8K though, that's almost like 3 chapters right there, since the ones I usually put out for this story are about 3K a piece. Hopefully that makes up for my tardiness.

Early announcement: Mock is going for surgery in three days. Don't worry, nothing death defying, but this means writing delays. The GOOD news, I have to take 3 weeks off work and I'll be a full fledged writing machine for that time!

Before I go under the knife, I'll do my best to have the next chapter of GUW up, but have been "Samming" it up, making food for the time I'll be out of commission, since I won't be able to stand for long periods of time (so cooking's out too for awhile) and Mr. Mock cannot cook to save his life! I have to pre-make stuff he can warm up for me. So that's what I'm doing today.

Thanks again for all your support for this story, it's ever so appreciated!

I wake up thinking I’m in the middle of an Earthquake, but then I remember I’m no longer on Earth. It’s not an Earthquake, it’s just Ridomie shaking the fuck out of me. “Ryker, you’ve got to get up now. The Major says you’ve gotta be in the Mess Hall for morning meal,” he’s whispering urgently. What the fuck's he whispering, for?

Mess Hall. Morning meal. I catalogue the words he’s said; it all comes flying back to me, where I am, who I am. I sit up quickly, too fucking quickly. “Fuck Ridomie. Why does it feel like I’ve been hit by a fucking truck?” I put my hand to my head, to stop the room spinning. Is this what 'drunk' feels like?

He looks at me confused. “Truck?”

Yeah, they don't use ‘trucks’ here. “Ummm, Earth expression,” I shrug not feeling up to explaining Earth shit. Earth is the past for me, literally. I’ll never be going back there, and I just want to forget it.

He moves on. “Don’t you remember? Yesterday? Your father?”

“Oh, yeah. Shit.” He was the fucking truck. I look at my wrist to make sure the bracelet is firmly in place, then down at my body to see that I am somehow already dressed in my Ryker school uniform. Ridomie must have dressed me when I was out; thank fuck. That would have been torture.

Ridomie looks at me funny again, looks at the bracelet then back to me asking me with his eyes what the fuck’s going on.

I make the snap decision not to tell him. I don’t want him to worry about me, and I don’t want him taking it easy on me in practice. I need all the practice I can get, now more than ever. I have to
build some more strength, *real strength* now that I have to wear this fucking bracelet. I can't solely rely on my powers anymore, but – and I hate fucking saying this—I'm a Ryker. With that comes particular responsibilities, whether I want them or not. The bracelet doesn't change that, just makes my life a shi**load harder.

“Are you okay?” he asks instead. Ridomie's fucking smart. He knows there’s something going on, but he's treating me like glass today. He’s beyond worried, and going to turn into 'Mother Hen Ridomie.' Fuck.

“Yeah. Bit dizzy, everything fucking hurts, but I’m fine.” I know I'm dizzy because of the fucking Moldevite.

“We gave you some Rykortisol, but it doesn’t seem to be working, as well as it's supposed to.” Looks like my plan not to concern him isn't going to work too fucking well either. He looks concerned. Almost tell him the reason, but his statement tells me something, the Major hadn’t told him either—about the Moldevite I mean, and I want to find out why before I say anything in case it’s important. See? I can fucking learn. The Major usually does shit like that for reasons. I'd also like the find out the reason the Major knows about Moldevite, why my father does and why no one else seems to fucking know.

Instead of thinking up a lie, I simply don’t respond. It's better that way. He already knows something's up. Lying won’t convince him anyway and would only serve to piss him off. I attempt to move again, but it hurts like fucking hell. I’ve never been in this much pain, not even since I’ve been here, and that’s saying something. “Fuck!” I scream, frustrated as I move each leg slowly, and painfully to the side of the bed.

“Here, let me help you, Ryker.”

Normally I'd fake bravado, but I really do fucking need his help. In fact, I don’t know that his help will be enough. I might even need the Major.

Speaking of. “Where’s the Major?” I ask as he tries to put his arm underneath me only to get a scream in his ear.

“Fuck, I’m sorry!” he says like I didn’t just scream in his ear.

*Holy, shit, Ridomie just fucking swore.* Maybe I’m dying. I try to make light of the situation. “I’m the one screaming in your ear, Rye.”

“Yeah… But… Ryker you look like hell.” His eyes are glossed over, he’s fighting back tears, and he still hasn’t answered my question about the Major.

“Go get the Major, Ridomie. You shouldn’t have to be subjected to this.” I wave my hand over my body. “The Major is immune to my screams.” I try, again, to make light of this fucked up situation.

He stares at me a long while, like he doesn’t know how to tell me, and then he just fucking tells me anyway, as I sit, breathing heavy, still trying to catch my breath from that small bit of movement. “I… I’m all you got right now, Ryker. The Major was specific. He said he couldn’t be here, but that you were to come down to morning meal.”

“Well, fuck that. How about I don’t go down to morning meal, and he comes up to find me?” I threaten, all pomp, no circumstance. I couldn’t fight a fruit fly right now the mess I am.

He shakes his head. “He said it was important you go down. Lord Ryker will want you there.”
“Oh, well if fucking Lord Ryker wants me there, let me get right the fuck on that.” I lace that one with as much sarcasm as I can, and even though I know it will hurt like a bitch, I swing my legs back on the bed, and flop down, just like ripping off a Band-Aid.

And let out a piercing fucking scream.

His concern stays, but is mixed with some anger now due to my lack of cooperation. He speaks ever so carefully, trying to hold onto his slipping patience, jaw tight, so he won’t let loose the vitriol he wants to on me, saying like one would to a child, “the Major won’t come get you Ryker, he’s not here, but he did say if you weren’t going to cooperate, I should go get Lord Ryker. Is that what you want me to do?”

Fuck, no I don’t.

I may have been a cocky bastard about it a moment ago, but the reality is, Derco has finally succeeded in striking fear into me. I’m not planning on crossing him, or angering him anytime soon. We are still talking about me here, I’ve no doubt I’ll piss off my dear father again, but right now seems a good time to lay off. “Fuck, fine.” Now of course I’m going to have to start from scratch. Getting off the bed I mean.

“Why don’t we just do this quickly? Once you're up—"

“Yeah, yeah, just grab my arms and pull.”

He does, a little faster than I thought he would, but he gets me up. And I fucking scream again.

But at least I’m up even if ’up' means me leaning against him. “Hmmm… You smell good, Rye. What is that?” He turns his head to look at me, which puts his eyes very, very close to mine, and I can see something there. Something other than concern, and other than anger. Ridomie really does fucking love me.

“Ryker, that’s, inappropriate.”

“Huh?” Inappropriate? Does he forget spanking my ass? How fucking inappropriate was that? I want to push him away, and I would, but as it is, I have to use him to stay upright. We end up in a short-lived staring contest, probably because he feels sorry for me being beaten and all.

“It’s probably the soap we use in the lockers,” he goes with off handedly.

No it’s fucking not. It isn’t. It’s the smell of Ridomie. I know the smell of that God awful soap, I’ve used it after practice many times. Ridomie smells like rich, spicy cologne. I enjoy his scent, nuzzling into him anyway, no matter how 'inappropriate' he thinks I am. He lets me for a moment, before he turns his head away and begins helping me, step by painful step, to the door. “There we go…easy does it…”

I groan. “This is going to take forever. Fuck!”

“We’ll make it,” he promises me with hard, grey eyes, resolved.

We both end up right. We do make it, and it does take for-fucking-ever.

When we get to the mess hall, everyone gives us a quick look, but all know better than to stare for too long. Especially since my eyes still work, and I can set a glare on them they don’t want to get from a Ryker, even if it’s just me—the lowest Ryker on Ryker totem pole. Sure there's been no announcement about it, but I feel like they know.
There's a small part of me that worried I'd lose the respect I've earned from them over this (because I'm sure news of this has already spread wildly), but it looks like it doesn't matter. If anything, it probably increases their fear of Rykers more. If Rykers are willing to beat their own, so viciously, clones don't have a fucking chance, best not to poke at one.

Ridomie helps me to our usual seats, and I immediately begin scanning the room looking to see where the Major is. “You won’t find him. He said he had to go somewhere. That it was important.” Ridomie always fucking knows what I’m up to.

“Where? When will he be back?” I need him.

He shrugs at me; sorry he can’t give the answers I want, and still fucking looking at me like I’m about to keel over. Should have known the Major wouldn’t tell him. “You all right here for a sec? I’m going to get us some food.”

“Yeah, I’ll be fine,” I tell him slightly irritated. I hate being an invalid, and I hate being treated as one even more. I look around some more while he’s gone trying to look for some clue, or some sign as to why the Major has suddenly disappeared, and where he went. I don’t know why I think I’m going to find it in the Mess Hall. Predictably, I don’t find anything. Ridomie returns quick though, and I’m grateful. It hurts to hold myself up. I need him to lean into.

“Poor, broken Ryker,” he coos at me as I lean in against him. I’m getting tired again already. I’m weak, and the Moldevite’s getting to me, making me sleepy. I close my eyes as he strokes my Ryker hair. I begin drifting back to dreamland, but he shakes me awake again, gentle this time. “Ryker, you have to eat something. Make you strong.”

I nod, but don’t open my eyes, allowing him to spoon food into my mouth for me. I chew at his insistence only. The day carries on like that, Ridomie, helping me to class, and me leaning on him. The classes we have today are large, three to five hundred clones large. We’re able to sit way in the back where I can rest against him without drawing too much attention. Considering the more than perfect eyesight of our ‘Profs,’ they can still see us, and we them with clarity, but none of them say anything to me. I know they had to have seen me leaning against, Rye, but they either turn a blind eye pretending not to notice, or look just as concerned for me. I’m sure it’s behavior even the Major wouldn’t condone.

I’m not excused from any classes, except practice, which the Major isn’t at either. In fact, it’s Ridomie who's been left in charge of practice. I opt to stay for it and watch. Though don’t think Ridomie would have let me go anywhere if I asked. He’s keeping me in his sights. I have a feeling that has to do both with the Major’s orders, and the strangely building, something, between the two of us.

Even if I wanted to participate, which I do, it’s just not going to happen today. Just sitting, and watching hurts.

One relief, Derek's nowhere to be seen. I wonder if our father has healed him, and is currently feeding him candy, and letting him ride ponies under a rainbow? Or if he's been given the courtesy of being allowed to stay in bed while he heals?

I figure Derco would have healed him... Only maybe he won’t even heal his beloved golden child, if he’s trying to prove a point. It suddenly occurs to me that Derek doesn’t have a Ridomie to drag him around from class to class. That thought makes me smile. He fucking deserves it. I felt sorry for the kid once, won't make that mistake again.

By the end of the day I’m, so exhausted, I let Ridomie carry me back to my room without a single
word of protest. He slings me over his shoulder, fireman style, and makes the insanely long trek back to my quarters quickly by running (least it feels insanely long today). “Sleep Ryker. I’m going to get you some food,” he tells me laying me down on my bed, and wiping sweat drenched hair out of my face. And I do, conking out soon as I close my eyes.

By the next day, the Rykortisol stops working, and Ridomie has that worried look in his eyes telling me, that before the Major fucked off to wherever it was he fucked off to, he had not planned for this eventuality. Ridomie doesn’t say so with words, but I still fucking know it.

Not quite knowing what to do, we carry on as we did the day before. I made it through yesterday; theory says I should make it through today too, right?

I do, but I’m vomiting by the time we make it back to my room after evening meal, even though I spent most of the day asleep on Ridomie. Thank whatever deity they do here (probably a Ryker) on this fucked up planet, that my father doesn’t seem to be anywhere in sight, and neither is Derek (still). It’s hard to say what they’ll do to me if they see me—a Ryker—leaning on, and full out depending a clone.

I’m sure they’ll hear about it, and then I will too, but hopefully when I’m at least able to stand on my own two feet and when the Major’s back to deal with it.

Ridomie helps me direct the vomit into a bucket, cleans me up, and gives me some water. I point blank him again. We need the Major. I know other than be my nursemaid, Ridomie can’t do anything else. The feelings of helplessness are getting to him and he’s getting pissed off. Not at me (for once), but that doesn’t matter. The calm, cool, veneer he’s kept is going to crack soon. The pain is beginning to get to me. It’s driving me insane.

“I’m going to get the medic,” he finally decides out of the fucking blue.

“No. Fuck that. You go ask for a medic, Derco will find out, then he’ll be here on my case. I doubt he wants me to have that kind of help and I don’t want to see him. Worse, he could decide he doesn’t want you helping me to punish me more. I can’t lose you. I need you here, Rye;” I plead using my Ryker eyes, the ones I know he can’t resist, even if he claims they have no affect on him.

Ridomie knows I’m right. The Major may have put him on ‘Ryker duty’, but my father can overrule him. “What are we going to do then, Ryker? You’re in so much pain; I can’t take it anymore.” His eyes are red, red enough, you’d think he was the one in pain, and maybe he is, of a different sort.

I’m coming to realize just how much Ridomie cares for me. When I hurt, so does he. Fuck. I wish he didn’t and I’m glad he does. “I don’t know.” I shake my head too fucking burned out from the Moldevite to think straight. “I just… Need some fucking sleep.” And something to distract me from the pain. I’ll never convince Ridomie to pay attention to my cock in the state I’m in, but I am thinking about it. My hormones never take a sick day. I roll over and close my eyes, but it’s more like just squeezing them shut, in an attempt to block out the pain—yeah, like not seeing gets rid of pain, I know. It doesn’t do shit and I suffer for a few moments, ‘till I feel the bed depress behind me.

Even though I probably reek of puke, and look like shit, Ridomie crawls onto the bed, carefully, and lays his body close to mine. His chest is right up against my tender back, the warm, good feelings outweigh the pain it causes. Wouldn’t this be defined as fucking inappropriate? I want to ask him, I’m about to ask him, but he starts pulling his hand through my hair, slow and gentle, over and over again, and I can’t seem to find it the fuck in me to say that, just to prove a fucking point. He recognized that I need some affection, and now he’s giving it. There’s no way I’m saying
anything to stop him.

Have I said how fucking glad I am for Ridomie? I am. Maybe I'll ask the Major if I can have a couple more Ridomies for my birthday. One to cuddle me, one to get me food and another to work on my cock. Maybe the other two won't fucking cockblock so damn much. Wait. Scratch that. What if they're all cockblocking mother fuckers? Forget it. I think I'm content with just one Ridomie. My Ridomie.

Mercifully, I fall asleep, but when I wake up in the night, Ridomie’s still awake stroking my hair. He won’t go to sleep. Out right refuses. He says the Major gave him the job of protecting me while I’m weak, and he takes that job very seriously – he won't fucking sleep.

I know he’s able to go days without it. We all (Rykers and clones alike) are when we’re healthy and depending on our physical level of exhaustion. Practice tires us out, greatly, enough that most of us end up wanting at least a few hours at night, every night. Still we can manage without it.

Rye’s been at least two nights with no sleep, practicing each day—leading practice each day—and looking and worrying after me. I know he must be beat, but he’s relentless, concerned about every noise I make. I ask him just to close his eyes for an hour, trying to convince him that we’ll be okay up here in my room (neither Derco or Derek have ever come up here), but he doesn’t think, so, and he won’t fucking listen to me. “I thought I was the fucking Ryker?” I say with no fire behind it. I’m just teasing him of course, and this time he knows it. Fucking finally.

“Shhh… Go back to sleep, Ryker,” he emphasizes my name mockingly. “Sleep’s all we have right now to get you better.”

“I don’t know if I can sleep anymore.” My eyes are still closed, but only ‘cause they hurt; my mind is wide-awake, thinking about things. "Play with my dick."

"Ryker," he growls. Guess that's a no go. “What’s your pain like?” His voice is gentle with a touch of hope that the sleep has done me some good, 'specially if I'm asking for sex stuff.

I consider lying to him, but he’ll find out in a few hours when we have to go to class anyway then he’ll be pissed at me, so I tell him the truth. “It’s still bad. I wish…” I wish I could have more fucking Rykortisol is what I wish.

“Yeah,” he urges me, continuing to card his fingers through my hair the way he knows I like.

“Wait a fucking minute…” An idea sprouts, and in my pain induced haze, well I wish I’d fucking thought of it sooner. I open my eyes. “Rykortisol,” I say simply, smiling like fucking sunshine.

“Rykortisol, Ryker, we can’t.” He’s panicked at my idea, he clearly thinks is harebrained. I have an argument for him.

“Can’t? Why? Did my father specify how much I could have?” It all makes sense now, why the Major estimated my recovery time to a week. He didn’t say anything not wanting to insult our intelligence; we could figure it out ourselves. He needs me to figure stuff out myself. Needs me to think like he does.

Who am I kidding? The Major doesn’t worry about insulting anyone's intelligence. This was probably a test. One we’d almost fucking failed.

I can picture Ridomie processing what I said in his mind the way he does. His eyes looking upward as if the answer would be plastered somewhere above him. He thinks on it for a few painstakingly slow minutes before answering. “Well… I’m not sure. The Major gave you the one shot, said the
Rykortisol wasn’t going to work as well this time. Stayed for a few hours, then left after making me promise I wouldn’t let anything happen to you while he was gone.”

“That’s good enough for me.” I attempt to sit up –’cause if he’s not going to go get it then I fucking am. Ridomie Stops me.

“I don’t think, so Ryker. You’re not going anywhere. I’ll go get it. Stay.” His tone is both incredulous that I would even think to get up, and firm in a way I really fucking like. Not being in any position to resist him, I gladly stay put.

The Major keeps an extra syringe in the drawer of my bath for just such occasions, and I hope he’s restocked it since the last time he had to use it, which was not all that long ago.

“Last, one.” Ridomie comes back smiling, syringe in hand. He applies it in a much gentler fashion than the Major does. The Major always fucking shoves it in my arm like I’m a God Damned pincushion.

When it hits my veins, it’s like sweet mercy. He returns to his spot on the bed, and begins running his hands through my hair again allowing the Rykortisol to its work. It doesn’t work like it usually does, that’s for sure. Fucking Moldevite. But it’s finally enough of a dose to take the edge off. After a couple of hours I can breathe properly again. “Thanks, Rye…feels a lot better. Fuck…”

I can tell he’s smiling behind me, and breathing easier too. He remains quiet, as he continues with my hair. I rake back over the past couple days and forward to the days to come. Life here’s going to be fucking hard. Thankfully I’ll have Ridomie to help me.

“Fuck, Ridomie,” I breathe. “I don’t know what I’d do without you.”

He laughs softly from behind me. “Silly Ryker. You’ll never have to find out.”

Huh. We both know his promise isn’t something he can really promise. With the fucking incinerator and the way Derek keeps threatening us, Ridomie might not have a choice, but to leave me. Still, he said it anyway and it’s the most optimistic I’ve ever fucking heard Ridomie. It's fucking music to my ears. I'm a fairly optimistic guy even with the shitty life (optimistic doesn't mean I don't call a spade a spade) I've lived. This place kills souls and mine is already starting to suffer the effects of this place. But with Ridomie saying stuff like that, it's like hope rising from the rubble.

A fist punching through the dirt, of a soul long buried and if that can fucking happen, anything can fucking happen.

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After a small argument, which I win, Ridomie acquires me some more Rykortisol. It's not too hard to come by. They keep it stocked in first aid kits around here like Band-Aids. Ridomie’s just a little hesitant is all. Unsure how much he’s allowed to give me despite the fact that I’m positive I can have as much as I need. It doesn’t take much today to bend him to my will. He’s putty in my hands. I’m still a beaten, broken Ryker doll, and have no qualms giving him enough sad looks to manipulate him into doing whatever I want. I wonder if I can squeak a hand job out of him. I’m injured, not dead and being, so close to him all this time is making my cock ache. I don't try.

The third day is tough, but not near what the first and second had been. By the fourth day, and five syringes of Rykortisol, I’m finally beginning to feel better. I’m still not a hundred percent, but enough to have Ridomie clear me for practice. Reluctantly. Very reluctantly. He wouldn’t if he
didn’t feel he absolutely had to, but we both agreed getting back to life as usual – well as is usual here – would be our best move. Things have been eerily quiet from the top; we don’t want to wave any red flags.

Practice is fucking disheartening. Everyone knows by now what my father did to me, so they all take it easy on me and it's still tough. Doable, but tough. Ridomie notices, but at least, at this point, I can still pass it off as being weak from the beating of the century even though I know it's the Moldevite slowing me down. I'm used to not having to work all that hard during practice, but now I really have to rely on skill which I've got little of. I'm actually surprised at the amount of strength I still have against these clones. Still stronger than they are, but the gap is far smaller and my stamina sucks. I just barely make it to the end; I don't get out of my first practice back, without puking my guts out, but if I was able to complete a full practice, I am a fuck load better.

At that point, I stop taking Rykortisol. I don’t want my father to figure out what I’ve done, even if I’m fairly sure I’ve kept within the ‘rules’.

Or worse. I don’t want him to think I removed the bracelet. I know he’ll keep his promise to make me sorry, and I know now he can do it. At least I don’t have to lean on Ridomie just to stay upright anymore, but we remain very close as the rest of the week passes, something having changed between us.

He checks on me often. In class he looks into my eyes, asking wordlessly if I’m okay. I give a tight nod, so as not to draw too much attention to tell him that yes, I'm fine.

In the Mess Hall, he keeps his hand on my thigh, under the table, permanently, now. Only unlike before, it’s a protective gesture. Like he’s ready to catch me should I suddenly keel over. Make no mistake, the possessiveness in the gesture is clear – I see it for what it was in the first place: The Major may have claimed Ridomie, but Ridomie’s claimed me.

He’s become even more concerned for me than he had been. He still won’t allow me to put my own plate together in the Mess Hall, and when I try to protest, he gives me that look, the one I can’t help, but heed. I know I’m ‘the Ryker,’ but it doesn’t matter. There’s something about him, something that demands authority whether he knows it or not. It’s just a part of him; how's he's made. I know he isn’t trying to be this way, especially with me, he just is. He would have made an excellent Ryker. Better than me any day.

Derek returns to classes looking as polished as ever. The only change, he ignores me completely. I almost miss his cheesy insults, puns and scathing looks.

How long will this fucking last?

My father walks into the mess hall (something he's never done since I've been here) on the morning of the seventh day and I shiver, not even able to look up at him, but I do stand at attention for him automatically. I hope he’ll walk by me, but of course he doesn't. Has he found out about the way Ridomie's been helping me this past week? I hope to fuck he isn't here to incinerate him, so just in case, I make sure I'm on my best behavior, careful to do the few things I know he'll like. One of those things is to fear him and I fucking do. I'm scared every fucking day of what he'll do to Ridomie. He can sense the fear leaking off of me, and it pleases him.

Huh. For once I’ve fucking pleased him.

I look up just enough to see his face. He smiles his cruel crocodile smile, the one that carries up to his eyes, but only forms a line across his lips. "Good morning, son," he says. It sounds like he's mocking me.
"Good morning, Father."

He smiles wider like he's having fun. Man, would I like to fucking punch him. Again. "I'll take that
to mean you and Uncle Lex haven't talked yet. I've been away."

What the fuck is he talking about? And he's been away? That's fucking information I would have
liked to have known. "Is there something we are supposed to talk about, sir?"

"Oh no. I don't want to ruin the surprise. I'll let him tell you."

I can feel Ridomie beside me remaining calm even though I'm sure he'd like to have his own
conversation with Derco. One that would end in the other's death. To be honest, I'm not sure which
one anymore. I've never seen Derco fight, but I have Rye many times. He's fucking strong and I'm
fairly sure he can even beat me now with this fucking Moldevite bracelet. I'm only fairly sure,
because he still won't use his full strength on me during practice, which is a helluva lot harder
when it feels like I'm moving through fucking water all the time. It has become easier than the first
day Rye cleared me for practice, which is hopeful, but fighting's harder and I've been beaten out by
a few clones now that they're more comfortable to use more force, thankfully ones from Ridomie's
G-batch, who don't say anything, but do give Ridomie concerned looks like they actually care
about me.

I cringe when I feel my father's hand reach out to touch my chin and I don't dare stop him. Using
his thumb and pointer finger, he moves my head, so my eyes look into his. We share a look and I
decipher he's evermore pleased with me and my submissive behavior toward him. I have to keep
reminding myself it's just a battle I'm losing to win the war. He leans forward and presses a kiss to
my forehead and I do my best not to fucking vomit. I feel the wetness of his soft lips and I'm going
to have to take like six showers to remove that kind of shit from my skin. "Thank you for obeying
me Briggland," he says holding my eyes a little longer with his stare. He's also referring to me
wearing the fucking bracelet he gave me. Even he doesn't want anyone knowing about it. Guess it's
some kind of dirty, Ryker secret. "You see? We can get a long. I expect us all to get along."

That's when I finally do figure something out about him, the most unpredictable person I've ever
met. He really fucking does have some kind of odd family loyalty. Something scratches at my
brain, something from Ryker Brainwashing Academy, but my head's still too foggy from the
Moldevite to bring that thought to the surface.

"Of course, sir." *Fuck off dickhead.*

"Good boy. But enough pleasantries, I come with purpose. Something I want to do myself, so that
it's official and probably better to do with an audience."

There isn't much of an 'audience' around. Most of the clones in the mess hall have suspiciously
disappeared. It's not much of a mystery. If I'd know Derco was coming, I would have disappeared
too. He pulls out a gleaming pair of shears that are so large, you know it's just his way of being
dramatic. But I know what he's going to do with those and a pit forms in my gut. I shake my head.
"Please don't."

It's all so stupid. I really don't care about having status, but somehow knowing I'm going to lose
more hair length devastates me. I feel the shame of it, the restriction of it. And fuck, I love my
fucking hair. It's something that's mine. Something I've always prized. I hated when the Major had
it hacked, but at least he'd left me with length. Somehow I know Derco's about to strip me of a lot
of it, more than he has to for it to be an acceptable amount shorter than Derek's.

He grabs the longest section of it anyway, ignoring my plea like I never said it and takes one big
fucking snip. My hair's not that much longer than Ridomie's now. Derco hands me the strip of hair, which I take, dumbly. "You like clones so much, I thought this would make you happy, now you're that much more like them," he says cruelly. "Continue to behave yourself and maybe we can renegotiate your family status. Continue to displease me and I'll have you shaved bald. Do you understand me?"

"Yes, Father," I say distantly, looking at my Ryker hair, which is now in my hand. I think I'd rather be beat than this.

"Good. Don't worry. You show promise. You'll make a great Ryker, I'm sure, once you learn your place. Just like your uncle did." He smiles a half sneer. "Second thought, I'll take that, no use in perfectly good DNA going to waste." He takes my hair from me then walks out the other side of the Mess Hall, carrying through.

What the fuck? He stop by just to do that? I fucking shiver. Once he’s passed through, my bravado comes pounding back, and I glare after him intent on murdering him someday. Good little Ryker my ass. I’m so focused on killing him with my eyes, I fail to notice who approaches us, until I hear the voice of the man I’d been looking for all week. Without missing a beat, I turn my glare around, and set it on him instead.

“Move, soldier, you're coming with me.” He's not worried about me being pissed off at him and I'm not worried about his 'orders.' Instead of obeying him, I take a moment to appraise him.

He doesn’t look right, I’m not even sure it’s him. His voice has the same southern cantor, which defines him, but it sure doesn’t sound like the Major. His voice is all gravelly, and muddled — like someone who's been crying. But I know the Major doesn’t cry—doesn't know the meaning of the word cry. Least my mind can’t reconcile the thought. A pit of worry grows in my stomach. What happened to him? “Major?” I ask then look to Ridomie, who is now the only one at the table with me—for the answer. The others have mysteriously scattered. I guess Ridomie is the only one with balls enough to stay, or more likely, it'll take a little more to pry him away from me after what we've been through.

“C’mon, kid. Somethin' wrong with yer hearin'? I said, yer comin’ with me.”

Again I look to Ridomie. Inside of a short week, it’s become instinctive. He's been my savior, and I foolishly look at him again to save me now. I don’t want to go with the Major, but mostly I don’t want to be separated from Ridomie. I know there’s nothing he can do though. No one, ‘cept me, is foolish enough to disobey the Major.

“But… Where are you taking me?” I sputter. The Major has a funny look in his eyes. In fact, he keeps looking at me funny. Like he’s never seen me before, which has nothing to do with my recent hair cut.

“You’ll see when we get there, now hurry the fuck up. I don’t have all damn day.” He's agitated, more agitated than usual that is.

“Can, Ridomie, come?” I wish I didn’t sound, so much like a pleading child, but I do.

He scrubs a hand over his face (I think it's safe to say it's been at least a week since the Major's slept), his eyes go wide. “No.”

Fuck him then. He disappears then returns demanding I go with him at the snap of his fucking fingers? Not on. “Then I’m going to stay right here.’ I'm no longer stupid enough to actually tell
the Major to fuck off, but that's pretty close.

“Ryker…” Ridomie growls at me.

“No, fuck this. Fuck everybody! Fuck this whole fucked up palace of nightmares!” I turn to the livid Major. “You were gone,” I accuse. “Where the fuck were you? How could you leave me like that?” Guess I was hurt. Didn't know 'til right now. Somehow the Major has come to mean a lot to me. I trust him even if perhaps I shouldn’t and he left me, fucking left me.

The Major is glaring at me fiercely, and I can’t help but cower a bit under that kind of stare. I look over to Ridomie, for help, but he’s about as happy as the Major is with me. I hate that look in his eyes, in both their eyes. Still, fuck them both then. I sit back down defiantly, and look at my plate. Yeah. I'm pretty much pouting. Lucky no one's here to see this. Everyone's left the mess hall by this point.

“Major, will you excuse us for a moment?” Ridomie speaks up, and surprisingly the Major nods his head. “Send him out to me when yer done.”

I hate that they're fucking talking about me like I’m not here.

The Major moves to the door of the mess hall, and out of it, probably waiting just outside. He can hear everything we’re going to say, it only gives us the semblance of privacy, but I appreciate it. ‘Specially when I know I’m about to get wrung out.

“You can't do this anymore. I know you act a certain way, like how you did on Earth, because that's all you know, but this isn’t Earth. This is a dangerous place you know little about, yet you refuse the help of someone, the only one, who can help you stay out of half the trouble you create. If the Major says he needs to see you, then you need to go with him no questions asked. You don't ask why and you don't give him a hard time about it. He won't always share his reasons with you and he doesn’t need to. The sooner you realize that, the easier things will be for you. If anything, you can do it as a sign of respect, a thank you for his help. I’m tired of the disrespect you show him.”

All I can think is: There are a lot of fucking ‘yous’ in his speech. I try to say something in return, but he silences me. He’s not done.

“Aside from all of that, I can’t watch you get beat like that every other week. That almost killed me, Ryker. Watching you suffer. Did it teach you nothing?”

“I—”

“I’m not finished,” he cuts me off. Okay, rhetorical question. How was I supposed to know? I’m not a fucking mind reader. I want to tell him; I have too learned a lesson this week.

“This isn’t happening again, Briggland. I’m going to personally make sure of it.”

My name. It's the first fucking time Ridomie's used my first name. It takes my fucking breath away. Doesn't stop me being an asshole. I always have enough breath for that.
“You can’t really make me do anything,” I challenge, and immediately feel like an ass for saying so. According to status, it’s true, but there are other things that make you do the things another says to do. They go deeper than the physical, and the hierarchal. Saying what I just did, denies that deeper bond between us, the one that’s been building since we met and wounds it.

Fuck. Don't want him looking like that. “Sorry,” is all I can think to say. It’s not enough, my actions will have to make up for my words, but it’s a start, and I will make it up to him. I look down at my hands. This is why I’m not good at relationships. I’m a Ryker Asshole.

“You’re better than that. I know you are. I don’t know why you insist on being hurtful.”

“Can I speak now?” I don’t deserve to say a word to him. I should just get up and go with the Major. I still don’t want to, but the Major will come back if I’m not out there soon, and fucking drag me anyway. Ridomie’s right about some things, ‘cept there are a few things I’m not willing to relent on. He nods. “You’re right about some things, okay. I can’t fucking deny some shit, like I should probably be less of a dick to the Major and a whole lot more respectful, but I’m the one getting beat every five seconds, and no one tells me a damn thing about anything, but apparently I’m supposed to sit here and just be grateful to be alive? Is that what you’re fucking telling me Ridomie? ‘Cause that I don’t buy. All this?” I say swinging my hand around in an arc. “Is bullshit! When are you going to realize that?”

“That’s why we need you, Ryker.” His eyes are pleading with me to understand whatever other fucked up message he’s trying to impart on me. I don’t get it though.

“You guys need me, huh? And what about the rest of it? If y’all need me so bad, shouldn’t I know shit? You’ve done your share of keeping shit from me too, Rye.” Yeah, I lay the fuck down.

“I’ll tell you whatever you want to know, Ryker. I don’t mean to keep secrets…I…” he huffs, frustrated.

Sure, maybe he hadn’t meant to, but there are things he hasn't told me.

“Look. Just go with the Major, please? We’ll talk when you get back.” He looks, so forlorn, I have to tease him, just a bit. I know we’re mad at each other, and I hate it. I hate us being mad at each other. I need to lighten the mood, a touch.

“Is ‘talk’ code for ‘spank my ass’?” I wiggle my eyebrows at him.

“Ryker.” He’s appalled at first and looks around, but there's no one to see, everyone's gone now. His eyes light up. “Don’t tempt me. Your ass needs to see a lot more of my hand I imagine—it’s the only thing that gets through to you.” He’s smirking now. “Is that what you need to get you going?”

Whoa, now? No. I stand, pushing out my chair. “I’m going with him, but only because you fucking asked me to.” There. That should show him that I do fucking care about him, and avoiding his wraith. I move to leave.

“Wait!” I turn back to look at him, and he seems all unsure now, very unlike the powerful authoritarian he was a second ago. He’s back to questioning himself again. Don't know why. Doesn’t he know that I don’t just do these things for anyone? Do I really have to fucking say it? ‘Cause I know I said I would, but I don’t know that I fucking can. I've never told anyone other than my mama I loved them and even with her, it wasn’t everyday.

We're standing face to face, only a paper’s width apart. I think he’s going to do something,
inappropriate, something he should not fucking do in the middle of the Mess Hall. *Who has the fucking death wish now, Ridomie?*

I’m frozen. Damned if I'm going to stop him. I want him to do inappropriate things to me. My dick hardens, and I’m shivering now, all for good reasons.

Losing his nerve, he takes a step back, reaching out his hand to move the only long piece of hair I still have left, out of my azure blues. He looks at me adoringly, and I see something fucking scary in his eyes, something that even if I’ve only ever seen it one place, I still know it like we’re all born to just recognize it when we see it even if our experience with it is limited.

Love.

Ridomie hasn’t said it since the one day, he doesn’t need to say it ever again, and still I know it.

He grabs both my hands, one in each of his, and squeezes them. He’s still fucking displeased with me, and I’m still not in agreement with all of the things he’s said, but he wants me to know that despite the outcome, it won’t change his feelings for me. He’ll love me every bit as fiercely as that look burning in his grey eyes no matter fucking what. He adjusts my collar, like I’m his very own Ryker doll, and I let him. “Do you feel okay?”

“Fine,” I breathe at him. *It's hard to speak with someone looking at you like he is.*

“Good. Go then. Come back to me.” His voice has some hardness to it, but the hardness does nothing to diminish the feeling in it. He smoothes my short hair one more time, releasing me in every way—with his hands, his eyes, and his powerful Ridomie energy.
Xander-Marshell

Chapter Notes

This is a short chapter but there are 2 more to follow.

The Major’s appraising me as soon as I get out the fucking door of the Mess Hall. “Why is it you listen t’that kid, and not to a damn word I say?”

His words piss me off more, ‘cause that just isn’t fucking true. But he referred to Rye as 'that kid' and not 'that clone,' so that's something. “I listen to you.” He arches his brow. “I listen to you, sir.” Okay, so maybe I’m not perfect at it, but I do try.

The Major’s not mad though, which is fucked up because he should be mad. What happened to him? Instead, he chuckles laughing at some inside joke, with himself. I’ve never heard the Major laugh so full. He has a Whiskey-Jack laugh that rumbles from his belly. The Major is experiencing some new brand of joy — something to do with me — but damned if I’m going to find out from him directly. He doesn't like answering my questions. Keeping my mouth shut is the best option at hand. If the Major is finally happy about something, who am I to ruin that good mood?

“Well, c’mon then, son.”

It's my turn to look at him funny. He’s called me son before, it fits in with his southern sort of cantor and all, but there’s something about the way he says it now. There's warmth wrapped around it. Fuck. The Major really has warmed up to me. I don't know how I do it; I really am that awesome. Wait 'till I tell Ridomie.

Regardless of how weird the Major is acting, I follow him, since I promised Ridomie I would.

"C'mon kid. We gotta run. Take my hand." He looks hard malachite eyes to me, they're practically glowing. Wherever he's taking me, it's something big. Right now is big. It's all about to change. He holds out his giant, meaty Ryker hand, palm up, the one that's strong enough to crush throats, while at the same time is pretty and looks manicured. I slap my hand down on his. We run, together.

Next I know, we're falling from the sky.

We land and I'm fucking out of breath like never before. It was hard keeping up to the Major with this God damned Moldevite acting like a wrench in my machinery. "Run faster," he said. "Now that yeh got that shit hinderin' yah, you have to get better conditioned. It can be done Briggland."

Yeah? What does he fucking know about it?

It’s early morning where we’ve landed; the sun is still rising. Dew still on the leaves, whoa, the giant leaves. We’re in a densely packed forest. There are trees here and there, but it’s mostly an overgrowth of weird, strange, dark green plants.

This is where we stop. Me catching my breath, my lungs fucking burning like never before and the Major looking at me funny. Again.

He looks softer, not quite so beat up from the ideals of this era—he looks like maybe what he once looked like, a long time ago. Younger. Naïve. Was the Major ever naïve?
He studies me, like he’s looking at me for the first time.

We both stand up at the same time. He doesn't take his eyes off me. I decide to ignore his strange behavior. 'Sides, it’s not like he’s going to let me in on what he’s thinking. He never does. I brush myself off instead of trying to figure out the complex inner workings of the Major’s mind. When I’m finished, he's still fucking staring at me. I can't take it anymore. “Major? Something on my face?”

“Hush. At attention, soldier.” It’s quick, but it’s an order if I’ve ever heard one. I freeze. Focus my eyes straight ahead, left arm to my side, right palm over my heart. I never thought I'd like 'military,’ but I've been enjoying the simplicity of following orders. I don't like following my father's orders, but when it's the Major, or Ridomie, I don't mind so much. There's comfort in going through repetitious motions, knowing you're doing what's expected of you. I barely breathe as I rigidly stand at attention, trusting him to do whatever he's going to do. Some otherworldly force guides him, he moves toward me, slow; hypnotized. Looking at me. Discovering the meaning of life. To him. Right now.

He's cautious approaching me, like he might ruin me. Like I might explode.

Slowly, he takes his hand to the hair I have left. I wince. I’ve been dragged by him too many times to think he’ll do anything else. He’s gentle, as if I’m the most precious thing in the world, he runs his fingers through the bulk of what's left of my golden mane. This is more terrifying than the other thing; him dragging me. He ghosts his fingers over my face — forehead then nose, then mouth — in absolute awe; like witnessing a miracle.

His hand returns to his side, but he’s still staring, and I don’t know what to make of it. His eyes say, how? his face, beams, proud, and amazed like he doesn’t have a clue how I got here, like I must be a gift from some other place, a place that isn't Ryker, 'cause there’s no other explanation he can fathom—that's the look on his face.

As he appraises me, I do the same to him, still unsure if he's lost it, or not. The Major's as big as he ever was and over time, he seems to get larger. Larger in size, larger in presence, larger in energy. He takes up all the space. What kind of space? All the fucking space. His long hair glimmers over his shoulder, moving with him, obeying him, as if he's threatened it. The entire right side of his head, perfectly bald, like the hair won't dare grow back, the skin of his scalp smooth and supple looking. From what I've learned, the Major is old, hundreds of years old, but he doesn't look it. He's got no wrinkles, not a single one. All the weathering sits in his glowing, malachite eyes. I always thought my jawbone was strong, but the Major's looks like it was carved from the side of a mountain and stuck on his face. His narrow nose always point down with the frown of his brow, his lips in a constant twist of annoyance. Except when he smiles big. Then all his teeth show, lip furled over them just a bit.

He's not wearing the long, black jacket he prefers. Today, it's a short one, stops at his thickly muscled waistline, thick, jagged lapels and strange designs embossed into the arms. His Ryker bracelet is missing in action.

“Major?” My voice is strangled this time. “Everything all right?”

My words alone, cause his smile to grow wider. What the fuck? What the living fuck? I'm good, but I'm not that good. Even I know that. “Yeah. Yeah, it is.” He wipes both eyes. Wait, is he fucking crying? When I hear sniffles, I assume the worst. “Major, sir, am I dying?”

His green eyes become as hot as an incinerator. “What? Who told you that?”
“No one sir. You’re...you’re crying. It must be bad.”

“I ain’t cryin’! Was a bug in my eye. Both eyes. Sides, why would I cry over yer death, for?”

“But you, you sniffled.”

“Didn’t.”

“You did. I heard you.” I don’t know when to shut up.

“Then yer hearin’ ain’t as good as we thought.”

“What the fuck is going on, Major?”

The reverent look he’d been giving me vanishes to nothing — not even a trace. The look he’s giving me now, the Major's *you disobedient little shit, I'm gonna whack you upside the head* look, that look I fucking know; it's comforting; back to ground I know. He takes a step away, yet he still feels close, the suppressed anger in his eyes coming alive in his growl. “You will comport yerself, as a proper young, Ryker. Understand? I don't want to hear you talkin' like that anymore. I mean it Briggland.”

It’s hard not to laugh at words like that, especially coming from a gruff guy like the Major. I still feel a flush of embarrassment at the scolding. His accent even sounds different saying it. Less cowboy, more rich oil tycoon. But I don’t laugh. He’s fucking scary right now. Instead I say the first stupid thing that comes to my mouth. “But, you swear, and you’re a Ryker.”

I tense expecting him to throw me, or try and grab onto the last of my hair by the skin of my scalp. The Major likes to hear ‘yes, sir’ and ‘yes, sir’ to the things he says. He doesn’t care much for anything else.

I get off pretty easy in my opinion. He pokes me in the sternum pretty damn hard, but I can handle it; I'm proud to be strong enough to handle what he can dish out. “You ain’t gonna be like me, Briggland. Yer gonna be better than I ever was.” He takes his finger off me standing up taller. “And it don’t matter how much I fuckin’ swear, I’m an adult and we get to do what we want. You can earn that privilege when yeh become an adult yerself. Yer just a kid—if I say you ain't t'swear, you ain't gonna. Now mind yer mouth, boy.”

I want to throw a rock at him. “Yes, sir.”

We head from one fucked up moment to the next. “You got another name. Other than Briggland or Ryker?”

"Is there any other name than Ryker?"

I expect some repercussion for that, but he laughs again. Same whiskey-jack laugh, rough around the edges, soaked in rye. He does do something physical. He pushes the long pieces of my hair in front, away from my eyes. "Guess it seems that way."

I want to keep his temperament on the up swing, so I tell him, but I hate telling people my other names. Mama must have been high when she named me. “It’s Xander-Marshell, sir. A bit fu— messed up if you ask me.”

If it’s possible, his anger increases. "Somethin' wrong with yer name, soldier?"

"No, sir. It's just, unusual, sir. Nothing wrong with it." Fuck. That's his name isn't it? "Did my...am
I named after you, sir?" The possibility is exciting. If I have to bear the name Ryker, I want something good alongside it. The Major is good.

He nods, tightly. Hard to know if that means good, or bad. One thing's for sure, nothing makes fucking sense anymore. "Why, sir?" There's every possibility the Major won't answer that. He keeps his secrets closely guarded. I can see he knows, but it's not something he fancies telling me.

"Fucked if I know, Briggland." It's the most honest answer he has to give. "Do you hate it?" He's peering at me, like he's afraid of the answer. He must need to know if he's bothering to ask.

"Not anymore, sir. You gotta admit though, it's kinda, different."

"My mama gave it to me. It's for both of your great uncles. They were two of the best men I've ever known. Both strong Ryker men. Real Rykers. You would have liked them."

I sense a big uncomfortable topic, so I change it. Sorta. "What about Briggland? That after someone cool too?"

He laughs. "Naw. That's yer mama bein' a dreamer, she..." He can't finish. "It was a long time ago, it don't matter now."

"What did Mama do to you Major?"

Fuck. Too far. I can tell by the change in his demeanor I've gone too far. "Mind your own damn business, boy."

"Yes, sir." Whatever it is, it's bad. I leave it. "Can I ask where we're going, sir?"

His generous mood is gone. "You can, ask."

I can ask, but he's not going to tell me. Fuck. Asshole. "Well how do I know I should follow you? You're acting kinda messed up. Maybe you're taking me to be killed."

“If I was takin’ you out t’pasture, you’d know it boy. Don't they say that where you came from? Now pick up the pace, we don’t have all that long."

The Major has never been one for words of comfort. I wish now, more than ever I had my comfortable leather to surround me, and man, do I ever miss my bike. I don’t miss much from home. Just my bike. Ridomie would love my bike too; I just know he would.
“Brigg. Briggland.” Where the fuck’s that boy gone to in his mind? “Briggland!” Damn Boy is off in some thought, not hearing a damn word I’ve said—he needs to pay more attention than that. It’s a wonder he’s made it this far on his own for so long. He’d be dead in half a second here without me. He no longer has the luxury of taking his surroundings for granted.

He trusted me, came with me to Cyntripien and look where it fucking got him.

He needs to be looking everywhere all at once, and if I have to be the one to drill it into his head — I will. No son of mine is going to be a spacey-lug, jumped, on the first dumb luck opportunity. “When we get back, we’re going straight to the training field. Just me and you. Y’hear? You need a lot more training.” Especially with all that Moldevite around his wrist, I don't add. I've already told the boy too fucking much. In some people's opinions, my brother's, they'd say I haven't told him e-fucking-nough, but I couldn't do it, yet. Tell him about us. What if he hates it, being my son, more than being Derc's? That would do it. I've already died a few times, but the last time, when I thought Dess betrayed me, it killed me. Brigg's brought me back to life, but if my son rejects me, I don't know I'll make it back from that. He didn't seem to mind much, being named after me.

“What? What’d I do?” He looks genuinely worried he’s lost my favor. That's good. I think. I end up taking some pity on the kid — some, mind. He still needs to learn a few things, or he's not going to be alive much longer.

“You're not on that prissy little planet I dragged you back from.” I make sure to make reference to the fact that I dragged him back. “Yeh can’t afford to be day dreamin’ no more, little boy. You think yer—Derco’s—the only one who wants yer blood?” I can’t call Derco the kid’s father anymore, not now that I know he's mine.

He visibly swallows, but gives me his annoyed look. “He’s not? You know, that's freakin' needs to know information, sir.”

“No. We own the galaxy, kid, because we have the best army. A Clone army made from your blood would make Ryker Corp. unchallenged. Yeh don’t think anyone else wants that?” I snap at him irritated. I don’t feel like explaining it to him. It terrifies me thinking about who could be hunting him. Maybe things even I can't protect him from. I'm not stupid enough to think we know everything that's out there. I walk faster. We can't stay on this planet long, unless we want to be detected and we can't run for the same reason. The planet we’re on now is heavily guarded and though I wasn't specifically told so, I know I’m not supposed to be here. Especially on this planet. This isn't one of ours. I don't know who Derco's been dealing with, but he borrowed this planet for his purposes. She was at Ryker Corp., on another compound, I know she was, but he moved her. Here.

The route we're taking, you could call this the ‘back route.’ Running here, my way was risky, but a fuck load less risky than taking a ship would have been. This whole idea is wrought with risk. Getting caught is just one thing I have to worry about. The thing I have to do isn't easy. The things I do for this kid. My kid.

“Maybe if you tell me what I should be looking for. Sir,” he adds belatedly, as he speeds up, subconsciously wanting to stay close to me.

Truth is, at this point, I'm not sure exactly what, but I know Dess—okay yeah at this point it could be argued I don't fucking know Dess and maybe I don't know as much about her as I thought I did,
but I can count on her always doing what's best for our boy—and I know that's why he's here:
Protection. Something's out there that's scarier than Derco to her. That's fucking saying something and I don't like thinking about it. So this kid just needs to shut up and do as he's told. “You need to be lookin’ everywhere, Briggland. For everythin’ and anyone. Don’t matter what it is. Stay alert,” I tell him quietly, serious as fuck—this isn't a drill. I leave it at that. I shake my head squeezing my fists to prevent them from punching something.

The forest opens up, and we can see the feint outline of the oval building. I put my hand out to stop the kid walking any further, pointing without words.

“What the hell is that, Major?” he says way too fucking loudly.

“Talk louder, boy,” I hiss. “Maybe they’re deaf.”

He scowls, but shuts up.

The building is still a ways off, but I'm not planning on going there today. I'm just keeping my first promise to the kid. Then he's never coming back here again. I survey, and count the clones that are scattered about the premise, trying to look all-important. Hmph. A bunch of kids is what they are. That's the problem with Mother Nature. You can cheat her, by speeding up the growth of a Rykerian clone, but there's only one way to mature. Time. It's how I talked Derco into the project with the Mothers.

Having a clone harvested, as an adult, straight from his womb made it so he knew dick all about life, hell, unraised clones need to be taught language, how to walk, who's in charge; it takes years to prepare the unraised to step foot onto the battlefield for the first time. It made more sense, in my opinion, for them to learn that stuff in the years that don't matter. Infancy.

No matter how many times I had tried to pound it into their flesh, soon as I released’em, unraised clones, from my ‘care,’ they make poor decisions. Most, forever stuck in a young mind-set. Sure they obey, better than raised but when stationed somewhere and have to make their own decisions, it can be a nightmare. Before we had the Mothers, I had to spend a good chunk of my time training lieutenants to run crews, never entirely happy with the result. None of them ever making past lieutenant until Ridomie. Speaking of which, I could use a second Captain. I could use a fuckload more Captains. I have a few raised that could be ready, but I've got to get around the issue that Briggland has that title and no clone can outrank him. He's not ready for more responsibility.

As for this place, it was clearly put together by my brother and, or Derek who know shit about how to set up a proper guard even if they fucking think they do. This place is in need of a few more lieutenants, inadequate as they may be, but I’m not gonna tell Derco that; works for me. I can spot all their weaknesses. We can do what we came to do, them none the wiser.

Idiots.

My eyes aren’t looking for clones though.

I take a deep breath and reach into one of the large pockets of my pants, and pull out something to help us see. The thing I don't want to see. Even we need something from this distance; I don’t want to get any closer; but especially him with his newly acquired hindrance, his eyes will need assistance. I scan every window of the building’s marble face, ‘till I see the red flames.

I almost don’t believe what my eyes are telling me, even though I expect to see her; know she's there. I stand transfixed, watching, as she moves the hair from her eyes, and stretches out on the large bed. Her neck elongates, awkward, up and diagonal. Still, she manages to look graceful as a
Pteradon, delicate as a babe.

Only I know better.

Oydessa Chance is not a delicate woman despite her fucking breakable appearance. She’s strong; indestructible. She's a lethal weapon.

No good for me.

Which doesn't seem to register. Here I am, staring at her, fucking marveling at her, and falling in love with her over, and over. Every time I blink my damn eyes. I try not to, but here I am.

After all this time, she’s the only thing that makes my heart beat with that fucking pitter patter — the pitter patter of a damn fool. My heart clenches — I wish I could rip it out of my fucking chest.

I didn’t expect her to have this effect on me, not after all the time I spent hating her—hated her more than I've hated anything. Then the moment I looked at her when I found her, I was just… gone again. Gone. Knowing we have a son together, a kid I actually like, makes it worse.

What’s my fucking problem? She lied to me. Kept my son from me. Deceived me in so many ways. I won't stop trying to hate her. I can’t forgive her; I won’t.

She sits up all of the sudden-like, cocking her head to the side. My heart fucking races. Can she hear us? Is there a problem? Trouble? Do I need to jump on my white fucking horse? ‘Cause I will. Even if I’ll hate myself after it, and hate her even more than I do now.

Nothing happens. She lies back down. I don’t doubt Derco thinks he has something over her, but she’s not his prisoner. She doesn't look like a prisoner. She looks bored. Waiting. If anything, Dess has him by the balls — he just doesn’t know it yet. She set this game up. She wanted me to go get Briggland.

But why? Either way, I’m glad that whatever is going on brought me my son. My foolish, son, who's still not paying enough fucking attention to his surroundings, but that can all be taught. I can teach him and I will. Dess may have considered him safe, tucked away in time, but the only place I consider him safe, is right here in my direct line of vision.

‘Sides, the misuse of time is a strong fucking opinion of mine. It's not right to hide things in it. You're born to the life you're born to. The challenges you face are given to you for a reason, for you to solve; not hide from.

Even if it means dying.

Course, I don’t like the sound of that. I just found out the boy is mine, I don’t want to lose him any time soon – don’t plan on it neither. In fact, in all her insanity, I now understand her need to keep our boy safe.

But it's not right, as much as I wish it were.

Time has a way of catching up with you — Dess knows that better than anyone, learned that one from her. All my thinking on the matter comes from her, which is why I can’t understand her thinking at the moment. “What’s your game plan, Dess?” I mutter to myself.

“Huh? What’s that, Major?”

I cuff him, hard. He knows why. He's not paying a-fuckin-tention again. Worse, since when was it
okay for him to ask me anything beginning with, huh? I decide the latter is understood well enough, I proceed to chastise him the former. “Pay, attention. I’m not tellin' yeh again.” Which means he’s going to be sunny-side up when we get back if he doesn't start listening. I can’t afford to baby him, or any of these kids. They’re soldiers.

Earth did that. Babied their younglings and it didn’t take long for Earth to fall. No one was trained. No one believed it was happening. It didn’t take long for them to be over powered, by a race called the Yat'sku. Earth's Great Grandfathers might have kicked ass in that war, but they'd long since bred fighting out of their population.

No one came to their aid. Earth's rulers hadn’t helped anyone else out of trouble in a long time. They became known as what the Yat'sku refer to as, Fluvatvian: Stand for nothing but themselves. So they could die, and be enslaved for nothing but themselves as far as the galaxy was concerned. The Sku took over, easily, keeping few prisoners and raped the planet 'till there was nothing left, leaving it the pile of rocks it is today.

Rykers didn't join in, because a Great Grandfather of mine a few Great Grandfathers ago, didn't care. He was happy for the place Rykerians evolved from to be lost and forgotten. Derco isn't the first Ryker to want no tie to our Human ancestors.

I don’t want to beat the tar out of my son if I can help it. If only he’d just fucking listen. But I will if it will save his life one day.

There’s the Growth Hormone to think about too. The deadly mixture of growth hormone, with the high levels of Testosterone running through these boy’s bodies, makes it, so they don’t respond to much else except for brute strength, violence; those they know have power over them. It keeps them in their place. I have to be the alpha-male at a level that transcends their conscious—just like in a pack of wild dogs—I had to nail it into their psyches.

Briggland nods with a, “yes, sir,” but he looks like he wants to fucking clock me. Good boy.

He needs to be fierce—the fiercest of them all—but he needs to learn to fucking respect me.

"Here, kid. Take a look at who’s over there."

"What are these? Binoculars?"

"Field glasses. They're for seeing long distances."

"Yeah, so binoculars."

"Call them whatever the fuck you want, just take'em and look." I smile fucking excited to give him what he asked for even though I hate being here. Near her. I’m also nervous. I don't know how he'll react. Sure it’s what he wanted, but the kid's been through a lot this past week. It might not be what he hoped it would be.

His eyes draw up confused, but he takes the field glass and holds them up to his eyes, biting his lip — worried at what he’ll find. He knows right away what he’s looking at. “Mama.” The bleating of a lamb for its mother; makes my cold heart tear a little bit. I want to beat the tar outta that woman for doing this to him — to us.

I notice the markers, the signal he’s gonna run. I have him pinned to the ground before he can say ‘what the fuck’ with that fucking dirty mouth of his. The field glasses tumble away.

“No!” he shouts as he scrambles to get me off him, and retrieve the fallen glasses, even if just to get on more look. I know that feeling too fucking well. She has that hold on me, I’ll be damned if
she’ll have that hold on him too. “Get off me!” He reaches again, on his back, me on top, his arm stretching as far as it'll go. All futile. He knows it, but he fights anyway. I'm not surprised he has so much fight in him, even with that bracelet on him and still healing from the fatigue of what Derco did to him. My boy’s strong like that though.

So am I, and I wear the same fucking bracelet. (Usually.) The energy from his will weaken me soon if I stay near him and it for too long. Skin on skin is worse, but the effects of Moldevite travel in an energy field. Takes time for that field to weaken me when it's not touching, but it'll have its affect in small ways, building the longer I stay in too close. I decide to end this before that happens.

I grab him by the lapels of his school jacket, slam him back onto the ground and stand over him. It's enough to daze him. Enough to knock some sense into his thick Ryker skull. “You wanna get us found out? Stupid, boy,” I hiss at him. "Be quiet."

“But… My mama,” he says breathin’ hard, twisting in pain. The exertion too much, too soon after a week of being broken. He can't even hold back the tears. There's some blood at the side of his head. I didn’t mean to pound him that hard, but it was the only thing I could think to do to silence him immediately. The luxury of enough words before he needed to shut up wasn't on the table. Was either that, or get found out and who knows what Decro would do to the both of us. "We have to help her," he croaks.

"'C'mon," I say helping him up by his hand. "Don’t you worry ‘bout your, Mama. She can get out of there if she wants — she’ll be just fine."

He stands, cradling his bloody head, and bruised pride, glaring at me fierce-like. "Here, let me see," I say going for his head.

"I'm fine, sir." He moves his head out of my reach.

"Would yeh quit bein' stubborn and let me look?"

He concedes with his eyes, holding still as I look. He's pissed. “Why’dya bring me here for then, Major?"

I look over his head. “You wanted to see her.” I spit out the words feeling him mighty ungrateful for what I’ve done. The time and effort it took for me to find her alone. Let's not forget how much I didn't want to ever fucking see her again. The risks I took bringing us here. Fuck. Welcome to fucking fatherhood, I guess. I often hear Derco complaining about owning a teen. "Your head's fine. We'll put something on it when we get back."

“Can that be now? I want to go, sir."

"It can be as soon as you tell me what the fuck is going on with you."

"This was a dumb freaking idea, okay? You're the adult here. You should stop me from doing stupid things."

"I tried, but you're so damn stubborn." The kid makes me feel like a fucking fool for giving him what he wanted. I refrain from taking my frustrated feelings out on him, but only just. While he seethes, I snatch up the field glasses again and take another look. She's gone. Confirms my suspicions. She's somewhere else now, maybe even some-when else. He doesn’t have to see her again, but I still do. There are things I have to ask her. Stuff I need to know on his behalf. I'll come back and do it alone. He's too much of a liability for us to do it together anyway. This makes my life easier. But fuck. I can't stand that look on his face. He's in pain that's got nothing to do with his
head.

I have no fucking clue what I'm doing, but I attempt the 'soft' approach. "C'mere kid." I pull him to me, dwarfing him in my large arms. It takes him a second to realize what's going on. Probably doesn't fucking believe it, but forgetting how unprecedented the Major hugging a person is, he latches onto me, crying.

"She's in there, sir, able to come out at anytime, to come see me anytime she wants and she doesn't. My mama doesn't want to see me."

Guess it looks that way, but it's a bit assuming for him to jump to a conclusion like that. Even for him. This must go deep. ‘Quit bein’ a…what is it you called Ridomie the one day? A Drama Queen. Quit bein’ a drama queen. Yer mama loves you. If she’s holin’ herself up in there, it’s for a damned good reason.” I can’t believe I have to defend her. It's the last thing I want to do at this juncture, but I guess that’s what parents do for their kids. Which reminds me, I’ve yet to tell the kid about, us.

He pulls away, wiping at his tears, smiling. “Can’t a guy wallow?”

“Not, you.” He can't afford to.

“Why? ‘Cause I’m a Ryker?”

“Yes.” It’s the truth. He needs to learn that Ryker’s like me and him have it tough. We don’t have time to miss our mamas. It’s best. I had to give up my mama when I was young too.

“I quit being a Ryker then.”

I laugh. As if he could just change what his blood is made of. Once you're born a Ryker, there’s no escaping it. I learned that the hard way. “Nice, try kid.”

“I want to live somewhere else.”

“What about yer boyfriend?” I tease him liking that I'm getting him to smile. We can speak a little more freely here. I know Briggland and Ridomie are not a good thing; I've thought it over. Briggland knows it too; it's going to end in Ridomie's death. As much as I don't want that to happen, the two are a force of nature. They'll happen. Ryker Corp. is a dark place. Ridomie is sunshine for him, for awhile, 'till Derco takes that away too. I've decided I'm not going to stop them. He might as well enjoy, 'till the rain comes. And fuck, he needs Ridomie. "Won’t he be upset if yeh go livin’ elsewhere?"

“Boyfriend? You mean Ridomie? He’s not my boyfriend, Major. We’re barely friends half the time. We fight too much.”

“Sounds like boyfriends to me,” I smirk at him liking the reaction I’m getting.

His mouth is wide, shocked speechless at what I'm saying, 'till he settles on, “Look, I don’t want to talk about him. Can we just, leave? Please, sir?”

I should know better. There's no sunshine at Ryker Corp. It's even clouding the sunniest thing to come by in a long time. “Yer not just anybody, Briggland,” I have to summarize for him. "There’s a responsibility bein’ you, whether yeh like it or not."

He stops whatever internal rant he’s on inside his head. “That’s what Ridomie said. At least, I think that’s what he was trying to say. But I don’t understand, I’m not even from here, not really.
I'm nothing special, sir. Why does it seem like this whole world evolves around me?"

I'd sure like to know that too. “Ridomie’s a smart man. You’d do well to listen to him,” I say not answering his question.

“Yeah.”

I arch my brow at him — he's getting too comfortable. It's why I don't do hugging.

“I mean, yes sir.” He looks sheepish this time and waiting, maybe hoping I’ll answer his question. I think about it, but how do I really put it into words? The best way is to show him. This is something that's fallen on me to teach him, as his daddy. I hope I'm ready for the task. I knock on his noggin. Not too hard, but not like it's made outta darmath bone either.

"Everywhere all at once, Briggland. Y'hear me? Or yer gonna be spending a lot of hard hours on the field and a lot of time over my knee."

"I'd do it, if you'd tell me what you mean by it."

"You'll see, son. Just say, yes, sir."

"Yes, sir."
Mother's Nursery

I get back to my cot, and there he is lying on the bed in all his Ryker glory like he owns it. He does own it I remember. He owns everything—least his family does—and I own nothing. If he weren’t a Ryker, I’d throw him off the bed; kick him out.

No. *If he weren’t a Ryker, I’d be on top of him.* I’d make him beg me to let him suck my cock, before I rolled him over, and claimed him in front of every single person in this room. I wouldn’t let him come for days and have him beg me for release, until I was sure, he was sure that he's for me and I'm for him.

Right. Either way, he does have to get off the bed before I can’t help but act on my blood’s cravings, but I’ll go with a gentler persuasion. “What are you doing in here Ryker? Far as I know, this place is still on your no-go list from the Major.” It’s been too long since I’ve relieved myself, and him on that bed is only reminding me of what happened there the last time. I’m sure I have plenty of reasons to spank his ass again, even if it’s just to get to touch it.

“I’m exhausted. The fucking Major, he has no mercy for a sick guy. He worked my ass off after he spanked the hell out of it—apparently I don't pay attention. Can you believe that?”

Oh Fuck. I don't want that to turn me on, but it does. I think if the wind blows the wrong way right now, I'll be turned on. I don't even want to know what he got in trouble for this time. “Okay. Let me ask in a different way. Ryker, what are you doing lying on the bed I usually use to rest in? Isn’t that what your quarters are for? You have your own bed, or have you forgotten?” He really can’t be lying there. My cock is hard, and it’s unhappy. No clones will even entertain the idea of us fucking since I 'belong' to the Major and the Major and I don't fuck. Masturbating only gets you so far. I'm in a bitchy freaking mood.

"Fine you fucking vagina. I risked my sore ass to come here, because of all your 'come back to me' bullshit and I get fucking rejected for the second fucking time to-fucking-day."

That's a lot of 'fucks' even for Ryker.

He swings his legs off the bed and gets up. *My dick is too hard, and it's driving me batty. It only wants Ryker. Ryker needs to get off the bed.*

“You have to go. The Major will come looking for you and we'll both be in trouble.”

“What does it look like I'm doing?” His annoyed, angry azure blues pierce me. I really do like his new hair. It’s a style more indicative of Cyntripien. He’s…one of us now. I feel bad that his father cut more off than Ryker would have liked and humiliated him like that, but it suits him. It’s still a lot like the Major’s: Bald on the right side with one longer piece flowing toward his right shoulder. That piece stops at the nape of his neck now, but still mimics the Major's style. He looks more, fierce than he did before. It shows off the fullness of his skull, and the height and sharpness of his cheekbones. He's already hardening. The soft Ryker who was dragged in here is already gone. Changed by this place. He still not who he needs to be, but he's not who he was.

“What about you? Shouldn’t you be in class?” Folding his arms across his chest, he arches a smug brow throwing my own words back at me.

“I’ve been excused from class.” Don’t ask why. Don't ask why.

“Why?”
Sigh. “Apparently, I need some sleep.”

“Yeah. I can see that. Were you being a grumpy fucking asshole in class, too?”

“Ryker,” I say as a warning. Yeah, I was an asshole in class, and yeah I am in a grumpy mood. Anyone would be if they were me. No sleep for seven days, and worrying about Ryker, who also happens to be the one person I love more than anything in the world, for those same seven days. I feel a little entitled to my current mood and I know exactly how to help my mood, which has nothing whatsoever to do with sleep. ”Wait, I know why I'm in a bad mood, why are you so pissed off?”

"Told you, the Major's a hard ass."

"No. Uh-uh. That mildly irritates you, not sends you into a fit."

"Not up for discussion Rye, so fucking leave it."

We're in a weird stand off. If he were my clone mate, the proper way for a clone to have a mate, he'd be over my knee for the way he's talking to me alone, but also so he'd know who his alpha is. I'd bite him in multiple places, before I fucked him and make him walk around shirtless, so everyone could see my marks on him. Mental. I'm going mental. My thoughts just won't stop going to these places. I know well that while he is my mate, he's not a clone and therefore off limits (Even though I kissed him and almost kissed him again). I can't say to him what I want to; I also can't say to him what I'm supposed to, so I just stare. He might be putting up this tough front, but he's falling apart inside. Others wouldn’t see it. He’s extremely stoic, and hard to read. Only reason I can see it, is because I spend, a neurotic amount of time studying him. "Come with me, Ryker." Damn. Too much like an order. "I mean, please, will you come with me?"

"What is this? Take Ryker on a field trip day?"

"I'm not taking you to the fields Ryker."

"Not what I meant. Yeah, fine. Guess I'll go with you."

"Don't you remember I promised to take you to my happy place?"

The vexation dissipates and he’s my sunny Ryker again. "This ah, a place we can, blow off a little steam, if you feel me?"

"Absolutely not, Ryker. Follow." I really wish he wouldn't talk about sex. With him. It's already all I think about.

We walk side by side, through the long halls of Ryker Corp. We walk a long time until we're way on the other side of the grounds. I'm glad we're doing this. I was in a hurry to kick him off the bed so I'd stop imagining fucking him, I let my blood take over, control my temper, but now that I'm calmed, I'm soothed by his presence. I'd also like to continue to keep two eyes on him. I don't yet know the reason for his sudden, mysterious decrease in healing power. I know it's his secret to keep, but my blood doesn't care. As far as it's concerned, Ryker's mine. Mine to take care of. If I don't know why he's broken, I can't fix him.

"So where did the Major tell you to go?"

"My room," he laughs. "We had the most fucked up conversation. First, the Major hugged me then he told me he thinks we're together. You and me."
I look around when he says that. At least he said it quietly. No one's in the hallway. I'm usually the only one who goes back. It's not forbidden, it's just something most don't do. If only the other would believe me when I told them Derek hardly ever comes down here. Lord Ryker does only when he absolutely has to. It's the best place to go to avoid Rykers. "Why would he think that? We're not mated." The Major knows how I feel about Ryker, but I've never given him cause to think we're mated.

"That what clones call it Rye? Mating?"

I nod.

"We call it getting married on Earth, or boyfriends."

"I know Ryker. So do Rykerians."

"Why is it mating for clones then?"

"Because that's what it is Ryker. We can't get married and when a Top meets his one, it's his one. We're more than boyfriends. We're mates. 'Mates' is a special bond." I'm breathing funny. Ryker's not stupid, he's going to know.

"You said you loved me Rye."

"And you said you're not staying."

"Am I your mate Ridomie?"

I ran a hand through my hair, frustrated. "It's complicated."

"Don't Facebook status me, Rye. Answer the question."

"What's a Facebook? No, never mind. It doesn't matter. None of it matters. You don't do relationships and you're not staying." We exit the doors on the other side of Ryker Corp. We're outside now. An inside-outside place. There are still structures that make you feel inside, a partial ceiling vaulting overhead, pillars spaced at six foot increments, but no walls. There's grass underfoot, but it's interspersed with marble tiles. Trees are tall and grow up toward and through the beautiful half-ceiling. We approach a fountain, the fountain I think is the most beautiful in Ryker Corp. even though the structure that spirals up from the center is of perfect Ryker DNA. Even before my Ryker, I was attracted to the beautiful quadruple Helix, carved from the finest white Rykerian marble.

My mother would take me here to play back when it was allowed. I remember marveling at its greatness. It's still massive to me at the size I am now. When I was a boy, it was colossal. I stop beside it and look up, watching the water spurt out of the top. "Will you answer my question if I tell you I'm not leaving, Rye?"

I turn to face him. "You're not? What about 'no relationships?'"

"Too late for that Rye." He takes a full step closer. My heart beats hard, I feel like it's going to stop. "You still love me?"

"I…" It's barely even a word, just a breath my lip trembles on. Nothing happens for several minutes, then I can't take it anymore. I place my thumb and forefinger under his chin and move it so it's just the right angle. When his eyes catch mine, they're scared and lost.
We're both breathing hard, heavy, he's waiting for me to do something, and I want to, I do, but here I am hesitating again. It's a Ryker's job to be dominant. A clone has no place dominating any Ryker. Confused. Everything tells me he wants this, he wants me to take the lead, but my stupid brain is telling me that can't be right. I know we've already talked about this. He's told me what he feels about anything Ryker, but it's hard to change a lifetime of conditioning.

I take my fingers off his chin and slam it in the water.

"You're one confusing fucker, you know that Ridomie?"

"Huh?"

"I thought you wanted me. I've practically thrown myself at you – I don't just give everyone permission to spank me like a little kid, just so you know – and you're still hesitating. Is this because of before? You don't want to be with me, now? I'm too much of a Ryker Asshole?"

"No. I mean, yes. I mean..." I sigh. "Yeah, you are an asshole, Ryker, but I want you to be my asshole. I want you, more than I have words to tell you, but I need you to be mine. My mate. I need to own you. You're a Ryker and Ryker's aren't owned. We can't ignore you being a Ryker. There are consequences."

He doesn't argue this time, or give me his line about not caring about what the world thinks about Rykers and Clones. He gets it now. He's seen the consequences. I look into his eyes trying to see through to his mind. Brig—Ryker is usually transparent to me, but right now, I can't decipher what he's thinking. My natural instincts kick in and I worry about him. Can't help it after the seven days we've been through. The closeness. Taking care of him.

"Let's leave," he says. Finally. "Together."

"Now you want to leave again?"

He turns to a tree frustrated, and rests his forehead against the bark like he'd rather be banging it there. "I don't know what the fuck I want right now, except you. I know I want you. You're the only thing I ever wanted Rye. Like this. The only thing like this."

I know the feeling.

Knowing he wants me the same makes it half better. Nothing's going to relieve the ache in my dick, but suffering together is something. "C'mon. I still haven't shown you my happy place."

"This isn't it?"

"No," I smile.

"All right, lead the way. This date better be good," he mutters.

"Not a date, Ryker."

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We walk past the massive, fountain, the one molded into the quadruple helix that represents DNA on this planet. The visual isn't far off the one on Earth, or I should say that was on Earth, since Earth has been gone a long time. I can see the differences, right before my eyes. We learned about them some in class, I've experienced and observed the differences, but seeing is yet another level of realization all together. We're vastly different from Humans.
"Where are you taking me Rye?"

"Have a little patience Ryker. It's just through here."

We've already walked a fucking long time, so the distance in comparison isn't long, but it's a ways past the fountain. I'm appreciating getting a tour of Ryker Corp. It's been a case of all work and no play for this Ryker boy—it's about time I did something around here other than eat, fight, school and sleep. I plan on changing my routine.

Also, I need to fuck. If Ridomie won't do it, I'm sure I can find someone willing. I won't make anyone, but I'm not all that sure fucking a clone, even if I ask, is all that consensual. That Ridomie seems to have the ability to tell me 'no' gives me hope. There are a few others that might have the same level of self-esteem; enough to turn a Ryker down. I'm so horny; it's ridiculous.

My sex addled brain is startled when a person runs up to us as we enter the tall building from the strange inside-outside landscape we'd just come from. I mentally fucking kick myself and if the Major was here, he would have kicked me for real. Believe me, after the spanking I got from him upon our return, accompanied by the fucking intense, private, hours of training he ran me through, I don't want to get on his bad side for awhile. I've got to start paying attention. To everything all at once—whatever that fucking means.

The Major's not the first place I've heard that. Mama taught me that too. I get what it means when I'm fighting, but the Major means it, like, for all the fucking time and I'm guessing in a few different contexts. I know it's the fucking homework and there will be pop quizzes. I need to get my head out of my ass and start paying attention to everything all at once, or I'm going to have a pretty sore ass. I hate having to deal with the god-damned look of incredulous disappointment on the Major's face. I like it much better when he's giving me that shiny look of pride.

Okay. Paying attention. The person who runs up to us is not just any person. It's a woman. I have to stare a long fucking time. I haven’t seen a woman, or a child since I entered this place. Seeing a woman now is unreal.

I've never seen a woman like her. First thing I notice about her is her hair color—that seems to be a thing here—it's not the darker shades like most of the clones I've seen. It's light. Nowhere near Ryker blonde, but it could be considered strawberry blonde. It's blonde mixed with tiny red flames. She's got large full breasts and hips. Fucking gorgeous. Her eyes are a mysterious dark, sapphire blue color. Her. I want her. I can't have Ridomie, but surely I can have her.

At the same time I'm admiring this sublime creature, I assess my surroundings. This place is yet another strange Ryker Corp. conundrum. The inside is still outside, but the garden has changed; it feels ancient, like I've walked back in time. Maybe we have for all I know. I don't put anything past this place anymore. Unlike where we just were, large walls surround us, all constructed of stone, but fresh orange sunlight pours over us. There's less ceiling than there was outside. Inside? I don't fucking know, but I note it all.

She's wearing a long white coat with large buttons, her heels click on the grey stone as she approaches, hurried. She blinks like a doe and smiles like June Cleaver. She looks like a Mama—like someone created her in the vision of what a Mama should look like. And I suddenly know: We have entered the Mother's Nursery.

Ridomie gets a great big smile from her. A fond smile. "You're back. The children have been waiting for you! Please come right this—" She pauses realizing belatedly: Ridomie’s not alone. I can see her mother bear instincts taking over. Her sweet doe features, tense; her eyes zone in on me like a hawk. "Who is this? I don't know that I can let him near the children. Does he have
clearance?"

My fucking nuts crawl up inside of me, afraid of what she can do to me. Ridomie isn’t phased, expecting her behavior. “Miss Taggart, please allow me to introduce you. This is Briggland Ryker.”

Her posture sheds the hardness she had a moment ago; it’s replaced by a nervous edge. “Ryker. Ryker, oh my. I’m so, sorry. We get so few Ryker visits. I should have recognized—the hair.” At the mention of mine, she twists her hands at the ends of hers. “We don’t have many visitors down here at all in fact. I’m not used to new people — I have a great responsibility to the children.”

I hold up a hand to stop her. It works immediately. Too well. Her eyes move downcast, submissively, and right away I know the position for woman at Ryker corp. Rykers hate them so much they don’t bother coming down here. I reach out, gently placing my fingers on her chin tilting it upwards, and bringing her eyes to look at me. Her beautiful doe eyes are still filled with apprehension, and I don’t want this lovely creature to fear me.

I smile my giant, charming, Ryker smile — the one that has failed to work it’s magic on Ridomie — and give her a little wink. She smiles, and I know I’ve still got the magic. I can see the age in her eyes when I look into them this way. She doesn’t look beyond her forties, but she’s much older than that. “Don’t worry sweets. You don’t gotta apologize to me.” I release her chin. She goes back to playing with her hair, flirtatiously and I know I’m in if I want to be. Looks like even girls of the future play with their hair when they’re into a dude. It’s nice to know that some laws of nature never die.

“Fuck, Rye. Why didn’t you introduce us sooner?”

“Maybe Miss Taggart needs to keep you here ’till you learn to clean up that mouth of yours. You can't swear like that if you want to meet the children.” It’s a definite snap. He’s pissed at me again. Don’t know the fuck why. What else is new?

I shrug at him, and look to Miss Taggart. “Mr. Ryker…”

“Briggland, please. I insist. Of course the girls used to call me Briggy for short,” I say, moving a stray lock behind her ear, she smiles, and looks over at Ridomie.

“I’m sure he won’t swear in front of the children, right Briggy?”

Ridomie's blood is boiling, which increases the fun I'm having, makes me want to keep going. He's jealous. I've never seen anyone so jealous. He also looks embarrassed. He takes a protective stance in front of me; I don't think he realizes he's doing it. He's acting on instinct. I wonder if that has to do with the whole 'mates,' thing. Contrary to what Ridomie said, I don't think it's like boyfriends or getting married at all. I think both he and the Major are delusional to make the comparison. Being mates is, everything.

“Miss Taggart, please!” Ridomie shouts turning a little red. “He’s a bloody Ryker! That’s highly inappropriate.”

*Inappropriate and driving him mental.*

The little vixen’s pretty blue eyes look at him crossly. “Watch your mouth, young man.”

Ridomie’s left gaping, pulling at words like a fish trying breathe air, face red. I laugh at the hypocrisy. I can swear, but he can’t. This Mama won’t let him. Guess that's why he's got such a clean fucking mouth. It's funny. It's also funny to watch Ridomie squirm like he is now, something
I don't get to see often. “I apologize, Miss Taggart.”

He looks at me expecting me to do the fucking same. At first I wasn’t going to, but judging from the look he’s giving me, I decide that I should. I gave her a coy look, like a shameful little boy and watch Ridomie lose it. “I apologize, Miss Taggart. Shall I report for my spanking?”

"Ryker!” Ridomie is incensed. It's fantastic.

Miss Taggart is flustered. “Oh no, Briggy. And please, you call me Brinette.” I have a good feeling Ridomie'd never been asked to call her ‘Brinette.’ “Would you like to stay here? So I can teach you how to behave in front of the children?” She blinks her doe eyes at me, arching her eyebrows up suggestively. Whoa. This is awesome. Ryker grown women are sex maniacs too! The other Rykers don't know what they're missing. Speaking of, there's no one else down here either. Not even a clone. You'd think they'd want this place under lock and key, plus a few hundred guards.

Before I have the chance to answer, Ridomie steps in. “That will be quite all right Miss Taggart. He will come with me, and I will make sure he behaves.” He grabs my hand gripping it firmly and pulling me away from the nice lady.

“Okay, boys.” She waves at both of us — her eyes remain on me. She’s falling in love, I’m sure of it. "Have fun. I'll see you soon."

Ridomie pulls me into something that looks like a forest, and I’m backed against a tree. “What was that?” he hisses, possessively. Suddenly, that I'm a Ryker and he's a clone doesn't matter. I'm willing to jump on that train if he is. Damn the consequences. I'll find a way for us.

But I'm no fucking pushover. I want him to Top me, but he can fight me for the position. I push back at him, but it's fucking hard with this bracelet limiting me. I don't want him to know how weak I still am, so I shove him with everything I've got, while making it seem easy. It only sends him stumbling a couple steps. It does nothing to quell his glare, which goes a long ways in winning my submission. Maybe, just maybe, I went a little too far with Miss Taggart.

“Well, you won’t fuck me. I don’t see what the problem is. Ryker, Clone. Remember?”

“Shh!” He points upwards.

Above us, is one amazing fucking obstacle course, a good five hundred feet into the trees. Logs hang from ropes. Cables are strung like tight ropes. Bridges are suspended in mid air.

“What the fuck?”

“Language Ryker.”

I wince. Right. Kids. It’s gonna be hard not to fucking swear. Don’t these kids have a swear jar I can just pay into? That would be a whole lot easier. At all the commotion, curious little faces pop their heads up from behind trees way above and from bushes down below. A little voice calls like a miniature battle cry, and as if from no here kids — little boys, swing out from the woodwork — literally. In less than seconds, we’re surrounded by little ones—little ones I’d never expect to be allowed to play games in trees hundreds of feet into the air, but I have a feeling, these are not average babes.

Their shy demeanor is juxtapose, to their war painted faces, and bodies loaded with green forest gear. These kids look like ordinary kids, but I don't fail to notice the tiny glint of aggression in each of their eyes… These babes are lethal warriors.

Before addressing them, Ridomie looks at me with eyes that say we’re not done talking, but we’ll
have to talk later. I nod evenly at him, too mesmerized by what I’m seeing to worry about him wringing me out. It's like we've stumbled upon the Lost Boys.

“Well c’mon then. Let’s have us a visit.” Ridomie waves them over.

“Domie!” They run to Ridomie like little kids should, abandoning whatever proprieties that have been injected into their Ryker clone DNA.

I do a quick count: One hundred and eighty-six of them. I stare at them in awe… and they right back at me. “Who's he, ‘Domie?” A little guy tugs at his pants. Ridomie picks him up, and puts him on his hip. “This is my friend — Briggland.” He uses my first name on purpose. He doesn’t tell them who I am; he doesn’t want to scare them.

There’s always the chance I could get recognized by my hair, but I trust Ridomie to know what he’s doing. Judging from Miss Taggart's initial reaction to seeing me, this area is a different realm altogether. They’re isolated from the other areas of Ryker Corp, and quite possibly Cyntripien. I gather they know enough to know a Ryker means trouble for them.

I’m surprised at how tiny they are. It’s hard to imagine they’ll grow up to be like Ridomie. It's hard to imagine Ridomie as a little guy like them. Bet he was fucking cute. “Can everyone say hello to my friend?”

“Hello!”

“Hi, guys.” I can say that and mean it. There’s not a single girl in the bunch. The energy from these children is like a breath of fresh air. One I haven’t fucking felt in a while, and one I need. No wonder this is a happy place for Ridomie.

"Why's his hair so shiny, Domie?" one of the kids asks.

I know he's still pissed at me, so I expect some kind of Ridomie style dig, but he doesn't. "It means he's somebody special. Remember?"

"Oh yeah. I forgot."

"Silly boy," Rye says kissing his forehead and setting him down.

"It means he's a Ryker," we hear from the distance. A young boy approaches. He's older than the rest. More like a Wendy than the Lost Boys, one about to leave the nursery. "Ryker's aren't nice."

"Toglin Brayz, apologize then go see your mother for a spanking. If you know he's a Ryker, then you know you can't talk like that to a Ryker," Ridomie says.

All his bravado washes away, there are tears and we can see that he really is just a boy, trying to play at being a man. "I'm sorry." He runs off in the direction he came from.

"It's okay Rye. I'm not offended. Rykers aren't nice."

"It's not okay and I don't care whether you're offended or not. He can't speak that way. That attitude will get him incinerated. If you didn't like watching an older clone's incineration, I promise you, you'll like watching a youngling's incineration even less."

Fuck. That makes my blood cold. "I-I thought you said Rykers don't come down here."

"I said hardly come down here. Imagine you weren't you, but your father. What would he have
done just now?"

Point made. A little spanking is nothing compared to being incinerated. I nod.

“Should we show Briggland here what kinds of games we play?” Ridomie says, distracting the kids.

I like hearing him say my name. I look over to him and smile for that. He thinks I’m smiling about the kids and their games.

For the rest of the afternoon, we play up in the trees. The whole afternoon is a rendition of Peter Pan and it's a fucking refreshing alternative to fighting, training, getting beat and Ryker Brainwashing academy.

The little boy, Toglin, returns with his mother, she's pulling him by the hand, he's crying. She looks similar to Miss Taggart, they are clones after all, but they're not identical. Her eyes aren't as blue, her cheeks aren't as sharp, hips not as vivacious. Still cock-achingly beautiful, but Miss Taggart is far prettier. "Master Ryker, sir, the boy has been punished. I'm putting him straight to bed, but wanted to bring him out for your approval, make sure his punishment met your expectations. He will be punished before bedtime tomorrow as well."

Before I can figure out what's going on, the boy's pants are being pulled down and I'm shown a very red ass. Fuck. That had to of hurt. I feel sorry for the kid. "Yeah. It meets, exceeds expectations." I don't know how he'll take a second spanking, but remember that these kids are made of Ryker genes. He'll be healed in an hour. And all I can think about, now that Riodmie's mentioned it, is this little guy being thrown in the incinerator. Makes me want to spank him myself to make sure he doesn't say shit like that to the wrong Ryker.

"I'd like to speak with him for a moment, Miss, if you don't mind." She knows it's not a request and nods. I crouch down to his height and help the crying little boy fix his pants back into place. He's trembling. Scared. "You know, Toglin you're right. Rykers are huge dicks."

His eyes go wide. "Nu-no sir. I'm sorry. What I said was wrong. I learned my lesson"

I shake my head. "You weren't wrong, but you still can't ever say that again. Promise me."

"I p-p-promise, sir."

"No more of that." I wipe his tears away. There's something different about this one. Not that I'm an expert, but something's in his eyes that's just…not in the other's. "I want to see you grow up and join my crew. Y'hear me?" I do my best impersonation of the Major.

"Really?" he says halting his crying upon my orders.

"Really."

"I'll work real hard, sir. I was wrong anyway. You seem nice."

This kid's pretty cool. I like his spark. How the fuck did he get a name like "Toglin?" Sounds like Goblin. "You know kid, you should try a different name on for size." I remember what the Major said about the middle name I share with him and take something from it. "How about Xane?" That's way cooler than 'Toglin.'

The kid looks irked again. Reminds me of Ridomie when he's annoyed with me. "Yes, sir."
I release him back to his mama.

We play until Miss Taggart comes to tell the boys it’s time for evening meal. With her is a crew of women, of Mothers, who look similar to her; strawberry blondes, warm motherly eyes, dressed in white cotton coats with big buttons and heels. I watch in fucking awe as groups of boys conglomerate around one ‘Mama.’ They know which one is theirs. Unlike the little boys I know, they don’t beg for five more minutes to play, they simply obey and follow their mamas like ducklings. It's fascinating to watch.

We say goodbye, but we don’t leave. Long after they’re gone, we’re still sitting in the trees amongst the 'games.' I’m swinging on a branch — Ridomie stands leaning his back against a tall Fir.

"This is where I was raised," he says proudly. “My entire G-batch was — the guys we train with. It’s the reason we're different from unraised.”

“The first of us were raised in a bio-engineered environment. Fake. It took your father's Lab Rats eighteen attempts to realize two important things. Younglings need more than food, and water to thrive. First, we needed love. Mothers. This is the only place women exist in Ryker corp. They are kept a secret from the civilians.”

"Yeah. Figured. Why's there no security down here though?"

"Don't need it. The Mother's comply willingly. In fact, no Mother has ever been incinerated to date."

"What? How have they manage that?"

"Think about it, Ryker. What's the worst thing you can do to a Mother?"

Oh God. "Incinerate their children."
"Yep. All of them. If a Mother steps out of line they incinerate all of her children."

"Jesus." I shake my head. "What's the second thing they need? The younglings?"

He's happy for the change in topic. “Sunlight.”

“Sunlight?"

“All living creatures need sunlight, Briggland, else they don’t thrive. Even with the love of a Mother, they got sick and weak when kept inside. They’d begin strong, but they’d grow like the early leaves of a plant; reaching for the sun, stalks becoming thin and, stringy.

“Sides you can’t get a better way to grow up than this.” He gestures around him. “…learning strategy while you’re playing in the trees. Miss Taggart is one of the first Mothers.” That's when I notice he’s got quite the fondness in his voice for her.

“Wait, dude, did I fucking hit on your mama’?"

He blushes. "Yeah."

I laugh and jump down off my ledge. “Dude! I’m fucking sorry, but holy shit. She's a milf man."

"A milf?"

"Mama I'd like to—"
"Okay. That's enough. You're not having sex with my mother Ryker."

An order. Interesting.

He takes a step closer to me; it’s a violent, dangerous step; lust behind his eyes. Warm fingers; gentle fingers, at my chin. He turns my head; my eyes look into his grey ones. His fringe falls just off to the side. Everything becomes big to me, as I feel his hand move to the side of my face; his thumb caresses my cheek. I become aware of his breathing. I can sense his fears, that each fucking moment together could be our last, and every moment that I’m close to him is precious. I’m sand to him; he’s trying to find the right strength to hold me to him: Not too tight, not too loose, or I’ll slip from his grasp faster and faster. Instinctively, he wants to grip me iron tight; he fights it.

I sigh and relax into him. Imagining what it could be like if there was no Ryker Corp. No rules. No fucking Ryker hierarchy bullshit. But without Ryker Corp, there would be no Ridomie. Is that an irony? I’m not sure. Fucking feels like it though.

“Do you mean it? Do you want her?” His hand slides back; digs painfully into my scalp.

“No. Not really, Rye."

“Don’t do it again.” He pushes me away.

“You don’t make any sense, Ridomie. You won’t fuck me ‘cause of some stupid racist, rules but you’re crazy over the thought of me fucking anyone else. I have to fuck someone. I can’t live the rest of my life as a Pope.”

“I don’t even want to know what that is Ryker, but if it's someone who masturbates for life, then you do it,” he says dangerously, gritting his teeth in a snarl and holding back from whatever it is he’d like to do to me to teach me a lesson. “That was stupid, Ryker. Stupid. I have a lot of testosterone, more than the other clones. It’s what enables me to be their Alpha. What do you think all the testosterone makes me want to do to you when you act like that?”

“Well, what the fuck am I supposed to do? You’re basically saying I can’t fuck anyone else and you won’t fuck me too. That’s not fucking fair.”

“Nothing’s fair around here, Ryker. Get used to it.”

Yeah. I’m familiar with our fucking dilemma. I don’t want Ridomie to be mad at me. I decide to forget our problems for the moment. Sweeping stuff under the rug is a Briggland Ryker specialty. Only trouble is, I’ve usually left by the time the pile under that rug is too big to avoid tripping on. We will have to solve this, least I think that's what other people do, but we can solve this one some other time. “Look. I’m sorry. I really am. I shouldn’t have done that—that’s not nice to do to someone you care about; I know that. I’m really fucking bad at this. Can you forgive me, Rye? Please?” I don't know what this is, I just want him to stop being mad at me.

He nods, but his nod doesn’t mean yes. I know that sounds fucking weird, but it's true. “I forgive you Ryker,” he says all calm and cool, while his body ferments with rage.

“No you don't. Ridomie, I’m sorry,” I say again.

“You shouldn’t be apologizing to me. C’mon. We should get you fed. You’re still recovering.”

He’s still fucking mad, but he’s working hard to calm himself. I feel defeated. I hate Ridomie mad at me, my whole world feels wrong and sad and grey. Is this what it feels like to be in love? Now I know why I’ve never done it before. When things are good it feels like a million sunrises. When
things are like this, it feels like shit on shit.

I don’t say anything and hope this’ll blow over.

**

I knew his cool wouldn’t fucking last. Ridomie says he forgives me, but I know he’s fucking lying. I reach over to grab one of the tomatoes off his plate like I always do. He shields his plate from me turning away. “Hey Ridomie, what gives?”

“You have your own food.”

*Yeah, but we always share plates.*

I’ve had enough of this shit. Either tell me why you fucking hate me, or leave me the fuck alone. “Fuck you, then.”

He gives a low growl in response to my dirty mouth. If he’s gonna be that way, I won’t talk to him either. I turn to Rex. “Hey Rex. Ridomie’s being a fucking dickhead. Why do you think that is?” I said I wouldn’t talk to him, not that I wouldn’t talk about him.

Whatever I thought I’d get, I don’t know, but what Rye does, isn't it. “He thinks I’m a dickhead? Why don’t you ask him who he was hitting on today?” Ridomie pipes up to Rex, who is still not saying a word, and looking like he really, really doesn’t want to be a part of our fake conversation.

That’s a low fucking blow. Miss Taggart is probably Rex’s mama too, or I dunno, a fucked up kind of Aunt or something. Asshole.

“Look you two, I don’t know what lover’s quarrel you’re in this time, but I think you better simmer down and start eating before you attract real trouble. The Major’s in a pissy mood today,” he says in a quiet voice.

Neither of us speak after Rex’s warning. We do; however, openly shoot daggers at one another. After only a few minutes of such gaieties, Ridomie pushes away from the table. “On second thought — I’m not hungry.”

He shoves his tray into my tray and now I want to light him up with a symphony of expletives, but when I see the look in his eyes — a swirling of painful; frustration — I can’t fucking do it. Besides, pushed all to one side on the corner of his tray — the side closest to me — is a stack of tomatoes.

Carefully picked out of his salad.

*Specially left for me.*
"Eat that."

I look up; I'm sitting on 'his' bed, the one he usually uses anyway, even if he claims it's not really his, as I flip through one of their whacked version of a newspaper I convinced the Major to get me (I had to behave for an entire three days straight—it was fucking hard).

He throws an apple at me, what is it with Ridomie and fucking apples?

I stare at it. Ridomie and I have been at each other's throats for weeks, and he fucking thinks when he gets me food he's making up for all our fighting. We still hang around together, everyday, attached at the fucking hip because we fucking have to be according to the Major, but that's not the only reason. We've tried being apart when we can help it. It's not pleasant. When we're apart I ache. I know he feels something too, even if he pretends he doesn't. Fuck. I pretend too, that's how I know he's doing it.

I don't know when it started, can't remember being without the feeling. When we're not close, it hurts; we think about each other, long for each other and when we can't stand it anymore, we claw our way back to each other. Suddenly, all my tension is gone, even Ridomie mostly relaxes; contented. So we've accepted our bitter amalgamation and hang out, as often as possible. Begrudgingly.

We go to practice, eat and go to class together, fuck, we even shower together. That last ones not as kinky as it sounds. We're in a large shower facility with a bunch of other clones. I'm under my own showerhead and I do my best not to look at him, or I think my cock will explode. Pretty sure he does the same thing.

Every moment of all of that we bicker. We've been like this since our fight. At first, I know he was pissed because of what I'd done with his mama, but now it’s transformed; mixed with something else. I won’t bother to fucking ask him what—I’m being a stubborn asshole too.

Both of us pissed off like this, is the worst fucking combination ever. He's been more of a grouchy asshole than usual and I retaliate, can't help it, don't want to help it, feels gratifying as fuck.

"Not hungry."

"You didn't eat enough at midday meal."

"So? Who are you? My fucking mama?" And on and on like this. This is us now.

Since my question is rhetorical I look back to my 'newspaper.' I've learned a lot about their pop culture since I started reading their gossip—that's what their newspaper is to me. It reads almost like a magazine. It's fucking interesting to see how the world views Ryker Corp—not at all how I do—they think Derco walks on water. And Derek; he’s a fucking ‘heartthrob.’ They always want to interview him and list the top ten things Derek likes to do on a date. I read that article and know they couldn’t have interviewed him—they missed torture the fuck outta people as number one.

"Eat the damn apple Ryker," he says and hangs his jacket—or I guess since clones don't own anything, the jacket he was wearing— on the small hook beside the bed.
I pick up the apple, it looks a bit different than the ones on Earth, it's purple, but I could still decipher what it was the first time I picked one up. Some of them are purple inside too, way cooler. I bring my eyes level with his. He knows what I'm going to do.

"Don't you dare Ryker! I've got enough shit to deal with, I don't need to worry about you too. Just eat the damn apple."

Fuck. Ridomie swore. He's really riled. Retaliation isn't a good idea when he's at this point.

*Know what? Don't care.*

I whip the fucking apple at his head, he ducks; it splatters on the wall. "Stop bringing me shit! I'll eat when I damn well feel like it. I'm fine now. I can look after myself." I've been at full health a while now. It's just my ass that's sore a lot of the time.

"Get out Ryker. Get out now before I…just get out!" *At least he feels more comfortable telling me what to do.*

I close my 'newspaper.' "Don't gotta tell me twice." He's told me to leave, but he doesn't really want me to. I sense the apprehension, like waiting to be punched in the face. That's pretty much what it's going to feel like. We just spent the last two hours apart. I'm exhausted with wanting to be near him. He feels the same. But I muster up enough anger, I'm able to put one foot in front of the other and walk toward the door. It's a game of who will break first. This time it's him.

"Ryker. Wait."

"Fuck you Ridomie. You don't want to fuck me, fuck you." ‘Cause that’s what this is really about. It's the forbidden topic, so we don't talk about it, but it is. We need to fuck so bad, we can taste it in the air. Sometimes, I swear I can smell his arousal.

"We can't—"

"Yeah, yeah. I heard you the first hundred times. At this point, I don't care who you fuck, or how you accomplish the feat. Just do it. Might cheer you the fuck up you cheerless motherfucker."

He stares at me for an eternity, digesting what I just said. I don't wait for him to come up with something. "Fucking enjoy yourself. I plan to."

"What? What does that mean, Ryker?"

I ignore the rest of whatever he says. I'm out.

**

I don't get propositioned like the other guys do. They're all open sexually and I've watched it happen plenty. Fucking goes on in every crevice of this place. Of all the things that are faux pas, sex is not one of them. With the guys, it's not because I'm a Ryker. This may be hard to believe but, Derek's offered sex every time I look over at him. Some clones (stupid clones) think they can avoid Derek's wrath by sucking his wiener.

I don't get propositioned because of Ridomie. I didn’t know what was going on the first time it happened, but I do now. He growls at anyone who gets within a foot of me; they’ve learned not to come near me. He stands really close to me, close as you can without touching, always keeping space between me and everyone else, save the Major, or other members of my family (but I think he'd like to). He doesn't mean to do it. I know that. I can see him mentally kicking himself every
time he does it. I kinda love it. Something in me craves a great big alpha male and all his posturing is fucking hot. But 'Rykers only dominate' and other bullshit. I'm not supposed to like that and he's not supposed to act that way toward me.

It fucking worries me. I don't know how far the Major's protection goes, especially since they're shit actors who aren't doing a very good job carrying that lie. I've been keeping track at who he's growled at (everywhere all at once, or I get my ass kicked by the Major) and so far it's only the raised from his G-batch, who seem to have particular loyalty to Rye that extends beyond duty. It doesn't bring me much comfort. The threat of incineration inspires information from anyone and I wouldn't blame them. It's a horrifying way to die.

The way I see it, Ridomie and I have two options: We fuck, or we get over each other. Hear me out. I don't know a lot about clones and mating, but from what I've seen of the clones who are mated, they're not nearly as homicidal, as Ridomie is when someone gets what he deems too close. I've seen things escalate with the other clones, sure, but actual shit has to happen before that level is reached, not the simple act of looking at me. Clones have actually started looking away when I come around. Ridomie has a lot more influence here than I think he knows. In each case of mated clones, they're 'claimed,' a sort of promise to each other. I don't quite get how that works exactly. Ridomie won't tell me and it's been hard talking to anyone else. In any case, my guess is that once this 'claiming' takes place, whatever it is inside the Top, driving him crazy is eased. Fucking me would get him to stop acting crazy. I'm sure of it. Less opportunities to get found out like he will when he inevitably kills someone for touching me.

That's one. My other idea: Get over each other seems like the more logical one, but I don't know if you can get over a mate. I think we're hooped in that area, but doesn't mean I'm not going to try. So here's me trying.

Besides, I'm fucking sick of this enforced celibacy. It's time for that to change. I mill about the first floor and talk to a few clones I know. Without Ridomie sewn to my hip, it's a bit easier. There are some kids that won't talk to me no matter what, but a few are afraid not to. It must be a very 'rock in a hard place' situation for them: Talk to me and get steam-rolled by Ridomie, or don't and face possible incineration.

Thankfully, I run into Rex. He's one of the few not terrified of Ridomie, or me. There's a wide belt of respect for Rye, but Rex won't ignore me and he feels confident enough to step-up to Ridomie when he's being unreasonable. Rex is massive. Not bigger than Rye, but big enough.

"Hey Ryker, where's Ridomie?"

"Who cares about that asshole? I'm here to talk to you."

"You two fighting again?"

"Again? Do we stop fighting? I mean that guy's as fragile as fucking glass."

"Glass? Glass isn't all that fragile—not trying to be disrespectful sir—you said there would be things that were different where you were from and you wanted us to tell you."

"I did, Rex. And you don't have to call me sir or apologize, for the one-hundredth time. Anyways, never mind that, what are you doing right now?"

"I was on my way to get something to eat."

"Okay that's good, real good. What I have in mind won't take long."
"Ryker, what are you doing?"
"I should think that's obvious," I waggle my eyes and grab his hips.

He pushes me away, actually pushes me away. That's good. It means if he really doesn't want to, he'll tell me. He's laughing. "Ryker, there's no fucking way I'm doing that. Ridomie will break my neck."

"Ridomie and I are nothing." I pull him closer. "I'm going to suck your cock then you're going to use it to fuck me hard."

I get pushed away again. "What the fuck, Rex? I thought I was the Ryker. I mean, uh say no if you don't want to, I'm not into rape, but if it's just because of Ridomie, forget about him."

"I mean no disrespect by this, sir, I mean, Ryker, but getting my neck broken by Rye is a real possibility. You've already proven you don't incinerate clones—"

"Yeah, yeah. Okay, I see where this is going."

"For the record, it's not just Ridomie. I'm a top, yes, so all those things you said, I'm game to do. But you're a Ryker; Ryker's don't bottom. I'd feel uncomfortable anyway."

"Fine. I do need to fuck though—is there anyone who won't care I'm a Ryker or about Ridomie?"

He shakes his head. "Not that I can think of—I mean, of course you can have anyone you want you know, but you'll have to order it. Use some kind of force."

So rape. No. It's the same everywhere. This is why Ridomie won’t fuck me—he wants to, I can tell—but he won’t because of this top, bottom Ryker bullshit. Ridomie is clearly a ‘top’ and according to their rules, I’m a ‘bottom’ or something.

"This sucks. My balls are blue Rex."

He stares at me a moment. “Ryker, wait. There might be a way.”

I turn around hopefully.

“I could take you to… Fuck, the Major would kill me if he found out and so would Ridomie…”

“Take me? Take me where?”

“I could take you to a place, a hang out for clones just out of bounds. There are locals there; you could disguise yourself. I’m sure you’d find someone to fuck there. A non-clone.”

Giddy up. “I'm fucking in.”

**

"Hey, Rido?"
"What?" I snap viciously. I don't mean to. I'm on edge. It's happened.

"I, uh. Just want to talk to you a sec, sir."

"Sorry, D'arko. Talk."
"We've noticed, sir. Your blood believes the Ryker is your mate and it's begun to react. You haven't claimed him."

I explode. In a swift move, D'arko is against a wall in the lonely corridor. "Of course I haven't claimed him. He's a Ryker dammit." He nods, unable to breathe; I release him.

"Wait, sir!" he says as I'm preparing to storm off.

"What?"

"I was sent because—"

"I know why you were sent, D'arko. Spare me. This is another collaboration of concerned clones. I know what happens to a clone who doesn't claim their mate." We become virulent.

"We think the new Ryker is willing to have sex with you."

I refrain from blowing his skull apart with my fist. Just. "Have you all been standing too close to the incinerator? Him having sex with me will do nothing to cool my rage." I need to fuck him. Claim him.

"That's not what has been discussed."

"You shouldn't be discussing it at all."

"The new Ryker is a good man. He will let you fuck him."

I have to tighten my fists and remain where I am. Remind myself they're just trying to help. "I might as well just throw myself into the incinerator then. Save myself being skinned alive when Lord Ryker finds out, which he will. You really want to help, D'arko?"

"Yes. Yes, sir. We do."

We clones live to help one another. It makes us have meaning, purpose. It makes us feel significant. I turn quickly and grab the lapels of his school jacket. "Find a way to make it stop. Undo the call of his blood. Please?"

He looks terrified. "I…I…There isn't. You can only equalize it, sir. By fucking him. You know what happens to clones who can't claim their mates."

I let him go with a little more force than is necessary. I know all of that. What he says it true even if I don't like it. I'm about to storm off again, done with this pointless conversation, when something occurs to me. "How is Ter-X doing?"

"Still beside himself. But they're already mated, Rido. I know what you're thinking, but it's not quite the same. He's not in the state you're in."

"Don't suppose to know what I'm thinking." Man I'm being a dick. "Sorry…sorry, D'arko." I grab my head in my hands and tear at my dark hair.

Tentatively, he puts a hand on my back. "It's okay Ridomie. We were raised together. I know you. I know how the call of your mate can make your blood sick. That's why I'm here to beg you to give in, before it gets worse."

"No. There's got to be another way. There always is. We just haven't found it yet." I'm still going to talk to Ter-X.
"Look, in the mean time, some of the guys and I are going to Legions tonight. You should come with us."

"I don't drink, Darks and you know why." Before he was mated, he saw the effects of me indulging in Turmulon and he's a Top.

He laughs. "That was a fun night for me. Don't tell Tayden, but it's still in my top ten."

Not for me. I don't like losing control. Hate losing control. I grunt. He laughs again. "You don't have to drink, Rido. Just come. Hang out. Relax."

"I don't think that's going to help. B-being away from him makes it worse," I admit. I'm shaking thinking about it. My blood constantly feels like it's on fire. It boils when I'm away from him and cools to a dull simmer when I'm with him, but it never stops. It's driving me mad.

"There is a way to find temporary relief from that. You know that."

"Of course I know."

"No clones will touch you; you're the Major's. He claimed you."

That's not unusual. Rykers don't understand the clone kind of mating, nor would they care if they did. A Ryker claiming a clone is different from a clone claiming a clone.

"Which is why you should come to Legions. There are plenty of Rykerians who come to be fucked by clones."

It's true. Most are either afraid of us, think we shouldn't exist, or think we should exist to serve them. There is a small minority, who think a variety of different things outside of that.

"I know it's not what you want, but it will calm you down. You can't deny that."

I can't. And I can't go on like this. "I'll think about it."

He smiles. "That's the spirit. Meet us by the gate when it's time."

He walks off before I can argue. I walk off, still intent on talking to Ter-X when I can.

**

It's pretty close to evening meal, so I make my way down. Finally, I'll get to be with Ryker again. It's been an hour. If I'm thinking that way after an hour, it's getting worse. I might have to go to Legions whether I want to or not.

I'm mad at Ryker, for a variety of reasons, but I still need to be with him.

On my way to the Mess Hall, I see Ter-X, he's with his twin, Heli-O. Perfect timing. I whistle. "Hey, Ter. I need to talk with you a minute."

He looks to his twin, asking with the gesture if he can come too. Those two have stuck pretty close since Brodix was lost. "Yeah. Both of you. C'mere."

They do. "What's up Rye?" Heli-O asks for them both. Ter-X doesn't look up to talking, but he's going to have to.

"How's he doing?" I ask Heli-O. I'll ease Ter-X into the conversation.
"Better. So long as I stick with him."

Clone mythology. It's believed that your brothers are fractions of you. Fractions strong enough to pull away and become their own being. To be with them is to make you closer to being whole. In my case, single birth we would say that none of my fractions, brothers, other clones, were strong enough to pull away from me; that I keep them with me all the time. Maybe it's true, maybe it's not. I know it's not something we learn in school.

"Has he been able to be without you?"

"Yes. More and more."

"What's it like for you Ter-X?"

He looks to his twin a bit panicked.

"I'm sorry Ter-X. I need your answers. You know I wouldn't bother you with this if it wasn't important." Ter-X and Heli-O are the closest to real brothers I have. We shared a Mother.

"It's true then," Heli-O says. "We've heard rumors about you and the new Ryker, but wanted to hear it from you."

I nod tightly. Does everyone know? This isn't good. My days are numbered anyway. Maybe I should just fuck Ryker.

Heli-O answers for his twin again. "It's hard. He can't stop thinking about him, wanting him, dreaming about him. When he's with me, the desires aren't as strong."

"That's how I feel, but I've got no brothers to make it go away." I feel a little better, that what I'm feeling is normal. "Even when I'm with him, it's never completely gone. Does that go after the claiming?"

Ter-X looks confused. I get a bad feeling. It's bad enough to make him speak up. "You still feel the burning when you're with him?"

My heart's beating faster. "It never goes away, I was hoping…"

"I don't know what that means. I'm sorry Rido. It's supposed to go away. How long has it been this way?"

"I don't know. I haven't been paying attention, I've been too distracted by him. I didn't feel any burning at first, but I always knew I wanted him."

"That's normal," he assures me. "The burning starts when it starts, but once it does, it will increase, consume you, until you mate. When you're with him, it's the desire that takes over. His blood calls to yours, desire increases 'till you have to claim him, but the bubbling, burning feeling quells. That's how you know it is your mate."

"So then, maybe Ryker isn't my mate?" I'm hopeful and at the same time outraged. It's confusing to want something so bad, but know you shouldn't, so you wish you didn't.

They exchange a look only they can understand. "From what you say, he's your mate, Ridomie. Maybe it's because he's a Ryker? A clone and a Ryker as mates, is unprecedented to begin with. Either way, feeling the burning at the same time you feel desire for him must be…"
"...Unbearable."

Ter-X nods his agreement with me. "I guess it doesn't matter in the end. The whole mating business is unbearable. After mating comes a whole new level of possession."

I've seen it. Heard of it from other clones, Miss Taggart and the other Mothers, but I'd like Ter-X's take on it. I can't imagine feeling anymore possessive of Ryker than I do now. "What's that like for you?"

"Exhausting. Some try to fight it and then it's more exhausting. It's and ever present calling from your blood. Mark him. Fuck him. Protect him. It's animal. That's why you have to have rules. The rules help."

That's what the others have said. An idea occurs to me. "Do you think they'd help now? Before mating?"

He shrugs. "Don't know Rido. I've never heard of anyone who's tried."

"Okay. That's it. I won't bother you anymore. I'm sorry to ask you these questions now. I've come close to killing...I don't want to kill anyone without good reason."

"You can ask, Rido. Anytime. I'm sorry I was resistant. It's been hard."


He clicks his tongue at me. "Aw Rido. Mother would be disappointed."

That smarts a bit. I'm supposed to be the 'big brother.' "She hasn't been our mother in a long time."

"You don't mean that. For what it's worth, the mating business it exhausting, as I said, but I wouldn't trade any of my time with... with..." He's crying. Heli-O pulls Ter-X to him, but Ter-X pushes away. "No. You've got to know, Ridomie. Mating with B-Brodix was worth all the trouble. Those of us who get mates are lucky. We don't get them forever. Nothing is forever. Don't throw it away."

**

The large hulking mass that is Ridomie walks up to the table I'm at and stares down Rex and Six, who are on either side of me. Rex slides over and Ridomie puts his tray down and takes his place beside me. His hand plants itself on my thigh, something he does a lot more of and he eats without a word and like we didn't fight earlier. Like we haven't been fighting for fucking weeks.

Good. I don't want to fucking fight either and I'm looking forward to getting the fuck out of here with Rex later. I haven't left this forsaken hellhole yet, and even if I don't find a piece of ass (which Rex is certain I'll find), it's bound to be interesting, not to mention I could use a break from Ridomie.

He watches me without smiling; does he know my plans for later? When we're finished, he cocks his head for me to follow him. Not seeing much choice in the matter, I do. He takes me up three levels to an indoor garden and leads me over to a fountain that is the monogram of a large 'R.' He takes my hand.

"I'm sorry about earlier Ryker—I'm sorry about everything. I've been the asshole lately."

He smiles his smile—the heartbreaking smile I don't want him to give anyone but me. I'm a
selfish bastard.

"Forgive me?"

I don’t want to. I want to punch him in the face, but I want to not fight with him more.

"Yeah, yeah." My cheeks heat. Am I fucking blushing? This feels a whole lot more intimate than it should. “Did you whack off?” I have to attribute his better mood to something.

"Sure did. You were right; I was a cheerless motherfucker that needed a good fuck.”

I don’t count that as Ridomie swearing since he’s just quoting me. “I could have helped you with that.”

“No. You can’t, ever.”

"About that. We can't go on like this Rye. ”

"I'm sorry, Ryker. I just don't know what else to do."

"I know you're not going to wanna hear this, but I'm not living like this."

"You're not fucking other clones, Ryker. I already told you."

"Since when do you make the rules for me?" I fucking challenge him.

"I didn't make the rules Ryker. Mother Nature did. I don't know why we've been cursed like this, but we have been. My blood chose you—I dunno, maybe some cruel joke—and that's never going to go away, be erased. We have to live with it. Fact is, if you fuck another clone, let him touch you, how I should be touching you, I'll snap. I won't want to, but I will. I don't feel like killing my brothers Ryker, so I'd appreciate it if you could comply, as I am, to the laws of nature. A life of masturbation is a small price to pay."

"You're serious? I can't believe it. You're fucking serious. You actually believe that's going to work. Well let me tell you something Rye, I may not know what's up around here, but I know you're driving yourself straight to the nuthouse with that attitude. You will break one day."

"I won't. I can handle this. But you have to help me, Ryker. Rules will help. I think we should make rules. Rules that you…not obey…just rules that you, keep in mind."

I'm wrong. He's already lost it. "Yeah, keep telling yourself that." I could be a real dick and say it's just his responsibility to keep him from killing anyone, he can control his behavior on his own, but from what I've gathered, I really don't think he can.

Just like I can't help the aching, or the wanting him.

I don't like the thought of him fucking anyone else either. It irritates me. I recognize that was what I was feeling the day the Major claimed him. It's not near the same as what Ridomie feels. He's almost, animal about it. "I'll make you a deal Rye, you make rules and I'll obey every one of them —"

"Not obey. Just think about and maybe decide to follow. Better to think of it as things I've mentioned in passing that you decide on your own are good ideas."

"Whatever gets you to sleep at night." I'll play into his delusion; only because I know it's bound to fail and that he has to go through it to see the truth. I'll have fun playing along. "So, uh, what's the
first thing you'd like to mention to me?"

"No fucking clones."

In what universe is that 'mentioning?' "You know Rye, now that you mention it, that sounds like a good fucking idea to me. I'm inspired. I'm swearing off clones." True fucking story.

He smiles. I'm surprised when he reaches his hand out to run his thumb over my cheek. "Perfect. See? We can make this work. It's all going to be good."

*It's going to be a fucking disaster.*

He breathes relief. His whole being is filled with genuine love for me and it makes me think that maybe I shouldn’t go through with tonight. Do I really need to fuck someone? Maybe I should just go up to my room and...

“I have to go see the Major for a few hours then I’ve got a few other things to do. I’ll be up late, but I’ll come by to check on you Ryker. You’ll get some sleep, though, yeah?” He pushes the hair off my face.

Fuck. It’s too perfect. I was a little worried about how I would lose Ridomie to go with Rex. Yeah. I'm still going. Besides. I don't really agree with his plan. I'm just humoring him. It will be much better for us. Who knows? If I’m not so God damned horny all the time, I can stop annoying Ridomie for sex and maybe this fucked up system of Rye's will work.

“I’ll definitely go to bed early tonight.” I mean it too. Though it won’t be my bed I’ll be going to.

His body is tense, that never seems to go away, but his eyes are soft and are saying all the shit that he won’t say to me. He loves me and he’s glad to have me in whatever capacity he thinks he’s worthy of. Right now, that’s being this strange version of friends. Mates? I’ll go along with this for now—’cause I’ll take him anyway I can get him too.

“All right then. Behave yourself, Ryker—you know, that is, if you want to.” He winks.

I waggle my eyebrows. “I dunno, maybe if you mention what you'll do to me if I'm naughty. Will you spank me?”

“You can bet on it, Ryker. And I can promise you—you won’t like it.”

Fuck. I can't breathe for a second. Authoritative, Ridomie. He’s sexy as fuck. “I’d better decide to behave then.” I’m sarcastic. He knows. I never fucking behave—character trait. I'm starting to think this accord we've made is going to be a major improvement.

“It’s obviously been too long since the last time—don’t you remember begging me to stop?”

Yes. It fucking sucked. I hated it; my cock liked it, there’s a difference. “I remember.”

He nods. “Good then. I’m going.”

For several long moments I think he’s going to kiss me, but he doesn’t. He gets up and walks away leaving me harder than rocks.
Sadly, Mock has a crazy person Trolling her stories. Because he's an anon commenter, it was suggested by the AO3 support team I turn off anon commenting for the time being. This makes me sad. I've met some great people through anon and there are some of you I talk to frequently who have anon/guest accounts. I invite those of you to contact me here for now: deadmockingbirds@hotmail.com

I realize he can now see that, but I can block senders, so I'm not too worried, though it has gotten a bit scary. When I turned off anon-commenting on the story he began commenting on, he went out of his way to crawl over to another story to leave me more messages.

Ugh. Anyway. I have another chapter for this story coming out today (I hope). Cheers all.
Chapter Notes

Sorry for all the cockblocking! I still blame Ridomie. I wanted them to do it ages ago!

Warning: Some may find this chapter a bit violent. Personally, I don't think it's that bad, but I can take a lot. So, uh, "buyer beware." But if you can make it through, I think it's worth it ;-)

“How does no one get caught?” This whole thing is rotten. Disorganized. We're going to get fucking caught. You think knowing that would get me to turn around and go home. Not a chance. This is the most exciting thing I've done in since I got here.

“I think they know, but they turn a blind eye,” Rex says.

“Why would they turn a blind eye?”

He shrugs. “Your guess is as good as mine.”

That doesn’t sit well with me, but I’m already in this for the long hull. I’ve sprayed what’s left of my golden blonde Ryker hair with some black stuff Rex dredged up for me—I’m going to attempt to pass as a clone. We had to run across the property and to the North wall where the guard pretends not to see clones walk through. All this time and I can just leave the fucking property. Of course I know I’d be found by morning if I tried and I’d have all of Ryker Corp. looking for me, but it’s good to know about this little loophole.

The guard is supposed to be looking the other way like he did for the clones ahead of us, but of course we get stopped. Unraised. “Wait, Rex. Who’s he? I never seen this guy before.” His English isn’t polished. I want to ask what batch he’s from.

Rex looks me over and I panic a little thinking I’m ousted. “This is Ry—ick. Ryick.”

Fuckin good one Rex. Asshole. This night is over before it began. Seriously, Ryick? What a dumb name. I get ready to turn the fuck around.

“How come I ain’t never heard of no Ryick before?”

Because you’re a dumb, slow-speaking moron… But I remember the Major talks slow too, and he’s not stupid. At all. It’s time to turn on the Ryker charm, just in case. “Hi. I’m Ryick.” I wink at him. “I just got released from G-batch 333624. I am new—you're quick and smart.”

I can see he still doesn’t trust me, but he’s softening. “You’re cute too. Where you been hiding, stud?” I worm closer to him so he can see my finer charms, fucking happy my shitty disguise is apparently working.

He points his weapon to the ground and grabs me from around the small of my back. “How ‘bout you come back and suck my cock later to thank me for lettin’ you leave tonight? Newbies don’t get shit for free.”
“It would be my pleasure… I can do it now if you want.”

“I’m on duty—you can do it later. I’ll look forward to it.”

He nudges at the collar of my black shirt with his nose, then uses his teeth to bear down on my neck, just under the collar and they sink in deep—fuck—that’s all I need, a noticeable mark to have to explain to people. To Ridomie. I may have to take my bracelet off after all—let it heal before I go back. Not that clones don’t walk around with 'love marks' and shit, but it would be different with me. Ridomie's going to fucking kill someone. I know my rights as a clone though—if I was one that is—I push away from him. “Hey sweet thang, I’m here for a good time, not a long time if you know what I’m sayin’”

“I don’t see any fucking marks on yeh. Maybe I’m sayin' yer mine fer tonight.”

Can clones just do that? Mark a fuck for later, like I’m a piece of cheesecake he's saving? I might be getting more than I bargained for tonight. I came for sex, but I’m also going to see what it’s like to be a clone first hand.

I look to Rex for help. “He’s with me Stark,” Rex says, finally, pulling me back to him, but careful to touch me only as long as he needs to. “I’ll make sure he’s back to pay you later.” Rex looks sick at having to treat me like I’m not Briggland Ryker; I’m just fucking relieved.

I know I can take this guy, sure, but I want to leave. I piss this guy off; it’s over, he’s not going to let us through. “Fine. My cock will be waiting,” he says to me pointedly.

Once we’re beyond the gates of Ryker Corp., I look around expecting something different, but it’s not. It’s a wooded area that is an extension of the massive grounds.

“C’mon, Ryick.”

I shake my head at him for that name. If it had been Ridomie, he’d of planned a name out for me instead of making something up on the spot. No. Scratch that. If it had been Ridomie, he wouldn’t let me step one toe off Ryker grounds. We run several thousand feet before we reach a building. It’s not well kept, but it’s sturdy and there’s a sign out front: Legions. Rex keeps his distance from me, but he stays close. It’s not like Ridomie's here. Why's he being so paranoid?

I expect a bouncer, but there isn’t one. We walk into a dimly lit warehouse. There’s a bar, lots of dudes…and women. I’m shocked to death at seeing women. I don’t know what to choose—maybe I’ll have some of each tonight. My nuts are fucking blue, and who knows when the next time will be?

“Maybe don’t drink anything, Ryke—I mean Ryick.”

“Don’t drink? I can’t get…” I stop midsentence remembering; I couldn’t get drunk on Earth, but here is bound to be different and fuck, I’m excited about that. Don’t drink he says? Fuck that! “Hey. Who’s the Ry…Ick here?”

He gets it. “Exactly. Now go get me a fucking… What do we drink here?”

“Turmulon.”

“Go get me one of those.”

He pauses. “I would… But it will look funny. You’re clearly… Oh jeez I can’t believe I’m saying this, but you’re clearly the brat, bottom… I’m a top.”
"You can sense that shit?"

"Hmmm. Never really thought about it before. I guess 'sense' is one way to describe it, but it's more a knowing."

"Right. Well I think I get it. Tops don’t do errands for brats, bottoms...whatever."

“No,” he confirms.

“I’ll go get it... ‘Sides the bartender looks cute—both of them do. Maybe I’ll get lucky.”

“Wait,” he stops me. “Ryick, there are things you need to know. Like, you’re unmarked, unclaimed... Well except for that thing Stark left you, but it won’t hold much weight without him here. If you go places alone, and a Top really wants you—you won’t have any choice, but to go with him. That’s the way of things."

“I'm not here to go for a clone, Rex. This disguise may have worked in the dark and on dumbo back there, but I don't think it's good enough if they have long enough to look at me. I'm going for a Rykerian.”

"Rykerian, Ryick. Ryker blood. While they're not quite the same as clones, they'll still peg you for one or the other and no matter how pro-clone they are, they won't take kindly to a Ryker clone, and a bottom at that, turning them down."

Everyone acts like there's this big difference between Rykerians and Clones, but the closer I get to it all, the more they seem kinda the same. Clones actually seem superior to Rykerians. They can do more shit.

I sigh. I wish he'd made mention of that before we came here. “Should you come with me then?”

“Not if you want to find a someone. You hanging closely to me will give that mark on your neck more weight. It won't prevent someone coming up to you, but it will make it less likely."

“By myself then.”

“Just find someone before they find you.”

“That shouldn’t be a problem.”

His eyes pop wide. “I don’t know about that. Haven’t you seen yourself? Especially with your hair like that. Don’t tell Rye I said this, but you’re hot Ryick.”

Fuck. This is not as easy, as I thought it would be. Last time I go for one of Rex's crazy schemes. For a top, he's fucking disorganized. “What do you suggest I do?”

“Just keep both eyes open, but uh, don’t make eye contact with anyone, find a top before one decides to take a liking to you.”

That's the same as no help. “Got it.” I feel like all eyes are on me, as I make my way to the bar, and I feel like it’s only a matter of seconds before someone makes a move. That’s fine. Maybe that person and I will fuck and Rex and I can leave. This isn't as fun as I thought it would be. Being a clone sucks. Everyone thinks you're a no one. Even other clones if you're the wrong 'kind' of clone. I take it all back. The Ryker in me likes the worshipful-type attention I get. I promise to continue to use it for good.
Thankfully, the stars must be aligned for me this night, either that, or I'm operating on dumb Ryker luck; I make it to the bar and order this 'turmulon' shit from the lady bartender. She's cute. Nowhere near the beauty of a Ryker manufactured Mother, but I'd do her. Unfortunately, she's not interested in me. Fine. I take a sip of the turmulon. It’s fucking good. Tastes like whiskey mixed with grand mariner, but without the burn. It's neon fucking green like Rykortisol. I sit at the bar and scope the place out.

“You’re new here, sweet stuff.”

I look up. It’s the bartender. The other one. He’s got the lightest hair of any one I’ve seen since arriving on Cyntripien, who’s not a Ryker. It’s nothing like mine, but it's a far cry from any of the darker hues the clones have. I like the sound of his voice. He’s kinder looking than the guard; though I can’t say I would mind having that strong, burly clone fuck my mouth—I can tell the guard's the possessive-type like Ridomie, I might be getting in over my head with him, which is exactly what I like. I fucking love the intensity of Clone-nature.

This bartender is hot enough though. He can be my warm up. “Ryick,” I say holding out my hand for him and do my best at submissive. Unless it's Ridomie, I'm just not into it, but I can pretend. Topping from the bottom is my specialty.

“Steve,” he returns. I can’t believe how ‘normal’ his name is—Earthlike.

I remember I’m the ‘bottom’ (though I don’t see why bottoms can’t be forward) and look at him coquettishly. “My first time to this place. Don't really come around these places.” It comes out sounding like the Major; his accent I mean. Apparently Ryick is a southern belle.

“Your first time? I’ve gotta buy you a shot then, beautiful.”

Before I can decline (because I do think I should heed Rex somewhat and not drink more than this one glass of turmulon) he’s pouring some other shit, blue liquid, into ounce glasses.

What the fuck? I pick up the glass, clink with his and we down it. “Wow, that’s fucking good Steve.”

He winks at me. “You gonna be here long blue eyes? I work another couple hours then I’d like to be in you.”

Mission accomplished.

“I can wait for you.”

“Good. Why don’t you stay here, keep me company. I’ll keep you supplied with drinks. Sound good?”

Translation: He doesn’t want me out of his sight. Even the fucking locals are a little possessive. Fucking Ryker blood. He's got feint Ryker features, like everyone else does around here, I've been paying attention; the Major would be proud, but uh, I don't plan on telling him about this. It's not on my 'Places Ryker Can Be' list. He was very clear that if a location is not on the list, I don't go there. I'm still working on being allowed in the Clone Barracks, I doubt I'll ever be allowed here.

“Sounds good,” I say. He fills up my glass with more green shit before getting back to work. I sit and sip and look over at him a few times for good measure while he serves drinks. He’s cute with blue eyes and strong arms. This was fucking easy and after Rex had me all riled up. I sit back and enjoy myself for-fucking-once, looking forward to when Steve gets off. Because then I’m going to be getting off. This night is going to be okay after all.
I hear the leather creak before I smell it—my jacket, my *fucking* jacket—I’m about to turn around to see how some asshole got hold of my fucking leather, then remove it from his cold, lifeless, body ‘till I remember Ridomie was the last person to touch my jacket.

My skin prickles with goose flesh. Fucking Ridomie’s here and he’s right the fuck behind me isn’t he?

“I’ll get a water, Steve, no ice.” Ridomie’s voice is unmistakable from above me. Yep Ridomie. What the fuck’s he doing here, wearing my jacket? And, *Steve*? Makes it seem like he comes here all the fucking time. *Why would he come here all the time?*

“Whoa. What the fuck’s wrong with you Ridomie? You look like shit.”

Something… wrong with Ridomie? He seemed fine when I left him. Did the Major punish him again? I wait to hear the answer.

“Inconveniences.”

“Inconveniences? You got a boyfriend, Ridomie? A mate? That why you haven’t been around?”

His answer fucking shocks me. “Yeah, yeah I do.” I can hear the smile in his voice. “He causes me no end of trouble.”

“Sounds like you could use a real drink, sure you don’t want something stronger than water?”

“No thanks. I don’t drink that stuff. I’m full of enough testosterone. I get violent.”

Testosterone? Does this shit have testosterone in it? Fuck.

Steve hands him the water right over my fucking head. “Well, it’s on me if you change your mind. Legions owes you Ridomie. If not for you, we wouldn’t get the business of Ryker Corp. Did you know they let us serve clones and foot the tab? Some nights it’s that tab that pays to keep us open.”

“How’s it on you if Ryker Corp’s footing my bill?” he laughs.

“I won’t add it, Dick. Now go find someone to make your night and tell your boyfriend to come talk to me if he doesn’t know what he’s got.”

That hits me. Steve isn’t the only one who thinks the world of Ridomie. I do. I really do. The only reason I’m here in the first place is because he said we can’t fuck, which I know is because of stupid Ryker ideals. I’m his, and he’s mine. Nothing will change that. If he asks me to become a masturbating Pope for him, then I should.

And I don’t want him finding someone to make his night.

“I was gonna have this one right here when I got off of work, but like I said, I owe you Ridomie. You take him—he looks like he’ll suck good cock.”

Fuck me—Steve is talking about me. *Fuck you Steve.* Did I say fuck yet? Fuck. Ridomie can’t know I’m here. He’ll go ballistic.

I feel Ridomie’s eyes on the top of me head. They stay there for what feels like a long time, and I don’t turn around. “No, I… I don’t… I just came here to get out. My ‘boyfriend’ told me I’m a cheerless Motherfucker. I don’t want him to think that way about me. I just need a night off. It’s already not working. I can still *smell* him. Like he’s right…ugh, never mind. I must be losing it.”
Phew. That was close. Fucking Steve. Fucking Ridomie's keen senses. But man, to know that even amongst clones, bottoms are the bottom of the pile to be passed around. We can be traded amongst tops even if we aren’t ‘owned’ by that top—it’s fucking unnerving.

“Your boyfriend sounds like an asshole.”

“Yeah. He’s an asshole all right, but he’s my asshole.”

Aw. So fucking sweet that Ridomie; I’m going to punch him in the cock later.

“Well let me know if you want a taste of Ryick, here, later. I’m off soon and I’m going to have a taste. He looks sweet.”

Okay, I know I already said this, but fuck me.

“Ry… Ick?”

“Yeah, this clone here.”

I feel a familiar hand plant firmly on my shoulder. “On second thought, I think I would like a sampling of Ryick if you don’t mind finding another. Can I use one of your private rooms for Ryick and I?” He keeps drawing out the name Ryick sarcastically; Steve doesn’t catch on. Stupid Rex and his stupid fake names.

“Certainly. Like I said, my pleasure, those Ryker blues eyes of his are bound to cheer you up. I’ve never seen them quite that color on a clone before.”

*Shut up Steve.* I can already feel the jealous rage peeling off of Ridomie, no need to make it worse by saying shit like that. "No. I'm sure you haven't."

Ridomie steers me through a mess of hallways in the old building, we climb two levels, transverse more hallways until we reach a lone room with a large four-poster bed. All the while I’m in front of him, neither of us saying anything. We enter the room and the door seals shut behind him. At least he can’t slam it, but he does slam me up against the wall.

The room spins a bit—I think I’m beginning to feel the effects of all the Turmulon I’ve drunk. I don’t know what I’m supposed to feel from it, but I feel a bit like I’m flying.

“What the *fuck* are you doing here Ryker?”

His eyes are cold, silver slits—I think he wants to kill me—normally I’d mouth him off with something along the lines of I don’t answer to you, or the ever famous *Fuck you, Ridomie*, but after what was said between him and the bartender (that moron Steve) I can’t bring myself to my usual asshole ways. Plus, I think I might die tonight. I can tell he’s in the grip of something he's barely got a handle on. I need to proceed with caution.

“What the *fuck* are you doing here Ryker?”

He slams me again, my jacket creaking and groaning with the movements. *Fuck he looks good in my jacket.* It's just a bit snug on him, but it's a little loose on me, so it works. “Ow! Ridomie! *Fuck!*”

He releases me and runs a hand through his hair making it wilder than it already is; falling over his bare scalp. I know he told me to shut up, but since when do I fucking listen? “I didn’t sleep with anyone. My balls are still as fucking blue as you left them.”
His head snaps back to analyzing me keenly, pressing into me with his crotch, his hard cock digs into me. He takes an inhale. “You smell like someone else. Who’s touched you?”

He can smell that? He doesn’t wait for an answer, tears my shirt open (which is why over dramatic) and looks over my bare chest, his hand grabs the scant bit of my hair that’s left as he pulls my head back and checks the skin on my neck, down near my collarbone.

“What is that? Is that a fucking mark, Ryker? Who did this? I’ll kill them. You’re mine. No one has a right to touch you but me.” Everything about him is wild. He’s lost it—Ridomie’s not here anymore just the wild thing inside him, the thing he seems to have inherited a lot of from the Ryker blood.

“Calm down Ridomie. It’s all a misunderstanding.”

“Misunderstanding? There’s nothing wrong with my sight Ryker. It’s perfect in fact. Who did this? I swear if you don’t tell me now I’ll tear this place down piece by piece, clone by clone, Rykerian by Rykerian.”

And that’s why I shouldn't have done this folks. “I’ll tell you but please, Ridomie, calm the fuck down, you’re fucking scaring me.” I’d never seen him like this before. I’m not sure what to do—I should’ve asked Rex how to calm down a possessive top in the throes of his dominance.

My words grab his attention, I can see Ridomie trying to fight his way back to the surface. “It was Stark. I had to make him a promise so he’d let me out—that’s all. He grabbed me; Rex got him off me. It was over, but he, marked me.”

“That should be my mark Ryker. No one should be touching you. Rex shouldn't have touched you either.”

I know once he calms down, he’ll see why Rex needed to do what he needed to; that it was a good thing, but right now, all that matters is calming him down. “No one, but you,” I assure him.

“What did you promise Stark?”

“It’s not important.”

“Answer the question.”

“It’s just gonna piss you off…”

His hand is under my throat. I’m powerless against him when he uses all his strength—that damn Moldevite under my bracelet. Call me fucked up, but I fucking love this. This is what I like. What I need. I want someone strong enough, fearless enough to tame me. I'll never make it easy though. I grab at his wrist with both hands and am surprised when I have enough strength to stave him off a bit. Maybe the drinks I've had? He’s still got a good hold on me. “I said I’d suck him off,” I get out between breaths.

“You’re not sucking him off,” he declares as he lifts me by the throat and tosses me on the bed.

His eyes still pin me in place even though his hands are no longer on me. I shake my head. “Of course not—I was just fucking with him. I just wanted out of Ryker Prison—like I said.”

“Yeah, to come here and fuck.”

“In my defense, you said no clones. I wasn't even thinking about touching a clone.
“Clones? Clones?! You think this is just about clones?” His voice is getting shriller.

“You said earlier—”

“Fuck what I said earlier. You’re mine Ryker. You fuck no one.”

Not ‘no one but him,’ just no one. I know what I decided earlier, but fuck, now I’m pissed about that. “Fuck that. Either you fuck me, or we fuck other people.”

“No.”

“Who made you the boss? I’m the Ryker.” I stand up now challenging him, but it’s all fucking bravado. The whole time, I’m trying not to shake.

“We both know how you really feel about that.”

“Then what’s stopping you? Either make me yours, or fuck off!”

He’s on top of me in a second, clawing at my body and pulling my hair to yank my head back. He sinks his teeth into the spot on my neck where Stark marked me and rips it clean off, I scream. He’s lost it. He’s fucking lost it. I’ve got to stop him. I reach down to my bracelet and try to undo it careful as I can. It’s fragile and I don’t want to have to explain to my father why it’s broken or why I had to take it off. He won’t care. He’ll be too excited over hurting me and another clone. Incinerating a clone. I think I’m home free, but I’m wrong. Ridomie grabs at my wrists as I’m tugging at the ties of the leather and it tears off flying who knows where across the room. Then I feel it and it’s glorious. The delicious power of my birthright flows through my veins and it’s mixed with that Turmulon shit. I’m a fucking bolt of lightening set free.

I rip my hands from Ridomie’s and grab his instead—that’s usually enough, but it’s not this time. Just as quick as I have them, they’re gone and he throws his body onto mine. I take my legs and wrap them around him with all my strength, I’m stronger than Ridomie—minus the Moldevite—I know this. I’ve kicked his ass before. But now is different. I’m not sure why, but Ridomie’s as fucking strong as me right now and I don’t know what the fuck to do. I continue to fight back until I realize we’ll be here all night—for days even, locked in battle. The two of us have a level of endurance that could last weeks if we pushed ourselves. I do the only thing I can think to do: I give up. Submit.

Only for him. Do your worst to me, Rye.

I’m on top of him at the moment, so I roll off onto my back. I put my hands up over my head, and just let him do what he will. My neck is fucking bleeding, but I can feel it healing already. I’ve missed my powers.

He looks at me confused. The animal still rages through him and he can’t speak, but he sees I’m no longer a threat—I’m not trying to keep me away from him. He climbs on top of me and wraps his body around mine; all the while I keep still and breath in and out, in and out, inhaling leather, mixed with Ridomie.

Time passes and I feel Ridomie calm. His hands loosen their grip on me, but he doesn’t let go, instead his fingers draws circles on my abs, around my nipples and back again. “You’re for me, Ryker,” he says brokenly. “They can’t have you.”

“They won’t have me Ridomie—promise.”
I feel him nod into my chest. “I’m sorry I hurt you.”

“No you’re not.”

“You’re right—I’m not. I want to hurt you worse.”

I stay quiet a moment and when I think it’s safe I ask, “What was that, Rye?”

He’s quiet.

“C’mon. I deserve to know—you ripped my fucking neck apart with your teeth.”

He sighs and sits up, so he can see me. “When clones mate they mate for life.”

“You and I haven’t mated yet.”

He scowls at me. “That doesn’t matter. Your blood calls to me, my blood calls back. It has chosen you. Whether we’ve had sex or not, you’re mine—my blood recognizes you as mine. Everyone knows it, everyone knows not to touch you. When others threaten those boundaries I…I can’t control myself—that’s what that was, a fit of my blood. Blood Rage. It makes me stronger. It's worse because I haven't claimed you. I feel the burning, always the burning. And when I’m with you there's desire and burning…” he trails off a thought dawning on him.

I can feel the possessiveness growing again, but I think I know how to handle him now. “Ridomie. No one is here—no one is touching me but you.” Even my hands are still above my head—I’m not even touching me. He visibly relaxes.

“Because of who you are—I’ve been trying to ignore that part of my nature, the part that chose you, but the reaction I just had to Stark’s mark on you…” he tenses again at those words.

His nail digs into my skin. I take a sharp inhale, but I take it. Ridomie hurting me is, exhilarating. It's painful. I want him to stop. I love that he will when he's finished.

“I should get to see my marks on you, not his.” I don't know much about this, but Ridomie must have some level of control to not be doing the things he's driven to do by instinct right now. A few claw marks are nothing compared to what he could do. He let's go and I can feel the mark he left, throbbing.

I chance it and pull him back to me, so he's lying on my chest, the skin of his cheek touching my skin. I run fingers through his hair. “Okay Ridomie. Okay. Tell me what to do. How do I make it better?” What I’m doing only placates him for moments at a time there must be something more to this.

“Usually, I would fuck you—that will cool my blood faster, but I won’t fuck you, not now. I won’t have our first time be like this when I’m in the middle of a rage-fit.”

I try not to let him see me smile. That means he's considering us having a first time at all.

“Nothing else?”

“One thing. Hurt you. Marks.”

“You have,” I remind him pointing my eyes toward my throbbing neck and the skin on my torso from his nails. Both are bleeding, but closing over fast without the Moldevite to hinder my healing.

“No. I was removing his mark. And that? That's nothing. I must mark you, now.”
“Is that all? I can take it; do your worst.” I know without my bracelet I’ll heal quick.

“I don’t think you truly understand, Briggland.”

*He never calls me Briggland.*

I don’t like the pain I hear in his voice. “Please—make it right between us.”

He nods, but he’s frozen with indecision.

“It's okay, Rye. I like when you hurt me, I want you to. And I'm not leaving, remember? I'm staying, to be a Ryker. I can be a Ryker, for you.” He's the only reason I'd be a Ryker.

“Not for me Ryker, for your people.”

"Yeah, sure, Rye." I don't have 'people.' I'm the lowest Ryker on the totem pole. "Now come on. All I care about right now is us, fix us."

"You barely even know what it means to be a mate, Ryker. Rykers don't mate."

"First time for everything. I'm a quick learner. And I know my blood calls to you—you said so yourself. That's gotta mean something. I can feel Rye. I ache," I admit. "I ache, so fucking bad."

"You shoulda…shoulda told me Ryker." He reaches up to touch my cheek, head still resting on my bare chest, I cover the back of that hand with mine and nuzzle into it; enjoying the feel of his skin, the smell, the energy.

"Please. I choose you too."

He slides up, so he's over top of me and feels so big. The look I give him is much different than I gave the bartender; it's exaltation and love; it's take me, all of me. *I'm yours.* Can you fall in love with someone over and over?

I wait as he stares back at me with equal love and worship in his eyes. Raking over me. Cataloging me. Enjoying. He guides my arms, so they're over my head, "Don't move, Ryker," and he dives in.

His lips hit mine and I want to grab a him so bad, pull him to me, press him to me, but I can't. I know he'll stop; don't want him to stop. Instead, I use all my will to keep my hips from bucking and my arms directly over my head. His tongue slips in, the whole kiss gentle, contrary to the savage tension I can feel flooding off him in waves. The kiss is controlled, until it isn't anymore and Rye loses himself kissing faster…faster… Then stop. He pulls away, I try to chase him with my head, but remember I'm not supposed to move. "Good boy, Ryker."

I fucking beam at the praise.

"The stuff I say, the rules wouldn't be suggestions, Briggland." He's forcing himself to use my name. Every time it comes out, it's barely a breath and something precious on his tongue.

"They weren't suggestions before," I laugh.

"No. Not really."

"I don't blame you for trying."

We're quiet again. Enjoy the simple bliss of laying together. I'd lay here all my life if I could, but I know we have to go back. "Any chance you're calm now, Rye?"
"No chance. Up."

I do as I’m told and realize I must look a mess. I’m half-naked, I’ve got blood down my chest, a gaping hole in my neck (thankfully he missed all the important shit), I’m feeling a bit woozy from the mixture of Turmulon and my own Ryker blood. My blood feels like it's racing. My jacket creaks and groans as he stands with me and grabs both my hands to steady me and looks me over. “Black hair, really Ryker?”

“I would have stood out from a mile away.”

“How about the name Ryick? That’s a bit obvious.”

“That was fucking Rex. Remind me never to sneak out with that guy again.”

“You won’t be sneaking anywhere again.” The dominance bleeding through him surprises me, it shouldn’t after what we just went through, but it does. He usually refrains from talking to me like that—I guess he won't anymore. But it does remind me of a question I have.

“What are you doing here?” I try to sound accusing. If I can’t be here then neither should he.

“It doesn’t work that way Ryker. I’m a Top. I can come here without a chaperone; you may not because I say you may not. But I will tell you that I was telling the truth to Steve—I was just getting away, I wasn’t going to fuck anyone. I haven’t since that day with Vallee.”

“I had a chaperone, just not a good one.” I mutter.

“Allow me to clarify then. You may not come here without me and I won’t be bringing you here.” His nose wrinkles. “Have you been drinking? Is that Turmulon I smell on your breath?”

I smile stupidly. “Yeah—that’s some good shit, Ridomie. You should try it.”

"More testosterone is the last thing you want me to have; I promise you Ryker."

I keep trying to soften him, but it’s like trying to melt granite right now. “Okay, okay, this is my first and last time here. I get it.”

"I’m pissed at you. You’re in a lot of trouble. I’m seconds away from beating your ass.”

My cheeks heat. I feel like I’m being chewed out by the Major. I could care less when it’s my father, but the Major seems to have some strange power over me, and so does Ridomie—I actually care about what they say. “Sorry?”

“Sorry won’t cut it. I’m taking it out of your flesh.”

I nod. I’ll give him whatever he wants. "Do your worst, Rye. I can handle it. I welcome it."
Ryker always brightens a day, doesn't he? He thinks he does. Arrogant Rykers...

I must look like shit—everyone's staring at me. No. That's not right. Everyone's staring at Ridomie in fucking awe. I'm not sure what he did to me, means, but it means something fucking big. My neck's sporting a decent-sized bite and my entire torso is marked with bites, claw marks, bruises and blood. Valuable Ryker blood. No one knows that, except Ridomie. He left my lower half virtually untouched, except the backs of my thighs and my ass.

My ass. He didn't just spank it, he beat it. There's no other way to describe the hot, swelling pain radiating from the skin, all from just his big, strong Ridomie hands. It hurts just to walk, feeling my ass with every step—I know it's bruised. But as I walk through Legions without my shirt off, so everyone can see Ridomie’s marks and see that I’m with Ridomie now, I feel pride. Extreme pride. I’m with him. Ridomie told me I should look at his back and nowhere else, as we walk through the dingy, club, I am, but I have to fight the smile that wants to break my face. I love it. I fucking love everything he did to me. I don't know why. I hate it when my father beats me; hate it so much. I'm not used to pain. This pain feels right and safe and comforting; like a warm safety blanket wrapping around me. I don't think I have enough marks. I want to feel him everywhere.

This pain I can handle. It alleviates the aching. The ever-present, maddening ache of needing him, that afflicts me. The one I already know will never leave me. I don't know why this pain snuffs out the other, but it does.

At the same time, I hate his displeasure. That makes regret seep into the pain. Regret for my actions, regret that he's hurt and pissed at me. Regret for his fucking turmoil. That's the part that could have the one Briggland Ryker on the path of righteousness. Imagine that? A world where Ryker is perfectly behaved. Hard to fathom, I know, but stranger things have happened. Expect to see that from now on folks. I'm on the straight and narrow.

Ridomie spies Rex from across the room, his eyes go wide when they see me (I might be looking up a little), Ridomie signals for him to join us and he does without hesitation, but he really doesn't want to. He joins my one-person parade and we follow Rye, as he leads us to the group of clones he came with, notifying them that he's leaving. No one questions him, too afraid to speak to the terrifying, giant Clone, who's clearly just been through a blood rage, I'm not entirely sure he's out of.

By the time we walk out of the place, I’m tired and sore and I just want my bed. All thoughts of sex are long forgotten. Well maybe not all, but most of them. Ridomie proved himself at yet another talent: Getting a Ryker to submit.

You sure you want this Ryker?


"Grip that."
He made me stand in the middle of the room. Overhead was a long bar; apparently, this room was equipped to handle unruly brats. Shirtless and trembling, I gripped. And let me tell you, I wasn't cold—there was no chill in the room, only heat. Pure, white heat. Ridomie was just a bit fucking scary.

"You don't know what you're getting into."

"No. No I don't. Doesn't matter though. I'm lost to it. To you."

His hand reached out, needing the connection to my skin. Fingers ghosted over my jawline, over my throat, then deliberate down my abdomen ending at my cock.

He grabbed it. Hard. Fuck. Like, fuck. It hurt, but I let him do it. I fucking loved it.

"I'll hurt you."

"Hurt me."

"When I want. Whatever way I want. You don't know what it's like to feel owned, but you will."

"Yes. Yes. Please yes." All I could think then was, he can have me. I'm his anyway. I was fucking excited and for once, I'm not just talking about my dick, but my dick was pretty hard too. It still fucking is.

"I'm going to need you to follow rules, unless you want a massacre."

"Yes."

He let go my dick and scraped his nails up my torso.

My face twisted with pain, but I worked to keep my body from twisting too. I didn't want to show weakness. I wanted to show him I'm a strong mate.

I can tell Rex is looking me over, the heat of his eyes burrowing into the marks on my skin. Making them burn somehow. I can still feel Ridomie giving them to me.

Once Ridomie had enough of etch-a-sketching my torso with his nails, he grabbed my hair, the longest bit left and used it to pull my head back, as I gripped the bar above me tight, feeling the under sides of my fingers begin to callous. He sucked little hickies onto my neck as I panted, feeling my cock press against the strain of my pants, which seemed extra confining.

But then his lips were gone and his hands were at the front of my pants and fuck, then he gave me the spanking of my life.

My skin prickled with anxious goosebumps, as he pulled the back of my pants down (still no ginch) baring my sexy little ass for the punishment it had coming. "When my crew misbehaves, I spank them. Before I do, I always say, may this teach you and keep you out of the incinerator. You can't be incinerated. You are a Ryker."

The reason I can do and can't do everything.

"To you, I can only think to say, may this teach you to obey me, or I'm going to incinerate your ass. In fact, if I'd have known to come prepared, I would have got my hands on a whip."

"Fair enough, sweet cheeks." Yeah, I know, that probably wasn't the smartest thing I coulda said.
“Believe me Ryker, I’m going to spank you and I won’t need anything but my hand to make my point. No need to goad me any further.”

Spank me he did. His hand was all he needed even though I’m a big, tough Ryker; sure, hard slaps that exploded on my rear. I didn't bother to count how many, I just know that after awhile, it was hard to remain still and hard to hold onto the fucking bar over my head.

"I'm sorry, Rye. I'm...could you, ow, that fucking hurts. Jesus Christ."

“You want to misbehave? This is what will be waiting for you Ryker. You'll take it with good form."

I knew I wouldn't get mercy, that's not what I was asking for, it just wasn't as easy as I thought it would be. Not with all the feelings I had racing around inside me. But I fought to be good for him, to take the punishment, the marking, whatever he wanted to do to me. I wanted him to be proud. He was proving his worthiness as my mate, one strong enough to be with a Ryker, I wanted to do the same.

Suddenly the spanking stopped, only momentarily, so he could pull my pants down further; straight to my knees. "Stick your ass out, Ryker. We're not done. Not by a long shot."

I whimpered feeling a healthy mix of aroused and fucking dread. "Rye, please. I-I'm sorry." I begged a lot. Till I was hoarse. Didn't make a difference. And I think at that point he would have stopped, but there was something more we had to take care of before his blood would cool.

He came around to my front, his large hand gripped my cheek, rubbing my tears away with a thumb. His forehead fell to mine and he closed his eyes. "You let him mark you Ryker," he says, barely a whisper. "T-told you, Ryker."

My tears fell faster. I hurt him. Wounded him. "Sorry, Rye." I stuck my ass up prettily, hoping to entice him into fucking it instead of spanking it, but when Ridomie does something, he's thorough. He kissed my forehead then started in on my thighs, expecting me to hold them apart for him, which I did and it was one of the hardest fucking things, let me tell you. That's how I learned it wasn't just a punishment, but a submission. Not the kind of submission like in those smutty, online romance novels, more raw and animalistic. He's my pack leader and he's showing me he's worthy. I could either submit to him, or fight him for dominance.

But I didn't, don't want to dominate him. I let him have me. That meant taking as much punishment as he deemed fit.

Finally, fucking finally he stopped spanking me. I licked salty tears off my lips and sniffled, still gripping the bar over my head for dear life. I didn't want to let go. Disappoint him more. His hand reached between my legs and grabbed my nuts, making me have to handlessly squeeze my dick to keep from coming. "That's a good boy." He ran his finger up my crack and toyed with my hole.

"Please Rye. Please tell me this little ritual ends in you fucking me." My cock was harder than it had ever been.

"I'm not sure you want that, Ryker. Me fucking you, doesn't mean you coming. You haven't earned it."

Didn't expect that, but fuck. It turned me on more. "I've been so good though. You said so yourself."

"For about four minutes." He walked around to the front of me and helped me pry my fingers off the bar then he slid my pants back, over my raw bottom and sealed them up telling me his final
decision on sex for the night. A decision I knew I had to accept or he would yank my pants down again and resume spanking, which at that point, I would no longer be able to take with good form. "You can have the sex I give you, Ryker, or none. That's likely the only thing you'll behave for," he smirked.

I pouted huge. "This is fucking unfair. How about you?"

He pulled me to his hulking, Ridomie form, growling, insulted. "You're my mate. I don't care what the other clones do, or what's right, or wrong, I want us to only be with each other. I'd never commit to you then be with another. I love you, Ryker."

I was fucking relieved to hear that. "I love you, Rye. Love you." He decided to seal that with a fucking kiss, a kiss that got out of fucking control. Once his lips were on mine, all the fire, all the sexual energy, the pain we shared, sent the kiss spiraling. I was against the wall, one of his hands gripped my hip hard leaving more Ridomie prints, then I was spun so hard we were both sent tumbling to the ground. From there, it was a brutal wrestling match, rolling, flipping over the other. Biting. Slapping. Punching. Throwing.

That's how I got so many more marks on me and that's how Ridomie ended up with a nice fucking bite on his neck and probably a whole bunch of bruises under his clothes despite the fucking jacket he's wearing. My fucking jacket. Whatever passed between us earlier, however it's usually supposed to pass, I don't know, but I added my two fucking cents. I'll destroy the world for Ridomie, do anything for him, let him do anything to me, but I want to know he belongs to me too.

Outside, he turns to Rex, not caring who's present as he scolds him. "You're in serious breach of everything. I should kill you right now," Ridomie says to Rex.

Holy fuck. I think he's serious.

"I'm sorry Ridomie, sir. I thought it the best solution. It was better than me fucking him, wasn’t it, sir?"

That was dumb Rex, dumb. Ridomie turns murderous eyes on me. I’d forgot that part. I speak up quick trying to save my Ryker ass from feeling his hand again, so soon. “Now I know what you're thinking Rye and it's not how it sounds.” Except it is how it sounds.

“What did you do Ryker?”

“What did you do Ryker?”

“I didn’t do anyone—you’ve made it clear you own my ass, no one would touch me.”

“Never mind, we’ll talk about it later," he says to me, which I'm not looking forward to. "And you too Rex." Rex looks equally thrilled. "Let’s just get back before anyone notices Ryker’s gone. That’s all we need. Ryker, put this on,” he says giving me my leather, now that we're going outside. I can tell he's had enough of people looking at me, even if I know that's what he wanted. I’m ecstatic to have it back, but I wouldn't mind him hanging onto it, in case, you know, he wants to wear it again. It wraps around my body and I inhale the scent, only now, it has Ridomie’s scent mixed with it, which just makes it better.

When we arrive at the North Wall, Stark is still on duty and he’s been waiting for me. Fuck. I can't even stop him before he says something to get himself killed. “Ah. There’s my little cockslut. C’mere.”

Ridomie is in no mood for talking and he doesn’t care that it was probably my fault in the first place; he doesn’t wait for Stark’s explanation, or give an explanation to Stark, he simply snaps his
neck. He’s dead instantly.

“Someone clean that up,” he orders one of the other clones on duty.

A clone standing a ways down the wall comes running, he looks up at Ridomie non-pulsed by the death. "Yes, sir."

“But before you do that. Fall in everyone," he calls toward the wall and several clones run in at his command. "I want Stark's death to be a lesson to everyone on this wall—do you see who you let out tonight?" He grabs me by the shoulders and thrusts me in front of the ten or so other guards.

“No, Ridomie, sir,” they answer unanimously.

“This is Briggland, as in Briggland Ryker you morons. You would all have been incinerated if I hadn’t found him before the Major did.”

That sobers them. They don't say shit to that. “Do not let it happen again.”

And that was the end of that.

Ridomie is still pissed—not sure how much punishing me has cooled him, but either way, Rex and I are in for a world of trouble before he’s through. We follow Ridomie and run across the large woods that are the on the property of Ryker Corp. and we end up outside the tall, white building. No one guarding the entrance seems to care that we're standing outside of it. I have no idea where the fuck we are. “Rex, report to me in the morning, first thing.”

“Yes, sir,” he says giving me an apologetic look for having to leave me alone with a livid Ridomie.

“Follow me Ryker.”

"W-where we going?"

"We’re going to get that shit out of your hair and clean you up. They have supplies here you don't have in your room. Then I’m going to make sure you make it to your bed, where you were supposed to be in the first place."

"What about…are you really going to 'talk' to me about Rex?"

There's no one around, it's dark, we're alone. He pulls my battered body to him hard, but he's softer and gentler once I'm to him. My jacket creaks familiar, I missed that sound, everything feels sweeter, like I can breathe a second. This whole trip back to the future has been a chaotic mess, but everything now feels, calm. "We're fine," he says against my lips. "Had to get you out of there. I'm better now. Ryker you can't do that."

"Lesson learned."

"I can't believe this is happening, Ryker, you're still real aren't you?"

I laugh. "I'm real."

"Just checking." His head leans in and he kisses me again, his tongue pushes inside and tangles with mine. "I'll be a good mate, Ryker. I swear. I can be your mate. You're here," he says putting his hand over the middle of his chest instead of over his heart. I'm in him.

He's in me.
Morning comes. I dredge myself from the sleepy haze and stretch my arms over my head. They feel good. I rub my eyes and my hand makes its way to my neck where I look to feel for the bite mark from last night that should still be there, thanks to fucking Moldevite. I want to feel it. I want to know I’m still his. That last night was real.

But it’s not fucking there.

Frantic, I rub my hand all over my neck—where the fuck is it? And sit up, eyes wide now, sleep gone, still searching for the mark that should be there. I realize belatedly that my arms shouldn’t feel as fucking good as they feel—but they do, I’m completely healed. Everything’s gone. Just the dull, constant ache, needing to be near Ridomie.

I know why, based on how fucking good I feel, but I look down at my wrist—hoping I’m wrong—I’m not, my wrist is bare. God Damn it, I forgot the fucking bracelet. Ridomie chooses this time to make his entrance, unannounced, because apparently being the fucking Top in clone-land means he can do what he likes even if I’m in the middle of a fucking crisis.

“Good morning,” he says all shy and not like Ridomie. He’s holding something behind his back, he walks over and pulls it out, it’s a flower, some kinda rose? It looks kind of like a rose from Earth, but who the fuck knows here?

“I removed the thorns.” Ridomie is fucking blushing. "I love you Ryker."

Ridomie is trying to be romantic, but I’m having a panic attack. “Yeah, thanks, Ridomie,” I say taking the flower and putting it aside as I stand up. I’m naked and normally with Ridomie this close, I’d be hard as steel, but I can’t think of anything except for getting that bracelet back. I move to my closet and begin dressing, leaving a stunned Ridomie who looks slightly heart broken.

“We have to go back. We have to go back to Legions right fucking now,” I demand as I pull on my pants.

He gets over the shock and hurt of me being a dick quickly. “I don’t think you understand how this works Ryker,” he says, the hardness returns to his voice and he approaches me like I’m prey. "You ask me if you can go to Legions, which as per our discussion last night, you know the answer is no… Hey, you’re healed. Did you take Rykortsol last night after I left?"

“Yeah, I did,” I lie.

He grabs me by the wrist, hard, and growls. “That’s not on Ryker. You don’t decide to remove my marks.” He’s hurt, but I can’t do anything about it, so I ignore his feelings completely.

“My bracelet, Rye, I need to get it back. It’s on the floor of that room somewhere.” I tear my hand out of his grasp since I’m strong enough to, without the Moldevite and without Ridomie being in that blood rage and finish getting dressed. Ridomie’s eyebrows knit together. He’s confused, but with Ridomie that’s going to morph into anger real fast.

“I get it. You’re testing me. No,” he says. “The only place you’re going is class. Nice try though. As if you can’t get your father to buy you twenty more of those.”

I look him in the eye. “I need that bracelet back Ridomie.”

“Why?”

“Because I do. Shouldn’t that be enough?” I feel bad pulling the trust card, especially when I’m not
trusting him with my information.

It works. “I’m sorry, Ryker. You’re right. It’s obviously meaningful to you—I’ll get it back for you, but I don’t want you going to that club. I can’t handle that yet.”

“That’s fine. I don’t need to go, I just need it back, now Ridomie.”

“I can’t go now. Are you crazy? They’re willing to turn a blind eye when we’re not on duty or expected in class but we’ll be skewered if we miss—especially the Major’s class. Did that Turmulon melt your brain?”

I know he’s right. Besides, Derco hasn’t exactly checked my wrist everyday anyway, most likely I’ll get away with not having it for the day; I’ll just have to pretend in practice to be wimpier than I am. It’s probably going to be kind of hard though, since I’m so awesome. “Okay. Sorry. I just freaked out for a moment. That bracelet is special.”

“Special? I though your father gave it to you?”

“Yeah, but you know, he was telling me I’m part of the family,” I lie. Poorly.

“You hate being a Ryker. What’s really going on?”

Why does Ridomie have to be so fucking smart? Okay, okay. I know the questions he’s asking aren’t fucking rocket science, but him looking at me like that flusters me like nothing else. “It’s hard to explain. I’m sorry. Maybe that green shit did fry my brain. How about you kiss me instead?”

“Like I said, I don’t want you drinking that stuff anymore Ryker—we fight enough as it is.”

He tries to hide it, but he can’t; he’s sad. I made him sad. Fuck. It’s fine. I’ll make it up to him somehow. He can beat my ass all night if he wants. “So how do we do this?” I change the subject. “I mean, you still gotta pretend to be the Major’s and you want everyone to know I’m yours. It’s not like we can hold hands in the Mess Hall, my father will still kill you.”

“Everyone knows Ryker. Thought you learned that yesterday—the clones know you’re mine. We don’t need to do anything different.” He smoothes a hand through my hair. “I’m glad we got most of the black out, don’t dye it again, okay? You don’t look like my Ryker with that hideous black hair.”

“You saying you only love me for my good looks?”

“I’m saying you’re not like us Ryker and everyone should know it. You’re not like anyone I’ve ever met before.”

He means more than he’s saying, but I don’t want to get that serious. “Okay. No more hair dye.”

He’s still toying with my hair and he’s smiling at me like he’s just discovered the secret to life. I can tell he wants me, but it’s like I’m a treat he’s saving for later—when he deserves it. But he deserves me right now. “How bout we skip the Major’s class.”

“No Ryker.”

“My balls are blue Ridomie,” I whine. “Will there be sex sometime in our future?”

“Yes.”
“When?”

“When it’s right.”

Fuck him and his morals. “Fine. Let’s get down to morning meal—I want to satisfy at least one of my urges.”

“We do have time for one thing.”

I get excited, because he looks excited. “Yes?”

“You shouldn’t have got rid of my marks, Ryker. Now I’ll have to replace at least one.”

Ridomie has a hand like fucking dynamite. Not that he cared. He looked to the seat beside him and told me with his eyes to plant myself right where he could see me, so there I sat on a sore ass all through morning meal. As far as spankings go, he was pretty easy on me. Can't even feel the sting anymore. But being fine only reminds me how not fine a clone and I will be if my father finds out I'm not wearing the bracelet. We’ve got the Major’s class now. I’m going to have to fake it.

'Cept I can't fake anything with the Major. Soon as we walk in, the Major looks at me funny—well funnier than usual. “I need to see you, Ryker. Now.”

Naturally, Ridomie comes with me. “Alone,” he clarifies. Crap. It is about the Moldevite. Has to be. I look to Ridomie and shrug. He moves off to the other side of the field still with one eye on me.

The Major wastes no time, grabs my arm and pulls up my sleeve to reveal my bare arm. “Where the fuck is it boy?”

“Lost,” I say like I couldn't give a flying fuck. I’m more than curious to know how he knows it's gone. It's like he can sense it's not there.

“Where did you lose it?” he says slow; like he’s talking to a complete moron.

I shrug. “Fucked if I know.”

It’s the wrong thing to say of course. He grabs my wrist again, but this time it's to spank my ass several times. Now this is over my pants and yeah I can feel it (the Major is pretty strong) but nothing compares to the embarrassment of being spanked like a little kid in front of the guys. They don't dare say anything, they're not really paying attention anyway, but it feels like it's all they can look at. I know Ridomie's watching; probably glad. "We're not finished," he says. “Ridomie! Get yer ass over here, now.” He’s there in a flash. For a moment, I think he’s going to ask Ridomie and I know how much Ridomie likes to suck up to the Major; he’ll rat me out for sure, but he doesn't. “Yer takin’ over class. Ryker and I have some business to take care of.”

Ridomie scowls at me. Me! Like I did anything wrong. All I did was walk in the fucking door and I get my ass reamed out. This is utter bullshit.

I follow behind the Major. We walk slow like he needs some time thinking before he says shit to me. Or maybe so he’ll be less likely to strangle me when we get to where we’re going. We travel the maze of hallways through Ryker Corp. and up a few floors in the West wing 'till we reach a large door. It slides open for him (as if by magic) and I follow him inside.
“Sit on the bed.”

I do, but I look around. All the furniture is hard and dark, yet the room still has brightness to it. The Major's rooms. He’s taken me to his private quarters?

He’s rummaging around in a wooden box until he pulls out something dangling from a chain. He stumbles a bit as he makes his way back over to me like he’s carrying something heavy, but resumes his footing quickly. That’s out of character for the Major, he never stumbles, except I remember he did once, when he carried me up to my room after my father had beat the tar outta me and made me wrap Moldevite around my wrist. *If that's a fucking coincidence, my name's not Ryker.*

Glaring daggers at me, he rips off his own Ryker bracelet and hands it to me. “Take that. Put it on.” I do confused as fuck and he's not offering any fucking information. I feel the familiar sensation of my senses being dimmed and my skin crawling, but it's paled as my mind busies itself, turning things over in my head and when I put it all together, my Ryker blood runs cold. The bracelet, the one he wears, also has Moldevite on it.

“You need to attend a family meal tonight in the private hall—”

“What is that, Major?”

“You got eyes. You can see what it is.”

He takes the necklace he’s holding and like icing on a black fucking cake, he ties it around his neck—the cold Moldevite glitters from it.

*The Major and I have the same flaw.* I remember something my father said: The defect is inherited. Looks like the person I inherited it from, is the Major.
I stare at him for what feels like a long time. It’s a fucking surprise, but it’s not shocking. Why didn’t he just fucking tell me?

“Will that be all then, sir?”

“No it ain’t all. The evening meal in the family dining room, tonight, you’ll come?”

That we have a fucking ‘family dining room’ is news to me. Is that where they all eat, without me? “I have a choice?”

“I’m askin’ ain’t I?”

This is fucking weird. The Major doesn’t ask anything. Something’s up. “I’ll be there, sir.” It will give me something to do while Ridomie goes to retrieve my real bracelet. “May I get back to practice now, sir?”

He stares at me now. “You got nothing to say about this?”

“What’s there to say? I mean, it happens in families, right? Back on Earth, there was this girl with this condition, it was in the family, her aunt had it. We were friends awhile—she told me all about it. I mean, I’m a little surprised these genetic flaws aren’t filtered out considering all the genetic technology we have here compared to Earth, but it seems pretty normal to me.”

“On Earth a genetic flaw can be passed on by any family member? But how do you know who it comes from?”

“A test would have to be done. Why, isn’t it like that here?”

“Just, get back to practice,” he says shaking his head. “I’ll explain tonight. Tell Ridomie you and him are taking over the lesson. There’s shit I gotta do.”

The Major’s done talking to me, so I know he won’t answer anymore of my questions. But something’s not sitting right. He’ll answer me tonight? What the fuck? “I’ll see you tonight then, sir.”

He tells me where I should meet him later and I head back to the training fields, walking to take my time, so I can think. When I get back, I pass on the message to Ridomie, but I ask him something else, the thing that’s stirring in my brain. “Hey Rye, here, on Cyntripien I mean, how’s a flaw passed on? A genetic flaw.”

He folds his brow together. “Like, what’s its inheritance structure?”

“Yeah, sure.” I don’t pay enough attention in class to know all their bullshit jargon.

“The flaw is passed by the paternal strand and—”

“Less science bull-crap, Ridomie.”

“Flaws are passed Father to offspring.”

Wait. What? “Can’t it be passed from, like, from an Uncle, or something?”
Ridomie laughs. “Some traits can, like if you're blue eyed, or green eyed, but not flaws. Not with the way we do things here. It can only be passed from the Father, like I said. Flaws don't happen anymore though, most babies are started outside of the womb and implanted for Rykerians. That way any genetic flaws can be sieved out. Almost no one has babies naturally anymore, Ryker.”

Holy. Fuck. I don’t feel, so good.

“You okay Ryker? You look like you just had your guts ripped out. Ryker?”

He's got a hand on my shoulder as I do my best not to fall over. “Yeah, fine. I… Yeah, I’d better sit down. Could you? Practice?” I sputter, not even getting the words to form a proper sentence.

Concern all over his face, he guides me to the ground and sets me up under a tree. “What happened Ryker? What did the Major bust your balls over this time?”

“Uh, nothing.”

I know he wants to ask me again, but he doesn’t. “I can do this myself. Sit your ass here; don’t move ‘till I come get you.”

I nod absently not even bothering to throw a snarky word at his ‘orders’. When he’s gone, I examine my hands. They’re his hands. I look at my feet. His feet. Even my damn face in the mirror—it’s exactly like his. I knew this before, but where I’m from it’s normal to have such striking resemblance to a more distant family member, I thought nothing of it. Here though, it's different.

Then it dawns on me: He knows. If he knows my flaw, he knows my heritage and he never fucking told me. He and Derco are probably in on this together. An elaborate scheme to—to what? Derco wants my blood and he has that, has always been honest about it too and I think he could have, had it with or without claiming to be my father. Why would the Major lie? Does he just not want me? No one fucking wants me.

Not true. Ridomie does.

Well fuck having parents then—they don’t want me, I don’t want them. I have a Ridomie.

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“And how’s our Briggland doing?” His voice is mocking and I want to fucking tear out his Ryker hair.

“Fine, sir.”

Derco sits beside his golden child and Derek, the ever faithful lapdog, somehow manages to look proud to be sitting there beside his father and regretful he has to waste his time here with me. I haven’t seen much of Derek since the ‘incident.’ Lately, he hasn't even been to practices. I suspect his daddy dearest transferred him somewhere else, keeping us apart for now. I'm not hopeful enough to think that's going to happen forever. Especially since Derco wants us to get along. He probably has us on some sort of fucked up time out.

Derco takes a sip of whatever’s in his glass. “You won’t be fine for long.”

What the fuck’s that supposed to mean?

I don’t know, so I use my time to think things like, 'I'd rather be the spawn of an amoeba than you.' The Major being that amoeba is good news, I’m just fucking pissed it's not good news to him. No I
I'm in the private, family dining room. All the rooms in this fucking rat maze are large and as pretentious as the next. And white. This place is no different. The table is far too long. Are we expecting twenty-seven guests? Because if not, we look like assholes; sitting here; at the end of the table; with all the empty seats. The Major 'requested' my presence, but he’s not here yet, of course and I’m left to suffer in the company of douche-bag and my brother.

Actually… I smile. Derek’s not my fucking brother. That is the best part of this 'news.' I just hope to Christ my mama is still my mama. I figure she has to be though. I'm pretty sure there's no one the Major hates more than my mama, which I'm sure has to do with all this shit.

That’s when it clicks together for me: This 'meal' is about the Major announcing to me, my real genetic relation to him. Fuck that—I don’t want to look like a fucking douchebag.

I push out from my seat. “Tell the Major it was kind of him to host me, but I got shit to do.”

“Sit. You will hear what your uncle has to say.”

“Uncle?” He’s still trying to spin that bullshit? I don't think so. "He's not my uncle and you're not my father."

“Sit. Now.” The look in his eyes is not worth arguing or getting beat over, not for this. I sit and fucking glare at him. “Besides, don’t I get to have a spot of fun every now and again? This is going to be priceless,” he adds.

Guess I should be grateful there's no such thing as Facebook in this universe; someone would be filming and posting this shit for sure. Ryker Family Fails. His words do make me realize, this isn’t the Major’s style; Derco fucking suggested a ‘family meal’ and the Major not knowing how the fuck to tell me, agreed to it. Knowing the Major he probably disagreed then agreed. Okay, fuck. I'm beginning to understand just what the Major was thinking a little, but I only feel a little sorry for him. He's fucked up. We're all fucked up in this family, but his fucked up stunts his ability to do things like tell his son, he's his son.

I'm still going to let him know how pissed I am.

“Why?”

He knows what I want to know. I don’t have to elaborate. “Haven’t we had enough conversations on asking presumptive questions?”

I huff and give a small, sarcastic smile. Yeah, I probably don’t want to know why—I always regret asking. I can’t believe I’ve learned something from this asshole. The Major says it all the time too though; maybe it’s a Ryker thing.

Before I can get too disgusted with myself, the Major storms in. His oversized muscles look especially large right now and tense—he’s fucking seething with tension. He also vibrates with something else I’ve never seen on the Major before: Nervousness.

When he reaches the entrance of the dining room, he pauses and looks around like he would assess a situation in battle then moves to his seat, which is to my left. Derco smiles like it’s his fucking birthday; Derek is guarded. He knows he should participate in the ‘fun’ with his father, to stay on his good side, but he’s just not interested. He’d rather kill us both—the Major and I that is.

The Major spears a large piece of meat from one of the large plates on the table and bites it like a
savage, not bothering to cut it into pieces. He chews in silence until he notices no one else has made a move to eat or speak. He picks on me first. “Well, boy? Eat.”

Fuck this.

“Not fucking hungry.” I make sure to emphasize fucking and push out from my spot again and the Major and Derco tell me to sit again, this time in stereo. I slump back down into my seat, not willing to disobey either of them and Derco follows suit with the Major, only he is far more polite about eating, neatly picking out a cut of meat from one of the plates on the table. He nudges Derek and he too finally chooses some food. The Major sees I’ve done nothing so he picks for me and slops food down on it pissed at me for not listening. I begin to eat. If I eat quick, maybe I can get the fuck outta here faster. The Major pauses his attack on the slice of meat on his fork and stares at it thoughtfully. “There’s a reason for this meal tonight Briggland.”

“No fucking kidding?”

I get cuffed upside the head hard for that one. Worth it. “Why d’ya gotta be so im-fucking-possible?”

“Because I’ve got too much of your DN-fucking-A,” I say imposing ‘fucking’ into words like he does to make my point.

He takes another bite of his meat, thinking on that one. He’s pleased. I squint my eyes together, confused, but move onto other topics. “Why didn’t you tell me?”

“I am tellin’ ya.”

“Before I mean.”

He’s speechless and doesn’t have an answer to that one. We stare at each other for a long time ‘till Decro interrupts us with his laughter, then we both turn and set matching glares on him. “This is beautiful,” he says clapping. “I only wish Father were here to see it.”

We both ignore him, and the Major turns back to me. “You know, kid?” He runs a comforting hand through my hair, which he does often, but I duck out of the way embarrassed by the affection in front of these two morons.

“Yeah, I know.”

The conversation is definitive of the Major and I—abrupt and vague. It’s what we do. We’ve always had an inner understanding of each other, now I know why. I go back to eating. I don’t want to give Derco any more satisfaction by giving him more of the show he expected. The Major does the same.

“Since the two of you have decided to labor under your usual taciturn ways, I will speak now. Just because I’m not your biological father, it does not mean I do not own you. I own you—I own both of you, as Lexington well knows. Nothing changes, really, except his title if you choose it.”

“I know your title will be changing. What was all that bullshit getting me to call you father when you aren’t?”

“You will watch your tone with me,” he snaps, but he’s smiling. “As far as the rest of the world is concerned, I am your father. Your mother gave you to me, like an adoption. You are still mine, Briggland. I had thought it would be easier for all parties if I were to declare this from the onset, but I knew there would be no way to hide this from you, ultimately because of the defect the two of
you share."

But I already know that and I know some of how he works. “I already know you’re a sadistic fuck, what I meant was, why have me think I’m your son if you have power over me anyway?”

“Control your belligerent offspring, Lexington, or our deal is off,” he growls. And the Major listens to him. Fuck. I hear his chair slide out and as I expect, he grabs me by my fucking hair, leaving parting words. “Yah don’t have to touch him. I’ll gladly beat his ass myself.”

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“What the fuck is wrong with you?” He throws me across his office. It’s different than Derco’s. More militant looking—less polished. It’s the only place in Ryker Corp (thank the fucking almighty) without so much god damned white. Most things are wooden, even the floors and desk. The only thing I do admire about Derco’s office is his giant fucking window with the incredible view, this office has no window—guess the Major doesn’t merit a window office.

“Sit the fuck down—we’re gonna talk, jus’ you’n’ me—none of this family meal bullshit. I knew I shouldn’ta listened to him,” he mutters.

I sit wanting this to be over. I plan on whining to Ridomie. Maybe he’ll fuck me over this. Make lemons into lemonade I always say. “Look, so our relationship is a bit different, why do we have to make a big deal about it?” I ask.

“You don’t think it’s a big deal?”

“Nope.” I hate talking about shit like this.

“Well I think it’s a mighty big deal.”

“Why? ‘Cause you own me now? I know how the Ryker thing works. You’re all so damn possessive by the way. But I’ve been following your orders since I got here and I plan to keep doing that, so if you don’t mind I’d like to leave.”

“So I’m jus’ orders to yah?”

“Yes.

The Major’s, hurt. Good. So am I.

“Well it ain’t nothin’ to me, Briggland—you need to know that.”

That blows me. I can’t say anything. I’m not good at the feelings-shit and dammit. He’s not supposed to be either. “I ain’t never been a Daddy before. I wanted to be one, for a long, long time, but it never worked. I never thought it worked for yer mama and I. I don’t know how this came t’be possible, but yeh did, yeh are, and I want it Brigg, I want to be a Daddy. I know this is hard for yeh—”

“It’s not hard for me. I just want to fucking go.” I’m mad now, because I don't want to fucking cry in front of him. I’m so confused. At first I was pissed because I thought no one wanted me, now I find out he does want me and I’m pissed anyway.

He pauses several moments, and I think he won’t let me go, but then he does. “Fine, take the night. Go talk to yer boyfriend, but then we’re fucking talking. I expect you back here tomorrow, before classes; ‘cause we’re talking about this Briggland,” he repeats.
“Fine.”

“Fine, what?”

“Fuck—fine, I mean, yes, sir.”

I can tell he wants to beat the tar outta me, but instead he just nods and I go. I don’t realize 'till I’m walking away, he never said a word to me about lipping off Derco.
I want to break shit.

I should just go and see if Ridomie is back, but instead I storm past a couple of clones, raised and obliterate a vase on my way by. They turn and look wondering if they should help me, but also not wanting to be at the receiving end of my Ryker rage. I send them a message with my eyes, daring either to say something right now, so I can add them to my list of things I want to destroy. How I’d love to fucking beat on someone right now.

This string of Moldevite around my wrist doesn’t matter and they know it. They scurry away quick, knowing I could make dog-food outta them, or whatever food you feed to pets here, if they even have pets here. I twist and turn down mazes of the many corridors that make up Ryker corp. and after awhile I realize I’ve lost track; I’m in an unfamiliar wing. It’s practically deserted, just scatterings of clones.

I'd feel like an ass later if I beat on a clone for the hell of it, so I chose the next best thing, all the shit in this corridor. I begin my rampage of destruction, throwing pictures off walls and any other Ryker crap I can get my hands on. A crowd of clones that had been walking by in an adjacent corridor come to see what bomb’s gone off. When they see it’s me on a rampage, they go rigid not wanting to incur the wraith of a Ryker. Good idea, but too late.

“What the fuck you lookin’ at? Get outta here!” I don’t recognize any of them, but they recognize me and run. I throw another painting (probably priceless as hell) after them. I continue down more hallways, and the people are more and more scarce, until finally there is no one. I look around, not a single clone in sight.

Perfect. I go mental.

“Arghh!” I hurl another painting into another ancient looking artifact. I really have at it for awhile, but after some time, the paintings and artefacts seem small-time to me, I need to break something on a larger scale, like this hallway.

When I turn around — ready to tear down a wall — I end up looking into a set of old azure blue eyes. I stop, frozen. “Mmmmm, hmmm,” the old man hums in a fucking smug way like I’m a misbehaved child, who’s just figured out he’s a misbehaved child. And in a lot of trouble.

I’ll fucking show him misbehaved. I move to pick up another, anything and finally set my eyes on an arrogant little Ryker statue. “That was your grandmother's. Put. That. Down. Enough foolishness.” Something about the man’s voice demands obedience. He’s commanding and scary a little bit. I replace the statue, and feel unnerved. “Come, here.”

Shit. Now I’m alone with some crazy old guy and too deep into Ryker Corp to call for help.

I turn to face his unyielding stare and make my way to stand before him. He looks me up and down the same way Derco might, a shiver snakes up my spine. I'm in for another beating, aren't I?”

He’s not impressed, yet not completely disgusted. As he studies me, it gives me the opportunity to look at him and when I realize who I must be looking at, my heart skips a beat. At first I had thought the man’s hair was silver, but now upon fuller inspection it’s clear that his hair is, only so blonde, it appears silver. It’s long, longer than Derco’s, and longer than the Major’s reaching his hips in thick bands. It's been brushed, so heavily, each strand lays flat gliding like silk in the
airspace atop one another.

His shoulders are broad, still strong even with the years he’s aged. I know that if this man looks the equivalent of a man approaching his hundredth year on Earth, he’s a lot more than that here. He could be perhaps four hundred, or more.

His age does not diminish his sinew. I could still imagine him rumbling with us on the training field, and easily putting us whippersnappers in our places. Ryker strength seems to grow with age, not wither. He does look worn though—tired, more so. Like in his years, he wishes he’d done other things with them, but now has to live with the consequences of his regretted actions.

His jaw is straight, and proud just like the bony, nose that stands out from his face. This man is a Ryker. This man defines the name Ryker.

“You are the image of your, father.”

“Derco is not my, father.” I just shed that fucking label.

“Derco?” His voice echoes off the walls, both elegant eyebrows rise. "Did I say, Derco?"

I shake my cowed head. This dude freaks me out.

“Derco is not your father—the very notion is absurd. You look nothing like him — why, even if your eyes are deceivingly his color, they are more like mine, and Lexington’s.”

He’s right; they are. “You even possess your father’s temper: Look at what you’ve done.”

I take a panoramic of Hurricane Briggland and wince not knowing what do say to make him stop giving me that unrelenting look of disapproval.

“Err, sorry sir.” I rub the back of my neck sheepishly.

“Indeed.” He shakes his head at me. “I shall forgive you, because you are very young, but I shall expect better of you in the future.”

I say nothing at first, caught a little off guard with the light scolding (especially since I had expected to be lamb basted). When he arches an expectant brow at me — much like Derco would — I quickly insert a “Yes, sir.”

“Indeed.” He seems to like that word. He studies me again, this time like I’m a rat he is deciding whether or not to let free, or to poison slowly. “You should keep in mind that while your father’s temper sometimes aids him, more often it clouds his judgment. Emotions overrule logic. They overrule reason. They are a weakness, Briggland.”

“You’re him. Malverick Ryker.”

“Yes. I am him,” he says proud, mixed with some regret. “Grandfather to you. Though sir is a pretty safe form of address. And now, you must go.”

My brow knits together. He does seem kinda omnipresent, but there’s no way he could know my entire schedule. “I am making an assumption, young Briggland. Young ones like you are usually not left to your own devices for such a period of time — you should have somewhere to be. If you do not, then my sons are not honoring laws I myself have set.”

I probably do have somewhere to be, since the Major releasing me, probably didn't mean go
destroy a few hallways, but I didn't really care at the time. In my defense, all he said was to go find my boyfriend, but he hadn't said we had to be anywhere specifically. Now that I'm less angry and reason is setting in, I really don't want to hear what the Major, who's actually my father, is going to think about me destroying shit. Here seems like a good place to stay.

“Shouldn’t I clean up?”

“That you should, young man; return a bit later. Tell your father I said you must return, and why.”

It’s weird for him to refer to ‘my father’ so casually, especially knowing whom he means. I’d just got used to Derco being my father; now I have to switch everything in my mind.

Assholes.

Wait. Did he say he wants me to tell him the Major, my father that I’d just destroyed a wing in Ryker Corp.? I have a good feeling, no scratch that, a bad feeling that's going to end in trouble. “Uh, sir, please. Couldn’t we just keep this between you and I?”

“By all means — if you think you can hide this from him. More likely, he’ll find out, and you’ll be in more trouble than if you had just told him the truth in the first place.”

He’s right, but sounds to me like I can at least try. “See you later, sir.”

**

“Where have you been, Ryker? I’ve been looking all over for you.”

Shit. I’d forgot about Ridomie. For a long time, I didn’t even know if Malverick Ryker was alive or dead. The way he’s talked about, it's like he was instead of is. He seemed more legend than a real person.

“With the Major,” I tell him. It’s not a lie. Not really. I'll tell him, I just need some time to figure shit out.

I inspect it and flip it over to see the glittery black Moldevite, but it’s not fucking there. “This isn’t all of it,” I snap at him.

“You’re welcome,” he snaps back.

Right. I'm being a total dickbag. “It’s been a hell of a day,” I say by way of apology. He must see how drained I am; he pulls me to him then looks around before he kisses the bald part of my head.

“You wanna tell me about it, Ryker?”

I nod into his neck because I realize as he asks: I do.

“C’mon. Let’s go somewhere more private than this.” We're in a hallway, not far from the Mess Hall. Not a good place for us to be canoodling.

He takes my hand and we run to where we were the last time we had any privacy; the place of the Mothers. We sit on the edge of the giant DNA fountain, he holds my hand. “No one will be around. The Mothers are putting the little ones to bed—they need more sleep than we do.”

After my sleep last night I’ll be good to go for days. I tell Rye all about the Major being my real father and the fucked up family fun meal we had. I don't mention meeting my grandfather. One bite at a time.
“That’s great, news, Ryker. He’s one of the good guys. Why are you pissed off?”

“Because I’m fucking confused.” I think I’m just pissed in general and the Major seems the likely target.

“When I was little, being raised, my name was different. Clones don’t get names—we don’t merit names—so we have to make them up ourselves. I went by Kay. Your, father, told me I should have a name, not a letter like nobody loved me; I didn’t get at the time. Why would a Ryker care about a clone being loved? I was mad he would have the audacity to change the name I picked for myself. It’s the only thing clones are allowed to give themselves and keep; I thought he was just being a Ryker, ’cause he didn’t like me. What I realized later was he liked me most of all, but by then it was too late. I got everyone to call me by my last name, because I was trying to be clever and beat the Ryker system and you know what he did? He smiled and laughed like I’d done something good, but I hadn’t. I’d spat in his face. And he’s kept doing things like that for me, even when I should’ve been executed; he saved me, Ryker. You know why? ’Cause he’s good.”

Okay, I get it. He should repeat it a third time. “Should I tell the Major to expect flowers?”

“Knock it off. I’m trying to be serious, but you’re incapable. Every time a conversation is out of your comfort zone.”

“That’s not true, exactly. I just, I want to know your name.”

“It is true, Ryker and I’m not telling you.”

“Why not?”

“For making fun of me.”

“C’mon I’ve had a hard day. Didn’t you hear me? I had to sit through a family meal with Derco and Deredick while this important life event was discussed then got dragged out by my fucking hair.”

He shakes his head.

“Something else happened too,” I continue.

“What?”

“Nope. I’ll show you mine if you show me yours.”

“What? You don’t make any sense, Ryker. I’ve got nothing to show you.”

“It was a saying from Earth. Look never mind that, would you just tell me your fucking name, so I can tell you the other bit of news I have—it’s bigger than the Major being my biological dad.”

“What could be bigger than that?”

I answer by raising my brow.

“Tell me, Ryker,” he demands, not liking this game.

“Fuck off… Kay,” I laugh at him.

“You really have no idea how this Top/Bottom thing works do you Ryker?”

“Why? You gonna spank my ass, again?” I kind of hope he will.
“I think that’s inevitable for you, but no, I do think your day deserves a pass. You need to tell me what else happened though. I won’t be able to think. Damn it Ryker, just tell me and quit being your asshole self!”

“All right, all right.” I really should find out more about this Top/Bottom thing. “I met my grandfather.”

“Your grandfather? As in Malverick Ryker?”

“Yep.”

“That is big, Ryker. How?”

I recount the tale for him.

“The first time you meet him and you’re already in trouble with him. Why am I not surprised?” He shakes his head laughing. I marvel at him for a moment; I love Ridomie’s laugh. "Your father's gonna kill you."

It's nothing he's said, it's just the simple act of talking about this, all of it and suddenly I'm fighting back tears I try to wipe away.

Ridomie reaches to wipe one. "Don't," I say, not really wanting to be consoled.

"It's going to be okay Ryker."

"Distract me. Tell me about your mother. Tell me about mothers."
Okay! Got four chapters coming up for a total of 10.5K.

This is a hard story to write and yes, needs editing well beyond typos, grammar/tense errors, etc. So I hope you'll forgive me for going back to edit as I go. One such edit, which may not make much difference (but for the sci-fi geeks like me) a genetic "malady" can only be passed on from the Father in this world. I had said in a previous chapter, that it was Father to son, Mother to daughter, but that was a rewriting mistake. All fixed now.

So, uh, yeah. Not too big a deal... but I may have to come back and fix this chapter a little.

Enjoy!

"A very long time ago, there were women who were Rykers."

"It's not a fucking bedtime story, Rye."

"On second thought, spanking you seems like a better idea."

"Please, proceed." He fucking means it. I'm pushing him and pushing him, I don't know why, but it's so much fucking fun. I like toeing the line and I want to see how far I can push 'till he does it.

"They were always kept under strict control by the Ryker men. The people of Cyntripien were scared of them. Are scared of them—the Mothers are secret."

"Huh. Classic sexism. Why are people scared of Ryker women?"

"Ryker women are prophets."

And probably a whole lot of other hoopla propagated by Ryker men. "Prophets? You mean prophets exist? They're only in books back on Earth." Goosebumps break out over my skin.

"They did exist. There are no more Ryker women, Ryker."

That fucking confuses me. "Okay, I know there's this whole 'clones aren't people' thing that most of this planet ignorantly operates under, but Ridomie, the Mothers exist, they are people and far as I know, are made with Ryker DNA."

"I love you for that Ryker. Sorry, I do believe they're people, I've just been talking this way a long time."

"Old habits, die hard?"

He smiles. "Yes, that's accurate. No one considers the Mothers people, they're even lower in hierarchy than a full-grown clone, so in the terms of Rykers there are no more Ryker women."
"Rykers pretend Ryker women don't exist even though they do, gotcha. Not surprised. So the Mothers are made of Ryker DNA, Ryker women are prophets, does that mean the Mothers are prophets?"

"No."

"What, did they splice it out, or something?"

"Yeah."

Guess they do that with whatever they don't like here. "Why do I feel like that's not the end of the fucking bedtime story?"

He sucks in a huge breath. He's trusting me with something big. I'm not offended, I get it. He trusts me, but there's difference between thinking it and saying it. He's officially making another statement that could incarcerate him, or in his case, incinerate him. No matter who he's saying it to, all those years of social pruning and brainwashing make it hard to do. "They did Ryker. Of course they did, but it's like I always say, they can splice out as much DNA as they want, but they can't kill Mother Nature. She still rules them all. They might take things out, but she puts them back in if she sees fit. I'm not entirely sure it worked. Once, there was a Mother suspected of prophecy. Her children were incinerated. Keeping her alive was the punishment. Everyone knows killing a Mother's children drives her insane. Eventually, she killed herself."

"Was she actually a prophet?"

"I don't know. She denied the accusations, but of course she would. Her children's lives were at stake."

"What do you believe?"

"I don't know what to believe, but I know that's why there are no women clones. Except the Mothers. The Mothers can be controlled."

"What about the DNA for the general population in Cyntripien?"

"That's stuffs not the same as what they use for clones. We know that much. It's diluted."

"Maybe it's more diluted than we thought?"

"Possibly."

"Or maybe not Ryker blood at all. How would the public know?"

He shakes his head. "They'd know. They wouldn't have kids that were more genetically evolved. Too many of them have classic Ryker traits—didn't you notice the similar facial structures on your little jaunt? Or how about the way Steve put claim on you for the night? Ryker possessiveness."

He's still not over that apparently.

True, though. It's a lot like the blonde-haired, blue-eyed Hitler thing—imagine if Hitler could make the population how he wanted it? "I'm sure that can be arranged without a lot of Ryker blood genes, with just a little dicking around in the lab, enough to make them show up, but not enough to do much. Not hard in this day and age Ridomie."

He's perplexed. "But why would they do that? It's not like anyone could challenge them."
"What's the number one thing you know about Rykers?"

"They're arrogant, egotistical maniacs."

"Exactly. They don't want anyone to be better than they are. If you're saying evolution can swoop in and make someone's DNA better, they're not going to give them a head start by handing out the best Ryker blood."

"There's a flaw in your theory Ryker."

"Which is?"

"Ryker's are so arrogant, they don't believe there could be better than them. And regardless, with Ryker DNA in every person, Ryker Corp. owns every person and any and all evolutionary progress."

"I don't fucking know then, Rye. Other than they just don't want anyone as good as them, nothing to do with competition." That's fucked up enough, it just might be true.

"Hmm. I'd agree with that, especially when it comes to the Mothers. Ryker males have many amazing and unique qualities, but the Mothers seem to have something special we just can't compete with. Maybe Ryker men don't want to compete with Ryker women."

"I think you're a fucking Mama's boy," I say, teasing him because the opportunity's struck. But I agree with him and if that's the case, it's not hard to figure out what happened to all the Ryker women.

"As if you're not."

I laugh. "Yeah. A bit. Knew you'd say that. You may have a point, maybe Ryker arrogant-ignorance is only toward other Ryker men, maybe they're afraid of Ryker women—it's too bad they couldn't rule together. It always has to be one man or one woman, though usually a man; we still don't have a female president back when I'm from. Enough of this man woman bullshit though. What was it like growing up with your mama?"

"It was the best time of my life, Ryker."

What would it have been like to grow up with my mama? Least one of us did.

And speak of the devil. "Briggy. You came back," Miss Taggart’s voice lights up behind us, knocking me out of my thinking. Miss Taggart sounds pleased to have me back and I know why. Shit. I forgot I’d done that. Ridomie tenses up beside me.

"Miss Taggart, hi. We were just sitting—we’ll be leaving now."

"The kids have gone to bed," she says suggestively and I can’t fucking help myself. I want to make Ridomie jealous and she’s fucking beautiful. Maybe that will finally get him to fuck me. I need him to fuck me. It hurts. It always hurts.

Since I’m the Ryker, he’s waiting for me to say something. "Looks like we’ve got good timing."

That’s all Ridomie needs and he’s onto me; he knows me too well.

He forgets about 'letting' me lead this conversation and takes over. "Actually Miss Taggart, we are due to meet Major Ryker momentarily."

He sets a glare on me that even I know not to fucking argue with.
‘Cept I do anyway. “I don’t remember any meeting.”

“There’s a damn meeting Ryker,” he growls. Something in his eyes says he’s had enough; it’s not going to be fun if I push it past this. I may have already gone too far. He grabs me by the wrist —yep, too far Ryker.

“Forgive my rudeness Miss Taggart—we must be on our way.”

She says nothing because her mouth is frozen, her eyes are popping out of her skull and zero in on Ridomie’s hand that’s gripping my wrist hard enough he just might snap it. She can’t believe he’s man handling me, a Ryker, in this way, but staring is all she does.

When he’s dragged me far enough away I start laughing my ass off—Ridomie’s silent: Dead fucking silent.

“Rye. Rye? Oh c’mon. I didn’t mean anything by it,” I whine. “I was just trying to rile you up.”

"Congratulations Ryker, you succeeded." He keeps pulling at me and I continue to follow. He walks, so I know he’s trying to cool off and I try to think of a way to calm him the fuck down. I have no idea where we are now. This place is still one big fucking mystery to me. It’s full of outside type stuff, like trees and plants and shit—a lot of stuff I don’t know the fucking names of, but there are different kinds of greens and browns. Some of the trees have leaves larger than me.

But right now, Ridomie’s bigger than any of it and he finally stops slamming me up against a tree, both of his hands are to the side of my head. He looks feral, he’s practically drooling—I can see his sharp eyeteeth. He works to get his breathing under control, but he’s not having much luck.

“Rye—"

“Shut up, Ryker.”

I shut up and let whatever’s about to happen—happen.

“You’re pushing me because you want to be punished—I’ve seen it enough times to know what you’re doing even if you don’t—but I’m the top and I decide when you’re in need of punishment. Am I understood?” He’s breathing fucking heavily; barely able to restrain himself.

I don’t know how to fucking answer him without pissing him off more—yes sir? Yes, Ridomie? Holy shit. Is that what I’m doing? Do I want him to punish me? So many things have me spinning today, I don't know what I want.

I decide to go with the safest answer possible. “Yes, sir.” I need to say it—I need the control, to be controlled; the balance to my out of fucking control day. My out of fucking control life.

His countenance flickers for only a second, but my voice sounds small and he can see what I need.

“You can't do that—even in play, not anymore. Mating is not a game. Not for us. We're different,” he says with a thought in his mind. “Oh Ryker. I’m a fool. This is my fault—me and my stupid social culturing. Ryker, you do need me to fuck you, don’t you?” he says after an eternity. “And not just for pleasure; you need to feel it. That you're m-m-mine.” It begins timid, but ends in a slight growl. It was much easier for him when he was amidst his blood rage; if I didn't think he'd kill anyone (literally) I might think it was fun to push him to that edge again—just so he'd fuck me. "And since your marks are gone it's only making matters worse.”

I don’t have to nod or respond and he figures me out piecing everything together with his broken,
voiced thoughts. I do need to know at the most basic level, the physical one—that I’m his. It’s
different than him telling me and different than anything else.

His stance takes on another meaning, the hardness in it, is to give me strength, but knowing how
much I need him awakens the untamable being within him and he needs to have me as much as I
need to have him.

“Sorry, this is going hurt.”

*That’s fine. I hurt anyway. Love always hurt me. “I'm already aching Rye—what more can you
do?”*

His lips crash down like a tidal wave—something that’s been building for miles and it comes at me
all at once, sweeping me away, pulling at me, so I go where his lips go. They’re soft, and delicious.
He tastes like, fuck, I don’t know, but I want more, and more. We both pant, and breathe heavy,
pulling each other closer — but we can’t get close enough. Claw deeper. Push further, but there’s
only so far we can push into each other. The kiss has become too much, a living, breathing thing
we don’t know what to do with it except throw it off each other.

But like strong fucking magnets we pull back to each other and bite and suck our way through
another kiss. He pushes at my shirt like he wants to take it off and I just let him as my back slams
against the tree over and over. My lips are swollen now, my blue-balled cock fucking aching and
the pit inside me slowly being filled.

He pulls the black shirt over my head and spins me around to face the rough tree. He places my
hands above my head and presses them into the tree, a clear order to keep them there. "I thought I
might need this. Wish I had one at Legions."

I have no fucking clue what he's talking about, until I hear the crack of a whip and shiver. The last
time I felt a whip, it was from Derco. It fucking sucked. A lot. I'm not scared though. I want to see
what it's like when Ridomie does it. I already know it will be different. I want it from him. *Crave
it. Crave his marks.* It's some undeniable need, always buzzing in the background. "Sorry Ryker. I
just can't, I can't have sex with you yet. I want to. I do. This will have to do, for now."

I already know what’s coming before the whip whistles through the air, I look forward to the hot
stripe it leaves on my back. He leaves several hot stripes in succession. They sear with white, hot
pain. *I feel alive.*

I flinch with each hit, but look forward to what I'll still feel tomorrow; (now that I've got my
Moldevite back). I'll feel him. I need him written in my skin.

When he's done, I hear him throw the whip aside. I don't dare move. I know when to be a dick and
when to listen, and now's a time for listening.

"Good boy, Ryker," he praises. "That's my good boy." My body, alight with pain, feels consoled. I
needed this. I remember being in pubs, night after night on Earth searching for something I didn't
understand, yet knowing I needed pain, and control of the rage within me in some form. I tried to
assuage the feeling by beating the shit outta someone, turns out I need the shit beat outta me. I
know now I was searching for this—I'm not meant to give pain, I'm meant to receive it. From
Ridomie. *Let someone else take control. Make decisions.*

He grabs my hand and pulls me to him, with my back to his front; he squeezes me like I'm
something dear to him and at the same time re-lights the fire in my back.
"Will that be enough, Baby?"

"Yeah, for now," I say, a bit disappointed. I want him to fuck me; I know why he still won’t. Fucking clone brainwashing,

"C’mon Ryker, I’ll rub some ointment on your back." He positions his lips just over my ear. "And I'll make out with you some more on your bed," he says in a low voice sending shivers through me.

"Sold."
That's Major to You Darlin'

It’s like I’ve walked back in time.

She can, so why the fuck don’t she? Take away the pain burning like sticky flames. “What are you up to, Dess?” I say out loud to her even though she can’t hear me from this distance.

_Fucking perplexing is what she is._ She's laying on the edge of the bed — which is all she does — looking up at the ceiling. I know that look. She's chewing. Mulling over decisions she’s made, wondering if she made the right ones, but too fucking stubborn to ask anyone — me — for a little insight. For help.

Yeah, I’m back, watching Dess; been doing this awhile now. I can’t stop; she’s my addiction. Seeing her once was the catalyst, I'm lost again. I sit here, and watch her; staring and watching, watching and staring. It’s got to the point where it scares me. Time passes, and before I know it, it’s morning. Sometimes it’s too fucking hard to tear myself away. But I do.

I can't seem to work up the fucking courage to talk to her. Or maybe I'm afraid I'll kill her. Both are true. I know we'd fight. It would be a doozy. We'd yell first, then it would get violent and we'd be throwing each other around. Shit would get broken. Then I'd fucking kiss her so hard and we'd have sex.

But I ain’t gonna do it, not today at least. I’ll sit instead in my spot in the trees, just fucking staring, just fucking watching. I swear that's my plan, but then three clone idiots come along.

“No you go this time.” The voice is a small ways off in the distance, but I can hear it loud and clear. An identical voice answers. “No, I went two times before that. If you don’t want to go Alman can.”

An identical voice answers. “No way. I’m not going. I’m the eldest and therefore I pull rank — this is between the two of you.”

“By a second,” the other two answer him synchronically.

“Besides, I fed the Dragon Lady for an entire week while you two sloughed off at Legions.”

Legions—that bar just outside the perimeter. We turn a blind eye to clones that decide they wanted a night out. It's good they have a place to let off a little steam. Good for morale. Dragon lady is Dess for sure. Looks like she has her own little clone triad looking after her.

"Let's just leave it outside the door, like we have before. Then no one has to deal with her. She kicked my ass last time."

"Yeah. I'm in for that. She leaves anyway, no matter how close an eye we keep. Sometimes she's just gone."

I fucking knew it.

I wait 'till I hear them coming back my way and and watch them head to the vehicle they arrived in, off into the distance. _I know an opportunity when I see one and it's too good to pass up:_ Looks like the reunion’s coming early. When they're gone, I easily slip past the poorly placed guard.

Outside's got a fair number of clones, sure, but her door's not even guarded. I expect as much.
There’s nothing — known — that can contain her, being more advanced then we are. She’s chained here by her own doing and I’m about to find out what the hell it is.

If she agrees to tell me I mean.

I pick up the large box of food and knock on the door making like I’m one of her hand-servants. She says two lame ass words, but they make my pathetic heart stop. “Come, in.”

Her voice is the worst thing it can be: It’s familiar. Like I only heard it yesterday. It's exactly like I felt that last time, when I didn’t know it was the last time I’d hear her speak to me in that familiar sense; the ‘I’m just stepping out for a minute’ voice. The one we all take for granted when it’s people we think we’re gonna see everyday for the rest of our lives. The voice of familiarity is one you look up at for a breath of a moment and shortly, you're back to whatever non-important thing it was you was doing before it interrupted you. You're not doing what you should be doing with it, which is memorizing it, committing it to memory—you don't know you're never going to hear it again.

I wish her voice wasn’t so damn familiar and I wish my body, mind and fucking heart would forget. Her.

But none of me does, so here I am knocking and being told to ‘come in’ with her familiar voice. My body remembers every connection to that voice, and with it brings a flood of remembered feelings, and warmth. I fall into character; fall back to the part inside me where she lived forever; the place where time never passed beyond the days when we were we. I almost don’t fucking go in. But I have to. I have new priorities now. My son. I need to find out what the fuck is going on for his sake. Not thinking about it no more, I open the door. There's not even an access block on it. It slides open quietly.

“Just leave it there, and get out,” she says without turning around. She’s still lying on the bed staring at nothing, curled in a little ball like she always is nowadays. The fire of hair flares like sunrays around her lithe body. Nothing's different, physically—she hasn’t aged at all. She’s only different on the inside and the only way I can see from the outside is the way she’s folded in on herself. Still, she’s beautiful. Most beautiful thing I've laid eyes on, next to my son.

I want to be a good little servant, or at least give that impression, so I do as she’s asked. I make more noise than necessary when I put the box down hoping to alert her. I’m sure those boys were quiet as mice not wanting to piss her off. She doesn’t turn around. I stare at her instead and wait.

“I said, you may leave. You are dismissed.” Her voice is getting that irritated twang to it. I’m almost jealous; I thought only I did that to her.

‘Course it still is me, but she doesn’t know that. I smile wider, and don’t fucking move. Without warning, she rolls off the bed like she thinks I’m a helluva lot more than a clone. It startles me, ‘cause what does she have to fear?

My eyes narrow, panic beginning to rise — if she’s afraid then I should be assembling an army. She seizes my rare moment of shock and pounces on me sending us both flying to the ground — me on the bottom, her directly on my chest. Her eyes widen, now I take advantage of her surprise; I grab her wrists and lock them together. “You and me are goin’ t’have a chat.”

She's still gripped with wild anxiety, but relief is quick to wash through them and finally morph to outrage. “Lexy?”

“That’s Major to you, Darlin’.”
She pushes me off of her, no hesitations. "What the fuck you doing here, Ryker?"

I fucking love her dirty mouth. I can't help smiling for a second over what that dirty mouth can do, 'till I remember how fucking pissed I am at her. But fuck, she's damn beautiful all swearing at me and biting her lip, her eyes glossing over with tears despite the confidence she’s trying to project. "You've got some explain' t'do," I say like the order it is.

"I probably do, but it's best if I don't," she tells me like she is sorry.

Oh. Okay darlin', my mistake. I'll leave. Huh. Bet she'd like it if I said that. She's not gonna be that fortunate.

"Please, Lex—"

"Major," I correct her, 'cause I’m the fucking Major to her now. Nothing else. She draws back, like I've just punched her. Believe me darlin', I'm just getting started.

"I guess I deserve that."

"It's not all yah deserve, but it'll have t'do for now."

She nods, a sad expression taking over her pretty features. She's silent, probably sensing the fury building within me, and not wanting to mess with it. "The only question I need to know from yeh anyways; why are you here, Oydessa?" I gesture around the room so there’s no mistaking my meaning.

"I can't tell you that."

My hands ball into fists, my anger going up a notch. I try a new question. "He's here. You know anything about that?"

"Yes." She looks me in the eye briefly to answer, then down and away again.

I decide to play arrogant, and slightly amused. I grab some food out of the box, the a leg of some bird and take a large, uncouth, bite. "You know I brought him here. That only I could bring him here. You wanted him here," I say between bites.

"Yes."

A tingle shoots through me. A fucking terrible, eerie tingle. She knows he's here. She practically sent me to go get him. She's made some sort of bargain with Derco to keep him here. There's only one reason she'd make such a bargain. His life.

I can’t think of anything to say except, “what the fuck?” as I throw the empty bone across the room. “You tell me the truth now, Darlin’. Is my son in danger?”

“So, you know then?” she smiles.

It's amazing how quick he’s become part of my vocabulary, how I've take protective claim on him.
He has and I’m not letting down on anything, not even for his mama. It doesn’t escape my notice
how she's avoided my fucking question. “Yeah, I know. Would have been nice ah yah, to fuckin’
tell me yerself. Better yet, would have been fucking nice ah yah to tell the fuckin’ truth in the first
place.”

“I know Lexy—”

“Major.”

“Major,” she repeats. I'm not stupid, she's just fucking placating me. *Damn woman.* “I did what I
had to do.” And she's not sorry for it either.

“But you can’t fucking tell me what that is I bet.”

“You deserve the truth, Major,” she begins and I don’t like the way she says Major, too much like
the son we share, belligerent. “But our son’s life depends on what I’m doing and that doesn’t
include you.”

“Like fuck it doesn’t!” I give her the stoniest glare I can muster. It works. She flinches the tiniest
bit.

“I’m doing what I have to do. This is the exact reason, I didn't tell you anything—I knew you'd go
off half-cocked like you always do.”

*I want to strangle her.* It doesn't change that she's right, or that I am too. We stand in a stare down
until she finally softens, marginally. “I promise, if I do need your help, I’ll ask. Haven’t I always?”

Fuck—yeah she had. I nod. "I will tell you one thing, if you promise not to ask anymore
questions."

I'll take what I can get. I plan on finding out the rest myself. "Promise."

"Don't ever let him leave you."

I open my mouth to ask why and close it remembering I said I wouldn't ask questions. Never said I
wouldn't comment though. "It would be nice to know the parameters of that. As it stands, I don't
think Briggland's gonna appreciate me sleepin' next to him, or have to follow me wherever I go."

Her smile hits her eyes. "No need to take drastic measures. So long as he's near Ryker blood, he's
okay."

Fuck my promise. "How far Dess?"

"I don't know. Took me all this time to figure that part out. I haven't really tested it enough. The
more of you the better. I’m fairly sure so long as one of you is at Ryker Corp. and he's a Ryker
Corp. he'll be fine."

That's not good enough for me. "What happens if we're not?"

"Nuh-uh. Don't find out."

*Stubborn bitch.* I know that's all I’m gonna get outta her, so I turn to fucking leave. I can’t look at
her any longer. *I want her.* Being near her, I can't deny it. I love her so fucking much it hurts.

“Lexy, wait!” I don’t correct her that time and stop without turning around.
“You love him. Our son.” I can hear the smile in her voice.

“You love him,” I answer even though it was a statement not a question. “He’s pretty damn incredible Dess—you have no idea.”

She laughs when I say that, her beautiful bell laugh, the one I’ve heard so many times before. Feels damn nice that it’s on account of me once more.

“I do, Major.” She calls me Major but I know she’s doing it on her fucking terms. She always called me Major when she was amused with me; it’s no different now. “He’s just like his daddy.”

I’ve never been able to understand with proper context where Dess is from, she's too far in the future for me to comprehend it, but from her explanations, it seems a lot like how I’d grown up. Her accent isn’t nearly as strong as mine, but she has some hints of a southern twang, like the southern planet Sundrean, where I grew up when I was Brigg's age. I like how she referred to me as his daddy. No one save me talks like that around here—probably no chance of getting Briggland to call me Daddy. It hurts too, her calling me by that moniker; gives me flashes of what could have been. I can’t be here no more.

I storm the fuck out.

**

Ryker’s still half naked. I’m watching him pretend not to sleep. He kept insisting he wasn't tired, yet here he lies with his eyes closed. "I'm just resting them," he said. The breathing of his large torso is slow like he's content; he's not all the way asleep. I can't help myself, Ryker is like apples to me—I have to touch him and now that I've had a taste of him, I will always, always have to taste him.

I trail my finger along the lines of his abs, savoring the feel of his skin, drinking in his essence. I marvel at his beauty. Ryker is more than just beauty. I try, while he pretends to sleep, to think of him as mine. I have to. I'm burning—it's driving me insane. He's hurting. Aching. I have to get over this.

It is stupid. I actually feel like I'm defiling Ryker. See? dumb. Ryker practically humps my leg when I get close to him. I'm uncomfortable with the idea of fucking a Ryker. Oh I want to and I'm trying with baby steps. The make-out session we just had was meant to be that, but now my dick is hard, his dick is hard and I'm just going to be an irritable grouch. It was a bad, bad idea. Worst I've had. I'm pretty sure that's why he's pretending to sleep. He's hoping I'll leave so he can tug one out. Even thinking of him touching him instead of me makes that place inside of me burn with rage.

Come on Ridomie. You can do this. Your dick's already hard. He wants this. He said he chooses me. Our blood's chosen the other. He begs me. It's hardest when he begs me.

It's just, I have to be worthy of him. I know it now, Ryker and I are meant to be together; we need to be together. Unbelievable as that is, there's been no mistake, our blood has chosen the other. So what's my problem?

He's right, it should be easier than breathing; I've done it enough times. Fucked. But not to someone I love. Not to my mate. Sure, I could pound into him and eventually I will, but I want our first time to be something different than what I've had with everyone else. When I claim him, I want it to be right. It's a selfish venture—I'm sure he's been in love plenty, who wouldn't fall in love with Ryker? He's probably made love, to all kinds of people. My hand has flattened on his abdomen, my nails unconsciously dig in, with just the thought of other people fucking my Ryker.
"There's no one here, Rye," he murmurs without a flinch at the pain—Ryker's quickly getting used to pain. That's a very good thing.

"How many guys have you made love with, Ryker?"

His eyes pop open, he looks afraid to answer—the number must astound. "What the fuck? Even I know that's a deadly question to answer in a relationship, let alone to you. No way. Fuck you, Ridomie."

"Answer the question Ryker," I say as my hand finds its way to his throat.

"I've never made love with anyone."

"You're lying."

"No," he says calmly. "I really haven't. I've fucked many, never made love."

I'm shocked—never made love, to anyone? It must be plain on my face. "Never, Rye," he says again.

My hand is gentle when I run it through his hair and smile. "But, who wouldn't love you? How can that be possible?" I can't hide my mirth. I don't care who he’s fucked, okay, maybe I do a bit, a lot, but I'd care more to find out whoever my Ryker loved, especially since he doesn't love me.

He sits up smiling his Ryker smile, the special one I've only seen him give to me, takes my hand and kisses it. "Others have loved me, but I never loved them." He takes a meaningful pause before he continues. "No one's ever held meaning for me like that."

I don't care that he doesn't love me, all I can think about is that he hasn't loved anyone else and I'm glad.

"You want to be the first to make love to me?"

"The first?"

"Hello, Ridomie, anybody home? Fuck. I didn't say it, I was supposed to say it. I meant to, but things got kinda hectic with the whole Maury Pauvich episode I was just on—"

I put my hand over his mouth. "What are you talking about, Ryker?"

I take my hand away so he can talk. "I love you dumbass. You really don't know? Thought we were mates, huh?"

"We are. But, this is so unprecedented I didn't know if—"

"You didn't know if a Ryker mating to a Clone meant love. What? Like I somehow blood-raped you? Is that what you fucking thought? A Ryker up to new tricks? I didn't just want to control you the regular way, but also by taking control of your blood? That it?"

"No. Ryker, I just didn't know. End of story." I did think he was choosing me because of the aching, that the blood was forcing his hand, but he already looks mad, so I don't mention it. "But you do, you...can you say it again? Please."

Easy to forgive, he sits up, slides a hand into my dark hair and brings me in for a kiss. It's a short kiss. He pulls away, but his lips are still close to mine. "I love you Ridomie. First. Only."
Suddenly, fucking him, making love, whatever, isn't the taboo it was moments ago. It's right. And I have to do it right now. The need is overwhelming. His blood calls to mine and mine answers back. I kiss him, kiss him everywhere—all over his face, all up his neck. I stop at his lips and pull his tongue into my mouth, mine tangling with his, I breathe in his air.

I need to be in him—I need to make sure he knows he's mine forever. I prowl on top of him still twisting my tongue with his. He let's me, submitting to my every command—letting me be in control, he has been for a long time, but I was too stubborn to let nature take its course. I fought for the rules I've always hated because there are still parts of me that think I have to try and be like everyone else. Ryker's been teaching me a long time now; those rules don't have to be true.

He really can be mine.

My hips move and his cock slides against mine underneath the confines of his black fatigues. Those need to come off. I reach for the latch on his pants and snap it undone with a deft flick of my fingers, the front of the pants open and I grasp the waistband as he takes a sharp inhale. There’s an excited pause in his movements as he realizes: We’re doing this.

I use both hands to slide his fatigues off, slowly, while still attached to his mouth. When they reach his knees I lean back to sit on my heels, toes tucked underneath me and manipulate Ryker’s legs to free them.

I stare at his cock.

It’s a long, wide, thing that’s every bit as supercilious as he is—it knows it’s something special and it wants everyone else to know it too. Ryker, the asshole he is, tucks his hands behind his head and pushes his hips out just enough, with a smirk on his face, proud of his super appendage. Okay, I’ll give him this one, he has a really nice cock.

But so do I.

I remember his little epithet of, show you mine if you show me yours, some Earth saying. That’s what I’ll do. He watches with youthful excitement, as I begin to undress; first taking off my black shirt and tossing it to the floor. My muscles flex as I undo my own fatigues; I knee up to pull them down along and let my hard cock spring out into the open.

Ryker looses his arrogant demeanor and looks at my penis. He’s seen it before, as I have his; in the shower and the day Derek ordered me to strip, but now he’s seeing it in a new way, as the thing that’s about to enter him. “Whoa, you’re fucking huge, Ridomie!” he says as mouthy as ever.

I laugh. “I’ll be gentle, Baby… this time,” I say in a voice that’s as gentle as I plan to be and lean forward to take his hands and place them over his head, where I like them. I look over his body, my marks are gone from his torso since Legions the other night, so I proceed to replace them. I put the first one on his thigh.

“Ow! Fuck, Ridomie! I thought you said you were going to be gentle?”

“I promise to be gentle when I put my cock inside you, Baby, but I need to mark you if I’m going to claim you like this. You can’t walk around unmarked anymore.” I bite down on his other thigh and I expect more expletives, but all I get out of him is a sharp exhale. I want more than that. I need to hear him scream. Part of mating, is him giving into me like this, letting me mark him up, taking the pain I give him. He gives himself to me and in return I give him protection—which is a thought that almost stops me again. Why would a Ryker need protection from me? Why should he give this to me, when I have no real thing to offer him? But it's too late, I'm too far gone. The smell of our
arousals combined, have me on a one way path and if not for that, the burning alone is enough to render me sex-stupid. I continue to mark him until he screams, he accepts my marks freely, I work to intoxicate him with feelings of me. His cock is still rock hard. As I suspected, Ryker likes pain.

“Please, Rye… I need you… So bad.”

But I want more from him, I want to hear him say the words. I’m certain Ryker will have lubricant in his nightstand, I reach over and pull the drawer out and jackpot—he does. I take some and use it to slick up his hole with my finger, slipping the finger in occasionally. He begs and moans and there are a lot of fucks interspersed between; I add another finger. “Tell me, Baby; what do you need?”

“You. I need you to put your cock inside me. I want to feel you Rye,” he whines. "I want you to have me and just you.” He narrows his azure blues at me meaningfully.

I position myself overtop of him and for one fleeting moment, I marvel that I’m on top of a Ryker. It almost makes me stop, but I remember that this is my Ryker and he’s different than all the other Rykers. ‘I love this Ryker, he’s my Ryker and I need to make sure he knows he’s mine.’ I need to go over it one more time in my head before I follow through with it.

I promised I would be gentle, but what I want is to fuck the living daylights out of him and now that he’s prepared for my cock, I can see that’s what Ryker wants too. He’s not afraid of my large member anymore, he craves it, so slam my cock inside him, right where it’s meant to be. He meets my thrusts and attempts to reach out and grab me, removing his hands from the position I left them in. I smack the side of his ass. *Hard*. He yelps and replaces his hands where they’re supposed to be.

“Good boy, Ryker.”

His cock jumps; he likes my praise. *He likes it when I make him do things.*

I press his legs back and spread them at my whim and slam into him harder—I can’t control myself, my promise of gentle but a memory. I don’t think Ryker cares if his moans are anything to go by. I’m getting close to coming already, but I don’t want to, I want this to last for me, for Ryker—I want to stay inside him forever. I slow down some, pumping into him at a leisurely pace.

“Jesus Christ, Ridomie! You’re a real fucking cock blocker, you know that?”

I don’t know whether to laugh, or beat him; he can be such a disobedient asshole. How the hell am I going to keep him in line? I decide to go with something he won’t like. “Keep talking like that and maybe I’ll decide that you don’t need to come.”

“Can you fucking do that?”

“I’m the top, remember? I can do what I want, and I don’t believe in rewarding disobedience,” I say with a dare in my eyes.

So he gives me those eyes—those damn eyes that will be the death of me—and begs me prettily. “Please Ridomie? I’ve been a good little Ryker. Make me come with that ginormous cock of yours.”

I know there’s a lining of flippancy in his tone, but I can’t resist him when he does that, and I hope he never finds out the powers he holds over me. I’ll do anything for this Ryker. Trying not to make it obvious, I slowly begin to pick up the pace again as he continues to stare at me and beg me with his Ryker eyes.

“Come for me, Baby,” I tell him and he releases all over his stomach and with a mighty thrust I
release inside him and continue to pound into him, so he’ll feel my point ’till tomorrow evening when I’ll take him again. “You’re mine, Ryker,” I say falling on top of him.

"You're mine too, dickhead."

I growl at that and pull him to me, rolling us to our sides. I cross my thick arms around him, trapping his arm; I bury my head into his neck, calming myself with his scent. He hisses as I press into the marks I left on his back with my whip earlier. When I begin to calm, I notice things. I feel on my way to satisfaction. I'm not nearly done with him. I plan to have him several more times; I'm getting my fill. But with my cock a little less obsessed with fucking Ryker, I can better articulate the burning feeling. It's still there. It hasn't lessened, but now that I'm not lust fueled, I feel it for what it is. Protect Ryker. Keep Ryker. Don't let anyone near Ryker. It's weird. I've never heard of a burning before. Sure Tops get protective of their mates and I'm not surprised an Alpha-Top like me is extra possessive, but the burning…I don't know what that is. I do know it fuels my aggressiveness and that need to be aggressive is intrinsically tied with Ryker. What is he doing to me?

"Fuck. Feels so much better. The aching feels better. Is that how it works? You fuck me and it calms me? Or is it the closeness? Something feels different now between us. Do you feel it too?"

"You ask a lot of questions I don't know the answers to, Baby. Except one. I feel it too." I feel a lot of things actually and I notice something I did not expect to feel. I may have claimed him, made him mine, but he's right. I'm his too. He's claimed me.

"Oh my god! Are you crying? You're crying. Is that because you love me so damn much?"

Still, Ryker needs to know his place. If he wants to be cheeky, so will I. I tighten my one arm around his, effectively trapping him, turn him just enough and begin slapping his bottom cheeks hard. The slaps practically echo off the walls followed by his yelps as he tries to dodge out of target range. "Okay, I'm sorry. Cry over me all you damn want to." He's laughing.

That gets him more slaps. Soon as I stop, I'm ready to go again. Note, spanking Ryker makes me horny. I slide my cock into his loose hole and flip him, so he's facing me again. But this time, I bend him in half. He reaches out toward me. "Uh-uh, Ryker. You know where those go."

"Oh, c'mon Rye," he whines, but he obeys, putting his arms over his head.

"You want to touch me, you earn it. I told you, I don't reward disobedience." I'm still pumping my cock into him, slow. I pick up the pace.

"I'm never going to get to fucking touch you then."

"I think you'll be a good boy now," now that I'm here to keep you in line, "I have every faith in you."

Chapter End Notes

I hope the build up was worth it.
I was so excited to hear people actually wanted to read this story. Thank you so much! Muah! xoxo Mock

“That was fucking kick-ass Rye—I forgive you for blue balling me—and fuck! Seven times. We just fucked seven times and you know what? I could go again.”

I marvel at him as he marvels at our fucking. *There’s no way Ryker feels the same for me that I do him. Even if he loves me. He’s my whole world, literally. Ridomie Planet only has two passengers—there’s no one but me and Briggland on it.*

"We have to eat sometime, Ryker."

Silence for a heartbeat, then, "Rye?"

“Yes, Baby?”

“Can I ask you something?”

“Anything.”

“What’s your name?”

“Except that.”

“Oh come on! We're Clone-married now. Shouldn't that count for something? I’ve given you my virginity.”

“Right, Ryker—"

“It’s true. I’ve never fucked with a man before.”

*He hasn’t? That’s—*

“You should see your face Ridomie! And yeah, I’m fucking with you—I’ve slept with men and women. Lots.”

My delight turns to rage. No one should have touched him in the past, present, or future. He’s mine. I don’t realize I’ve done it, but I’ve got him caged—I’m on top of him, my teeth sink into his neck. He moans in pain—there is only pain in my bite at the moment, bitter, jealous, possessive pain. I pull away with blood dripping down my mouth. “I don’t want to hear about who you’ve fucked.”

“Yet you were all nosey about who I’d made love to,” he mocks.

“That’s different.”

“How?”
“I’m not getting into this now.”

“How?” He pushes me off of him. I slam him down telling him to ‘stay down Ryker’.

I rake my eyes over him staring at his sweaty, bronze skin. I want to bite him again. “In truth, I didn’t want to hear about either—but I had to know if you’ve loved someone else. People don’t just fall out of love Ryker. I want to know if I have competition.” Who I have to kill, once I figure out time travel.

There’s something else I want to know about him; something he’s been keeping from me. It’s the reason behind him not healing as well as he used to. He’s probably thought I haven’t noticed, but I notice everything to do with him—I just never ask because I didn’t consider it my business, and despite what the rest of Ryker Corp. thinks, I believe a man has his right to privacy. “You tell me your secret and I’ll tell you my name.” I phrase it like that on purpose to make him understand that I do listen to the things he says.

“Secret. I don’t have a—”

“Don’t lie to me. If you don’t want to tell me then don’t, but don’t lie to me. Just because I’m a clone, it doesn’t mean I’m stupid,” I snap and immediately regret saying it. Ryker’s not like that and I don’t want to fight with him after our first time. It would be fitting though—Ryker and I can’t go two minutes without fighting.

“Yeah I do got a secret,” he says practically underlining the word, secret.

“Well, when you want to tell me your secret, I’ll tell you my name.”

“All right. Fuck.”

I know I said we have to eat, but Ryker’s still far more appetizing than the thought of food. “In the mean time, get that dirty mouth over here, turns out, I’m not done with you yet.”

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Ridomie and I fucked all through the night, straight through to food time, having the endurance of Gods. Probably better than Gods. We almost decided just to make each other morning meal and we would have if we’d been in charge, but we’re not, the Major is and the Major would fucking skin us alive if we were to miss his class.

The Major. Ridomie succeeded in making me forget all about that guy, but here we fucking are now and I gotta deal with him and whatever other shit comes my way as a result of our new relationship. “I’m not sucking you off in the shower Ryker, it will take us forever to get downstairs.”

“Grouchy fucking, Top,” I mutter under my breath.

“I heard that. Get in the shower and stop lollygagging.”

Did anyone ever tell Ridomie he sounds like the Major? Well I’m not going to. That can be someone else's funeral. I get in the shower. When I’m out five minutes later, Ridomie switches off with me giving me a kiss as he goes by. He’s laid out my attire for me—I smile—my boyfriend, my mate, is the thoughtful kind. I still don’t know what a fucking ‘mate’ is, but so far it's good. The aching is mostly gone. It's dull in the background.

When he gets out, I help him into his get-up, one-upping the mother fucker and smirk as I do it. He
shakes his head too happy to get mad at me today. I’ve noticed how much happier he is since the night at Legions—a giant weight has been lifted from him and I can bet that weight was me.

Thinking of Legions makes me think of that missing piece of Moldevite lying around—the one we forgot to go get ‘cause of all the fucking. I feel uneasy about that Moldevite. The Major was always going on about more people than Derco wanting my blood, how handy would it be if they had a piece of Moldevite to help them do the job?

Really fucking handy.

We can’t hold hands on our way down to morning meal and I’m surprised when that bums me out. If I’m going to be in a relationship, I want all the shit that goes with it. I’m antsy about it until I feel Ridomie’s hand clamp down on my thigh underneath the table. Today, his hand strays to my crotch region, and not the region of my crotch I’d like him to grab (newsflash: My cock), but to one of the large ass bites he’s left on my thigh (fucking possessive mother fucker) and he knows exactly where it is too. He keeps pressing on it and I know he likes knowing it’s there and the pain it gives me. But where there’s pain there’s pleasure for me, so it’s also lighting up my cock as much as it hurts like fuck. There’s an odd comfort in it too. It does fucking calm me.

When I finally do set eyes on the Major mid-day, he’s pissed like I’ve never seen him. He storms onto the field, orders Ridomie and I to take over then fucking stands watching ready to break the neck of any clone not working. I try to look to Rye with a ‘what the fuck crawled up his ass?’ expression on my face and get whacked upside the head for my troubles when the Major walks by and catches me.

The only thing that usually makes him that mad, is me and I haven’t done anything recently, unless, he already knows about the West Wing? Shit. Seems extreme to me he’d be this mad over that. I mean, I knew he'd be pissed, but maybe it’s got something to do with me being his son? Fucked if I know.

I redouble my efforts and work my team hard, barely getting a look of approval from him. Maybe instead of being hurt over the whole conversation in his office, he’s mad, which is actually just him being hurt. Hurt-mad.

I don’t know, but it’s distracting as fuck. Why do I suddenly care so much? ‘Cause he’s my Dad? Maybe a little. I decide then and there I’d better come clean about the whole thing in the West Wing and his father. I should probably apologize too for being a dick. After yesterday, nothing seems to matter anymore—I’m too fucking happy.

Besides, I have to admit, life here might end up being okay. Sure it’s got fucked up rules, but so did Earth. Derco doesn’t appear to want anything to do with me anymore—he’s laid right off—that family meal being the first I’ve seem of him in weeks, and Derek won’t even look at me. The Major will always be on my ass, more so now, but only because he cares, and that’s not really a bad thing, just annoying. And even if things were shitty, I’ve got the best piece of ass at Ryker Corp.

And he calls me Baby. I like that—yeah I’m a fucking sap now, I’m a changed man—a taken man. I gotta find a cutesy little nickname for him. Yeah. Things are pretty perfect, even if I’m in big trouble with the Major, my father.

I’m so caught up in Rykertopia, Ridomie’s been calling my name for a couple minutes and I haven’t heard him. “Has sex fried your brain, Ryker? Training’s over,” he says so only I can hear him. Even that makes me smile and he smiles too.
Ridomie and I start to head when I hear the Major’s three famous words. “Not. So. Fast. Brigglanld, your ass is stayin’, Ridomie get to your next class and tell the professor yer companion is with me.”

I’m too emotionally overwrought. As soon as Ridomie leaves, I freak out, both because watching Ridomie walk away from me is harder than I expected it to be and because I know the Major’s found out about the West Wing disaster and about to skewer me. The best defense is a good offense. “I’m sorry sir, I didn’t meant to do it, I was pissed and I just went on a rampage.” I stop realizing he’s staring at me and hasn’t got a clue of what I’m referring to. If it’s possible, he looks angrier than before.

“What did you do?”

“Uh, nothing. What’s the thing you were going to say?”

“You know I ain’t a patient man, son.”

“Don’t call me that.” I’m just getting used to the idea, I’m not ready for that yet. Even though, yeah, I know he’s called me that before. It just matters right now.

“Call you what?”

“Son.”

His eyes fill with blood spilling rage. “Whether either of us likes it, or not, that’s what yeh are. Yer mine. Now where were you?”

I can’t argue with that, least, I’m not dumb enough to argue with that. “Okay, fine. I went for a walk in the West Wing, sir.”

“Are you the reason one of Derek’s clones has a slash across his cheek?”

I could be the reason, but in my defense, I don’t know for sure. I threw a painting at a couple of clones, maybe one got hit, or maybe not. I didn’t see. “It’s a possibility.”

“What did I say about you respecting elders?”

“How am I not respecting elders?”

He glares at me enough I add the “sir.”

“Yer bein’ cheeky,” he sighs knowing we’re getting nowhere. “Have you forgot everythin’ I’ve ever said to you?”

“No, sir.”

“So you’re just deliberately disobeying me, then.”

“Yes, sir.”

Running a hand through his hair, frustrated, he lets go another breath. It's taking any tolerance he ever had to keep that hand in his hair instead of using it to punch me repeatedly. I tend to bring that out in people. “Now I see why Derco beat you. Yer a stubborn ass.”

“Guess it runs in the family, sir,” I drawl.
“What sort of state should I expect to find the West Wing?” He seems a little resigned now, and for the Major that’s a big deal.

“You should expect to find a bit of a mess, sir, but I’m expected back to clean it at some point.” Possibly a point in time that’s already passed. "Grandfather said I should come back.” I practically underline the word Grandfather.

His eyes narrow in anger, then widen in shock at the same time, he looks like an angry fish. “You say your granddaddy told you to come ba—you met your Granddaddy?”

“Yes, sir.”

“And he didn’t beat the tar out of you?” The Major’s anger leaks away like air out of a car tire. “Well, wonders never… How?” He scratches his head. “Yer not lyin’ to me are you boy? You know how I feel about lyin’ senselessly.”

“Come with me, if you don’t believe me, sir.” To be honest, I don’t want to go back there alone.

“But he doesn’t take visitors. He hates people, especially family.”

“It’s not like it’s a social call.”

He rubs his thumb at his temple. “You’ve got to go,” he says more under his breath and to himself than to me, “but, hmm. I’m going with yeh. He’s a sinister man, not to be trusted.”

“You don’t need to come.” He shakes his head. “We’ll deal with that later, this takes precedence now. I just needed to make sure…anything happen while I was gone?”

"You were gone?" I'm fucking offended by that for some reason. If he goes anywhere, he should fucking tell me. It must be on my fucking face. The Major laughs his deep, rusty laugh and slings an arm around my head, putting me in a headlock and tousling my hair.

"Did you miss yer Daddy?"

I glower at him. "How am I supposed to miss you if I don't know you're gone?"

"Okay. I can see you're real sore about that. I'll tell you next time I go."

"Y-You will?" I almost ask for some kind of ID. The Major isn't acting like the Major. "Aren't you supposed to tell me, it's none of my fucking business and to shut my face, or something?"

"Well it turns out, it is your business. I might not always be able to let you know where I'm going, but I'll tell yah, I'm leavin'."
Fuck. He really is trying. "Fine. You can call me son—but I'm still mad at you."

He crosses his arms and nods. "Fair. I'll make it up to you kid. I swear."

"How? You gonna buy me a pony?" I smile. "Baseball at the park?"

"What in blazes are you talking about?"

"Nothing. I'll settle for you notspanking me when you see the West Wing."

"Maybe you haven't met me. I'm yer daddy, not a fuckin' pushover. Get movin'."

I still say it was worth a try.

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We stand in the aftermath of hurricane Brigglan. I’m not pleased. A bit of a mess my ass — he fucking destroyed the place. “What the hell is th—do you have any idea how priceless these paintings are? They’re Ryker heirlooms.”

“Well, now they’re Ryker trash,” he says all de-fucking-fiantly.

I’ve done a damn good job of holding my temper all fucking day with my kid, repeating the mantra ‘I will not murder my own child’ in my head a million fucking times. I deserve a fucking medal for my tolerance thusly. It’s run the fuck out.

I have him by his arm, and pin him face forward into the wall before he can say another cocky line. Is a helluva lot easier with that trinket around his wrist. I’m about to pull his pants down, so I can spank his ass good, but before I have the chance to beat sense into him — as he damn well deserves — a polished voice comes from behind us. “Unhand my grandson.” It's a command—simple enough. Not much fucking shocks me anymore, but that does. I drop Brigglan like a bag of hot rocks.

“Oaf —Jesus Christ Major!” He leaps to his feet.

Regaining my senses I reach back to fucking cuff my doesn’t-know-when-to-shut-up-offspring. “That will be quite enough, Lexington.”

“He’s my kid and he's being lippy.”

“And you are my child.”

Fine. I get it. I let him the fuck go. “I believe he's here to amend for his temper. I’m here to oversee that he does. Yeh can go back into yer little hide-away, and we’ll be on our way, soon as he’s finished.”

My father considers me a moment. “Shouldn’t you be setting an example for him?”

“Say what now?”

“An example,” he drawls slowly. “For your, son.”

I look to Brigg who tries to hide his amusement then back to my father.

“You are expecting him to ‘respect his elders’ are you not?”
I nod hardly believing I'm in the middle of a lecture.

“Then you should show some respect to yours.” He narrows his eyes, making his fucking point.

*Yeah, yeah. I get it.*

I look back to Brigg — who has mirth leaking out his eyes even if his lips are tight as a wire. He doesn’t fucking care, he just likes seeing me get taken to task fer once. I don't know if my father is right—I've no idea how to be a Daddy. He wasn't the best example. Maybe that’s why Dess hid Brigg from me in the first place—but since I don't see any better ideas lying around, I give it a try.

“I apologize, Father. I didn't mean to be rude,” I annunciate, killing my accent as much as I can, through bit teeth. I’m ready to add to the mess my son began.

“Oh,” he murmurs to what had taken great fucking effort for me.

I’m getting fucking irritated, I need to wrap this up and get outta here before I kill someone. “I apologize for my son as well. I’ll make sure my he cleans up every last bit of the mess he made. He won’t enter this corridor again. I promise you.” There. That's gotta be the cleanest fucking sentence I’ve ever said. I look to Brigg to make sure he heard — to make sure he’s taking note of the ‘example’ I’m setting. He's enjoying this too fucking much.

“I’m not worried about the mess at the moment, I admit it was just an excuse to have him return — I am sure he will put everything to right. In truth, I wanted him to come back for refreshment. With me.”

That puts me on edge. My father, the one who asked never to be disturbed again, wants my son to come for refreshment? It don’t make no fucking sense. “Do you really think he should be rewarded for his poor behavior?” I try and glower at him for good measure. I’m not leaving my kid alone in a room with this maniac. My father was, and always will be a snake.

“I didn’t realize you considered spending time with me a reward.” His tone is somewhat amused.

My daddy wasn’t one to change much even in his years as a recluse. He’s dressed like he’s ready to attend some fancy meal function all trussed up in his late evening meal jacket, his long, silvery, blonde hair brushed soft and straight, posturing like the royalty he is. He may be a lot of things in my opinion, but ugly ain’t one of them.

Just on the inside.

“Why you design on having refreshment with my boy?” I notice Brigg’s expression out of the corner of my eye. Every time I acknowledge him as mine, he bristles. I did expect some modicum of discomfort in me telling him, and even the anger, but not his aversive eyes, or the sour lips he kept twisting my way. He said I could call him son, didn't he? I'm at least better than Derco, ain't I? He doesn't make sense.

“If you suspect me of some ulterior purpose, which I can see you do, you may join us as well. To supervise. Is it not enough for me to simply enjoy at least one of my grandsons?”

Briggland lights up. I can’t fucking explain it, the world has flipped axis. *My son's pissed at me, but is growing affection for his Granddaddy?* I nod my permission toward him when he looks to me for it. Brigg fucking smiles wider.

*He* fucking smiles, too. Well, as much as my daddy smiles—is more of a tight, lipped smirk. The thing that gets me though are his eyes — cause you can’t lie with those. His fucking azure blues are smiling fondly at his grandson like he actually does fucking like the kid.
Whatever he’s up to, I don’t know, but so help me — I think he likes my fucking kid. “Please, come in.” He gestures to me and Briggland, but more to Briggland. Briggland, happy to get over the nervous tension, waltzes into his Granddaddy’s forbidden quarters without any idea just how few people have crossed this threshold in the years since his withdrawal from our lives.

We sit proper, at a casual table and sofa chairs. Refreshment service waits for us. I notice that there are three mugs set out, not two. I arch a brow at him, and the mugs. “You are quite predictable, my boy.”
Hey all! Once again, I am so grateful to those reading this story. I feel like a broken record, but it's so dear to me.

The chapter names are not steller (not that they ever are) but they are particularly bad this round (chapter naming is not my forte). I'll fix'em.

Something very important is coming up. Very excited to share these next three.

Love Mock

PS. AO3 tends to cut pieces out sometimes. If you notice any dialogue that feels like it should have had something before it, that's why. I'll come back and fix these up later.

It’s weird, watching the two of them together. They dance around each other like a stupidly brave mouse taunting a snake. The Major doesn’t have to tell me to be wary of my Grandfather. I don't trust him. Doesn't mean I don't want to get to know him. It's something similar to what drew me to the Major. Something Derek and Derco don't share with the rest of us Rykers.

I’ve already figured this fucking tea party is going to be us being sensitive of each other — but I want to do this. I want family. I want to learn. "Evil" or not, this man knows things I want to know. I'm on his good side for now, I'm getting information—that's what I'm thinking. Especially since the Major tells me shit.

He considers me a naive little boy. Here, Cyntripien, my age (which would be that of a boy coming into manhood on Earth and therefore independence) is considered young. A man, but a boy. Certainly not an age which merits independence. The Major's in charge. I do what he says. He knows all. End of story.

The Major looks over to give me a look meant for keeping me in my place, which I return with a look he knows means, I don't plan on doing anything stupid. He grunts and pours each of us some of the steaming liquid serving Grandfather first. Grandfather keeps calling it refreshment, but it looks like fucking tea to me.

Grandfather takes a sip and studies me yet again like he can’t stop believing I'm here; like he’s got a private secret about me and is deciding on the right time to relinquish that secret.

“Did you know, too? This entire time?” the Major says. I’m surprised to hear the Major speak first. I thought Grandfather would be running this show. Apparently the Major runs all shows.

“I knew. I have to ask how you could not — look at the boy.” He gestures toward me as if it’s the most obvious thing in the world. I look at the Major to see what he’s talking about.

I start at his body—I hope one day I grow to such a stature. His physique is often talked about amongst the other clones. We want his strength, and power. I’m strong, and on Earth no one matched me. Here though, standing beside the Major, I look like the small eighteen year old boy I feel. I’m still bigger than a lot of the guys — stronger than the ones my age and some older than,
even with the Moldevite, but I don't come close to my... to the Major. I can see where I might resemble his build one day.

Searching his face in a way I never have, I look for more than the superficial signs of resemblance, like the color of our irises, which are in no way the same. I look past the ridged Ryker nose, and hard, perfect jawline, the one we all have. That’s not proof enough; not what could be used to claim us as "father and son" ultimately.

The Major never quite softens his face, but for the moment it has lost a little of his hardness. (I won’t be telling him that though)

His eyes hold something familiar, something I recognize in me. A quality unique to us.

I find it first in his eyebrows, which arch in a way I’ve often done, while at the same time holding an ever present anger waiting to be unleashed — that connects us too, but it’s still not the most important connection. Something goes deeper, something underneath our anger, something we both understand.

The anger though. Our anger often gets us both into trouble, but it’s also what drives us to protect of our values; to protect those whom we value. We use anger with heart. This shines through us more than any other quality. It shapes every line on our face, chisels every aspect our character, choreographs the movements of our bodies — down to the way we carry ourselves. This identical quality in our essence creates a trick of the eye making people see more resemblance than there is in our physicality.

Though there are plenty of physical qualities to connect us too, but the other stuff, the things that lie inside, that’s what causes people to think we're identical.

The Major looks away from me, his rage in full effect. “Was I the only one not told?”

“You didn’t know?” I ask.

“I did not,” he annunciates, something he rarely does.

Grandfather bursts into a genuine laugh, laced with a little ridicule. “You didn’t know, and he didn’t know you didn’t know, which only means he didn’t know either, did you boy?”

I nod.

“I see. This is connected to your tantrum?”

“It was, sir.”

“What a mess.” Disappointment is clear. “You two have just discovered your relation. You two should celebrate such a find, instead you waste time being angry.” He sips his “tea.”

I don’t like the way he’s talking to either of us, and feel increased alliance to the Major. I glare at my grandfather.

“Calm down, my boy, I was only—”

"I’m not your boy.”

“Briggland,” the Major growls.

Grandfather Ryker clears his throat. “Figure of speech.” Yeah fucking right. Not in this family.
"Allow me to begin this again. Briggland. You are my grandson due to the fact that your father, Lexington Ryker, is my son. I would like very much to get to know you, and you I. If you would please make my acquaintance, I would like you to acknowledge me as your Grandfather. I desire a relationship."

I squint my eyes at him, “Why?”

“Because I am an old man. I have nothing and no one left. Yours is the only relationship I have not tainted of whom I also desire the company of. It is simple as that.” He pauses, then, “In addition, there will come a day in which you will require my help.”

“What are you, a fucking prophet, now?” That's the Major.

“We don’t need help from you,” the Major says.

“I beg to differ; however, I will not deprive you of your naivety. Please, by all means continue to act as a fool.”

Things are turning sour, fast. The animosity between them is a living thing. Holy shit. I jump between the two of them, a potentially stupid move, I know, but what choice do I have? Thankfully it stops them killing each other.

“Look… Grandfather? As much as I would like to finish having refreshments with you, I should get to work out there.” I turn to the Major. “Major, I think you should oversee the task, you know I'm not capable of getting work done otherwise.” I turn back to Grandfather. “I'll come another day. I promise.”

The Major gives me look that says, 'I don’t remember givin’ yeh permission to call the shots, soldier, or to fraternize with the likes 'a him' (I can hear his gruff accent and everything).

Grandfather, in a gesture of good faith, doesn't let him kill me for being dictatorial. “Quite right. I do apologize — this meeting did not go as intended. I shall look forward to meeting with you in future.” He turns away with the hint of some of the anger the Major's famous for, losing his 'cool as a cucumber mask.' He faces a window now. I wish I could read his thoughts.

"Move it solider," the Major barks when I don't move fast enough for his liking.

But I'm still staring at the pervasive figure Grandfather Ryker is, even as the Major's frog-marching me out of the room.

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The Major doesn't just oversee my clean up, but helps me clear the damaged items from the desiccated hallway. I'm fucking speechless. “This is partly my fault,” he says. “I should have made you stay and talk. 'Specially with our conversation incomplete as it was—but I…I fucking suck at talking, Brigg.”

"Hey, a no chick-flick moments policy is fine my me, sir."

"Did you just swear at me in Earth language?” he says, mad all over again.

“No. sir. Thank you.” I put my fucking head down and get to work. He's in a volatile mood and liable to spank my ass without warning. I hope all talking will cease there, but I'm never that lucky.

“Briggland, yer mama and I lost a lot of babies ‘fore we finally made one that stuck," he says and
takes a shaky breath. “We tried so damned hard.” If the painting he's holding, wasn't already injured enough, it is now. He reduces the frame to dust and tears the picture to shreds. “She lied to me. Tol’ me Derco was yer Daddy. I wanted to fuckin’ kill her, and him — instead I helped her run away, with you.”

He's bursting with rage. Years of it. Combating the madness that tries to consume him before my eyes. “Worst part? I thought I knew what the fuck was goin’ on, but now I'm thinkin' I know as much as you do. She tol’ me she was runnin’ ‘cause since you were Derco’s, he’d have ownership of you if he found you, he'd be able to take yer blood. She didn't want him making clones of you.”

I think on his words as I begin to put some of the rubble into a pile, then tell him, “That plan is a little ruined.” It feels good to raise my brow at him for once. “Why come get me after all these years? Why bother helping my mama in the first place?”

The Major freezes. I've come to a conclusion he didn't expect. “That’s for me t'know, and you t’shut up.”

I glare at him. “I was fine where I was. Fact? You were most likely the only one who knew where I was. Derco has my blood now thanks to you — I’m sure he’ll introduce me to the next army à la Briggland any day now.”

That cuts him. It's true this is his fault, he thinks so too.

“There ain’t gonna be no army made of yer insolent, ass. Ryker help me if I have to deal with more than one 'a you,” he says, but I know he doesn't mean it. “Same thing that happened to mine and yer mama’s babies — they can’t seem to get a clone to cook in the fire properly. None of them have survived. Haven't you wondered why Derco keeps needing yer blood?”

It's hard for me to answer his question, because I'm fucking shocked—this is the most information he's ever given me. I try to play it cool though. Think Ryker, and think fast Ryker—the Major doesn't like waiting. The thought had crossed my mind, but I figured they just needed more—I don't know how fucking clone-making works and I'm not fucking privy to that information. I shake my head and continue to sweep and hope the Major will shut up.

“I asked you a question, soldier.”

“Yes, sir. I wondered, sir.”

"No need for the attitude." I’m finally granted some silence after that. We get half done before the Major says more. “I should have told you when I found out, I’m sorry for that.”

Moldevite. It was the Moldevite. He found out the same way I did, only he found out before me. Only by weeks though. I remember the angry look in his eyes, anger not directed at me for once. Must have been a fucking shock for him on a level I can't comprehend.

He’d been trying to have a baby with my mama for what sounded like a long while. Finally a baby comes, and his wife says she betrayed him. More than a decade passes before he finds out he does have a kid, one his wife hid from him.

Yeah, I’d be fucking pissed.

“I think I get it and I… don't be sorry anymore, Major.” Yeah, I know right? I can't believe I just said that. I should be milking his pain and regret for all it's worth, but I can't do it. He looks so
broken.

More silence passes, interrupted by the Major whipping that arrogant little statue Grandfather stopped me throwing (a Gramma Ryker favorite) at the wall. Leaves a decent hole; I wonder how the fuck we’ll fix that.

He turns to face me full on. “Yer Daddy knows a lot of things Briggland — but he don’t know how to fix this.” He gestures at the imaginary rift between the two of us.

Wow. He must be pretty torn up over this—he looks wrecked. He... he wanted me. He wanted more than just me. He wanted a little slice of happiness: The woman he loved, a child; a life with those people, but his whole idea of happiness was stripped away. Now he's got pieces of that dream back, but they're all out of order, the situation so fucked up, he doesn’t know if it’s even possible to put them together; form something tangible. I don’t how to fix our situation either, but I know we don’t have to live in the past. “Maybe it’s not about fixing anything, Major. Maybe it’s just about moving forward.”

He gets that look over his face again, I'm starting to know it well: Pride. He looks just like he did that day, the day I watched clones get incinerated and I'd set them free. His lips pull into a tight half-smile (which is like anyone else beaming a face-cracking smile) and he grabs me roughly by the neck, pulling me into his wide torso. His arms wrap around me. "Keep moving forward—I like that, kid. We can do that."

I'll never admit it out loud, but there are fucking tears in my eyes, which I reach stealthily up to wipe away before he sees and put my arms around him. He squeezes me harder and I swear to Christ, I see him reach up to do the same to his eyes. He'll never admit to shit like that and I won't either. It's how we do. I like that.

But then our moment is over. He pries away from me and his face is all business again. "We need to finish this, then you and I are havin' a little chat."
“Sit down.”

That's sort of a good sign. If he was planning on spanking me, he usually doesn't begin with pleasantries, but it's been twice now in a period of two days and I’m back in the Major’s office. I know he intends on having the conversation with me he started after that stupid family meal. Turns out it’s also the reason he’d kept me after class (before I ratted myself out)—it’s the conversation that doesn’t want having.

I sit without arguing. I want to get this over with so I can be back with Ridomie, for no other reason than it's already been too long since we fucked. Okay, there might be one more reason. We need to look for that stray piece of Moldevite. But I've been too busy getting into trouble to work on important life events.

The Major moves to the front of his desk and leisurely leans against it, crossing one arm over the other, making it look like the skin of his arms is having a hard time containing the muscles beneath—like they’ll burst out any second. He’s a frightening sight, even when he doesn’t mean to be, which makes Derco Ryker more frightening. How is anyone able to imprison the Major?

"Now you know you're mine," he begins. Of course he fucking does. God damned possessive Ryker assholes. I can't help feeling comforted by that at the same time. Maybe Rykers are designed to like being owned as much as they like owning? Anyone ever think of that? Whatever it is, there are certain people I don't mind saying that: Ridomie and the Major.

“DNA doesn’t make you someone’s father,” I say because I'm a cocky little shit, but also because, I want more from him, I want him to try to be my father, a real father (whatever that means here) rather than just expect me to accept him like Derco had. Fucking Derco—he messed me the fuck up.

Two cold, green eyes study me keenly. “First of all, son,” he says too sarcastic for my liking. “I have never briefed you on my sentiments on that matter. What have I told you ‘bout assumin’?”

I cringe a little. That's one of his 'lessons,' one he's willing to spank into me if need be. "Sorry, sir."

He grunts. “I know as well as you, DNA don’t make a Daddy, but I won’t deny the truth: I’m yer father and you're mine. My son."

I’m not one to lie to myself either. He’s right, so I’ll concede that point. “Are you going to make me call you father too, like Derco did?”

The Major's offended. “I won’t make you call me Daddy, or anythin’ else. You may continue to call me the Major if that’s more suitin’ to yeh, but you will obey me as your father.”

“Is that the moniker they used where you were from, sir?” The Major's not from here, that much I know. He lived somewhere else before, with his mama.

“Yes. We lived in the south, my mama and I. A planet called Sundrean.”

I almost fall out of my chair: the Major answered one of my questions—he's given me yet more information. I must look as startled as I feel. “You can ask me questions about my past, Briggland—I’ll answer or not—but you can ask. I think it’s good a boy knows where he comes from. Sides there’s a few things you oughta know fer yer safety, fer example how our weakness came to be.”
Then he tells me. The story of his mama, a cave full of Moldevite and the only time the Major was weak: When he was a fetus.

“Where’s your mama now? She sounds pretty kick-ass. D’ya think I could meet her?”

He glares at me for swearing. “If I knew where yer nana was, I’d take you to her myself, so she could box yer ears for yer dirty mouth—she don’t take kindly to cussin’.”

“Obviously her methods didn’t work, so well,” I mutter. “You really don’t know where she is?”

He shakes his head sadly. “After my daddy took me from her, I never saw, or heard from her again. I look, every time I get a chance to, but Derco’s kept me busy. Speakin’ of, you can’t lip Derco off no more. He’ll still have you beat within an inch or worse. He’s losin’ the little patience he possesses.”

I glare at the Major. If he’s my father, why should I have to listen to that Asshole?

He figures by my expression I’m not planning on being very agreeable. “I mean it. I don’t want to hear, or see another disobedient word or action from you — or I’ll beat you myself— and I promise Derco’s like cotton compared to me.”

"Aw Major, I'm starting to think you care about me," I say, still too caught in our old patterns to understand we've begun new ones.

"That's that thing, kid, I do care about you. A fucking lot. I have no problems tanning your hide if necessary, but he's not fucking beating you like he has been."

"But you just said—"

"I'll do what I have to, to make sure you obey me enough not to piss him off. If that means beating the tar out of you every now and again, so be it." The Major's green eyes are steely, like his father's, his body is set hard. This is important to him. I remember what he's said, more than once about stuff I don't know about this planet, Ryker corp., how here is not like the prissy little planet I'm from. He's scared for me.

It still pissed me off that I have to listen to that asshole, but I get it. "Major, why don't we just… leave? You said so yourself, this places isn't good—"

He’d been soft-spoken (for the Major) thus far, but his voice hardens back to its usual malice. “Get that thick idea outta yer skull. We ain’t leavin’.” He waits; I say nothing. This place is the worst, yet everyone seems to want to stay. Why? “Say it. Promise me yeh won’t do anythin’ stupid.”

When I don’t answer the second time he’s over to me and has me flipped over his knee, his foot planted firmly on the chair I was sitting in, my pants are down and it’s hard, Major-style smacks to my bare derriere that take my fucking breath away. "Okay, okay! I'm sorry."

“Say it.” More smacks.

I turn my head to peer up at him. “Fuck, fine. We’re not leaving. I won’t leave. I promise not to do anything too stupid.”

He lifts a brow.

“Well, you want the truth, don’t you?”
He smiles (a stiff line in the middle of his face) and gives one last powerful smack to my ass, "acceptable." He helps me up.

I pull my pants back up and try not to rub my ass, but better believe I'm gonna, soon as I'm out that fucking door. "Another rule we have to address, do not go visitin' yer Granddaddy without me knowin'. He'd dangerous, Briggland."

"Yes, sir."

His eyes squint at me. "What are you plannin' boy?"

"Whoa. Nothing, sir. Nothing. You're right. He's dangerous, I don't know what I'm getting into."

"You've suddenly become agreeable?"

"Well, don't go that far, Major, I'm just learning that sometimes, you're right."

"Sometimes?" he quirks a brow.

He gets an eye roll for that one. "May I go now sir? Or is there more Fatherly wisdom you wish to bludgeon into my skull?"

"Naw g' on lil’ Soldier," he says ruffling my hair as he moves away from me. I scowl and blush at the same time—he fucking does that on purpose.

"You will not call me that." But it tugs at my memory—I've heard that somewhere before.

"Then you better be on yer best behavior, son," he says with a wide smile this time, a real smile I've never seen on the Major before—it makes him look... Beautiful. The man is practically delighted I'm his son, so much so, he's showing emotion. Here I thought the Major only had one emotion: Rage. I prepare to leave, but he calls me back. "One more thing, I'm sure you've heard of Legion's by now?"

The way he says it makes me think he already knows about my little escapade, but I'm giving nothing away, already did that once. I pretend to look confused, but my fucking heart races.

"It’s a clone bar—most clone’s think we don’t know they go there, but we do, found it makes’em more obedient when they get to relax and do something other than fight. Thing is, it ain’t a good place. I know you’ve made friends with some of the clones and that don’t bother me none, but you’re not to go there with them: I want you to stay away from Legion’s."

Ridomie already banned me from that place, but I think they're both being helicopter parents. "What? That’s not fair. All the other clones get to go. Why shouldn't I?" There. I sound just like a sulky teen and feel good about giving the Major the full having a teenage son experience. I don't know that I care to go back there (except to get my Moldevite), but being told I can't makes me want to go.

"What happened to yer whole I'm always right thing you jus' said?"

"I didn't say—"

"I'm not arguin' this one. You ain’t a clone, Briggland. Yer mine and I say yeh keep yer stubborn Ryker ass on Ryker Corp. where it belongs. You best mind me on this, y’hear?"

"Yeah, I hear you." I can’t make too big a deal, far as I've told him, I don’t even know about it 'till
now. On the off chance he doesn't know, I don't need to make him suspicious.

Except he stares at me in a way that says he’s suspicious, "Briggland."

"Yes, sir. I won't step a toe off Ryker grounds. Not even the pinky one." It's a good thing we own the whole fucking planet.

"Do I need to spank you again?"

"Whoa, no. No, sir."

"All right, get out of here, kid."

Fuck. Skin of my fucking teeth, I tell you. I get the hell out, before he tells me what else I can’t do. What is it with that place? *Legions.* Ridomie doesn’t want me there ‘cause he thinks someone will try to fuck me, and the Major thinks it ‘ain’t a good place,’ ‘cause he thinks someone will try to fuck with me. Who cares? I’m Briggland fucking Ryker. I’d like to see someone try.

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After talking to the Major, who I know doesn't fucking believe me for a second, I know my time in getting out of here to go Moldevite hunting is limited. We, me and Ridomie, have to leave and it has to be now. *Just to convince him*... “Let’s get the fuck out of here Rye—”

The fucking rage peeling off him cuts me off mid sentence, even before his hand to my throat does. He slams me against the wall; I know now to let him. He runs his nose from my collarbone to the underside of my chin. I realize what he’s doing. “It was the Major, Ridomie. I fucking, you know, did my thing I do and he had to spank some sense into me.” I push him away; he falls back startled. “Are you always going to be like this? It’s a bit fucking much.”

He doesn’t agree, judging by the look on his face. “No. But it’s going to be that way for now, so deal with it Ryker.” He doesn’t tell me when it won’t be, so I assume he doesn't fucking know either. “How did it go with your father?”

That sounds weird, but I guess that’s Ridomie’s way of making me face facts—he’s like the Major that way. I shrug. “Fine.”

“That’s it? Fine?”

“What do you want me to tell you? We went on a fishing trip then tossed the ball around?”

He looks confused as fuck. “Never mind Ryker. Whatever you two talked about… Or did is your business. I just wanted to make sure you were okay.”

“I’ll be better once we get my item from Legion’s. Let’s go.”

“What do you want me to tell you? We can’t just go to Legion’s. Why don’t you just tell me what ‘your item’ is, and I’ll go get it—it’ll be easier that way.”

“Cause it’s another thing that’s just my business,” I say evenly. I wait several long minutes for him to argue.

“Nothing’s ever easy,” he mutters under his breath. “Fine. We’ll go.”

I smile until I remember the Major’s words. “Ah. And one more thing, I might need that paint again.”
By the time we do end up leaving, it's nightfall anyway. We missed dinner because we were looking around for paint that wasn't as easy to find as is was for Rex. Other than that, we don’t have the problems Rex and I had leaving the property—people are afraid of Ridomie and do as he asks without question. They also respect him; they comply to his requests graciously and like there’s nothing better than pleasing Ridomie.

I agree with them, there isn’t anything better than pleasing Ridomie, but there’s also something to pissing him off I enjoy equally as much.

Ridomie’s hand is welded to my shoulder. He’s more possessive than usual if that’s imaginable. He growls at everyone that dares to look my way; they part like fire ants, as we make our way to the bar. “Third time in two days?” the sexy bartender, Steve, raises his brow at Ridomie. “And I see you’ve taken a liking to our friend Ryick. Did you decide to dump your asshole boyfriend?”

Ridomie doesn’t answer his questions. “We need the room again. We’ll take it for the night.”

“And they say you don’t look like the romantic sort. Go on up. It’s free.”

"Thank Steve. This isn't all fun though. I'm here on Ryker business. You wouldn't happen to know who's used the room between now and the last time we used it, would you?"

Steve shakes his head. "We don't pay that much attention. It's casual. People come in pay and go upstairs. We don't check on them after that."

"But there's been no one out of the ordinary?"

"Not that I can recall. Sorry, Ridomie."

"And the people who returned the bracelet to you?" Ridomie asks.

"Ilshilda and Conrad. I know them well, they're regulars."

"I may need to talk with them." Ridomie gets information on which nights they frequent here. It's the only way we can chat with them, since he's allowed to leave Ryker Corp. as freely as I am. Least he gets to come here.

Ridomie steers me up to the room. It’s the same; nothing looks moved, or touched—or cleaned. I see the hole in the wall made from Ridomie’s and my squabble. I laugh to myself; our squabbles always end in shit getting broke.

I get to work straight away. I remember where I saw the bracelet fall, I begin in that direction, “Where did you find the bracelet?” I say when I can’t find shit. I look up to see he’s been staring at me with his arms crossed, watching me as I look, as he tries to figure out what the fuck I’m looking for, 'cause oh, I didn't fucking tell him. Not really.

“It’s the thing that makes you… not heal so good, isn’t it? It was on that bracelet.”

"How the fuck did you figure that out?" I say too much.

“I’ve been putting the pieces together for awhile now, and you’re not the best liar by the way, we need to work on that.” He strides over to me and holds out his hand. “Here, give me your other bracelet. You’ll be able to sense what you’re looking for better if you're not wearing that.”
I’m pissed, ’cause he's right and why didn't I think of that? I give him my bracelet (knowing he’ll
look it over). He crosses back to the other side of the room with it. I continue to look. “What is
that?” he asks as he stares at the glittery black stone on the underside of the Major’s bracelet.

“Moldevite.”

“Moldevite. Huh. So it weakens you. I wondered at the change in your strength at practices.”

“Maybe I was giving the other guys hope.”

He laughs. “You’re too arrogant to do a thing like that, Ryker.”

I can’t even pretend that bothers me; yeah I am an arrogant prick—sue me. Least I got reason to be.

In my periphery, I see Ridomie looking the bracelet over, then he puts it on. I feel energy, strong
and electric, surround me. I turn to face him, his grey eyes are silver and he looks bigger somehow.
It’s like someone plugged him in to a wall socket—he almost glows. "Ryker, c'mere," he says all
breathy and commanding. "Now." Fuck. I can't resist him when he's like that. I practically hear the
erection creaking in his pants.

I obey him and abandon my search. I’m always compelled by him, but right now I couldn’t deny
him if I wanted to. We’re magnets. He’s stronger. I want to fucking stick to him.

When I reach him, he pulls me to him from the small of my back and covers my mouth with his. I
feel his sharp pointer teeth glide over my tongue as he reaches inside with his and forces my tongue
into his mouth. Suddenly, he’s sucking all my air away. I can’t breathe. I don’t care. I don’t dare
touch him (he doesn't fucking like that unless he says I can); I just submit.

He boosts me up from under my ass easy—like he’s lifting a feather—and I wrap my legs around
him. That's when I realize: The Moldevite is affecting him in the opposite way it does to me, it
makes Ridomie, Super Ridomie. It’s also heightened the primal creature inside him. He's grabbing
and pawing at me. Bruising my skin.

He pulls his tongue out of my mouth long enough to breath the words, “I need to be in you,” and
slams his tongue into me again walking us towards the bed. It feels wonderful to have Ridomie
possess me like this. It’s all I’ve ever wanted.

He places me on the bed carefully, but that’s the last bit of gentleness I get. He rips my fucking
shirt—you need to stop ripping my shirts Ridomie—and tears into my nipple with his sharp teeth
drawing blood and sucking hard; I scream, my body arches up into his. “You’re mine. No one
touches you, do you understand? You let too many fucking people touch you. It makes me crazy. I
want to crush them and beat you.” The first part was for me, but the last was said to himself. And I
don’t miss that he’s said the word ‘fucking,’ Ridomie almost never says that, but right now he’s in
the grip of something, I know it’s because of the Moldevite.

“I should chain you to this room, never let anyone, or anything near you, even to look at you—
you’re too beautiful, everyone wants you, but they won’t have you.” He licks over his bite marks
and makes his way down to my pants. They're gone in moments. My cock is rock solid as it’s
unsheathed; fuck I want him.

This level of dominance is a real huge turn on for me. The best part is, he can actually do all of the
dominance shit with the strength I'm feeling from him—it's real and not fake, not some kind of
play. I can't fucking believe it, Ridomie plus Moldevite is stronger than me. I want him to keep
biting me, slam me against every corner of this room as I fight him and he rams his cock into me.
Maybe he'll hold me down, fingers bruising into my neck, while my ass is out in the air, begging for him as I cry.

_But I have to fucking stop him, don’t I?_ If Ridomie's gonna do any of that shit to me, it better be when he's in control of himself. He didn't know what the Moldevite would do to him, but once he does know, I'm getting him to put it back on and finish this, ’cause this is fucking awesome. “I’ll let you fuck me Rye, but you’ve got to take off the bracelet first.”

He grabs the hair at my skull, violently and rips my head back. I can’t move, can’t escape. The Moldevite might incapacitate me, but it makes Ridomie strong as a God. “Let me fuck you? I don’t recall asking. You’re mine and I’ll take you as I wish.”

Fuck that makes my dick hard. I'm leaking. It's getting harder to want to try to stop him. I want it, I want it more ‘cause he’s not giving me a choice; but he’ll hate himself when he finally removes that bracelet. I have to stop him. It's just hard to figure out how I'm going to do that just this moment. He’s stronger than me, especially with that fucking Moldevite so close to me. It’s not as bad as when it touches my skin, but being in its vicinity is draining me some, just the slightest, but with him strong as Zeus, any loss of strength makes my strength suck more. There’s no way around it, he out powers me; I have to find another way to stop him.

_But first I have to calm him the fuck down._

“Of course Ridomie. I didn’t mean it. I’m yours—you know that, I know that.”

“I don’t think you do. You don’t obey me as you should, you let others touch you—you touch them. I need to erase their existence from you,” he says like he's whimpering. Hurting.

“Yes. Please. Teach me,” I beg. I’ll note those things for later. Just because he’s in a Moldevite induced, dominant-crazed state, doesn’t mean these aren’t his real thoughts and desires. If anything, he really feels this way and holds himself back for my sake. I can tell by the pain in his voice that it's not _just_ desire, but a need. Some deep, fundamental need, like his blood is aching. I know because mine aches for him too. Constantly. He's begun giving himself over to me, but he holds back. Overbearing as he is, he still holds back.

“I’m going to fuck you so hard, every time you move you’ll think of me,” he purrs from above, my hard cock strains to touch him, his teeth bite into my thigh—I should just let him fuck me like this once, so I can see what it's like. I can always apologize later. _Better to ask forgiveness than permission._

“Stay,” he instructs after unlatching his teeth from my thigh and steps back. For a moment, I forget I’m supposed to be stopping him, as he unwraps that beautiful body out of all those black layers. I’m greedy and drink him in as he unveils his frightful copper muscles, his dark hair, running down the center of his skull, spills down to the nape of his neck; he looks like a heavenly giant. When he takes out his cock, I want to die. I abandon my plan; I want to be fucked by that gorgeous cock, so fuck you to Ridomie’s morals, fuck you to Ridomie's fucked up code of ethics and just, well, let’s fuck Ridomie.

He slams into me; our skin touches: My bronze to his copper. I can feel the silk of both of us as we slide together rubbing our cocks up and down the other. My orgasm's already building. His mouth is on me in a thousand different places, tasting, savoring, sucking, biting, until his tongue is once again down my throat to clean me from the inside. I can't get enough of him, something calls to me, I want him in me as much as he does. “Please,” I beg. My body strains, it hurts, my soul aches—I need this.
“You need me, tell me you need me.”

Easiest thing I’ve ever done. “I fucking need you, please.”

He raises my legs; he pushes one of them so it’s up by my ear; I’m open and exposed for him; he wets his fingers and rubs them along my special place grabbing my balls just tight enough. I moan—a sigh—it feels good. I see the Major’s bracelet, it’s on the wrist of the hand holding my ankle to my ear, I can reach it easily; but do I want to? No, no I fucking don’t. Do I have to? Fuck. Yeah I fucking do. Maybe he’ll reward me afterward for being a good boy.

The shaft of his cock is sliding between the crease of my cheeks, wet with his saliva. God Ridomie! Why do you have to feel, so fucking good? I stop thinking about how good his cock feels and fucking tear the bracelet from his wrist. I don’t let it go flying; it almost does. I hold it tight in my fist and feel the Moldevite weaken me, as it touches my skin.

Ridomie’s shaft is still between me, my balls still in his fist, I’m open to him. “Please don’t stop, Rye, fuck me,” I plead.

It’s almost instantaneous. Ridomie’s restraint is back. He reels in his passion like a fishing line and his one hand let’s go my leg, his other hand lets go of my balls—his shaft remains where it is. He doesn’t look dazed, or like he’s broken out of a spell and I understand: He’s been here the whole time; the only difference is now he has control again. He’ll always seem omnipresent to me, but even I know some of that fades into the background, now the Moldevite is no longer touching him.

“C’mon Rye, we don’t have to stop,” I almost cry. I’m so fucking horny it hurts.

His hand trails down my chest as he sits between me not moving. “God, Ryker, you are so fucking gorgeous—I can’t believe you’re mine. What was that?”

"Moldevite turns me into Prince Adam, and you into He-Man."

He squints at me.

"I lose power, you turn into Super Ridomie."

"Yeah. I felt that, but there was more, Ryker. I felt… I felt rabid."

I make a show of putting my hands over my head where he likes them. "I fucking love rabid. I was a good little Ryker," I say. He fucking owes me for this one.

"Yeah? You think you deserve my cock, baby?"

He told me after the last time we fucked, he's not giving me his cock again until I earn it. That I'd have to earn it every time—fucking Ryker-Clone-controlling-possessiveness. The guy could barely call me his, but in less than two days, he's making kinky sex rules. That's not what they are here though, I understand that now. This is how they live. A code. Instinct. I spread my legs obscenely wide and hope he can't resist. I throw in my Ryker smile for good measure. "If you think I do, sir." Of course I fucking think I deserve his cock after that feat of super restraint I just pulled off, but I know better than to tell him. He decides.

He grabs my cock and starts stroking, pressing his knees behind my ass. "What would you say if I said you could have my cock, but you don't come Ryker? That I'm going to tease you and torment you, but you don't get to come?"

I already know this is a trick fucking question. "I wouldn't say anything, sir. That's your
prerogative."

But my eyes give me away. He can see the rebellion there. I bite my lip for good measure. "Put your hands under your ass, Ryker. They stay there."

"Yes. Sir." I comply immediately, him still stroking my cock and slide my hands to sit under my ass cheeks. My legs are still open for him, hole exposed—fuck I want his cock in there. Yeah I'm turned on, turned on like no one would believe, but it's more than that. Maybe it's some fucked up 'mates' thing, I don't know, but I'm starting to believe I need his cock to live. He takes a finger and toys with the area just under my nuts and circles my pucker, sliding a finger into my saliva slicked enterance every now and again.

"You do deserve some kind of reward for stopping me with… whatever that was, but I don't know if it's my cock."

I open my mouth to protest, but stop myself. He'll fucking stop everything. *Fuck* I know he will. He's already established, I get what he gives me, or nothing at all. That thought alone makes my dick ram-rod hard. I mean, harder. It's already fucking hard. He trails a hand over my abs (still stroking) deciding, admiring. "Was it hard to stop me, Baby?"


"Tell me."

"You were going to fuck me, claim me—do things to me I'd still feel in the morning—I wanted that. All of that, so bad." That last word is a fucking whine as I have to bow my head and squeeze everything below so I don't fucking come. Ridomie's already told me what will happen if I come without his say so—he'll pretend my dick doesn't exist for a long time.

"Yeah… you like it when I do those things to you, Ryker?"

"So, fucking much." *Though I like it better when you stick your cock in me asshole.* This Ridomie power trip's not such a bad thing either, though. Much as I fucking want to punch him in the dick for it.

Without warning, the head of Ridomie's cock presses at the tip of my entrance. "Beg me Ryker."

"Please, fuck, please, Rye. Sir." I know he likes "sir," a lot. He obliges, but only one fucking centimeter. He smiles above me like an evil sex god. "Please, sir. More. Fill me—I'm not a fucking doll, Ridomie."

Just like that his fucking cock is gone. "No! No," I say. I want to fucking cry. "I didn't mean it, I was just being—"

"You're disobedient."

"Isn't that part of my charm?"

He must agree, because the head of his cock is back and he's slowly working it in, like it's a large (fucking large) finger he's scissoring into me. He takes his time working me open, I love the rough feel of his skin inside me, carving its way in, with nothing but the moistness of me and what's left of his saliva, for him to scrape against. I'm still holding my ass like he wanted me to. "Don't come, Ryker," he says, but it's hard, 'cause I fucking like rough sex like this, without the hearts and flowers bells and whistles. He builds to a quick orgasm and releases inside of me.
I'm shocked to death when he swallows my cock. My ass is now leaking his come, my thick legs are still spread for him, hands under my ass, his mouth on my cock. He looks up at me and I can hear the order without him saying it, "don't come, Ryker."

Jesus Christ. I feel like that's all I've heard for the last fucking ten minutes. It takes everything in me not to glare at him. Instead, I focus on watching him. The edges of his Mohawk look like blades trailing down his skull, his large grey eyes, still with some of that silver glint, the only thing shining in this dingy shit-hole.

His tongue lathes my cock, coating it in sweet, saliva, swirling around the head. "R-Rye! I'm gonna, fuck—" he pops his mouth of my cock. "Please!" There are tears coming out of my eyes now, the sadistic bastard smiles.

"Gimme your hands Ryker," he says.

I do without hesitation. He pulls me up and switches our places, so I'm on top. I get the picture pretty fast and help him, so I'm poised over his dick, which has already regained its hardness—best part about Rykerian blood, Rykerian refractory. Ridomie lays back as I slide myself (still dripping with his come) onto his enormous cock. He places his feet, flat on the rickety bed and grabs my ass, still a little sore from being spanked. "Hands," he says. "Behind your back. Grab your wrists."

I'm starting to think he's got a 'hands' kink, or at least some kinda bondage kink where he makes me bondage myself. I do what he says, clasping a hand to opposite wrist. "You look good on my cock, Ryker."

He helps hold me up under my ass, as I squat over top of him. "I want to watch you fuck me, baby."

Say no more. I start slow, but end up thrusting down hard, 'till my balls are slapping against his stomach. He uses his feet for leverage and rams up into me meeting each thrust as I struggle to balance, he helps me, switching his grip, so he's grabbing my hips. It's fucking ecstasy, only problem, there's no way I'm going to hold off any longer. Between his fun little edge-the-Ryker game, him making me do shit like hold my hands wherever he wants them, and staring at me, watching me ride his cock like I am, it's becoming impossible.

"P-please, Rye. Please. I can't, I ca-can't." My voice is shaky, barely there as his cock hits that sweet spot inside me over and over.

Rye grips the base of my cock in his large fist, staving off any orgasm I thought I might be having. "You can come, Ryker."

Fucking sweetest words I've ever heard.

"But not until I have."

'Usual me' would complain because the asshole's already fucking come once, while I've got a Ridomie sized cock ring cinched tightly around my wang and balls as blue as my fucking eyes. But I know what complaining will get me, so I don't say a word. See? I can fucking behave myself, I just need the right motivation. I begin putting every ounce of energy into getting Ridomie to come. Sweat's leaking down my forehead, by the time I finally see that sweet look on Ridomie's face: the one of a man about to fucking come hard. He pushes up inside me and as I feel new, warm wetness in my ass and without further adieu, my dick explodes with milky white come.

I'm so exhausted (I can run a billion laps for the Major, but this tires me the fuck out) I collapse on
top of him, my hands fall to either side and we breath together. His arms wrap around me, he's gentle now as he brushes a hand over what's left of my hair. "Thank you, Ryker."

"For what?"

"For existing."

"You're such a fucking sap."

He smacks my ass for that one. Hard. "I knew I shouldn't have let you come."

"That's got nothing to do with anything." I don't want him fucking thinking that—that my cocky behavior is because he gave into me. I'll never come again. I'm an asshole by nature.

"I like what the Moldevite does to you, Rye."

"You do?"

"Yeah.Fuck, you gotta fuck me with my bracelet on."

"I don't know if that's a good idea, Ryker. I didn't feel, in control. I don't think that was a good thing. We should learn more first."

"I had you covered the whole time. I could do it again."

"Sure you could, Ryker," he says staring into my face and brushing my painted hair away.

For moments, we just lay and breathe each other. We don't get to do this often. Just be. There's always some kinda bullshit happening. Class, practice, blood draws, the Major chewing me out for something. We don't get to press pause. I take advantage now and sink into him, wishing for more like this, but I'm not saying it.

Too soon, it's over and we're wiping ourselves off (we just use the bedspread like everyone else probably has) and redress. I remember to put my bracelet on this time—I hadn't sensed anymore Moldevite in the room other than this one piece, the other piece is gone, which is a fucking problem. After I've got my pants on, I remember I no longer have a fucking shirt. I look to Ridomie since he's the one who ripped my fucking shirt in the first place and complain to him. Asshole-y. He's not impressed.

"You don’t need a shirt, you need a collar."

When he’s dressed and I’m half dressed, he runs a hand through his hair looking at the spot on the floor the Moldevite should have been, knowing what I know: that missing piece of rock’s going to be a future source of trouble. “Where could it have gone?” He’s not asking me, he’s just thinking out loud.

“You sure you only saw the bracelet when you came up here?”

“I didn’t come up here. Steve had it, said the couple who’d used the room after us found it and brought it to him. Maybe they have it.”

“Or Steve found it and lied, took the Moldevite for himself.”

Ridomie sighs; the world on his shoulders. “Maybe.”

“This is bad.” We both know why without either of us saying it. It’s no coincidence we can’t find
the only important piece of my bracelet, someone who knows my weakness has taken it. But who?

There’s a knock on the door and because we’re both thinking about our doom and it jolts us both. I nod to Rye who goes to the door and I remove the Major’s bracelet once again—there might be a fight on our hands and I’m not going into it with half my strength.

He opens the door; it’s Steve. Steve looks at my half-naked, obviously gnawed on condition. I’m red and bitten in all kinds of places; the room reeks of sex. He’s not looking at me as Ryick anymore and he looks scared: He knows who I am even with the black paint. He looks to Ridomie. “I don’t know what’s going on Ridomie, but Major Ryker’s downstairs and he’s pissed. He’s looking for you, says you might know where his son is.” He looks back to me, knowing exactly where Major Ryker’s son is.

Ridomie looks at me too, figuring out I haven’t told him something and I try to communicate wordlessly that we can’t let the Major find us. Ridomie closes his eyes then opens them again. “What did you tell him?” he asks Steve.

“I said I hadn’t seen you. He didn’t believe me. He’s brought a few hundred clones with him—was fucking hard for me to get away without him knowing.”

“Thanks, Steve. I owe you.”

Steve shakes his head. “Naw. I’ve owed you a long time now, you’d never let me buy you a drink.”

“Well I think I’m going to need another favor.”

“Right. You need out of here. Follow me.”
Steve leads us through a maze of hallways that in turn leads us underground, then back up again, then down some more then fucking up again. We travel a long time at a speed too slow for a Ryker clone, but far faster than any human. I know by the end of it, we're a long way from Kansas. As we follow him, we ask him a few questions while attempting to veil our pursuits. We need to know if he found the Moldevite, but we don’t want him to know why it's important to us, or any fucking thing else. We have no reason not to trust Steve, but it's hard to trust anyone around here. Steve doesn’t appear to know anything about anything; we’re forced to abandon our questions.

Steve takes us as far as he dares. “This vein will lead up into the town, so it’s good no one can recognize him," he says gesturing toward me. I notice he's only speaking to Rye. He's either too fucking afraid to speak to me, or Ridomie's giant alpha machismo is showing. "I'll take care of Major Ryker best I can.” He removes his blue shirt, it's the color of my eyes— and hands it to me. “Please take this Master Ryker and accept my apologies for…” he can barely say it.

I accept his gift graciously giving him a sly wink. “Don’t apologize for hitting on me—I wanted to suck your cock.”

Ridomie growls beside me then removes his black sweater. “You’re not wearing that Ryker,” he says snatching the blue shirt (which is far more my color than his) as he slaps the black sweater into my chest. Possessive Bastard—doesn’t want anyone’s smell on me but his own—even if that means him wearing a shirt that’s two sizes too tight. He puts Steve’s shirt on; I can see every one of his muscles. Hot.

Steve doesn’t seem phased by Ridomie’s crazy behavior. “This Ryker, he is your mate then?”

Ridomie nods.

"My apologies to you as well Ridomie—I didn’t know it was possible to own a Ryker… I thought —"

I think Ridomie will go into a whole spiel about how he didn't know that either, because he fucking didn't know that, but apparently, Ridomie's attitude on all that is different now. “I will forgive you this once. Do not make the same mistake again," he says in a voice so powerful I can’t believe this was the same man who only a short time ago would have agreed with Steve. He doesn’t deny his claim on me; he doesn’t care that he’s a clone anymore. My Ridomie, all grown up. What have I done to him?

Steve nods, “Go.”

I’ve only just had time to put on Ridomie’s sweater and he’s pulling me by the arm; we run at Ryker speed the rest of the way. Even at Ryker speed, it takes us a long time to reach our destination. Hours have passed. We finally reach a set of creamy stone steps and I realize how far underground we are. We are beneath Cyntripien's first town coming from Ryker Corp., Trion Ansari; this is fucking cool. Ridomie slams me into a wall. “Why is the Major looking for you, so late in the night?”

In all honesty, I don’t know for sure, but I have a few guesses. “I think it has to do with me being his son. He’s kind of overprotective.”

“What aren’t you telling me Ryker? I let you keep your secrets, but this is a needs to know.”
“Fuck, fine. He forbid me from going to Legion’s—a promise I intended to keep after we’d got my Moldevite back—and I sort of got the feeling he might know I’d already gone and was planning to go again—it probably wasn’t the best night to go.” I don’t add that it’s just a theory. How did he know I’d gone? The Major's turned into a bit of a hover mother on me, but has he taken to checking up on me too?

He releases me, roughly. “That would have been nice to know.”

“Would you have still taken me?”

“Of course not.”

“Case and point.”

He looks defeated. Like he's an alpha-failure. He's got to give himself more of a break—even I'll admit it, I'm fucking impossible. “What am I going to do with you Ryker? Do you realize the position you’ve put us in?”

“Yes, but if I could go back in time, I’d do it again. It’s important we find that Moldevite. Wouldn’t you agree?”

Without hesitation he nods and I almost laugh because we finally agree on something. He returns to me and nuzzles his nose against my nose, his lips find mine and he kisses me, and pours all his love, all his desire into me. I return the kiss with as much fucking emotion as I can, so Ridomie knows I'm fucking sorry for being me, even though that's never going to change. Not that I think he wants me to change, but I know I exhaust him sometimes. Example A, I love making Ridomie jealous, but the truth is, I don’t want anyone else. This man owns me; the world can go to hell—if they have hell here that is.

He pulls away and smiles at me. "You are in so much trouble when we get back to Ryker Corp., if we get back to Ryker Corp."

"What do you mean if?"

"We're going to have to head through the town back and through the Black Forest. The town's not the safest place for renegade clones, but at least it's not as bad as the city, we might be okay."

I know what that means. "Will they, incinerate you?"

"If I'm caught, they'll take me straight to the incinerator. Lucky for you, you'll just get one pissed off Major—but I think you'll survive that." He's actually smiling about that.

"How can you smile at a time like this?" 'Cause I'm freaking, in case no one noticed.

"I'm not happy about this Ryker, but freaking out won't help, better to find the humor. Let's just not get caught."

"Good plan, but now I'm thinking we should have just gone with the Major. Maybe we should tell him about this Moldevite thing and he could help us." Yeah, I'm going to be in trouble, but better than Ridomie getting incinerated.

"Good idea, if you had it before we ran off. I doubt the Major's going to let you in on this hunt now."

Wait a minute. That doesn't sound like Ridomie, unless… "You know you'll be exacted from the
hunt too. *You* want to find whoever's got the Moldevite." I'm right. I know I'm right by the way his body tenses.

"Whoever took the Moldevite knows it harms you. It's my responsibility to find them. I protect you, Ryker."

I'm slammed against the wall again, he stares at me with a wild hunger. "Aw, fuck Rye. You make me tingle. My own personal Prince Charming."

"You won't think I'm so charming once you see what I have planned for you. *If* we make it back."

Ridomie's intensity takes my breath away. I can barely speak, but I force myself. "*When* we make it back, and I'll let you."

His lips press to mine again. I think we're heading into another delicious round of edge-the-Ryker, but he pulls away suddenly. "Why are you still calling him the Major? Shouldn't you be calling him Father, or something?"

"None of your fucking business," I say and it hurts him. I fucking hurt Ridomie and I hate it, but at the same time, warn a guy before jumping him with questions like that. "He said I could call him Major," I insert lamely, hoping it'll take the injured look off his face.

“But he’s your father, Ryker and I know you respect him. Doesn’t he deserve more than that?"

He’s right of course, which is why this whole situation pisses me off. I just don’t feel comfortable calling him anything but Major. He takes my chin between his thumb and pointer-finger and angles my head so it’s looking up at him. *I hadn't realized I was looking down.* "Okay, baby. I get it. But he'll love it. You know that right?"

I still think Ridomie has an older man crush on my, the Major. "I know, Ridomie." It's not like I couldn't see how fucking hurt the Major was when we talked about it. He said I didn't have to call him father, but I know that's what he'd like. I feel like more of an ass because I can't. I need to change the fucking subject. “C’mon. You can lecture my ass later—let’s go have some fun.”

“I’m going to do more than lecture your ass, Ryker,” he promises.

We head further into the bowels of the stony passage 'till we reach some stairs. Not just *some* stairs, a fucking butt-load of stairs we climb. Even I'm a bit out of breath by the time we've *run* up them and exit out of a door that’s not hidden at all and I wonder why no one else walks the halls of the underground (they were empty save Ridomie and I) until I look down. We are way the fuck up in the air; no one could make this jump—except a Ryker or a Ryker clone. *More wondering.*

“I think you’d better pocket that bracelet of yours, Ryker. We need you full strength—you’re not going to make this jump without it."

I look down, again—fuck, he’s right.

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Once we land on the ground in one piece, I look up. It won’t matter how long I’m here—I’ll never get used to having that ‘super power.’

“C’mon Ryker. We have to get something else to wear, even in this shirt I’m still a dead ringer for a clone and well you just… you're you.”
“Clones don’t come into town?”

“They do as patrol and we don’t want to be pulled in. I’ll be considered a renegade clone because I was not ordered to be on patrol. Like I said, I'll be incinerated for sure but, there's always the possibility I'll be killed on the spot.”

Fuck. I really do have to start thinking about the consequences of my actions. This really isn't Earth. We should have just gone back with the Major, he’s the only one who can prevent Ridomie getting killed for dumb Ryker reasons. We’ll just have to make sure it's the Major to pull us in—once we find the Moldevite, if we find the Moldevite.

“What do you plan on telling your father when we get back?”

Of course he's going to twist on that knife. “Don’t know yet. I’ll figure something out. Where to?”

“Our best place to look is the one we just left.”

“You think the person who has it would stick around Legion’s? Please, Rye. I know you’re not that stupid.”

“Fine. You’re right. But what makes you think they’re still on Cyntripien?”

“As far as we know, Moldevite has one use—"

“Two,” he says pointedly.

“Two,” I agree, even though I'd bet dollars to donuts no one knows about the second 'use' for Moldevite, 'cept me and Ridomie. “Both which have to do with me. But way I see it, I’m still on Cyntripien and so will the person with our stolen Moldevite. We’ll have plenty of opportunity to search Ryker Corp. once we’re back—this is our only chance to search the town. We've got to rule it out.”

He nods knowing I'm right. “Fine. Let’s keep walking.” He grabs my hand giving me a half smile. He's laughing at something.

"What?"

“Just thinking about you back there: Oh, Ridomie fuck me, please, please, just stick your cock in me,” he says, his imitation of me needs work.

“I won’t deny it,” I say proudly. "And I meant what I said, I want you to fuck me wearing this," I say patting where it is in my pocket.

"I'll decide that Ryker. I need to figure out what that thing did to me."

"It's pretty fucking simple, Rye."

We turn the deserted corner and are smack in the middle of the busy town. We must have been underground for sometime; the sun has already come up and people are out and about. It’s nothing like I think it’s going to be. When I think future, I think The Jetson’s and talking robots with flying cars and apartments in the sky. This future is far more rudimentary. The Flintstone’s meet Star Wars. There are definite signs of technology: floating carts, doors that slide open and are activated by buttons on walls (or maybe however the fuck it happens at Ryker Corp.) people communicating by touching something on their earlobes, but all of the buildings are anachronistic: Made of a creamy stone, like the stairs we climbed to reach this level, reminding me of how I picture the
stone-age, based on Hollywood depictions of course. The city is nothing like the exotic white marble and sleek designs of Ryker Corp. The buildings are tall, but to a level I’d expect to see in the time I’d come from—nothing different. There doesn’t seem to be a ‘car’ or ‘spaceship’ of any kind on the road (though I know that doesn’t mean there aren’t any, since I know they exist here). The women are dressed in robes of various colors with sandals and hair pulled up and away from their faces, the men wear loose cloth shirts and pants stuffed into black boots with their varying colors of dark hair, long and flowing.

There is a ton of flora—everywhere. It’s the only thing making the city look rich and vibrant, otherwise, it would look like it is: Poor and drab. Vendors are set up everywhere, people are shopping, and children run and play in the dirt streets. The general feel of the city is happiness though—the people don’t look deprived of anything. Maybe they like what “Ryker” brings them: Endless amounts of top-of-the-line genetics, good food, clothing, an army of darkness.

Ridomie heads for a vendor and buys us each a set of clothes; only they are nothing like what everyone else is wearing. The pants are black leather, the shirts are sleeveless, he purchases a few other wares from the man, he hands the man a vile of Rykortisol.

“You can get all that for a vile of Rykortisol?” I ask when he returns.

“More. But it’s all we needed, ‘cept for maybe some food, but he doesn’t sell food. Rykortisol is illegal in the city, but it still gets in. People will give their right arm for it—literally.”

He hands me my ‘clothes’ and we find a hidden space to change. He stuffs our old clothes in a pack he had also traded the man for. He hands me a leather throng and a dirk. “Tie that to your leg.”

“We planning on killing someone?” It's not like we need weapons for that. We're bred and trained to be killing machines.

He doesn’t answer and finishes loading up our pack. I secure the dirk to my leg like he tells me. “I thought we were supposed to blend in? We don’t look very much like the others, Rye.”

“We look like travellers. We can pass as travellers passing through.” He hands me another item: a bandana. “Tie that around your head. Your paint is wearing off—there’s one thing that will make us stand out more than anything and that’s your hair. No one has hair that blonde anymore. We might be able to trade for some more paint. I’ve got one vile left of Rykortisol, but I’d like to try not to use it. I’m hoping we’ll be on our way back soon,” he says meaningfully.

“What are you doing carrying around, so much Rykortisol?”

“Since I took ownership of the one Briggland Ryker,” he says with a sly smile. “I’ve never seen someone get beat to death, so many times and I’ve lived a long while, Ryker.”

I know he’s making fun of me, but I’ve got more fascinating things on my mind. This is cool: Ridomie and I on a Moldevite reconnaissance mission. I tie the bandanna like he says and he’s staring at me. I probably look badass.

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“See something you like?” I cross my arms and look at him seductively.

He rolls his eyes at me. “You know I do Ryker,” he groans. He stands up and slings the pack onto his back, slides a hand to the nape of my neck and pulls me into a sweet kiss. It’s short, but still plenty of electricity to remind me I’m his. He rests his forehead on mine and breathes in my scent.

He takes my hand and we start walking through the town—first time as us. At Ryker Corp.,
everyone (everyone being our crew) knows I’m his, but we can’t be open about it. I’m not certain Derco and Derek don’t know about us, they haven’t said a word, but rubbing it in their faces can’t be a good idea.

I check out Ridomie’s ass in the tight leather pants—I love leather and I love Ridomie in leather. Speaking of, he stole my jacket and I want it back. I think he thinks it’s his. But it’s not a fucking dowry and when we we’re back at Ryker Corp. I’ll be reclaiming my beloved cowhide.

Ridomie seems to have a plan even though he asked me what we were going to do next. He just can’t let anyone else take charge. Well I might not be the ‘alpha’ in this relationship, but in this mission I want say. Logically, I know nothing about this town, and it will do well to follow his lead—at least for now. So I keep my Ryker mouth shut. “Where we headed?”

“We’ll exit the town and go to a part of the village the travellers frequent. We could work for a night’s stay. That okay with you Ryker?”

“Yeah, why wouldn’t it be?”

“No reason.” But there is a reason, there’s always a reason with Ridomie. I glare at him until he answers. “You’re cute when you’re mad, you know?”

“Stop being a fucking sap and tell me what you were thinking.”

“Well you’ve been a Ryker a while now—you might not be used to having to do menial labor,” he says it with a big smile—he’s only teasing, but I can’t let him get away with it.

Yeah. He didn't see the hours of work cleaning up that hallway with the Major. Jackass. “S’okay. I plan on sending you to work for me, take after my ancestors. Besides, I’ll have the place in love with me and doing my Ryker bidding in no time—it’s how we roll.”

“You arrogant—”

I cut him off with my loud laughter.

“I would like to see that,” he says seriously. “You Ryker’s do have charm—I’ll give you that, but you better not be charming anyone into bed but me, or I’ll kill them and tan your pretty hide.”

I roll my eyes. “Let’s just find that fucking pain in the ass black stone.”

No one pays attention to us as we walk through town. We’re just a couple of travellers, passing through, wanting to make it to the other side of town before night fall. We’re in the larger part of the town and it takes a while, walking as we are to make it to a part of town where the crowds thin. Civilians can’t run; not like a Ryker or a Ryker clone, so neither can we. I’m kinda enjoying walking hand in hand with Ridomie.

By the time the strange, orange, Cyntripien sun—the one I’ve seen so many times from my window—is low in the sky we’ve reached the outskirts of the town (where there aren't any civilians) and also the conclusion that we have no fucking idea how to look for what we’re looking for, which rocks to look under for our rock. I’m starving, I forget when the last time I ate was, I know Rye’s got to be in the same shape, but we wanted to get out of this part of the town, so we made no stops. Ridomie's certain if we make it to the Black Forest by the end of today, we’ll make it to at least Traveller’s Cove before we're caught by the Major. He also thinks that's where we could find something. People go there to trade strange and potentially illegal objects. It's a shady place according to Ridomie.
I’m about to ask Rye if there’s anyway we can get some food when I hear it, something large falls behind us, a familiar sound that triggers the deep dark recesses of my memory—I'd know that sound anywhere. *Fuck.* We don’t get time to turn to look: Something else large and black lands ten feet in front of us.

“Fuck.”

Ridomie’s looking toward the sky; watching in calm, amazement and I can't help standing frozen, watching too. I can only catch the orange sun in glimpses now, as they appear out of nowhere, from everywhere: Men in black, falling from the sky.
Weird Ass Not Ryker Clones

Chapter Notes

This is the part of the story I'm not so happy with, which is why it took so long. I'm going to post the next three chapters anyway, so we can get to the next part which I do like. So um, hope no one gives up on the story cause of this part.

“No! Back to back! Now!” That’s me doing all the shouting. Instinct born from repetitive memory kicks in.

The men in black. They're the things you never forget about, things that itch my fucking brain while I try to forget. They haven't shown up in so long, I kinda hoped they'd gone away. I'm not that fucking lucky.

If I'm being honest, I knew—sure as the strange orange Cyntripien sun rises—that they'd come and I know what they are: The real men that hunt me. They look exactly like Ryker clones if you don't know what to look for; I thought they must have been the same, or a version of when I didn't have the understanding I have now, having lived with Ryker clones, fought with them, loved them. I've learned the men that have become my comrades—these aren't them.

Yeah, Derco’s men are a lot like these ones, only these men are nothing like Derco’s.

They’re quicker, deadlier, plain murderous. No emotion. Pure assassins.

“Don’t let them get a hold of you,” I say giving Rye the crash course. “Circle, stay in a fucking circle. “Look everywhere… all at once.”

Fuck! Why did this have to fucking happen now? And where the fuck have these guys been? I know one thing: It’s no coincidence they haven’t shown up ’till now.

They keep falling around us like caterpillars. They never fight, ‘till they’re all present and Mama always thought it best to wait, don’t know why, but I don’t think now’s the time not to take her advice, though now would be a good time for her to come out of her fucking hidey-hole to help. I don’t want to die, but I don’t care, so much about me dying as I do if Ridomie fucking dies.

I have to keep telling Ridomie to hold. He wants to start fighting, he thinks I’m nuts, but there’s a fucking order to fighting these dudes and it must be obeyed. He senses I know (or at least think I know) what I’m doing and he listens. Right now, I'm in charge. I love him in charge for everything else, but it's pretty fucking cool knowing a guy like Rye would take any kind of orders from me. Speaking of shit Ridomie should do, I pull my bracelet out of my pocket. "Use this."

He's apprehensive about it, his grey eyes look as afraid of the stuff as I am, but he's smart and knows better than I do, that these aren't our kinda clones and that he might really fucking need to be Super Ridomie right now. He slips it on after I give my silent agreement to get it off of him, somehow and we wait.

I don’t think they’ll stop dropping, until finally they do. I count: Fifty. It's important to know how many there are.
Fifty. There’s never been more than thirty and I’ve never fought them alone; without my mama I mean. “Do like the Major does—snap their necks. Stay close to me. Wait ’till I give the signal.” I'm waiting ’till I see it, the toe of the boot of one of the dudes moves. "Now.” I give the signal quiet, as I can. I grab him first, snap neck, move on. Super Ridomie does the same—with two. They could stock pile us, but they don’t, never have and I don’t know why they just keep coming at us predictably. Ridomie’s fucking amazing and I could get wrapped up in watching him, but I can't—he's beautiful, even when he's killing, maybe even more so. I can't watch him though, I have to concentrate to fight these dudes, like when I'm fighting Ryker clones wearing Moldevite, except they’re even faster and almost indestructible. If I don’t grab the neck immediately, don’t kill immediately, that’s one more left to grab hold of me. It's got to happen fast, almost without conscious thought.

I feel a hand on my arm, fuck, snap! I break his wrist as I pull him in and break his neck. I check to make sure Ridomie’s right behind me, I feel his back, I hope it’s him…it is. Snap! Another down, how many is that now? Seven for me, fourteen for Rye.

We’re a good team taking them down fast, not letting them get hold of us. For a long while, all that can be heard is the sound of necks snapping and bodies colliding. They don't even scream when they die.

Another count: Fourteen for me, holy shit, twenty-four for Ridomie. I wish Mama could see him go.

When it's twenty for me, I calculate Ridomie’s gotta have at least… I take a quick look. How long we been fighting? There are nothing but dead men in black surrounding us.

Ridomie jumps around me as I snap another neck and Ridomie kills the last two, before the one I got is lifeless in my hands. Ridomie’s breathing heavy; murderous rage in silver eyes. He looks for more. Hopes there are more. Could have fucking used him and that stone years ago. I stare at him, in utter disbelief. Sure he's got the rock that makes him a god, but those dudes were hard for my mama to kill. He makes it seem like cake.

“They want to kill you.”

That might have something to do with it. I toss the man in my arms aside. “Yep. Since I can remember.” I look around—yep all fifty and no sign of my mama.

“You’re mine, Ryker. They won’t take you from me—no one will.”

The battle might be over, but Ridomie's still in the thick of it. Thank fuck there's no blood. I think he wants to fuck me now, I can see it in his eyes, but even I know we don’t have time. “We have to get the fuck outta here Rye. More will come. We have to run, if the Major catches us, well it’s better than if they do.” And that's saying something.

"Let them come Ryker. I'll kill them too. Right now, I'm going to fuck that sweet ass of yours."

Wow. Regular Ridomie wouldn't say that; he should though—it's hot. We do have to go though, much to my dismay. I think of the only thing my brain's capable of as far as distractions go. I know I can get a bit of a head start.

"Only if you catch me." He might, eventually with that rock he's got on him, but I know I'm faster than Rye, always have been. I take off at a run hoping he'll catch me. Wouldn't it be fun to let him fuck me with it on in the forest?
“What the fuck are these things Dess?” They look like Ryker clones, but they ain’t fucking Ryker clones.

“Sir?”

Shit. I was thinking out loud again. “As you were soldier, when I want to speak t’yeh, I’ll call yeh by name.” He scampers off and it were a good thing too. I wished I had been here to take care of these mercenaries—the mood I’m in, I woulda enjoyed it. Snapped necks, all fifty. A force to be reckoned with blew through here and I’ll bet my good Ryker name that force was my son and his secret boyfriend.

“Sir?” A different clone this time.

“What?”

He looks terrified. Should fucking be. I feel like destroying the whole fucking useless army I’m with and carrying out on my own after my disobedient offspring. I am going to beat his ass when I get my hands on him, if he’s still alive.

“We think they went that way, into the Black Forest.”

Of course they did. If they can do this, there’s not much out there they can’t take care of, but if enough of these come along, I’m not so sure. Something’s off about these clones—and it’s not just that they’re not Ryker clones, though that’s disturbin’ enough. I gotta find my boy and I gotta find him soon. Into the forest I go.

“"For the fifth time, I don’t know who those clones were Ridomie. My mama never told me.” I’m getting pretty sick of him asking me that question over and over. He’s pretty pissed, at me though and this whole situation. He’s not pleased I ‘failed to mention’ the weird ass clones that have been hunting me since I can remember, but he’s more pissed at whoever is trying to have me killed. I think part of it’s that the Moldevite still has him. I mean, yeah, he’d be pissed with or without having touched Moldevite, but I think there's some kind of residual effect.

Oh and that. How did I get it from him? Turns out that while it's not the easiest thing, the Moldevite makes it so he wants to claim me, bad, (which by the way is the hottest fucking thing ever) so it's not the hardest thing either.

I ran and was pleased to find out that even Super Ridomie had a tough time keeping up with my run. I slowed down and let him catch me.

He tackled me to the ground soon as we were a distance into the forest and he kissed me. The kiss was consuming and bruising and I wanted to keep doing it. But I knew regular Ridomie would put my nuts in a vice, so I ’played along’ pretending I was interested, which wasn't hard because I was interested, for as long as I could without Rye being pissed at me later. Battling large, weird-ass clones isn't just a turn-on for Ridomie. When he was distracted, I hijacked the bracelet, like I did last time.

“You’re sure it’s not your uncle? Your cousin? Those look a helluva a lot like Ryker clones—maybe they’re a new version.”

“I’m positive. Ryker’s don’t kill Ryker’s. We’re too fucking arrogant to do that. We think we’re
better than the other and that the other couldn’t possibly have one over on us. We find each other too useful. We’d rather find the other’s weakness and exploit him with it.” Man my family’s fucked up.

“Point.”

We’ve run as far as we can and are now standing about ten feet from the outside of the Traveller’s Village. We were arguing on whether or not we should go in and it's turned into a mystery solving discussion. *I hope there's enough of that fucking Moldevite residue in him to fuck me like a big hot super alpha.* Yeah, that's what I'm still thinking about.

“Why didn’t your mama tell you anything?”

“I was too little I imagine. It’s irrelevant anyway. Let’s just head inside, so we can get out.”

“This is important. This is, fuck!” Okay, now he’s swearing. That’s never good.

“I never thought I’d say this, but we need to get back to Ryker Corp,” I tell him honestly and ‘cause I know he’s thinking it even if he can’t form proper words for speaking.

“Yah think?” Sarcasm does not suit Ridomie.

“But first we check for that Moldevite.”

"No Ryker. I'm freaking out here. These clones take fucking precedence."

He really needs to stop hanging around with me, but, uh, I hope he doesn't. "Yeah, unless they get the fucking Moldevite." *Sigh.* I remember. "Shit, they know about the fucking Moldevite. Maybe they have it."

"Then one more piece doesn't matter."

"No wait. That can't be it. It's someone else, has to be. Those clones, they know where to get their own Moldevite." And the Major has said before I've got more people out for my blood than I think.

Rye's not impressed. "So now you know everything about them and how they think?"

"I don't... I'm just... okay so a little I guess." I'm only realizing this now as I tell him. "But it's not them and we need to look."

He thinks about it, then finally, "if we make it out of this alive, you and I are having a long chat about this over my knee."

"Noted. That mean we're going in?"

"Yeah, we're going in. If we're going to find anything, this place is our only lead." He wants to curse at me again, I can tell he’s restraining himself; what the hell for? We’re probably as fucked as we’re gonna be. I want to tell him to stop holding everything in before he blows a gasket, but he won’t know what a gasket is since there are no cars here—at least I haven’t seen one. Everyone gets around on foot, or flying things.

We approach the entrance; it’s not guarded. When I ask Ridomie why, he says it’s because this is not an official village. It’s a bad part of town the villagers don’t frequent and Ryker Corp. doesn’t feel the need to guard it directly. In other words, they don't fucking care.

“Make no mistake,” he says quietly. “There are clones around watching what goes in and out of
Traveller’s Village. But what goes on inside isn’t policed by them.”

The village is, busy, far busier than the town had been. It reminds me of a giant, outdoor, biker bar—except for monkeys. People are swinging from branches and hanging from trees. They are dressed like us; but they’re wild. They don’t look dangerous, to me, but I suppose if I were one of the Cyntripien natives, I wouldn’t much like the looks of some of these characters. Some look mean.

“Hey! Wat you lookin’ at?” Large dude with a black Mohawk and several piercings asks me as we try to walk by, just minding our own business.


He peers at me and Ridomie, not trusting us a bit. “What he means is,” Ridomie cuts in. “We’re looking for a place to spend the night.”

"No one stays in this place a night without talkin' t'Ergy, but frum the look 'a yah, yer better off sleepin’ in t'fores’,” he says in a gruff voice.

*God this kid's accent, sucks.*

We walk away with him laughing manically behind us. I give Ridomie a ‘what is with that guy look?’ He shrugs. "I thought this was a quick venture, we stayin' the night now, Rye?"

"We're not Ryker, that idiot was trouble. I was getting him off our back."

"What now?"

"We chat some people up." He sighs. "I can't believe I'm sayin' this, but do your thing, Ryker. Charm people."

I laugh. "Didn't you just see me with that dude? You saved our necks."

"He challenged you. I've seen your charm in action. Do it, but no touching, or flirting."

"Half my charm is flirting, Ridomie. No, fucking forget it, I'm not getting someone killed."

"I can restrain myself, Ryker."

"That's bullshit. You can't do that anymore than I can stop my hair growing in, the color it is." Especially not after the fucking Moldevite, I don't add.

"I gave you an order, Ryker."

"And I'm telling your order to go fuck itself—not you!" I add when he looks like he's going to bite my head off. "Your order. I'm not doing that." I can't believe I'm the level headed one. But he's really not okay.

For about five seconds, I think he's going to beat my ass, but then his look softens and he pulls me to him. "Wow, you've... you get it, Baby." He kisses me. "Thank you, Ryker."

For reasons unknown, *that* embarrasses me. "Yeah, yeah, Rye. You know, it's too bad we're not staying the night here, we could have some fun with the bracelet we do got."

He smacks my ass, hard. "We haven't a clue what that stuff's actually doing to me. We only use it when necessary, like if more strange clones show up. Otherwise, forget it Ryker."
We do walk and talk to people, but I let Rye do most of the talking. We're trying to be stealth, but buddy was right, we don't fit in here and people know it. By the end of it, we're fucking hungry and thirsty and tired—killing those clones was no easy thing.

"Well, what now?" I say when we've come up with absolutely nothing.

“Maybe it’s time to head back and tell the Major about this, like we should have done in the first place,” he says. I hate to admit it, but ‘running to Daddy’, might be the thing to do; I’ve made enough dumb decisions. I’m just lucky Ridomie hasn’t been killed.

We head to the exit, defeated. This whole thing sucked, but it's about to suck a lot more—we're surrounded by guys that look like Mohawk and in fact, Mohawk himself is part of the group closing in on us. "That's them," he says pointing to a man that, fuck, he's fuck…is he?

It's a large man, who’s clearly got more Ryker in him than anyone in this disgusting little unofficial village. He looks like he could be the King of it, especially with hair as light as his is. He’s rough and he’s been through something judging by the big scar down his face that goes right through his eye socket, where an eye used to be, but isn't anymore. Intelligence burns in the eye he has left, he studies us with cold fascination; he knows we’re something more than travellers. He hasn't introduced himself, but I know this has gotta be Ergy. Fuck, he's scary looking. "You two are coming with me," he says.

Fuck that. "We were just leaving," Ridomie says.

"Not anymore. Come."

I'm not sure what to do. Obviously we can take these guys, right? This Ergy sucker must know that.

"I know what you're thinking boy and I'd think again if I was you. I don't know what kind of clone you are, but I know what kind he is and I have a line straight to Ryker Corp. Decide to run or fight and I'll call on it—I'm sure you know what they do to renegade clones."

Fuck. Fuck. Fuck me right in the ass. He could be lying, I know that, but we can't take the chance. Ridomie knows it too. "Yeah, we'll come with you."

**

Ergy’s is a greasy joint. Even Legion’s is far classier than this place and Legion’s isn’t classy. The bar tops look thick and sticky, never been wiped and the floor is worse. There’s only one type of person in here and it’s not the bright and fairy kind, it’s guys like Mohawk and worse. None of the orange sun enters this place. I have to plug my nose at first—the smell is bad. It's like an apartment building come five o’clock: All the smells of everyone’s menu melded together. I look at Ridomie, he's barely keeping from snapping necks.

We're led in through the kitchen to the other side and apparently Ergy doesn't need goons anymore, because none of them follow through with us. It's way cleaner on this side. Fucking sparkles. We're led through a maze of hallways and door and up and up, 'till we can smell something else, something delicious. "Wait here," he says. "Sit." He points to a wall that's got cushions lining it, there's a big window that looks down on the village—can see the whole fucking thing from up here.

We sit confused. "What the fuck is going on?" I ask Ridomie.

"We're in a fucking load of shit, Ryker. This is bad. Did you see him? He's fucking got Ryker genes, a lot of them. He's somebody."
"What kind of somebody?"

"I don’t know. I’m not people, remember? But he’s a somebody Ryker. They don’t give away that many Ryker genes to just anyone."

We shut up when Ergy returns, he’s got an ugly looking knife. He sets it on the table in front of him, not caring that we could grab it. Fuck. We should have run, we shouldn’t have come here with this mutated Ryker facsimile. "You," he says to me. "You’re hiding something. Take off that bandana, boy."

I look at Rye, he’s gone stone cold, clone. He's waiting this out, but if need be, he's going to make a move. I remove the bandana, most of the damn paint already gone and more of it coming with the bandana. My blonde Ryker hair tumbles out (what's fucking left of it) and the guy's eyes pop out of his fucking skull. "You’re—"

"Ryker. Briggland Ryker." Always wanted to fucking do that James Bond shit. Okay, okay, confession; not the first time.

He stares and he stares and he fucking stares some more. "But you're a spittin' image of Major Ryker."

"That's 'cause he my—" Father? Papa? Sperm donor? "—Daddy." I go with a sudden gut feeling I'm having and use the Major's lingo.

Then he starts laughing. Loud. It's a loud, big laugh and in some ways, it's like the Major's. He's slapping his knee. "No shit? Well lookit that. Didn't know the Major had a kid."

I don't tell him that Major didn't know either 'till recently. "Yeah and uh, he's expecting us back, so you know, how about we call this a big misunderstanding and you let us carry on?"

He laughs harder at that. "I wasn't born yesterday. You two are up to no good. 'Member that line to Ryker Corp. I was talkin' about? My line's the Major. I'll have him come collect you. I'm sure he'll want to come pick up his son directly."

It's just as well by this point. My heart's been fucking racing so hard, knowing we're close to being out of this mess (even if we're jumping into a frying pan) is a relief.
He's up again, but doesn't leave the room, this time only to poke his head around the corner, then
he's back to sit. "Now tell me, what are you two doing, wandering away from the nest? I know
you're not where you're 'sposed t'be," he says to Rye. "And I doubt you are." That's to me.

"If you don't mind, sir, we'll wait 'till the Major gets here." And that's Ridomie. Shit. Can't fucking
believe he said that and to an elder. He's come a long way too.

Ergy loses the light demeanor he had and stares Ridomie down. I don't like it. I recognize the look.
It's the same one a lot of people looking at clones get. It says, you're not fucking people, so why
are you talking to me like you are?

Ridomie knows it too and he can't help it, it's the thing that truly crushes him, which makes me
want to crush, Ergy. I don't think just grab the fucking knife off the table in front of me; either he
was bluffing us all along, or he didn't know who he was dealing with, because I do get to the knife
before he does. I plan on taking out his other fucking eye.

I don't get the chance though. "Stop!"

The sound of her voice, makes me turn to look—a woman whose familiar features arrest me, 'cause
I fucking know that face, but then again, I don't. It's the weirdest thing. She's got her hair tied back
in a scarf-looking thing (yeah like had—not suspicious at all), a tray of stuff in her hands; I have no
idea what any of it is. I mean, it's food, but what kind of food, I don't fucking know. At least what's
in the bottles, looks like it could be beer or a Cyntripien form of ginger ale. She carries on setting
the tray on the table in front of Ridomie, Ergy, takes the opportunity to snatch the knife from me
and knock me off him. "Sit down, boy, before you get hurt."

I take that to mean I took him by surprise once, but it's not going to happen again. I do sit down,
kekking hating his guts and keen to get out of here. The lady smiles at us, like she can make up for
whatever Ergy did. "Hello boys, my name's Maud-Lynn, you can call me Maud—"

"They should call you, Ma'am," Ergy interjects.

"Hush. Don't pay any mind to him, he's in a bad mood."

You're fucking telling me.

"Eat. The Major should be here soon."

"How do you—" I start to ask.

"You hush too, young man. Eat."

We do, in silence. Me only half an inch away from ignoring any warning from Ergy and Ridomie,
because he's probably torturing himself with whatever idiotic notions are rolling around in his head
because of Ergy. And sure enough, there's a knock from the front of this place, which Ergy storms
off to answer then reappears after several gut-churning minutes with the Major who looks more
mad than I could have ever imagined. "You two, come with me. Now."

Yep. We're dead. These are our last moments on Earth, uh, I mean, Cyntripien.

"I don't think so, Lexington. Sit. Let's have us a visit."
"We don't have time, Maud-Lynn."

"Just for a quick refreshment."

"A quick one. But I'm taking care of him right now."

Fuck, the Major means me and I don't like the way he's looking at me. "Now sir, you shouldn't do anything while you're angry," I say and get up and prepare to run, but he's ready for that and snatches me out of thin air.

He plants a foot on the cushion I was sitting on and begins wailing on my ass and let me tell you, my pants are not much protection from his hand. "I thought you were either dead or in a hole somewhere. You were supposed to stay put, does this look like stayin' put?"

I'm getting the Major's version of the 'dead in the ditch' lecture, which is kinda nice in a fucked up way, even if I am being spanked and with an audience. "N-No, sir. Ow!"

"When I give orders, I expect to be obeyed to the letter, am I makin' myself clear to you?"

"Clear. You're clear!"

"Fifty dead bodies Briggland, fifty. How was I supposed to know you survived that?"

Wow, he really did fucking care. A lot. Okay, I'm a jackass. "I know, I'm sorry, sir—really and not just because you're spanking me. I'm sorry."

He spanks me until he thinks he's made his point (though I could have told him he had a minute to go) and until I can no longer sit down without feeling something, then he's pulling me up and pulling me into his large arms. "Fuck, Briggland. Don't ever pull shit like that again." He's squeezing the life out of me, but it feels good. I'm sniffing as I hug him back, glad this ordeal is fucking over and that he'll take us 'home' now. Ridomie's still too quiet.

"And what do you have to say for yerself?" the Major asks Ridomie, still squeezing me. That shakes him out of whatever stupidity he was winding himself into.

Ridomie jumps up to stand at attention. "Nothing, sir. It was hare-brained from the start."

The Major still hasn't let go 'a me. "Yep. I see a lot of hare-brained. And how about you, Maud. What are you doin' here?"

"Well, hello to you too."

"I didn't risk my ass to save yours, so yeh could flounce in and out any ol' time you want. At least shave your fucking head."

Shave her head?

"I wanted to meet him. He really yours?"

The Major nods into my head and finally let's go, telling me with his fucking eyes to stay the fuck put. "He's mine," he says and even I can't deny how much pride's in his voice. "Which is why my priorities have changed. I can't help you no more, I hope you can understand that. Uh, I might be needin' the favors."

I can't believe what I'm hearing.
She smiles a big smile. "All you need do is ask, Major. 'Course I understand. May I?" she asks him. This whole thing is really fucking weird. The Major nods apprehensively and steps aside, but stays close to me. 'Maud-Lynn' moves in.

"I only meant for you to see him, not touch him," the Major says when she puts a hand on me.

"Oh hush. How you expect me to do my thing without touching?" She puts her hand on my head, then neck, chest, over my heart, shoulders; she even lifts my hand in both her soft ones and closes her eyes a moment, then opens them with a little gasp.

"Okay, enough," the Major says, pushing me behind him. Ridomie visibly relaxes too, not having liked her touching me like that one bit and having a difficult time of restraining himself.

"Wait, what did she see?" I ask.

The Major turns his head at me with another 'shut the Hell up' he doesn't say. Maud answers me anyway. "He's in terrible danger, Lex."

"Yeah, I know and he damn well knows it too. It's why I told him to stay put." Another glare my way.

"Okay, I'm tired of all the fucking cryptic bullshit. Who are you?" I ask.

The Major sets his glare on destroy with all my 'language,' but doesn't do anything about it, for now, he does nod at Maud and she removes her scarf. Out tumbles hair spun from gold. Ryker hair. She's a fucking Ryker. I can see it now; the features I recognized, all Ryker features, but the softness of them threw me off. Her face is still cut sharper than any woman I've ever seen and more beautiful. "Whoa!" I say, even Ridomie's eyes bulge.

"I guess I'd be your great-great-great cousin several times removed?" She quirks an eye at the Major.

"Somethin' like that," he agrees.

"What about him?" I ask the Major this time.

"Ergy's..." he sighs.

"It's okay. I'm a Ryker that's too watered down, so far as a Ryker is concerned, no Ryker at all."

"Well, I'm a watered down Ryker, I'm basically a half-blood." I'm the only one who gets the Harry Potter reference, so I have to laugh to myself.

The Major shakes his head. "It don't work like that, Briggland. You got more than enough and with the 'enhancements' from yer mama, that makes you a whole other kind of Ryker. A better one."

Yeah, just a fucking flawed one according to Derco.

"'Sides, with my particular blood alone, that would be enough to make you full Ryker. I mean, it's not the preferred method, the way you were made, but it's more than enough, or Derco'd want nothing to do with yah."

Wouldn't that have been lucky? "What is the preferred method? Knocking up your cousin?" I know they used to do that shit on Earth too, hell, they'd marry brothers and sisters for blood purity, like they did in royal families, 'till they found out it weakened the genes. Rykers don't have that
problem.

Everyone stares at me like I'm the strange one not getting it. "Aw Hell, did Grandfather? Oh my God… shit, okay this is too fu—freaking much." I think I've more than stamped my swear card with the Major today; he lets a few go free, but he's got limits. "Know what, on second thought, don't tell me, I don't wanna know—I get it Major. Congratulations, you've finally managed to bludgeon that lesson into me about asking questions you might not want to know the answers to."

"My parents didn't follow any of the 'protocol,' I'm too far removed, but I'm not like a civilian either. I have a gene they don't get. I'm stronger, faster, but I can't run," Ergy continues.

In Ryker terms, he's a bit of a fuck-up, why's he so uppity about clones?

Unexpectedly, he breaks out in a warm smile. "It's enough to give me gifts the civilians don't have, but not enough to garner any trouble from Ryker Corp. other than what your papa gives me."

Papa? That's a new one from someone around here.

"We need to go, but I wouldn't mind a report. Anything to tell me?" the Major asks, expecting something.

Ergy shakes his head. "Nothing out of the ordinary for a place like this... except, Haims did talk about a traveller that came through, he said he was shaved bald with strange tattoos on his forehead. Said the guy gave him the creeps—that's the only part out of the ordinary, Haims doesn't get the creeps from anyone."

I look at Ridomie, maybe that's our guy.

"Did Haims say anythin' else?" the Major asks.

"No. We usually leave people 'ttheir business unless they're 'causin' trouble, or look like renegade clones," he says in our direction. "So I doubt he questioned him, he was just real happy when he left."

"Might be good to make a stop there then. He around?"

At the door Maud hands Ridomie and I each a package wrapped in white cloth. “Somethin’ for the road."

"Thank you, ma'am," we both say.

The Major gives Maud a fond kiss on the cheek, “Thank you Maud-Lynn – did you two say thank you?” he snaps at us. We jump about to thank her again anyway, but she speaks first.

"They're good kids, Major. Both of them. Briggland, you be careful. Listen to him, I know he can be a real stick in the mud sometimes, but he knows what he's talking about. You're lucky to have him for a Daddy."

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"How'd you do that?" says Haims. He's awed and a bit scared, which I get it now after seeing him; it really does say something. Haims is short and stocky, but reminds me of a wall made of titanium. Sure he's weathered looking too, his skin is like sappy, peeling tree bark, but his chest is thick as a burn barrel, with bulging biceps that look like bubbles, under squarely set shoulders. He's intelligent, you can tell by the way he studies thing with his eyes. He's the sort of guy who creeps
people out, not the other way around.

"Do what?" Just because he's built as fuck doesn't mean I'm not mouthy enough to say shit. Briggland Ryker here.

"I'll do the talkin', kid," the Major says. Him I'll listen to, sometimes. "Do what?"

Haims braves the Major, but even he's apprehensive of a guy like the Major. "Grow all that hair. You were bald last time I saw yah."

I look to Ridomie. That's got to be our guy. I bet he has the fucking Moldevite. Fucker.

The Major knows what assumptions I'm making. He's not so sure. "When was that?"

"Two, maybe three days ago. He came through here, 'cept bald wearing a long, black leather coat."

This whole thing is starting to creep me out. Cause what the actual fuck? "Are you tellin' me some asshole with my face came in here?"

The Major yanks me backward by my hair and pushes me over to Ridomie with firm, unspoken orders to shut the hell up. "Fine." Ridomie tugs me to him by the back of my pants, seizing the opportunity (for once) to touch me in public. He secures an arm around my waist. I'm furious and freaking out. There's some clone of me walking around and it finally hits me just how much I don't want to be fucking cloned. I like clones fine, so long as they don't have my face.

"Shh, easy Ryker," Rye says running fingers up and down my bare arm. I relax into him. He feels good. Calms me better than warm fucking milk.

"Haims? Anything else you can tell us?"

He shakes his head and I get the feeling the encounter's left him getting a creepy vibe from me too. He studies me as he answers the Major. "Sorry Major. Nothing. 'cept he, he had tattoos on his skull of something I couldn't make out; didn't want to be caught staring. I could tell he was one breath away from destroying the place. He came in, sat alone, had a drink and left."

"I want you to send word through Ergy if you see that guy again, or anythin' else not right."

We get a firm nod from Haims.

We leave the village using the Major's special trick and arrive home, since he didn't want to waste anymore time away from Ryker Corp for some reason. He had a truck load of clones he'd brought with him too, but he told them to meet us back at Ryker headquarters. We have to walk a ways off to use his little trick, so we, you know, don't blow anyone apart. The three of us are quiet as we walk into the forest, but I break the silence with something I'd been dying to say since the Major showed up. "We weren't running away—I know that's what it looked like."

His green eyes burn with: Rage, disappointment, relief and exhaustion. He rakes over us before he asks, "I'm afraid t'ask, but what were you two doin' besides that massacre back there?"

So he had seen. We quickly recount the story. "Yeah, wasn't too bright of yeh t'lose that Moldevite, but you should have come t'get me."

"And risk the trouble we'd have gotten into?"
“How much trouble do you think yer in now? You’ll be lucky to be released from the sentence I have planned for you by the time yer forty.”

“Okay, none of this was bright, but Major, there’s a piece of Moldevite out there, some guy that gives guys like Haims the creeps running around with my face and men falling from the sky who want to kill me.”

The Major grabs me by the back of the head, for a moment I think I’ve gone too far and he’s fixing to drag me back by the scruff left on my head as usual, I shouldn’t have said anything to him—he’s pissed enough as is—but next I know, my face is pressed into his chest, his strong arm around me. He holds the other one open to Rye who joins us in the weird three-man hug, but the Major is big enough for the both of us. None of us cry, we’re not going to cry over this, but we’re all worried as fuck without a solution. “We’ll figure this out,” he says. “I told yah, you got me now kid and I promise that’s going to be somethin’ you can depend on.”
We’re both in the Major’s office, Ridomie and I, getting wrung out, but that’s plain for any fly on the wall to see. Difference is I deserve it this time and I agree with everything he’s saying—poor Ridomie's just guilty by association in my opinion, not the Major's. We have to sit through a long discussion of points we’ve already been over before, but he goes over them again and in great detail: Don't leave Ryker Corp., obey every word he says and report to him before we decide on doing anything stupid—in fact report to him before we do anything, 'cause it’s most likely something stupid.

We both feel suitably chastised by the end. I’m slouched in my chair trying to hide from the Major’s blazing eyes, but it’s impossible. Ridomie is stoic in the face of this danger. He accepts the scolding like a grown-up, feeling like he deserves what's he getting and much more.

At the end of his lecture, he lets Ridomie know what the rules are, expecting I won't follow them, trusting Ridomie to keep me in line. As if Ridomie needs encouragement for that.

The Major runs a frustrated hand through his hair and stares at us a long time. Neither of us is willing to say anything to the Major—we both hate we've disappointed him, so much. “Don’t worry about the missing Moldevite no more. There ain't nothing t'be done fer it now. We’ll just have to be careful. 'Sides, we got bigger problems.” We both know he's referring to the kid with my face. None of that shit makes any fucking sense. I mean, obviously Derco is prime suspect, but not only is it not his MO (if he had made a clone of me, he would have announced the 'new heir' at a family meeting by now), the new 'me clone' wouldn't fit the description we got from Haims, the kid would be like a toddler or something.

“What we going to do about that, sir?” I ask.

“You are to do nothing. Leave that to me. I know yer used to relying on no one but yerself, but things are different now. Besides, yer going to be too busy working on gettin' back in my good graces after this escapade.”

Okay, maybe we aren’t outta trouble.

“But before yer sent to work, I want the two of yeh to get some sleep. You are dismissed and will report to me after morning meal tomorrow at which time you will both be punished—I'm tanning both your hides good for this.”

"But you already spanked me."

"That weren't a spanking son."

"Ryker," Rye says in a hushed voice, as if the Major can't hear him. I know that means shut the fuck up, even if he won't say that to me in front of the Major.

"Fine." I cross my arms. "But why bother waiting? Can't we, you know, get it over with?" I don't want that hanging over my head; the waiting, the wondering, the goddamn guilt. Fuck that. His arms are folded over his thick chest, his long hair flows long over one shoulder, making the side that's bald, look more bald. Within all his gruffness, there's something beautiful about the Major—don't fucking tell him I said that.

"Believe me boy, you want me to wait. I'll punish you when I'm good and ready. Now scram. You two look like you're about to fall over."
I don’t remember the last time we slept, so it’s probably a good thing. Ah. Oh. That's why he's waiting, he's… thinking of me. He probably wants to, but he's waiting—that's actually kind of awesome. Now I feel like even more of an asshole. "Yes, sir."

The Major stares at us both awhile, like he's going to say something else, but then he doesn't. "Go'on then. You're both dismissed and Briggland, wash the rest of that crap out of your hair. You're a Ryker; you need to look like one, or Derco's gonna start breathing down my neck. If that happens, I'm going to be annoyed."

It takes all my will power not to fucking roll my eyes at that shit. Fucking Derco. "Yes, sir."

He's said we're dismissed, but he's still staring at me funny and I feel like we shouldn't go. "You okay, sir?"

"Yeah. Fine. Why ain't you gone yet?"

"We're goin', we're goin'. Come on Ridomie."

We’re both subdued when we leave his office after that fucking telling off—for like a second, and in the next, we've deciphered that we're both thinking: We’ll get the most privacy in my room. We don’t walk, but run there. The Major thinks we need sleep and yeah, we fucking do, but there are things we need more than sleep and that's each other, right the fuck now.

The moment we’re inside with the door sliding shut, we attack each other. I’m kissing and biting at his lips; he’s tearing at my clothing. I back him up through the anteroom, to the bed. By the time we get there, I’m half-naked, just the travelling pants I’ve been wearing for too long; he flips us and slams me down, so he’s on top of me. “I need to be in you, Baby,” he says. He sounds all breathless and straight out of one of those daytime soap operas. What? I had a foster-type-mom who used to watch them.

And if he wants to stick his cock in me that's fine by me. That's all I've been wanting this whole time—one track fucking mind; literally. I think that's my special Ryker gift, wanting to have sex all the time, even in the face of danger. for once, Ridomie's consumed by it too.

He pulls back with a silent order for me to undo his belt and pants then he shucks them off and climbs onto the bed and positions his cock in front of my face. “Suck Baby, boy.”

I feel warm all over when he calls me that. I tentatively nibble on the head then swallow the shaft down to the root as he begins to fuck my mouth. He moans and I moan at the feeling of being, ruled. I’m nothing, but a wet orifice for his cock to enter, while at the same time, I’m everything to him—I know the two ideas shouldn't work, but Ridomie makes it happen. Right now, I feel his. Owned. I fucking love it. I use a healthy combination of my teeth and skim them against the soft skin of his cock as he pushes in and out of my mouth, giving him just a little pain to go with the oh, so sweet sensation of being inside my wet mouth. I barely gag when he hits my throat; I’m used to large dicks in my mouth.

“Fuck, Ryker. I fucking love your dirty mouth.”

I love that my dirty mouth is rubbing off on him. I love how Ridomie’s mouth gets dirtier and dirtier when we fuck—if only the others knew how much he swore.

He pulls out just as he's getting close and removes the rest of my clothes unsheathing my large and illustrious cock. I must look impatient because he tells me “Don’t worry, Baby, I’m going to give you my cock. You don’t even have to earn it this time. I’m just going to fuck you until you can feel
Dear God, if there is one, please don’t let me die of orgasmic overload. I don’t think I’ve ever been this fucking horny. We've done all the things that turn me on; face death, uncertain danger, Ridomie in a Moldevite induced blood rage. What more could this Ryker ask for? Speaking of Moldevite induced blood-rages though, I don't think that's completely gone from Rye. It's like a drop of it's stayed with him this time. Maybe it did last time too, the effects residual; building and becoming more apparent over time and were too subtle to notice last time, seeing as Ridomie is a possessive bastard anyway.

My legs are pushed up wide, so I’m open and exposed for him. I help by holding onto the back of my legs, so he can put a hand to his cock. He keeps the other hand on my leg anyway, splitting me open wider. He teases my entrance with the head of his wet cock, putting the head just this side of in, but keeping it out. “Please, fuck, Ridomie!”

He laughs. He loves having this much power over me. He can have it, there’s no one I trust more. He shoves a finger in and I almost start crying because I want his cock, not his lame-ass finger. He still has me moaning and pressing deeper onto his finger, fucking it, taking anything he’ll give me. I try to be sly. I release one of my legs and slip my hand stealthily towards my cock.

He stops everything. “Did I say you could touch that, Ryker?”

I drop it like it’s hot. “No, sir.”

“Then, don’t. Fucking. Touch.” He glues his eyes to mine and I can only nod. Possessive Bastard.

He moves over to my nightstand and retrieves the lube I have there. I feel him slick me up pulling two fingers in and out this time. My cock feels like it’s about to explode, I let out a strained whine knowing there’s no way he’ll say I can come yet. I can feel his amused gaze from above me; he loves my pain. Sadist. They can smell it a mile away.

He gives me the briefest of reprieves then slams his cock into me harder than he ever has, it hurts so good, I scream. He continues to pound into me. How the fuck does he last so long? Don’t I make him want to lose his shit? What about the stellar blow job? That’s got to have helped matters. Looks like it did fuck all. Ridomie’s got super endurance. “Rye… I can’t…”

“You can and you will Ryker. If you come before I tell you to, I swear you won’t even look at my cock for a month. I want to fuck you long and hard and I will, understand?”

“Yes, sir,” I say knowing if I do it will help bring him to the edge. I feel him building up, I get hopeful then he fucking pulls out. “Fuck!”

“I told you—you’d get my cock, Ryker. I said nothing about not earning an orgasm, Baby.” He wipes the sweat out of my eyes then pulls me up from the bed, my poor, hard, dong slogging from side to side, so filled with blood it aches.

"Asshole," I say under my breath.

"I can hear you Ryker," he says as he pulls out the hard backed chair from beside my bed, flips it around and places my hands on it. “Keep your ass out. Do not move from this spot. Understand?”

“Ridomie, c’mon. My cock hurts.”

His response is a hard whack to my bare ass. I jump forward a bit and have to readjust my position.
“I believe the answer is yes, sir.”

Ha. I knew he liked that shit. “Yes, sir,” I oblige him, hoping like fuck an orgasm is on the horizon.

“Good, boy.”

He leaves me like that and isn’t gone long. Fact: Once I see what he has in his hand, I wish he would be gone longer. “Fuck. No, Ridomie. Please. I’ll be good—a fucking good little Ryker from now on.”

“You will. And you are getting this spanking. You deserve it, Ryker.”

"But, the Major’s going to punish us tomorrow."

"Yep and we'll make sure you're all healed in time for that, but I'm spanking your ass. Now. Your withholding important information from me could have gotten us killed Ryker—that wasn't fair."

Yeah. I guess not.

"The Major thinks we're too tired and broken," I say as a last ditch effort.

"Ha! If you're well enough to have sex, you're well enough for this. Don't worry Baby, you'll live."

He's way too fucking excited about this. “But a brush, Rye? A bath brush? It looks, so hard and hurt-y.ˮ Not to mention, I didn’t like too much the last time I met up with that bath brush by the way of the Major brushing my skin to death with it. Haven't they come up with DNA that can make their arms reach their backs in this time? That's the first thing I’m doing if anyone ever asks for my two cents on the matter.

“It is hard, and it will hurt, very much.”

"You're supposed to reassure me and shit, not tell me how much it's going to hurt."

"Then I’d just be lying. Why would I do that? You don't make any sense, Ryker.ˮ He puts some lube into his hand, and I'm fucking afraid of what he’ll do with that lube-filled hand, more than the bath brush. He places his instrument of torture on my back and starts tugging at my cock with his hand and all the lube. I moan. He starts smacking my ass, not sparing any strength as he continues to pull on my cock. The sting in my ass intensifies, and so does the pleasure my cock feels and I have to bite my lip and think of anything else but his hand on my cock—it's fucking torture.

I feel him remove the brush from my back and rub it on my sore ass. I hiss.

“It will be okay, Ryker. I intend for you to cry—then it will be over. Then I’ll fuck you 'till you come hard,” he whispers in my ear. I shiver in a good way, until he fucking whacks me harder than I expect.

Whack!

“Fuck you, Ridomie!”

Whack! Whack! “What was that, Ryker?”

“I said, Fuck—ow! You—O-O-WW!”

Ridomie doesn’t stop. He continues, I beg, he continues some more, until—fuck him (I won’t say that out loud right now)—I’m crying, sobbing even. I barely know why. Is it the pain? Is it the
disappointment I feel from Ridomie? From the Major? Is it sexual frustration from my poor, poor
cock? Maybe it’s all of it.

When I reach that point, he finally stops and puts the damn brush down, right where I can see it.
He doesn’t say I can stand up—I won’t fucking dare. There’s no way I’m doing anything to merit
that fucking brush ever again. Fact two: I’m destroying it as soon as I’m alone with it.

He rubs his thick hand over my heated ass and I moan into a hiss; it hurts, but feels so fucking
good. The rubbing lights it up with pain at the same time it takes away the pain leaving a delightful
tingle. “Why did I do that, Baby?”

I want to say, ‘because you’re an asshole’, but I’m still looking at the fucking brush—s’probably
why he put it there—so I go with, “I didn’t tell you what the Major said about me not goin’ to
Legions and it got us into a fuck load of trouble.”

He slaps my ass lightly, but that’s all it needs right now to hurt. I bet it’s fucking bruised. “That’s
part of it, yes, but there’s a more important reason. Do you know what that reason is?”

I don’t and I’m afraid to say I don’t, but I’m not lying after that. “No, sir.”

The hand rubbing my ass stops and I think he’s for sure going to smack it again, but he doesn’t.
He’s thinking over my answer and checking for flippancy. When he decides there’s none there he
says, “I’m disappointed, Ryker.”

I wish he’d just smack me again, with the brush even if he wants. I hate fucking disappointing him,
more than anything else. More tears fall; he lets them.

“I’ll tell you, because you need to know. The answer is: Because I can, because you’re mine. I
don’t need a reason. Remember that.”

I don’t answer, because he’s not looking for an answer. He’s telling me, not asking. It’s the most
important lesson of all.

He walks behind me; he’s got the lube again. He kicks my feet apart, so my ass is more open to
him. He spreads my cheeks apart and he isn’t careful about it—it fucking hurts, but what’s about to
happen is going to fucking hurt more.

I can hear him pop the cap to the lube then feel it pouring down my open crack. He uses two
fingers to rub it up and down and coat my already stretched hole, more. A slick hand reaches under
and he pumps my cock.

At long, fucking last, I feel his head at my hole, he uses his hands to spread my sore cheeks even
wider and slams into me. That’s when the pain becomes nothing, but a fly on my nose. I barely feel
it—it adds to the pleasure. The skin on my ass is tingling again as well as my cock; I’m screaming
and crying for a different reason now.

His thrusts are harder and faster as he builds towards his orgasm and I hold tight to the fucking
chair. Then I hear the sweetest words. “Come, Baby.”

I do. “Jesus, fucking, Christ!” My hips thrust forward in time with the cum spurting out of my cock
and there are white and black spots before my eyes. There’s come all over the chair and in my ass
—Ridomie’s cum hard too and there’s a fucking ocean of cum inside me. My limbs quickly turn to
jelly and I feel him scoop me up.

That’s why I’ll always tell people Ridomie’s stronger than me—I can’t move or think after sex like
that, but he always seems to have enough energy left over to take care of me.

He lays me on the bed—face down—finds cream from somewhere and rubs it into the cheeks of my bruised ass. With a warm cloth, he wipes my tear-soaked face as I close my eyes and feel every sensation I’m left with: burning ass cheeks, tired muscles, the phantom of Ridomie’s cock in my ass and utter contentment. All of it wonderful—I’m still burning that brush when I get the chance.

When he’s done with me, I’m a boneless heap. He thumps down beside me, one hand on my burning hot ass, the other in my hair. He nuzzles his lips to my neck.

“Ryker,” he sighs into my neck.

“Yeah?”

“Nothing. I just like knowing it’s you beside me,” he slaps my ass.

“Fuck, Ridomie. Could you take it easy on me back there?”

He answers with a laugh that borders on maniacal. He sits up on his elbow and starts inspecting my ass. “You have a nice bruise right here,” he says tracing over it suddenly deciding to be gentle. “It’s a masterpiece. Maybe I’ll let you see it later.”

“Mmmmp…” I say into my pillow. What am I saying? Nothing, or maybe something that can be roughly translated into, ‘Go the fuck to sleep, Ridomie’.

“’Sokay, Ryker. Sleep… I just, don’t want to close my eyes, you know?”

When I don’t answer he continues; I’m half-way to dreamland.

“I’m worried Ryker. I’m worried if I close them, when I open them, you’ll be gone.”

I don't like Ridomie talking like that. “I’m always going to be here, Ridomie—no one will let me leave this forsaken place, least of all you. You’d hunt me down and spank my ass with that stupid brush—if I let it live.” Most of my words are mumbled into my pillow, but he can probably hear me. He does.

“I can’t lose you, Ryker. I can’t.”

At least that’s what I think he says, I’m off to sleep.
Derek's Revenge

Chapter Notes

*Timidly peeks out from behind writing curtain*

Sooooo, time has been passing in much the same way it passes for Rykerians for me. It felt like I only posted a month ago. Try since September 2016 Mock! Yeah, sorry about that.

I was a bit nervous posting this chapter and you'll see why. I hope you enjoy it though. More coming as soon as I can.

Let me just say though, I am overjoyed at how many of you asked me when I'd be posting for THIS story. That makes my little writer's heart so happy.

*Goes back behind curtain*

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Ryker?” I sit up in a wild panic. He was right under my hand, I kept his hot bottom where I wanted it all night, but now he's gone. I kept watch for us, ’till I couldn't keep my eyes open. Fighting those mutant clones wasn't as easy, even if I killed a lot of them. Even if I enjoyed it. Anything that tries to kill Ryker has to get through me first.

And now I've lost him. I don’t know why, but I had this bad feeling nagging at me since we set foot on Ryker Corp., and now it's taking hold of me, riling up my adrenaline like an incinerator.

“Ryker? Ryker!” I shout standing, pulling the blanket from me. I hadn’t meant to. Damn it! I hadn’t meant to fall asleep. On the floor I see our discarded clothing from many hours ago. He’s real, that’s enough to tell me he’s real (I often think I'm going to wake to find out he was some amazing dream), but what use is it—he’s gone. I throw on a boot and look for my shirt.

“Aren’t you forgetting something, Ridomie?” The cocky, arrogant, Bastard, stands with his arms crossed at the door to his bathroom suite smiling like a beautiful warrior, his cock hard and hanging out. He starts laughing at me.

I’ll kill him.

“You’ve got to put your pants on before your boots, Ri—do you need a hand?”

“Is your ass not sore enough for you Ryker? Where the fuck did you go?”

“Did anyone ever tell you it’s impolite to fucking swear?”

“Ryker.”

“Is there a law against pissing?”

When he says that I’m dumbstruck. “Pissing? I… I’m sorry, Ryker.”
“Yes. You should be. Especially since my ass looks like it doubled as a paint-ball target.”

“A paint what?”

“Never mind—Earth thing. There are six colors of bruises on my ass.”

“Are there?” I say forgetting about him vanishing. “You’re being dramatic. Let me see.”

He runs and jumps face down on the bed, so I can see his backside. There are a couple small bruises—it was a feat getting Ryker to cry—and one larger one, the rest of his ass is red, the brightest, most beautiful shade of red I’ve ever seen. I want to touch it; I want to fuck it. I’m gentle, loving, as run my fingers over the smooth surface of his skin worshipping him.

“See? It’s pretty rough back there.”

“I don’t know, I think I can do better,” I say as I look for my brush only to find it nowhere. “Ryker? What have you done with my brush?”

“Brush? I don’t know what you’re talking about. Never seen a brush.”

I don’t care about that so much right now, my heart’s still slowing down from the panic of finding him gone. I lay down beside him grateful he’s here. I don’t know how long I’ll have him. “Love you, Baby.”

He turns on his back with a small groan; I’m surprised he can lie on his back at all. “Ridomie,” he closes his eyes and looks up at the ceiling. “I love when you call me, Baby.” He heaves a large breath; he looks content.

That’s not what he’d planned on saying. I know it. I don’t pursue him.

**

We fuck again. I love when he fucks me; it’s raw and hot. Then we dress and I make fun of Ridomie for putting his one boot on before his pants (and yeah he fucked me with that one boot on). It was fucking funny to see him standing there in one boot and no pants, but he can’t find the humor in it. When I think of the reason he dressed in a hurry like that I stop laughing. He thought I’d been taken. He’s nervous for some reason and I wonder if it’s the same reason I’m nervous. I can’t seem to shake the feeling that we’ve reached a culmination of sorts. The fucking conclusion. Maybe I’m going to finally get to see a clone of myself—that would be a fucking trip. I hope my uncle uses that to run the world with. I’ll be somewhere else when that time comes, even if I have to bring all the kids in Ryker Corp with me.

I think I’d walk up to ‘myself’ and say, “Good fucking luck, Kid.” ‘Cause no matter how old he would look, he’d be younger than me, which is why I’d call him Kid. Then, hand in hand with Ridomie and with a trail of mini-Rykers following behind us like ducklings, we’d walk off the Corporation grounds—no one would want to stop us. The kids could be ours. I want that with Ridomie. I want everything with him—fuck being a Ryker. We could change our last names, maybe to Dragon, or something cool like that. Rambo would be cool too. Ridomie would never know where I’d got the name.

“You ready, Baby?”

I love when he calls me baby, but I’m suddenly in a fucking mood. It creeps over me, like a dark cloud. "We need to leave, Ridomie."
Ridomie grabs my hand like he did when we were just us. I like it. If the world could be this fucking simple all the time. “We do. We’re going to be late, then we have to go get wrung out by the Major again.”

“No I mean leave. Leave Ryker Corp.”

“You’re crazy, Ryker. We just got back. We can’t leave,” he says and kisses my crown. “Everything’s going to be fine—trust the Major for once, will you? He’s your father, he’d never let anything happen to you.”

Yeah, he’s right, but—there are things even the Major can’t prevent. “I have a bad feeling. I can’t shake it Rye.”

“I know. I've felt that way too, since we’ve been back, but don’t you see? It made me act crazy a moment ago, now I’ll never live down that dumb nickname you gave me.”

I called him Captain Jack because he looked like a drunken pirate with the one boot on and one boot off—kinda like it was a peg leg or something. Fuck that’s funny. It still makes me laugh. “I’ll stop calling you that if you just come with me. I’ll take us far away from here—we can bring the kids with us,” I add when I see he’s about to protest.

He rolls his eyes. “Do you know how ridiculous you sound? We’d barely manage on our own; we’d never make it with several hundred kids. Enough nonsense, Ryker, let’s go.” He’s trying to pull the ‘top card’, fuck that for this.

“You’re not listening to me. Something bad is going to happen.”

He looks me over and sees how fucking serious I am. Even if I’m off my rocker, I believe it and he spends a moment gathering that understanding. As his offended Top cools down from being told off, so does he. "Do you have some kind of reason for this sudden insanity Ryker?

"Well no, not really. Just a really bad fucking feeling. Can't you hear me?"

He grabs me roughly by the bicep and pulls me to him in a firm way that tells me to behave. It's a violent sort of action, but it calms me. Shakes me out of panic-loop I was running. "I hear you, Ryker," he says. "But you've got to calm down."

His grey eyes are concerned and he tilts his head to study me some more.

"Okay, Rye. I'm fucking calm. But it changes nothing, we've outstayed our welcome and we gotta go." The more I say it, the more right it feels.

He let's go of me. "Say your crazy intuition is right. We're going to run away? What kind of soldier would be such a coward?"

“The smart kind. You don’t fight a battle you know you’ll lose.”

He looks frustrated. “No. No.” And to think there was a time not so long ago, he wouldn't have dreamed of saying no to me, why did I complain about that again? "This is crazy Ryker. Just like when we needed to leave here to get your bracelet so bad. No. We do the right thing this time and talk to the Major. He'll know what to do."

"Ryyyye."

My pretty Ryker eyes have him by the balls, so he goes with pleading. “Please Ryker. We’d be
dead out there. There are too many wild cards, or have you forgotten about the men in black who fall from the sky?"

“No.” He's right. He is. But so am I.

“Good. Any chance I'm getting through your stubborn skull?”

“Yeah, yeah. How about a visit to dear old Dad then?”

That gets me a smile at least. "Yeah, because he's pleased with us right now. He'll spank us on site."

"I'm willing to risk his displeasure over this Ridomie."

"Allow me to rephrase, he'll just spank us and kick us out. He's not going to entertain this after our last adventure, Ryker. Not without something more than a feeling. In case you hadn't noticed, the Major doesn't do feelings."

Somewhat debatable, but yeah, overall he's right. "Fuck, fine Rye, but first sign of trouble and promise me you and I are out of here?"

“Of course, beautiful.” I fucking blush at that. He pushes the hair away from my face and kisses me once more. I grab onto him and pour my soul into the kiss, because what if.

Just… What. Fucking. If?

FY

"Isn't this the cozy look of domestication?"

"Derek?" I haven't seen the dude in I can't remember how long and was hoping is existence was actually just some weird daytime nightmare I kept having. Where the fuck did he come from? I spin around to greet his cold smile, his face alight with sadistic pleasure. The two that seem to always be with him, flank him. He’s staring at Ridomie and I in a strange fucking way I don't like. It takes the anxiety I'm feeling about needing to get the fuck out of here and makes it sky rocket. "What do you want?" I say, trying not to sound as uneasy as I feel. Truth is, I’m ill prepared to be face to face with Derek like this and I feel fucking flustered; I’m sure it’s pouring through.

"Should I want something from you?" he says and pauses a moment, pretending to think. "Oh wait, there is." I have no idea what the fuck he’s referring to, but by that look in his eyes, he’s got something on me, something good.

I wait to hear the cost of his secrecy, but it never comes. He doesn’t want to blackmail me; he wants revenge. "All I want is for you to suffer." He walks away leaving me numb, a creepy fucking tingle goes down my spine and I panic. Panic is not something I do, but I just know I'm about to lose something important. I believe him when he says I'll suffer.

My intuition is fucking flickering. "We have to go. My God Ridomie, we have to get out of here."

"Okay."

Phew, fuck. The feeling leaves me. I'm relieved.

"We'll go straight to the Major, after we eat."

The panic spikes again.
"No. We have to go. I'm not fucking kidding."

"Are you on about that again, Ryker? I thought we settled this matter."

"No," I say on the verge of freaking the fuck out. "It'll be too late by then."

"What will be too late?"

My brain has the sensation of falling. Like I'm trying to grip something, the thing that will tell me why I'm freaking out, but it keeps slipping on it. "I don't know, Rye," I say pulling at my fucking hair – what's left of it anyway.

"If you had something, anything I'd say let's go. But, Jeez Ryker, we've been over this – we can't go to the Major with we think something bad will happen. Where would we go, exactly?"

"I don't know Ridomie! It's not like I've thought this through."

"Well until you do…” He continues walking toward the food.

Suddenly, it hits me. I latch onto the thought like two gears slotting together. I know what it is. "He knows. Fuck," I run a hand through my shortened hair. "He fucking knows about us."

Ridomie smiles his beautiful smile at me; the sun shines behind him. I commit the picture to memory. “It’s all going to be okay. The Major will take care of us. I know he will. Just have a little faith. We’ll meet with him, right after this. Whatever Derek has planned, he can’t do anything about now. It will take time to put together a scheme.”

I shake my head. “No. It’s already together. That’s why we haven’t seen him. But he’s too arrogant not to gloat, so he came here to do that, before he does whatever he’s got planned.”

“I’m the Major’s for all intents and purposes, Ryker. He can’t touch me.”

“Yeah, ‘cause you guys have been doing so well with that façade? I don’t think, so Ridomie. Let’s skip food, go to the Major now.”

“Okay, okay. But when you’re a hungry, grouchy asshole in class, don’t expect any sympathy from me.”

Ah. That's what he was warring with – feed the Ryker, or deal with his weird-ass breakdown. Both are equally important, I can see his angle now. “I won’t.” I feel one thousand per cent relieved, now that I've got Ridomie on board and we're on our way to see the Major. To see my… male parent.

I'm getting there slowly with that one okay?

We both turn to leave, and head toward the door to the cafeteria and man do I feel better. I don't know if we're going to be able to convince the Major. If we can't, I'll just have to find another way to convince Ridomie to leave with me. If I'm right and Derek knows about us, he's not fucking safe.

We're three steps toward the door, when my heart sinks again. It’s already too late. Derco and Derek stride into the cafeteria like the royalty they are and everyone stops. Behind them are at least seventy clones. All unraised by the looks of it. Two of the clones close the doors to the cafeteria manually, a large rectangular bar, looking like it's made out of something that might be akin to steel on Earth, slides across the door on its own and several of the clones block the exit –
no one's getting out, not without a fight.

That's how I immediately know it's for my benefit. The clones, whether raised or unraised are not likely to bolt. I fucking am. Yep. This is at least somewhat about me.

Derek looks at me directly. He's way too fucking happy. It’s happening now—I don’t know what, but it is.

“Attention, everyone. We are pleased to announce that Ryker Corp is expanding. We will no longer hold one Kingdom, but two and thus we will hold court on the planet Tenear. Construction will begin promptly.”

“Rye. Let’s get the fuck out of here.” I whisper as Derco drones on about the new palace he’ll have built and all its bells and whistles. “You, promised.”

“No problem Ryker. We can leave – just as soon as you tell me how to do that without getting sent immediately to the incinerator.”

Fuck. He’s right and I know it. We’re not getting out of here, not until he finishes.

"It's all gonna be okay, Baby," he says quietly, his hand into mine. We’re standing amidst a hoard of the other guys now as they’ve all gathered around to listen to what Lord Ryker has to say. No one can see his hand in mine.

Derek takes over. “When I call out your name, that means you will be leaving with me. If a clone is called who isn't currently present, I expect someone will inform him. Those who are called, who do not make it to Bay 14 in time to leave will be incinerated, which would be unfortunate – if you were chosen for this, you were so, because I value you in some way.” Derek doesn't value anything but his father. He means he saw them as more fuckable than the others. "When your name is called come up to the front immediately. You will be taken to a special training facility and depart tomorrow."

And wait. I missed something while I was whispering to Ridomie. Clones are going to Tenear? With Derek? I can’t begin to get fucking excited about Derek leaving, because I know; either me, or Ridomie is going to be on that list, but not both of us and all we can do is stand here waiting to find out. By the worried look on Ridomie's face, he knows it too.

Derek begins reading from a long list of names as I look between the door and at Ridomie, desperation rising. I devise how it's likely to go down. Derek knows about the two of us, so he’ll want to break us apart that bit is simple, but he can’t take Ridomie can he? He's supposed to belong to the Major, even if the two of them are shit at acting. It’s gotta be me. That makes me feel better. I’ll have time to do something about it—to fucking escape and fucking take Ridomie with me. But then I remember, with me out of the picture to convince him to fucking leave, who knows what’ll happen to Ridomie? He could be sent straight to the incinerator if Derco knows what we've been up to. I'm not fucking letting that go down. No way. Not on my watch.

But I relax, and swallow the turmoil in my mind, smiling at Ridomie, to let him know I got this. He's confused of course not knowing my inner monologue. I squeeze his hand as we continue to hear names called. They don't seem to be in any particular order, alphabetical or otherwise. I'm sure it's by batch number or something. I don't have a batch number, since apparently, I'm a 'real boy'. Maybe that means I'll be called up last. Kinda like a cherry on the top of Derek's revenge sundae.

“Saige," Derek calls.
Ridomie’s face goes fucking pale. Does he know Saige? I look around. Ridomie must know him and he must mean something to him by the way he's frozen. No one's moving, so he must be an absentee clone we're gonna have to find and give the 'good news' about moving day to.

It's when everyone looks at us, waiting that I figure it the fuck out. My blood runs icy and I can feel my heart pounding in my chest. "S-Saige?" I say to him. I feel like I'm in a fucking nightmare, one of those ones where you can't run, or even walk fast enough to get away from the thing chasing you and your whole body feels like it's filled with sand.

I shake my head. "No. No." Ridomie glares and tries to pull his hand from mine, but I won't release it. "No."

"Let it go, Ryker. I have to go up there."

"No. No." I keep saying it over and over as if at some point, the whole fucked up situation will just stop. Maybe Derek will turn to the crowd and say, "Naw. Just kidding big-half-brother, but you should see your face. I got you good." I know that's not going to happen though. If only.

"It will be okay Ryker," he says. "The Major—go get the Major. He’ll figure this all out. I’ll see you soon, okay?"

"O-okay," I say, but my heart is beating at eighteen thousand miles per minute. I'm so scared. I've never been so fucking scared, even when I've been running for my life from large-ass scary dudes. "Fuck, okay." I watch as his hand slips from mine, and he walks up to the front. I have the awful feeling I’m never going to fucking see him again. No. No. Fucking, no.

I fall to my knees. I know names are still being called out, but I can't hear them. I can't move for a few moments, even, so I sit. I feel the pain radiating in my ass and I press myself harder into the ground—it’s him, I want to feel him. He's walking up there, away from me and I can’t stand it. I can’t fucking stand it. I’m losing something—something important, something that’s a part of me, something I need. Mate. Him. Need.

Rex sees me sitting amongst the crowd.

I have to say something. “Wait,” I say too quiet for me to be heard. Derek's still calling names, but I'm sensing he's getting close to the end. I'm gong to miss my chance.

“Ryker, come here.” Rex, still staring at me, tries to get my attention.

“No. I’ve got to… Wait!” I say louder. I look to Rex for help, since I my body still won't listen to the commands my brain is giving it. It's probably a good thing too. If I could move, I'd be doing something that's likely to get someone incinerated. Rex hurries over to me, I put my arms out for him to help me stand; I can’t stand by myself. I think about how Ridomie won't care about that, all he'll see is Rex touching me, his. He's probably feeling all crazy possessive, even through this fucked up situation; probably punch the shit out of Rex when we sort this all out. Makes me feel better.

I get up on shaky legs. Derek is smiling ear to ear; that lousy asshole, crocodile smile of his and Derco looks irritated.

“What is it, Briggland?” Derco asks probably feeling the need to humor me, since I am a Ryker.

“S-Saige, Ridomie, sir. He’s the Major’s clone, sir,” I say to Derco, using as much fucking respect as I can. I admit it, he's got me. Nuts in a vice and all that – I'll give him whatever he wants.
“The Major’s clone?” He looks to Derek. “Is this true?”

“Not that I am aware, Father,” lying asshole, ”but even if it were so, you remember what I told you?”

Derco nods.

“You’ll let me have him, won’t you father?”

Another nod.

_Just like that?_ What happened Ridomie ‘belonging’ to the Major?

"The matter is settled then. Major Ryker will have to find another clone; it seems this one is valuable.”

_So much for no clone being more valuable than another._ I do get an idea though.

“Are you accepting volunteers?” I ask.

“Of course,” my uncle preens. “Any clone may volunteer himself for this venture.”

Okay then. Easiest decision I’ve ever made. “I volunteer, sir.”

He laughs his ugly, cackle laugh. “You would think that wouldn’t you? That clone, means you.” He laughs some more. “All the more reason for what I have planned for you. You are not a clone and you will remain with two feet planted firmly here until I’m sure you know that.”

I glare at him, getting some of my machismo back. I want to gut both him and Derek; maybe I can.

“Ryker, don’t,” Rex hisses, pulling at my arm. I growl at him. I am not Briggland right now; I’m a _fucking_ Ryker. He gets it and steps away.

“Are there any other names, son?”

“That’s all for names, Father.”

I’m frozen with rage. The clones who were named file out along with the crowd of _unraised_ and the Ryker Royalty. Ridomie takes one last look in my direction; he's worried about me—he’s the one most likely going to his doom and he’s worried about me. Of course he is. All I can think about right now is how much of I dick I was to him seventy-five percent of the time we were together, instead of that twenty-five where I wasn't. I wasted all that time. All I want to do now is tell him I love him over and over. Make love to him. Fuck, he can spank me all he likes. I just don't want him gone. I make myself look strong and I don't take my eyes off him until they've left.

And when they do I fall. Rex isn’t the only one that comes to me this time. Six and Theta come too. “What can we do for you, Sir?” Rex asks.

“Get… get the Major. Now.”

Rex, _runs_. Not regular running like on Earth, but the special kind of _running_ only we can do. I can’t believe how fast the Major’s here.

“Major?” I say in a hushed, private sort of voice. “I need to get out of here, would you?” I can’t move, but I have to get outta here all the same. He knows what I’m asking for.
In a movement that makes me look lighter than Earth air, he picks me up and swings me over his shoulder. “Upsie Daisy, Lil’ Soldier.”

I can’t even complain about him calling me that—I’ve got other shit to say to him. “Ridomie… they can’t…”

“C’mon, back to my office,” he says to me even though I’m bound to go where he’s going; I’m flung over his shoulder. “Rex—lead class this morning.”

The Major doesn’t walk us back to his office. He *runs*.

Chapter End Notes

#trustmock
Since it's been way too long without an update on this story, I'm posting the next. I had wanted to post the next two in succession, but I have had some rewriting to do. This story can sometimes be tough because of all the back and forth and like I said, these characters can be a pain now and again. LOL

I hope you're ready for some serious, good old fashioned angst. Just remember, HEA guaranteed. But for now pain.

Enjoy! LOL

I feel like I have no bones and like I’m moving through thick sludge with every articulation of my limbs. Everything is exhausting: talking, thinking, feeling. I sit in a chair in the Major’s office and tell him what happened. He punches shit and knocks shit over: He loves Ridomie too.

“They can’t take him, son. He’s mine; remember? We’ll fix this.”

He says, and I appreciate his optimism, but somehow I know it’s over. Ridomie’s going to go to that stupid planet and I’m stuck here with no way of getting off it. Derco’s army is too big, too powerful.

Besides. I fucking know Ridomie. Many of the men chosen were his men. He won’t abandon them there. And he’ll feel torn ‘cause his mini-Ryker clones are here, but he’ll think to himself ‘at least they got Ryker’ and they do, but it won’t be the same ‘cause I don’t know that I’ll ever be the same without him again.

“Come. Now.” The Major doesn’t say where we’re going, but I can guess. When we reach the solid white doors, my suspicions are confirmed: Derco’s office. The Major storms past the guards and when they make a feeble attempt to stop him, he pushes each to the side hard enough, they’re flat on the ground.


Derek’s in the room too. I lunge for him without even thinking about it. I’m going to kill him. They may believe in all this ‘don’t kill a Ryker bullshit’, but I fucking don’t. I’ll kill them both with my bare hands. I might even enjoy it.

The Major’s on me before I have the chance. “Not, fucking, now kid. Sit your ass down and don’t move it,” he says throwing me into a chair. I do, glaring the fuck at Derek. My ass hurts to sit on; it reminds me of Rye, but this time, there's a pang of sadness. How long 'till I won't be able to feel him anymore?

“You have a clone that’s mine amongst your batch for Tenear Derco. I want him back.”

Derco laughs delighted. “You don’t fornicate with clones, brother, but your son does.” He finally turns around and stares at me. Icy tingles run through me. Fuck. He knows too. Of fucking course. “Isn’t that right, dear nephew? But not just any old clone for you, you’ve only been with him,
haven't you?"

I know this isn’t the time to say any of my fucking stupid Briggland shit that I usually say. I know how dangerous this man is now, and Ridomie’s life hangs in the balance, that is, if he hasn’t already been incinerated. “Where is he? What have you done with him? He’s not even going to Tenea is he?”

“Not to worry. He is fine. I wanted to kill him, but you have your cousin to thank for saving his life. When he came to me and told me this clone had seduced you into falling in love with it, I wanted him gone. Rykers do not fall in love with clones, young Briggland. You’ll do well to remember that in the future. But your cousin explained that the men respond well to him, and this makes him valuable: That is what saved him. One thing is certain; you will never see him again. I do this for your own good and the good of the family. One day, you shall understand. For now: Get. Over. It.”

*I'm so sure Derek's efforts were noble.* I start breathing hard. “Where's your proof?”

“I have proof and I would love to embarrass you with it if you force my hand, but there's no need if you remain quiet. If that’s not enough for you to behave then perhaps I was wrong; perhaps you don’t love that clone. Because every time you step out of line, we will make it so you can watch us beat him. He can be your own personal whipping boy—I believe all royalty had them back on Earth, it will remind you of home.”

His dates are a ways off, but I know what he's talking about. Royalty did have them a very long fucking time ago. I look to the Major for help, but he just stands there doing nothing. I can’t depend on him for this; Ridomie was wrong. This is up to me. I’ll beg if I have to.

“Please, Uncle. I’ll do whatever you want, please don’t send him there.”

“Yes. You will do whatever I want. If you don't, your pet clone will suffer.” He pretends to think. "Be a good boy and I'll make sure Ridomie's the first clone to make it to old age – that would be a fun experiment in and of itself."

I want to rip him to pieces. This is fucking bullshit.

"This is enough of my day wasted on this nonsense. Briggland, am I clear? Do you understand the rules?"

"Yes, sir."

"Good. I want your obedience and I will have it, or you will pay with your hide and the hides of others. Everybody where they're supposed to be." He flicks his had at all of us, expecting his will to be done.

"Wait, can I, please can I say goodbye?" I feel like all the life is falling out of me.

"Well of course you can say goodbye," he says, but why don't I fucking trust him? "Except, time's up," he adds feeling that undercurrent of time, “the shuttle will have departed by now. Looks like he's gone."

I lose the little cool I had. "Why you—"

The Major grabs me. "Kid. Not now. Not now. We'll figure this out."

"You're not figuring out shit. You're just letting them take him!" I'm mad. Really fucking mad.
"Control your offspring Lexington and get out."

"Believe me, I'm gonna," the Major says.

With strength I still can't get over him having, he picks me up and slings me over his shoulder. I'm kicking and hollering of course. He pays me no mind. He waits until we get far away from Derek's office and to his own before he sets me down. "What the fuck was that, Major? You just let them take him!"

He doesn't warn me, he methodically strips my pants down to reveal my bare, already spanked ass, plants a foot on a chair, I get tossed over his knee, and he proceeds to add to Ridomie's artwork. "I understand you're goin' through a rough patch, but it's not a free ticket to disrespectin' me like yeh are."

His smacks are crisp and sure as always, giving me no levity for my ass already being spanked, or Ridomie being gone. And you know? I don't want levity. The Major gives me exactly what I need, until I'm kicking and begging him to stop. He doesn't stop 'till I'm crying good, a heap of sobbing Ryker over his knee. "I'm sorry, sir. I didn't mean to be a dick it jus', it hurts." I'm not talking about my ass.

He stands me up, and sits me on the chair, using his knees as a vice to hold me there. "I know, Briggland. I know," he says with uncharacteristic softness, brushing what's left of my hair aside.

I take a shaky breath, why can't I stop crying? and stare at him, just fucking hoping he'll have something to give me. "Look, we'll work on somethin' to get him back. I don't know how long it'll take, but we'll do it somehow. Jus' let him have some time to cool off. He does cool off."

It sounds pretty fucking hopeless to me; it's not the proactive solution I want. The Major helps me with my clothes and I wipe my eyes. "C'mere, kid," he says pulling me to him, surrounding me with his huge arms. At least there's him. I don't know what I'd fucking do without him.

It's these little moments where it seems unfair to just call him the Major, he's more than that, but the stupid little word won't come past my lips. "I really am sorry. Thank you, sir."

He squeezes. "Hey, that's my job, to keep yer ass in line," he says. "No more need to be sorry, jus' behave yerself." For once, his words don't come across as scolding, he's trying to lighten the mood.

I nod into his chest.

"You wanna go see yer mama?" he asks and it surprises the fuck out of me, and show his level of concern. "We'll go right to her this time." That's all I've wanted a long time with no one ever making good on that wish. I've never had the ability to go to her. All I could do was wait and hope she'd show up. When I was small, I'd sit by the window and fucking try to will her to show up and take me away. Everyday I'd hope it was the day she was going to appear and tell me we could be a family. I'd cry thinking about her and miss her, especially when I'd see other kids with their mamas. As I got older, I wondered why she distanced herself from me and it hurt, but I tried not to think about that too much, lest it fucking eat me from the inside out. I would simply have faith that there must be something, a big important reason, else she'd never leave me.

But with Ridomie gone, so has a large chunk of my faith. It's dwindling fast like the stars at dawn and the light for my mama's gone out. She's here, close by and she doesn't want to fucking see me. I'm not going to her.

"No. No, sir. I don't wanna see her."
"Briggland."

I pull away enough to look at him, just look and he must see all the pain of all the years, including the moment they ripped Ridomie away from me, swirling there – least it feels like it's fucking swirling and I feel like I want to destroy something. Everything. *Maybe the whole fucking world.*

He gets it.

"If you change your mind…"

"If I change my mind, I'll come to you, sir. But I won't."

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The kid's killing me. Fucking killing me. If I'm desperate enough to take him to see Dess, I'm real fucking desperate. Truth is, I'm gonna do whatever I can to get Ridomie back, but Derco has me by both balls now and I don't know what that's gonna look like. All I can do is pull Briggland to me again, and squeeze him harder.

When we finally pull apart, I take inventory of him; he looks like shit. "C'mon." I tug his shirt and let him trip along behind me, wiping his tears.

"Where we going?"

"Somewhere you can rest," and I can keep an eye on him.

"I'm not fuckin' goin' to my room. I'm never goin' there again."

He's never gonna stop cursing, is he? Doesn't mean he won't keep getting in trouble for it. "Hey, watch the language. And you'll go where I say you go." I'm not taking him to his room though. I head off to my room and when we get there. I shove him inside roughly. "Clothes. Off."

I smile to myself. He wasn't expecting this. I open the covers as he undresses, finally obeying a fucking order without complaining. "I'm not even tired. I feel like all I've been doing is sleeping lately." Okay. Without *much* complaining, then.

"You don't have to sleep. I just want you to rest. Later, you can go beat the shit out of shit."

I turn to leave. "Y-you're not staying?" he says.

"I'll be back to check on yah soon enough. "

But before I can go. "Wait, I, I want to see him."

I know who he fucking means. He wants to see his granddaddy. "Well you can't see him."

"Why not? He said he wants me to. He'll fix this."

Fuck. He won't. And I don't want the kid having to experience anymore disappointment (especially not the kind I have), but sometimes, that's the way of things before you can understand. "I'll think about it."
Okay! I figured this chapter out! Whooooa Mock!

It didn't turn out as angsty as I thought it would be, but maybe that's a good thing. The Ridomie chapters and what comes up is ... hard.

Thank you all for reading this story, I'm so stoked people are still reading!

The Major eventually makes true on his promises for me to break a bunch of shit, but there's no fucking headway on getting Ridomie back, or even knowing if he's still alive. Or unhurt. I don't know what's being done to him (because something fucking is, there's no question there) and it's making me crazy. So crazy, I can't think about it, I have to start to not-think about it.

Or I might lay waste to everything.

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Since the Major is going to let me use his room, I camp out here for four fucking days. The first day, I moped and everyone let me. By the second, I use the large, plush blanket as clothing, wrap it around myself like I'm some kind of druid, and refuse to eat unless people bring me food. Sometimes it's the Major, but turns out, he actually does have shit to do around here, so I'm visited by a few of the others: Rex, Ter-X and Heli-O and they bring me food and clean clothes I refuse to put on.

I also refuse to shower, or leave my sanctuary in the Major's room. I learn that the Major does sleep. Not often, but he does. He has to get another blanket though, I'm not fucking sharing the one I stole, and he falls asleep beside me on the third night. I learn that the Major wakes up screaming bloody murder. It scares the living shit out of me, because what can make the Major scream like that? I don't ask. I don't wanna know.

On the fourth morning, he decides that I'm leaving the room if he has to drag me out by my hair. "Out kid, out of that blanket."

"Huh?" I've been swallowed by the pain at this point, consumed to the point that it makes me fucking dizzy. I can't eat anything anymore either; I puke up everything I try to. Fuck. Seriously, fuck this.

"You heard me. Move, or I'll move you my way."

"I'm not fucking moving." Yeah, I know better, no I don't care.

"Fine. My way." The Major grabs me by his favorite place, the meat of my hair, his fingers digging into my scalp and tugging enough so it fucking hurts. I don't care. I'm already filled with pain that makes my fucking soul ache, a new and physical pain is welcome. Like a puppet, I'm swung up and off the Major's bed. I'm naked, and smell of the stench of a person who hasn't showered in four days—look it too. With how greasy my hair is, I'm surprised I don't slip from the Major's grip. I think he'll toss me in the shower, but he starts dragging me to the door. I reach out desperately and
snag the blanket I'm cocooned under, before it unravels, and falls to the floor.

"Where are you taking me?"

"You want to be a disobedient little asshole? You can be on yard duty."

"Like this?"

"Yah seem to like it so much, not even showerin'."

Asshole! "I'm wallowing. I want to wallow." All the while I complain and argue, he's dragging me, and I have stopped fighting him, focusing instead on keeping my blanket. "Can't a guy wallow?"

"Yah, and yah did. For four days. Time to start the let-go process."

"You're not supposed to decide that for me!" I'm fucking mad now, how dare he?

"No better person than someone else. Besides, you're a Ryker, you have to. You have to be stronger than the rest, and the rest are pretty fucking strong, so you've got some catchin' up t'do. What do you think happens when a clone is incinerated? that their loved ones get a fucking grieving day? No Ryker. They get right back to it, or get incinerated themselves. You've already had four more days than they get."

That wakes me the fuck up, and I get it. I'm better than I've been. "Well can I get a shower?"

"Nope."

"Boots?"

"Nope."

"Will you at least ease up on my fucking hair?"

"What do you think?"

Fuck.

"I've told you time and time again not to fuck with me, kid."

I can't do anything beyond glare at him, so I do.

"You can lose the attitude, or have fun doing this with a red ass."

"Fine."

"Would it kill you to say yes sir, just once without me havin' to yank it out of yah?"

"I could, but that's what makes me your son, sir." I swear to whatever Ryker God they pray to here, I can feel the Major melt, and he let's go my hair. Was that all I had to do? He puts an arm around me, and brings me up beside him, as I pull my blanket around me tighter. I adjust my pace to match his.

"Yah, guess you got a point there, kid," he says all proud and shit. I smile in spite of myself. We head toward the training fields, and I shudder to think about what 'field duties' means, when the very person I want to kick the shit out of most, steps in our path.
"Just who I came to speak with, my idiotic-clone-loving-cousin."

Whatever fog was left over my brain is gone, as my state changes instantaneously from pathetic, to rage. "Brigg," the Major warns.

For once, I take the warning, but posture myself, towering him, and dwarfing him with my Ryker presence—yeah in my fucking blanket. "You have two minutes, Derek, then you can scurry along, or I break your pretty, Ryker, face."

He sneers, and laughs. "Oh, I'm going to have fun getting you to realize how very mine you are. We have all the time in the world, and I'm going to make sure it's as slow and painful as possible. You are quite beautiful you know—would be like fucking myself."

I ignore his taunting. "What do you want?"

"Right, I'll leave all that for another day. Today I came to speak about your pet, who is now my pet. He's disobedient from the start, so I've decided to surprise him with a little lesson."

Derek nods toward his goons, and they move to grab me, but the Major isn't fucking having it. "The first clone to lay a finger on him without my say so, can go straight to the incinerator."

They back away from me, like I'm the incinerator.

"He's already in enough trouble with me, Derek. You're not fuckin' touchin' him," the Major—my dad—says.

I grin my face off, all fucking cocky again.

"Father said I could," Derek whines. What a fucking baby.

"Well Brigg ain't his. You can ask my permission if you want to do somethin' to him, and I'll save you the trouble by tellin' yah, the answer's no. Forever."

I expect Derek to go into a rage, at the very least to say something Derek-like, like, "I'm telling on you," but he doesn't. Instead he straightens his posture. "Yes, sir."

That astonishes me more than anything I've seen in my fucking life. Huh. Guess he can listen to someone, but it probably has a lot to do with the fact that the Major looks like he wants to kill him. Derek turns sharply on his heel, his entourage following behind him. I cross one arm over my chest, and wave at him with the other, a giant smile on my face. I'm gonna kill that mother fucker one day.

The Major doesn't approve of my taunting. I get several sharp spanks to my ass. "That's the sort of behavior that got you into trouble with him in the first place. Stop it."

The Major thinks he needs full spankings to get his points across to me—he really fucking doesn't, that was more than enough. "That. Hurt!" And what was I saying earlier about needing other kinds of pain? I take it back.

"There's more where that came from, if you don't start behaving yourself."

"Yes, Sir."

"And next time I'll let him take you."

There's no way he means that, but if he's even driven to say it, he's pretty fucking displeased with
me, and I feel badly for making him so displeased with me. "Yes, sir."

He gives me the look I already recognize as the one that doesn't believe me. "I mean it. I won't taunt him anymore, sir. I'll just kill him. No more taunting required. And by the way, the next time the Major says move, I'm fucking moving. I end up spending the day in the mud, leading a fucking team of other, weaker clones, through some field maintenance. I'm in my bare fucking feet too, but was grateful to be handed a pair of pants by the Major, who informed me that to earn the rest of my shit back, like boots and a shirt, I'd better do the job of excellence he expects from a Ryker of my stature—whatever the fuck that means.

So I worked my ass off. It did fucking suck as much as it sounds like it did—I would rather have been doing cool drills with my G-Batch, instead of fucking gardening—but the Major was right. The change in my physiology changed my focus, and I got out of my rut. I realized I had spent the past four days thinking I couldn't do anything, rather than focus on what I could do to get Ridomie back.

The shower after that mud shit, is the best shower of my life. I step out from under the hot water, never more grateful in my life for hot water. I'm in the, what I call, the locker room, they call it the Field's Shower, toweling off, when the Major shows up. He's got a smug smile.

"What?"

"Big fucking handprint, on your ass." He laughs, hard.

"Yeah, only because I have to wear this stupid thing," I say, showing him the stupid Moldevite necklace he gave me.

His face changes, and it's clearly regret. "I'm sorry about that, kid. It's my fault you got that defect in the first place, and now my brother's fucking exploiting it too."

The Major is shaking with rage, and I finally get something, something I knew before too, but I get it better now. Derco must have something real good on the Major, as if he'll tell me, and I've been fucking embarrassed enough for one day. "It's fine, Major."

"It ain't fine, Briggland."

"What I mean is, it ain't right, but I know if you could do anything, you would. It's not your fault Derco's a psychopathic fuck."

"You know what hurts Briggland? Being spanked on a wet ass. I'm gonna let that one go, because it's true, but one more cuss-word out of you, and I'll show you what that feels like, understood?"

"Yes, Major." I can't help smiling, or the feeling that he's letting me get away with murder, both because he feels bad about said psychopathic fuck exploiting me like he is, and even though he's all about the letting go today, I know he's giving me leeway because of Rye. "So have I earned clothes back? Because I really don't relish in the idea of walking around this place in bare feet." Also, that's got to be the cleanest fucking sentence I've said in a long while.

"You've barely earned that much, but I'll give you boots."

That's not so bad, and besides, the thought of what Ridomie would say and do if he knew I was walking around this place shirtless still entertains me. Makes me feel like he's not too far away.
I put everything into my training, once the Major finally lets me off Field Duty, and I learn not to fuck with him. Derco wants me fucking trained? Fine. I'll become a soldier, good as any clone and he's a fucking idiot for allowing it. I know he thinks I'll eventually 'see the Ryker light' and join the family mission someday, but he's in for a real surprise. Maybe I'll even match up to the Major some day. That guy's so fucking hard on me. Me being his kid doesn't get me any special favors and neither does the fact I just don't work right without Ridomie. If anything, it makes him grind me harder into the ground; making me fight through the pain, making me think about it less; making me use it. Thinking about it less isn't the same as forgetting. I never forget. It's just shelved in the daytime, so I can do shit, because I can't fucking doing shit; can't function while thinking about Ridomie.

So, I make learning something I do for Rye and that helps. Thinking I'm just doing another thing he's asked me to, keeps me going, makes it feel like he's here. The boys are sometimes wary of me. I think they can sense when I'm angry and an angry Ryker is never a good thing – their instincts on that one are too deep to ever let it go. I try not to be too much of a dick, but I am a dick, so there's only so much effort I'm willing to put into that, especially with the mood I'm in. A mood that I can only explain in Majorisms—and also, it's a mood that feels like the Major looks.

It would be real fucking nice to take out my bad mood on Derek's face, but that guy hasn't been around since that one day shortly after Ridomie was taken. It's been four weeks since they took Ridomie from me, and just under four weeks since I've seen Derek's face—no coincidences or mysteries there. But Derco, he's around all the fucking time. Watching me. Seeing what I can do. What I can't do. Making sure I keep my Ryker-ass on Cyntripien.

And the blood draws continue to happen.

"I'm really getting tired of this shit. If your fucking lab rats can't get it right, I shouldn't be subjected to this all the fucking time. I'm a Ryker for fuck'sakes." Yeah, I try pulling that card to see if it gets me anywhere. It doesn't. Not really.

The Major makes move to (probably) spank my ass in front of all the clones and lab rats present for the fucking aforementioned blood draw. Derco stops him and takes the funny looking syringe from the dude who was going to jab me. He does the jab himself. Fucking hard. I wince. "I must say, I am happy to hear you're finally embracing your station to some degree, but embracing the Ryker name means respecting the head Ryker. I'm having your fucktoy beaten for that." His voice is cool and nonchalant, like he's discussing, fucking, the behavior of ants or something. I guess he is.

"What? C'mon. For that?"

"Twice then."

Fucking asshole. "I'm sorry, okay. Beat me, don't take it out on Ridomie."

"Good idea. I will beat you." I sigh relief. "I'm still having the clone beat. In fact, I'll make it interesting."

"Wh-what do you mean by that?"

"You'll see," he says, taking my fucking blood again. It's not a nice you'll see. It's a you'll see that sends fucking shivers up my spine.

The Major has words for me afterward. "That was stupid, kid. I'm still spanking you for that and I
don't feel sorry for yah. I keep tellin' you. Neither of us are in a position to act so brazen with Derco. He'll make you pay. Suffer. He's good at it."

I think he does feel a little bit sorry for me. I'm just angry and want to break yet more shit, which he's been trying to help me with, and he's right, Derco is the wrong person to express my hatred of him to.

The Major drags me off to the eating area and that's where he spanks me (like people want to see that while they eat) but it's sobering, because he makes it a good one and no, I can't hold still and yes I look like a wimpy little kid getting a spanking. There's something that's always gonna be embarrassing about having your bare-bottom reddened in front of your peers – especially since they, well they kinda look up to me, even if they shouldn't.

Still, I end up crying and realize after: I fucking needed that.

Also after, the Major looks me over in a way that's become perfunctory. He's looking and judging my state constantly. "I'm okay," I deny, pulling up my pants.

"No yer not, but that made you feel better." He crosses his arms, closing the deal on it.

That I can't deny. I piss and moan about those kinds of spankings, but they help. They ground me.

"I'm gonna be off-planet today, kid," he says suddenly. "I wanted to take you with me, but, well, Derco."

He won't let me off the planet for anything. "Y-you're going?" I didn't realize how much that would terrify me. The Major's become something of a rock for me.

He nods. "I wouldn't go, if I didn't have to. It's important." In other words, he can't fucking tell me. Fuck. Fine.

"I'll be fine. I'm not some little kid."

"No, but yer my kid," he says in his gruff, scratchy, voice. Whenever he says shit like that, he's so full of feeling. I'm sure it must get to even the heartless like Derco. "I might not always be able to tell you exactly where I'm goin', or what I'm up to, but I wanna make sure I tell yeh what I can because yer important to me. Y'know?"

He must be worried about me if he's laying down the only kinda sap the Major knows how to. I nod. "I-I know, but you'll be back for…?" for whatever the fuck Derco's got planned.

"I'll be back. Then I'll take you to visit yer granddaddy, okay?"

I nod.

"But for Ryker's sake Briggland, please promise me you'll stay out of trouble for one fuckin' day? I'm beggin' yah kid. I know how much you hate the world right now – you're not alone with that – but yer only hurtin' yerself and, and the ones that love you t'death by bein' stupid. Might feel good in the interim, but serves nothin' in the long run. Trust me. I know."

Fuck. The Major's gonna have to watch whatever sadistic shit Derco's got planned ('cause you know it's sadistic) and he's gonna hate it too. "Yes, sir. Promise. I'll behave for one day. Miracles do happen," I joke.

He smiles his tiny, Major, quarter-smile. It also hits me now, in this moment, just how fucking
much the guy loves me. He doesn't ask much 'a me, well, unless you count the grueling, fucking practice sessions that have me on the ground with exhaustion, but that's all physical and fleeting; he's never asked me to sell my soul for him – if Ryker's have a soul that is – and that's what counts with me. You should be allowed to sell it if you want, but no one should ask that of you.

I've done nothing but throw all my dickishness in his face, but this, this is all the humanity we've got; the humanity we build for ourselves between the people we love. The little moments, in between all the fucking bullshit, and evil motherfuckers.

I feel like I should say something, show him I'm grateful it's him and not anyone else that sired me. I get an idea. I'm gonna say it. And not just some thing I'm comfortable saying, I'm gonna say it how he always pictured. I just, I gotta work myself up a little more, but I will. I'm gonna say the D-word. He'll be so fucking happy.

"Thanks, kid. Keep yerself busy. That's an order."

"Yes, sir. Be safe. That's an order."

"Aye, Captain Ryker." He puts an arm around my head and pulls it close, kissing the top. "Love yah, kid. Fuck, I love yah."

And I do. I do feel loved.

~**~

I've always had nightmares, but this one's different. This one haunts me while I'm awake, like it means something.

Can't help feeling like it might be a message, but how can it be?

I appear in an abandoned schoolyard, like what they had on Sundrean way back when I was just a young'un. There's a strange red-orange hue over everything and sand stretches in every direction, like an ancient, Earth-desert. Trees grow out of the ground, even though it should be impossible, but it's a dream, so I guess anything goes. They're sparse and in strange places. I walk until I approach a fence, which I always climb over, even though I could jump it. It's like I'm taking my time, waiting for something to pounce, so I can kill it, but there never is. I'm always the only one in this desolate place.

It's eerily quiet. I'm driven forward. I know where to go, but I don't know how I know.

The building is run down, and as abandoned looking as everything else in this forsaken place. I hate being there, but I know I need to; need to do something important, so I keep walking. When I enter, it's cold. Everything up until this point's been hot; incinerator hot, but inside (if you can call it that with all the busted walls) is cold. An empty, desperate feeling encompasses me.

That's when I hear the crying. It's a small, scared sound, but it carries through the building, even though it shouldn't with all the broken walls. I feel like I'm on a hunt to nowhere, following it. The sound always seems to be far away, until I get closer to it, 'till I'm where it should be, then it's far away again. Sounds like a little kid mewling for his mama.

Was like that for so many nights, 'till the sound became words, and the words became something scarier than the dream.

"Dad-Daddy? Daddy." I know that's what I hear. Every damn night for weeks, and then that bullshit. That's what I hear now. A little boy's voice, calling me, begging for me to save him. It all
hits too close to what's going on with Briggland. Is my fucking subconscious trying to make me feel guilty for not being there when he was just a tiny mite? 'Cause I'm fucking already there with that. I feel guilty as fuck that he was left to fend for himself, without me. Me, the person who's supposed to protect him from everything. The thing I'm doing a shit job at even now with what he goes through on behalf of the blood I gave him.

I don't know. I don't know what it means, or if it means anything. I just know it stays with me now, even when I'm awake. Seeing how torn up he is over Ridomie makes the dream that much more relevant.

And that.

I wish I could fucking fix that.

To make matters worse, I wake up screaming, overwhelmed with the pain, and frustration of it all, the fucking, eeriness of it all. The whole thing terrifies me to my core. And because my kid won't go back to his room to sleep, he's beside me. My screaming wakes him. I have no fucking clue what to do about anything.

I'm in my spot. Watching her. It's fucking creepy I know, but I can't do much else. I agree with Brigg – she's not someone I want to see either, but watching her's different than seeing her. At first I did it because I miss her. Love her. And no, I can't seem to stop loving her, but that's not why I'm here this time. I'm here for Briggland. The end. If she does anything I need to know about, well, I want to know about it. Right now, she's the only thing out of the ordinary I got.

I can't find shit on the bald-headed, tattooed-kid, but maybe I can find out what she's up to. She's not perfect. She could slip up. I just have to watch long enough.

'Course, I'm not impervious. Watching her stirs things in me. Old things. New things. She's the mother of my child – that fucking means something to me. And somehow, it's a fucking kink: I wanna bend her over, fuck her and make more Brigglands. Drives me a bit crazy thinking about it, her, full and round with another Ryker. My Ryker. Love a Brigglandette too, but with the fucked up ideas about Ryker-woman floating around, it's just easier if we have more boys.

My but she is beautiful with her hair, red as flames and copper skin to match. I lose myself for a bit, thinking 'bout her, 'bout us, 'bout how much I just want to take her and Briggland and hide them both away somewhere. I come to, suddenly awake, having fallen asleep, for once not having dreamt at all. I look to check on her one more time before I leave, but she's gone.
Okay, so I chickened out on writing a full-on torture scene. I will write one, one day. I *do* think it's important to write out of my comfort zone to stretch my writing skills.

But anyway, in this case, it didn't exactly fit the story at this point, or serve a true purpose. I'll leave it for now, and if when I read the whole thing again it feels lacking, I'll add. As is, you'll get the idea.

I promise we will be back to Rye's head soon!

Thanks for continuing to read! Love you all.

P.S. I have another chapter of WW half-done and coming soon!

I need a fucking break and I know Ridomie'd want me to check on them while he's not here, so I go. I've been going. Miss Taggart, Ridomie's mama really likes me, too much maybe. Let's me do almost whatever I want. It's a bit weird having Ridomie's mama make eyes at me, but she's hot, so I don't think about it too much, or how old she might be. Instead, I enjoy how much it feels like being with Rye.

He's like her in some ways. It's mostly an energy thing, and it makes me consider just how we can move energy from one place to another—absorb and give energy. It's like with Moldevite, sapping my strength; giving it away. But with Ridomie, he takes from the Moldevite. Huh. So Ridomie-typical—he's even able to make the Moldevite his bitch.

Miss Taggart (I know she asked me to call her by her first name, but I can't help calling her what Rye does—course I pick when he's gone to behave myself) slides up to me. "You're just in time. The babes are up and they're looking forward to trying to beat you up."

I smile. "Good thing I came then."

She smiles and the way she smiles, has elements of Ridomie. It makes my heartache. She frowns. "You miss him."

"'Course I do. Why wouldn't I—oh right, guess that's not very Ryker of me." Fucking Ryker racism.

"You're different," she decides and is looking at me in a way she hasn't before. It seems like forever until she says, "the kids can wait. I want to show you something."

My stomach does flips and I get excited tingles everywhere—like I drank a pot of coffee or something, and it's not because she's turning me on. For once, my dick isn't doing the majority of my thinking. I miss Ridomie so bad it hurts too much to be turned on. Literally. My blood aches for him, and it's starting to drive me a bit crazy.

She drags me off to a section I've never seen before. Must be the Mothers' lair, or something. It's a large space, like they have for the clones with rows of beds. I feel a pang of sadness for the
Mothers. They don't get any privacy either; no space to call their own. Guess this is what happens around here for the subhuman. I fucking hate this place. "What you showin' me this for? To make me feel bad? I know we treat you like dirt—worse than dirt."

She smiles at me, like a mother would, with love and wisdom, so unlike the younger girl-like flirtations she usually gives me and I start to think that I've been getting played all along. "Do you know how old I am, Briggland?"

I shake my head. I don't know how old anyone here is.

"I am the first Mother. I was created from female Ryker DNA long before the Mother's project began. I served the last Lady Ryker."

Okay. She's got my fucking attention. "Say what now?"

"Ridomie doesn't know that. I don't mention it to anyone. Of course, some know, but it's not common knowledge."

In other words, please don't tell anyone, but I know I can't ask that of you. Got it. "Why you tellin' me?"

"Ridomie was my first, my first babe. He was my only one for a long time. He might not be mine exactly, I'm not supposed to care about him like he's mine, but…"

But she does.

"I'm going to get him back. Even if I have to fuck the world, I'm going to get him back."

She wants to believe me, but I get it; hope died in this place a long time ago. "Rykers weren't always, like they are now," she says trying to be euphemistic.

"I don't care if you say they're dicks, they're fucking dicks. Hell, I'm a fucking dick most of the time."

She won't agree, too brainwashed, and too scared to say anything else. "Look, we shouldn't take too long. I need to show you something."

We continue to the back of the large room, filled with beds. Beyond, there's a large wall filled with books, like an old-time-y library back on Earth. "We're allowed to keep these of the boys; they're journals. Lord Ryker doesn't like wasting time and resources making us, we don't have rights to access anything in the Ryker databases—if we see something he doesn't want us to see, he has to incinerate us."

"I thought Rykers don't come down here?"

"Well other than you, they don't, but there are plenty of ways for him to find out anything he wants to know about the goings on in the Mother's Nursery."

Guess he really wants Mothers in the dark.

"But these journals hold only information Mothers can know; for raising proper Rykers. We are allowed to take any kinds of notes we like about our Ryker younglings. Of course there is protocol we must follow, but over time, we've come up with best ways of achieving that protocol; we're always trying to improve, and we record this for any new Mothers who might be made." She heads over to a particular section and pulls out A Something akin to binder, only it has no rings. The
pages seem to stick inside magically. And holy shit, the binder is all about Ridomie. "Is that Ridomie's baby book?"

"Baby book?"

"Nevermind. Is that Ridomie when he was little?"

"Yes," she says proudly. She flips through the pages showing me. "Ridomie was one of a kind. There's not a lot of information on ones like Ridomie."

"Um, not to be rude," yeah I'm actually trying not to be rude and Ridomie's not even here to see, "but how can he be one of a kind if there are others like Ridomie?"

Her smile is patient, like I would imagine it to be when she teaches the young ones. "There have been others born that are like Ridomie, with some of his features, but no one's quite the same as him. Still, we put them into the same category in terms of raising them. They are… more challenging."

She points to a picture of a young Ridomie being disciplined. "Is that him getting a spanking?"

Now there's something I've never seen.

"Yes," she says. "He was a good boy, but on occasion, he could be willful. I always hated spanking Ridomie most. But spanking clones improves behavior and results in less incinerations. Keeping that thought in mind helped me do it."

All I can think about right now is seeing Ridomie get spanked. That would be awesome. Someday, I'm gonna make it happen.

She keeps flipping. "I want to give you this," she says. It's a picture, a side profile of Ridomie. He's got his hard intense stare going, his feathery, dark mohawk is grown in a little on the sides of his skull. He looks handsome. His skin golden—a dark shade of olive with a hue that makes it golden. His eyes, two silver spheres, and ready to cut whatever's sharpest on this damn planet. I immediately fall in love with the photo. I can even see the cut of Ridomie's strong shoulders. I remember what his arms felt like around me. I tear up.

When she removes it from the page, it doesn't peel off, like a photo from an Earth photo book would, it kind of snaps off, like it was stuck on by a magnet. She hands it to me. "Th-thank you," I say. "Won't anyone notice it's gone?"

She shakes her head. "Like I said. These are for the benefit of the Mothers. We may edit and change as we please. I remember that day. It was his last day here. It wasn't really necessary for documentary reasons, just an indulgence of mine. I was trying to get him to smile for me, but he was upset. He didn't want to leave; the best he could manage was stoic."

Huh. Even back then he was like he is now.

"I honestly didn't expect to keep it as long as I have, but it was such a nice recording, even without the full smile, I couldn't bear to get rid of it. I've never had much luck getting him smiling—but you have Briggland. That brings me great joy."

Yeah? Well he's still a moody bastard, I don't say. I'm too busy beaming and feeling like a teen who's just found out his crush likes him back, even though yeah, I already know Ridomie's crazy about me. "I'll get him back," I tell her again.

She's biting her lip and I know she's grateful for me even trying, but it dawns on me why I'm really
getting this picture—she doesn't believe he's ever coming back. This is to remember him by. And that makes me fucking angry. Not at her. Just thinking that even A Mother, the Mother, doesn't believe in miracles is fucking awful. She's too brainwashed to argue with me too, and I can't. I can't be in here a moment longer. 'I think now would be a good time to take me to the children, Miss Taggart.'

She's no longer playful and flirty with me, dropping the act completely; being the warrior she really is. "Yes, Captian Ryker, sir."

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We're walk down the hallway to my doom, the Major leading me by my neck from behind, his displeased look firmly in place—yeah I can't see it, but I can feel it burning the fuck into the back of my skull. We reach the double, white, sliding doors and they open for us as if by magic. Derco's waiting inside for us. "Oh, do come in Lexington," he says being a facetious fuck, because we barged in.

"Here's the kid." The Major's trying to act like he doesn't care, but he does care; a whole lot.

"Lexington. Thank you. You can stand over there," he says to the Major, pointing to a wall on the far side of the room. With the nod of Derco's head, I'm grabbed by two clones I don't know (there seem to be no shortage of those, and I can tell they're unraised), the Major flinches, and I'm dragged to center stage. Center stage is a large, white, circular dais, raised only inches, and floating in midair.

They jump, in sync, not needing my assistance, and in a heartbeat, we're up on it. A fancy set of ties lower to us. "Take his shirt off," Derco instructs.

Hey! Careful with that, I don't say—the Major was a real hard-ass about giving me the right to wear a shirt again—but I glare the fuck out of them. "I can do it, I can do it," I tell them, and they actually let me fucking do it. They let go of me, and I take my shirt off, handing it to them, still glaring—I glare at the whole room.

This is not my first rodeo, so once my shirt's off, and gone, I raise my arms overhead, letting them strap me in. Let's get this shit over with. The straps hold me so I'm only just dangling. My tip-toes touch the ground, which is worse than if I couldn't touch at all, because it gives you the hope like you could touch, and take the god damned pressure off your shoulders, but then you fucking can't. A bit of a panic sets in; I try not to let anyone see me taking a few deep breaths to settle myself.

Derco is smiling with glee. He really does fucking love this shit. "Comfortable?"

I keep trying to breathe as steadily as I can. "No, Sir." I tell him what he wants to hear. I don't give a fuck about pleasing him, I just want this over with.

"Good, because you're going to be there awhile." He points my attention to a raised, white circle on the floor, just off from the weird fucking dais I'm on. My visual path to it is clear. With a quick flash, I see why—it's Ridomie, like he's here in this room, only I know he's not here. It's like a live-stream computer graphic in as many fucking dimensions as a person can exist.

I know there's no point, but I struggle to get to him anyway. I can't help him. I ache all the time, and I know it's because my blood is reaching out for him, searching for him, and never getting the satisfaction of touching him. "Rye!" All my moving does is pull at my fucking shoulders, and makes them hurt more. It makes me wish for the lower gravity of Earth, where I wouldn't hang so heavy in these shackles.
In true Ridomie form, he doesn’t say anything, and I know what that means. Because he's not allowed to call me Briggland, is not really supposed to refer to me as Ryker either, unless we're on the field, and is not going to call me Sir, in whatever time we have together, he decides on saying nothing at all. I don't want him to either. His silence is the best thing he can do.

I've fucking missed him. I wasn't prepared for looking at him to hurt this much. I take in his sliver eyes, and his copper skin. He's still got the dark Mohawk down the center of his head—I don't know why I expected it to be gone, but I did, and I'm glad it's fucking not. In fact, he's mostly the same, his shoulders still bulge, and his muscles still flex like the skin is going to burst; he's every bit the formidable force he was when he was taken from me.

There's just one difference, and that's aside from the bruises on his face that have to be fresh; still dripping with blood: Ridomie doesn't have any of the burning defiance that he tries to deny is there, but that sizzles through him anyway. It's gone. Vanished like it never was. He doesn't look at me, though I can tell he's itching to, but he won't do it before he's told. He doesn't have to wait long.

"There he is, the clone that won my nephew's heart."

Ridomie doesn't move, not even a flinch, but it's not the rebellion you might think it is, it's Ridomie behaving best he can. We both must be in a lot of fucking trouble. "I wanted to have you incinerated, but my son had use for you, and now it would seem so do I. Good job, son," Derco says.

Huh? Derek?

Derek, looking like the arrogant fuck he is, steps into view behind Ridomie. And that's when Rye gives himself away, the smallest of shivers running through him. He's scared of Derek. Not like him at all. What the fuck has Derek been doing to him?

"Thank you, Father." He turns to Ridomie. "Oh no, no. What did I tell you about standing when I am in the room? That's going to cost you, I'm afraid. On your knees, where you belong."

Ridomie doesn't hesitate. He's on his knees, still at ridged attention. I know he'll feel embarrassed. I hate that he will.

"How are you enjoying my little surprise, Briggland?" Derco asks me.

Not fucking at all, because I know where this is going. He's going to beat the fuck out of us both. I don't answer; it angers him of course. "Beat the clone."

Derek takes great pleasure in belting Ridomie across the face, smack dab into one of the bruises already there. Fresh blood spills onto the floor. I stare at Rye's beautiful face, as it's getting beat, shocked by the violence a moment or two, before I can get my head together. "No. No sir. I'm not enjoying it."

Derco isn't the sort that wants fake answers to his questions. He wants the truth. When he's doing something you genuinely don't like, it's all the better for him to know that. I get that now. I don't want to give him what he wants, but I don't want him to beat Ridomie more. "Please. Please!"

Derco smiles wider and signals to Derek to stop. And Derek does, immediately, not willing to disobey his father. Ridomie is breathing hard, trying not to show how much what Derek did hurt him. "I'm glad you hate it," Derco says. "Now, this is how this is going to go. I'm going to have him beat to a pulp, and you're going to learn a lesson in how a Ryker behaves. He can watch the
same done to you, with whatever's left of his consciousness. Sound good?"

I'm already here. I'm already in trouble. There's no changing it. I set my full gaze on him, and suddenly I'm not Briggland, some chump they yanked off of Earth, I'm Briggland Fucking Ryker. "I'll make you regret every finger that's laid on him."

I get a sharp backhand. "You're going to pay for that."

And I do.

**

I open my eyes, or well, eye, and everything's bleary. I make out the shape of the Major who's sitting in a chair beside me, his head in his hands and is he... is he crying? "H-h-heya, Major. You miss me?" I think I slurred some. "How looong I bin out?"

"Brigg? Oh thank fuck. I thought... fuck." He's up and looking me over.

"Yeeeer, not ge'in rid-o-me so eeeasy." Jesus. I really can't talk so well.

"Fuck. Just, just lie the fuck still." I can make out how red his eyes are—probably from all the crying, which I will make fun of him for later.

"I'll bee fine," I say, and try to sit up anyway.

"Kid. Please."

Even in my state, I can hear the level of desperate in his voice. Also, I now realize I'm not in my room, I'm in the Major's, on his bed. "Yessir. I'lllll just sleep." I close my eyes again, and I'm out.

I'm out, but it's a fitful sleep. I'm plagued with flashes of Ridomie's face when they were done with him, his blood spilling on the floor. A few times I flinched thinking it would spray me, his blood I mean—it was so god damned real looking—but it was only spraying the floor of wherever the fuck they were beating on Rye. Not that I cared about having Ridomie's blood on me, it was just gut reaction to the shock of it coming out of him. There was so much, so much fucking blood.

When I wake up, I can see better, and the Major's still with me. He doesn't look like he's slept at all. He does look like he needs to sleep. I tell him. "Jeez Major, anyone tell you, you look like the dead walking?" I notice I feel a lot better than I did.

He perks up some. "H-how you feelin'?"

"Like hell, but better than the last I woke up."

"You're tellin' me, with the way you were screamin'."

"Screaming?"

"You—you don't recall?"

I shake my head. "How long I been out?"

"You've been in and out a for a week. I managed to get a little food and water in you, but you weren't too coherent." The Major's voice is rough. Rough. Rougher than I've ever heard it. It makes me worry.
I sit up and this time he lets me. I ache, and I'm still fucking beat up all over, but I'm okay enough to sit up. And it's kinda weird I'm still this beat up feeling with all the Rykortisol the Major's probably given me. "You been holding back on the Rykortisol, Major? I could really use some more."

He shakes his head, and I don't like the way his face looks—he looks like he's lost all fucking hope. "I've given you plenty it's, look." He points to my wrist.

Looking at it is enough to make me sick. Around my wrist, blacker than Derco's soul (if Rykerians even have those) is a bracelet made of pure Moldevite. It's a thin band, but it's enough to really fuck with me. "What the hell? How does it come off?" It's seamless, and tight to my skin.

"It doesn't. Has to be smashed off at the weak part where they poured the liquid Moldevite."

Fuck. I do not remember that part. "Liquid Moldevite?"

"Yeah. I've never seen anything like it." The Major looks, holy fuck, he's fucking terrified. "I never should have told him about the… fuck it's all my fault Briggland. I told him about Moldevite."

"It's not. It's not your fault he took A Thing and decided to do evil fucking things with it."

The Major is still Major enough to give me the stink-eye about the swearing. "Oh c'mon. It was appropriate."

"It's about respect, Briggland. It's time for you to have respect."

I think about that. He's right. Respect isn't just the thing you do when you admire a person or a thing, it has another meaning too, one I'm learning well. It's also about respect for a power that can defeat you if you don't heed it. That's a tough pill to swallow when you don't admire the power, or the person of power, but it's no less huge, and no less likely to swallow you whole if you don't respect it. It's harder kind of respect—having respect for that which you don't admire. But it's called maturity, and it's a maturity I need. That's the kind of respect I need to have for Derco anyway.

For the Major, it's time I showed more of the former. I do admire him, yet I'm a real ass. I can't even do the smallest thing he asks, like stop fucking swearing in his presence. I'm not going to stop swearing, but I won't in front of him anymore—at least, I'll do my dandiest. "I'm sorry, sir. It won't happen again."

That gets me his quarter, smirk-smile. "See that it doesn't—though, I'm thinkin' some curse words are bound to slip through."

It feels nice for us to both be our version of normal, when everything's gone to shit. "So, this mean I'm going to heal, slow?"

"'Fraid so. The Rykortisol helps some. I'll give you more in a bit."

I'm afraid to fucking ask, because I know they're not gonna give him Rykortisol, but I ask anyway. "How'd Rye make out?" I do remember him, but my brain is trying to forget what it saw. Images of him being beat over and over with that fucking, thing. Any time I've remembered anything, I've had to remind myself that Ridomie is made of the strongest stuff imaginable, and when that failed, that no one's going to kill him, because they need him to keep me in line. Which I fucking hate, but at least it buys me time.

The Major doesn't look sure as to how to answer me. He takes a heaving breathe. "He's alive."

That's it. That's all the Major can offer me. And it's fucking maddening. "I'm gonna find out more,
soon as I can, but I gotta be careful how I do that you see."

I nod and lay back down, feeling at square one with this whole thing, only a lot more pissed off. "So what do we do now, sir?"

"You are going to fucking stay put for another couple of days, and another few rounds of however much Rykortisol I have to give you to make you whole again. Then back to it Briggland, and that's all there is."

"What do you mean that's all there is?"

"You want to see Ridomie beat like that again?"

"No."

"Then we keep low awhile."

"How long is awhile?" Time is different here. I know that much. Awhile could be a hundred years to the Major.

"Awhile. And that's the end of it Briggland." I'm about to argue, in true Briggland style, but when he stands to probably storm off, he's wavering off balance. The Major doesn't waver off balance, no matter what he's been through. I look at my wrist. It's the damn Moldevite, combined with how run down he is, isn't it? I don't mention it. Instead, I stop being fucking self-centered. This isn't just about me and my love life, and I've been making it about just me and my love life.

"I'm sorry, sir. Awhile. Got it." The Major doesn't want Ridomie gone anymore than I do, and hates thinking about what's being done to him just as much. He surprises me when he moves to the other side of the bed, and lays down beside me. How's he supposed to get rest that way? He'd be better off far away from my Moldevite-ridden wrist.

"Maybe I should go lie down in my bed, sir? It can't be comfortable with me taking up a bunch of space."

"What did I just say about you staying put?"

"But I—"

"Go back to sleep, son. Sleep is the only thing that's going to get you better right now."

All these millennia, and sleep is still the best medicine.

Fine. He wants to be a stubborn ass? Fine. I close my eyes. I can't sleep, and neither can he, but we lay there anyway and wait for the answers that never come.

**

I believe in the stars. They've been around longer than anyone, even longer than Rykers; they've seen it all. Some races claim they've learned to read'em. Hard to say if it's true, but I like to believe that anyway; it's better than having nothing to believe in.

I laid with Brigg long as I could, but I'm in too weak a state to be lying next to more Moldevite, especially with my own still hanging around my neck. While he sleeps, I go. I know he must be wondering what a coward his daddy is. Not standing up to Derco. Letting his love be pulled off planet and tortured. Telling him he needs to fall in line, do as he's told, keep his head down. I know
what I would have thought at his age, only I didn't have to watch my daddy bow to some other Ryker.

So here I am, looking up at the stars, above where Dess is residing for the time being, hoping some of them say something good about what's in store for my boy, or fuck, just hoping she's got something good for me. Because I'm here to beg, and I'll do whatever I need to, so she'll help us.

This time, she's ready for me; catching her off guard is no longer an option. She's knows I don't listen well, and even though she wanted me to stay away, I was always coming back. "Lexy."

"I told you not to call me that, woman."

She laughs a laugh that's annoying because it's so damn beautiful. Before I know it, I'm falling in love with her again—so basically, same old shit. "You're here, so you must need something from me."

I want to touch her, run my fingers along her soft, coppery skin. I refrain; it takes strength, but I do. It also takes strength to say what I need to, because it's the last thing I want, but being a good parent means doing things that are best for your kid, and not yourself. "I need you to take him Dess. Take him away from here, and hide him like you did before."

"I can't. I told you, he needs to be here now. Here is better. Make him a Ryker."

"Bein' a Ryker is the worst possible fate for him."

"It's not."

"I'm all ears. Tell me why and I'll leave you alone."

She answers, but it's so low, I barely hear her. I think she says, "because it's the only thing I haven't tried."

"What was that?"

Instead of another answer, she pounces me, knocking me to the ground. I'm taken back to forever ago, hit with the same force that bonded me to this woman forever, and I'm staring at her, a lovesick Ryker, ready and waiting to do her bidding. She laces her hand in one of mine, and I watch her eyes, barely able to breathe. "You look like shit, Ryker." Before I can complain about that, her lips are on mine, and I don't know what fucking year it is for a long time.

My body fills with her—all the leftover, empty places inside soothed with her. Briggland's already filled some of'em up of course, but there are some places only your lover can fill. Breathing seems easier, heart beating easier, everything easier; the weight of all the years without out her instantly lifted. I feel the way she's breathing, and it gives her away—fuck anything she says, she feels like I do; hopelessly in love, and we give ourselves over to it, to love. It makes us both pathetic, and we don't fucking care, so long as we're together like this, we're the happiest fuckers in the universe.

I let her kiss me, let it fuel me 'till I combust. I grab onto her thigh, and press her to me, flipping us so I'm overtop of her. She's loves it, I love it—the fight for dominance like we always do. The two of us tangling together, breaking shit, while we make love. Or fuck—whatever you want to call it.

She reaches to the waistband of my pants, and yanks, letting my hard cock fall out, while I paw at her red shorts, like a young Ryker about to have his first time. "You want me Ryker?" she says, all breathy and shit.
“I always want you, Dess.” Even when I fucking hate you. And I do. I love her and I hate her. It’s what love is.

My cock slides into her, too fucking easy this time, but I enjoy the warmth and wetness. Both of us turn into animals. I start sucking at her neck too hard, digging my fingers too deep into her scalp. She pushes her nails into the flesh of my back, till hot Ryker blood's pouring down it. I pound into her, with force that will bruise even the likes of her, and rather than just take it, she absorbs me consciously, acting as the thing that cancels out my force, rather than the thing that's destroyed by it, moaning all the while. "That's it Lexy, more. More." I give her more, and it's raw and violent; pure.

When we're done, we're caked in dried blood and bruises. Everything is wrenched from me, yet I feel more alive than I've ever been. I've got her lying where she should be, on my barrel chest, my chin nuzzled against her fire-red hair. "He's got to be with you, Lex."

I smile at her and it's just a tick more than my standard quarter smile. "Was that what the sex was for? So I'll listen to yah, and you don't gotta tell me why?"

"Did it work?"

"No, but it's not like I'm gettin' the information from you anyway."

She laughs. "You aren't. But I'll tell you something, so you can get rid of any ideas of me taking him anywhere."

"Yeah? and what's that?"

"He's too old now, he's too powerful already."

"Too powerful for what, Dess?"

"To travel with me. When he was younger it wasn't as bad. I could be with him little bits at a time, before they could find him, find us—his blood was weaker then. But now us together, that's like a magnet, they'll find us faster, easier. Your blood protects him, mine gets him killed."

"Gets him killed? Dess?"

She nods. "I can't be with him anymore, Major. Just keep him safe with you."

"Who's tryin' to kill our boy?"

She shakes her head. "Someone you don't have to worry about if you keep him at Ryker Corp."

In other words, she's not fucking answering that question.

"Congratulations, Major. You're a Daddy."

Even though she's teasing, it makes me smile. Yeah, I am. And while I still don't like the conditions under which I have to keep Briggland, it's somewhat comforting knowing it's a must. I was going crazy in a way I wouldn't even let myself think about, at the idea of him being shipped off again, even if I thought it best for him.

I push her hair back, and stare at her beautiful face, one last time. "Is this goodbye?"

She laughs at that. "I bet you'd like to finally be rid of me, Ryker. But no, we're never goodbye—you got that?"
"Yes, ma'am."

She leans in for a kiss, and we get five blissful seconds together, before we're fighting again. I'm getting dressed, and I make the mistake of asking her more questions. "What about this Briggland look-a-like being seen every where? I think I'm owed information on that one by this point, darlin'."

That makes her angry. "You're owed nothing."

"How in the fucking Ryker can you say that? I'm his daddy, but I can't know enough about what's going on with these fucks to keep him safe? Fuck that Dess. Just fuck that. And another thing, I should know who's settin' on killin' him." I was all love-drunk before, and accepting what she said, but that haze has left me.

"I already told you Ryker. No. Now get out."

"Oh I'll get out all right. And I ain't comin' back neither. We don't need you." I'm pissed. Madder than pissed. Whatever the fuck level the maddest you can be is.

"Good," she says, fucking smiling.

I don't bother taking my shirt. I just finish righting my pants, and storm out. I hear her laughing behind me. I don't look back, and have somehow managed to find a way to hate her more than when I came in.

I'm a storm all the way back to my son, and it's not until he's looking at me scared, I even think to tone down my anger. "What happened to you, Major?"

"Huh?" My torso is covered in bruises, scratches and bite marks. "Oh, uh, animal attack," I say and it's not all the way untrue.

He's trying to hold back from laughing. "That why you're so pissed? Did it win?"

I pause to think about that then twist my lips wryly. "Yeah, it won." 'It' always fucking wins. I pull out some more Rykortisol. He's finally looking somewhat decent, but he's not good enough to go back to fighting—I've got to get him back to fighting. "Gimme yer arm kid."

Surprisingly, he does as he's told, and I stick him full of Rykortisol. I'm careful though, and don't jab him. I've been pretty gentle with him these days. "Okay. Have a shower. We're going out."

"Out? Sir?"

"I promised you a visit to yer granddaddy, didn't I kid? The Major always holds true on his promises."

He gets up slow, keeping himself covered in the blanket he seems to like so much, and makes his way off the bed, as I begin taking off my boots, planning on laying down for a few minutes, while he showers. He gets to the door. "You know Major, next time you wanna wrestle with my mama, you'd better get some decent sleep."

I throw one of my boots, so it'll land just above his head, at the top of the doorframe. He laughs. "How'd you know?"

"Because. Aside from the fact that I don't know anything you'd let get close enough to do that to you, you're the maddest I've seen you get, yet your whole body is smiling."
I'm too stunned to answer him. He knows he's right, and wisely says nothing more, but he does head off to shower, laughing all the way.
Short of licking his thumb, and using it to wipe off my face, the Major has done everything, to make sure I'm well-groomed for our visit to Grandfather's place. I'm in, I suppose, what passes for 'dressed-up' here. It's still the same black fatigue-type pants and black shirt, but now I've got a long jacket over top. It's a lot like the Major's fancy long, black jacket, with all the buckles adorning it. In fact, it's almost exactly like the Major's, but mine's got a hood. "Huh, we really do look alike," I say to him, looking in the mirror.

I don't think I've ever seen him smile so big, his malachite eyes shining brightly. He made sure to smooth his hair out with a weird looking brush, making him look like some sort of elven warlord, and he cleaned every bit of dirt from under his nails. Somehow, he doesn't look as gruff as he usually does; still every bit as imposing, but more a Ryker of status, than decorated army general. "Almost like a clone 'a me," he says and he actually fucking winks.

"Why we getting so dolled up this time?" He made me take three damned showers, and almost took me to get my haircut, until I convinced him the twinning look would bode well for us, and we can deal with Derco's stupid rule later—um but said nicer. I'm doing my best to stay on his good side.

"Because my daddy likes you, and I don't know why, but I'm gonna keep it that way."

"Hey! I'm wonderful. Of course he likes me."

He laughs his gruff laugh. "Mostly, yah are, and I can see plenty of reasons for someone to like you, but it's nothin' t'do with you, everythin' to do with me. I expected him to hate any offspring of mine on sight."

"Why does he hate you so much, sir?"

He shrugs. "Don't know."

"How can you not know?"

"Guess I don't ask as many nonsense questions as you do," he says getting irritated.

He thinks he can barricade me from answers as easily as he used to, but things are different now; I'm going in on this one. "Nonsense? So I guess a father-son relationship is just nonsense to you? Not worth asking about?"

It makes him mad because he has to say the truth. "Did you have to be as smart as yer mama? Fine, it's not nonsense, but while you're seeing this kind-old-man-who-invites-people-for-refreshments-act, I know a different man, and he ain't nice. He's not the kind you could ask those questions to. Why don't you like me, Daddy?" he scoffs. "He'd have strung me up by my thumbs for that kinda question. Literally." He shakes his head. "Look, if you need an answer so bad, best I can figure is my weakness. He had big plans for me until he found out I was flawed."
"Do you see me as flawed, sir?"

"What? No. What kinda stupid question is that? I mean, you could behave better, but you ain't flawed."

I shrug. "I have the same thing you have."

"It's my fault you have it."

"I thought you were born with it?"

"Yeah, but I coulda chose to have you a different way and remove the flaw, instead we decided to forgo technology and go natural. You're lucky to be here at all."

"Look where I came from, we don't have a good handle on that technology; I don't know any different. I don't blame you or Mama for that."

"You need to get somethin' straight, kid," he says, dark eyes on me, "yer from here. Not there. And yes it does matter because I coulda done somethin'."

"Fine. Where I grew up then, but you know what? keep blaming yourself. It's real good for you."

"Are you sassing me, boy?"

"No, sir." Except I am, but what I'm saying is true.

We engage in a fierce stare, growling at one another, until I break first and grab him around the waist. "I'm sorry!"

Slowly, he encircles me with his bear-like arms. "You've got to find a better way to say that stuff. I've got too much testosterone for you to talk to me that way kid. But, you're right. I'll find a new way too."

Now would be the perfect time to say it—it's a movie moment. Yeah, Daddy. Say it. Just fucking say it Briggland. But I think I'll sound stupid and I can't and the moment passes.

The Major pulls away. "Well, we ready, kid?"

I nod.

We look damn good dressed in our sharp black attire, and gold Ryker hair brushed to perfection. I am more than a little jealous of the Major's length, and hope at some point, I gain a few damn inches of hair—of all the fucked up status symbols. We march through the hallways, our boots snapping at the floor, our jackets floating behind us, all the way to the West Wing. We get several interesting looks from clones, who try to make out like they're not looking our way, but we both know they are. I get it—we're fucking captivating.

The Major looks nervous once we're at Granddaddy's door. He takes one last look at me, still unable to prevent his eyes from wincing enough at the corners I can tell he's doing it, at the giant bruise on my face that's healing too slowly, before he straightens his jacket, and knocks on the door.

We wait. We wait, and we wait, and we wait. No answer.

"Okay, he's not here, let's go," the Major says.
He's about to turn, and hell, I'm gonna just follow him, I trust him enough to bring me back and honestly? with all this fuss, I'm starting to get nervous about the whole thing too, so I'm fine to come back another day, but then the door swings open.

"Right on time, I see," Grandfather says. If the Major is the elven warlord, Grandfather is definitely the king. As regal as we look, he puts us both to shame. Good or bad, there's something magnificent about him, and I can't help staring with awe in my heart, before I go all Briggland.

"Heya Gramps," I say squeezing past him, and making my way into the room.

I can feel the Major's death lasers on me from behind. "Briggland." The Major makes his way in as well, and I'm making myself at home in front of the tea-like crap—guess he really was expecting us.

"What'd I do?" I say to the Major.

"Gramps? That's disrespectful. Address your grandfather properly, or I'm gonna box your ears."

Before I can correct myself, Grandfather glides through the area where the 'tea' is served, and disrupts our father-son banter. He looks angry. "What happened to your face?"

He's talking to me, and I'm surprised he seems so surprised. "You don't know? You didn't see with whatever magical spy equipment you've got this place rigged with?"

The Major growls at me, and I know the thinks I'm not being respectful enough. "Sir," I add for good measure.

"Stand up," Grandfather says, striding over to get a better look. He uses his thumb, and pointer fingers to grab onto my entire jaw, which enables him to control my whole head. He twists my face so he can inspect the nasty bruise; I submit to it all without another thought. I got all kinds of bruises during practice, but none of them were so terrible that they were still this angry looking after a shitload of Rykortisol, sleep, and time. Just this one. He's a bit rough, but I can tell his lack of care is nothing to do with me so much as it is about me. He's pissed this was done to me, and he's forgetting he's still holding my face. Finally, he tosses my face aside. "Sit."

I sit, and so does he. He doesn't chase his earlier question, and he doesn't lose the rage barreling through him. "Tell me about this 'Gramps' thing," he demands as he pours the weird fucking tea.

I have to see the Major's face, and it doesn't disappoint—he's a restrained storm. "Uh, it's an Earth thing I guess? It's a familiar way to address a Grandfather."

"Familiar, as in affectionate?"

"Yeah."

"I'm unsure about it. I appreciate the affection, but I prefer something respectful. I'm not sure it's enough. Let's try it, and I'll let you know how I feel."

"Yes, sir." I can't help smiling victoriously the Major's way. He's still not impressed.

"I am glad you've come to visit me, and to answer your question, I was away."

"I don't suppose you'd share where?" I ask.

"I was looking for someone, and that's all anyone needs to know."
The Major is quiet in a fucking eerie way, watching on like we're a movie, as we make small talk, and ask some simple get-to-know-you type questions. But I don't take long getting to the: "I'm going to be straight with you, Gramps. I—we, need your help. A friend of mine was taken."

"A friend of yours was taken? By who?"

"Derek."

"I should have that boy strung up by his thumbs."

"Yeah, you should. He thinks that just because Ridomie's a clone, he can do whatever he wants to him." There have been multiple times I have wanted to say fuck during this conversation, I hope the Major's paying attention to how clean my mouth is.

Grandfather looks at me confused and then he starts to laugh. "For a minute there, I thought you said, clone."

"I did say clone. Ridomie's a clone."

That makes him laugh harder. "I know you're not this funny, Lexington. Does he get this from his mother?"

"What is so funny about Ridomie being a clone?" I really don't get the joke.

His laughter stops short. "You're not kidding are you?"

"Not even a little bit. There a problem?"

"Only if you're telling me you've befriended a clone." His voice booms a little bit, and it's frightening, if you wanna know.

I look to the Major to figure out just what the fuck is going on. He doesn't look surprised. Okay, I get it, Granddaddy is a cloneist asshole. "I have," I tell him. The Major's death lasers are on me again, so I tone down my defiance.

His tone is shockingly gentle when he answers. "Briggland, you can't befriend the clones—they're not meant for that."

I'm disappointed. Maybe the most disappointed I've been in a long while, and I've been experiencing some pretty shitty, shit these days. Without knowing him, I began looking up to him—he just seems incredible to me—but this knowledge lets me down more than I have words to say. The Major was right.

"Right, they're only meant to be Ryker slaves."

He sips his tea, and doesn't deny it. "They are."

I want to go into a rant about how they're people too, and how slavery is wrong, and I would if I thought it would do any good.

"We needed an army Briggland, and no one wanted their family members going to war. Clones are bred specifically for war—if they become people, we'll face the same issue."

That in no way assuages me. "You seem like a pretty smart guy to me, you had to know that regardless of the definition you gave them, they were gonna be people?"
He's getting angrier, and while I'm not going to abandon my values, I am going to show respect, if not for his perspective, definitely for his Ryker station, so I don't get my ass kicked. "You are very young, so I shall forgive your ignorance, when you're older, and understand the finer details on ruling an entire planet, you'll see that some decisions must be made for the common good. The lives of a few clones, are nothing compared to the safety of all Rykerians."

I continue to approach him carefully. "I get how you got to that. I get how morally justifying that statement seems for, so many reasons, but you can't use it to justify tyranny, sir."

He's genuinely intrigued. "Tyranny? How is saving billions of people tyranny?"

"When the good of some people takes precedent over the good of others; those others end up as nothing more the metaphorical, sacrificial animal."

"Which is why we don't call them people, and why we don't consider them friends. They are animals. Good Ryker, Briggland, if it gets out that a Ryker considers clones people we'll have havoc. No. Absolutely not. I forbid it."

I get it. The entire system is designed to keep clones, at the bottom of the life barrel, so we can have peace and no one needs to worry about them. Doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure out that clones are going to want the same rights offered to Rykerians and some point, and if they can be brainwashed from birth to believe they're nothing, controlled by threat of incineration, mix in a little societal belief system about them not being people, and voila—everyone can ignore the nasty little word 'slavery', in defense of 'the greater good.'

But I'm no idiot. I can read people well—it's always been a skill of mine—he's got to hold some remorse over this; people don't hide themselves from the whole world for no reason. "Saving billions of Rykerians is a good thing, but I can't justify it while others—whatever you want to call them—live in misery, and are forced to serve one gang’s idea of the 'greater good'. It's a culture of using a living being, as a means to an end, and I can't do that."

"You kill to eat," he says. "How is that different?"

"You're right, and there was a time I struggled with that too. I suppose it could be viewed that eating an animal to live is using an animal as a means to an end—but it's not. It's a universally agreed upon constitution—everything in existence must eat, or consume something else living to sustain its own existence. No living being; plant, animal, human, Rykerian is above the other in deriving sustenance, which makes us all the same. We all need to eat living things to thrive, so we do, but I won't have that mean downgrading a species, or forcing a species to live miserably so I can live."

"Miserably? The clones want for nothing. They have food, and shelter—there hasn't been a war in years, so they've had nothing to do but act as guards and Town's protection."

"They're also beaten, raped and abused."

He stands up, hot, Ryker anger racing through him. "I've had enough of this little visit." He waits, and I guess that's our cue to leave.

"C'mon, Brigg." The Major's been quiet this whole time, but he's got to prompt me to action. I'm too disappointed and furious.

"See you around, Grandfather."

When we're outside the room, the door is too-firmly shut behind us. "All right, hit me with it—
you're gonna tell me you told me so, yeah?" I say to the Major.

He shakes his head. "No. You, you were really somethin' in there kid. I'm fucking proud of yah."

I blush. "Well, I'm sorry I ruined him liking me anyway. I know how much it meant to you."

"Nah. He still likes you. And even if he didn't like you no more? wouldn't matter. I'm glad you got to say what you did."

The weight of the truth suddenly settles on me. "There really is no hope getting him back anytime soon, is there, sir?"

"Not unless we want to get ourselves into a whole mess of trouble, I promise will be bigger than we can handle at this point in time."

"What now then?"

"For now, we get you back to resting. And then we live, Briggland—we do our best at living. C'mon," he says slugging an arm around my shoulders. "We'll get you something to eat, some fresh air, before all the resting you're gonna be doin'."

"Is this your way of having a father-son day?"

"A what?"

"Never mind, sounds good to me." There, that right there would have been a perfect time to slip in the ol' 'Daddy', but what the hell is wrong with me? What more does the poor guy gotta do? I don't know, but I do know, in all my wildest wishes of having a 'Daddy', when I was a little boy staring up at the stars and wishing, never could I have fathomed a guy like the Major. He's the greatest Daddy there is.
Aching Blood

Chapter Notes

Jan 01, 2020
___________________

Hello everyone, and welcome to the new decade. This one's gonna be a wild ride. You ready?

Speaking of wild rides, we are at that point in this story, which totally makes sense as to why my muse left it for a bit. This is classic Mock's muse when we're about to avalanche toward the end of a story -- it leaves it for a bit, has a pout (because it hates when stories have to end) then wanders back hell bent on finishing. There's also lots of angst coming, and a bit of darkness, so buckle up. As always though, you WILL get a happy ending. Okay?

As you may have noticed, I posted the wrong chapter last time *winces*. Sorry about that. I have no excuses to offer. I just fucked up! But this means I didn't have as much ready for posting as I thought. However, I have spent the past week working on this story and it's coming, but slow. A lot of this part needs fixing up, and some additions, and some rewrites. Stuff I'm finally ready to do after 12 years of writing this story. I'm thrilled!

Hope you like it. More to come soon.

Love,
Mock

It's one thing to understand something theoretically, but practical application is a different matter. I've accepted the Ridomie situation, so far as understanding the truth of how things are with my brain, but my blood doesn't give a fuck. The aching is awful.

When I tried to seek out Ter-X to see if he could give me tips for dealing with the terrible mate-blood-withdrawals, I was reminded that he and his brother were sent away with Rye, which only served to fucking depress me and make me smile all at once. Least Rye has them.

I also realize how magnanimous a thing it was for Ter-X to forgive me. I'm the reason he's separated from his mate—the pain he endured—and while he was pissed at first (even if he wouldn't say it directly to me), after his blood cooled some, he stopped being pissed at me.

Ter-X isn't here though, so I ask around to find someone else, and there's no shortage of guys who have lost their mates one way or another. I pick the first guy I run into, a raised clone called Norhal who I learn had a mate who was incinerated on Derco's orders. "Of course I'll talk with you, sir," he says.

I know enough now to know there is no way he'd say no to me, but I don't plan on taking advantage, and I'm not going to ask for personal details; I just want advice. We sit in the eating area, and for the first time, I'm acutely aware of that I'm a Ryker meeting up with a clone. Rykers
don't meet up with clones casually like this. I never would have thought about it before; I hate that it's there now. And I don't give a fuck, but I'm more in the know on which of my actions toward them will get them in trouble, or worse, so I'm careful about being too familiar.

Grandfather was the ace up my sleeve, but that's gone. Just thinking about him is fucking irritating. I should have known he'd be like everyone else around here—he's one of the people responsible for making this place what it is. Which seems super obvious now, and I'm not fucking stupid, well, not that fucking stupid, but I thought maybe his life in solitude changed him, maybe hoped's a better word. That the mistakes of his past were the reasons he went off to think, and that he got better.

That's what would have made him different. But he isn't.

Instead, I've succumbed to looking over my shoulder, monitoring my behavior, keeping reasonable distance from everyone, and everything when I possibly can. "Norhal, man, I just need—how do you soothe the ache? Is there anything?" I cut to the chase.

He looks nervous. My desperation must be tangible, and he doesn't want to give me the answer—it's probably not what I want to hear. "It's okay, just tell me," I say.

"Only time. It will run its course and it does calm down, but your blood has to do that on its own."

"What happens when it's done? It just goes away?"

"No. Not exactly. It never goes away, just gets easier to manage."

"How long's it take to get to that part? The easier to manage part?"

He shrugs. " Took me the space of about twenty-four moons."

That's a year in Earth-time; they have longer moons. "Shit. That's a long time."

"I've seen it take longer too," he says, wincing. "And uh, do you have any er, ah, support?"

"Support?"

"We call it Clone Hovering, or just hovering. There's a group of three or more clones on a person at any given time, hovering there just in case. The blood ache can cause irrational behaviors, and thinking."

"This works?"

"Pretty well. The odd clone has been killed, but we're good at it. We get enough practice."

Huh. "What's irrational?"

"Anger, and attacking Rykers."

"That's a fucking weird response," I say without thinking, but then the reason comes to me. The ache turns to rage pretty quickly, and I want to take out the one responsible for taking my mate from me; I'm sure it often boils down to that—Rykers taking mates from clones, and clones wanting to go after who is responsible. It's lucky for me Ter-X didn't kill me. Bet hovering had something to do with that. I'm a fan of this hovering thing."

He shrugs again, but then he looks around, and gets quiet. "Sex helps too."
“Sex? I can’t have sex with anyone. Ridomie will hunt every clone I fuck down, and murder them.” Providing we get him back.

He nods, and knows I’m not kidding. Ridomie won’t even be able to help himself. “We could arrange a trip for you to, Legion’s.”

“No one’s letting me an inch off the grounds.”

“You want me to be honest with you, right? Even if you’re not going to like what I have to say, yeah?”

“Yes.”

“You’re going to have to have sex at some point. You’ve got time, but your body will demand it, and you won’t be able to resist. You’ll get sicker until you give in.”

Fuck. Maybe I can convince the Major to allow me to sneak off to Legions…? Also, why is everything tied into sex around here? That’s fucking weird.

"Look, Captain Ryker, sir, I know how hard it is. I volunteer myself to help you, if you find me acceptable."

I want to accept, but I realize something. I can't have this hovering system. That would mean clones stopping me, a Ryker from doing things, and if anyone of my family members see that, save the Major, those clones could be incinerated. It will make little difference that a clone could be stopping me from a Ryker-killing-rage-fit. I might have to see if I can enlist the Major, much to my dismay. Love the guy, but do not look forward to him telling me what to do every second of every day—which he will do. Ugh. I'm going to have to come up with a plan B, eventually.

"I'd love that Norhal, and no one would be better," I say; he smiles. "But I can't, it's too risky for you." I explain to him my thinking.

None of it gets rid of the light in his eyes. "I'd like to do something for you, if you're willing, sir. Would you allow me to work on a solution for you?"

"You'd do that, for me?" I guess of course he would. He wouldn't be the first clone to do something for a Ryker. Brownie points, or I guess they call those something stupid here, like Ryker points.

"I would be honored."

"Okay. Give it a shot, but I don't authorize anything that could pose a risk to clones, got it?"

"Yes, sir."

"Good." Business done, I decide lingering is a bad idea, so I rise from the table. "See you at practice."

~**~

Practices are a bitch now. They always were, but with me running, so low, between the blood aching, and the Moldevite, they're fucking rough. The Major has his eyes on me, but he knows as well as I do this is my ticket back into Derco’s good books, and any hope of me getting Ridomie back in some century, or another.

If Rye lasts that long. Clone lives are short when compared to Ryker ones, because Rykers kill
them and then replace them like I used to toilet paper back on Earth.

The Major saunters into his room, where I go to recover, like it’s my own personal cove. I’m cocooned in a blanket, having it wrapped around me from my head down, what’s left of my sunny blonde Ryker hair sticking its way out the top. I’m sitting on his bed with the Ryker version of hot chocolate, and an orange banana, reading up on my Ryker history. *Man we suck.*

The Major stares a long while, disappears off to his private bathroom, and reappears with a syringe of Rykortisol. “Gimme your arm.”

“What the fuck, Major?”

“I am gonna wash your mouth out, let me tell you, boy. Clean it up, and hold out your arm.”

I glare, I glare so hard. “My hands are busy.”

“Then put that shit down. If I have to do this with you getting hot chocolate all over my bed, you’ll be sitting sore for the next few meal times.”

It dawns on me what he’s doing. Being normal. Well, our kinda normal that is. Sorta warms the heart in a weird-ass way. “All right, all right. Lemme put this stuff down.” I slide off the bed on my ass, managing to keep the blanket tucked around me, while hanging onto my stuff. I pad barefoot over to the table and set down the mug, but keep my banana, taking a bite, as I return to where’s he’s standing, and hold out my arm.

He twists angry lips at me, because he has to wait for me to chew and swallow. When I’m done, he’s rough grabbing my arm, and jabbing the needle into it. I feel like a little kid being given medicine by a worried parent. “Thanks, Dad,” I say when he’s done, being a sarcastic fuck.

But I can feel how much he loves that, and I soften. I’m just tired and irritable, and he’s being patient for the Major.

“Or, guess you prefer Daddy don’t you?”

“Whatever you want, Briggland.” He’ll take anything he can get, which isn’t fucking fair. The Major deserves everything.

Jesus, he’s got a tear in his eye, loving what I’ve called him. He’s been doing the crying thing a lot of late, and it’s weird to me watching stone cry. I can’t help having flashes of a man who’s had a hard fucking life, finally getting something he thinks is really amazing – even if I’d argue I’m one helluva pain in the ass prize – and hoping to fuck he’s finally getting something real.

Thing is, I feel the same way. The Major is everything. Yeah so is Ridomie, but that’s a whole other kind of a relationship. Ridomie’s my boyfriend, the Major is my parent, a real one. The Major’s love is something unique. A kind I’ve never felt, even from Mama. Sure she loves me, but she’s got a different way of showing it, a way I don’t know I’ll ever be able to comprehend on the inside. The Major, I get him like he is me and I’m him. I get his kind of love, and I feel it more, even if they’re the same amount.

*Which has a lot to do with why I’m mad at Mama, and don’t want to see her.*

I’m done with wasting time. I’ve got something I’ve always wanted, who knows how long I’ll have it with the way things are around here? I’ve been given a treasure, I’m fucking seizing it. “Daddy it is then,” I tell him. “But probably the Major when you piss me off.”
He wants to cuff me upside the head. I know it. Instead he’s a bit awkward, crossing his arms over his chest, uncrossing them, smiling more than his standard smile, then trying to cover it up. He finally settles on smiling with arms crossed. For a few heartbeats he looks young again, real young, like maybe when he started the whole mess with Mama. “That’s fair, and it’s probably a good idea for field-type stuff.” I rub my arm, it hurts now to go along with all my other hurts. “Fuck, I’m sorry. I was rough.”

“It’s fine. I have large clones barreling at me left and right, all day long. It was a pin prick.”

“The latter is necessary, the former is not. I’ll be gentle, as I can in future, for this kinda stuff anyway.” I read between the lines, field stuff’s a whole other ball game. “Your mama always said I was all battle and no grace. Time for me to learn grace.” The Major has plenty grace, but yeah, it’s usually found on the battle field. “Here, I’ll prove it.”

He disappears again, and returns with supplies, making me push down the blanket to reveal my bare chest and back, and begins bandaging me, and rubbing weird looking creams and ointments into the bruises. He’s gentle as he can be, but he’s still the Major, and well I’m me, so I complain some. “I’ll get better with practice,” he says.

“That mean, I have to go through this again?”

He tousles my hair. “Yeah, yah do. Deal with it.” He taps the book I was reading. “Why don’t you put this away, get some rest. You’ll heal better.”

How many thousands of years have to pass before sleep isn’t the best medicine? I feel like I don’t have time for sleep. I also know the Major doesn’t make suggestions. As if to confirm my suspicions, he scoops it up and sets it off to the side. I lay back onto the pillows. “Yeah, all right, Daddy.”

I stare up to the ceiling thinking about everyone and everything, feeling the Rykortisol doing its work. I am tired, but not sure I’ll actually fall asleep. “Tell you what, I got an idea,” he says reaching into the back of his closet, and returning with a book that looks older than he is. “When I first got here, my daddy read this to me.”

“Thought you said he didn’t do stuff like that?”

“He didn’t.” The Major bites his lip. “But he was prone to a few decencies for his nightmare prone son.”

He should have been prone to more. The Major’s nightmare’s never stopped; he screams like a banshee in the middle of the fucking night.

The Major’s eyes harden. “Close your eyes.”

I do.

“When Dalton arrived, everything seemed strange to him; the people, the land, and everything in between…”

I still can’t sleep, but I feel cozy listening to the Major’s voice. It’s smooth, and comforting. I should probably feel weird about having my dad read me stories when I’m well past the age for that, but fuck it. I rarely got read stories through my fucked up childhood, and I’m gonna enjoy the hell out of it, and if anyone thinks it’s weird, they don’t know.

I don’t fall asleep, but I do end up wrapped around one of the Major’s pillows contending with
blood aches, pleasantly distracted by this Dalton kid. The Major only notes when I open my eyes to watch him, and even allows me to ask questions when there are parts of the book I don’t understand. It’s a book clearly meant for tweens, but I’m still learning Rykerian colloquialisms, and the ins and outs of their social constructs, so it’s the right level for where I’m at with all that stuff.

“All right,” he says after three chapters. “I have work to do, but you’re to rest ‘till the Rykortisol’s done its work in full. Y’hear?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Try to sleep kid. If you can’t, come find me. No more training for you today.”

“What about G-sixteen-seven-eighty-four?” Derco wants them trained, and out faster than it feels like I can, especially when I don’t know what the fuck I’m doing. Without Rye’s coaching, I’m worthless to the whole Ryker-clone-raising business.

“That batch will still be there tomorrow, and Derco can fucking wait.”

I slump back into the pillows, relieved. He heads off.

I feel as better as I can after the Rykortisol, and a few hours rest. I secretly believe the Major’s care helped too. I dress, and find the Major, who’s on the field, watching and overseeing drills. He looks me over. “Not good enough, but better. You can watch, prepare to ask me questions at the end. I expect you to have a ton of questions, solider.” He’s gruff like the Major, but there’s something new underlining the gruff. Daddy.

“And what if I have suggestions, sir?”

“In that case, suggest away. I’ll happily disseminate your rookie ideas all night long.”

Fucking Rykers. He will too. That’s fine though, I’m gonna surprise him one of these days with a helluva suggestion he’ll be proud of. I cross my arms, just like his are, and take my place beside him, watching over our men.

RYE

Shovel. Shovel. Shovel. This planet is full of more rocks than Earth was said to have, and the ones inside Derek’s head.

All we do is shovel. We’ve gone from spending whole days learning the art of war, to whole days shoveling rocks. Some of us build. Some of us shovel. I do both, but right now I’m digging.

First officer Ryker has knighted me foreman and I am only required to supervise, but I refuse to leave all the work to my men. And yeah—I’m foreman—highest ranking clone, a meaningless title, other than I’m the one who shoulders all the responsibility if anything that goes wrong. It’s the position Derek likes me in the best, though it’s not the only position he likes me in.

Fuck.

Yeah, I swear sometimes, now. I try not to; it’s a habit, a bad one I picked up. I always swear when I think of Derek. But enough about him—I like to keep him out of my head until I’m forced to deal with him.

I’m too transfixed on the other Ryker. My Ryker. It’s driving me to insanity not knowing how he’s doing, not being able to touch him, and keep him in line. I know the Major will do a good job, but I
need to do it. I've got the blood aches. Bad. I'm a living ball of rage most of the time, okay, all of the time. I've destroyed a lot of things—thankfully most things are made of rock here, so it's been a help rather than a hindrance.

But all of its better than that day—the day Ryker got us both beat almost to death.

I knew I couldn't refer to him how I wanted to, silence saying more than words could. I can still see the look in his clear, azure blue eyes; he's sorry and he looks like he wants to die. It breaks me. Not only because of what would happen next, or the why of it happening, but because I'm not as optimistic, or as confident as he is; I know I'm never getting off this rock.


Derek walks up, his terrible smile in place. I don't wait; I kneel before him and do my best to ignore the sharp rocks that cut through to my knees. He runs a gentle hand through my hair, like he treasures me, like I'm the prize of all prizes. I can smell him. He smells a lot like my Ryker, but the smell is just off. It's too close and it torments me. Sometimes I close my eyes and pretend he's here with me. I can't do it for long though, the things my instincts want to do to Ryker, my Ryker, I can't do to this one. It riles my aching blood, and worse, it soothes it some, which I hate. Feels so fucking good, I've been known to lean into his touch when the aching gets bad enough.

“Hello, Pet. How are things on this side of town?”

“Good Master, Ryker.”

“You hate me, don’t you?”

“Yes, sir.” Derek doesn't want lies, he wants what I really feel, which believe me is not always something I want to say, but he's too good at figuring out when I lie.

He grabs be by my hair, and gets his face close. “I like that you hate me; it makes your obedience that much sweeter—knowing how much you hate it. Tell me—tell me how you really feel. Go on.”

“I want to rip your throat out with my teeth and lick your warm Ryker blood from my lips.”

He releases me, smiling wider. “Good. Very, good. I'm glad you have such strong feelings for me. Does Briggland know?”

“He knows I hate you.”

“But he doesn’t know what I do to you and how I make you mine each night. How you submit to me without any coercion at all. That's why you hate me—you need me. I provide for you what he can't.”

No. Brigg doesn't know that. I'd want to die if he did know. But just so one thing's clear; I'm not Derek's. He does provide something for me, but it's not what he thinks it is. I'm not going to tell him any different. What he does is coercion, even if he thinks it's not, I can't say no to him. I don't have a choice.

He caresses my chin and I lean into his gentle touch. I can't help myself; my blood hurts so much, it exhausts me, not to mention, I'm too well-trained. “Good, boy. I think you are deserving of a reward, and as long as you continue to behave, I will not tell our mutual friend.”

Derek leaves and I have to take heaving breaths, to calm down. From the rage yes—the rage is
always there—but also the other feeling I feel when he touches me. The violation. I realize now the violation was always there acutely, but things have changed, I know what choice feels like, it's made the violation exponentially stronger. I shake it off with a shudder, which of course doesn't make it leave me completely, but it compartmentalizes it, making it easier to deal with.

One Year Later: Ryker

I notice the birds here are always in pairs. The ones who are alone cry desperately, and wander either in search of a mate, or for the loss of one. My blood is the same. It cries for my mate. I’ve become used to the ache of it, so while it hasn’t dulled, I’ve become better at managing it, even while the whole time, I run at thirty-five percent of my battery life.

Norhal and his semi-suicidal plan has helped some. There have been times when I wanted to kill Derco. It’s an irrational plea to make the suffering end. If I could kill him, (and I would) it would only be the first step. I would still have to make it out of here. There are the clones who are loyal to Derco, which is something no one talks about, like no clone wants to really admit it. I had to figure this out the hard way.

I’ve spent most of my time here with raised clones, the unraised are a different breed, and can be somewhat robotic in their thinking. I’m starting to see the differences more now that I’m not only focused on my love life. Of course, it’s not easy enough to just have a category I can stick unraised clones in. I think there are some unraised I can trust, some that are perhaps the exceptions to the rule, still figuring that out, but I’m more careful around them in general.

I’d also have to get around Derek. He’s got both eyes, and some on me.

As is, I can’t kill Derco, and what’s more, get called into his office regularly to give my reports on armies I’m not allowed to serve with in person, because I’m still forbidden to leave Ryker Corp. I have to rely on reports from my men, and the scouts I send. It’s fucking irritating.

I’m then subject to having the Major laugh his ass off at me, because of how proper I have to be to Derco’s face, which is fucking amusing to him. “Least I know you can be obedient,” he says to me, or something of the like after I storm out of those awful meetings. Har. Har. Guess it’s only fair he gets a laugh though, I have my fun about him right back – uh, carefully of course. The Major has lines, and I tiptoe right around the edge in true Briggland style.

But I digress. Retrieving Ridomie is not something I’m equipped to do at this moment in time. A fact I’ve been forced to admit. I’m too weak, and I don’t have the resources. Besides, where would I go? Attempt to run from Derco? He’d have me in a heartbeat, and he’d be sure to incinerate Ridomie on sight.

The whole thing feels pretty fucking hopeless.

All I can do is get stronger. I’ve spent my every waking moment, learning my daddy’s ways of war, become him, being just like him, and watching the birds who cry for their mates, feeling their sorrow with them, letting them cry for me too.

~RYKER~

“We are receiving multiple reports of invasions, sir. My men tell in town send word every day.” I try telling my fucking infuriating uncle. “I need to go down there, and check this out for myself. The people should see a Ryker down there. They should see me.” He wants me to be a Ryker? Fine, I am one now. Let me do my job.
“Hear that Lexington? Your boy presumes to tell me, what I need to do with my planet, and my Rykers. Fascinating.”

The Major gives me his, ‘you couldn’t have seen that one coming, kid?’ look, and I mentally kick myself. *Yeah, I should have.* The Major’s been trying to teach me how to talk to Derco, so I can get some of the things I want. Not all the lessons are sticking just yet.

“Absolutely not. Send a crew to eradicate the threat, and be done with it. For pity’s sake, Briggland, what more do you need? A giant clone army? Oh wait, you have that. Get it done.”

“Yes, sir.” Christ he’s frustrating.

He storms out, done with me. I’m left alone with the Major. “Yeah, I messed up. You going to chew me out, now?”

He puts a hand on the back of my neck. “Last time you tried to punch a hole in the wall. I see this as improvement,” he says. “I’ll go down.”

“No.” It’s almost a whine. I don’t mean to sound pathetic, but I do. I’m not doing well with the separation, it’s hard to know if I ever will. The Major is the only thing holding me together. “I mean, yeah, I guess you have to, but I don’t like it.”

“I don’t like it any more than you do, kid.” He’s struggling between being a Major slash soldier of war, and a Daddy. He knows I need him, but the Ryker business, it’s all consuming, and at the end of the day, it’s between my relationship issues, and people dying. “I’ll be fast. We know who it is. It’s information we need.”

We don’t actually know who these bald assholes are, we just know it is the bald assholes. I nod. “I know. I’ll be fine.” I do have the guys, and they help some. Norhal’s plan helps. It’s basically *hovering* without actually hovering. Guys keep an eye on me, and distracting me when they know I’m about to go off. They pull me into dark corners of Ryker Corp. to lay against them when I need to hold onto something. No Ridomie wouldn’t like that part, but it’s better than the alternative, which gets clones killed.

The Major slings an arm around me, and pulls me out of Derco’s office, to a hallway where he begins appraising me. “You don’t look fine, You look like shit.”

“Yeah, well not much I can do about it, is there?”

“No, I don’t suppose there is.” The Major looks as defeated as I feel. “Use my room while I’m gone, stay close to the clones, and away from Derco. Those are orders.”

“Always do, sir.” That’s become standard protocol. Both things. I don’t really stay in my room anymore, and I keep far away from Derco when I can, it’s not my fault he seeks me out.

“I mean it, Briggland. I want to see some of those bags around your eyes gone. Ryker’s are not supposed to have bags under their eyes. I want you to take a dose.”

I wrinkle my nose. I hate relying on Rykortisol. “*C*’mon. I’m fine.”

“A full dose, Captain Ryker,” he says using my title to remind me I have more than myself to think about. “I’ll know if you didn’t.”

I nod though, because he will fucking know, and I don’t really feel like being held down, so he can do it anyway, and then spanked for not doing as I’m told. On impulse, I hug him, because we do
that now, and I’m used to it, and he’s fucking leaving (you never know around here if someone will return). I hold onto him for dear life, and he squeezes me back just as fiercely.

“Be back soon, kid.” And then he’s gone.

~**~

After two Earth days of the Major being gone, I’m bone weary, and it’s getting to my head, even though yes, I took the fucking god damned Rykortisol. My spirits lift though, when we get an unexpected visitor from Tenear, Bigley, one of Ridomie’s men arriving with a shipment.

Thing is, we don’t get shipments from Tenear. This will be the first and it has fishy written all over it.

Word can spread pretty quickly about a thing like that, so I hear about it. I run so I’m down at the loading bay in a flash. “Captain Ryker,” he steps back. It’s not a conscious response, it’s the one a clone gives a Ryker. A real Ryker. For a brief moment, he’s afraid.

“C’mon Bigley, it’s me.”

“I know, but you’re. Wow. You’re a Ryker.” He hasn’t seen me in over a year.

“Was before too.”

“But you look like one now. You’ve become one.”

Since I’ve got here, everyone’s seen a version of the Major when they look at me, and have commented on how I’m a clone of my daddy. But I really am now, developed his sense of cynicism and everything. Bigley doesn’t just mean that though. I’m different inside, and it shows through to my outsides. I’ve seen too many deaths of people I care about. A lot of them my fucking fault. I’ve hardened in a short time, and it’s that hardness gives me the Ryker ambiance, in combination with the features I’ve got to go with it.

“You can say it, I look like shit. The Major tells me every chance he gets.” I attempt to make him comfortable with a Briggland-style-joke, but without much Briggland to go with it, my joke isn’t received.

“Your hair’s longer,” is his response.

Everyone around here knows what that means. Hair is something of a status marker, one only Derco can give. I kinda want to say, ‘it’s not what it looks like,’ but it is. I impressed my uncle with my Ryker efforts, and was rewarded with more Ryker status. He’s trying to show me he’s not the enemy, while I do whatever I can to please him to earn my way off this fucking rock.

I nod, out of jokes. Yeah I’m worried about what that will mean to him, but nothing I can do about it, nor can I risk saying my true feelings about that one out loud. Not here anyway. “H-How’s Rye?” I whisper. Saying his name, hurts.

He pauses and a haunted look washes over him. “Alive.”

I know that doesn’t mean good.

“Was hoping to talk to you, sir.”

“You don’t have to be, so fucking formal. We’re not training. It’s Brigg, remember?”
He shakes his head. “I… sir if you really want. You’re… please.”

He doesn’t want to tell me no, but he can’t say yes either. That he’s asking please is something, remaining from any less formal relations we held previously, ones pretty much dissolved by this point from lack of proximity and probably more Ryker style conditioning from Derek. “What do you have to talk to me about?”

He looks around and I get it, Loading Bay is not the best place for the topic he’s got in mind.

“What level we talking here lieutenant?” In other words, how private? There’s a code amongst the clones. The ones here trust me with it. I’ve learned it.

“Infinity.”

Shit. Only one place we can go for that. *I hate intruding for war kindsa shit though. But I know it’s about Rye, so I’m doing it. “Follow me.”*
The Plan

Chapter Notes

Feb 06, 2020

Here comes Mock in for the posting Hattrick -- !

This one is a shorter chapter at 3K. But this story is just like that.

Enjoy!

Miss Taggart knows we’re not here to play with the kids, but we play it like we are. In truth, this place isn’t totally private, I’m watched everywhere. This is just low on the priority list. Safest.

The kids are excited to see me and I light a bit of my old spark for them. It’s the most exhausting thing I do. My blood aches, worse when I do things I did with him, when he’s mentioned, when I do more than exist.

We’re flipping through threes with the kids, when Bigley tells me his plan. “We have to get Captain Ridomie out, sir,” he says. For him to ask a Ryker, even if that Ryker’s me, he’s desperate. Hell, for him to ask anyone at all. It’s more typical for clones to accept their fates, and the fates of others. They do what they can, and move on. Ridomie’s special though. I like that he’s a Captain again.

“We thought maybe, because he’s yours you would help.”

“He isn’t mine,” I don’t know why I bother, except that it feels a level of wrong that burns on the inside. He doesn’t get it, and he won’t, so I don’t push the issue. “I want to help you, but I don’t see a way without someone dying.” Part of my job has become keeping clones alive.

“I know,” he says.

Oh. “You’re the sacrifice.”

He nods. “We’ve all been talking. Rye’s bad. His blood won’t stop aching. We think it’s slowly killing him.”

That’s how I feel. “Yeah, what’s with that? I thought it was supposed to chill out?”

“It supposed to, and the sex with Derek has helped some but—”

“Whoa, what?” He says it so fucking casually. Guess it is for them. It’s still not for me. Especially not with Rye.

Bigley’s scared, knowing he said something to piss me the fuck off. “Derek takes him, sir.”

I have to take a lot of breaths. The Major’s been teaching me to do that rather than breaking shit, and making Derco mad. Thing is, Derek’s fucking raping my boyfriend and there’s nothing I can
do to stop him. That feels like punch-a-tree-worthy. I do, not realizing how angry I am, and the tree folds in half, we have to jump out of the way, thank fuck there were no kids in it. “Whoa, you’ve gotten strong, Captain Ryker, sir.”

I have. Just because I’ve got Moldevite strapped to me, doesn’t mean my muscle can’t grow, it just takes my muscles more time than without. I’ve made it my mission to get big like Daddy. No I’m still not anywhere near him, but I’m off to a good start.

It’s nothing really though compared to the strength I should have, and I’m fucking bitter about it.

“I, look, I hate to be the one to tell you this, but Derek doing what he does to Ridomie helps some. It’s the only thing that helps him at all.”

There’s no way it’s a good Samaritan act, but if it helps him at all then I can’t help feeling some relief for him – that’s where we’re at on this fucking planet of horrors, really bad shit is sometimes not as bad as other really bad shit. The blood aches are worse than anything I’ve ever experienced. Even the wrong kind of relief is relief.

“So look, Captain, I’m here to bring you there, so you can take him away.”

I laugh. Because that’s fucking funny. “That’s suicide.” For others. My uncle’s taught me what will happen to people I care about should I even breathe about rescuing Rye, because believe me, I’ve fucking tried. Me I’m willing to take chances with, others? not so much. “I’d love to, you have no idea how much I’d love to, but where would we even go? There’s no running away from Rykers.”

He smiles. “See that’s the thing. I’ll have a ship. We’ll take it to a location I can’t say just now, but it’s off the map. No one will follow us.”

I didn’t expect that. “You’ve been working on this awhile, eh?” I don’t believe it’s gonna work for a second, but I’m impressed with their ingenuity.

“It’s of grave importance, Captain Ryker.”

“What makes one clone stand out above the rest?” I want to fucking know. I know what Ridomie means to me, but clones don’t usually go to these levels.

“Maybe this is all gonna sound like nonsense, but the thought of no more Ridomie in the world, is the same feeling I get when I feel hopeless. The rest of us, we’re just clones, but Ridomie, he could be a real person. We want to give him that chance.”

Apart from his fucked up logic due to all the years of clone slavery and brainwashing, I get what he means about Ridomie. Something is different about him. People follow him into battle. They’d die for him, but more importantly, they live for him.

“There’s a huge chance you’ll be incinerated,” I say. Because this isn’t going to fucking work, but maybe it will? My heart’s beating faster, just the thought of maybe seeing him even though it’s a fucking long shot’s got me all riled.

“Captain, I said the sex with Master Ryker was helpful to the blood aching, not that it wasn’t taking its toll on other aspects of him. That combined with being apart from you is killing him. He will die. It’s only a matter of time. Truth is, I could be incinerated tomorrow for any number of meaningless Ryker crimes. You, you’ll live a long time. When Captain Ridomie and I are gone, how will you live with the regret of not taking this opportunity? Even if it doesn’t work, we’ll all know we tried. You taught me that, sir.”
I did? I don’t even remember. What the fuck is happening to me? What I do know for sure is how I’d feel if I didn’t try. It would eat me up inside. Forever. I’d go completely fucking mad.

*I might already be.*

“Would there be a way to get word to the Major?”

“We knew you’d ask. Word has spread about how close you two have become. Of course, he would be notified.” He smiles like he’s proud to see this, two Ryker spawn getting along for real, like he’s witnessed a miracle.

“He is my father. Shouldn’t we become close?” I ask. He talks that like it’s not a thing.

“We’ve just never seen it, sir.”

Right. To me Derco and Derek, and even Grandfather and the Major are the exception to the norm; they’re the fucked up version of family relations. To clones it is the norm.

He looks worried. Am I doing that thing where I impersonate the Major again? Fuck. Probably. I try to soften my features some, but it feels like softening stone. “How much time do we have?” I ask.

“I leave for Tenear in the morning, you’ll have to be aboard before then.”

“I can do that.” I’ll need a bit more Rykortisol for this mission, but that’s not a problem.

His face cracks with pure happiness. “So you’ll do it?”

“Against my better judgement, yes.”

“I told Exfo, you would.”

“Exfo?” There are too many clones for me to remember them all. I hate myself for that. I want to know every single one for the individuals they are.

“He’s my mate now,” he says proudly.

That puts worry in my gut. I don’t like using clones period, clones with mates I like using even less. “Bigley, you have a mate. Why did it have to be you? You guys couldn’t have chosen an unmated, clone?”

“For two reasons. One, I’m the best pilot. The others are good, but I exceed them, you need the very best for this. Two; I might not choose how I die, but I choose how I live. As a clone, my choices are few, but I still have choices. I chose this.”

Well, fuck. That puts me in a corner. I take this away from him, and I take away one of the few freedoms he’s found for himself. I sigh. Nothing’s ever easy. “Okay, lieutenant. But don’t fucking fail me, that’s an order.”

“Captain Ryker,” he says all cocky-like. “I am the best pilot in the galaxy. No way I’d fail you.”

Hah. He could teach Ryker lessons with that level of arrogance. My stomach eases a bit. “I’m holding you to that. See you at dawn.”

~**~
On my way out of the Mess Hall, I bump into the Major. “Sir?” I didn’t think he’d be back so soon. Normally I’d be thrilled, but this complicates things, seeing as it’s his eyes that are on me the most. He always seems to know when I’m up to something. An eerie, parental sixth sense.

“Got a lead, son. Still no direct sightings, it’s almost like the miscreants don’t want me to see them, but I’m gonna check something out. Wish I could bring you with me.”

He claims we work better as a team. The thought makes me smile. I get positive feelings which transfer to the thing I’m about to do. You know? This birdbrained idea, it just might work. I’m already smiling more easily.

“This means I have to go back out, but you were on my mind, I wanted to come check on yah real quick.”

I hate lying to Dad. He’s so fucking earnest with the whole Dad thing, always trying to do right by me. I mean, he’s acting from a whole other, alien set of parameters, but he’s doing right by the morals of this planet, and I appreciate the hell out of it. I can’t tell him what I’m up to though. He’ll stop me for sure. “Doing fine, Daddy.” I don’t say it a lot, yet, trying to say it more, but sometimes it just feels right, and I know it makes his fucking life.

He can’t help himself, the happiness radiates. “Good t’see you smiling, kid, and thanks for taking the Rykortisol like I asked. It uh, makes here feel better,” he says tapping over where his heart is with three of his meaty fingers. “Come with me, a minute.”

“Don’t you have to get going to your lead?” I was going to pack some stuff.

“I do, but I’ve got, ten minutes for my boy.” He leads us back into the Mess Hall. I try not to show stress, but it’s hard. I don’t have a lot of time. Then again, what if works out? When’s the next time I’ll see the Major?

I let him lead me to grab their version of coffee, and then we sit down. “It’s important we make time, Briggland,” he says. “My daddy never did for me, claiming the world was at stake, and it is, seems it always is, but if we don’t get the in between moments, who the fuck cares about the world?”

I nod. He’s right. “You gonna tell me about this lead?”

“No. No talking about leads and other bullshit. This is jus’ you and me.”

“Oh God. You want to talk about feelings? Spare me, please.” I’m still a teen, and I still don’t want to talk feelings with my father.

He laughs his gruff laugh. “No, I suppose you don’t, but you’re gunna. Spill.”

He wants stuff? Fine. “I was thinking about having sex with others.” It was suggested to me a long time ago, I’ve sustained which let me tell you, has been a bitch. Doesn’t mean there weren’t times I haven’t thought long and hard about doing so. If this plan goes belly up, I may have to consider it.

That doesn’t faze him like I’d hoped for. “I think that you should. If it were something I could order you to do, I would. As it stands, I wish you would. It would help you, Briggland.

Even my dad wants me to have sex? Now I’m curious about stuff. “Have you… have you given up too?”

“No, that’s not what I said. We just don’t know how much more time. It could be years. You
already look too much like me, and if you’re not careful, you’re going to end up with my disposition on life.”

“Might be too late for that.”

“You’re too young to be so, cynical.” He shakes his head, and sips his drink.

“Have you seen, Mama?” I ask changing the subject, but also bringing her up to point out how stubborn he is, also resigning himself to one person, and that he’s just going to have to deal with the fact we’re exactly alike.

“You still won’t see her, eh?”

Dammit. Touché, Daddy. “No.”

I can tell he wants to go into the whole thing, but we only have eight minutes left. He thinks she can help me gain perspective. “I haven’t seen her.”

I understand something about my parents I didn’t before. He loves her, so much it hurts, like me with Ridomie, but they’re done. The universe won’t let them be together either. He’d rather not see her if he doesn’t have to, but sometimes, he has to. For me.

It seems everything the Major does these days is for me.

I can’t see her though, and briefly gaze to my bare wrist where the watch she gave me used to sit. I smashed the thing, and threw it off the top of Ryker Corp. into the wind. Because fuck her. And yeah I know that’s harsh, but I’ve got my reasons, and I’m allowed to have a moment about it. A moment that’s lasted over a year, but still.

Inspiration hits me, and I have to know. “Sir, if you could do it all again, would you do anything differently?”

“I’d do everything differently, Briggland. I let pain blind me, like a fool. I won’t do that again, and I hope I can inspire you not to do that either.”

“But that would have meant leaving Ryker Corp,” I say quietly. “Running from Derco.”

He nods. “Uh-huh. I would have ran with your mama long as I could have, raised you as my own, which yah are anyway, but I didn’t know that then.”

The Major’s so soft right now, I can tell he’s imagining it. A dream that will never be for him. “Where’s all the questions comin’ from?” he asks.

“Major I—”

“—you’re not planning anything stupid, are you boy?”

How could he know? Fuck, the parent thing, probably. “No, no. Jeez.”

“You’d better not be,” he says. “I’ll find out, and then you’ll be in real trouble.”

“Exactly. You’d find out. Why would I do that?”

He gives me the glare so hard, I almost confess, but thankfully gives up on it. “All right, why don’t you tell me something good then?”
“Like what?”

“Derco tells me you’ve qualified another batch of *raised* clones already. That’s something.”

I bite my lip embarrassed by the praise, liking it at the same time. “Yeah.”

He rolls his eyes. “What do you mean ‘yeah’. That’s amazing. You’re something else, kid, and I’m proud of yah.”

“Should we pin it on the fridge?”

He smiles and remembers what it means; I’ve taught him some Earth lingo. “If I had a fridge, it will have all kindsa Briggland shit on it, and I’d show it off to all my friends.”

“Not worried. You don’t have any friends.”

“How would you know?” he says with mock offense.

“Who wants to be friends with an overbearing fangtoothed monster?” Apparently those exist here. I hope I never see one.

We laugh, and banter like that some more, and it’s a good ten minutes, but fucking Bigley walks by on his way out, and I have to do my best to distract the Major with another joke. It doesn’t look like he saw him, but the Major is the master of looking everywhere all at once. He doesn’t respond though, so I *think* I’m in the clear.

“This has been fun, kid. I hate to leave you again, but I’ll be back soon. If I find anything, we’ll talk about it.”

We stand together and exit the Mess Hall. Suddenly, he pulls me to him. “You’re killing me, Briggy. I love you, okay?”

He rarely calls me by something so juvenile, which Briggy kinda is for me. I’m confused. I thought things were, relaxed. Well, for us. “Major?”

“Things are going to get better, I promise. I’ll make sure.”

“I know they will. I know.” I hate that the only way to make them better is to leave him. I hate worrying the fuck out of him. I hate that my choices seem to boil down to what I want, and people dying. I try not to cry, and squeeze the fuck out of him. “Love you too, Daddy.”

He pulls back to take a last look at me. I etch his face into my memory, like he is now, strong, and fierce. He’s a got a few lines in his face, but it’s not bad for someone who’s a few hundred years old. His eyes are watery. The Major of not so long ago would have wiped those away fast, but this one leaves them for me to see, fully vulnerable to me. He pats my shoulder. “See you soon.”

And he’s gone.

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