the ides of march

by SnorkleShit

Summary

Jake knew that the pillars of his family were rotting before he was even born. The weight of his failures, however, was the storm that brought the house down.

written for the prompt: jake/ezekiel + "I’ve done bad things, but let me ask you… am I that shitty of a person…?"

Notes

crossposted on my jazekiel blog:

jazekielstones.tumblr.com

See the end of the work for more notes

Contrary to popular belief, Rome did not fall in a day, either. It was brought to it’s knees by a long series of events, just like everything else. The fatal blow, however, is something that happens in a day, in a moment, in the blink of an eye. It seems unexpected, but really, the end has been a long
time coming. Jake knew that the pillars of his family were rotting before he was even born. The weight of his failures, however, was the storm that brought the house down.

The fateful day the empire crumbled was constantly replaying in the back of his mind. It followed him like a shadow, casting a cold grip of a perspective onto everything he did. He was 14 years old, and it was a warm summer’s day. He came home to a house half empty. No truck in the driveway.

“Where’s mom?” He had asked, despite dreading the answer he was sure of already.

He remembered how his father had held a half bottle of whiskey limply in his left hand as he slurred “She’s gone. All ‘cause of your sorry ass. I don’t blame her. Ain’t nothin’ worse than having a shitty kid.”

And that was how he sat now, years later. A bottle of whiskey - not quite half empty, but getting close - in one hand. Hunched over on the floor of his living room, with his back pressed against his couch.

He was so lost in the recesses of his own mind, he didn’t’ hear a knock on the door.

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Jake was a pretty emotionally retained guy, you could say. Regardless...for a month or so, Ezekiel hadn’t been able to help but notice he’d been acting more distant than usual. It got worse, and worse, until a week or so ago, when Jake had just stopped coming into work. Eve said they didn’t need him right now, that he might even be on his own mission or visiting someone, not to worry about it. But Ezekiel knew he wasn’t on his own mission, and he knew he wasn’t visiting someone. How did he know this? Well, because the location Ezekiel had gotten on Jake’s phone (so what, sometimes he GPS tracked Jake and Cassandra, it was entirely out of concern for their well being) said he was in his apartment.

So, here he was, knocking on Jake’s door. He’d almost turned back five times up the stairs. He’d never been over to Jake’s apartment, whereas Cassandra invited him over constantly. Not that that bothered him at all. Okay, maybe a little bit. Or a lot. Whatever.

No response to multiple knocks. But Ezekiel knew from the security feed of the shop across the street from Jake’s apartment complex that Jake hadn’t left the building in days. (He wasn’t creepy, he was just concerned!)

Ezekiel sighed, glancing back and forth down the apartment building hallway before pulling out his lockpicks. It took a total of two seconds to open Jake’s door. It occurred to Ezekiel that maybe, in their line of work, he should hook all of his friend’s places up with a better security system. He mentally filed that note away for later, and hesitantly poked his head into the dark apartment.

“Cowboy? You dead?” He called. No reply. Ezekiel pursed his lips, stepping entirely into the entrance hallway and closing the door behind him. There was no light on anywhere.

“If you’re dead, i’m selling all of your dumb old stuff on ebay to your fellow nerds!” He called, trying to defuse his own emotions with a joke.

Ezekiel clenched and unclenched his fists as he crept down the hallway silently. The first doorway opened to the kitchen, which was empty. The second lead into the living room.

It took him a few steps into the room until he managed to see around the couch. Jake was on the ground, staring at the floor with a bottle in his hand. He didn’t acknowledge Ezekiel’s presence. The younger man stopped, heart twisting as he looked down at the sympathetic figure of his friend. This
Ezekiel’s eyes fell to the bottle of whiskey. There was a disturbing amount of air in it.

“I sure hope you’ve been nursing that all week, and not just today.” Ezekiel said, voice reverberating in the intense silence. Jake didn’t look up at him.

“Go away, Jones.” He said lowly.

“Well, I would, but if I did Eve would kill me, so…” Ezekiel said, swallowing thickly under the emotional pressure of the situation. His gut tied itself in knots as he worried over what to do. He wasn’t good at things like this.

If he were on the other end of this, what would be the best way to approach him? Bicker as they might, Ezekiel couldn’t help but acknowledge they were rather similar in some ways. They were both very closed off. But Ezekiel had watched people drink themselves to death, more than once. And after meeting Isaac Stone? This was scary. This, right here, it was scarier than any monster or cult or magic. It made something deep in his chest ache, physically ache.

Coming to a decision, Ezekiel silently got down onto the floor next to Jake, leaning back against the couch beside him. Jake turned his head away in the other direction, so that he couldn’t even see the other man’s face. Ezekiel felt the awkwardness of this scene grating against his instincts, but a deeper, more rooted sense of need had taken over. No running away for him, not this time. (Not that he’d ever admit that.) Ezekiel pointed to the whiskey bottle.

“Mind if I tag along?” Ezekiel asked. Jake hesitated, before silently passing him the neck of the bottle. Ezekiel took it, grimacing at how light it was. He still hadn’t gotten an answer as to how long it’d taken Jake to drink this much. Taking a deep breath, the thief raised the bottle to his lips and took something between a swig and a chug. He grimaced slightly as it burned down, setting the bottle down on the right side of him. Farthest away from Jake. If the art historian cared, he didn’t show it. He seemed to be worlds away, the presence next to Ezekiel just the image of a far away world he would never be able to know.

Well, it was worth a shot to try.

Ezekiel crossed his arms and nodded, staring ahead. Waiting. And he waited, and he waited, and he waited. The two sat in tense silence for exactly four grueling minutes, before Jake finally caved. He turned slightly, glancing at Ezekiel out of the corner of his eyes, which were extremely bloodshot.

“What the hell are ya doing, Jones?” He muttered angrily, furrowing his brow in confusion and irritation. Ezekiel shrugged casually, as if he wasn’t affected by what was going on.

“Oh, I figured we’d just play the silent game until you cracked. I’m not leaving till you talk to me, so, what i’m doing is entirely up to you.” Ezekiel replied matter of factly.

Jake shook his head, closing his eyes. He reached to rub a hand over his face, swaying slightly.

“I’ve done bad things, but let me ask you…” Jake started to say, staring ahead with distant red eyes, “...am I that shitty of a person…?”

Ezekiel blinked, taking a moment to process the words, before whipping to squint at Jake in alarm and confusion.

“Are you pulling my leg?” He exclaimed, accent thickening in his distress. Jake huffed, grimacing
over at him.

“What? No, fuck, Jones, you said ta talk -” Jake slurred rapidly, getting defensive in response to the other man’s outburst. Ezekiel, now practically vibrating with the raw energy of his disbelief, held up a hand.

“Oh, I get that you’re trying to talk, I just can’t believe this is what you’re trying to say!” Ezekiel said loudly, turning to fully face Jake, eyes wide and intense. Jake was frozen like a drunk deer caught in headlights.

“Did you hit your head or something mate? How could you ever think you’re a bad person? Are you shitting me?” Ezekiel exclaimed, throwing his hands up.

Jake recoiled, grimace increasing as he curled in on himself, shaking his head. His every muscle was tense, body strung with self hatred and the weight of far too much remorse. He clenched and unclenched his fist, and Ezekiel could tell he was biting the inside of his cheek, from the way the other side sunk in just the right way.

“This isn’t a - this isn’t funny, Jones. I - I’ve never been good enough, okay? I’m always on your case but it’s all a hypocritical crock of bullshit. Just like the rest of my life. Because you - you - at least you’re honest, and I…” It was like every word had to be forcibly ripped out of him with pliers, like teeth too rotten to fix but too stubborn to fall out on their own. There was so much pain in such soft, tense words.

Ezekiel could only stare at him, his jaw practically dropping. Head moving back and forth in just the tiniest increments, in awe. Not all awe was good awe, that was for sure.

“Good enough? Good enough is in your rearview mirror! You can’t -” Ezekiel started to say, but Jake couldn’t let him go on, he couldn’t bear Ezekiel of all people trying to make him feel better without knowing the truth. The horrible truth ripped out of him, freed by regret and a few shots too many.

“I did it on purpose!” He admitted, voice heated and tormented. Silence fell. A confused thief stared at him, trying to understand why that simple statement had sounded so upsetting. He hesitated, before trying to get some elaboration.

“Did what…?” Ezekiel asked slowly, watching him like a man may watch a dangerous, injured animal.

“When we were in Peru, I…” Jake stared at the carpet, heart pounding. His throat dried up and tried to clench closed. His deeply instilled sense of honor and manners began to whisper to him through the haze of fear, hatred and alcohol. Tell the truth. He deserves to know. They all deserve to know. They all deserve better than you, that’s for sure. Don’t be so afraid, take responsibility for your actions! Look him in the eye like a man and tell him what a piece of shit you are!

Suddenly, misery shifted into anger, anger at himself and at everything he’d ever done. He felt hot pain sear him from the inside out, and he threw himself into the wave of self hatred. He rose up, swaying to his feet, reaching to bury his hands in his hair. He walked unsteadily across the room, back turned to Ezekiel. The thief remained on the floor, staring up at him quizzically, waiting. Trying to understand.

“I did it on purpose! I drove us apart on purpose!” Jake practically shouted it, suddenly whirling around to face Ezekiel, who flinched at the unexpected volume. Jake was too far gone in the fray of his own drunken emotions, there was no going back now.
“I bossed you around and rode you way more than was warranted, I did it on purpose! I knew - “
His breath hitched, “I knew how much it would hurt you, I knew how it would get under your skin, me trying to control every little thing you did, s-so that’s what I did! I drove you crazy on purpose so that you would have a good reason to leave! And I- I knew Cassandra would try to fix it and get strung up in the middle and I knew how much it would hurt her and you but I did it anyway! No, not even that, I didn’t do it anyways, I did it because I knew it would hurt you!” Jake exclaimed, each word harsh and full of anger, grating against each other.

Ezekiel was frozen on the floor, eyes wide as he stared up at his companion. The information sank into him, and his expression slowly dawned into one of realization and somewhat of horror. All the emotions he’d kept down regarding so much of his relationship with his fellow Librarians was wrapped up in that time in Peru. Flashes of memory surfaced in his mind, namely the night after they’d split ways, when Ezekiel had sank down to the floor of a motel bathroom and silently cried while biting his knuckles, because he was alone again. (Something he would rather die than let anyone know, ever. One of the many things he was planning to take to the grave.)

And now it was all unraveling at the seams and he didn’t even know what to think of it, he could only stare up at the other man as his brain tried to process it all at once. And it seemed the whirlwind that was Jacob Stone was not yet ready to break apart and dissipate back into apathy. The energy in the air crackled, and Jake took a deep breath, clenching and unclenching his fists.

“I was so...I was so afraid of fucking up inevitably, of fucking up whatever we had between us...that I just went ahead and fucked it up anyways in the most malicious, fucked up, manipulative-” He stopped, trembling as he cut himself off. Then the tension snapped, and he whirled around. He grabbed the poker from next to his dormant fireplace, reeling it back, intending to take out all this hatred on the wall, he just had to get it out.

But then, in a flash, Ezekiel was at his side, gripping onto his arm to hold it back. Jake froze, turning to look at Ezekiel in surprise as the other man pulled the poker from him and tossed it away.

“Slow down there, Cowboy, the wallpaper didn’t do anything to you.” Ezekiel said. Jake felt exhaustion well up in him, the misery crashing back down now that anger was not there to hold it up.

“I’m so sorry.” He whispered, unable to look Ezekiel in the eye. Ezekiel was still holding Jake’s arm. He smiled, shaking his head slightly.

“You know, it’s funny. I was just thinking about the similarities between you and me. I guess there’s more than I ever thought…” Ezekiel said. Jake frowned.

“What’s that supposed to mean?” He asked.

Ezekiel hesitated, before he reached forward to put a hand under Jake’s chin, pulling his face up until their gazes locked.

“So what, you try to drive the people around you away?” Ezekiel asked, shrugging. “That doesn’t make you a bad person! It just means you’re fucked up. But it’s okay, I am too. Pretty sure everyone is. Must be another one of those pretty little job requirements.” Ezekiel said, before letting out a soft laugh, eyes dropping down to where his fingers were still touching Jake’s chin. Jake’s eyes were bound to him, and he was frozen in his grip.

“The difference between you and me,” Ezekiel carried on, “is that I am a bad person. So, trust me, you’re not a bad person. Take it from an expert on being bad, you’re goodness is pretty annoying.”

Jake’s whole body laxed as those words rolled over him. Ezekiel of all people was trying so hard to
convince him he was good. When he’d done nothing but berate, boss around, and doubt Ezekiel. And here he was…

It seemed the sheer amount of alcohol he’d chugged was finally deciding to kick in. He could feel his faculties buckling, and his body started to sway and twitch a bit more. He blinked, still staring sadly at Ezekiel. Then he pressed their bodies closer, burying a hand in the fabric of Ezekiel’s shirt. Ezekiel’s eyes widened as he did, raised arm instinctively moving out of the way and wrapping around Jake’s neck. As that was the easiest direction to go in.

“What-” Ezekiel tried to ask, but Jake cut him off.

“No. You aren’t bad. Stop - stop saying that. I can’t stand it. You’re such a liar. But you’re honest. It’s so frustrating, you’re like a puzzle wrapped in a maze. That’s the real reason i’m always mad at ya…” Jake admitted, sighing as he gazed at Ezekiel with a pained look. The shocked thief couldn’t think of how to react to this sudden shift in situation.

“Jake, I don’t know-”

“You’re so good, I know it, I see it all the time, I’m sorry if I made you think you had to close yourself off like this, I’m sorry, i’m so sorry…” Jake whispered intimately, a reverence in his drunken slurring that shook Ezekiel to the core. Ezekiel just stared at him, mind reeling. Jake’s head swam in a sea of haziness, now, and was sinking faster by the minute. But one desperate need still rang out across the dark waters. He had to make Ezekiel understand, how much he hadn’t really wanted to hurt him, how good he was, how much Jake cared.

*Actions speak louder than words, right?*

Before he could change his mind, Jake moved forward to press his lips against Ezekiel’s. Ezekiel went rigid in shock, eyes blowing wide as he felt Jake’s chapped lips move gently and reverently against his own. Then the shock snapped, and he forgot everything in the relief of being so close, finally, after all this time. He kissed back enthusiastically at first, heart aching with the need for it. But then his mind caught up with him, and he panicked. He yanked away from Jake, stepping back as his mind screamed at him to run.

Before anything could be said, Jake started to sway more, looking pale as he started to look like he was about to fall down. Ezekiel forgot his mortification and dove forward in concern, catching the other man right before he could collapse.

“Ooookkay, you’re really drunk. Time for bed. Sleep this off, you’ll be fine, everything will be fine…” Ezekiel muttered, starting to drag an incoherent Jake towards the hallway.

It took forever to get the lumbering idiot to his bed, at which Ezekiel just threw him down onto it and tossed a blanket on top of him.

“Sorry, not changing you. Sleep in your clothes, that’s what you get for drinking that much.” Ezekiel said in a huff as Jake tried to adjust to the change. Jake settled into the bed uncertainly, blinking up at Ezekiel. He looked so pitiful.

“I’m sorry for kissing you…” He said, and Ezekiel flinched, reaching to pinch his nose.

“Jake, just -”

“It’s okay if you don’t feel the same way, I get it,” Jake said weakly, attempting to reassure him.

“Dude, you need to sleep!” Ezekiel exclaimed, grabbing a pillow and tossing it on top of his face.
Jake muttered something in agreement, before turning onto his side and passing out instantly. Ezekiel turned and raced as fast as he could towards the door, heart pounding like he’d been pumped full of adrenaline. He took the stairwell three steps at a time. As he left the building in such a hurry, he prayed to every deity that had ever existed that in the morning, Jake would have forgotten everything that had just happened.

End Notes

A second part might be in order for this, but only if people like, would really want it. So don’t forget to comment!

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