Keep Me In Close Orbit

by valmontheights

Summary

He only ever gets to be Roman fucking Reigns, presented like an exotic wild animal caged within impossibly chiseled, beautiful features, almost too good to be true, everything the people were supposed to love but decided to hate instead.

Hunter can’t fix that, he doesn’t know how to even begin, it’s a train that went off the rails a million miles ago when nobody heeded the signs and put on the brakes.

He can’t give Roman the world, but he can at least make a small pocket of it bearable, here in their own private little universe where pain and pleasure orbit like binary stars. The Game knows how to play those two things against each other like nobody else—and he wants Roman to get everything he can out of it.

Notes

The first in a series of non-chronological excerpts from the long and rather complicated relationship between Triple H and Roman Reigns. Not kayfabe-compliant, with Triple H in
his “Papa Hunter” mode (genuinely caring but still occasionally a bastard) and Roman Reigns as a needy, eager-to-please bottom with submissive tendencies. If that doesn’t sound like your cup of tea, I suggest you turn away now. Not all of the warnings and pairings listed above will be trotted out in this first chapter, but they will occur in later parts of the story.
It’s nearly midnight when Hunter finally hears the knocking from the other side of his hotel suite door. Three deliberate raps on expensive wood, knock knock knock. Hunter pads over to the door, bare feet sinking into the lush carpet of the suite. He opens it to reveal the predatory eyes of Randy Orton, smirking under the hood of his jacket.

“Boss…” the Viper greets him as he steps inside the room. “Nice digs you got here, I guess being so high up the company ladder does have its perks.”

“You’re late,” Hunter says as he closes the door and locks it.

“There were a lot of interviews,” Randy says as he peels off his jacket and throws it haphazardly against the back of the ornately-upholstered couch in the suite’s living room. “Mostly they just want to know who I’ll be up against for Wrestlemania.”

Hunter chuckles lightly. “Wouldn’t you like to know.”

“You’re gonna keep me in suspense? I tried to get Shane to tell me, but he’s adamant that Vince’s still mulling over that one.”

“Vince is still mulling over a lot of things,” Hunter says. “Come on, he’s been waiting for you.”

Randy takes a step back, seemingly to appraise Hunter’s attire. He’s still in his dress pants, dress shirt untucked and unbuttoned, exposing his chest. “I’m surprised you haven’t gone a few rounds with him already.”

“Had to keep him fresh and ready for Mr. Royal Rumble,” Hunter throws a casual arm around Randy’s shoulder and guides him towards the bedroom door. “You’re his reward, after all.”

Randy starts to laugh, but the noise dies in his throat the minute he steps into the dimly lit bedroom and sees what awaits him on the king-size bed.

Roman Reigns, naked and lying curled up on his side, his hands cuffed behind his back and his
mouth held open with a bright red ballgag, saliva glistening on his obscenely swollen lips. He’s squirming and whimpering quietly, beautiful ass clenching around a vibrating plug that’s pushed up to the hilt into his puckered hole.

“God damn…” Randy curses under his breath. “You’re spoiling me here, Hunter…got him all nicely packaged up for me.”

Hunter wants to correct him, wants to say that if it were up to him, Randy won’t be getting anywhere near Roman Reigns tonight, not after all Roman already did for him at the Royal Rumble, but he swallows the words around his clenched jaw.

Roman wanted this. Roman begged for this, begged for Randy specifically, and Hunter can’t deny his favorite boy his reward, even if it sits uneasily at the pit of his stomach.

Randy’s kicked off his shoes and climbed onto the mattress on all fours, slithering like he’s looking for his next RKO. Roman senses the dip in the bed and looks back over his shoulder and outright mewls when he sees Randy, muffled by the gag in his mouth—and Hunter can’t deny how unspeakably hot that is, heat starting to coil below his own stomach.

“So…general rules?”

Hunter clears his throat with some difficulty. “You don’t get to come in his ass, and you don’t get to touch his dick. Either he comes from you fucking him, or I’ll take care of him after. Apart from that…have at him.”

Randy’s smile widens into a predatory grin. “Sounds good to me, Boss.”

Roman squirms on the bed, pushing himself back against Randy’s groin in a gesture of offering, the faint buzzing of the plug in his ass suddenly seeming like the loudest noise in the room to Hunter's ears.

“How long has he been under?” Randy asks as he peels off his t-shirt, tossing it over the side of the bed impatiently. Hunter can clearly see the naked hunger in Randy’s eyes and fights off the wave of possessiveness that washes over him.

“A couple hours now,” he tries to sound casual. “I had him blow me just to keep him occupied, but
otherwise he’s untouched…”

“Mmm…” Randy hums pleasantly as he lowers himself, draping his body over Roman’s and breathing close to his neck. “Hey there, baby…”

Roman strains his neck to look back at Randy, eyes glassy and desperate. He looks so wrecked already, glistening with sweat, long dark locks forming a damp curtain down one side of his tan neck. Randy bends his head and nips none-too-gently at Roman’s collarbone, eliciting another sweet, sinful moan from behind the gag.

“You’re really gonna let me have it all tonight, aren’t you baby?” the Viper mutters into the shell of Roman’s ear. “You let me toss your ass over the ropes, and now you’re gonna let me fuck it, too?”

Roman nods, a little too enthusiastically for Hunter’s liking, but his traitorous cock still stiffens at the sight of Roman so pliant and helpless underneath Randy, at how easily and readily Roman gives himself to whoever has control over him.

“Such a good boy…” Randy praises him as his hand wanders low between Roman’s ass cheeks, toying with the base of the plug. “Always so willing to take one for the team, so eager to please…”

Roman sinks his head into the mattress and lets out a choked sob, body tightening as Randy pushes the plug even deeper into him.

“You really outdid yourself out there, huh?” Randy continues. “Last year it was ‘one versus all’, this year it was you versus all of Texas…”

“Randy…” Hunter says warningly, in a tone that immediately gets the Viper’s attention. “Play nice.”

As much as he knows how Roman gets off on being talked down to when he’s this deep in subspace, the subject of his treatment by the crowds is still a sore spot that Hunter has always tread carefully around, even when he’s pushing Roman’s other tolerances to the limit.

And tonight Roman had just taken the biggest hit of all, putting his game face on and running out there as Royal Rumble entry No.30 to a deafening roar of disdain, undoing whatever small shred of goodwill he’d built up in pockets and clumps over the last few months. He’d eliminated the Undertaker, of all people, absorbing all the heat he could as well as deflecting it off Randy—who
had ultimately triumphed by tossing Roman over the ropes.

Randy takes the cue and kisses Roman’s stubbled chin gently, his other hand pulling back the strands of dark, sweaty hair away from his temple. “Thank you, baby… thank you for letting me do that—for letting me do this. You’re always so good for us, you know?”

Hunter can see the praise practically rippling up and down Roman’s flesh, every syllable of Randy’s voice sending minor shockwaves through him, echoed by the pulsing in Hunter’s own cock. He palms the front of his trousers to steady himself a bit—he’s already come down Roman’s throat once tonight and he still wants to do more with the boy once Randy’s done, so it’s in his best interest to pace himself.

On the bed, Randy’s stripped himself down to his boxers and maneuvered Roman to lie on his stomach, kicking his legs apart with his knees. He kneads the firm, muscular globes of Roman’s ass greedily, marveling at the sight of Roman’s hole clenching around the base of the plug. He looks up at Hunter and grins. “Why can’t they all be this easy, huh?”

Hunter shrugs. “He’s special…he just wants to please.”

It’s more than that, Hunter knows it’s so much more than that, but he’s not having this discussion with Randy now, not when Roman’s so far gone he can barely support his own weight on his knees when Randy pulls him up by the hips. Truth be told, he just wants Randy to get it over with and leave, so he can have his boy all to himself again.

“The other one is such a brat…” Randy says as he strokes down Roman’s broad back, feeling the planes of muscle there. “Sure it’s fun to finally get him down and willing for you, but sometimes it takes so much effort it’s barely even worth it…”

“Don’t remind me…” Hunter says, suddenly reminded that he still has Seth to deal with. The entitled little shit had shown up at the NXT event unannounced, throwing everyone off script with his little stunt. Later, after a thorough dressing down in the production truck, Seth still had the gall to say he should be rewarded for coming up with something that kicked their storyline into high gear, frustrated with how slow it took for the feud between him and Hunter to build up.

It was all so typically Seth, and so typically maddening.

“He knows what’s coming for him, though…didn’t like it when I told him, but he’s gonna take it like
a good little bitch or he’s going to have to deal with even more punishment.”

“Think he’s jealous because of all the attention you’ve been giving his pretty brother over here?” Randy smiles as he leans down and licks a long, salacious stripe up Roman’s back. The Samoan arches his body, as if chasing the hot, slick trail of Randy’s tongue and Hunter gets another jolt in his groin. He sets any thoughts of Seth aside for now.

“If he wants more of that kind of attention, all he had to was ask…” Hunter moved close to edge of the bed near where Roman’s head lay, kneeling down in front him. Roman looked at him with wide, glassy eyes, saliva beading down his chin from the gag held his mouth open. “Like this one…he always knows how to ask so nicely.”

Hunter strokes down Roman’s face, delighting in how the boy nuzzled against his palm, even with all that Randy’s doing further down his body.

Still mine, Hunter thinks, cupping Roman’s jaw. Still fucking mine.

Roman tenses suddenly, shoulders tightening as a loud moan escapes his lips. Looking up, Hunter can see Randy holding the plug, turning it off before tossing it over the side of the bed.

“Jesus, you’re impatient, Orton…” he hisses. “Careful around precious company merchandise, will you?”

“Bullshit,” Randy says as he reaches over to the bedside table, where Hunter has thoughtfully laid out a bottle of lube and some condoms. “I know how this bitch likes it…he wants it rough, don’t you?”

Roman nods, hair falling in front of his eyes. Hunter brushes the strands back, wanting to look into the boy’s eyes to make sure he’s completely on board. It’s difficult to tell with Roman sometimes—he’s built to take a lot of punishment and doesn’t like to admit when things get a bit too much for him to handle. This deep in subspace, desperate with need and with someone other than Hunter so hungry to fuck him, Hunter isn’t sure he can trust the boy to know his own limits. It’s happened before.

“Take that fucking ballgag off him,” Randy says, already a little breathless as he lines his cock up against Roman’s entrance. “I wanna hear the noises he makes.”
Hunter shoots him a dark look, not appreciating the commanding tone in Randy’s voice, but he slides the gag out of Roman’s mouth and lets it tuck under his sloppy chin. “Hey, baby boy…”

“D-Daddy…” Roman croaks out, his voice hoarse.

“You ready for this?” Randy smacks him once on the left side of his ass. “Wanna hear you say it, pretty boy…”

“Yes…” Roman says as he struggles to look over his shoulder.

Hunter sinks his fingers into the thick, damp strands of Roman’s hair and tightens his grip. “Ask, baby… ask for what you want.”

Roman winces at the pull on his scalp, coughs to clear his throat, and strains his neck further to look Randy in the eyes. “Please fuck me, Randy… please.”

Randy fucking snarls at that and pushes forward, sheathing himself in Roman in one savage thrust. The force of it throws Roman forward, his forehead thumping against Hunter’s chest. He cries out, clearly in some kind of discomfort, wrists pulling at the cuffs where it held them at the small of his back.

“Shit, still so fucking tight…” Randy murmurs appreciatively. “And here I thought your Daddy would’ve ruined you for everyone else, Reigns…”

Hunter quells the urge to say, I may just make sure I do that from this point forward and rubs soothing circles into Roman’s scalp with his thumb. He knows he can’t stay there, Roman wants this moment with Randy and he can’t be interfering like this, so he reluctantly backs away and settles himself into one of the chairs in the bedroom, mindful of his own hard-on as he leans against the plush upholstery.

He has to admit, the sight is better than any big-budget porno can ever produce. Randy's pounding into Roman, holding him by the hips for leverage, tattooed arms glistening with sweat as he fucks the helpless man below him. Roman, his mouth now ungagged, is letting out a symphony of moans and whimpers that sets Hunter’s dick throbbing inside his pants, a litany of please and more in staccato bursts in time with Randy’s thrusts and the clink of the handcuffs holding his hands immobile.
Randy grabs Roman’s hair and pulls back, forcing the boy to arch his neck up with no real means of supporting his weight. Roman cries out sharply, tears starting to gather at the corners of his eyes.

“Yeah, keep making those noises, you little cocks…” Randy says as he bites down on Roman’s straining shoulder. “Wanna hear you lose it…”

Hunter wants to tell him to slow down, to ease off a little bit, instead he just bites the inside of his mouth so hard he tastes his own blood. Roman has a safeword and knows how to use it. Randy knows the safeword, too—and Hunter’s warned him plenty enough to look out for signs of Roman tapping out if he can’t quite use his voice. He just has to sit here and let it happen—let his precious, beautiful boy get fucked senseless by The Viper because it was the reward Roman asked for.

He’ll fix this once Randy’s done. He’ll make Roman his again, without a shadow of doubt. For now he just squirms on the chair, white-knuckled as he grips the arms to stop him from touching himself, listening as Roman’s moans escalate into a crescendo in time with Randy’s quickening pace.

“Fuck, fuck, fuck…” Randy grunts, hips pistoning into Roman as he plasters himself against the Samoan’s back, one hand in a bruising grip at his waist and the other tightly fisted in his hair. “Gonna come soon in this sweet little hole…”

“Please…” Roman whimpers, half-muffled against the sheets that have bunched up around his face. “Please, Randy…”

Hunter averts his eyes as Randy hits his climax, thrusting deep and savage into Roman and holding himself there. He can hear Roman’s choked sobs as he stares out the window at the San Antonio skyline, delicious noises he’s heard a million times before and can never tire of, already thinking of how he’s going to make Roman make those noises again, this time for him and him alone.

“Fuck, that was amazing…” Randy mutters breathlessly as he withdraws, giving Roman’s ass a smack for good measure.

Hunter remains seated as Randy gets off the bed and pads over to the bathroom to clean himself, then watches as he gathers his clothes from the floor and dresses up quickly.

“I believe you can show yourself outside?”
“Sure, sure…” Randy says as he zips up his jeans. “Thanks, Hunter…I know you don’t share much, but that’s a piece of ass I wouldn’t mind having another go at, if you’ll let me.”

Hunter wants nothing more than to punch The Viper in his smug-looking face, but he quells his jealousy enough to say, “Only if he asks for you again…”

Randy looks mildly disappointed at that, but shrugs it off. “I’ll catch you later, then.”

Hunter waits for the telltale sound of the suite’s main doors closing, assuring him that he’s once again alone with Roman, before getting off his seat and kneeling in front of the bed once more.

“Hey…” he cups Roman’s face with both hands and lifts it to look at him. “You okay, baby boy?”

Roman bites his lip, trying to shuffle closer across the mattress but the movement produces a painful grimace that instantly tells Hunter something’s wrong.

“Roman?”

“H-hurts…” the boy rasps out. “It hurts, Daddy…”

Alarmed, Hunter immediately reaches for the safety latch in the handcuffs, opening it with a click and gently pulling Roman’s arms forward to rest beside his head. He then circles around the mattress to get a good look at Roman’s backside, the unease knotting in his stomach growing as he looks between Roman’s slightly parted thighs.

“Son of a fucking bitch…” he mutters when he sees Roman’s bruised and battered hole, slick with remnants of lube and an unmistakable red rim of blood, a trickle of it already starting to trail down his right thigh. Hunter sees red himself, bolting halfway off the bed before he can think. “Stay here…I’m going to fucking kill him!”

“No!” Roman exclaims, reaching back frantically to grab at Hunter’s wrist. “Stay with me—stay with me, Daddy…please…”

“Roman…”
“Don’t leave me—” Roman softens his grip, as if realizing he’s overstepped his boundaries. “Please, please stay here…”

Hunter inhales deeply, trying to get his own thoughts in order. He wants nothing more than to chase Orton down the hallway and throw him down an empty elevator shaft. He also wants nothing more than to hold Roman close and never let go again. Then there’s the guilt, the feeling of having failed Roman by letting another man hurt him. And the anger, anger at Randy for going too far, anger at Roman for not using his safeword or tapping out.

_Priorities._ _Think._ Tend to the damage first, make sure he’s okay. There are other ways to punish Randy Orton.

He pushes the questions aside for now and scoops Roman off the mattress, an easy enough task now with plenty of practice even if the boy is over 260 pounds of muscle and bone, carrying him to the bathroom. He makes Roman bend over the counter as he inspects the damage and cleans it with a soft washcloth, adding the cooling antiseptic gel he always keeps in his toiletry bag just in case. _Just in case I let another man run wild over you and tear you open. Fucking hell._

“Why didn’t you stop him?” Hunter asks, unable to hold it in any longer. “You know you’re allowed to stop him if he gets too much for you.”

Roman hangs his head between his elbows, not meeting Hunter’s gaze in the mirror.

“Look, I know I can be a bastard sometimes but I’m not a fucking monster, Reigns…” Hunter grits out, wiping the washcloth down one of Roman’s strong thighs. “I would’ve stopped him if you asked me to. I only let him fuck you because you asked for it, I didn’t enjoy that one bit, and I certainly wouldn’t have let him anywhere near you if I knew this was going to happen.”

“I’m sorry, Hunter…” Roman manages to choke out.

“You have your safeword, you could’ve tapped out if you needed to.” Hunter throws the washcloth into the wastebasket in the corner of the bathroom. He knows Randy’s discarded condom is probably in there, too—and he doesn’t want to look to see the stain of Roman’s blood on it. “We can’t go on like this…”

That gets Roman’s attention, his head snapping up to regard Hunter with fearful, dark eyes. “W-
“This will only work if we both follow the rules, Roman…” Hunter says sternly. “I’m all for giving you whatever you want, and I know you’ll give me whatever I want in return, but I won’t be made to feel like a fool for sitting by and letting someone hurt you like this, all the while thinking you’re getting exactly what you want.”

“Hunter, I…”

“Get back in the bedroom and think about what I just said,” Hunter says as he pulls Roman upright, unable to resist kissing him on his tattooed shoulder. “Wait for me,”

“Are you—“

“I’m not going anywhere, I just need to go in the living room and make a call,” Hunter assured him. “Make yourself comfortable,”

With that, he stalks out of the bathroom and retrieves his phone from the bedside table, before making his way out into the suite’s living room.

Orton at least has the common sense to sound apologetic, even if Hunter’s known him long enough to know there’s a streak of sadistic delight running through The Viper’s appeals for forgiveness.

*Never let Randy Orton play with your toys if you don’t wanna see them broken,* is the undertone of their brief phone conversation, and Randy doesn’t even sound too bothered by the prospect of not getting anywhere near Roman again for the foreseeable future. Hunter knows Randy has others he can play with, it used to be Seth until the brand split necessitated the Viper expanding his horizons a little—he doesn’t ask for details because he really, really doesn’t want to know.

When he ends the phone call with a curt goodbye, Hunter grabs two bottles of water from the pantry and steps back into the bedroom. Roman is sitting at the edge of the bed, his back to Hunter as he gazes out the window. He’s still naked, the warm bedside lights bathing his tan skin in a golden glow, and already Hunter feels his heart rate picking up and his traitorous dick, rendered soft by the sight of Roman’s pain, starting to harden again.

He steps in front of Roman and hands him one of the bottles. “Drink…then we’ll talk.”
Roman takes the bottle obediently and uncaps it, swallowing mouthfuls of water into his throat as Hunter watches. He’s not quite as deep in subspace anymore but still heeding Hunter’s commands like a good boy, and the way he’s sitting suggests the pain from Randy’s treatment may not be as bad as Hunter first thought, but still.

When Roman’s had enough to drink, Hunter takes the bottle from him and sets it aside. Standing tall in front of Roman, he reaches for the boy’s neck with one hand, exerting just the tiniest amount of pressure.

“Look at me,” Hunter stays sternly.

Roman swallows, his throat bobbing in Hunter’s grip, and he doesn’t move his head fast enough for the older man’s liking.

“I said, look at me!” Hunter moves his hand to Roman’s chin and yanks it up, forcing the boy to look at him. Roman’s dark eyes are still glassy with need, red-rimmed from tears, his mouth hanging slightly open. He’s not being defiant, just…confused and lost and more than a little ashamed. Hunter can practically see the thoughts forming and breaking behind those eyes, the twitch of dissolving words on those swollen, pretty lips.

“I’m going only going to say this once, so listen carefully…” Hunter begins, fighting to keep his tone even. “When you want pleasure, when you want to feel good, you have my permission to seek it from anyone you want. I don’t care—as long as you’re happy. If it’s me you want it from, then I’ll give it to you—so long as I get some from you, too. You understand?”

Roman nods, blinking as a tear drips loose from the corner of his right eye.

“But when you want it to hurt…when you want to be taken down so hard you don’t even think you can come back up, when you need to go to that place where pain is the only thing that works? You come to me. And only me.” Hunter tightens his grip on Roman’s chin for emphasis. “It’s only me that gets to hurt you, because I know how to do it like nobody else can, I know how to do it the way you like it, and I can make you like the the things you never thought you would.”

He leaves out the part where he’s the only one who can bring Roman back from the bottomless pit, the only one who can break him into a million pieces and meticulously put him back together again with all the care that Roman deserves, and then shove him back out there into the glaring lights of the world to be torn anew.
The way Roman catches the heel of Hunter’s calloused palm with his lips in a trembling, reverent kiss tells him that the boy already knows.

“Is that clear?”

“Yes, sir…” Roman’s voice is barely a whisper, eyelids starting droop as he drifts back under.

“Not sir…” Hunter thumbs the boy’s stubbled cheek gently. “The other word.”

Roman’s eyes flutter shut, and when they reopen there’s a faint spark of light there that Hunter relishes, the look of utter trust and devotion he craves.

“Yes, Daddy…” the voice that speaks the words is steadier, as if finding strength in his submission.

Hunter smiles, bends down and kisses Roman’s forehead. The boy trembles, shoulders tightening as he almost starts to cry again.

They’re both navigating their way through this, Hunter more than he’ll ever care to admit, but Roman’s worth it. He knows he’s holding something so powerful and precious in his hands, a fragile center made of sharp panes of glass, wrapped in strong sinew and bone, and he won’t ruin it for anything.

“I can’t always make it happen for you out there…” he says when he pulls back, both hands now caressing Roman’s face. “Too many variables. What Vince wants, what the creatives come up with, what the other guys are doing up and down the card, what sort of mood the crowd’s in when we roll into whatever goddamn city on a given week…not to mention the million other things I’ve got on my plate.”

Roman nods, breathes deeply against Hunter’s chest. “I know, Daddy…”

“But when it’s just you and me? Like this?” Hunter smiles down at his boy. “You tell me whatever you’ve got going in that pretty head of yours, what you want to feel and how you want to get there, and I’ll get you there.”
Roman’s expression brightens so quickly it’s almost painful to watch, unguarded need breaking through the hard surface, and there’s a twist in Hunter’s gut he has to fight to suppress.

“Promise, Daddy?”

Oh, that voice. That voice saying those words will be Hunter’s undoing. He fucking knows it. “Promise… so what’ll it be tonight, baby boy? What do you need?”

“You…” Roman says breathily. “Just you, Daddy.”

“I’m flattered, but you gotta be more specific than that, baby…” Hunter smiles as he brushes his thumb along Roman’s bottom lip and watches as the boy catches it in his mouth, sucking the tip gently. “Why don’t you go lie down, you’re always better at telling me what you want when I’m on top of you…”

Roman complies, scooting gingerly up the mattress to lie on his back, legs spreading out of habit. There’s still a streak of crimson lining the rim of his abused hole, and Hunter makes a mental note to ensure that Randy loses one of his matches leading up to the Elimination Chamber. Maybe the one against Cena that’s scheduled for next week. He’ll call Shane and the bookers in the morning.

For now, he settles himself next to Roman, lying half on top of him, one hand stroking through his thick, dark hair while the other wanders down to caress the underside of Roman’s thigh. Roman nuzzles against his shoulder, burrowing as deep as he can go, one hand worrying the collar of Hunter’s open shirt.

“Talk to me…” Hunter says. “Tell me what’s in your head.”

“I wanted Randy to hurt me,” Roman says, the words ghosting hot against Hunter’s collarbone. “I wanted to not be able to do anything about it, just take it… to feel like I didn’t have a choice, like it’s all I’m good for,”

Like it’s my job, is what Hunter hears between the hitched breaths. Like I did tonight at the Rumble. Take all the heat, let myself be the focus of everyone’s anger and disdain so Randy gets a pop when he throws me over and wins the damn thing. Just like I’ve been told to.
“And why didn’t you stop him when it got too much?” Hunter asks carefully. “Why’d you make me sit through it, when I could’ve saved you?”

*Why did you make me sit there and watch as a man who revels in being called a viper, a fucking predator, destroys you like you’re a worthless piece of meat, when you damn well know I can barely tolerate anyone else touching you?*

“I wanted…” Roman pauses, clearly mulling over his choice of words. “I needed you to *not* save me. I can’t… I can’t really explain it. I wanted it to feel like, I’m so far gone that even you don’t think I’m worth saving anymore;” his breath hitches over the words. “I don’t know, *fuck*—I don’t know, I’m so messed up, Daddy, I can’t…”

“Shhh….” Hunter calms him with a kiss on his temple. “It’s okay, baby… you’re doing good…”

*You’re not the only one. There’s a lot of messed up people in this business, and God knows I’m messed up beyond all things when it comes to you.*

“I… I thought it would make it okay in my head. Make *tonight* okay,” Roman continues. “If I can wake up tomorrow thinking that I’ve let Randy Orton do worse things to me than anyone out there will *ever* know…” he looks up at Hunter, eyes wide and hopeful. “…at least I’ll have that.”

Hunter nods, even though he doesn’t understand the whole thing, not *yet*, though the pieces are starting to slot together for him.

Tomorrow, the world will tear Roman Reigns to pieces again, or at least try to, and he will shoulder that burden just like he has so many times before. Tonight, though, tonight Roman can let himself break down completely, crumble under the weight of it all, let the man he’d been forced to lose to get all up inside him and wreck him thoroughly, finishing the job.

Roman doesn’t get the luxury of working through his feelings out there in the ring. He doesn’t get to exorcise his demons through fists and thumbtacks the way Ambrose does, or spit out fire and vitriol laced with snarling laughter like Seth. He doesn’t get to bash his way through someone’s body and heart, and have it done to him in equal measure the way Zayn and Owens have been going for what seems like centuries, doesn’t get to bask in reputation and respect like AJ Styles, or even relish and play to the crowds’ disgust like Jericho.

He only ever gets to be Roman fucking Reigns, presented like an exotic wild animal caged within
impossibly chiseled, beautiful features, almost too good to be true, everything the people were supposed to love but decided to hate instead. Hunter can’t fix that, he doesn’t know how to even begin, it’s a train that went off the rails a million miles ago when nobody heeded the signs and put on the brakes.

He can’t give Roman the world, but he can at least make a small pocket of it bearable, here in their own private little universe where pain and pleasure orbit like binary stars. The Game knows how to play those two things against each other like nobody else—and he wants Roman to get everything he can out of it.

“And what do you want me to do now…” Hunter says. “After I didn’t save you?”

“Take me back,” Roman says without hesitation. “Take me back from him, Daddy…make it…make it feel right again,”

He’s gone under completely again, his voice raspy at the edges, and Hunter responds almost instinctively to that, hand tightening in the muscles of Roman’s thigh.

“I’ll do that…” he puts more of his weight on top of Roman, pressing their foreheads together. “And when I’m done, you’ll forget you ever had Randy fucking Orton inside of you. You belong to me, you understand?”

Roman nods frantically. “Yours, Daddy… I’m yours.”

Hunter lets his hand drift higher between Roman’s legs. “I’ll fuck every last trace of him out of you, I’ll make you mine again, fill you up with my come the way I’ll never, ever let him or anyone else do.”

“Yes…” Roman whimpers, legs spreading wider to allow Hunter’s hand more room. “Please, Daddy…”

He knows he needs to be careful, there’s less than 24 hours until the next episode of RAW and he sure as hell can’t send Roman out there to interfere with someone the likes of Braun Strowman if the boy can’t even walk.

“What’s your safeword, baby?” Hunter asks as he reaches over to grab the bottle of lube Randy left
on the nightstand. “Say it, so we both know you remember how to use it.”

“Shield,” Roman gasps out. “My safeword is ‘Shield’,”

“Good boy…” Hunter leans down to kiss him possessively, tongue snaking inside Roman’s mouth as he coats his fingers generously with the cool gel. “This will hurt, but it’s going to be me hurting you, not him.”

“Only you…” Roman agrees. “It’s okay if it’s you, Daddy…it’s more than okay, fuck—“ he hisses as Hunter pushes one finger past his swollen rim.

Hunter usually starts him off with two, or three if Roman’s begging for some kind of punishment, but he really can’t bring himself to do it tonight. Not after all the damage Randy’s done. He’s secretly glad he put so much lube on that one finger—the gel cushions him from feeling if Roman’s still bleeding inside. He’ll have to check in the morning just to be sure but right now he just needs, wants to be inside Roman so bad.

“You’re beautiful…” he says as he nips at Roman’s ear. “Open for me like this, I never get tired of watching you…”

Roman’s eyelids flutter, sinking into the praise, mouth falling open as Hunter presses his finger deep, teasing his prostate. Hunter lets his eyes wander down the length of Roman’s body, at the hard nipples peaking on his bronze chest, the neglected erection twitching against his muscled stomach, the willingly spread legs between which Hunter’s hand is nesting, wrist brushing against the soft, dark curls.

When Hunter adds another finger Roman arches off the mattress, burying his face in Hunter’s neck.

“Hurts?”

“A little…” Roman whispers. “I can take it—for you,”

Hunter leans down and kisses the beading tear off the corner of Roman’s eye. “I’ll make it good, baby…I promise.”
He scoots down the mattress to kneel between Roman’s spread legs, undoing his trousers just enough to let his hard cock pop out of its fabric confines. He doesn’t want to bother undressing the rest of the way and he knows Roman likes it when Hunter fucks him half-dressed, it tips the power balance just that little bit more. Grabbing a pillow and placing it under Roman’s hips, he urges the boy to lift his legs and hold his own knees up, Hunter’s weight helping him roll up the rest of the way.

“Please…” Roman begs softly, and Hunter surges forward to comply.

There’s a noise Roman makes whenever he’s being penetrated in this position, caught in his throat, a desperate little wheeze that sets Hunter’s nerves on fire. The look on his face is unguarded and loose, just like when he’s lying on the mat after taking a particularly hard bump or someone else’s finisher. Hunter loses count of the number of times he’s had to quell a raging erection in the production booth, when the cameras focus on Roman’s face a little too long as he’s lying face down on the mat, squirming in pain with glazed, unfocused eyes.

“Fuck…” he mutters as he bottoms out, forehead pressed against Roman’s. “So tight around me, baby boy…like your ass was made for my dick.”

Roman’s breath hitches again, drawing his legs up even further.

“Think you can come just from me fucking you, without touching yourself?” Hunter says as he leans down to kiss the tip of Roman’s nose. “I know you can, you’ve done it before…”

“Y-yes,” Roman says with a nod.

Hunter starts off with a slow pace, but soon he’s undone by the heat and tightness wrapped around his cock, and the beautiful face underneath him, contorting in a mix of pain and pleasure. He lets Roman’s legs down to wrap loosely around his waist as he bends to kiss Roman again, swallow his pretty moans as he starts to thrust harder and faster.

He could go all night like this, fucking hard and good and making sure he hits Roman’s prostate with every other thrust, but he knows he needs to do more, needs to get Roman back on even ground, make it feel right as he says.

Hunter grabs Roman’s face in both hands and angles it so they’re looking straight into each other’s eyes. “Look at me…”
Roman’s eyes are two dark pools of trust and obedience, unhindered by colored lenses and camera lights. They’re windows straight into his mind, a rabbit hole Hunter’s fallen down into time and again, chasing after some sick validation he never even knew he craved. He sees the way his own rough, large thumbs bracket Roman’s eyes and the surge of possessiveness kicks in again, prompting a particularly hard thrust that sends Roman wincing.

“It’s only me that gets to hurt you…” he growls darkly against Roman’s mouth.

“Only you…” Roman agrees.

“Only me that gets to bleed you, only me that gets to breed you,” Hunter accentuates his word with a nip at Roman’s bottom lip. “Say it…”

Roman inhales sharply as Hunter fucks into him, steadying his voice. “O-only Daddy gets to bleed me—oh, fuck…and only Daddy gets to b-breed me…”

“Good boy,” Hunter rewards him with an angled thrust that jabs right against Roman’s prostate, drawing a long, guttural moan out of him. “Come on, baby…I know you’re ready to burst down there, just let it go—“

“Fuck, fuck, Daddy—“ Roman says as he sinks both hands into the fabric of the pillowcase and grips tightly, knowing he’s not been given permission to touch elsewhere. Still being a good boy even when he’s about to lose it, and the thought sends Hunter that much closer to the edge.

Roman comes like that, both hands fist ing the pillowcase and his mouth hanging open, eyes squeezed shut as his dick splatters untouched between their bodies, painting Roman’s stomach and Hunter’s chest with thick white strands of semen. Hunter stills himself to ride it out, watching as the beautiful creature underneath him unravels completely, hours of pent-up frustration and repressed feelings bubbling to the surface, like a fever breaking over sick flesh.

“Oh, God…” Roman mutters weakly as his head falls back onto the pillow, damp with sweat and tears of relief.

Hunter smiles and resumes fucking him, delighting in the involuntary twitches from the oversensitive body he’s thrusting into. “You can hold on to me if you want, baby…come on.”
Roman seizes on the permission and hangs onto Hunter like a lifeline, arms flung around the older man’s neck and legs tightening around Hunter’s waist, as if drawing him closer. Hunter can feel his walls clenching around him even further, as if wanting to squeeze the orgasm out of him, Roman’s body still shaking in the wake of his own.

“Gonna come in you…” he grits out against Roman’s ear, nipping at the shell. “Fill you up…”

“Please, Daddy…” Roman’s voice barely registers as words. “Need you…inside me…”

Hunter pulls back as he feels his climax coming, steadying himself so he can look down and enjoy the view of Roman as he’s being pumped full of his Daddy’s come, pulse after pulse of it shooting inside his body, reclaiming him. It’s almost as good as the face he makes during his orgasm—perhaps even better because he’s more lucid, fully aware of what’s happening to his body, of what Hunter is doing to him. He looks up to meet Hunter’s gaze, dark eyes wide and trusting as if to say, I’m yours again.

Hunter leans down and kisses his mouth, molding wet lips together to the throb of his pulse in his own ears, drumming mine, mine, mine in a crescendo even as his orgasm recedes into a dull ache in his joints and the stickiness of his dress shirt against his sweat-soaked back.

Later, after a cursory wipe-down and another check to make sure he hasn’t done more damage than has been inflicted on his boy earlier that night, he’ll finally strip himself off the rest of his clothes and slip under the covers with Roman, gathering him close as he starts to drift off.

“How long…how long do I still have you for?” Roman asks drowsily against his chest.

“Until tomorrow night at least,” Hunter says as he stares up at the ceiling. “Got that big segment to do with Seth on Raw tomorrow…then I think I need to head down to Florida for an NXT meeting.”

“Hmm…” Roman mumbles. “Wish you could stick around longer,”

“Me too, baby boy…” Hunter rubs up and down Roman’s back slowly. “I think your own road schedule’s looking pretty crazy for the next few weeks.”
“Yeah…” Roman says. “They’re having me team up with Sami for a couple of house shows—should be fun.”

Hunter smiles and nuzzles against Roman’s forehead. “Maybe he can teach you how to do the Tope Con Hilo *properly*…”

Roman cuffs him lightly on the chest. “Don’t tease…”

“You hungry? You haven’t eaten anything since we got back from the Dome…”

“M’tired…just wanna sleep…” Roman says, shuffling even closer. “I’ll eat tomorrow.”

“Oh…” Hunter brushes his lips against Roman’s temple softly.

He spends the next few minutes with his fingers splayed on Roman’s back, rubbing circles with his fingers as he feels Roman’s breathing even out against his chest, signaling that he was falling asleep. Roman’s always like this after they have sex, clinging to him as if afraid Hunter’s going to leave—even after numerous assurances that he’s not going anywhere, at least not until morning and they have to re-emerge out into the real world.

To be completely honest, Hunter doesn’t know if any of this actually helps, if Roman’s any better to face the reality of what awaits him out there after being with Hunter for a night. He’d like to think so, but he’s been wrong more times than he cares to admit when it came to Roman, made some bad decisions on the younger man’s behalf that ended up doing neither of them any good—more often than not leaving Roman for the worse.

He likes to think that at least Roman’s *safe* with him, here in his arms and not having to care in the slightest what the world outside thought of him. It’s a patch-up job at best, like sandbags heaved against a broken dam, too infrequent to sustain him for long periods of time. But Hunter knows his boy will step out onto the stage tomorrow and brave the onslaught with a steely look in his dark eyes, knowing that he’ll always have a place to come back to where he can let himself break, let the facade crumble into dust.

It’s the least Hunter can do—at least until he figures out how he can do more.
Chapter Summary

Roman takes the phone and reaches behind himself to put it on the bedside table, giving Sami another chance to watch the play of faint sunlight on the ink-wrapped muscles of his arm. Roman’s a beautiful sight to behold, shaped as if from sculpter’s clay, and the half-smile he gives Sami when they’re face-to-face again is another pinprick of warmth in an otherwise cold room.

Chapter Notes

A sweeter, slower interlude taking place during the RAW roster's trip to Alaska back in February.

Cold.

That’s the first thing that registers in Sami’s sleep-heavy brain as he slowly wakes, hands instinctively reaching for the spot next to him in the mattress and finding it empty. He cracks his eyes open, the fuzzy outline of the hotel room window coming into view, illuminated by the weak early morning sunlight.


As his eyes focus, he can see the snow gathering at the corners of the window frame, and the gray-white landscape of the Alaskan winter outside. He has fond memories of playing with his colleagues in the snow outside the arena yesterday, throwing snowballs at each other like big, rowdy children. It’s a moment of unguarded silliness they rarely get to indulge in with their busy schedule, and Sami wonders if he can muster enough will to bundle up and walk in the snow outside before they have to check out, just to relish the great white wonder of it all.

That is, unless his roommate has other plans.

His roommate, who is currently absent from the bed where he should be, leaving only tousled sheets and indents on the pillow next to Sami.
That’s when his other senses catch up with him and he hears the low hum of a murmured conversation from the other side of the room, the one still mostly cast in shadows. Sami cranes his neck and sees Roman on his phone, seated on the only chair in the room in a languid stretch, dressed only in his boxers and talking quietly to whoever is on the other side of the line.

Roman sees him and smiles, and Sami feels just a little warmer. A little. Not enough. He makes a gesture for Roman to come back to bed, which Roman ignores at first until there’s a pause in the conversation, and he looks straight at Sami.

“Yeah…yeah, he’s awake. Just.”

Sami rubs his eyes and stretches, the back of his hands meeting the fabric-paneled headboard. Roman gets up off the chair, phone still held against his ear.

“You wanna talk to him? Hold on, I’ll give him the phone…”

“Who…” Sami has to cough first to clear his throat. “Who is it?”

Roman just smiles as he hands his phone over, which Sami struggles not to drop with his sleep-stiff fingers. “Hello?” he croaks sleepily into the phone.

“Hey, Red…”

*Sweet Merciful God.* The combination of Hunter’s gravelly voice, the smile Sami can hear in it, and the use of an old nickname he hasn’t heard in too, too long sends a jolt straight up Sami’s spine and he’s ten times more awake than he was five seconds ago.

“Hey, Hunter…”

“How is it up there?”

Sami closes his eyes, letting the voice wash over him, the rasp of it so close to his ear he can almost imagine the man himself in the room with them. If only. *If only.*
“Cold,” Sami says as he snuggles deeper into the blankets. “Really, really cold.”

A chuckle comes across the line. “Isn’t Roman keeping you warm?”

Sami looks up at the tall figure standing silhouetted against the bleak light from the window. “He was, now he’s just standing next to the bed trying to look all, I don’t know, _statuesque_ and shit.”

Roman gives him a scowl, meanwhile Hunter just laughs, the sound of it rich and warm against Sami’s ear. “I can imagine…must be quite a sight.”

“Yeah…” Sami agrees, taking in the way light and shadow falls on the lines of ink on Roman’s arm. “Yeah, it is.”

“You ain’t such a bad sight yourself, if I recall correctly…” Hunter says. “Bet you still got that soft red fuzz all over you, the one that goes all the way down to your happy trail…”

Sami gasps a little, making Roman arch his eyebrows. Damnit, how is it that Hunter can go from casual conversation to phone sex in 0.5 seconds?

“You getting a little warmer there, Sami?”

“A little…” Sami lets his free hand trail down to his navel, running his fingers through the short hairs Hunter referred to. “I’m imagining your hands on me.”

It’s early and his brain-to-mouth filter, dodgy even at best, is clearly in a state of non-function, but Hunter responds with another soft, warm, chuckle. He knows Sami too well by now. “Been a long time since I got my hands on you, Red…”

“You’re a busy man,” Sami says, trying not to sound despondent about it.

“That I am,” Hunter sounds almost regretful. “I can make it up to you, though…”
“Oh?” Sami’s smile widens, and Roman arches an eyebrow in interest. “You planning something for me, Boss? Aside from taking the Coquina Clutch, that is…”

Roman winces a little, a twinge of sympathy for Seth, no doubt—and a reminder that Sami’s being set up to basically be cannon fodder for Samoa Joe’s establishment as an all-conquering destroyer.

“It’ll be fine, you’ll be fine…” Hunter assures him. “I’ve told him to be extra careful with you, Seth just had a bad fall when he went down…”

“I know,” Sami says as he shifts the phone to one hand, beckoning Roman to come closer to the bed with the other. “I’ve talked to Joe about it. We’ll rehearse the spot before we go on air, figure out how exactly he’ll take me down. I’m more interested in what you’ve got planned for after, if that is indeed what you’re implying here.”

Roman climbs onto the bed next to Sami as he lays the phone down between them, hitting the speaker button.

“I’m heading straight to Vegas after we wrap up the Elimination Chamber,” Hunter’s voice crackles through the speaker. “Got a big nice suite booked, and I can think of one or two people I’d like to keep me company in it,”

“I’m listening…” Sami says playfully, exchanging a knowing glance with Roman. “Roman’s listening, too.”

“Is he, now?” Hunter sounds amused. “You there, baby boy?”

Roman gives Sami a little smirk and leans down onto the phone to say, “Right here, Daddy…”

Sami has to quell the moan that threatens to escape his lips because holy shit, it’s the hottest thing he’s heard in months even if it shouldn’t be. The timbre of Roman’s voice, the depth and huskiness of it as he casually calls Hunter ‘Daddy’, resonant with promised obedience and submission, sends a bolt of heat right into Sami’s awakening dick. He’s known about Roman and Hunter for years, the same way Roman’s always known about him and Hunter, but he’s never actually experienced their relationship dynamics up close like this. The idea of getting to see more of it, of getting to take part in it, is something that definitely makes up for whatever Samoa Joe’s going to do to him on Monday.
“You taking care of our Sami, Roman?”

Our Sami.

“Yes, I am…” Roman reaches over and brushes his thumb across Sami’s quivering lips, a pinpoint of warmth against the cold surrounding them. “Gonna take care of him some more, after this…”

Oh, you wanna play, Big Guy? I can play. Sami catches Roman’s thumb in his mouth, sucking gently at the tip before swallowing it down to the first knuckle, purposely making a wet sucking noise as he does so.

“You boys should take care of each other…” Hunter’s voice says. “…at least until Monday night, then I can have the both of you.”

Sami lets Roman’s thumb slide from his mouth to say, “That a promise?”

“I always do right by my boys, don’t I?”

“That you do….you sure you don’t wanna watch us take care of each other?” Roman offers, thumb now stroking Sami’s chin.

“Can’t…got a meeting with the engineers coming up. We’re testing this new chamber they’ve built to make sure it doesn’t fall apart the minute your buddy Ambrose starts monkey-jumping all over it…”

Roman chuckles. “I bet he has some crazy shit planned already…it’s gonna be a great show.”

“Not as great as the one I’ll get when I have the two of you with me in Vegas…” Hunter says. “Listen, I gotta go. Be good, baby boy…”

“We’ll see you in Vegas, then.” Sami says.

“See you there, Red…” Hunter says before ending the call.
Roman takes the phone and reaches behind himself to put it on the bedside table, giving Sami another chance to watch the play of faint sunlight on the ink-wrapped muscles of his arm. Roman’s a beautiful sight to behold, shaped as if from sculptor’s clay, and the half-smile he gives Sami when they’re face-to-face again is another pinprick of warmth in an otherwise cold room.

“So…I’ve heard of unusual bookings before,” Sami says. “But I don’t think I’ve ever been booked for a threesome by my own boss, with my own boss, no less.”

Roman laughs, half-sinking his nose into a pillow. “Yeah, that just happened, didn’t it?”

“M’not complaining or anything, just…” Sami blinks at the ceiling. “Yeah.”

“You’re thinking too much,” Roman reaches over to drape over Sami’s torso, dragging him closer. “C’mere and let me take care of you like I promised Daddy…”

The last coherent thought Sami has before Roman starts kissing him is how fucking hot it’s gonna be to hear Roman call Hunter ‘Daddy’ and have the older man present in the room, to see the look on Hunter’s face when he hears it. Sami knows it’s gonna be a really special night, but right now he’s content with the preview Roman’s giving him with a tongue swirling around his mouth, strong arms wrapping tight around Sami’s body.

Warm. Warm. Warm.

Every inch of Roman is warm, from the tongue snaking into Sami’s mouth down to the thick calves wrapping around Sami’s legs. Sami sinks into him like a handprint in the sand, suddenly aware of how utterly cold he’s been—and it has nothing to do with Alaska.

It’s an intimacy he’s been without for too long, pushed to the back of his mind as he tries to find a more solid footing on RAW, still unsure of where he stands in the greater scheme of things or if he’s even part of that greater scheme at all. Teaming up with Roman last night and actually winning against Kevin for once felt good, made even better by the quick and dirty handjob Roman gave him later in the showers.

He won’t go so far as to say he’s stagnating, just—at this point it can go either way and the minute he’s called up to possibly fill Seth’s spot against Samoa Joe for Fastlane he knows he’s probably going to have to eat another loss.
“Will you stop that?” Roman asks with mild annoyance when he pulls free.

“What?”

“I can practically feel you thinking while I’m kissing you,” Roman says, and Sami flushes a little.

“I’m sorry, I just—” he waves his hand aimlessly. “God, I’m being a mood-killer, aren’t I?”

Roman catches his hand in mid air and brings it down between their bodies. “What does Hunter usually do to get you to stop?”

Sami blinks, caught off guard by the question. “Uhhh…”

“I’m sure he has ways of making you stop thinking and just enjoy the moment. So what is it?”

“He, uhh—” Sami swallows, trying to will his mouth to form the words. It’s stupid to feel embarrassed about it when he’s already slept with Roman, but he’s never actually shared details of his own experiences with Hunter. “I…he makes me go down on him, usually.”

“That’ll stop you talking, for sure…” Roman smirks. “But does it get you to stop thinking and drifting off?”

“Well…having a dick in my mouth forces me to focus,” Sami says, feeling the color rush to his cheeks even as he says the words. “There’s a sense purpose there, you know? There’s an endgame, and you wanna get there the best way possible—“

“Oh, just shut up and suck my dick, Zayn…” Roman pushes him down by the shoulders none-too-gently, throwing back the sheets to reveal his half-hard member poking above the waistband of his boxers.

Sami positions himself so he’s lying across the bed, head nestled in Roman’s lap as the bigger man leans back against the headboard. It doesn’t take long to work Roman into full hardness with his
hands and flicks of his tongue, and just when he senses Roman’s starting to get impatient he encloses the head of Roman’s cock with his mouth and works his way down, sliding smoothly all the way until his nose is nestled against Roman’s pubic hair.

“Fuck...” Roman gasps and reaches down to ruffle Sami’s hair. “You don’t do anything half-assed, do you?”

Sami smiles, as much as he can around Roman’s length, starting to work his rhythm up and down, closing his eyes in concentration. He’s good at this—he knows he is, Hunter’s told him as much many times, and he notes with satisfaction that blowjobs don’t seem to have an equivalent to ring rust.

Roman’s not content to just lay back and enjoy the treatment, however, evident by how his hand has traveled down Sami’s back and is now pushing an insistent finger at Sami’s entrance. He shifts a little to let Roman in, still slick and loose from last night and rubbing his own erection against the mattress, moaning around Roman’s dick as a thick finger enters him.

He licks a bead of pre-cum off the tip of Roman’s length before sinking down on him again, already on edge thinking of how good it’s going to feel having Roman inside him again, spurred on by the finger preparing him for the inevitable intrusion.

“Wanna see you ride me…” Roman says as he fetches a condom from the side table with his other hand.

Sami lets Roman’s cock slip out of his mouth and licks his lips. “So I gotta do all the work now?”

“Trust me, I’ll make it worth your while…” Roman smirks as he hands the torn foil packet to Sami.

Sami helps him slide the condom down Roman’s hard length and positions himself, Roman’s big hands steadying him by the hips. He stares down as he angles himself, fascinated by the sight of Roman’s tan, thick fingers splayed against his paler flesh, then having to close his eyes as he slowly, slowly sinks himself down.

“Fuuuck….” Sami lets out a breathless whine as he fully seats himself on Roman’s dick, the heat at their point of contact spreading to every extremity of his body, to the very tips of his nerves. “So good…”
“I try, Zayn, I try.” Roman says dryly before he starts moving, guiding Sami’s pace gently with hands on his hips.

Sami braces his hands on Roman’s chest, pale fingers dancing in the ink and sweat, watching Roman’s beautiful face as dark, deep eyes stare up at him.

It’s nothing like last night, when they were still high on adrenaline and clumsy with fatigue, Roman taking from behind before Sami had even properly worked his pants off. It was good, it was fucking great, but Sami relishes getting to enjoy every move, every breath they make together in the stillness of the cold morning air, pale winter light painting Roman’s golden skin in bluish highlights.

Roman pulls him forward, changing the angle of his thrusts to hit Sami’s prostate and Sami moans shamelessly, a long note that ends abruptly when Roman kisses him. They ride it out like that, trading wet, swollen kisses as Sami lies on top of Roman like dead weight, melting into him, every thrust drawing a little whimper from his throat that Roman sucks into his own.

“Ro…” Sami gasps weakly.

“Yeah…” Roman says, not even needing to hear the rest of the words. His hand snakes down between their bodies and finds Sami’s own cock, stroking him in time with his thrusts.

It doesn’t take long, Roman feels so good inside him and his hands are like magic, and Sami soon comes apart, shooting into Roman’s fist, his mouth open and pressed against Roman’s neck.

Roman stops moving for a while to let him come down from it, thumb still working Sami’s sensitive slit to tease the very last drops out of him.

“Oh, God…” Sami mutters when he finds his voice again. His throat feels raw, there’s blood pounding in his ears and his limbs feel like jelly.

Roman lifts his messy, come-stained hand to his face and licks a thick bead of it off his own thumb, the sight of it nearly sending Sami into blackout. When Roman offers his hand to him, it seems the most natural thing to do to let out his tongue and lick, tasting himself against the salty sweat of Roman’s hand.

He doesn’t even realize Roman’s started moving again, resuming his steady rhythm, Sami’s world
narrowed to two points of contact—the hard heat of Roman inside him and the slick, tangy rub of Roman’s digits in his mouth, feeding him his own release.

“Dirty little babyface…” Roman says with a hint of amusement. “Not so innocent after all, are you?”

“N-never said I was, *fuck*—“ Sami hisses as Roman picks up his pace, clearly on the verge himself. “There’s a lot you haven’t seen, Big Dog.”

“I bet Daddy’s seen it all,” Roman growls, the hand still on Sami’s hip gripping hard enough to bruise. “Bet you’re dying to show him again, aren’t you?”

“I’ll show both of you…” Sami says as he finishes licking Roman’s index finger, shaking with the force of what he knows are Roman’s last few, deep thrusts.

“C-counting on it,” Roman grits out, then throws his head back as he bucks his hips up and comes. The force of it pitches Sami forward onto Roman’s chest, gasping as he feels Roman coming inside him. He’s mouthing kisses against Roman’s ink as he rides it out, mouth wet with his own taste and Roman’s sweat.

He never wants to be cold again.

—

Hunter’s phone buzzes as he walks down the corridor to the meeting, and he flicks it open with one hand as he shifts the folder containing the Elimination Chamber rundown sheets under his arm—

—and nearly drops both the folder and his phone onto the floor of the arena.

*Those naughty little bastards.*

The picture doesn’t show any faces—they’ve wisened a little after the whole Seth debacle—but he
knows exactly what he’s seeing. Two bodies lying together, spent cocks nestled against each other, one darker in tone, the other paler against a bed of reddish curls, streaks of sweat and semen still visible on two muscled torsos.

Hunter’s own cock instantly takes interest, and he has to summon all the willpower in the world to quell it, knowing he’ll have to jerk off in his hotel room later tonight to that picture, hands already aching to touch his boys again.

*You two are so getting spanked on Monday Night. -H*

He doesn’t have to wait long for the reply.

*Sami’s game—he says you never done it to him before. -R*

He has to smile a little. At least Roman’s in a good mood and Sami seems to be feeling playful, which guarantees Hunter that he has everything to look forward to when he gets done with this PPV and gets his ass over to Vegas. Just one more night.

*Tell him: first time for everything. -H*

He pauses in front of the door to the meeting room, schooling his features back into something reasonably *businesslike*, pushing the thought of Sami and Roman—and that damn photo—to the back of his mind.

He won’t read Roman’s reply until much later, just before the pre-show kicks off.

*Just make sure it’s not his last. -R*
Chapter Summary

Contrary to what most people will undoubtedly think of him—if they ever find out, that is—Hunter doesn’t do this just because he can. Being the brains behind the Performance Center and in charge of NXT doesn’t mean he gets a free pass to fuck any piece of ass he wants from developmental, even though he’s sure that there are people within the system who think that way, convinced that Full Sail is just spilling over with hot young talent eager to please the King of Kings.

Chapter Notes

This chapter explores the beginning of Hunter and Roman’s relationship, just after the destruction of The Shield on RAW, the night after Payback 2014. Featuring a cameo from Seth Rollins and hints of past Ambrolleigns. But mostly just Hunter going after what he wants, and getting what he wants.

Contrary to what most people will undoubtedly think of him—if they ever find out, that is—Hunter doesn’t do this just because he can.

Being the brains behind the Performance Center and in charge of NXT doesn’t mean he gets a free pass to fuck any piece of ass he wants from developmental, even though he’s sure that there are people within the system who think that way, convinced that Full Sail is just spilling over with hot young talent eager to please the King of Kings.

He’ll confess to being an egotistical bastard at times, but not that kind.

He takes his job very seriously, hours in meetings debating which talents to push, which talents to move up to the main roster and in what manner, and who needs more time to hone their skills. Sometimes the decision is taken from him completely, through injury or circumstance or because Vince is having one of his ‘why the heck not’ moments, reminding Hunter rather painfully that even this high up in the company ladder there are still things that are beyond his control, directions he can’t quite take the company yet because someone else is still holding the reins.

So he keeps his eyes on his young hopefuls, sheltering them as best he can from the capriciousness that sometimes tears through the company’s decision-makers like freak waves, knowing his protection will mean little once they’re shoved before the eyes of the WWE Universe. They will
make it or break it out there, amassing wins and losses and bruises aplenty, and in each of their eyes Hunter sees the future—he really does, there’s nothing he believes in more these days.

It’s just that he sees more in the eyes of some.

In Seth Rollins, he saw a rogue shooting star. Bright and reckless, long-limbed and graceful, the smoothness of his technique counterpointed with the gravel snarl and the brash attitude. The minute he arrived in Florida, it was obvious that Seth had bought early bird tickets to his own victory parade, and Hunter had to step in to make sure the boy didn’t go supernova prematurely, destroying himself and everyone near him in the process. Seth needed to be tamed, brought down a few pegs every now and then, every mark of Hunter’s hands on him a new lesson in discipline and restraint. Being the over-achiever he was, of course Seth excelled in those lessons too—even if he took a lot of teaching. Hunter made sure the little bastard knew there was no way he was getting the NXT belt on him until he’d proven that he could keep his pride in check.

Seth loves being good at things, being told how good he is, he’d sink himself low and lick his own come off the floor if it got him praise and Hunter’s fingers through his hair. He’ll bitch and moan and complain all the way but Hunter knows he loves it, keeps coming back for more, keeps upping the ante by baiting and teasing. But as dirty and kinky as they get it’s a relatively straightforward relationship, especially compared to some of Hunter’s other dalliances.

Sami Zayn arrived like a red streak trailing a golden sunrise, warm and energetic, and he had Hunter’s attention from the first time he wrestled without his mask. Sami didn’t need much coaching—he knew how to work a promo, how to present himself, and in the ring he knew how to tell a story with nothing more than a look in his eyes and a shift in his stance. Hunter appreciated that in someone so young, how Sami could marry finesse and technique with rage and passion, how he wrestled each night like it would be his last time. Heart and soul of NXT, indeed. Sami craved respect and Hunter gave it to him, the night after the first NXT live event and his match with Cesaro. Took him aside and told him how proud he was, held that trembling, sweating body close and whispered a secret promise in his ear, one he’d keep once the crowds went home and the cameras stopped rolling.

Sami was unique, which is a shit way to describe someone so intriguing. He wasn’t really a submissive per se but he liked to play, liked to entertain Hunter’s ideas and Hunter found him pleasant to be around, period. Sami, who knew where to get the best coffee in twenty cities spread across three continents. Sami, who didn’t ask to hear stories about the Kliq or DX like the others, but wanted to know everything about hanging out with Motorhead and Hunter’s favorite classic rock songs. Sami, who still blushed when he hears praise or the crowd singing his theme song but burns like molten steel when you book him against an opponent he can really go the distance with.

Whenever Sami came to him with that need in his eyes, it’s never about being taken down or reminded of his place like Seth. Sami knew exactly where he stood, how he got there, was so
painfully lucid about anything and everything that sometimes, he just needed to forget. Needed to not think anymore, needed his mile-a-minute brain to be forced to submit to baser purposes. Nine times out of ten, it was about Kevin. Kevin, who wears Sami’s bruises the way Sami wears his. Kevin, who is simultaneously Sami’s best friend and his on-screen nemesis, inhabiting that role for so long that Hunter was genuinely shocked when Kevin cornered him one night and politely—but menacingly—told him that he would come after Hunter, job relationship be damned, if he ever hurt Sami.

Hunter never asks about the true circumstances of their relationship—it seems complicated enough that not even Sami can unravel the knots. He just knows that whenever Sami is with him, the last thing he wants to think about is Kevin. And Hunter’s more than happy to help him in that regard, take Sami places he’s never known both in mind and body, cover the bruises and marks Kevin left with his own, things that show on Sami’s flesh the next day and doesn’t fade for weeks. Hunter doesn’t get to devote half as much time to Sami as he does with Seth, not with his schedule, but he tries to make each time count, wants Sami to know he’s never forgotten, never far from Hunter’s mind even when they’ve hardly touched for months.

And then…there’s Roman Reigns.

Hunter first took notice of the latest entry in the Anoa’i legacy when he was still wrestling out of the old FCW warehouse, in trunks that barely covered that sweet, succulent ass of his, technique still raw and rough around the edges. Roman had a way of making himself unmissable, despite his limited experience, carrying himself with grace and holding his own in the ring against the likes of his future Shield brothers.

He was beautiful, that was for damn sure, but there was nothing about him that called out to Hunter in particular, none of Seth’s doe-eyed neediness or Sami’s endearing complexity. Hunter was content to learn about Roman through the coaching reports, each of them filled with glowing assessments that the boy could be groomed into the face of the company, could carry the flag for many years to come.

When The Shield finally made their way to the main roster, Hunter watched with great pleasure as the three men blossomed into Superstars, each adding their own unique touch into the cocktail mix of violence and brotherly affection that was fast becoming one of the company’s biggest draws. Roman was a juggernaut, six-foot-plus of raw power and muscle, ready to step in with a well-timed punch whenever his high-flying, risk-taking brothers got into trouble. He was The Big Dog who growled and scowled and speared everybody in half, who spoke little and hit hard. He seemed almost unflappable.

That impression lasted until the Shield vs Evolution storyline started, and Hunter got a closer look at the supposed alpha of the Hounds of Justice.
To be precise, Hunter got a closer look at him on his hands and knees, crawling brokenly across the ring after one too many Pedigrees and powerbombs, bleeding from the mouth, one arm flailing to reach for the tips of Hunter’s shoes before his strength gave out and his hand fell onto the mat. Hunter’s world seemed to slow down at that very moment, Randy and Dave’s taunting laughter fading into the background, as did the sight of Dean and Seth lying motionless in the corners. All he saw was Roman Reigns, eyes desperate and glassy, breathing ragged from his bruised chest, the sound of it setting a chain reaction in Hunter, shutting down logic and decency whilst awakening his baser, more animalistic instincts.

One second, Hunter was thinking what a damn good seller the kid was, the next second he was picturing how good it would feel to drag Roman up by the hair, force his mouth open and push his cock into those thick, swollen, blowjob-perfect lips.

Long story short, it was the closest Hunter had come to being charged with public indecency since his antics in DX.

Later, he’d drag Seth into the VIP showers in the arena and fuck him against the wall under the hot spray, Seth wailing and clawing at his back as Hunter pounded into him with no preamble, no games or rules or stipulations.

“What’s got in to you, Big Daddy?” Seth would rasp as they lay on the cold tile floor afterwards, still catching his breath. “Not that I’m complaining, but…holy shit, that was some next level stuff, and I’ve been fucking you for years…”

“Shut up,” Hunter said, wiping Seth’s come off his chest and soaping them both clean.

“Oh, oh—“ Seth exclaimed, his voice acquiring that annoying sing-song tone. “It’s because of Roman, isn’t it?”

Hunter’s head snapped up, caught off guard. The little two-toned bastard was smirking at him, eyes glimmering.

“Yeah, I saw how you were looking at him…had one eye open the whole time I was supposed to be out after that Powerbomb,”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about,” Hunter said as he soaped down Seth’s long, muscled legs.
Roman’s legs were definitely bigger, his thighs thicker, and Hunter wondered how they would feel under his hands.

“Don’t lie, I know how you get when someone’s at your feet like that, especially someone who looks like Roman…” Seth teased. “He’s beautiful, ain’t he Daddy?”

Hunter sighed, hanging his head under the spray of rapidly cooling water. “Yes…”

“You want him?” Seth asked. “He knows about us, you know…”

“Yeah, I figured you had to tell both him and Ambrose where the hell you fucked off to anytime you disappeared from the hotel for a night,” Hunter said. “Although…judging by how much less you’re doing it these days, I suppose they’re keeping you occupied.”

Seth cocked his head to one side, curling his lips inward. “They’re…we…the stuff we do is pretty, well, tame. Dean and Roman combined aren’t half as kinky as you are, Big Daddy.”

Hunter had to smile at that, standing up and pulling Seth with him. Seth’s body was lithe, lean, it suited his high-flying style and gave Hunter a bit of an edge in strength, and Seth happily made a show out of melting into his embrace like jelly, purring like a kitten.

“You didn’t answer my question…” Seth said as he nipped at Hunter’s chin. “Do you want Roman?”

“What if I do?”

Seth shrugged. “That sits just fine with me… although, don’t expect me to do you any favors. You wanna go after him, you figure out how yourself.”

Hunter grabbed him by the chin. “Last I checked, I never needed any help getting what I want, Seth…”

Seth licked his lips deviously. “Good hunting, Big Daddy. You’re stalking after big game, here.”
In hindsight, if Hunter had known that Seth was alluding to more than just Roman’s size, he probably would’ve stopped and evaluated his attempts at conquest.

Probably.

Probably not.

He was just a man, after all, and Roman was so god damn intoxicating.

The way he looked up at Hunter as he fist ed a hand in Roman’s thick hair, grunting threats of violence and destruction into the microphone, so close that each of Roman’s labored breaths blew across his face like an invitation.

The way Roman stared at the blood spatter he’d coughed into his own palm, lying facedown in the wake of another Evolution beatdown.

The broken, guilty look in his eyes as he’d crawled towards Seth and Dean’s prone bodies at ringside, collecting them into his embrace, patting them down for bruises.

Hunter wanted him *bad*, the desire building and burning brighter even as the clock ticked down to The Shield’s inevitable destruction. He tried to keep it strictly professional in the ring, even as the brawls between their two factions intensified. When Randy tore a gash in Roman’s forehead, Seth refused to have sex with him for a week, which only served to heighten Hunter’s frustrations. He knew that once Seth had jumped sides he could have the little bastard anytime he wanted, with the storyline demanding that Seth be physically separated from the other two to get their headspaces realigned, but it was Roman who occupied his thoughts, his jerkoff sessions filled with images of inked arms looped around his neck, strong thighs wrapped around his waist and a tight, pulsing hole milking his cock.
Then came the night he stood over Roman and Dean’s bodies, his arm around Seth’s shoulders, the crowd roaring with howls of derision as Seth shook in his embrace, lips quivering as he struggled not to break character. There was genuine regret there, fear that he might have hit one or both of them too hard, disbelief that the moment had finally come, overwhelmed by the realization of what had been ended in one swift, brutal swing of a steel chair.

Randy and Hunter had to physically coax Seth up the ramp, step by agonizing step, as the boy kept looking back at his brothers’ broken bodies in the ring, the look in his eyes so conflicted that Hunter knew he wasn’t merely selling the angle.

Backstage, away from the cameras and locked inside Hunter’s private dressing room, Seth finally crumbled, sobbing ugly and messy against both Randy and Hunter’s shoulders, anxious to know how Roman and Dean were doing but realizing he couldn’t ask them himself, the separation they’d discussed for weeks now suddenly, painfully real.

Hunter had to give Randy credit for stepping up in that moment—The Viper didn’t normally bother with niceties and kindness, and he hadn’t shown any gentleness the few times that Hunter had shared Seth with him. This particular night he seemed to understand the weight of the situation, gathering Seth onto his lap as they sat on the couch in the dressing room, cooing murmurs into his ear, hand brushing away sweat-damp strands of two-toned hair. Seth clung to Randy like his life depended on it, eyes drooping as he kitten-licked the sweat off Randy’s collarbone. Hunter had never seen Seth go down that easily before, pliant and tame almost as soon as Randy pulled him in close, and he exchanged a knowing look with his Evolution stablemate.

“You take care of him, yeah?” Hunter said as he gathered his belongings. “I gotta check on the other two.”

“Yeah, this one’s with me tonight,” Randy said as he patted Seth’s rump affectionately. “Ain’t that right, baby?”

Seth sniffled and nodded, burrowing deeper into Randy’s chest as Hunter threw one last look at them before walking out the door.

Hunter caught up with Ambrose in a deserted corner of the parking lot, bags at his feet and a cigarette twirled between his fingers. Any other time, he would’ve scolded Dean for smoking within
company perimeters, but he figured he could cut the Lunatic Fringe some slack tonight. Dean’s fingers were twitching, his shoulders tight with anxiety, three stubs already crumpled at his feet.

“All in a night’s work, right?” he muttered with a thin, bitter smile when he saw Hunter.

“You okay?” Hunter asked.

“I’ve had worse,” Dean shrugged. “Chairs are more forgiving than barbed wire or broken glass.”

Hunter winced—he’d seen the old CZW tapes, back when they were still assessing Dean for recruitment. He remembered thinking what a miracle it was that Dean was even alive and functioning.

“How’s the little two-toned weasel?” Dean asked, the affection for Seth bleeding through his voice.

“A wreck,” Hunter said truthfully. “He’ll need some time to adjust…you all do.”

“Nah, I’m good to go, Trips…” Dean took another long drag of his cigarette. “Gonna have some fun with Seth in the coming weeks, judging by the scripts I’ve been sent. Don’t worry about me,”

“You sure? Did you get the trainers to check on you?”

“I just need a couple of beers, some food, and some much-needed downtime,” Dean stared out into the emptying parking lot. “Like I said, I’ve had worse.”

Hunter could tell Dean was antsy to be left alone, so he changed the subject. “Where’s Roman?”

“Trainers drove him back to the hotel,” Dean said as he flicked his cigarette onto the ground, stomping it with his foot.

“Shit, why? Something wrong with him?”
Dean’s head snapped in his direction, eyes wild and angry. “You tell me, Boss…he took a couple
dozen hits from kendo sticks last night, a few Pedigrees, some RKOs, maybe a Powerbomb or two
for good measure—oh, and probably enough chairshots tonight to send us back to the Attitude Era!
Why would you think there’s something fucking wrong with him?”

Hunter sighed. “Fuck, Ambrose…calm down, okay? Didn’t mean it like that.”

Dean deflated visibly, shoving his hands into his pockets, eyes staring at the pavement.

“Look, I know you’re still processing it in your head, everything that went down tonight, just—”
Hunter scratched the back of his head. “Walk it off, or do whatever you need. You and Roman have
the rest of the week off. Just get it out of your system before the next show,”

“Yeah, yeah…” Dean shuffled uncomfortably. “Do what’s best for business, right?”

Hunter ignored the taunt. “What’s your room number?”

Dean stopped moving, icy blue eyes staring right at Hunter as if getting ready to pounce on him
again.

“Dean…I need to check on Roman,” Hunter said calmly, as if confronting a wounded animal.
“What’s your room number?”

“It’s…327,” Dean finally blurted out.

“Thanks,” Hunter said and turned to walk away before the erratic blonde could say anything more.

He felt Dean’s eyes on his back the entire time, wondering if Dean knew about Hunter’s recent
infatuation with Roman, if Seth had told him anything.
Hunter was standing in front of the door numbered 327 and had just finished knocking three times, when his phone buzzed with a text message from Randy.

*Got the lil prince sound asleep after a few rounds to take his mind off things. You going after the big one, aren't u?*

Hunter scowled and typed a quick: *Mind your own fucking business, Orton* just as he heard the locks being undone on the other side.

And then he found himself face-to-face with Roman Reigns, in a loose-fitting tank top and sweatpants, hair pulled back into a ponytail, eyes wide with surprise to see Hunter there.

“Hey…” Hunter started awkwardly.

“Uh…hi,” Roman said, his voice low and labored. “You…came to get Seth’s things? He left some in the room,”

“Did he? I’ll send someone to get them in the morning,” Hunter said as he slid his phone back into his pocket. “Actually, came here to check on you. Dean said the trainers drove you back,”

“Oh…” Roman said, still holding the door halfway open. “Yeah, I kind of…when they were examining me back at the arena, I kinda got sick and threw up all over the place.”

“Shit, are you ok?”

“It’s nothing, really…” Roman shrugged, but the movement caused him to grimace in pain. “Happens sometimes when…after nights like this, when shit gets intense.”

“I see…”

“The doctors didn’t find anything wrong, and they gave me some fluids before driving me back, so I’m fine now,” Roman said quickly. “But…thanks for checking up on me,”
He started to close the door but Hunter held it open. “Wait, Roman…”

Roman could’ve shut the door in his face if he wanted to, there was enough strength even in that bruised and battered body to do so, but he let Hunter push the door fully open, inching forward slightly into his space.

“Let me see it, okay?” Hunter kept his voice low, unthreatening, as far as possible from the deep growl he used on the mic to antagonize his opponents. “Let me take a good look at your back,”

He had no business asking Roman for this, not even with his position in the company. Roman could tell him as much and send him on his way, and that would be the end of it. But the younger man relented, stepping back into the room and allowing Hunter to follow inside, Roman walking gingerly on his stiff and sore limbs, looking suddenly extremely self-conscious.

The lights were dimmed and the TV was off, and Roman’s phone lay connected to a charging socket on the desk. The beds were unmade but clearly hadn’t been slept on—he was probably still in too much pain to lie down. Roman’s bags were already packed, perhaps out of habit, even though neither he nor Dean were scheduled to appear on SmackDown. Hunter couldn’t help but notice that Seth’s luggage had been shuffled to one corner of the room, like something Roman wanted to forget.

Rolling up the sleeves of his dress shirt, Hunter sat down on one of the beds, patting the space beside him, closer to the headboard where the light was better. “C’mere…”

He tried not to let it get to him, how quickly Roman complied, how unquestioningly he moved to sit down beside Hunter, his weight sinking into the hard hotel mattress.

“Take this off…” Hunter tugged at the hem of the tank top, pulling it upwards gently. Roman lifted his arms with much effort, sharp intakes of breath signaling how much pain he was in, Hunter helping him pull the garment over his head as Roman’s back was laid bare for him to see.

*Jesus fucking Christ.*

It was worse than Hunter had imagined. The thinner welts were no doubt from Sunday night at Payback, when Randy and Dave had gone to town on him with kendo sticks, but the uglier, larger bruises that were starting to stain the Samoan’s skin purple were from tonight. He could see the burst blood vessels, blossoming angrily under Roman’s flesh, and in some places the cuts were still open,
red and raw and undoubtedly painful.

“Fuck…” he couldn’t help but mutter. “How are you even moving around, I have no idea…”

“Painfully,” Roman offered a weak chuckle as he drew his ponytail aside to drape over one shoulder, exposing the long tan neck that Hunter wanted to sink his teeth into, desire sparking somewhere deep in his chest.

“Does it hurt when you breathe? Did they check for anything internal?” Hunter realized he was fussing over Roman, perhaps unnecessarily, but it was the least he could do. Some of those bruises were of his making, after all.

“Yeah, s’all good, it’s just…” Roman winced as he flexed his left shoulder, the one left uninked. “Gonna take a while before I can spear anyone convincingly again.”

“You nearly broke me in half with that last one yesterday,” Hunter said.

Roman looked over his shoulder, glancing at Hunter with one eye. “I was… I could barely stand at that point, we’d been going for what, half an hour?”

“Yeah,”

“That last spot came up so fast, and before I knew it Seth was off the ropes—and I just had to come at you with everything, couldn’t even think…” Roman’s voice trailed off as he reminisced, the pleasant memory of winning souring as his eyes dimmed, remembering what had become of his little stable. “I’m gonna miss that…”

“What, spearing me? I’m sure you’ll get plenty of chances in the future,” Hunter half-joked.

Roman turned around to face him, meeting his gaze for a split second before lowering his eyes. “No, I meant… the three of us. The Shield. Working together in a ring like that. Setting each other up, stringing those moves together… hearing the crowd pop when he hit those spots.”

Hunter nodded sympathetically, placing one hand on the younger man’s shoulder. “It’s gonna take
some time to get used to…”

Roman’s eyes darted towards the other bed in the room. “He slept there last night…” he said wistfully. “Curl...
“I believe his term for it was ‘storyline-appropriate cockblocking’…” Hunter said.

“Oh my God,” Roman rolled his eyes. “That insufferable little shit…”

“I know…” Hunter smirked. “Aren’t you glad I’m taking him off your hands for the time being?”

Roman laughed for real then, the sound of it rumbling deeply from his chest, tempered only by the wheeze of pain as he clutched his ribs. He was still smiling when he looked up at Hunter, though, a sight that sent a warm surge of something up Hunter’s spine.

“Stop…fuck, stop making me laugh.”

“Sorry,” Hunter said, taking in the close-up view of that blinding smile. “Was just trying to make you feel better about this whole thing…”

“Yea, well it’s working…” Roman assured him. “Thanks.”

“No problem,” Hunter said. “Lemme help you with these bruises, ok? Trainers must have given you something…”

“Bruise salve, extra-strength, stings like a motherfucker…” Roman gestured at the side table, where the nondescript tub was sitting. “Unbranded. Physio probably mixed it up himself with some weird herbal hoodoo or something,”

“That’s usually the good shit,” Hunter said as he retrieved the tub. “Over-the-counter stuff just won’t do. Can you lie down for me?”

He stood up to give Roman some room to maneuver, admiring the sight it presented to him. Roman lay flat on his stomach, head cushioned on a pillow and turned to one side, his bruise-covered back rising up and down as he breathed. The waistband of his sweatpants hung slightly low, exposing the curve of his hip and the start of the swell of his ass.

He flinched at the first touch of Hunter’s salve-covered fingers against his flesh, starting at the largest of the bruises. “Fuuuck…”
“I’m not pressing too hard or anything, am I?” Hunter said as he began to work the salve in.

“It’s…it’s gonna hurt no matter what, so—“ Roman gritted out. “Just ignore me, yeah? Being a bit of a wimp here,“

The thing was, Roman was making these soft little whimpers and noises that were impossible for Hunter to ignore—rather, they shot straight to his dick. Fighting to keep his touch steady as he worked his fingers on Roman’s flesh, Hunter could feel the younger man’s body heat even through the chemical heat of the salve, the skin having more yield to it than he’d anticipated.

“Damn, you got big hands…” Roman blurted out as Hunter massaged down one side of his ribcage.

“I’ve had my hands all over you for weeks, Reigns…” Hunter said, putting just a bit more pressure into his touch. "You're only realizing it now?"

“Hard to—oww, hard to appreciate the size of man’s hands when you’re taking the Pedigree,” Roman grunted against the pillow.

Hunter considered his next words carefully. Roman was relaxed and accommodating, even a little playful. Surely it wouldn’t hurt to push his luck just a little.

“You like it better when I’m touching you like this?” he said as he purposely let his hands drift low, on the pretense of rubbing the salve into the bruises at the small of Roman’s back.

Roman inhaled sharply, eyes squeezed shut, hips rising slightly off the bed. “Yeah…” he sighed, an almost resigned tone to his voice.

Hunter smiled, letting his hand travel up Roman’s spine. “I like it better, too…”

When he finished his handiwork, Hunter leaned in close to Roman’s ear and whispered, “Stay here while I wash my hands, okay?”
Roman nodded, a wordless noise escaping his mouth, eyelids heavy and his expression content. Hunter couldn’t help but smile at that, knowing his touch had put the boy at ease, as he rose off the bed and made his way to the bathroom. Washing his hands clean of the residual salve—he didn’t want any of it on his fingers with where he was planning to put them next—he looked up and took in his own reflection in the mirror. Hunter still had a black eye from Payback the previous night, barely recalling who’d put it there. Roman, probably, with a Superman Punch or two—Dean’s elbow strikes were never that stiff and Seth chose to fight with his feet most of the time. The obvious bulge tenting his trousers was unsightly, but Roman didn’t need to see it—not yet, at least.

When he returned to the bedroom, at first he thought Roman had fallen asleep—his breathing was slow, regular, salve-slicked back glistening in the dim light. When he got closer he saw that the boy’s eyes were open, staring blankly out from where he had one cheek pressed onto the pillow.

“Gonna get a crick in your neck if you sleep like that,” Hunter said as he sat on the bed, closer up to Roman’s head.

“S’not like I have a choice…” Roman muttered.

With his now clean fingers, Hunter pulled back some of the strands of hair that fell across Roman’s face, tucking them behind his ear. Roman looked blissed out, and a little expectant, so Hunter decided to go a little further. Leaning down, careful not to put any pressure on Roman’s back, he brushed his lips against the younger man’s temple, hand moving down to Roman’s chin.

Roman breathed sharply, turning his head towards Hunter’s inquiring mouth. Emboldened, Hunter started pecking light kisses from Roman’s forehead down to the hollow of his cheek, delighting in the flutter they produced in the younger man’s form. This close, this intimate, he could sense even the most minuscule shifts in the other’s body, the pace of his breathing and the throb of his pulse. Gently, with his hand cupping Roman’s chin, he turned the boy’s face towards him and kissed him on the mouth.

There was an instant surge of heat when he did so, a shudder that traveled up Roman’s spine and into his own body, lips quickly shifting from exploratory to possessive latching. Without breaking the kiss, Hunter maneuvered himself so he was lying next to Roman, both of them on their sides, his hands keeping the boy’s head in place as the kiss grew hotter and heavier. Roman moaned, the sound of it equal parts sweet and shameless, as Hunter dove his tongue into his mouth.

He’d never gone this slow with anyone before—not Sami, definitely not Seth, but it felt right with Roman. Hunter was enjoying himself more than he thought he would, loving how slowly but surely Roman opened up to him, letting him get closer, tighter, deeper. He looped his arms under Roman’s and drew him close, mindful of the state of his back, and Roman’s own hands started traveling up and down his chest, as if feeling out his body.
When Hunter pulled back and opened his eyes, the sight that welcomed him was nearly his undoing.

Roman had *those* eyes, the same eyes that had stared up at Hunter as he crawled towards him on the mat, wide and open and *desperate*, eyes that had stirred something within him, something so deep and primal he’d never admit it in polite company, could barely admit it to himself. Roman was also breathing hard, each exhale hot and humid against Hunter’s lips, the space between them thick with anticipation.

“Bed’s too fucking small…” Hunter muttered. “Come up with me, I wanna do you proper on a nice big bed,“

Roman’s eyelids fluttered at the suggestion. “Okay…”

It took every ounce of willpower in Hunter’s body to pull away from Roman and get up, watching as Roman followed suit. The boy grabbed a hoodie from the back of a chair and pulled it around his shoulders, leaving it unzipped and exposing his chest. Quietly, he grabbed his phone off the desk and followed Hunter outside the room, grabbing his keycard off the slot in the wall.

The ride up in the elevator took far too long than it should to ascend a mere fifteen levels, Hunter impatiently tapping the keycard of his suite against his thigh. He had one arm around Roman’s waist, supporting some of the boy’s weight, but he didn’t dare make any more moves until they were safe inside his room. As tempting as Roman was, giving the Novotel night clerk a heart attack through CCTV footage—or worse yet, blackmail material—wasn’t worth the risk.

Roman baulked at the foyer of the suite, staring around at the excessive amount of space. It was a far cry from the cramped accommodations he’d spent the last two years sharing with Seth and Dean, but Hunter quickly maneuvered him towards the bedroom. He sat at the foot of the king-sized bed, feeling how soft and plush it was compared to the beds in Roman’s own room, and beckoned Roman towards him.

“C’mere…” he pulled Roman into the space between his slightly spread legs. Roman took the hint and clambered onto Hunter’s lap, looping his arms around the back of the older man’s neck as Hunter pulled him down for another kiss. He pulled the hoodie off Roman’s shoulders with ease, throwing it to the floor and placing his hands on the firm globes of the Samoan’s ass.

Hunter was in heaven—hands full of hot, yielding flesh, the weight of Roman grinding down on his lap and making his dick almost painfully hard, his tongue dancing with Roman’s inside his mouth.
Roman was so open and willing, so ripe for the taking, his every move communicating quiet
agreement with whatever Hunter had in mind for him. It was the sort of subtle submission that drove
Hunter crazy with want, mouth traveling lower to suck bruises into Roman’s neck. One of his hands
worked the hair tie loose from Roman’s ponytail, letting his dark mane cascade loosely down his
shoulders and back.

“I’m gonna try to put you down on your back, real slowly…” he whispered. “Okay, baby boy?”

Roman nodded, bottom lip held between his teeth. Then the nickname registered in his lust-fogged
brain and he made a choked noise in his throat, hips grinding against Hunter shamelessly. Hunter
could hardly believe his luck. Slowly, he turned around and lowered Roman onto the bed, hand
cradling the back of his neck. Roman hissed as his back made contact with the mattress, but the soft
surface gave under his weight and he soon looked a lot more comfortable, his dark eyes hazy and
looking up at Hunter with expectation.

Hunter made quick work of their clothing, stripping himself off his dress shirt and trousers before
going back on the bed. Roman had nothing under his sweatpants and Hunter got his first real look
at the boy’s cock, slightly longer than his own but not as thick, curved slightly at the head, hot and
heavy in his hand when he reached down to stroke it. Roman stared at the way Hunter was palming
his cock with a look of bewilderment, as if not believing that this was really happening.

“You like that?” Hunter said as he stroked slowly.

“Mmm-hmm…” Roman mumbled. “Wanna see yours…”

Hunter smirked at the boy’s eagerness and lowered the waistband of his briefs enough to let his dick
out, stroking it alongside Roman’s.

“Fuck…” Roman mumbled, hands reaching down to join Hunter’s tentatively, fingers tangling
against the hot, hard flesh of their lengths.

It felt insanely good to have Roman’s hands on him, but Hunter hadn’t planned on reaching his
climax this way. Slowly, he withdrew from Roman’s grasp and crawled further up the bed,
straddling the younger man’s chest. Roman’s eyes grew huge as realization dawned on him, sinking
further back into the pillows as Hunter held his dick in his hand, thumbing a bead of pre-cum from
the tip.
“Open up, baby…” he coaxed gently, his other hand cupping the back of Roman’s head. “Be a good boy for Daddy…”

Hunter’s words seemed to strike Roman somewhere deep, his mouth opening up to take the head of Hunter’s cock between his kiss-swollen lips as a moan tore from his throat, needy and hungry. Hunter’s nerve endings sparked with electricity, his eyesight blurring as Roman sucked him hard yet slow, lips puckering perfectly around his cock, eyes looking up and searching Hunter’s face for some kind of approval, filthy yet innocent at the same time.

“God, you’re so—” Hunter rasped with barely-concealed admiration. “You’re gonna kill me with those eyes one day, you know? Looking at me like that, all sweaty and gorgeous in the ring, crawling at me like you want to beg at my feet…”

Roman’s response was to suck even harder, dark eyes misty with submission.

“Were you being a tease, baby boy? Were you trying to get at me?”

Roman shook his head, tongue lapping at the underside of Hunter’s cock.

“No? But you like doing this, don’t you? You like having Daddy’s cock in your mouth, stuffing you full like this…”

Roman nodded, taking Hunter in so deep he gagged. He didn’t try to pull off, though, just blinked the tears away from his eyes and continued sucking, determined to please his Daddy. Hunter would’ve enjoyed coming down his throat, enjoyed the sight of his seed leaking from the corners of Roman’s wet, swollen mouth, but he had other ideas in mind about where he wanted to put his dick.

He pulled out of Roman and laid down beside him again, kissing his own taste off the boy’s mouth as he reached for the bottle of lube he’d stashed in the drawers next to the bed. So far, Roman hadn’t objected to anything, hadn’t shown any signs of hesitation, not even when he could hear the bottle uncapping and saw the thick gob of gel Hunter was pouring into his hand.

“You’ve done this before?” Hunter said as he lowered his hand between Roman’s legs, resting at the top of his thighs.

“I’ve had…fingers, mostly,” Roman said, a little fidgety. “Dean and Seth—sometimes they’d do it
“So all this time, you’ve been their big badass loverboy, fucking them with that beautiful dick of yours, but they never returned the favor?” Hunter asked.

Roman pushed playfully at his chest, color rising to his already-flushed cheeks. “You make that sound so horrible….no, it’s just that…they never offered.”

“And you never asked,” Hunter said as he paused his fingers just outside Roman’s hole, smearing the lube around the tightly-puckered rim.

Roman shook his head.

“Well, I’m asking now,” Hunter said firmly.

Roman looked up at him then, the spark of something new and almost dangerous flitting across his dark eyes. “Maybe…maybe I don’t want you to ask,” he whispered. “Maybe you should just…do it.”

Holy shit.

Hunter found himself somewhere between dumbfounded and aroused to no end, his finger starting to push into Roman before he could stop himself. Roman shifted, trying to take in more of the invading digit, both of them gasping at the heated contact.

“Next time…” Hunter fought to keep his voice level as he began to work Roman open. “Next time we’ll discuss some rules—figure out what you like, what you don’t, set some hard limits and how you can signal me if you want me stop…but for now, let me be a boring traditionalist and do it the old-fashioned way, yeah?”

Roman smiled and nodded. “Such a gentleman…Daddy.”

“Oh, you won’t be calling me a ‘gentleman’ when I’m done with you, baby boy…” Hunter smirked as he pushed his second finger in. “Love hearing you say ‘Daddy’, though…love how good you’re
He could sense and feel Roman slipping under the more Hunter worked him, breathing heavy against him as Hunter busied himself sucking more marks into his neck, marking him up like property. There was none of Seth’s defiance and brattiness in him, just a quiet yielding to Hunter’s touch, trusting and beautiful. Hunter felt the possessiveness surge from deep within him, Roman so wanting and ready to be claimed, his every demeanor calling out to Hunter’s desire to make Roman his.

When he finally knelt between Roman’s spread legs, heaving the boy’s hips to rest on his own, Roman looked wrecked and gone—eyes glazed over and hands limp at his sides.

“Gonna go slow, baby…” Hunter assured him as he angled the head of his cock at the rim of Roman’s slick entrance. He pushed in, the impossibly tight flesh gripping him, one hand stroking Roman’s muscled stomach to relax him. “You okay?”

“Yeah, just…” Roman bit his lower lip, fighting to keep the pain off his face. “keep going.”

Hunter pushed again, feeling the head of his cock finally breaching past the tight rim, the rest of his length sliding easier into Roman’s body. He stopped again at about halfway in, checking Roman’s body language for discomfort.

“Just a litte more, baby boy…” he said. “You’re doing so good…”

Roman nodded and exhaled deeply, willing his body to relax. Hunter felt his inner muscles unclenching slightly and pushed further, finally seating himself fully inside Roman’s tight, wet heat.

“There we go…” he leaned down and kissed Roman’s forehead. “You’re so tight, feel so good around me…”

Roman reached up to hang his arms around Hunter’s neck, bringing him in close. “Full…I feel so full,”

“Gonna feel even better when I start moving…” Hunter rocked his hips slightly, like a promise. “Think you’re ready?”
“Uh-huh…” Roman nodded his permission.

Hunter started slow, not wanting to aggravate the bruises on Roman’s back, reminding himself that for all his willingness this was still a boy who’d taken a rough beating two nights in a row, probably aching in his joints more than he’d care to admit. Tomorrow, tomorrow Hunter intended to run him a hot bath, feed him a nice breakfast to fill him up, and explore what else Roman Reigns had to offer him. For now he just wanted to fuck his boy good, show him what he’d been missing, get him used and addicted to the feel of another man’s cock inside him.

“Can I…can I touch myself, Daddy?” Roman asked, his voice raw and throaty.

“Yeah, go on…” Hunter said as he started to move faster, angling for Roman’s sweet spot. “Let me see you work that dick while Daddy fucks you…”

Roman reached down with both hands and started jerking himself, Hunter’s elbows bracketing his head on either side of the pillow. His open lips were inviting for another kiss and Hunter took it, swallowing the soft noises from Roman’s throat as he rocked his cock deep, jabbing against Roman’s prostate and causing him to mewl into Hunter’s mouth.

He knew it couldn’t last long, he was so keyed up from all their bantering and foreplay and Roman was so fucking gorgeous underneath him, working his cock furiously as Hunter drove into him over and over, both their bodies glistening with sweat. When Roman came, Hunter felt the wet splash of his seed against his stomach, the slick noises of Roman’s hands milking himself finally tipping him over the edge. He thrust forward one last time, spilling deep inside Roman, teeth buried into the intricate ink on Roman’s right shoulder. The boy was panting harshly against his ear, still coming down from his own release, heart beating fast and thumping against Hunter’s chest.

He pulled out and laid himself out on his back next to Roman, staring up at the ceiling as he brought his own breathing back under control. Roman shuffled close, draping one arm tentatively across Hunter’s chest as if unsure if the gesture would be welcome. Hunter quelled his doubts by pulling him close, letting Roman’s head rest in the crook of his shoulder, hand stroking through the sweaty strands of dark, thick hair.

“You good?” he asked after a few moments’ silence and Roman’s breathing had steadied.

“Peachy…” Roman muttered. “Not sure how it’ll be when I wake up, though—“
“You’ll be sore,” Hunter said truthfully. “No way getting around it.”

“It’ll be a good kind of sore,” Roman said. “I like this better than you hitting me with a chair,”

“I like this better than you spearing me in half, too…” Hunter chuckled. “Funny business we’re in, huh?”

“You know, Seth told me and Dean about…about you,” Roman said against his chest. “This…this isn’t what he described, though…”

Hunter pulled back slightly so he could look Roman in the eyes. “Seth is different. Each one of you is different, and your—**needs** are different.”

Roman blinked at him curiously. “So you’ll treat us differently based on what we…need?”

“Well, let’s just say that I…” he arched his brows deliberately. “I **adapt**.”

Roman cuffed him in the chest, unable to stop himself laughing. “What the—Hunter, did you seriously just make an Evolution joke? You’re fucking unbelievable, old man…”

Hunter simply drew him in tighter, feeling the pleasing rumble of Roman’s laugh against his skin. “Yeah, I’m an old man who makes bad jokes, but I know how to make my boys feel good…”

“Hmmm…” Roman sighed happily against his neck. “Can’t argue with that.”

—

At the next Smackdown taping, Hunter stood with Seth in gorilla as they prepared for Seth’s first post-Shield promo, the younger man shifting uncomfortably in his ill-fitting suit.
“We’ll get some tailored up for you after tonight,” Hunter assured him. “You’re gonna look a million dollars, Seth…”

“Did you see the new ring gear they designed for me?” Seth said with exasperation. “I look like a goddamn fetish model!”

Hunter quirked an eyebrow at him. “And the problem with that is…?”

Seth scowled petulantly. “You kinky bastard, did you tell them to make it like that?”

Hunter shrugged, feigning nonchalance. “I might have made a suggestion or two…”

Seth narrowed his eyes, but decided not to comment further.

As they stood waiting for their cue, Hunter leaned in close and whispered, “By the way…you didn’t tell me Roman was a virgin…”

“Oh, don’t be so dramatic…” Seth rolled his eyes. “He’s fucked plenty of girls and he’s fucked me and Dean senseless numerous times…he’s just never taken it up the ass.”

Hunter stayed quiet, waiting for Seth to catch up. When he did, Seth’s expression was priceless. “Holy shit, you fucking beast…”

Hunter smiled as their cue hit, shoving Seth forward through the curtains.
Chapter Summary

If he had his way Hunter would give his boys everything, each of them, everything he had and more. He’d give Seth a healthy knee and a long run as champion. He’d give Roman the match of his life and a stadium full of cheers. He’d give Sami all the respect he craved and a shiny belt he didn’t need to cling to from a stretcher.

Chapter Notes

Man, this one got real angsty. I needed a chapter to work out some of the more emotional beats in this epic mess of headfuckery, before delving back into the twisty filth that I seem so fond of. For now, enjoy Daddy Hunter's internal struggles and Sami Zayn being the pure ray of human sunshine we all know he is.

Inspired partially by this.

“You must think I’m a real asshole…” Hunter sighed as he leaned his head back against the rim of the bathtub. “I barely say anything to you for months, and the one night you should be resting up from one hell of a match and preparing for another match, I drag you up here…”

“I wouldn’t be here if I thought that way,” Sami said quietly, his movements creating small ripples in the water of the tub. “Besides, you keep looking at me like you did back there, you’re welcome to drag me anywhere…”

Hunter smiled, letting his gaze wander up to the bathroom ceiling. He was seated on the floor next to the tub, still half-dressed, feeling the hard press of the cold tile floors under him. He hadn’t been the one wrestling that night but he felt a strange ache in his joints nonetheless, worn out after hours in the production booth and calling out cues as his NXT stars took Dallas by storm. The crowd had been absolutely out of this world, screaming themselves hoarse match after match, white-hot from the start all the way down the main event, every noise fed into his earpiece making him long to actually be out there and see it happen with his own eyes.

And Sami, his pride and joy, his Little Red Sunshine, had blown the roof clean off the building in his match against Nakamura, going so hard and so strong, and looking so damn beautiful that Hunter’s heart was fit to burst out of his chest when the boy had limped back into gorilla afterwards.
“I’m so proud of you, Sami…” Hunter reached over to stroke the moss of red hair on the younger man’s head, wetting the sleeve of his shirt in the hot water Sami was soaking in. “I know I’ve said it already, but damn…that thing was fucking magic, what you and Shin did out there.”

Sami, smiling despite the exhaustion Hunter knew must be setting deep in his bones, leaned into his touch like an affectionate pet. “Shin’s amazing…”

“So are you,” Hunter said. “You’re fucking amazing, Red…”

“If I’m so amazing, then why are you sitting out there and not in here with me?” Sami inquired playfully.

Hunter quirked an eyebrow at him. “The plan was to get you a nice hot bath to relax, then get some decent food in you, then make sure you get a good night’s sleep before Wrestlemania. I get into this tub, at least one of that ain’t happening.”

“I’m changing the plan…” Sami said as he pulled his body close to the edge of the tub, sending water cascading over the rim and wetting Hunter even further, which he didn’t seem to pay any mind to at all. “I think I’ve earned it.”

He paused to let his chin rest on the ceramic rim, close enough for Hunter to feel Sami’s breath on the side of his face. The air was quiet, save for the ripple of water and the muted noise of traffic from somewhere out the window, the hum of the building’s generators reverberating in that low-key depth that nobody tended to notice. Hunter could hear every little noise though, his senses extremely keyed up for some reason, probably because he’d been training and working out intensely to prepare for his match with Roman.

*Roman.*

“Something’s bothering you…” Sami said close to his ear. “I can tell.”

“I’m sorry, Red…” Hunter said as he turned to look at the boy, at the deep eyes that always seemed to look through him. It felt wrong for him to even be thinking of Roman right now—for Sami to have anything less than his undivided attention. “You deserve better,”

“Maybe…” Sami shrugged. “I still want you, though.”
Hunter reached over and drew Sami in gently with a hand at the back of his scalp, fingers pressing into reddish strands as he kissed his boy, slow and rather chaste, feeling the other’s mouth with his lips, like retracing a path long since unwalked.

“Get in here…” Sami demanded quietly against his mouth when they parted. “Just…I wanna be closer to you,”

Hunter nodded and started to remove his partially-wet clothes, shrugging them off into a messy pile on the bathroom floor. He stepped into the tub carefully, not wanting to disturb the water too much, and stretched himself out on the opposite end from Sami, their legs tangling underneath the water. Once he’d settled into a comfortable position, he held his arms out and beckoned Sami to come to him. The boy went to him on his knees, buoyed by the water, turning around so he could press his back against Hunter’s broad chest, lifting his arms so Hunter’s could loop under them and pull him close. Sami let out a happy, contented sigh as he settled, a sound that went a long way towards easing the knot in Hunter’s chest, leaning down to drag his lips down the length of Sami’s pale neck.

“I meant what I said back in the locker room,” Hunter said softly. “I don’t know how the fuck the main roster’s supposed to top what you guys did back there…especially what you and Shin did,”

Sami rested his hands on Hunter’s arms where they were clasped around his stomach, drawing lazy circles under the water. “That’s not what’s really bothering you though, is it? At least, that’s not all of it…”

“Let’s not make this about me, Red…” Hunter said. “Tonight should be about you, I wanna reward my boy for doing so good.”

Sami lifted one of Hunter’s hands to his mouth, kissing his knuckles reverently. Hunter felt a swell of something inside him, pride and affection laced with guilt, holding someone who never gave him less than everything he had, put up with all his lengthy absences, his months of neglect—which Sami would never even call that—and was still willing to trust him in this manner. It overwhelmed him at times—Sami’s bright-eyed enthusiasm, undimmed by politics and bad bookings, the hardened core of will and belief that was hidden under soft flesh, red hair and an easy smile. He wondered how long that would last, how much fire would remain in Sami if things went bad somewhere down the line—he’d already seen uneasy glimpses of it back when Sami got injured.

Hunter bent his head and kissed the fading scar on Sami’s shoulder, trying not to think back to the dark days just after Sami’s surgery, when the pain was fresh and the future uncertain, when he’d snuck past hospital visiting hours multiple times just to let Sami cry himself to sleep on Hunter’s shoulder, unable to offer other means of comfort.
“It’s all healed up now…” Sami assured him, reading his thoughts as always. “Doesn’t even twinge anymore.”

“I know…” Hunter said as he brought Sami’s chin up, twisting his head around for another kiss.

There was a bit more desperation this time, more Hunter’s than Sami’s, seeking something he had no name for from his little sun, his one unswerving source of warmth, turning Sami around in his embrace so they were face-to-face, Sami’s palms pressed against his chest. Hunter’s fingers circled Sami’s wrists, the skin still indented from where it was taped over, feeling quickening pulse thrum in his grasp.

“Bed?” he asked, and Sami nodded silently.

Hunter wouldn’t have minded carrying Sami all the way to the bed but the younger man was having none of it, rising up on his own volition and wrapping himself up in a large white towel, half-hard dick dripping excess water on the floor as he led Hunter to the bedroom.

The balance was off, Sami looking exceptionally clear-headed and calm while Hunter’s own thoughts were a murky mess, but Hunter found that he didn’t really care. Not tonight, with Sami’s eyes regarding him with something that bordered dangerously close to unconditional, something Hunter certainly didn’t deserve and shouldn’t feel buoyed by. He laid Sami down on the bed and proceeded to dry him off, kissing every inch of flesh with as much apology as affection, paying close attention to thin red welts and bruises that would soon turn blue. Sami had always bruised easily, Hunter had discovered that way back in NXT, sickly yellow-purple marks blotching under his soft red fuzz.

After a while he tossed the towel aside and laid himself on top of Sami, braced on his elbows, trading long kisses as Sami’s hands wandered up and down his back. Their hard cocks brushed against each other but Hunter was in no rush, thumb sinking into the soft pale skin of Sami’s cheek. It was a gesture he’d often repeated, one he was comfortable doing even when the cameras were on—or maybe, in some sick way it was the gesture of affection he’d wanted the world to see, that Sami was his boy, his precious Red. Whenever Hunter did that Sami’s eyes went puffy and soft, like he was savoring touches that were all-too brief and fleeting, wanting more but always having to hold back.

If he had his way Hunter would give his boys everything, each of them, everything he had and more. He’d give Seth a healthy knee and a long run as champion. He’d give Roman the match of his life and a stadium full of cheers. He’d give Sami all the respect he craved and a shiny belt he didn’t need to cling to from a stretcher.
But he couldn’t.

He couldn’t and it was gnawing at him, tight and heavy in his chest, bubbling up to the surface even as he maneuvered Sami onto his side and tucked himself against the younger man’s back, wanting to feel as much contact as possible. Sami reached back and curled his fingers at the back of Hunter’s neck, chasing for another kiss, helpfully lifting one leg and draping it back over Hunter’s waist, relax and ready and open.

I don’t deserve this, Hunter thought to himself even as his fingers wandered, fondling pliant flesh, sinking into soft curls of hair, reaching down, down, down.

It was Sami’s gasp as he sank his first finger in that brought him back to somewhere resembling reality, what he was holding in his two hands—living flesh that had been put through hell, and a mind so rich with thought and possibilities it often shamed Hunter’s own. Sami with his insistence on finding the right music for any occasion, Sami who wondered aloud about the fate of wayward migratory birds, Sami who cried about certain things he saw on the news when he thought nobody was looking, Sami who muttered aloud to himself in his mother tongue in private spaces where nobody could judge him for it, and hated the fact that he had to do so. Sami, who wrestled like fire and cut promos like sharpened steel.

“You’re beautiful, Red…” was all Hunter could say to articulate the swell he felt in his chest and his throat. “So fucking beautiful,”

Sami squirmed, not unpleasantly, stroking the back of Hunter’s neck. “You’re always so good to me…”

Not good enough, Hunter almost verbalized, stopping himself in favor of lining his cock up with Sami’s entrance. Sami’s tight heat welcomed him, easy and slow, hips pressing back against Hunter.

For all that he was a virtual rubix cube of a person, an interlocking and ever-twisting pattern of thoughts and feelings and ideas he couldn’t wait to express, making love to Sami had always been blessedly simple. No waters to tread around, no eggshells to walk on. The times he’d indulged Hunter in something darker, edgier or otherwise out of the norm had been done out of playful curiosity, and he’d always want to talk about it afterwards—what he liked and what he didn’t, what part of the broad canvas of human sexuality he felt it represented.

On this night, all complexity melted away from him, taking some of it out of Hunter, too—he
focused himself on his movements, rocking his hips into Sami and holding him tight, savoring every
gasp, every soft little noise the drag of his cock against Sami’s inner walls produced out of the
younger man’s throat, every instance of Sami’s fingers tightening on his own, laced tight, in time
with his thrusts. Hunter’s other hand held Sami’s leg up, cupped under his thigh, determined to take
on as much of the effort as possible.

Sami came with both Hunter’s hands and his own gripped tight around his cock, letting out a long,
drawn-out moan that was music to Hunter’s ears, reverberating all the way down his body. He
followed not long after, stilling himself inside the boy’s body as he sank his face into the soft bed of
red hair on Sami’s head, nuzzling gently against his scalp.

“Missed you…” he whispered as both of them came down from the high, a poor approximation of
what he really felt. “Missed this. Should’ve been around more, should’ve been there for you…”

“You were…” Sami muttered, fingers still tangled with Hunter’s on his stomach, spreading the mess
of his release. “You were always there. I never—God, Hunter, I couldn’t have asked for more than
this,”

Hunter kissed his shoulder again, tracing the scar with his lips. “Thank you,” he said, hoping Sami
would understand. Knowing Sami, he had a feeling that he would.

—

An hour later, Sami was half-dressed and stuffing himself with selections from the hotel’s extensive
room service menu, including a kebab he’d proclaimed to be ‘half-decent’ and a quiche he'd nearly
keeled over in praise for, insisting that Hunter have a bite.

“Don’t give me bullshit about ‘watching your figure’, you’re about as cut as anyone your age has
any right to be,” he said.

Hunter took the mouthful off Sami’s hand, and smiled as he saw the contented expression on the
younger man’s face.

While Sami busied himself with his food, Hunter went to the suite’s living room area and fetched a
black, rectangular box from his work briefcase, feeling its weight in his hands as he carried it back to
the bedroom.
“What’s that?” Sami asked.

“Finish eating first, then I’ll show you…” Hunter said.

As Sami ate, Hunter sat on the bed and turned the box over and over in his hand. Some part of him wondered if this was the worst idea he’d had in a long line of bad ones, but something inside him also felt that he had to, that Sami would understand and appreciate his intent.

He hadn’t even noticed that Sami had gotten up from the table and was now sitting next to him, looking expectantly at the box. “So…?”

Hunter took in a deep breath and laid the box on the mattress, undoing the two metal latches that held it shut. “I wanted to show you this—not even sure if it’s the right thing to do, or just a dick move from someone who should know better, but…” he slowly opened the lid. “…I wanted you to see them first.”

Sami’s eyes went wide, mouth agape, the reflection of metal glinting in his eyes.

Inside the box, laid side by side, were two round sideplates emblazoned with Sami’s logo, ‘SZ’, black and red lined with gold, polished to shining perfection. They were brand new, fresh off the workshop in Connecticut where Hunter had insisted that they be finished in time for Wrestlemania weekend.

“We get these made for everyone who gets called up to the main roster…” Hunter explained. “Just to have them ready in case the bookings change, or an injury happens, or Vince gets one of his bright ideas…”

Sami’s fingers trembled as he traced his initials on his sideplates, the look on his face a mix of uncertainty and awe, and Hunter felt the ache in his chest return tenfold.

“Sami, look at me…” he asked quietly.

When Sami did, there were a million questions in his eyes.
“I’m not…I can’t say when you’ll actually get to see these put on a belt…” Hunter said. “I wish I could. Please don’t take this the wrong way, I’m not trying to give you false hope, or empty promises—I’d never do that.”

Sami nodded. “I understand…”

“I just wanted you to see them, to know they’re waiting for you—“ Hunter’s voice trailed off. “Anything more than that, I’d be a lying sack of shit and the asshole I promised myself I wouldn’t be anymore.”

“Hunter, please—“ Sami silenced him with hands on his shoulders, pressing just enough to make their presence known. “They’re beautiful. They’re perfect. I’m glad you showed them to me, okay?”

Hunter sighed in relief, leaning forward to press his forehead against Sami’s, shutting the lid of the box. “I’m glad you feel that way…”

“I know it’s not your call what happens to me on the main roster,” Sami continued. “I won’t hold you to anything. You never gave me any bullshit back in Florida, and I know you’re not gonna start now,”

“There’s gonna be plenty of bullshit coming your way from other places,” Hunter said honestly.

“I know,” Sami nodded against him. “I just gotta keep doing what I do, put the work in, take the bumps and whatnot—and remember that I got into this business because I love it,”

Hunter put the box aside and stroked his thumb down Sami’s face, opening eyes he hadn’t even realized he’d held shut. Sami’s face was back to its unquestioning look of acceptance, something Hunter rarely saw in anyone these days, couldn’t remember ever seeing in himself.

“My precious Red…” he said affectionately. “I wanna see you burn bright, tear the house right down at Wrestlemania…”

Sami smiled, a spark igniting in his eyes. “How does a Tope Con Hilo through a ladder sound?”
“You’re serious?”

“Oh yeah, I got it all figured out…” Sami grinned. “Gonna set that ladder right at the ropes and leap through the space in the middle, take out everyone else outside…”

Hunter could see it in his head, could almost hear the pop of a sellout stadium crowd, and had to smile himself. “You’re gonna kill it.”

“I’m gonna kill Kevin too,” Sami shrugged. “It's his turn. We flipped a coin.”

“Probably gave the bookers a heart attack when you guys proposed it, huh?” Hunter asked with amusement.

“Nah, they gave us the brief rundown and told us to go crazy filling it with spots,” Sami said. “It’s gonna be great.”

“I’m sure it will,” Hunter said. “Gonna be a tough act to follow,”

Sami’s expression changed, eyes taking on a searching look that always left Hunter feeling pierced through. “Are things…bad between you and Roman?” he asked tentatively. “It’s okay if you don’t wanna talk about it, I just—“

“No, it’s fine…” Hunter assured him. “Well, actually it’s pretty damn messed up, but I’m…I’m okay talking about it.”

“How bad?”

Hunter exhaled deeply, staring down at patterns in the carpet he’d only noticed were there. “It’s not Roman’s fault. He used to come to me so he could forget, put everything away, not have to think about the bullshit and the crowds and the stupid booking. Now that I’m the one beating him up week in and week out, gloating about how he’s not good enough to be a Champion and all that, it’s not so clear-cut anymore.”
Not that anything ever was, but.

“It’s tough to feud with someone you actually care about…” Sami said wistfully. “Gets in your head, jumbles everything up.”

“Roman’s not like you, Sami…” Hunter said, shaking his head. “Everything gets to him if he lets it. His skin’s pretty thick but up here…” Hunter touched Sami’s temple. “…his walls are thinner. He’s built them up somewhat, but everytime I try to get close, I feel like I’m tearing them down…”

“So you’ve been…staying away?”

Hunter nodded. “We both decided it was for the best…at least until Wrestlemania.”

“Must be killing you, though…”

Hunter looked up, meeting Sami’s gaze. “Yeah, but you’re not here because I needed a distraction, Sami. That’s not what you are.”

“I know,” Sami assured him. “I wouldn’t have minded if it made you feel better, but I know.”

“You should mind,” Hunter said sternly. “It’s not fair.”

Sami gave a sad little chuckle, tracing an index finger across the lid of the box that held his sideplates like a guarded treasure, a dream yet unrealized, sealed behind velvet lining and golden latches. “When is anything, ever?”

Ain’t that the truth.

—

The night before Wrestlemania, Hunter stood bare-chested on the balcony of his hotel suite, the
strange itch under his skin now even more pronounced, his joints tingling with the phantom ache of bumps he’d not even taken yet. He could make out the shape of the AT&T Stadium not too far away, knowing the production crew were still there, working flat-out to get everything ready, testing lights and music cues, installing multimedia screens and security gates.

His phone buzzed quietly in his pocket, and he retrieved it to see a single line of text message:

can’t sleep

His chest tightened as he quickly typed in a reply:

me too

It took less than a minute before another message came in:

can i see u

Four words shouldn’t affect Hunter so much, but they did, sent him stumbling back into the bedroom to look for a shirt and his jacket, thumbing a reply clumsily with one hand:

i’ll come down. room number?

He was out the door when the reply came in:

406

—

When Roman opened the door, Hunter pushed his way inside and kicked the door shut behind him before either of them could say anything, pulling Roman close into a tight embrace. The younger man stiffened for five of the longest seconds of Hunter’s life, then his resistance melted away and he
threw his arms around Hunter’s back, holding just as tight.

Hunter had no words, nothing worth saying, not even sorry or I wish I could make this easier for both of us. They rang hollow and petty in his mind, meaningless despite the best of intentions, and he didn’t want to tarnish the sheer relief flooding through him at having Roman in his arms again, the press of Roman’s body against his, the smell of his hair, the racing beat of his heart against Hunter’s chest.

“I…” Roman began, already choked with doubt.

“Let it out,” Hunter said against his ear. “Tell me everything. Anything.”

“I fucking hate this,” Roman said, the words rushing through gritted teeth. “I don’t want to do this anymore, I don’t wanna beat you up over a stupid fucking belt, don’t wanna go out there and hear how much they hate me for it, I’m sick of it…so fucking sick of it…”

“I know, baby boy…” Hunter soothed him. “I know.”

“Motherfuckers think they’re so fucking smart, think they know better…” Roman said bitterly, hands balling into fists on Hunter’s chest. “Think I got this far on shits and giggles and a family name, they don’t know—they don’t fucking know!”

Hunter held him close, tight coils of muscle straining against him, threatening to explode.

“They don’t know how it makes me feel—everytime I have to hit you, everytime I have to knock you down, pretending like there’s nobody in the world I hate more than you—“ Roman looked up at him, eyes wild and lost. “I can’t do this anymore, Hunter.”

“Roman…”

“It’s not too late to change the outcome, right? They did it last year when they made Seth cash in on me and Brock…we can still do it, right?”

“Roman, please…”
“You should keep the title,” Roman continued rambling. “Maybe then they wouldn’t burn the whole place down with everyone of us in it, fuck—the last thing they want to see is me winning that thing from you!”

“Roman!” Hunter shook him, hard enough to jostle a man Roman’s size. “Fucking listen to yourself, you’re losing it!”

Roman shook his head. “I’m fucking serious, Hunter—I can’t…I can’t take this,”

“You can, and you will.” Hunter said sternly. “Fuck what those losers want, what they think should happen!”

“But—“

“Shut up and listen to me,” Hunter silenced him, both hands gripping the sides of Roman’s face, forcing him to meet his gaze. “By this time tonight, you will be the new World Heavyweight Champion. Okay? No changes, no last-minute swerve. We’re going through with this,”

Roman bit his lips, holding back the protest Hunter knew was dancing at the edge of this tongue.

“Now, this is how it’s gonna go, okay?” Hunter said, his voice trembling with the effort to keep calm. “You’re gonna hit me with everything you got, and then you’ll cover me, and the referee is going to count. One, two, three.”

Roman closed his eyes, as if fighting off the inevitable.

“Say it,” Hunter shook his face. “Say it to me,”

“One…” Roman choked out. “Two…three.”

“Good,” Hunter said. “Then you’ll be handed that big black belt, and you’ll hear your name being proclaimed Champion,”
“Hunter…”

“No, listen…” Hunter shushed him. “This is what you’re going to do. You’re going to climb up a
turnbuckle, and you’re gonna find the one motherfucker in the crowd who’s been booing you the
loudest, who’s spent all night throwing insults at you, screaming himself hoarse trying to wear you
down,” he paused to lean close, pressing his forehead against Roman’s. “And then…I want you to
stare right into his fucking eyes as you hold that belt high above your head, letting him know that
you’re still there, that you’re still standing strong, that you fucking won.”

Roman exhaled sharply, a shudder passing through his body.

“Can you do that for me, baby boy? Can you be strong for me like that?”

“I…” Roman swallowed hard. “I can.”

“Good,” Hunter rewarded him with a kiss on the tip of his nose, the one that was still mending from
being broken. “I want you to savor that moment, okay? That’s your moment, yours, not theirs. Don’t
let it be theirs.”

“Mine,” Roman repeated, more to himself than anything. “My moment,”

“That’s right…” Hunter pulled him in close again, letting Roman’s head rest against his shoulder.
“My Champion…”

Roman sank into him, arms around Hunter’s neck, knees wobbling with relief.

Hunter felt exhausted suddenly, letting gravity tug them both down onto the bed, sheets tousled from
Roman’s unsuccessful efforts to go to sleep. He didn’t let go of Roman the whole time, petting softly
at his hair and stroking gently up and down his back, arms unwilling to release the body he’d so
desperately missed.

“Can you stay?” Roman asked, his voice unsteady.
“Sure…” Hunter said. “I’ll let myself out early.”

“Thank you…” Roman said, burrowing deeper into his shoulder.

Hunter drew the blankets over their bodies, the knot in his chest beginning to unravel, ever so slightly. It still wasn’t enough, he was starting to think that nothing could ever be, his every gesture oscillating somewhere between too much and too little, a broken nose and a broken table here, a smashed TV screen there. As much as it was his job, he hated every hit he’d landed on Roman with the roar of the crowd behind him, their sick delight in seeing Roman beaten bloody through his hands.

It got to Roman, sure—but it got to him, too. More than it should, more than a veteran of his years should allow it to.

Asking Roman to be strong for him had been a mere smokescreen for his true feelings—it was him that needed to be strong for the boy, needed to be there for the punches and spears, needed to make sure Roman ended the night feeling on top of the world, fuck what everyone else felt.

And if they did end up burning the whole place down with everyone in it, he’d stand by Roman for that, too.
Chapter Summary

It should have bothered him more, how easily he’d surrendered control and never tried to reclaim it since. How much effort he put into meeting every demand, fulfilling every request, even ones that were new and alien to his body, his mind channeled into a single narrow focus that wanted, more than anything, to please.

It shouldn’t feel this good or, more alarmingly, this right.

But it did.

Chapter Notes

And...back into the filth we merrily go!

Roman stood in front of the full-length mirror in the suite’s spacious bathroom, taking stock of his own body in the harsh downlighting.

His chosen line of work had always meant a lifetime of bumps and bruises, a network of shallow cuts that ran just under his skin, stitches that eventually fade into imperceptible ridges of raised flesh.

Last night’s match with Randy had been a seventeen-minute marathon, trading blows and false finishes until Roman’s vision went fuzzy around the edges and neither of them could stand up straight. Randy had been on one of his cleaner, more clinical nights, every move crisp and crowd-popping, including the scoop slam that genuinely knocked the air out of Roman’s lungs, leaving him dazed for a solid few seconds before he could gather enough brain cells to remember the next spot. Randy didn’t generally bludgeon his opponents into bloody messes, at least not when he’s on a singles run, so Roman had come out of it relatively unscathed.

Right now, though, his body was playing host to marks of an entirely different kind.

Slowly, Roman lifted one hand to his own chest, trailing a finger across the reddish splotch on his collarbone, the faint indentations of teeth that still stung if he pressed against it. And press against it he did, the sensation awakening memories like the world’s least-PG highlight reel, still potent enough that it sent a shudder straight down his body.
The trail of bruises would continue downwards, circling each of his pectorals, bruising one nipple slightly more than the other for some unknown reason, and Roman traced each of them with his fingers, his pulse quickening, his other hand braced on the sink counter for support. If he closed his eyes, he could almost pretend the hand running down his body was someone else’s—older, rougher, driven by single-minded purpose to own and manipulate.

Roman bit down on his lip, stifling a moan that threatened to escape his throat.

Last night had been another significant moment for him, winning against one of the roster’s best in a hard-fought match that went the distance. He’d walked backstage feeling pretty good about himself, adrenaline pumping, aches and pains momentarily forgotten as he received congratulatory handshakes and pats on his back for a job well done. Randy had gruffly clasped him around the shoulder—he was somewhat pissed that the bookers made Roman kick out of an RKO while he had to stay down after the spear—and left with one hand yanking Seth’s arm towards the locker rooms to do God knows what.

Which left Roman on a long, slow walk down the corridor, toweling himself down as the crowd noises continued to reverberate down the concrete walls.

Then came the arms that grabbed him violently and pulled him into a supply closet, slamming him painfully against the wall as hands started to undo the catches of his vest, all before Roman could even come to grips with what was happening. Once he’d realized who the perpetrator was, steely eyes and rough voice, the combative side of Roman’s mind switched off, almost treacherously, and he’d gone under as if he’d been drugged.

There were words spoken, terse and lustful, about how Roman had worked that match like the slut he was, letting Randy’s hands get all over him, put him into all those sleeper holds, how Randy had looked down at him like a piece of fuckable meat and how Roman had all but presented himself to him, crawling like a whore with his ass in the air.

Roman hadn’t remembered the match that way, but that wasn’t really the point. Once the seed had been planted in his head he went with it, playing along, begging and pleading for mercy as he was pushed facedown onto unforgiving flooring, ring gear yanked unceremoniously down his hips.

There was pain, brief and searing but not unwelcome, his mouth forming a litany of “no” and “please” that his heart didn’t mean. If he’d wanted it to stop, he’d have said something else. His hair yanked back, his mouth covered by a large, sweaty palm, an arm tight around his torso as grunting breaths filled the small space, deep jabbing thrusts that took him to the edge of what he could tolerate and left him wanting more, more, always more. Roman had cried and begged and pleaded, wetting the hand over his mouth with spit and tears, even as his body had pushed back and arched up like a wanton whore, his mind taken apart and reduced to its most base components.
He’d been finished off with a rough hand, before the length inside him was unceremoniously yanked out, leaving him feeling empty and unfulfilled. Then he’d been turned over to lie on his back as the first hot spurt hit his face, then painted on his exposed chest where his vest lay open, his tongue darting out to taste even before the whole ordeal was over. He’d muttered a breathless gratitude, unprompted, so high on everything, and had been rewarded with a smile and a kiss, a plain white keycard tossed into the drying mess on his chest.

Roman smiled at his own reflection, a smile unlike the one he gave to interviewers and fans. It came from somewhere deep, a part of him that he’d always known existed but hadn’t let out to play too often, at least not until it had been drawn out of him by hands that knew exactly how to touch, a voice that knew exactly what words to say.

Roman moved his hand lower, tracing the jut of his hips, matching his own fingers to the shape of the bruises there, eliciting another full-body shudder.

It wasn’t the pain, or the memory of it, that made him go weak in the knees. No, it was the intent behind the bruising grips, the promise of damage lying coiled in muscles under neatly-pressed suits, clear brown eyes and a voice that rubbed like sandpaper against the back of Roman’s neck. It was the smell of him, the presence of him, the deep grunting breaths that blew against Roman’s face like an untamed beast, the weight of him pressing down on Roman so completely he could almost imagine never being able to get back up.

It should have bothered him more, how easily he’d surrendered control and never tried to reclaim it since. How much effort he put into meeting every demand, fulfilling every request, even ones that were new and alien to his body, his mind channeled into a single narrow focus that wanted, more than anything, to please. It shouldn’t feel this good or, more alarmingly, this right.

But it did.

Last night’s encounter at the arena had been followed up at the hotel, much the same but at a slower pace, slow enough to take in the words that poured into his ears like honey, thick and sweet and whispered close. Roman had hung onto every syllable, though he couldn’t remember most of them now, only that they’d made him squirm and whimper like a man his size had no right to be doing, how it had all felt so wrong, so fucking good.

Roman stopped his hand just short of his half-hard dick, skirting around it to inch down his thighs. There were marks down there too, teeth and fingers and the crawling scratch of beardburn, more than his eyes could see from where he stood. Maybe, maybe if there was a mirror close to the bed, he could lie himself down in front of it and really see…
Gasping, he shook himself loose from the fantasy and tried to ground himself, opening his eyes. His own reflection stared back at him, naked and wanting. His hands had now fallen limp at his sides, a strange heat starting to prickle underneath his skin. He still needed it, the itch wasn’t quite through being scratched yet, the fog in his mind not yet cleared.

Quietly, he switched off the bathroom lights and stepped back into the bedroom, staring at the messy sheets, stark-white in the morning sun that came in from the window. There was a faint hum of conversation from the other side of the door, someone talking on the phone, words like ‘scheduling’ and ‘assessment’ and ‘production meeting’, real-world things, business things, things far removed from Roman’s own little world right now, naked and shivering in the cool breeze of the bedroom’s air-conditioning.

His own clothes were a dark heap of fabric on the floor in one corner of the room, unappealing. But right by the foot of the bed was a discarded dress shirt, still pristine and white even if a little rumpled, and he’d bent to pick it up before he could stop himself.

It wrapped awkwardly around his shoulders, too tight in some places and too loose in others. It was a shirt tailor-made to perfection for another body, and Roman felt like a bit of an intruder wearing it, though he couldn’t deny how good it felt against his skin. Letting it hang loose and unbuttoned, he crawled back onto the bed, body still singing with that strange, unshakable sense of need. Lifting one arm and sniffing at the fabric, inhaling a trace scent of cologne and a hint of sweat, the heady mix of familiarity and comfort laced with something darker, more dangerous. The fog in Roman’s brain thickened, body falling forward onto the bed, into sheets still damp in spots from last night’s exertions, filthy and dirty and welcoming, a place where everything was distilled down to simplicity.

Beyond the door was a world that dealt in packaging and presentation, projecting images and sound onto giant screens and a square mat lined with wire ropes. A world that dealt in backstage politics and lobbying, in internet polls and merchandise sales. A world that built up heroes and villains with fireworks and smoke machines, and tore them down with ladders and steel chairs.

In here, none of that mattered. All he had to do was breathe in the scent of the man who wore this shirt last night, curl up in its sweet, comforting haze, and wait. And wait.

It couldn’t have been more than a few minutes—the sun was still just barely peeking over the buildings outside the window when the muffled sounds of conversation stopped and the door to the bedroom finally opened.

Roman lifted his head from the sheets, just enough to see the figure standing tall at the foot of the bed, broad chest rising with heavy breath as eyes locked with his, dark and piercing. A gaze that
might have withered others, opponents and friends alike, a gaze that would’ve stripped him bare if he weren’t already naked, the flimsy fabric of a shirt leaving nothing to the imagination.

“Missing me already?” came the deep voice, touched with a hint of amusement.

Roman nodded, legs opening out of their own volition, thighs quivering, beckoning and a little desperate.

“Damnit, baby boy…” the bed dipped a little on its springs, hands circling around his ankles and pulling them wider. “That slutty hole of yours still hungry for my cock?”

Roman closed his eyes as he heard himself make a strange, animal noise from his throat, a sound so alien it almost startled him. But there were hands on his body now, large and soothing yet rough at the same time, crawling up his torso, re-tracing the marks he’d studied so intently in front of the mirror. A pair of lips latched onto his inner thigh, sucking harshly with a mix of teeth and tongue—another bruise, another claim.

“You like wearing Daddy’s clothes, huh?” the voice said from down below, hot breath ghosting against his groin. “You like feeling me all around you, like I’m wrapped tight and won’t let go?”

“Y-yes…” Roman managed tho choke out, tongue fumbling over the simplest of words.

“Yes what, baby?” the voice crawled up now, beard rubbing against his stomach.

“Yes, Daddy…” he said, the word now rolling sweetly off his tongue, any hint of hesitation that might have been there months ago long since gone.

“Open your eyes…” the command came from directly above and Roman did, staring straight into a handsome face lined with deep furrows, brown eyes keen with intent and lips quirked into a half-smirk, his physical heat and weight now all too real and nearly overwhelming.

_Hunter._

A name that meant little two months ago—his boss, his in-ring opponent, not quite his boyhood hero
but still a name that had gone the distance he’d only begun to travel.

Hunter.

Roman’s voice might not be calling him that name but his body was, flesh tingling with need, aching to be touched, wanting to be taken to that place where everything else faded away and all he could see, feel, touch, and think about was Hunter.

Hands, then. Everywhere, grabbing him by the shoulders, pulling his arms up, half sliding the shirt off him and half keeping it on, until he was cradled across a strong lap with that hot, heavy mouth sucking at his neck, one arm wrapped tight around his shoulder while the other snuck between his legs, a calloused palm stroking lazily along his length.

“I could dress you up like a Ken doll,” the voice muttered darkly against his ear. “Make you wear all the nicest things, clothes that make you look so pretty, so damn delicious, clinging to this body of yours just right—“

Roman sank deeper and deeper on each word, swimming in the haze, his own hands flung weakly around a thick, muscled neck.

“You’d drive everybody crazy, walking around looking so damn good—but it’s only me that gets to mess you up like this,” words accentuated with a lick across his jaw. “…my own little fuckdoll, my pretty little bitch.”

Roman gasped, his open mouth swallowed into a rough, bruising kiss. One of Hunter’s hands palmed at his chest, rubbing the fabric of the shirt against his skin, thumb flicking almost lazily at a nipple. Hunter tasted like fresh roast coffee and a bit of toothpaste—he was an early riser, Roman had learned over the last two months. Liked to get a bit of business done first thing to allow him time for a good workout or, failing that, going another round with Roman.

Hunter tipped his chin up, tapping an index finger against Roman’s cheek. “You wanna give Daddy something nice before he has to go back to work?”

Roman nodded, his tongue thick with remnants of kisses and his own lust, unable to form words.

“Hands and knees,” Hunter said.
Roman wasted no time complying, Hunter’s shirt riding up his body as he turned over to assume the position, ankles hanging off the bed. On instinct he lowered himself down to his elbows, where he could rest his head on the mattress and push his ass further up, arching for the pleasure of his one-man viewing party.

“Such a good slut…” Hunter cooed as he stroked down Roman’s back, touch and words driving a ripple of pleasure that traveled down Roman’s spine. Whichever part of him clung to common sense and decency was currently being drowned by the part of him that loved being good for someone else—for Hunter, specifically. Especially in moments like this, with Hunter’s firm hands parting his ass and a deep, guttural chuckle of amusement reverberating against his exposed skin.

The next thing he felt was a warm, thick tongue lapping at his hole and it was all Roman could do not to thrust his ass back or grind himself down on the mattress to relieve his own aching hardness. Hunter wouldn’t like that. Hunter wanted to control how things went, when Roman would be allowed to come and how many times. Right now he was wetting Roman’s hole with his spit, fingers molded into the bruises on Roman’s hips from last night, holding him in place as he licked. Roman’s breathing through his mouth, breath dampening the sheets under him even further, eyes shut against the brightening sun and focused on the sensations racking his body.

“Should see what a mess I made of you back here, baby boy…” Hunter said as he nipped at one ass cheek. “You’re all wet and swollen, still loose from all I did to you last night,”

Roman whimpered, squirming a little for more contact, which seemed to amuse Hunter.

“Don’t worry, I’ll fill you up nice…” he said, pulling Roman’s hips back to get a better angle. Roman allowed himself to be manhandled into position, Hunter’s shirt still wrapped around him, filling him with overwhelming sense of closeness, of Hunter, all around him.

Hunter rarely went slow with him these days and that’s fine, that’s absolutely fine, Roman loved the burn and the friction and the sense that this wasn’t his show to run, that someone else had made the choices for him. All he had to do was be a good boy and take it, open up his body to the rough intrusion of Hunter’s hot, hard length and let him slide in, let him use Roman any way he saw fit.

“You like that?” Hunter asked once he was balls deep, rocking slightly to let Roman feel it.

“Yes, Daddy…” Roman said raspily, hands fisted in the sheets.
Hunter started moving, pulling almost all the way out with excruciating slowness before thrusting back in aggressively, each time knocking Roman forward and causing a burning ache that spread all the way to his fingertips. It hurt, and it also flooded him with pleasure so intense he almost whitened out. His dick was hanging hard between his legs, dripping copiously, and sweat was plastering the fabric of Hunter’s shirt against his skin.

“I wanna hear more…” said. “Tell me why you love this so much, tell me how this makes you feel…”

Roman’s eyes flew open, mouth struggling to find words. “I…I don’t—“

“Oh, don’t worry…” Hunter draped himself over Roman’s back to whisper in his ear. “Daddy won’t tell anybody else. Just between you and me, baby boy…”

He nipped at Roman’s ear to emphasize his words and Roman felt something inside him shatter—one last barrier of dignity, perhaps, or one last anchor to sanity.

“I…I feel full,” he began awkwardly. “You…you’re so big, and you fill me all the way up.”

“Keep going,” Hunter said, his voice steady even as his thrusts picked up.

Roman fought to keep his head in the right state—he’d never been good at this, could never get the hang of dirty talk, never been one to spout filth like Dean or tease and flirt like Seth, but he couldn’t fail, couldn’t bear the thought of letting Hunter down, couldn’t—oh.

Oh.

“I like pleasing you,” he let out shakily. “I like it when you tell me I’m good for you, that I’m doing things right…”

“Mmm-hmm,” Hunter murmured appreciatively.
“I like it when—oh, God…” Roman bit his lip over a hard thrust. “When you’re all over me, like this, like last night, when there’s nothing else for me to do but be good for you…”

The words left him in a rush, everything coming back to him like a flood, every sense memory feeding the confession of filth running from his mouth like a broken dam.

“I love doing this for you, Daddy…I love, love it when you just take me, when you make me yours…”

“Fuck, Roman…” Hunter sped up his movements, clearly affected.

“I love being yours, like this—oh fuck!” Roman gasped, realizing that his own cock was sputtering, untouched, the sensation letting loose a final litany of words. “Wanna be yours all the time, don’t want anybody else, just you, just you, Daddy—“

Hunter came with a loud, long grunt that sent nearly his full weight pressing down on Roman’s back, hands locked tight around Roman’s wrists. Roman felt him, heard him, could smell him and almost taste him, blood pounding in his ears as Hunter’s climax rippled through him, intermittent aftershocks that rocked his hips forward, burying his softening dick even further into Roman’s body.

“Damn, baby…that was…” Hunter muttered breathily against his ear. “That was something else.”

Roman buried his nose into the sheets, senses slowly returning to him, an unwelcome coolness starting to form under his skin. Had he said too much? Had he gone too far? The misty haze in his mind was beginning to clear, just in time for self-doubt to start prickling at the edges of his thoughts. When he could breathe through his nose against he realized he’d gone all sniffy, and that the heat gathering in his eyes were unshed tears.

Right. Go to pieces like a crybaby after the best fuck of your life. What a mess.

“Hey…” Hunter seemed to sense his discomfort, turning him over.

Roman kind of wanted to hide but there was nowhere for him to go and Hunter was having none of it, the same strength that had held him down and fucked him now redirected, holding him close and stroking his hair as they lay on the bed, Hunter using his own body to shield Roman from the increasing brightness of the sun outside, the now discernible noises of traffic, the looming sense of
the real world that was starting to dismantle the walls of their shared little one.

“Don’t worry, baby…” Hunter said as he laid a kiss on Roman’s forehead. “I don’t want anybody else to have you, either…”

Roman sobbed, a strange relief overcoming him, burying his nose deep into the crook of Hunter’s shoulders. The reciprocation, the knowledge that his words hadn’t been dismissed as hopelessly stupid, or the ramblings of someone crazed with lust, comforted him immensely.

“Nope, not gonna happen…” Hunter repeated. “Keepin’ you all for myself.”

Roman mouthed yours yours yours in an endless loop against Hunter’s shoulder until he fell asleep.

—

Two hours later, Roman was freshly showered and back in his own clothes, wheeling his small trolley bag into the foyer of the suite. Hunter was also packing up, though it was standard practice that they wouldn’t be seen checking out together.

“The rest of your stuff should already be in Vegas…” Hunter said as he walked Roman towards the door. “There’s a car waiting for you downstairs in the lobby. You can either go straight to the arena, or check in at the hotel first.”

“Thanks,” Roman nodded.

Being in bed with the boss certainly had its perks—their nights together often meant that Roman got separated from the rest of the traveling circus, especially on days like this right after a Pay-Per-View with RAW being just hours away. Thankfully, Hunter had his entourage of assistants, drivers, secretaries or whatever—people Roman rarely saw but whose handiwork would take so much of the hassle out of his hands. Whether it was checking him out of the current hotel and into the next one, taking care of his rentals, or making sure the rest of his luggage had been collected from his hotel room and transported to the next city, it left Roman with little to be concerned about except making it to the next show.
“What’s on your plate tonight?” Hunter asked as Roman wheeled his suitcase out the door.

“Just some bullshit six-man tag match,” Roman shrugged. “Kind of a throwaway,”

“I’ll catch you after the show, then…” Hunter said, every bit his normal everyday self, the EVP, the suit-wearing executive with a million different appointments and a cellphone that buzzed every few seconds.

“Sure…” Roman said. “I’ll…see you there, I guess…”

“Call me when you reach Vegas,” Hunter said as he retreated back into the suite, letting the door swing shut.

It wasn’t quite the walk of shame but it felt a little like it, Roman in yesterday’s clothes wheeling his suitcase towards the elevators, every joint in his body protesting last night’s and this morning’s exertions. It was a good thing he wouldn’t be driving his ass to Vegas because he certainly needed to catch some actual sleep before tonight.

The car was waiting in the lobby as Hunter had promised, a nondescript black rental sedan with a bland-faced driver in a WWE polo and sunglasses, nodding politely at Roman and helping him stow his suitcase in the trunk.

Once the car was rolling, Roman helped himself to the bottles of water and organic energy bars that had been provided in a small caddy, and reached into his pocket to retrieve his phone, which he hadn’t even looked at since last night.

The newest message was from Seth, time-stamped only a few hours ago:

*Randy fucking wrecked me last night, man… and it’s all your fault.*

Roman smiled and typed back:
Don’t lie, you fucking love it.

He leaned back against the seat as the car sped towards the Interstate, the warmth of the sun seeping in through the tinted windows, painting everything golden.

Maybe, just maybe, he could get used to this.
Chapter Summary

It was excruciating and ugly, to hear the deep guttural noises of exasperation that came out of Roman as Hunter held on to him, wishing he could reach down and pull out whatever was causing him grief, wishing he had more to give than surface comfort, a warm bed and a few hours’ worth of privacy that would only last until sunrise. Futility wasn’t a feeling Hunter was used to—normally he could see obstacles and ways to get over or around them, difficult as they might be, but this…how was he even supposed to begin with this?

Chapter Notes

Sorry this took a good long while you guys. Wrestlemania kinda wrecked me, not to mention the subsequent RAWs, then Star Wars Celebration took over, as did real-life, work, moving house and the like. But here I am, back with another installment of this twisty, messed-up saga. Originally, this chapter was meant to cover the entirety of 2015 but then I realized my poor brain can’t cope with that much fuckery, so I kept it confined to Wrestlemania 31 instead.

Also, as I’m writing this the news broke about Matt Anoa’i, Roman’s older brother passing away, and I send all my thoughts and prayers to his family in this difficult time. Perhaps it’s also the appropriate time to note here that even though this story isn’t kayfabe compliant, I still consider the people within it ‘characters’ rather than their actual real-life personalities—hence my use of their ring identities instead of their actual names. Just putting it out there.

Specific warnings for this chapter: Angst, depressive thoughts, mild infantilism, and potentially over-the-top schmoop.

Seth was beaming — as well he should be, title belt gleaming from the shoulder of the exquisitely-tailored, bespoke three-piece suit that Hunter had ordered for him towards the end of last year. He was sipping at his champagne gingerly — stil a lightweight as far as alcohol was concerned, and on his best behavior as he welcomed congratulatory handshakes and backpats from Hall of Famers, shareholders, and corporate sponsor representatives.

Stephanie looked every bit the proud mama as she watched Seth work the room at the after party, turning towards Hunter to whisper, “Guess he turned out okay after all, didn’t he babe?”

Hunter smiled, squeezing his arm around the waist of her dress. “We taught him well,”
“No, you did…” she corrected him, giving him a little peck on the cheek. “I consider myself an involved spectator.”

Hunter chuckled, recalling the few times he’d shared Seth with Stephanie. It had all stemmed from way back when Hunter had first gotten Seth into his bed, and shared a few pictures of his latest conquest with his wife. They’d reached an agreement a long time ago that Hunter’s dalliances with male talent were perfectly acceptable, so long as she could also indulge in her own activities on the side. Hunter being Hunter, he’d never asked questions about what she got up to when he wasn’t around, but Steph was always curious about Hunter’s ‘boys’, and she’d taken a particular liking to Seth amongst all of them.

Sometimes, Hunter wondered what he’d done in life to get so lucky. So far as he could recall, he’d done plenty of questionable shit throughout his career, and if NXT was any form of atonement then he’d surely messed that up too by fucking some of its brightest stars senseless. Still, getting to please both his boy and his wife in the same night had to be considered a win-win situation for all. A loss for Seth’s poor little ass, perhaps, but he never protested. Much.

“So do you have plans for him tonight, or is he still playing Randy’s bitch?” Stephanie asked quietly against his ear.

“Probably the latter,” Hunter said. “Randy won against him, but now he’s got the title—I’m sure that’s gonna be interesting to work out between them.”

“Hmm…maybe I should ask if I can watch,” she said over the rim of her champagne class.

“Wouldn’t that be a show,” Hunter smiled. “If you do—make sure to take a couple of videos for me.”

“Will do, babe…” she threw him a sly little wink. “Oh, there’s Dad with some of the sponsors…I better go and mingle.”

“As you wish, Princess…” he bowed playfully as she walked away towards where Vince was involved in conversation with a few sharply-dressed corporate types, undoubtedly already starting to work out deals for next years’ worth of PPV sponsorships and cross-promotions.

That was the part of the business that Hunter was still struggling to get to grips with — he’d rather
focus internally, developing talent, building the Performance Center, making sure the future is secure in terms of their roster and the level of performers they could put in the ring. But he knew a spectacle like the Wrestlemania they’d just put on was impossible without their sponsors, especially with the scale of Vince’s ambitions escalating year to year.

His phone buzzed in his pocket then, and Hunter set down his empty champagne glass to retrieve it from his pocket. When he saw the Caller ID, he stopped dead in his movements—Hunter kept most of his roster on his contact list, but here was a name he never thought he’d see pop up on his screen:

*Dean Ambrose.*

Hunter quickly made for the nearest exit from the ballroom, finding a side hallway used by the caterers and the service staff.

“Hello?”

For a few seconds, there was no response from the other side.

“Hello? Ambrose, you there?”

Dean’s voice came at last, low and hesitant. “He’s…he’s not talking.”

Hunter frowned, backing himself into a quiet corner of the hallway. “Dean, you’re not making any sense. Who’s not talking?”

“Roman, you asshole! I got him back to the hotel, and now he’s just lying there, not talking to me, not even responding to me, I don’t know what the fuck to do anymore!”

Oh shit.

“Dean…back the fuck up,” Hunter fought to keep his voice calm. “Tell me, what the hell happened with Roman?”
“You saw what the fuck happened, you jackass! You and the brass made Brock wreck him, then Seth ran in and cashed in on him, and they left him a mess in the middle of that ring with the whole fucking stadium screaming for his dead body!” Dean’s voice cracked loudly over the line. “Were you fucking blind? Didn’t you see all that?”

“Of course I saw!” Hunter said defensively. “I was in gorilla the whole time, Dean. He came back through the curtains…he told me he was okay,”

“Well, he fucking isn’t!”

Hunter breathed deeply, rubbing his face. “Okay, okay…where is he? Where are you?”

“He’s in our hotel room,” Dean said. “Was quiet the whole ride back, I thought…I thought he just didn’t wanna talk about shit…but then…”

Hunter felt his stomach tightening into a cold, heavy knot. “Did he throw up?”

Dean was quiet for a few seconds. “How….how did you know?”

“He said it happens whenever shit gets intense for him,” Hunter explained. “Did he?”

“Yeah, like he…fucking puked his whole guts out, man, was dry heaving by the end of it,” Dean sounded almost desperate. “And then he just…got on the bed, curled up and hasn’t said anything since, like…like he’s fucking out of it or something. Like he’s not even there.”

Hunter felt a stab of ice in his gut, cursing himself silently for not checking up on Roman sooner. “Are you in the room with him?”

“God, no—don’t want him to hear me say all this shit,” Dean said. “I’m on the balcony, got the door shut tight—fuck.”

“Dean?”
“He’s just lying there, Trips…” Dean’s voice trembled. “Staring up at the ceiling like…like he’s
fucking dead.”

Hunter’s mind was made up in an instant, already walking towards the nearest door that would lead
him to the parking lot. “Okay, just hang tight…I’m coming there.”

“Can you…fix him?”

Hunter stopped dead in his tracks, a cold and uneasy weight settling on his shoulders. “I don’t know,
Dean…I don’t. I’m gonna try.”

“I just…” Dean’s voice hitched, an exasperated noise coming out of him. “Fuck, I don’t know what
else to do—I’ve got these staples in my head, I need a fucking aspirin and a good night’s sleep but I
can’t…I can’t…”

“Dean,” Hunter put as much calm in his voice as possible, hoping the cell signal would hold up as he
entered the basement parking lot. “I know it wasn’t easy…making the decision to call me, I mean.”

“The fuck else was I supposed to call?” Dean said, and Hunter could hear the flick of a lighter.
“Look, man…I don’t pretend to understand what it is that you got going with him, or Seth, or
anyone else for that matter, but…I know you’ve been good to him, okay? Otherwise why the heck
would he keep coming back to you?”

Why, indeed.

“You know, I ask myself that question a lot, Dean—“ Hunter said as he got into his rental, key
already turning in the ignition. “I can’t promise you anything, okay? I’ll…do my best.”

“Should I…should I just like, leave the room and then you can…get in?”

“No!” Hunter shifted his phone to one hand as he buckled himself in. “Look…he…we gotta be
careful around him when he’s like this, okay? If he sees you leave, he’s gonna think that you gave up
on him.”
“Well, fuck that.” Dean all but growled over the line. “Ain’t gonna happen.”

“I know,” Hunter said. “I can’t fix that, Dean. You’re still his best friend. Nothing I do is gonna make it better if he sees you walk out on him,”

Dean sighed loudly. “So how do we do this?”

“If you can get him to stand up and walk, meet me at the hotel’s side entrance. I’ll let you know when I’m close.”

“Okay…” Dean said. “I’ll try.”

Hunter turned the key in his ignition. “I’m starting the car right now. Meet you there.”

The call ended and Hunter resisted the temptation to throw his phone across his dashboard, tires screeching as he pulled out of the parking lot as fast as he could without hitting something.

He should have known. He should have known Roman was lying through his teeth when he came through the curtains with his eyes red-rimmed and swollen, assuring everyone that he was okay. Should’ve seen through the bitter laughter he’d forced out of himself as he received handshakes for a well-fought match, never mind the fact that he’d only been told that very morning that Seth would cash in on him and win the title. Hunter should have seen it the moment Seth raised that belt in victory, fireworks exploding behind him as Roman stared from the ring, broken and wrecked from a barrage of suplexes and drowning in the crowd’s adulation of his on-screen nemesis.

“Damnit!” he cursed himself out loudly as he drove, then waited until the first red light before grabbing for his phone again.

In the fifteen minutes it took him to get to the hotel where the roster was staying, he’d sent out a couple of quick messages to Stephanie and Seth, then called up a few people in his personal staff to make some arrangements. They were a good, hardworking bunch who didn’t ask questions and didn’t blab, all but sworn to secrecy, and his PA didn’t even miss a beat when Hunter told her that he needed to get checked out of the current hotel and checked straight into another one closer to the RAW arena for the following night.

He sent a quick text to Dean as he neared the hotel, hoping there weren’t any fans or press milling
about the side entrance. Thankfully it was all but deserted, and as he pulled up he could see two figures standing just off the steps, keeping themselves as much in the dark as possible.

He flashed his lights twice in quick succession and stopped his car just short of the entrance door, away from the glare of the terrace lights, knowing they had to be quick.

Roman had a dark hoodie pulled over his head and Dean was guiding him by the shoulder, carrying Roman’s sports bag over one shoulder. Hunter unlocked the doors and leaned over as Dean opened the door on the passenger side, coaxing Roman in. Hunter couldn’t get a clear look at his face but he wasn’t sure he even wanted to, not until they were in the safe confines of privacy. Roman had his eyes downcast the entire time, buckling himself in as Dean threw the bag into the backseat and slammed the door shut.

Hunter made a silent gesture of ‘I’ll call you later’ with his hands, to which Dean only nodded. The look on his face was a mix of relief and misgivings, which was understandable. Dean had taken a nasty bump during the ladder match which led to the staples in his head, and seeing Roman in this state couldn’t have been easy for him. Still, he probably still had doubts on whether or not he’d made the right decision calling Hunter in to try to remedy the situation—doubts that Hunter himself felt, but tried his hardest not to show.

As they drove away, Hunter wondered whether he should try to talk to Roman or touch him, but the man seated next to him seemed so closed off, so disconnected from his surroundings that he didn’t want to risk it.

“I’m just gonna get us to the next hotel, closer to the venue for tomorrow, okay?” he said quietly as they stopped at the first intersection.

Roman nodded silently, which gave Hunter some indication that he was at least lucid, and he focused on getting them to their destination as quickly as traffic would allow.

His PA called to let him know that he’d been checked into the suite at the Westin San Jose and that his luggage would be waiting there for him. Thanking her, he also told her to get someone to collect the rest of Roman’s things from the hotel they’d just left, and to make sure Dean Ambrose gets a company car to transfer him to the Westin.

“Right away, sir.” she replied. “Someone will meet you at the basement parking lot with a keycard and show you to the private elevators that’ll take you straight up to the suite rooms.”
Thank God for efficient staff, Hunter thought to himself as he turned on his GPS and plotted the quickest route to the Westin.

As promised, there was a WWE staffer waiting for him at the basement parking lot. Hunter took Roman’s bag out of the backseat and shouldered it, handing his rental keys to the man in exchange for his keycard. Roman stepped out of the car slowly, his movements slightly stiff, making Hunter wonder if he’d bothered to see the trainers after the match to get himself checked—he suspected not.

Their elevator ride up to the suite floors was silent, reminiscent of many he’d taken with Roman over the course of the last half-year or so, though never with Roman in this bad of a near-catatonic state. It was undeniable that their ‘relationship’ so far had been a medley of hotel suites and private arena dressing rooms, which gave the whole thing an air of triviality Hunter was beginning to despise. He wouldn’t be surprised if Roman still thought of their little arrangement as one of mere convenience and physical desire—Hunter hadn’t given him much reason to believe otherwise, but the realization that he’d failed Roman so utterly tonight twisted his insides in a way he never thought possible before.

Entering the suite a step behind Roman, Hunter deposited the sports bag on the floor and reached behind him to bolt the doors locked.

The sound seemed to trigger something in Roman, the sign of the outside world finally being shut away, and he ran straight for the bathroom without a single word. It didn’t take long for sounds of painful dry heaving to emanate from there, which made Hunter feel like a thousand different shades of shit, but he held back from going straight after Roman, determined not to overcrowd him.

Dean had thoughtfully packed a change of clothes of Roman, which Hunter laid out on top of the covers in the bedroom. Retrieving Roman’s toiletry case from the sports bag, he carefully made his way to the bathroom and slowly opened the door.

Roman was kneeling over the toilet bowl, hoodie thrown back to reveal his hair held up in his usual half-bun, plastered with sweat that Hunter knew had little to do with physical exertion. It was a cold, sickly kind of sweat, confirmed when Hunter knelt next to him and gently laid his hand on the back of Roman’s neck.

“Hey…” he started, not really knowing what to say.

Roman didn’t look at him, spitting weakly into the toilet and breathing with much difficulty.
“Did you shower before going back to the hotel?”

Roman shook his head.

“OK, then let’s get you out of these clothes and into the shower once you’re done, okay? You’re sweating right through these, that can’t be healthy…”

Roman nodded, but then a new wave of nausea seemed to overtake him and he heaved again, banging his hands on the tiles as his body continued to revolt against him. Hunter could do little but stroke his back, the cold sweat already starting to soak through Roman’s clothes. He made a mental note to make sure he got some food into him somewhere between now and tomorrow, though he wasn’t sure what Roman could keep down at this point.

Slowly, he helped Roman out of his clothes, turning the shower on to what he judged was a suitable degree of warmth as he did so. Despite a strong urge to follow Roman into the booth Hunter restrained himself, not wanting to crowd too much into the boy’s personal space. Roman knew he was there, that had to be enough for now, whatever else would follow could wait.

While Roman was in the shower Hunter set his toiletry bag on the counter and pulled out a travel-sized bottle of mouthwash and his toothpaste and toothbrush set, laying them out next to a fresh set of towels. Then he returned to the bedroom to unpack some of his own luggage, which his staff had also checked into the room for him, changing out of his formal attire into something more comfortable.

Checking his phone, he saw a text message from Seth:

*Is he okay? Please take care of him.*

Hunter typed out a quick, affirmative reply and waited for Roman to finish showering, using the suite’s kitchenette facilities to boil a kettle of water in the meantime and flipping through the provided selection of herbal teas before settling on simple black, something familiar and comforting rather than exotic or floral.

When he came back to the bedroom, Roman had dried off and put on the clothes that Dean had packed for him, loose-fitting sweatpants and an old t-shirt that was almost threadbare in places, well-worn and a little faded. He was sitting at the edge of the bed, towel loosely slung around his neck, staring out the window vacantly.
Hunter felt the twist in stomach deepen further, walking slowly until he was in front of Roman and lowering himself down to kneel in front of the boy, not quite touching him yet but trying to look into his eyes for the first time since they’d last seen each other in gorilla after the main event, trying to really see this time and more importantly, making sure Roman saw as well.

“You okay?” he asked. It was a stupid question, all things considered, but he had to start somewhere.

Roman shook his head slowly, lower lip starting to tremble.

Hunter reached out and laid both hands on Roman’s knees, ready to pull back if he sensed any rejection whatsoever. But Roman accepted his touch as readily as he always had, which made Hunter feel even worse, for some reason.

“It’s okay if you don’t wanna talk about it…I understand,” Hunter said quietly.

Roman drew in a deep, heavy breath. “He said thank you,” he let out in a voice that was thin and raspy.

“Who?”

“Seth…” Roman said. “When he was pinning me…in the middle of all that noise…he said ‘thank you so much’ right next to my ear.”

Hunter tightened his hands on Roman’s knees, unsure of how to react.

“He was…he was probably trying to make me feel better about the whole thing, but…”

“Only made it worse, didn’t it?” Hunter finished for him.

Roman nodded, the trembling in his lower lip becoming more pronounced.
Hunter rose from his knees and sat next to Roman, looping an arm around the boy’s trembling shoulders. “Roman…it’s okay. Let go.”

Roman shook his head, eyes shut tight against something Hunter knew was pushing up into the surface, threatening to bubble over.

“Roman…” he said again, turning the boy’s face towards him. “It’s only me in here. There’s nobody else. Nobody can see you, nobody can hurt you. You’re safe with me.”

The word ‘safe’ seemed to do the trick, and soon Hunter had his arms full of 260 pounds’ worth of trembling muscle and bone, his fingers threading through Roman’s wet hair as sobs convulsed through his body, hands balled into fists on Hunter’s chest that seemed on the brink of pounding. Hunter wouldn’t have minded if Roman had let loose on him, beating bruises into him in all his frustration—he had a sinking feeling that he probably deserved it.

It was excruciating and ugly, to hear the deep guttural noises of exasperation that came out of Roman as Hunter held on to him, wishing he could reach down and pull out whatever was causing him grief, wishing he had more to give than surface comfort, a warm bed and a few hours’ worth of privacy that would only last until sunrise. Futility wasn’t a feeling Hunter was used to—normally he could see obstacles and ways to get over or around them, difficult as they might be, but this…how was he even supposed to begin with this?

Back after the Royal Rumble earlier that year, when it became painfully obvious to anyone with half a brain that Roman no longer had the crowd’s favor, the boy had turned to him for reassurance, asking with wild and almost-innocent eyes about what was happening and whether Hunter had seen it before. Back then, Hunter had brushed it off with an easy smile and a pat on Roman's back, telling him that it was a phase and that ‘they’d soon get over it’.

How foolish he’d been, and how wrong.

Even if they’d managed to appease the crowd today by letting Seth win the title, where would they take Roman next? Hunter didn’t know, and he was willing to bet all his share in the company that the creatives and bookers didn’t know either.

“I’m sorry…” he heard a faint mutter from against his shoulder. “I’m sorry, Hunter…”

“The fuck are you apologizing for?” Hunter said, keeping his voice low. “You did exactly what was
asked of you. You fought a good match, you sold it like a pro, and you made Seth look a million bucks. You got nothing to be sorry for.”

“I’m sorry for this,” Roman said. “I’m such a wreck—I should’ve been stronger, shouldn’t have given Dean a scare like that, made you come all the way from the afterparty just to pick up my pathetic ass, I—”

“Stop,” Hunter squeezed his shoulder tightly. “You stop that right now. I don’t wanna hear any more of it.”

“But…”

Hunter pulled back and forced Roman to look him in the eyes, wiping a few stray tears from his face. “You were strong. You held up so well even with all the bullshit the crowd was throwing at you, and you kept it up for as long as the cameras were rolling…but you don’t have to be anymore.”

Roman’s face twisted in his grasp, relief and denial warring across his features. “I…but you…”

“You think I’d rather be rubbing shoulders with sponsors and listening to Hall of Famers getting drunk and telling stories, rather than be here with you?” Hunter stroked down his neck, feeling the prickly heat that signaled the beginnings of a fever underneath the sheen of cold sweat. “If something’s wrong with my baby boy, I need take care of him.”

Roman drew a sharp breath at that, the exhale of it traveling down his body in a shudder. Hunter felt some of the tension leave him, his face tilting to nuzzle against Hunter’s palm. The older man reciprocated by rubbing his thumb slowly in circles on Roman’s cheek, smearing wet patches of tears against the fresh bruises from tonight’s match.

“You’ve done your job already, Roman…” he whispered close. “Now let me do mine, okay?”

Roman nodded, falling against him again. There were no convulsions this time, just Hunter holding him close and tight, his earlier suspicions about the beginnings of a fever confirmed when he felt the heat all over Roman’s body, and the cold sweat that was continuing to break across his skin.

“I know it’s probably the last thing you want, but we need to get you fed—your stomach’s been empty for hours,”
“Can’t…” Roman said weakly. “Can’t keep anything down.”

“Let’s start with some tea, and see if you can sleep for a bit, okay?” Hunter said. “Maybe you’ll feel a bit better when you wake up.”

Thankfully, Roman was able to sip at the tea until he got at least half the cup down, with no signs of his nausea returning. Hunter then set him down on the bed and stayed with him until he fell asleep, before extricating himself carefully and quietly making his way to the living room, grabbing his phone to dial Dean’s number.

“How is he?” Dean said as soon as he picked up.

“Sleeping,” Hunter said. “I got him showered and changed and he’s…communicating again, at least.”

There was a sigh of relief from the other end. “Oh, thank fuck…”

“He still can’t keep any food down,” Hunter said. “I managed to get him to drink something, and I’ll try to get some food in him in the next couple of hours…but he’s starting to get feverish too.”

“Motherfucker’s the worst at taking care of himself,” Dean muttered. “Always felt like he had to look out for everyone else before he’d even think of his own good…”

“It’s probably psychosomatic, but I’ll see how he feels in the morning,” Hunter said. “Did someone come to pick you up already?”

“Yeah, I’m now sittin’ pretty in the Westin, probably a few floors down from you,” Dean said. “They also got the rest of his stuff…thanks for that, by the way.”

“No problem,” Hunter said. “You get some sleep, and make sure to get those staples looked at first thing in the morning by the trainers, okay?”
Dean huffed, probably disliking being told what to do like a child but unable to put up any resistance. “Yeah…”

Hunter chewed his lip, thinking over his next words carefully. “Dean…I know what you’re probably thinking. Just say it.”

There was a loud, exasperated sigh before Dean’s voice returned. “This whole situation sucks, Trips…like what the fuck did he ever do wrong? He deserves better than this…this mess that he’s gotten into.”

“I know,” Hunter agreed.

“And you…of all people, you who’ve spent the better part of last year nailing him through the mattress across America for all I know, you didn’t see any of this coming? You didn’t try to fix this before it got this bad?”

Hunter closed his eyes. A part of him wanted to fire jabs right back at Dean, probably dress him down for his insolence, but he knew the truth in those words even if his pride didn’t want him to admit it.

“I wish I had…” Hunter said. “What more do you want me to say, Dean? I thought it would pass—we all did.”

“Well it didn’t,” Dean said bitterly. “And I don’t see how it’s gonna get any better for him.”

“I can’t change what’s already happened,” Hunter said. “As for what’s next…”

“Oh, that’s right, I forgot—“ Dean’s voice turned cold and mocking. “You don’t actually control much of that yet, do you?”

Hunter bit back the retort that was at the tip of his tongue, willing himself to stay calm. “No.”

“Look…” Dean paused, an uneasy shuffling audible in the background. “He obviously likes being with you, so I got nothing to say about that, I just…I don’t want things to get worse for him.”
“He’s *safe* when he’s with me,” Hunter said. “It’s when he’s out there…that’s where I can’t…can’t really do much for him.”

“Bet that bothers you, huh?” Dean said. “Mr. Cerebral Assassin, groomed to take over the company, so used to being able to manipulate things to his advantage…”

“Yes, yes it *does* bother me,” Hunter replied sharply. “You happy now, Ambrose? Is that what you wanted to hear?”

Dean fell silent for a few long moments.

“Dean…I’m doing what I can over here,” Hunter said. “I’m trying.”

“Yeah, yeah…” Dean said, exhaustion clear in the brittleness of his voice. “I’m…sorry, this night’s been all kinds of shit.”

“Tell me about it,” Hunter said. “You should get some rest…I’ll update you on Roman in the morning.”

“Cool…” Dean said. “Night, then.”

Hunter hung up and let his phone clatter onto the dining room table, sitting himself down heavily as he rubbed his face in his hands. The ache in his bones from his own match with Sting seemed centuries away, like a memory already forgotten, his thoughts now occupied with Roman and what he could possibly do at this point, if anything, to even begin to fix the situation.

His thoughts were interrupted by a sharp cry from the bedroom, which had Hunter bolting out of his seat and through the door in record time. Roman was sitting up in the bed, panting heavily, his eyes searching around the room until he found Hunter in the doorway. It was obvious that he’d woken up from some kind of terrible nightmare, his whole body trembling. Hunter was back at his side in a flash, arms around his shoulders as he tried to calm him down.

“Are you…are you really here?” Roman said, his voice quivering, hands scrabbling at the collar of Hunter’s t-shirt. “This real?”
“Right here, I’m right here…” Hunter assured him. “What’s wrong, baby boy? What’d you dream about?”

Roman fell against his chest, still breathing heavily. “The stadium…back at the stadium…alone, nobody else there…”

“You’re not at the stadium anymore, you’re here with me…” Hunter said, grasping Roman’s fingers tight to ground him. The fever was rising, he could feel it all through Roman’s body, even more pronounced when he pressed his forehead against the younger man’s, the heat of him seeping through.

“Place was fucking empty—” Roman continued. “Couldn’t find you, couldn’t find Dean, couldn’t find anyone…”

“Dean’s right here, in this same hotel—he got here not long after we did,” Hunter said. “I’m here too…”

Roman sagged against him, his ragged breathing beginning to stabilize as Hunter swept his sweat-plastered hair away from his face, cradling him gently.

“Baby, you really need to eat something—you’re only gonna get sicker if you don’t…” Hunter said.

“Can’t…” Roman said. “Stomach still feels all wrong. Don’t wanna throw up again.”

Hunter patted his thigh lightly. “Think you can take liquids?”

Roman nodded. “I think…I think so.”

“Okay, stay here…” Hunter said as he rose off the bed, Roman’s hands clutching emptily after him, desperate to maintain contact. “I’ll be right back, let me go fix something up for you.”

The protein mix Hunter kept in his gym bag wasn’t going to set the culinary world on fire, but at
least it was in liquid form and he knew it was the same brand and flavor Roman used. More than that, he’d done this for Roman several times before, when the boy was too shaken or tired to eat properly, so hopefully by now Roman would’ve associated the taste of it with Hunter, with the feeling of being cared for.

He shook the shaker bottle vigorously for a lot longer than he normally would, wanting to get the fluid in as smooth a consistency as possible. Then he climbed back onto the bed and gathered Roman into his arms, leaning against the headboard and allowing the younger man to rest against his chest, his feverish body heat bleeding through the blankets Hunter had wrapped him in.

“You want Daddy to feed you?” Hunter asked as he brushed his lips against Roman’s forehead, and Roman nodded weakly.

Hunter fed him the mixture slowly, rocking him gently throughout and watching for any signs of the returning nausea, which thankfully didn’t come. Roman soon got into a steady rhythm of sucking on the bottle’s nozzle and swallowing slowly. His breathing evened out and his eyelids began to droop, signifying that he was getting more relaxed and comfortable.

He’d half-expected to be slightly weirded out by the whole thing, or that Roman would be, but instead it felt like the most natural thing for him to do. Hunter felt intensely protective of Roman right now, on top of his usual possessiveness. He needed to ensure his baby boy was fed, that he was being looked after, and he didn’t care how absurd the notion was that he was sitting there cradling one of his top talents and—for all intents and purposes, bottle-feeding him.

This was the small, private world he shared with Roman, in snatches of time between cities and shows, where Roman didn’t need to think and worry and concern himself with what anybody else thought of him. All he needed to know was that Hunter was there for him, and that no harm would come to him in these precious few hours that they had to themselves. Roman looked up at him and Hunter smiled down at his boy with easy affection, watching Roman’s throat convulse as he swallowed the last of the mixture in the bottle.

“That’s a good boy…” he kissed the last drips of it off Roman’s lips.

“Thank you, Daddy…”

“Try going back to sleep, okay? I’ll stay with you this time…”
Roman wiped his mouth with one hand and settled back into the covers, Hunter settling in next to him. He knew by now that Roman didn’t like waking up to sunlight coming through the windows—it brought him back to reality a little too soon and too harshly, so Hunter always made sure he slept facing the far wall, or that Hunter’s own body was there to shield him from the morning light.

He pressed tiny kisses against Roman’s heated neck as the day’s exhaustion finally caught up with them both, dragging them into what he could only hope, for Roman’s sake, was a deep and dreamless sleep.

—

Roman’s fever broke in the morning, when Hunter was roused from sleep by his watch beeping his usual 6 a.m alarm. Normally he’d be out of bed and putting in a good hour of exercise before settling down to do some paperwork, but this time he wanted to make sure he was there when Roman woke up. He patted some of the sweat away from the younger man’s neck and back with the towel Roman had used the night before, feeling him slowly stir awake.

“Mornin’…” Hunter said softly when Roman looked over his shoulder at him, blinking wearily with red-rimmed eyes. “You sleep okay?”

“Yeah…” Roman turned to face the wall again, but pressed himself back against Hunter under the covers.

“Feel better?”

“Won’t know until I try to get up or eat something…” Roman said.

Hunter tightened his arm around the boy’s waist. “I’m gonna get you moved down the card for tonight’s episode, okay? Let Seth take up the segments—you don’t have to show up until the last hour or so.”

“Okay…” was the weakly-muttered reply.

Normally Roman would object to something like this, he didn’t like being treated like he was made
of glass and was eager to put his work in and earn his dues, but last night seemed to have taken a lot of the fight out of him. Hunter knew the last thing he wanted was for Roman to have to soak up heat during an opening promo when the wounds from the main event were still so raw.

“How much…how much time do we have?” Roman asked.

“It’s only six in the morning,” Hunter told him. “Arena’s only a few blocks away—we can stay here awhile,”

Roman shifted around, turning to face Hunter. He didn’t look nearly as lost and broken as he had last night, but not entirely whole again, either. He reached up, fingers tracing the stubble on Hunter’s chin.

“D-daddy…” he started, wetting his lips as he spoke.

“What, baby boy? What do you need?”

“You…” Roman said as he bowed his head, as if ashamed to ask. “Need you.”

Hunter felt heat stirring deep inside him, the flicker of something that had been furthest from his mind last night. “You sure? You know Daddy always wants you, but he doesn’t want to hurt you, either…”

“Won’t fix things…” Roman said knowingly. “But it’ll feel good.”

Hunter smiled, pulling Roman’s chin up and kissing him, drawing him in closer. Roman opened up easily for him, like he always did, letting Hunter’s tongue roam his mouth, letting Hunter’s hands slowly maneuver them so half of his weight was now settled on top of Roman.

“I can do that for you…” Hunter said when they broke apart, grinding their bodies together. “How do you want it?”

“Any…any way you like,” Roman said, kissing the tip of Hunter’s stubbled chin. “I trust you, Daddy…”
Something lurched inside Hunter then, something that had little to do with the desire pooling heavy in his groin, but he returned the kiss and guided Roman’s body with his hands. “Lie on your side, baby boy…yeah, just like that.”

There wasn’t much he could do for prep except spit, but he spent a good long while fingering Roman open, kissing his neck and shoulder all the way through it, his other arm braced across Roman’s chest as the boy suckled on his digits. Hunter was determined to take it slow, as slow as he could manage with Roman feeling so needy in his arms, and the soft noises that was coming from his throat that never failed to drive Hunter crazy.

He pulled his fingers out slowly and draped Roman’s leg back over his hip, reaching down to work some of his own pre-come down his shaft as extra lubrication as he angled himself at Roman’s entrance. The push inside was slow—Roman was still inexplicably tight even after all this time and Hunter didn’t want to cause him any unnecessary discomfort, but steadily he worked himself in until his entire length was sheathed inside Roman’s tight heat, the boy letting out a pleased whine—music to Hunter’s ears after last night.

“That feel good?”

“Always…” Roman said as he pushed his hips back against Hunter, clenching to draw him in deeper.

Hunter rocked their bodies into a steady rhythm, content to let the slow burn overtake them both, his nose buried in the crook of Roman’s shoulder, nipping softly at the lines of his ink.

“Want you to remember this…” he said softly. “Whenever you’re with me, like this, you’re mine, okay? Nobody else gets to touch you, or even see you.”

Roman shuddered. “Yes…”

“I won’t let anybody even come near you—“ Hunter continued. “Gonna keep you safe, take care of you…”

They both knew those were promises meant for within these walls only—broken as soon as either of them stepped out of the doors, shattered by the swipe of a key card. Even now, with the morning creeping up on them, the walls were already beginning to crumble. But Hunter was determined to
shore them up as best he could, with words and caresses, put Roman’s pieces back together from the splintered fragments of the previous night.

He batted away Roman’s hand from his own cock, whispering “Let me…” as he stroked him in rhythm to his thrusts, Roman trembling in his arms the whole time.

“Close, Daddy…” the boy whimpered. “So close…”

“You’re gonna come first…” Hunter said firmly. “Let me feel it, come on…”

Roman did just that, coming with a hoarse cry as his dick sputtered in Hunter’s hand, coating it with sticky release. Hunter held himself still inside Roman as the orgasm ripped through the boy’s body, loving the tight clench of him, the involuntary shudders it produced against his tight embrace.

“Thank you…” Roman whispered as he pulled up Hunter’s messy hand, punctuating his words by licking himself off each of Hunter’s fingers. It was all the encouragement Hunter needed to resume moving, fucking into Roman a little faster this time, the flick of the boy’s tongue—which was practically sin made flesh—feeding into his desire.

When he knew he was close he drew his fingers out of Roman’s mouth and turned his face around, kissing him and tasting come on Roman’s tongue as he drilled in deep, hips bucking into Roman’s backside. He came like that, with his mouth still latched with Roman’s, messy and wet, swallowing Roman’s moans and whimpers and the taste of his release.

Hunter would build these walls over and over, as many times as it took, in as many cities and as many rooms as he had to, even if they were little more than flimsy shelters disguised with expensive bedding and marbled bathtubs, short-lived fantasies decorated with beveled doorknobs and ten different flavors of herbal tea.

“Mine…” Hunter rasped through his teeth when they had to part for breath, holding on to the word as much as he held on to Roman, the truth and the lie of it blurring together as daylight seeped in, Roman’s eyes shut tight against it.
Royal Rumble - 2016

Chapter Summary

Tonight, Roman wasn’t on his knees for his Daddy. He was, quite literally, bowing down to the King of Kings, the newly-crowned Champion, the man who had ended Roman’s title reign to the crowd’s sheer delight, whose mere entrance into the arena had set the place on fire. A man who wielded the power to command the respect or scorn of thousands, whichever he chose, with a mere look in his eyes or a few choice words on the microphone.

Power Roman could never hope to wield—and one that was slipping further and further away from him.

Chapter Notes

Another chapter? So soon? Well, it's national holiday over here, so I thought might as well.

This will probably be the darkest chapter yet, given the timeframe. Not so much on the angst this time around but more on the angry, twisted, messed-up sex that is the flipside of the tenderness we saw in the last chapter. I promise I’ll make the next one happy for once (and shamelessly smutty, too)!

Specific warnings for this chapter: dubious consent, bondage, sex tinged with violence, blood, dom/sub play, name-calling…well, you get the idea.

This wasn’t entirely new for him.

Roman had been on his knees for Hunter countless times before, on lush hotel carpets and cold tile floors alike, his own weight resting on his calves and threatening to cut off his circulation.

Having his hands tied behind his back with a leather belt wasn’t something new, either—Hunter had done that to him on several occasions, whenever he felt like he needed to dial up the power play, or whenever Roman needed to go down real quick and hard.

Hunter’s dick in his mouth was a familiar sensation, too—the weight and heat of it resting against his tongue, the girth making Roman’s eyes water as he stretched his lips to accommodate. He’d been instructed explicitly not to get the older man off, restricting himself to gentle sucking and occasional flicks of his tongue, which had gone on for what felt like hours. Roman’s spit was dripping down his
chin, his jaw sore from the strain of keeping his mouth open around Hunter and his teeth covered, his own cock jutting hard and neglected from between his legs as he knelt there naked, his mouth reduced to a mere hole Hunter was using to keep his dick warm.

No, there really wasn’t anything here that they hadn’t done before—except for one little detail that Roman was painfully reminded of each time he dared to look up.

Hunter was seated at the edge of the large chair in the hotel room, hands resting on the armrests and his face a cold, hard mask of absolute control. The World Heavyweight Title, a bejeweled strap of black leather that had rested on Roman’s shoulder up until a few hours ago, was draped across Hunter’s waist, its garish emblem just inches from Roman’s face, Hunter’s newly-installed iron crosses gleaming from the sideplates.

Tonight, Roman wasn’t on his knees for his Daddy. He was, quite literally, bowing down to the King of Kings, the newly-crowned Champion, the man who had ended Roman’s title reign to the crowd’s sheer delight, whose mere entrance into the arena had set the place on fire. A man who wielded the power to command the respect or scorn of thousands, whichever he chose, with a mere look in his eyes or a few choice words on the microphone.

Power Roman could never hope to wield—and one that was slipping further and further away from him.

Losing the title to Hunter had been the easy part—it was almost a welcome relief after a night of being built up as “one-versus-all”, video packages which made Roman cringe but had little power to change, entry after entry coming into the ring to beat the shit out of him when he just wanted the night to be over and done with. When Hunter had held the title aloft and stared down at him with the roar of the crowd behind him, Roman had felt every bone in his body turn into lead—all the fight gone out of him. They were so loud, so loud in their approval of their new champion and in their disdain for Roman, that he’d wanted nothing more than to crawl into the ring and lay himself at Hunter’s feet right then and there.

Why the fuck not, Roman had thought as he made the slow, painful walk backstage, still selling the heck out of the damage the League of Nations had inflicted on him. Why not finish the job right then and there, humiliate and degrade him until there was nothing left, show the crowd that the former Champion, the supposed leader of a so-called ‘Empire’, was nothing more than Triple H’s bitch, a pliant and willing body he could use however he pleased?

He needed this—needed to feel the crushing weight of Hunter’s power over him, needed it to drown out the noise in his head, needed the fog to be so thick inside his mind that nothing could penetrate through.
“You know, a lot gets thrown around backstage about your mic skills needing some work…” Hunter said casually as he looked down at Roman. “But why bother? I think we both know what your mouth is best for, don’t we?”

Roman’s lips fluttered around Hunter’s cock at that, a shudder passing through his body.

“Too bad we weren’t doing this when I used to come out for Wrestlemania seated on a throne like this chair…” the older man tapped his fingers against the armrests. “Would’ve loved to go out there with you kneeling like this, sucking my dick and showing the entire stadium what a whore you are,” Roman moaned aloud, his mind flooded with images painted by Hunter’s words, wrists straining against the belt holding them together at his back.

“Yeah, you actually like the sound of that, don’t you?” Hunter smacked his right cheek, not hard but enough to sting. “My little whore of an ex-champion, all used up and broken—but always, always you come crawling back to me for more.”

Hunter grabbed the back of Roman’s head without warning and pulled him close, forcing his dick down Roman’s throat and making him gag. Roman spluttered, fighting to keep his breathing as tears rolled free of his eyes, spit bubbling across his lips as a painful retch tore from deep inside him.

“You’re a messy slut…” Hunter said almost affectionately, his fingers tangling in Roman’s hair. “So fucking shameless.”

Roman wanted to drown in that voice, to lose himself in the words that cut him apart like he was nothing, every shred of pride gone and stamped under Hunter’s foot, incinerated in the glare of his eyes and the garish belt now bumping the ridge of Roman’s nose.

“Told nearly all the roster to beat the fight out of you tonight, but the moment you saw me…you knew you were done, weren’t you?” Hunter said as he clasped Roman’s chin roughly.

Roman nodded, as much as he could with Hunter’s cock lodged so deep in his throat.

“Yeah, saw it in your eyes the second I walked out on that ramp…you’d have rung the bell yourself
and handed this thing to me on your knees if you could,” Hunter tapped at the title belt with his other hand. “A good little slut who knows he’s been put in his place.”

Roman dragged his tongue along the underside of Hunter’s cock, murmuring his appreciation. He was falling, head so murky only Hunter’s voice could cut through the haze. His muscles were straining, tired from the long, heavy slog of the Royal Rumble and further aggravated by being in this position for such a stretch of time, consciousness reduced to the narrowest point of focus he could manage, the presence seated in power before him and the control he had over Roman.

“Off,” Hunter commanded, yanking at Roman’s hair to pull him away, his length sliding out of Roman’s mouth. Roman leaned back, a thick trail of spit still connecting his lips to Hunter’s cock, his own erection dripping into the carpet below.

Hunter backhanded him across the face, whipping Roman’s head to one side and making him let out a sharp cry of pain and surprise. It wasn’t Hunter’s full strength—Roman would be unconscious if that had been the case, but it hit him hard enough that his cheek stung and his vision blurred. It hurt more than any of the bumps and hits Roman had taken tonight, more than being put through a table and slammed against ringposts. It struck Roman where nobody had dared to strike him before, defenseless, the intent behind it not to wound his body but his pride.

“More…” he muttered under his breath.

“What was that?” Hunter pulled at his hair again.

“I said, more…” Roman nearly spat out, though he could feel his voice withering as Hunter’s intense gaze drilled into him. “Please…” he added, almost as an afterthought.

Hunter made a soft noise of amusement and leaned back, lifting his hand again. He hit Roman with the palm of his hand this time, and the fact that Roman saw it coming did little to lessen the pain.

“I guess losing brings out the painslut in you, huh?” Hunter said as he gripped Roman’s aching jaw. “That’s interesting…”

“I just…” Roman struggled to get his words out through his swollen lips, his face beginning to bruise in Hunter’s strong hand. “I need…need something that hurts more.”
“Well, aren’t you a lucky little bitch, then…” Hunter stood up, one hand still gripping Roman’s face while the other held on to the title belt. “If there’s one thing I know how to do, it’s to hurt…”

Roman strained his neck to maintain eye contact, the full height of Hunter looming over his kneeling form, aware of how utterly helpless he was in his predicament.

As if to punctuate his thoughts, Hunter struck him again, the force of it nearly enough to topple Roman to the floor. He gasped, tasting blood in his mouth, feeling it well up over a split in his lips.

Hunter yanked him up by the shoulders and tossed him unceremoniously into the bed, landing face-first awkwardly, unable to halt his momentum with his hands tied behind his back. Roman felt a sharp relief flood over him upon contact with the much more welcoming surface, though he knew his respite would be short-lived. Behind him, he could feel Hunter climbing onto the bed after him, knees knocking Roman’s apart to make room.

“Not gonna give you much prep…” Hunter said. “I don’t think you’re gonna complain all that much.”

Roman shook his head—he needed Hunter now, needed the sharp burn of and the weight of the other man’s body pressed down on him, needed to feel the hard thrust of cock into his unprepared hole, dragging abusively against his inner walls and the litany of filth that went with it, needed to be taken apart and reduced into a willing receptacle for Hunter’s pleasure.

Hunter jabbed two fingers inside him, minimally coated with spit, scissoring him open as he draped his body over Roman’s back, breathing lustfully against his ear.

“Normally I wouldn’t mind you coming untouched just from me fucking you…” he growled as his fingers drove deeper and deeper. “That’s how much of a slut you are for my cock, isn’t it? Just having it inside you is enough to get you off…”

Roman nodded frantically, pushing back against those invading digits.

“But not tonight,” Hunter said. “Tonight, you come only when I tell you to—you got it?”

“Yes, sir…” Roman said weakly, his bloodied lips starting to speckle the white sheets with beads of crimson.
A third finger was added, Roman’s hole stretching painfully at the rim to accommodate them, his eyes shut tight and his mouth open to let out ragged breaths. He wanted Hunter to wreck him, destroy him, finish him until there was nothing left, nothing left of Roman Reigns, the man that had been so stubbornly built up only to be torn down by one swift move from the only person who wielded true power, The Game, who held control over his mind and body like strings on a puppet.

“Maybe this is why they don’t make you lose often,” Hunter said as he rose up, fingers withdrawing from Roman sharply and landing a smack on his backside. “Maybe they know what it does to you, how you can’t help but fall apart and go crawling after whoever beat you, begging for their cock…”

Roman buried his nose deeper into the sheets, the words shredding into him like shrapnel. “No, sir… it’s only you, I swear, I swear it’s only you—“

“Shut the fuck up,” Hunter cut him off and rammed inside him in one savage thrust, burying himself to the hilt and knocking Roman forward until his head nearly bumped against headboard. Roman couldn’t help but cry out, the sharp burn of it bringing tears to his eyes, barely able to catch his breath before Hunter started moving, thick fingers gripping both of Roman’s hips for leverage.

It was too much, too much and not enough at the same time, Roman’s wrists twitching helplessly in their bindings as he was fucked, as hard as he’d ever been, each thrust pushing his face further and further into the sheets until he almost couldn’t breathe. Hunter pulled at the belt holding his wrists together and yanked back, straining Roman’s shoulders even further, riding him like a beast, grunting low and harsh, the sound of it rippling up Roman’s spine.

Roman fought to keep his aching dick from rubbing against the sheets, knowing each bit of friction would only bring him closer and closer to coming, unwilling to imagine the consequences of failing Hunter’s orders. He was so far gone, title belts and hostile crowds driven out of his mind by sheer physical sensations, the fog now thickened into a shroud around him, binding and suffocating, blood ringing in his ears, spitting from his mouth, running like hot lava in his veins.

He knew by now how long Hunter could keep going like this, how far he could prolong Roman’s torment, how easy his body was to manipulate to the older man’s wishes.

Then, without warning, Hunter pulled out—the sudden ache and emptiness forcing a loud moan out of Roman’s throat.

“Easy there, little slut…we’re not done yet,” Hunter chuckled darkly as he flipped Roman over like
he weighed nothing, grabbing for his ankles and pushing them forward until Roman was nearly folded in half, dark eyes burning straight into him as he thrust back in.

Roman howled, the new angle jabbing him straight at his sensitive little spot, the sparks of pleasure rippling through him counterpointed with the harsh pain—his heaven and his hell merged into one. His bound wrists now underneath his body, the metal of the belt buckle digging into his lower back, Roman was acutely aware of how everything hurt—his strained muscles, his poor little hole that Hunter was fucking into, his sore mouth that had strained around the older man’s dick, his lip split from Hunter’s hand, the roots of his hair from where Hunter had yanked him roughly.

Only Hunter could hurt him like this—only Hunter knew how to hurt him, that had been obvious from way back when they first started messing around with each other, when Hunter had staked a claim over him and never left him alone since. Roman had fallen under his spell like some kind of paperback virgin, molded and shaped until he suited Hunter’s needs, until he knew how to please and beg and submit.

Maybe that was all he would ever be good for, maybe that was all he ever needed to be. If pleasing an audience of millions was out of his grasp, then at least he could please one man, couldn’t he?

Hunter moved in as if to kiss him but Roman turned his face away, flinching at the thought of any tenderness intruding. Hunter settled on licking at his jaw instead, moving downward to suck harshly at his neck, undoubtedly leaving marks, ugly red hickeys that would turn blue tomorrow, marks Roman would have to let down his hair to cover up but would rather wear proudly instead, let the world see who owned him.

Hunter shoved Roman’s ankles even further back over his body, stretching him to the limit of his flexibility, pounding hard and deep, his pace picking up as he neared climax. Bent backwards like this Roman could see Hunter’s cock driving in and out of his body, the slick sounds of it echoing loud in the room, his hole open and helpless to the invasion. Tears were falling freely from his eyes now, his mouth struggling to take in breaths as his nose felt clogged up.

“You need my come in this needy little hole of yours?” Hunter grunted.

“Yes, sir…” Roman choked out, his voice nearly gone. “Please…please come inside me.”

Hunter did just that, burying himself deep one last time and holding Roman still, his own muscles straining with the effort, face contorting with mixed pleasure and menace as he came. Roman could feel it filling him up, hot and thick against his battered insides, his own cock twitching weakly at the sensation, desperate and straining. Hunter let Roman’s legs go, falling limply against the mattress,
“Should plug you up so you don’t lose any of it…” Hunter muttered under his breath. “But let’s save that for some other time.”

Roman bit his lip, his own cock aching for release, oozing against his stomach as if begging for attention. Hunter took a swipe at the gleaming head with one hand, forcing another moan out of Roman as he struggled not to come, not to lose himself to the rough friction of the calloused fingers stroking at him.

“Poor little thing…” Hunter said mock-sweetly as he cradled Roman’s cock in his hand, palm rubbing at the sensitive underside. “So desperate…”

“Please…” Roman whimpered.

Hunter’s grip tightened, starting to stroke in earnest as he fell forward onto Roman, lips latching onto one hard nipple and sucking loudly. “Come…” he said with the hard nub caught between his teeth.

Roman lost it right there, climax ripped through him by the sheer force of Hunter’s command and the contact made on his flesh, teeth and fingers and a cock still lodged deep inside, screaming himself raw until all remaining strength left him. He fell limp as a ragdoll in the aftermath, tense muscles unwinding into liquid as Hunter withdrew from him, and for a moment it felt like he might actually lose consciousness, the edges of his vision growing blurry and black.

“Stay with me…” he could distantly hear Hunter’s voice as he was rolled onto his side, deft hands undoing the bindings around his wrists. Roman drew his hands to his face as soon as they were free, rubbing at the raw flesh of his wrists, the indents left by the strap of the belt and its metal hardware. He curled up, tucking into his own chest, only faintly registering the feeling of Hunter leaving the bed and rummaging around the room, of the bathroom lights being switched on, of water running in the sink. Tentatively, Roman licked at his raw wrists, tasting leather and sweat and feeling the sting of the reddish welts that ran across his skin, the purplish bulge of his veins underneath them.

Hunter returned with a damp washcloth and gently coaxed his legs open, and Roman complied without looking. He wasn’t sure what he’d see in Hunter’s eyes then, wasn’t sure if he’d be ready for it, what this meant for them down the line.

“What is… bleeding down there?” he asked after several minutes had passed and Hunter had finished
“A little,” Hunter said, working the damp cloth on Roman’s stomach.

Roman bit his lip, squeezing his eyes shut. “Good…” he muttered.

Hunter’s hand stopped moving. “Is that what you needed?”

Roman nodded his head slowly. “Don’t ask me to explain…”

“I won’t,” Hunter promised. “If any of this actually helps you, that’s enough for me.”

Anger flared in Roman’s chest then, hot and sudden, and he twisted his head to look at Hunter. “Don’t do that…don’t fucking say that to me.”

Hunter looked genuinely taken aback. “What?”

“We’ve been doing this long enough, Hunter…we both know you’re not doing this out of the pure kindness of your good old heart,” Roman spat out bitterly. “Don’t make me out to be a charity case. You got off on that just as much as I did. Don’t even fucking pretend you didn’t.”

Hunter was still for a few moments, nostrils flaring as his eyes locked with Roman’s heated gaze, and for a moment Roman almost expected to get hit again. But then the older man’s shoulders sagged and he tossed the washcloth aside, sighing deeply as he moved to sit next to Roman, though not quite touching him.

“You’re right…” he said. “I shouldn’t have said that.” He reached for one of Roman’s wrists, pausing just as his fingers skirted over the raw flesh. “Okay if I touch you?”

Roman nodded slowly as Hunter took his hand, threading their fingers together as his other hand inspected the marks his belt had left there. He pressed his thumb into the indent and Roman winced, but didn’t move to take his hand away.
“One of these days…you’re going to push me too far, and I’m going to do something I regret,” Hunter said. “You know what gets me, and by now you’re as good at getting me worked up as I am with you.”

“Thanks for the compliment,” Roman mumbled.

“Roman, I’m serious…” Hunter tightened his hand slightly. “This isn’t even half of what I’m capable of.”

Roman pushed himself up off the bed, ignoring his protesting muscles and sore backside as he sat up, determined to look at Hunter at eye level. “That’s why you made me choose a safeword, right?”

Hunter chuckled bitterly. “You’ve never even *used* your safeword…”

“Never had reason to,” Roman shrugged.

There was something in Hunter’s eyes which suggested that he didn’t quite believe him, and Roman couldn’t blame him. He started to stand up and walk away when Hunter’s hand on his wrist caught him.

“Where you going?”

“Back to my room…” Roman said as he pulled his hand free, moving to gather his clothes off the floor.

“You’re not staying?”

“Can’t…” Roman shook his head, which was still hazy and half-dazed as he struggled to put his clothes back on. Normally, he’d welcome the prospect of sleeping in Hunter’s bed for the rest of the night, safely cocooned in arms which had only moments ago destroyed him, but he’d made up his mind about tonight—and about the months to come.

Hunter at least had the presence of mind to help him get dressed, doing up the buttons of his shirt, a task Roman couldn’t manage with how badly his fingers were shaking. After he was dressed Hunter
also made him sit down and drink half a bottle of water he’d pulled from the minibar, cooling his parched throat. When Roman had gained back more of his senses and the ability to speak, he finally looked up at Hunter who was standing cautiously near the doorway.

“I need a break…” he started. “…from this. From us.”

Hunter sighed, nodding his head slowly. “I had a feeling you’d say that…”

Roman stood up slowly, walking gingerly towards where Hunter stood, every ache and pain in his body magnified with each step. “I just…they’re gonna make us beat the living crap out of each other for the next couple of months, and I can’t….I can’t….”

I can’t do it if all I can think of is how much I want you, how good you’ve been to me, how much I fucking need you all the time.

 “…it doesn’t feel right,” Roman finished his sentence awkwardly.

“I know,” Hunter said.

“I’m sorry,” he hung his head.

“Don’t be…” Hunter assured him. “You do whatever you need—for you, okay?”

I need you. I’ll always need you. I never stopped needing you from the first time you touched me.

“Okay…” Roman said. “Thank you.”

A few minutes later he was out of the suite, the heavy doors shutting behind him as he stood in the glaring rights of the deserted hotel corridor, garish and bright, hands dug deep into the pockets of his hoodie where they balled into fists. Slowly walking towards the elevators on shaky legs, he pretended not to hear the muffled noise of anguish coming from behind the door he’d just left, and the loud banging of it being kicked in frustration.
“Jesus fucking Christ…” Dean said from the bathroom door. “What the fuck did that old bastard do to you?!”

Roman knew how he must have looked, standing naked just outside of the shower booth. The noise of him clattering about the bathroom must have woken Dean up, seeing as how he’s now standing with bleary eyes that were nonetheless alarmed as he gazed up and down Roman’s body. Dean had seen Hunter’s marks on him before but never like this, never so raw and fresh, and never so many of them all at once.

“Nothing I didn’t ask him to…” Roman replied.

Dean’s face tightened with the telltale signs of words that were being held back, which was uncharacteristic of Dean, especially when he’d been roused from sleep at assfuck o’clock in the morning.

“Please tell me he at least took care of you afterwards…” Dean said.

“Yeah…” Roman nodded as he grabbed a towel off the wall rack. “Yeah, he did.”

Dean sighed heavily and leaned against the doorframe. “Seth called earlier…”

“Yeah? How is the little shithead?” Roman asked as he dried off.

“Pissed off and whining about the knee, as ever—doesn’t look like he’s going to make it for Mania,” Dean said. “He saw how the Rumble went down… wanted to know if you were okay.”

“And…?”

“Told him the old man was taking care of you, which seemed to be good enough for him.” Dean
shrugged. “I hope it was good enough for you…”

“More than enough,” Roman said, not bothering to explain further. Dean didn’t need to hear it—Roman wasn’t fond of telling tales like Seth used to do way back then, when The Shield were still together and him and Hunter were getting it on regularly, talking Dean and Roman’s ears off about how fucking amazing the older man was and how much he liked being a slut for his ‘Big Daddy’. Mostly he did it to rile Dean and Roman up into getting a little rough with him, Dean calling him a shameless little pervert and Seth calling him one right back.

Roman missed those days. As messed up as they were, things were simpler back then.

When he finished changing into his sleeping clothes and came out of the bathroom, Dean was back on his bed again—hands tucked behind his head. Roman was just about ready to pull the covers back on his own pristine, untouched bed when a thought struck him. Not just a thought but a need, albeit one far removed from anything he ever needed from Hunter.

“Dean…” Roman said. “Can you…scoot over?”

Dean looked up at him for a few seconds, then smiled lopsidedly and moved over, making room for Roman on the mattress and patting the space next to him. “Come up here, you big pussycat…”

Dean smelled like aftershave and tobacco, there was always something unkempt and loose about him even when he’s on his best behavior—which was almost never. Roman had always appreciated that about him, how easy and generous Dean was with both his affections and his violence. The bed was too small for them but they made do, just like they had when Seth was still rooming with them, Roman’s head coming to rest on the crook of Dean’s shoulder. Dean patted his head lightly, like the softest tag possible, yawning wide as he switched off the bedside lamp.

“Y’know, it’s funny how I used to run in a stable with two of the biggest fucking headcases I know, and yet somehow I’m still the ‘Lunatic’ in the group…”

Roman chuckled at that, his first real taste of mirth in the last twelve hours, and settled himself to sleep, Dean’s steady heartbeat serving as his lullaby.
Chapter Summary

The few times he’d considered sending a text message or calling to casually ask how Hunter was doing, he’d stopped himself, rationalizing that the older man was probably busy, that they’d have very little to talk about anyway. But now here he was, hearing Hunter’s voice again, and already it was beginning to wrap tendrils around him he thought he’d shaken loose. Roman didn’t know whether he hated or loved it.

Chapter Notes

All right, I promised y’all a happier chapter for once, didn’t I? Well, it seems that the 30 days of Roman’s suspension is way too long for me to cover off in one chapter, so I guess that makes two happy chapters? Yay? Here’s the first installment, with 7000+ words of Hunter being super duper extra with his whole Daddy thing and Roman…well, Roman’s in for quite a ride. Enjoy!

Thirty days.

Thirty fucking days of the biggest stinking pile of bullshit he’s been dealt this year alone, which was saying something, and worst of all—he couldn’t blame anyone but himself for it.

No doubt the internet had gone nuclear by now with accusations of him being some kind of juiced-up ‘roid junkie, but Roman knew better than to stray into that minefield when he was already so close to breaking and smashing things in his apartment.

Seth was furious with him, even though he knew it was more administrative negligence on Roman’s part and not actual substance abuse, but he was pissed nonetheless. He’d only just gotten back, and was really chomping at the bit to have a go at anyone and everyone it seemed, as if wanting to make up for six months’ absence in a few weeks’ worth of episodes. And Dean…well, Dean was the World Heavyweight Champion now, at least there was that, and Roman was happy for him regardless of the circumstances.

Headquarters had been strict about the terms of his suspension: no television or live show appearances, no public events, no signings, and no statements made on social media except for one accepting responsibility for the whole debacle, which no doubt the rest of the online world would jump on with their own bullshit. Roman had taken it all in stride, or at least tried to, until he was
alone in his apartment in Pensacola and going half out of his mind with just what he was going to do with himself.

He thought of going for a run around the complex or hitting the gym and taking his frustrations out on a punching bag, but it was just past noon and sweltering outside, and the local gym would probably have at least a few people who recognized him—Roman didn’t feel like having someone upload a blurry picture of him working out on Instagram, not so soon after the news had gone out that he’d been suspended.

Maybe he’d finish painting the spare room that had languished in its half-finished state for what seemed like eternity. Or maybe he’d rent a room down in Orlando and spend his days in the Performance Center, where at least he could train around familiar faces and catch up with some old friends. Or fuck it, maybe he should just go to the Magic Kingdom and ride Splash Mountain all damn day. He needed the break, anyway. Perhaps this wasn’t how he’d planned on getting it, but what’s done is done.

His phone was ringing and buzzing near-constantly, to the point where Roman wanted to fling the damn thing across the room. Mostly it was just family and friends, to whom he’d had to repeat the same explanation over and over whilst keeping his cool. He’d stubbornly ignored any calls from media outlets or unrecognized numbers, and turned off notifications for his Twitter replies. Someone from the PR and Social Media Division would be watching over his account for the next thirty days, he didn’t need to even come near it.

He had his laptop open and was seriously just about to start looking up the current prices for Disney’s Park Hopper packages when his phone rang, not with its usual ring tone but with one he’d assigned to a specific contact, one he hadn’t heard in months. Not Dean’s. Not Seth’s. Not Jimmy or Jey’s.

*Hunter.*

Roman stared at the caller ID on his phone as it rang on his coffee table, flooded with so many feelings at once he couldn’t even begin to untangle one from another, before what small portion of his brain was still capable of rational thought reminded him that this was still, in fact, his boss—so he reached over and picked it up.

“Look, I’ve already had the honor of getting chewed out by Vince and half of senior management, okay….so I don’t think there’s anything you can say that I haven’t already heard. But let’s have it,” he said, frustration bleeding into his voice.
“Wow, I was thinking more along the lines of ‘hello’ and ‘how are you’, but if you’d prefer to hear a corporate speech then I guess I can compose one and call back in five,” Hunter sounded jovial, almost amused, which did little to ease Roman’s frayed nerves.

“Seriously, Hunter…what do you want?”

“Oh, I don’t know….majority share in the company, higher TV ratings, less paperwork and hassle to cut through whenever we’re trying to bring in international talent…” Hunter rattled on. “…for now, I’d settle on knowing how fast you can pack a suitcase.”

Roman frowned. “I…what?”

“I wanna take you off the grid, Reigns…” Hunter said. “Away from everything.”

“Company’s already doing that,” Roman answered blankly, still not sure what Hunter was getting at. He had an idea, just the barest inkling of an idea, but he didn’t dare hope too much.

“Yeah, and that means what—being cooped up in your apartment for the next thirty days and hoping people don’t get in your face and ask you about this whole mess whenever you go out for groceries?”

“Well…” Roman shrugged.

“We can do better than that.” Hunter said. “Just pack a suitcase. I’ll take care of the rest.”

Roman moved to sit down, heart hammering in his chest. It was almost too much to process, what Hunter was saying, and everything it implied. They hadn’t spoken for months—not that Roman had intended for the whole ‘break’ thing to last that long, it was just how things had played out. As soon as their Wrestlemania 32 feud was over, Hunter had gone straight back into the business side of things, while Roman had been thrust even more into the spotlight as the new World Heavyweight Champion. The few times he’d considered sending a text message or calling to casually ask how Hunter was doing, he’d stopped himself, rationalizing that the older man was probably busy, that they’d have very little to talk about anyway. But now here he was, hearing Hunter’s voice again, and already it was beginning to wrap tendrils around him he thought he’d shaken loose. Roman didn’t know whether he hated or loved it.
“Roman?”

“Thirty days is a lot to pack for,” Roman said, looking awkwardly around his apartment. He’d unpacked most of his road gear and luggage, and it dawned on him that he wouldn’t necessarily know how to pack on short notice for something which didn’t involve doing wrestling shows or training.

“Just pack enough for a weekend trip, and we’ll take care of the rest along the way…” Hunter said casually. “In about an hour or so, someone will show up at your door with a car and a ticket for a flight to Orlando. I’ll be waiting for you there.”

“Wait…wait,” Roman said, the rush of information making him feel a little light-headed. “You planned this whole thing already? Even before you called?”

“I’m not the world’s most patient man,” Hunter said, unapologetically.

“Yeah, I remember that about you…” Roman said.

“I hope that’s not the only thing you remember…” Hunter said, voice dropping to a lower register. “But if it is, I’ve got thirty days to remind you of the rest…”

Roman shuddered, biting his lip against the noise that was threatening to escape his throat. A few months apart with barely any contact and still, Hunter could do this to him, cast a spell over him with only a few words.

“It’s…been a while, hasn’t it?” he said.

“Too long,” Hunter said from the other end. “But we can fix that…”

Roman sighed, recognizing the tone in Hunter’s voice which signaled he wasn’t about to take no for an answer.

“An hour, you said…”
“Give or take a few minutes, yeah…”

“And you’ll be at the airport in Orlando?”

“I’ll be there…” Hunter said. “I promise.”

Roman closed his eyes. “Okay…”

There was more he wanted to ask, more he wanted to know about what Hunter had planned for him. But he had an hour to pack, about two hours of flying time, and Hunter would be waiting for him when he landed. He could ask then—or maybe he’d be so caught up in Hunter he wouldn’t even care.

He suspected it would be the latter.

—

Dragging his hastily packed suitcase behind him as he made his way out of the arrival lounge in Orlando, Roman lowered his sunglasses over his face and prayed that nobody would recognize or try and strike up a conversation with him. Blending in with a crowd didn’t exactly come easy to a man his size but he gave it his best, keeping his head low and his earphones plugged in as he scanned the area for his pickup.

He saw the company guy almost right away, one of the people who’d been on Hunter’s staff for years, and they exchanged nods before Roman was led through the crowd towards where a black limousine was waiting. It wasn’t the ostentatious stretch version that the McMahons sometimes rolled out for the sake of TV appearances, but it was still quite flashy. Roman swallowed hard in his throat as his luggage was loaded into the trunk—he didn’t quite know what to expect, couldn’t see past the darkened windows of the limo and felt uneasy knowing that whoever was inside could see him quite clearly.

When the door was finally opened to allow him to step inside he saw Hunter, seated at the far side,
dark navy business suit and no tie. He’d grown his beard out since their last encounter at Wrestlemania, the dark blonde fuzz framing his face speckled with bits of grey. He looked damn good, and the little smile he gave Roman as he climbed into the limo set flutters in Roman’s stomach like a fucking teenager.

Roman returned the smile, or at least tried to, as he sat down and the limo door was shut behind him.

“Drink?” Hunter said as he opened the cooler unit on the wall next to him.

“Just water, thanks…” Roman said, catching the bottle of Perrier Hunter tossed him. He drank quietly as the limo pulled out of its spot, wetting his lips with the cool liquid as he pulled his sunglasses off. “Where...where we headed to?”

“My apartment here in Orlando,” Hunter said as he leaned back in his seat. “I got it a couple years ago when NXT started really picking up, figured I might as well have a place down here since I was gonna be spending a lot of time here between Full Sail and the Performance Center…”

“That’s nice,” Roman said non-commitally.

“Besides, I think you’ve had enough of hotel rooms for a while...thought I’d keep you somewhere you could at least stretch your legs out and feel a little more comfortable.”

*Keep you.*

“You’ve had me in hotel rooms bigger than most people’s apartments,” Roman said. “Though I rarely got to see more than the bedroom.”

Hunter chuckled lightly. “Well, you got me there…”

Roman set his water bottle in the slot at the bottom of the door panel and looked at Hunter, really looking at him for the first time since he got in the car. The last time they’d been alone with each other, their feud had worn both men down to frayed edges and tired-looking eyes, and Roman’s bones ached just from the memories. Things hadn’t exactly gotten better for him since as far as the crowds were considered—they were as hostile as ever, booing him every chance they got and cheering on whoever was put against him. Roman had begun to accept that it would probably be his lot for the rest of his career—and that the sooner he could learn to live with it, the better it would be
Hunter had gone back into his business role as if nothing had changed, his last title reign already a distant memory, a necessity more than an achievement. Part of Roman had been angry about it, about how trivial it made everything feel, a man of Hunter’s stature and track record being reduced to a transitional champion. Their match at Mania had not been a classic but they’d slogged through it nonetheless, and Roman had held his belt high just as Hunter had told him to do, stood proud in the hurricane of disdain that followed and had weathered the storm since.

“Oh, thirty days…” he said at last, the words twisting between a blessing and a curse.

“You needed the break anyway,” Hunter said, echoing the sentiment Roman had left unsaid.

“Yeah, I do…” Roman nodded slowly, casting his eyes around the rest of the limo’s interior. It was fitted out with a few passenger conveniences like the drinks cooler and foldout tables, but nothing too fancy. A padded panel served as the divider between them and the driver’s compartment, and the heavily-tinted windows made the late afternoon light outside seem more like dusk.

Roman’s world was shrinking, the same way it always did whenever he was alone with Hunter. The muffled rumble of the limo’s engine and the noise of traffic outside seemed little more than background filler, the air heavy with the sound of his own breathing and the barest hint of Hunter’s cologne drifting from where he sat. Already his limbs felt a little sluggish, a strange heat traveling up his spine as haziness descended over him.

“Hey…” Hunter said as he reached over, dragging the back of his knuckles down Roman’s cheek. “Come here…”

Maybe it was that little touch that did it, or the voice, or the combination of the two. Whatever it was, Roman found himself moving so fast his head swam, straddling Hunter’s lap with both hands on the older man’s shoulders, mouth gasping like someone coming up for breath after a long, deep dive. Hunter caught him, one hand at the back of Roman’s head and the other around his waist as their mouths met, Roman sucking at it hungrily like his life depended on it. Hunter tasted like his last meal and breath mints, his beard rubbing coarsely against Roman’s jaw as his arm tightened around him like a vise.

Roman hadn’t thought about this for the longest time, didn’t allow himself to in case he found himself not being able to go another day without it, but here he was—back in the arms of the one man who could make him feel like the rest of the world couldn’t touch him, who could keep him safe. ‘Safe’ usually meant a night cocooned in some fancy hotel suite after a long Pay-Per-View,
fucking and sleeping and maybe fucking again before the inevitable intrusion of daylight would shatter the illusion. But now they had more than one night. They had thirty days. Thirty days and Roman couldn’t even begin to imagine what Hunter would do to him in that time—all he knew was that he wanted it all.

He’d barely drawn back from their heated kiss to take a breath before Hunter pounced again, latching their lips together with even more urgency. Roman made a noise in the back of his throat and rubbed himself against Hunter shamelessly, the heat spiking inside him when Hunter bucked his hips up to meet him, cocks rubbing against each other through layers of clothing. Hunter’s body felt just as tight and toned as he did when Roman last wrestled him, muscles stretching the fabric of his dress shirt underneath his suit, thighs easily supporting Roman’s weight and thick arms keeping him close. They were of equal height if slightly different build, pound-for-pound probably of similar strength, but Hunter could bring Roman down with a finger if he’d wanted to, and often did so with no more than his voice. Roman loved that about this…thing of theirs, that there was never any question as to who held the power, relieving him of any need to make the decisions, except maybe on whether he wanted to be a good boy or a bad one. More often than not, he chose to be good—the rewards were more than worth it.

“Missed me?” Hunter smiled as he held Roman’s face a breath apart from his.

“Like you wouldn’t believe…” Roman let out in a sigh.

“Missed you too…” Hunter drew a thumb across Roman’s bottom lip. “Can’t believe I let you out of my sights for so long…”

“You gonna keep me in it for the next thirty days?” Roman said as he flicked his tongue against Hunter’s thumb. “All for yourself?”

“All for myself, that’s right…” Hunter nodded, a self-satisfied smirk blossoming over his face. “Gonna take real good care of you…”

Roman shuddered, the other part of the equation locking into place inside his mind. Hunter had always been a possessive lover, controlling and manipulative to the point where he could command Roman’s body to do things he’d never thought he was capable of, whether it was coming untouched multiple times in one night, or taking Hunter so deep in his throat without gagging and holding him there until his jaw cramped, or feeding his ears with so much honeyed filth in words and asking him to repeat them back. But the same man who could—and have—destroyed him in a few hours’ worth of relentless fucking was also the same man who’d bathed him and clothed him when he was half-dead from exhaustion, who’d rocked him to sleep when he was ill and feverish, pressed ice packs into his bruises, bottle-fed him protein mixes and fed spoonfuls of soup into his mouth when he was too sick and weak to eat anything solid. With Hunter, Roman had been toyed with, tormented, deep-
throated, smacked around and fucked open within an inch of his life, but he’d also been made love to like he was the most precious thing Hunter had ever held in his two hands. Roman enjoyed both equally, and something told him he’d be getting a fair measure of both in the coming days.

“You meant what you said? About taking me away from everything?” he breathed against Hunter’s nose.

“Yeah…” Hunter stroked a few strands of dark hair away from his face. “Nobody’s gonna be bothering you for the next thirty days. Not the shitheads out there, not the press, not even the company…they wanna check on you, they can do it through me.”

How Hunter could even begin to manage that, Roman didn’t even know, and didn’t need to. “Thank you…”

“I’m gonna make it all good for you, baby boy…” Hunter smiled, before pulling him closer and kissing him again.

Roman relaxed a little, the edge taken off his urgent need and the rush of sensation at being with Hunter again, and he felt himself melting a little more into Hunter’s embrace, still perched quite comfortably on his lap and grinding slow. Hunter’s hands were fondling his ass now, fingers splayed wide on either cheek, hard cock rubbing up against Roman through his expensive trousers.

“If we had time I’d have you right here in this limo, lay you down and get you all nice and wet for my cock…” Hunter whispered hotly in his ear. “…too bad we’re almost at the apartment. Think you can hold out for a few more minutes?”

Roman nodded. “A few more—not too long.”

“Not too long,” Hunter agreed.

Mercifully, they soon pulled up to a complex of new-looking apartments—not exactly luxury but definitely upscale, all sleek lines and grey slate accenting the walls. It was nearly sunset and there was a soft ocean breeze blowing in the summer air as Hunter led him to a private entrance, dragging his suitcase behind him.

Hunter’s unit was on the seventh floor, with an open-plan living room that had been partially
converted into a home office, floor-to-ceiling windows draped with off-white blinds. The decor was
decidedly minimalist, unlike some of the garish hotel suites they’d stayed in during their time on the
road. The master bedroom was airy and spacious, with an en suite bathroom complete with a large
tub and shower. A room which Roman suspected was the second bedroom had been turned into a
small gym—not with the complete set of equipment but enough to keep a man in shape.

“You can use that room as much as you want…figured you’d probably prefer not training in public
places.” Hunter said as he wheeled Roman’s suitcase into the master bedroom. “Or you can go to the
Performance Center—you still have your access card?”

“Yeah…” Roman said, fishing his wallet out of his pocket and laying it on the kitchen counter.
“Always a good place to come back to.”

“They’ll be happy to let you train there—Matt knows to expect you in the coming weeks,”

Roman looked around the apartment some more—there were very few personal effects, not even a
tasteful framed print or a shelf of books, a space that hadn’t been lived in as much as it had been
used. Hunter’s desk near the window was strewn with paperwork and folders, his laptop charging
quietly with its top closed.

“You’ve been busy…” he said as he walked back to the kitchen, where Hunter was digging around
the cupboards.

“The upcoming brand split’s a lot to manage…” Hunter said as he produced two tall glasses.
“Splitting the roster is one thing, but we’re talking about splitting the staff, the stage crew, the
trainers, the producers…and ironing out schedules with the arena people.”

“I have enough of a headache keeping my rentals and hotel bookings in order,” Roman shook his
head as Hunter produced a carton of orange juice from the fridge, and proceeded to pour them each a
glass. “Don’t know how you keep yours straight.”

“Mostly it’s the paperwork that drives me nuts,” Hunter said as he sipped his juice. “Plus the
Cruiserweight Classic starts taping two days from now, so things are gonna get busy down there in
Full Sail,”

“Sounds like fun,” Roman said as he downed half his glass. “Been a long time since that division got
any attention,”
“Not in our company, no…” Hunter said. “But they’re popular the world over—it’s a miracle we’ve been able to secure so many top names for the tournament.”

Roman nodded, licking remnants of juice off his lips. “I think I need to use the shower…”

“Sure…” Hunter said. “We’ll get dinner after, just take it easy…”

When Roman got to the bathroom he stared at his reflection long and hard in the mirror. His lips were a little swollen from the car ride here, eyes a little glazed and unfocused, and there was a flush to his cheeks that had nothing to do with the weather. Smiling quietly to himself, he peeled his clothes off and stepped into the shower booth, noticing that Hunter had stocked two bottles each of Roman’s brand of shampoo and conditioner on the wall-mounted rack. Roman shook his head—the older man had clearly been planning for this, probably from the moment he first heard about Roman’s possible suspension.

Not that Roman was complaining, not at all. This beats staying in his own half-furnished place in Pensacola for thirty days, stewing in his own frustrations, jerking off to bad porno he’d stream illegally and eating shitty takeout food. Here, he had a nice big bed to sleep in and a warm body to sleep next to, a place to exercise and keep in shape, and if his previous times with Hunter were any indication, his every conceivable need would be taken care of. Roman wasn’t a fool, he wasn’t going to say no to that. And if the ‘price’ he had to pay meant spreading his legs or giving up any other part of his body for use whenever Hunter wanted to, well…that wasn’t exactly a loss on his part, either.

Exiting the bathroom with a towel wrapped loosely around him, Roman found Hunter waiting in the bedroom for him. He’d taken his jacket and shoes off and had his sleeves rolled up, sitting at the edge of the bed with a knowing smile on his lips.

“I put most of your stuff in the wardrobe,” he gestured towards the built-in units lining one side of the bedroom wall. “Looks like you’ve packed enough for the next few days, at least…after that, we’ll just get you some new clothes.”

“You gonna dress me up all pretty?” Roman said playfully as he stepped closer.

“Hmm…that’s a thought,” Hunter tugged him closer by his wrist, shaking the towel loose from his waist, letting it fall into a damp puddle on the carpet. “Right now I prefer you just like this, though.”
Roman smiled and got on Hunter’s lap again, flinging his arms around the older man’s neck. Unhindered by clothing, Hunter’s hands now roamed everywhere, stroking up and down his back, pinching playfully at his chest, sneaking fingers down between Roman’s ass cheeks until Roman could feel the press of cold, slick digits against his hole. Hunter wasted no time fingering him open, his fingers coated generously with lube, eager but apparently mindful of the fact that it had been a long time since they’d last fucked.

“So tight…” Hunter muttered against Roman’s ear. “You’ve been keeping this hole nice and clean for me, baby boy? Didn’t let anyone else touch it?”

Roman shook his head, already close to coming undone by Hunter’s fingers alone. “Nobody else…”

“You sure? I know you’ve had a lot of new friends come in since I’ve been gone, people who’d love to have a go at this ass of yours…”

“No…” Roman looked right into Hunter’s eyes. “Never wanted anyone else, Daddy…”

Hunter’s light brown irises flashed with something at those words, and soon Roman found himself flipped over onto his back, calves resting on Hunter’s shoulders as the older man worked his trousers open with one hand, the other still three fingers deep inside Roman. Roman watched him through hazy eyes, rocking himself against Hunter’s fingers slowly, delighting in the soft ripples of pleasure it produced up and down his body.

It was true, he hadn’t let anyone fuck him other than Hunter—the thought had never even entered his mind. When Seth came back, him and Roman and Dean had ended up in a half-drunk heap in Seth’s hotel room, giving each other messy handjobs half the night and snoring on each other’s shoulders for the other half. Seth had given him a rather wonderful blowjob to wake him up the next morning, then Dean got pissy and wanted one too, and they almost didn’t check out in time to get to the next town for RAW.

Roman loved having his two brothers with him like that, stupid and messy and reminding them of simpler times, but it was nothing like what Roman got from Hunter. Hunter could build entire worlds around him, flood his mind with imagery through words and the play of his hands, his voice the only thing cutting through the intoxicating haze in Roman’s head and guiding him along as if on a leash. A leash Roman would follow anywhere.

“Tried doing this to myself…with my own fingers,” Roman said as he pushed back against Hunter’s digits. “Didn’t feel the same…”
“I bet it didn’t…” Hunter smirked as he twisted his fingers inside Roman, his other hand working his own cock with leftover slick. “You put anything else inside you while I was gone?”

Roman shook his head. “No…”

“God…your poor little hole must feel so neglected by now,” Hunter withdrew his fingers and lowered himself onto one elbow, the other guiding his dick into Roman’s hole. “So let’s fix that, shall we?”

Roman gasped at the sensation of being penetrated, the shock of it both familiar and new, sense memories awakened with every inch that Hunter pushed into him. His mind flashed through those countless nights of being on his back just like this, or on his stomach, or sinking down on Hunter’s lap with hands braced on some hotel room’s fancy headboard, of curtains drawn tight to keep the outside world at bay and hurried breakfasts the morning after, chasing after the next taping, the next live show, the next press junket—the next opportunity to steal a few hours away.

Hunter exhaled when he was fully sheathed, stroking down Roman’s right leg and kissing the inside of his knee. Roman reached up and undid the buttons of Hunter’s shirt with his shaking fingers, trying not to yank too hard as Hunter started to thrust inside him. He pushed the fabric of the shirt aside and pressed his palms against Hunter’s chest, feeling the drumming beat of his heart under the heat of his taut flesh. This was real, he told himself. This was real and Hunter was really here, big and warm and strong, just like how Roman remembered him.

Hunter let Roman’s legs down so they could wrap loosely around his waist, allowing him to press down closer and tighter, mouth busy marking up Roman’s neck with bruises they both knew wouldn’t need covering up the next day. Roman ducked his hands under Hunter’s shirt and clawed blunt fingernails down his back, bucking up to meet each hard thrust and gasping mouthfuls against Hunter’s shoulder. He wouldn’t last long—it’s been too long and Hunter felt so good, so close and warm, his movements sharp and focused. Hunter grabbed Roman’s face in both hands and kissed him fiercely, sucking the air right out of him as he sped up his thrusts. Roman reached down, finding his own dick already straining and swollen, ready to explode.

One of Hunter’s hands joined him down there and together they stroked frantically, bringing Roman off in spectacular fashion and in record time. Roman could feel himself sputter and shoot, come plastering his chest and a little of it even getting on his chin. While he was still moaning and writhing in aftershocks he could faintly feel Hunter licking him up, lapping up the release on his sweaty flesh as he resumed thrusting. Roman’s head felt fuzzy, his oversensitive nerve endings still sparking intermittently as Hunter continued fucking him, thick tongue dancing across his skin.
Hunter came with his mouth hovering over Roman’s, shiny with spit and trails of Roman’s own release on his lips. Roman pulled him down and kissed him, tasting himself even as Hunter shot his load inside him, feeling the hot drench of it, the ache of fullness that reached all the way to the base of his spine, the mess of fluids smearing their bodies. He needed another shower. He probably wouldn’t be able to walk tomorrow. He couldn’t care less.

Hunter released his mouth and breathed heavily against him for a few moments, still not pulling out despite his cock softening inside Roman. Blinking the haze away and stroking down Hunter’s deeply-lined face, Roman bit his lips and waited.

“That…was just the beginning,” Hunter said with a little smile. “I could do this all night.”

“I was kinda hoping you would,” Roman said.

“Now who’s impatient?” Hunter smirked and kissed the bridge of Roman’s nose. “Listen, I need to go out and get our dinner, but there’s something I want you to do for me while you wait…”

“Oh..?”

“I want you to keep this sweet little hole wet and open for me, so I can slide right back in again…” Hunter said, punctuating his words with a short, shallow thrust. “You still remember how to do that?”

Roman shuddered, wetting his dry lips. “You…brought it with you?”

“It’s right here…” Hunter reached over to the bedside table and rummaged for something in its drawer. “Just waiting for you.”

Hunter hadn’t used a lot of toys on him in the two years they’d been doing this, but there was one plug in particular in Hunter’s little collection that Roman was fond of—black rubber, simple-shaped, no fancy ridges or electrics, just a big blunt end and a wide base that sat snugly against his hole whenever it was fully sheathed inside. Now Hunter was holding it inches from his face, rubbing the end of it against Roman’s wet lips.

“Tell me again why you liked this one…”
Roman took the end of the plug inside his mouth, sucked on it wetly, then released it with an obscene pop. “Because it feels like you…”

“Damn right…” Hunter said as he drew back, rising up on his knees.

He withdrew his cock from Roman’s hole and pressed the tip of the plug against it, pushing it inside the still-wet entrance slowly as Roman breathed, working his muscles to draw it in further. When it was snugly inside Hunter pressed at the base a few times, which did unspeakable things to Roman’s prostate, causing his spent cock to twitch a little.

“Think you can be a good boy and wait for Daddy to come home?” Hunter teased a little with his fingers rubbing around Roman’s rim.

“Uhh-huhh…” Roman nodded. “Just don’t take too long.”

Hunter smiled and kissed him one last time before getting off the bed. “Be back before you know it…”

Roman laid back on the bed as he heard Hunter leave the bedroom, and the faint sounds of the apartment doors opening and closing. The sun had fully set outside, the room bathed in the soft glow of two bedside lights with dimmer switches. Roman reached over to turn it down to the lowest setting, trying to limit his movements as much as possible. Then he flopped back onto his back, drawing his knees up to accommodate the strange but not unwelcome sensation of the plug inside him, every soft rub of it against his insides sending a ripple of pleasure through his body and to his cock. He probably wasn’t going to get hard again so quickly, which was just as well since he didn’t want to have to deal with the plug and an erection while waiting for Hunter to come back. Thinking on the absurdity of his predicament, Roman had to laugh, staring up at the ceiling and shaking his head at himself.

*What a difference a day makes…*

Fifteen minutes went by and Roman decided that he most certainly needed another shower, even if Hunter was just going to dirty him all up again when he got back. Standing under the warm spray felt nice, it gave him something to focus on other than the sensation of the plug pressing deep inside him, and the knowledge that it was keeping Hunter’s come from dripping out. Roman soaped himself down thoroughly, washing the stickiness off his chest and thighs, but left his backside alone, afraid to dislodge or even disturb the plug.
Hunter had unpacked his suitcase and put his clothes into the wardrobe as he’d said, helpfully separating tops from bottoms and giving an entire drawer for his underwear. Roman decided against too many layers for now, slipping on one of his soft, sleep-worn t-shirts and a pair of grey sweatpants. He had a feeling he wouldn’t be wearing them long anyway, he just needed something to cover up for decency’s sake while they ate. He was hungry, he hadn’t eaten on the plane and his stomach was starting to rumble, he just hoped Hunter wasn’t looking to do too much once dinner was over—Roman had a tendency to get all drowsy after he’d been fed. He was already starting to get drowsy now, with all of the day’s events catching up to his body.

Roman settled himself back on the bed, grabbing a pillow to rest his head on as he lay on his stomach. The bedding was softer here than any he’d laid on in fancy hotel suites, not too starched with overwashing, a faint scent of Hunter still remaining on the sheets, proof that this is where Hunter had slept last night. The thought made Roman smile as he drifted off, fingers drawing lazy circles on the pillowcase.

Roman woke slowly, tugged from sleep by a strange sensation in his lower body. At first he couldn’t remember where he was, lying facedown on a bed wider than his own and softer than any hotel’s, then he breathed in a familiar scent and everything came flooding back to him.

Daddy’s home.

He lifted his head just enough to look over his shoulder and sure enough, Hunter was there, face hovering just above the small of Roman’s back, one hand caressing his ass while the other worked between Roman’s legs, pushing the plug deeper into his body. A bolt of pleasure shot right to Roman’s dick, trapped between his body and the mattress, making him arch off the bed with a loud moan, pushing his ass back at Hunter eagerly.

“Someone’s happy to see me back…” the older man said with a little smirk.

Roman had nothing to say at him, just offered a smile of his own and pushed back even further.

“I got dinner set up in the kitchen, but looks like it can wait a little bit…” Hunter said as he started to
pull at the base of the plug to draw it out. “…something needs taking care of first.”

Roman bit his lip as the plug was slowly eased out of him, knowing what was coming next. He spread his legs a little wider in anticipation, grabbing fistfuls of the bedsheets on either side of his head.

“Shit…would you look at that,” Hunter said with awe in his voice. “Your pretty little pucker’s just begging for me to get back in it.”

Roman moaned into the pillowcase, every inch of him burning hot with need. He felt Hunter shuffling behind him and soon he was full again, this time with hard living flesh, sinking into him without any resistance. Hunter laid on top of him, weight pressing Roman even further into the bed, grabbing each of Roman’s hands and lacing their fingers tight together. Roman felt Hunter’s mouth on his neck and shoulders, nipping with teeth and flicking with tongue, breathing hot and heavy against his skin.

“Thought I’d never get to do this again…” Hunter muttered next to his ear. “…thought you didn’t want Daddy anymore.”

Roman shook his head weakly. “Never…I never stopped wanting you.”

Hunter kept rocking into him slowly, nothing like the frantic pace of their earlier coupling. They were pressed so close, so close that Roman couldn’t tell where he ended and Hunter began.

“You gonna be Daddy’s boy for the next thirty days, baby? Gonna do whatever I want you to?”

Roman pressed a kiss to the knuckles of Hunter’s left hand where it covered his own. “Yes, Daddy…”

Hunter placed his mouth against Roman’s cheek, kissing him with tenderness that almost seemed out of place. Roman shuddered, recalling that this is how Hunter had kissed him that first time, two years and a lifetime ago, slow and deliberate and comforting. Back then, Roman hadn’t known what he was getting himself into, was drawn in by curiosity more than anything else, but now the feeling of belonging was so strong he almost didn’t know what to do with it.

“I’m sorry I didn’t…” he gasped, breath too short to even complete a sentence. “…didn’t get back to
you sooner…”

“Ssshh…it’s okay,” Hunter soothed him, still fucking him slow and sweet. “Daddy’s not angry with you, baby…he’s just glad to have you with him again.”

Roman felt a sharp pang of relief at that, even though it was hardly an earth-shattering revelation. He turned his head, meeting Hunter’s mouth with his own and sucking wetly at his lower lip. Hunter kept the pace slow, even as his hips stuttered and Roman knew he was getting close. Roman’s own cock was rubbing against the mattress with each move Hunter made, wetting his stomach and the sheets with pre-come.

Hunter grunted low and harsh when he came, hands tightening around Roman’s so hard he thought his fingers might break. Roman felt heat flooding him again for the second time that evening, Hunter’s length pulsing as it shot inside him, a long and drawn-out sensation that vibrated through his whole body.

“Turn over…” Hunter said as he withdrew, releasing Roman’s hands from his grips.

Roman did so slowly, feeling the pleasant ache in his bones as he moved to lie on his back. Before he knew it, Hunter had Roman’s entire length in his mouth, swallowing him whole in one swift move. Roman gasped, feet digging into the mattress as he felt the older man’s tongue work the sensitive underside of his cock, lips wrapped tight around him. Hunter didn’t do this too often, but whenever he did Roman was invariably left a writhing mess, and this time was no exception. Hunter held his hips down as his mouth worked its magic, making heat pool in Roman’s belly as his climax neared.

He wouldn’t have needed much more to bring him off, but then Hunter snuck one long finger inside Roman’s well-used hole and that was it, Roman was fucking gone, coming hard and long into Hunter’s mouth. He watched as Hunter swallowed, the edges of his vision blurring as blood pounded in his ears, each convulsion of his dick traveling all the way up and down his body.

Hunter licked him clean and crawled up the mattress, brown eyes soft as he kissed Roman again, spit and come mixing as their mouths tangled. Roman threw his arms around Hunter’s back and pulled him down, wanting to relish every bit of the rare intimacy. There was something different here, something he couldn’t put a name to, something that went beyond Hunter’s usual playfulness and seemingly unquenchable desire. It threw him off a little, like a buoy rocked by strong waves, though a part of him wanted to drown in it completely.

“Dinner’s getting cold…” Hunter said when he finally let go. “Come on…you must be starving by
Roman nodded and allowed himself to get pulled up off the bed, his legs wobbly as he followed Hunter out of the bedroom.

The small dining table was filed with takeout boxes emblazoned with some fancy Italian restaurant’s logo, and Roman felt his stomach rumble as the scent of food wafted into his nostrils. He was starving.

“You bought enough for five people,” he noted with amusement as he sat down, wincing a little at the soreness in his backside.

“We’ll save the leftovers for breakfast,” Hunter said. “And who’re you fucking kidding? You’d finish half of all this easily.”

Roman grinned and started on the thin-crust pizza, grabbing a slice and biting it off nearly to the crust. Hunter chuckled and followed suit, and for a while they just ate in companionable silence, interrupted only by business calls Hunter had to take on his phone. Roman’s own phone had gone mercifully silent since he’d arrived in Orlando, with no missed calls or messages. He briefly considered sending a message to Dean or Seth, but decided against it, wanting to enjoy the relative peace and quiet.

“What’s tomorrow like?” he asked when they’d finished the first box of pizza and moved on to the risotto, which they ate straight out of the box with two spoons.

“There’s a run-through for the Cruiserweight taping scheduled for the afternoon, but other than that I don’t have any plans…” Hunter said. “Why, you got something in mind?”

Roman shrugged. “I don’t know…be nice to sleep in for once.”

Hunter seemed to consider his suggestion for a few moments, then smiled as he caught on. “Yeah…we’ve never really done that, have we?”

“No…” Roman said. “Always rushing to get to the next city, or the next show or whatever.”
“Well, then…sleeping in it is.” Hunter said. “I’ll put it on my timetable.”

Roman laughed, fighting not to choke on his mouthful of risotto. “You’re ridiculous…”

“So I’ve been told…” Hunter said casually as he reached over and picked a bead of rice off Roman’s beard. “And you’re a messy eater.”

“You like me messy,” Roman said without thinking.

“I do, don’t I?” Hunter agreed with a knowing smile.

The rest of the meal passed by in relative quiet, Hunter stashing the uneaten food into the fridge as Roman excused himself to use the bathroom again. Even something as mundane as taking a shower and brushing his teeth felt new and strange here, with the knowledge that he wasn’t going anywhere, that he was here to stay. No rushing to check out, no rental car to stuff his gear into, no endless stretch of highway with Dean’s off-key singing for hours on end to serenade him. He loved Dean to bits but this felt much, much nicer. Odd, but nice.

When he came out into the living area again Hunter was at his desk, face lit by the glow of his laptop. Roman watched him for a while, trying to quell the strange tug he felt inside his chest, watching the man he knew would someday take over the company being engrossed in his work. Hunter didn’t need accolades or titles anymore—he was literally laying the future down for each and every one of them, Roman included, slow and excruciating work that often went unthanked. NXT was merely the tip of the iceberg as far as Hunter’s ambitions were concerned, and Roman had to admire that.

Hunter saw him approach and beckoned him closer, patting his thigh. He pulled Roman down to sit across his lap and showed him the brackets for the Cruiserweight Classic on his laptop screen, some names Roman were familiar with and others he’d never heard of before.

“Wow…you actually got Ibushi?” he said as he peered at the screen.

“Not on a permanent basis, sadly…” Hunter sighed. “That’s still being negotiated. But he’ll add something special to the tournament for sure.”

Hunter showed him a few more things—some preliminary designs for the UK Championship Belt,
assessment videos for some of the Chinese talents he’d been scouting, plans for international tours and partnerships with other promotions. It was all fascinating, aspects of the business he didn’t even know was going on outside his weekly circus of RAW and Smackdown, but Roman was beginning to drift off, barely able to stifle a yawn as he rested his head on Hunter’s shoulder.

“You should go to sleep…” Hunter said softly against his ear. “Been a long day for you.”

“Hmmm…” Roman shifted a little on his lap. “You still got a lot to do?”

“Just a few more e-mails and I should be done,” Hunter said. “Go on…I’ll be right there.”

Roman’s eyelids felt heavy as he made his way back to the bedroom, crawling back onto the bed and slipping under the covers. They’d have to change the sheets tomorrow, but for now he was happy enough to lie there and wait for Hunter, a novelty unto itself. All of this, all of this was new and unexplored territory, something he suspected other people whose relationships fell within the spectrum of so-called ‘normal’ would take for granted. Just the act of lying there, waiting for someone to come to bed, trying not to fall asleep as he heard Hunter make his way to the bathroom, the noise of the shower and the water running in the sink—little things life on the road had never allowed them time to indulge in.

_Time_. Time was what this was all about, wasn’t it?

Hunter got into the bed with him, tugging him close by the waist with one arm. Roman noted that he still kept the habit of positioning himself between Roman and the window, which sent something fluttering in his chest again. For once, he didn’t dread the prospect of morning, of daylight turning the fortress around his mind into dust. The walls would still be there tomorrow, and so would Hunter.

It would only be thirty days.

It felt like all the time in the world.
Chapter Summary

It was only the third night, but time had a funny way of passing when your entire world revolved around a fixed physical space and the rest of the world passing outside like mere scenery, day melting into afternoon and then evening into night at the pace of molasses.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Even with his alarm turned off and the tantalizing prospect of a lazy morning spent lying in bed with Roman in his arms, Hunter’s stubborn body clock roused him at six anyway, conditioned by years of routine and the demands of his job. He opened his eyes to find the bedroom cast in greyish light, and the sound of light rainfall splattering against the windows. An Orlando morning drizzle, the first of this summer—or at least, the first he’d been in town to wake up to.

Roman had curled away from him sometime during the night, taking up most of the blankets with him, hair fanning out in a cascade of dark curls over the pillows. Hunter sat up and pulled his knees to his chest, stretching and flexing his neck and shoulders. His phone lay on the bedside table, notification screen showing five unread e-mails and a few messages—nothing urgent. Droplets of water ran down the bedroom’s tall windows, painting a hazy picture of the apartment’s courtyard outside and the streets and sky beyond.

Thunder rumbled in the distance, a low hum that reverberated through the window’s glass panes. Roman stirred slightly, turning his body as if seeking out the source of the noise. His eyes were still shut but he murmured something in his half-sleep, a hand reaching out weakly to the search the space beside him on the bed. Hunter caught it before it could fall on empty mattress, grasping Roman’s fingers in his own.

“It’s just the rain…” he said. “Go back to sleep.”

“Why…why are you getting up?” Roman mumbled, eyelids opening just a sliver before falling shut again.

“I’m not…” Hunter assured him. “Promised you we’d sleep in, didn’t I?”
Roman tugged at his hand petulantly. “Then come back here…”

Hunter smiled and allowed himself to get pulled back down, Roman burrowing close as soon as he was horizontal. Hunter watched him closely as the younger man rested his head on the broad expanse of Hunter’s chest, taking in every feature visible in the still-weak light, from the flutter of Roman’s lashes to the gentle slope of the nose Hunter had broken not too long ago. Roman’s beard was growing out, the dark fuzz rubbing against Hunter’s skin, but it did little to diminish the air of innocence he somehow still carried with him. His lips were hanging wet and half open, every exhale a soft puff that blew warmly against Hunter’s face.

Twenty-four hours ago, Hunter couldn’t even be sure of how this little plan of his would play out—bringing Roman here, offering him a place away from all the clamor and the noise for thirty days, an all-or-nothing play just to have the boy back with him again. Roman must have sensed it the moment he picked up the phone—he’d been with Hunter long enough to recognize underlying motives beneath all the gestures of affection and generosity, and Hunter would’ve admitted to them readily if it had been brought up. He’d sorely missed his boy—watching him on TV all these months had been a poor substitute for actually holding him close, breathing his scent or tasting mouthfuls of his flesh.

He’d had plans—oh dear Lord there’d been all kinds of plans, all the things he’d planned to do to Roman to make up for all that lost time, all the little games they could play, all the things he wanted to hear uttered from the boy’s sweet, sinful mouth.

But then Roman had got into his limo, had climbed onto his lap and kissed him with all the naked desperation Hunter never even knew he was capable of, and all those plans had evaporated. Then all he could think of was holding his boy tight and never letting go again, heart thundering in his chest as the chorus of mine mine mine inside his head lost all of its edge and became equally desperate, almost pleading. Suddenly, Hunter didn’t want to play games anymore. All he wanted was to keep holding on to Roman, lavish him with all the attention he could spare, build a fortress around him within the solid concrete walls of this barely-inhabited apartment in Orlando, as far away from the spotlight and scrutiny as possible.

I’m so fucked, Hunter thought to himself as he reached down and drew an index finger down the bridge of Roman’s nose, dipping it into the gap between his slightly-parted lips. Roman suckled on it gently, more out of involuntary reflex than anything else since he was still pretty much dead to the world, the soft smacking noise of his lips sending ripples of heat down Hunter’s spine.

Yep. So very, very fucked.
Three hours and twenty minutes later, it was Roman who had to get out of bed to empty his bladder, Hunter half-heartedly trying to stop him by holding onto an ankle.

“You’re a kinky bastard, Helmsley…but I’m not ready to piss in your sheets just yet,” Roman said as he wrenched his foot free.

Hunter laughed as Roman padded towards the bathroom, using the opportunity to steal back some of the covers that Roman had hogged last night. The rain had stopped, leaving the world outside a misty haze of sunshine and low clouds. He had five, maybe six hours before he had to go to Full Sail to oversee the run-through for tomorrow’s Cruiserweight Classic taping, and he should probably get up and re-heat some of their dinner in the microwave or something, but Roman’s enthusiasm for sleeping in was rubbing off on him.

Roman emerged from the bathroom and leapt straight back onto the bed, landing with a joyous little bounce and a barely-suppressed giggle, a noise that reverberated warmly through Hunter’s body as Roman settled close to him once more, resting his head on Hunter’s shoulder.

“Can’t remember the last time I got to do that…” he sighed happily as he curled one arm loosely around Hunter’s middle.

“You’re right…this is nice,” Hunter said.

“I do have good ideas from time to time…” Roman deadpanned, already close to drifting off again.

“Maybe you should make a list…” Hunter said, his nose brushing against Roman’s forehead. “All the little things you never get to do on the road, random everyday shit that other people take for granted, and we’ll see how many of them we can tick off.”

Roman lifted his head slightly, dark brown eyes regarding Hunter. “S’funny…before I got here I thought maybe you would have a list.”

Hunter had to smile at that, carding his fingers through Roman’s hair, slightly tousled from sleep. Roman knew him so well. “You know what? I kinda did.”
“And…?” Roman blinked at him curiously.

“And now I just wanna throw it out the window and start over,” Hunter said as he fitted his palm against the side of Roman’s cheek. “Fuck those plans. I wanna know what you wanna do for the next twenty-nine days,”

Roman grinned a little sheepishly. “That’s a bad idea...you leave it up to me and I’ll just end up slouching around like a lazy bastard, stinking up the joint, eating all your food and leeching off your wi-fi, getting all fat and ugly while I’m at it.”

“Oh, I don’t know about ‘ugly’...” Hunter’s other hand rubbed against Roman’s belly, kneading handfuls of pliant flesh. “I still have some old pictures of you from the FCW archives, back when you still had more meat on these bones…”

Roman flushed at that, cringing at the mention of his earlier, chubbier form. “I looked ridiculous.”

“You looked kinda cute, actually…” Hunter said, fondling a bit more of that soft skin to prove his point. “More for me to play with,”

Roman looked embarrassed but not uncomfortable, an awkward little laugh escaping him as he dug his nose against Hunter’s collarbone. “Thought you liked your boys all small and dainty and pretty…”

“That what you used to tease Seth about?” Hunter patted his rump playfully.

“Dean used to tease him,” Roman corrected. “Though Seth hardly fits the bill anymore—all muscled up and ready to tear the world a new one.”

“Yeah, I saw...” Hunter said. “Well if you must know, I do like my boys pretty…but I like ‘em happy, too.”

Roman stopped squirming, letting out a soft little sigh against his chest. “Well, then...I guess I’m kind of...both right now.”
Something warm spread quickly across Hunter’s chest at those remarks, prompting him to pull Roman in for a kiss. There were a few seconds of morning breath to deal with but past that, it was all melting and warm and sweet, their lips smacking loudly in the quiet morning air. Roman seemed to expect things to escalate, weight already shifting back as if anticipating Hunter to move on top of him, but Hunter held him close and continued the languid kisses, hands never wandering further down than Roman’s neck or shoulders.

“We…we just gonna do this all morning?” Roman asked breathlessly, lips tinged red and juicy and already a little swollen.

“Well?” Hunter said nonchalantly, hoping it would mask the slight tremor in his voice as he took Roman’s mouth with his again.

He felt Roman smile against him, heard the soft rumble of an appreciative noise from the boy’s throat, a noise he could get used to hearing over and over again over the coming weeks.

“Yeah…” Roman whispered hotly against his lips between chasing for more kisses. “Why the fuck not?”

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The leftovers ended up being eaten as lunch rather than breakfast, dumped onto plates Hunter somehow managed to produce out of his kitchen cabinets and heated in the microwave. He made them coffee with the expensive new coffeemaker he’d just gotten a few weeks ago, watching as Roman slowly and deliberately folded a piece of thin-crust pizza into the smallest little bundle he could manage, then proceeded to pop the whole thing rather unceremoniously into his mouth. There was something so lazy and childlike about his whole demeanor this morning, something Hunter had never witnessed on the road, what with their busy schedule and the demands of constantly being on the move.

He was on the phone with his NXT producers throughout most of the meal, talking logistics and scheduling all the while Roman sat across from him at the small dining table, still yawning every few minutes or so even as he sloppily ate through most of the leftovers, licking sauce off his fingers. The view outside was bright and sunny now, the tall windows behind Hunter’s little office area letting the sunlight in without shattering their shared little world. Roman was relaxed, fed, and completely
removed from the cares of his daily grind—and Hunter really, really didn’t want to leave.

He got into the shower as soon as all the food had been eaten, letting the water run a little cold, determined to get himself in full working mode—he still had a job to do, and a damn important one, plus he had plenty of time to play with his boy again when he got back. Still, it didn’t help that as soon as he emerged back into the bedroom he saw that Roman was on the bed once again, curled up on Hunter’s side of the bed with a serene look on his face, hugging a pillow close. Hunter forced himself to look away and got dressed, picking out a dark grey suit and a matching tie, checking himself in the mirror all the while gazing at Roman’s sleeping form reflected in it.

Once he was ready to go, he took one last glance at the boy and decided fuck it, before climbing onto the bed to drape himself over Roman’s body.

“You’re really taking this ‘sleeping in’ business seriously, aren’t you?” he said with an amused little chuckle against Roman’s ear.

“Mmm-hmmm…” was Roman’s mumbled reply, his lips curling into a slight smile. “I’m allowed to, right?”

“Sure you are, baby…” Hunter said as he placed one hand over Roman’s full, satisfied belly. “You’re just making it real hard for Daddy to leave you and go to work, is all…”

Roman turned slightly and regarded him with sleepy eyes, fingers toying idly with the knot of Hunter’s tie. “Then maybe Daddy should try to come home real quick so he can play with me some more…”

Jesus, don’t tempt me like that.

“M’gonna try, okay?” Hunter said instead. “These things can either wrap up quickly or they can run till midnight, depending on how much they get right on the first go…”

“With you running the show? I’m guessing the latter…” Roman said with a knowing smile. “Always looking out for the smallest details, I swear I’ve seen you operate the lighting rigs yourself just to make sure the techs know their cue,”

“Someone’s gotta do it….” Hunter shrugged and bent down to kiss Roman’s forehead. “I’ll bring
“Okay…” Roman said, the word tapering off into a yawn.

Hunter smiled and ruffled his hair slightly before slipping off the bed, turning the dimmer switch low as he did so. He took one last, long look at Roman and forced himself out the door to find his shoes and pack his briefcase, lest he linger too long and found himself truly unable to leave.

This was going to feel like one heck of a long afternoon.

—

It was seven in the evening when Hunter finally made it back to the apartment, dropped off by a company driver in just in front of the private entrance, laden with armfuls of takeout and a few shopping bags. Swiping his keycard and entering the apartment, he found it brightly lit and with a fresh, clean smell in the air. Roman was on the couch, reading a thick, rumpled paperback—and Hunter nearly dropped some of the stuff he was carrying when Roman looked up, his eyes framed by his reading glasses. Hunter had nearly forgotten about those, having only seen Roman wearing them in candid fan photos or during impromptu backstage briefings before he put his gear on. He looked somewhere between a postgraduate student and the world’s hottest substitute teacher, and Hunter seriously wanted to skip dinner altogether and just get down to boning him, like right now.

“Hey…” Roman said as he set down his book and moved to help Hunter with his things. “Whatcha got there?”

“Chinese,” Hunter blurted out, trying to distract himself by looking at the food he was setting out on the table. “I also got you some more clothes…it’s mostly Tapout, but that’s what they got down at the PC.”

Roman chuckled as he saw the shopping bags. “So I get to stay on-brand even when I’m off TV, is that the idea?”

“Figured you’d be able to use them whether you’re working out or just lounging around…” Hunter shrugged. “Oh, and I still wanna dress you up real nice…but that can wait.”
I actually got time with you now.

Roman sniffed at one of the takeout boxes, seemed to decide that it was something he liked, and went to grab a pair of chopsticks from the plastic bag. They ended up eating in the living room area, watching a college football match on replay with the sort of detached half-interest that often accompanied a TV dinner. Roman stretched out on the floor with his back leaning against the couch and head just resting against Hunter’s knee.

“How’d the run-through go?” Roman asked in between mouthfuls of fried noodles.

“Pretty tedious…” Hunter sighed. “Language still an issue with some of the foreign competitors—we’re bringing in some extra runners from the Full Sail kids, give the producers more of a workforce for the actual taping.”

“That’s tomorrow, isn’t it?”

“Yeah…you wanna come along and watch? I can stash you in the production truck or somewhere else if you don’t wanna hang around backstage…”

Roman seemed to consider this for a while, chewing his food slowly and deliberately, before finally shaking his head. “I’ll just stay here and wait for you, if that’s okay…”

Hunter swallowed his next bit of food with much difficulty, the thought of Roman just sitting patiently in the apartment waiting for his return doing something funny and unexpected inside his gut. “You sure? Could take a long while…definitely longer than I was gone today,”

“I can keep busy…” Roman assured him.

“Speaking of which, what did you get up to while I was gone?”

“Not much…” Roman shrugged, the movement rustling him against the fabric of Hunter’s pants. “I changed the bedsheets. They were…getting kinda gross.”
Hunter chuckled. “Yeah…how’d you find the spare ones?”

“Bottom drawer of the closet—that’s where most people keep theirs, so I figured that’s where they’d be,” Roman said, popping a piece of sweet-and-sour chicken into his mouth. “Kinda tricky doing it on a bed that size on my own, but I managed…”

“I’ll help you with them next time,” Hunter promised.

_We’ll be going through a lot of bedsheets, I can guarantee you that._

“Then since I was already working up a sweat, I decided to get a bit of a workout…” Roman continued. “Seems like a good idea, seeing as how you keep stuffing me full of all this food.”

“…among other things,” Hunter couldn’t help but say.

Roman shot him a dirty look, eyebrows arching over the rim of his glasses. “You are so fucking obvious sometimes…”

Hunter just grinned at him and continued eating.

“I did the dishes from this morning, too…” Roman said. “Couldn’t just let them pile up in the sink.”

“So that’s what that smell was when I walked in…” Hunter said. “Looks like you had a productive day, after all…”

Roman rubbed his cheek lightly against his knee, leaning some more of his weight on Hunter’s leg. “I guess…”

The housework and subsequent workout had clearly put Roman onto a healthy appetite, and Hunter had to smile at the way he wolfed down the boxfuls of Chinese takeout with childlike glee. Watching him like this, it was almost impossible to believe that there were times when Roman couldn’t eat at all, body heaving with nausea in response to some external stress, nights when Hunter had to literally feed him the tiniest morsels bit by bit, coaxing his mouth open and watching warily for any signs that he might throw up.
He wouldn’t mind doing some hand-feeding on his boy again sometime soon—this time for the sheer pleasure of it.

Roman finished his second box and let out loud burp, belatedly trying to stifle it with the back of his hand. “Sorry…” he muttered a little sheepishly.

“Don’t worry ‘bout it,” Hunter set his own box down on the coffee table. Roman proceeded to lick his fingers with a contented sigh, glasses riding slightly up his nose. “Something wrong with your contacts?”

Roman looked up at him. “I forgot to pack my clear ones, and only had those damn grey ones they make me wear when I wrestle.”

“We could get you some clear ones, if you want…”

“It’s fine, it’d be silly to pop them on just to read a damn book,” Roman said. “Think they’ll let me just stick to the clear ones from here on out?”

“Why not?” Hunter said as he brushed two fingers across Roman’s forehead. “I like your real eyes better, anyway…”

Roman smiled up at him, the flesh around his eyes crinkling as they tended to do whenever he was genuinely happy about something, and Hunter just couldn’t take it anymore.

“You still hungry? Think you have room in there for something more?” he asked none-too-subtly as he leaned back on the couch, letting his legs fall open slightly.

Roman’s smile widened into a grin as he crawled into the space between Hunter’s legs, kneeling on the carpet as he reached up to undo the older man’s belt. His fingers made quick work of the buckle and the buttons on Hunter’s pants, pulling out Hunter’s cock and massaging it to full hardness between his hands.

“Daddy’s been working hard…” Roman said in a low, sultry voice, which made something rumble deep in Hunter’s chest.
“Yeah, because Daddy’s got a little slut waiting for him at home that he’s gotta feed and take care of,” Hunter said as he reached down to caress Roman’s cheek. “Keep those glasses on, baby boy…”

Roman had the audacity to throw him a wink before wrapping those pouty, still-greasy lips around Hunter’s cock and sinking almost all the way down, letting out a small noise of pleasure which Hunter echoed. He hadn’t been in Roman’s mouth for so long it was almost painful, the velvet sin of his tongue lapping and flicking playfully at the underside while his cheeks pouted and hollowed in full-force sucking, one of the little things he did that he knew drove Hunter crazy.

“Jesus, baby boy…if I knew you were this hungry for it I’d have fed it to you first before anything else…” he said with a smirk, hands cupping Roman’s face and thumbs rubbing circles down his jaw. Roman’s only response was to suck him harder, every swipe of his tongue becoming long and deliberate, hands sneaking down presumably to pull out his own erection.

“Don’t bring yoursel off, baby…Daddy’ll take care of it. If you can be good boy and swallow everything, that is….” Hunter told him. Not that Roman ever had any trouble swallowing, or being a good boy for that matter, but Hunter knew how his words affected Roman sometimes, how it pushed buttons in his mind that drove him further and further into that hazy, comforting space which allowed him complete surrender.

Roman looked up at him, eyes wide and dark and pretty, framed perfectly by the rim of his glasses as he took Hunter down to the hilt, throat convulsing with the effort. His lips were stretched wide around Hunter’s girth, his breathing ragged, and tears were starting to prickle at the corners of those glassy brown eyes. Roman loved doing this, pushing himself to the limit and then past it, pulling back only to try again. It scared Hunter sometimes but he knew the boy needed it, needed to wear himself down until he was threadbare, push away any notion of the stoic, aloof strongman the business had asked him to portray.

“Easy there, Champ…we got all night,” Hunter reminded him.

Roman nodded but didn’t let up his pace, probably chasing after his promised reward. Which was just as well because Hunter couldn’t hold on for much longer either, his balls were starting to tighten with the telltale signs of impending orgasm, and he held the base of his cock to steady himself. Roman recognized the signs too, sucking hard and long and maximizing contact with the fleshy parts of his mouth, before drawing back until only the head of Hunter’s cock rested in his mouth. Hunter’s other hand reached for the back of Roman’s head and held him in place, more out of habit than any need to stop him from getting away—Roman wasn’t going anywhere.

His climax hit quickly, his cock throbbing and pulsing inside the boy’s wet mouth, Roman’s eyes
fluttering shut as he concentrated on keeping his lips tight around Hunter so as to not let anything leak out. Hunter waited out the aftershocks with his fingers tangled in Roman’s hair, before pulling back and letting his softening cock slide out. Briefly he glimpsed the copious white fluid inside Roman’s mouth before the boy leaned back and swallowed, throat convulsing once, twice, eyes going misty as he let his tongue out to lick his lips. Hunter had never seen anything more beautiful.

“Did you get it all?” Hunter asked through his own ragged breathing, like a teacher quizzing a pupil.

“Yes, Daddy…” Roman said, and his voice was fucking wrecked, which would’ve sent Hunter straight into full hardness again if he hadn’t just come.

“Then come up here and let Daddy reward you…” Hunter patted his thigh.

Roman didn’t need to be told twice—he moved to sit across Hunter’s lap, flinging his arms around the older man’s neck as Hunter reached down and pulled his aching cock out of the waistband of his boxers. He let out a soft, appreciative noise and threw his head back as he was stroked slowly, achingly, Hunter’s other arm wrapped around his back.

“My beautiful, slutty boy…” Hunter hummed as he nosed up and down Roman’s neck, hand working Roman’s cock steadily. “I could get used to coming home to you all the time, you know…”

Roman squirmed on his lap, choking out something unintelligible as Hunter’s hand started to pump him faster.

If Roman had been naked, Hunter’s mouth would be feasting on him right now, marking his shoulders and collarbone with hiccys, sucking greedily at those dark, peaked nipples that were visibly hard under the fabric of his t-shirt. As it were, Hunter was content to just breathe in the faint scent of shower gel and shampoo that still lingered on Roman’s body, musky sweat starting to come through with the heat of their physical contact. He let his teeth graze the base of Roman’s neck where his tattoo was visible, and tightened his hand around Roman’s dick, jerking him off hard and fast.

“Ahh…fuck, Daddy!” Roman gasped, hips bucking up as he fucked into Hunter’s fist.

“Come on, baby boy…come on, show Daddy what a good slut you are, come on…”
Roman moaned aloud and came, his release coating Hunter’s hand and his own thighs, gasping for breath as he rocked himself on Hunter’s lap, the grinding movement of his body almost enough to get Hunter hard again. He was so beautiful like this, completely lost in his own pleasure, a sight Hunter could never get tired of. He kissed his way up Roman’s neck, to his jaw, and finally to his mouth, tasting the remnants of his own come on Roman’s trembling lips. His sticky fingers soon joined the fray, feeding Roman his own come and letting the boy lick them clean as he kissed the corners of Roman’s mouth. It was all so messy, so fucking filthy, and so very good.

They stayed like that for a good long while, Hunter leaning back to let the couch take on some of Roman’s weight, trading languid kisses that slowly tapered off as Roman’s breathing steadied, hands tracing the scruff of Hunter’s beard. His eyes were hazy behind his glasses, and Hunter was already thinking of how he was definitely going to get Roman a new pair, something nice with gold rims that would make those beautiful eyes pop.

“You…uh, you don’t happen to have spare coverings for the couch do you?” Roman muttered breathily against his jaw.

Hunter laughed and smacked him playfully on the thigh.

—

It rained again the following night, a full-blown thunderstorm that sent the trees in the courtyard swaying, and Roman was on the bed alone, phone lying beside him and still open on the text message from Hunter which informed him that the CWC taping was running late, that he didn’t have to wait for Hunter to come home. That was two hours ago, and Roman was drifting in the uneasy space between restless and sleepy—earlier he’d made himself a passable sandwich from stuff he’d scrounged out of Hunter’s fridge and kitchen cabinets, then watched a couple of documentaries on Netflix at least halfway before losing interest, but now he just longed to hear the apartment door open, to know that Hunter was back.

It was only the third night, but time had a funny way of passing when your entire world revolved around a fixed physical space and the rest of the world passing outside like mere scenery, day melting into afternoon and then evening into night at the pace of molasses. In between using the makeshift gym, familiarizing himself with the apartment some more and doing mundane household things like taking out laundry and cleaning up after their meals, Roman felt like he existed in some sort of weird time loop, the difference between days marked only by the different colors of Hunter’s shirt as he walked out the door, or the food he would bring when he came home.
Hunter had gone out earlier this morning while Roman was still asleep, returning with a box of freshly-baked croissants and cinnamon rolls so sticky and sweet Roman was convinced they were enough to earn him another wellness policy violation. They ate most of it at Hunter’s desk, Hunter finishing up some paperwork with Roman perched on his new semi-permanent residence on Hunter’s lap. He found it both indulgent and comforting, allowing him to pick crumbs off the older man’s beard and kiss the sticky cinnamon residue off his lips even as Hunter talked to one of his production staff on the phone. Hunter seemed to love having him there just as much, swiveling his office chair around and giving Roman that lopsided smirk of his.

Roman smiled at the memory, breathing lungfuls of trace scent from Hunter’s side of the bed, eyelids starting to droop. These past few days had been a wash of something new and pleasant, something life on the road had never afforded them. And Hunter had been unequivocally sweet and tender with him throughout, even when they were a tangle of sweaty limbs and grunting breaths, his playfulness never straying into that murky darkness he’d often tapped into in the past. Roman knew he was merely playing off whatever vibes Roman was giving him, tuning his treatment to suit his mood, and he was glad for once to just enjoy himself, no post-match adrenaline to work through and no lingering emotional baggage he wanted to bury under the scratch of nails or bruising fingers.

Twenty-seven more days to go.

Time was passing so imperceptibly slowly and yet already Roman was starting to feel anxious about this little seclusion coming to an end. He wasn’t dreading returning to action, far from it, the itch to go out there and pound the mat was always present under his skin, but this odd bubble of domesticity Hunter had created around him was so welcoming it almost made him feel like the world outside didn’t exist anymore.

I could get used to coming home to you all the time...

Those words echoed in Roman’s head as he fell asleep, serenaded by the rain and the rumble of thunder outside.

—

He woke with a start, groggy and blinking at the strange play of white lights, his brain taking a good while to process that it was lightning flashing outside. The rain was lashing against the window now, drenching everything in a blur, and the air felt thick and muggy. Roman wiped the sweat that was starting to gather at his neck, feeling uncomfortably hot under the thick blankets that had felt so nice and warm just hours before.
He was reaching over for his phone to check the time when an arm wrapped around his torso and pulled him close against a warm, wide chest, causing him to gasp. He hadn’t even realized Hunter was on the bed with him — he must have gotten home after Roman had fallen asleep and didn’t wake him up.

Roman turned, just about to ask Hunter what time he got back when an index finger was pressed against his lips, silencing him, accompanied by the softest, barely audible shushing noise close to his ear. Roman nodded, a little curious as to what little game Hunter was playing this time, blinking his eyes to adjust to the darkness. The bedside lights were off and the lightning outside made it difficult to focus, but Roman could feel Hunter out with his hands and feet. Hunter was still in his shirt and pants—he must have come home too tired to even change into something more comfortable, and Roman stroked down his back comforting.

There was tension in Hunter’s shoulders, which Roman could feel as the older man moved on top of him, searching his mouth out for a kiss. He wrapped his arms tight around Hunter’s back and welcomed the kiss, trying to get a feel for what Hunter wanted from him. Without words, without commands, he felt a little lost—wondering if he was doing the right thing. Hunter didn’t seem too bothered, though—just kept kissing him and grinding down on him, the space between Roman’s open legs quickly filling up with friction and heat.

From there it was a blur of hastily discarded clothes and fishing one-handed for the lube stashed in the drawers, and still Hunter didn’t say a word. Roman tried to look into his eyes but found it hard in the darkness and intermittent flashes of lightning, what little he could see of Hunter’s expression looking tired and a little frayed. He offered silent comfort with his touches, stroking down Hunter’s deeply-lined face and kissing his jaw as Hunter worked him open with fingers, trying to communicate that whatever Hunter needed from him, he could have it.

The sex itself was slow and labored, Hunter refusing to throw back the covers, making the air between them so thick and close Roman found it almost hard to breathe. Everything was reduced to touch and taste and smell, his sight hindered by the darkness and words held back between his lips. It heightened the sensations somehow, the wet glide of Hunter inside him, the beads of sweat on their foreheads, the bristle of Hunter’s beard along his collarbone as he nipped down Roman’s chest. Roman lost himself in the sensations, eyes shut tight as Hunter thrust deep into him, hands bracketing Roman’s head on the sweat-damp pillowcase. He wasn’t his usual precise, methodical self—everything felt loose and raw, his rhythm erratic, and Roman clung to him through it all, fingers laced at the back of Hunter’s neck.

When he was finished Hunter stayed for long moments with his nose buried in Roman’s hair, panting and dripping with sweat. Roman winced when he pulled out a little roughly but was quickly gathered into Hunter’s arms as he laid them on their sides, still holding Roman as close as their bodies would allow. Roman went with it, unease still heavy in his chest—Hunter had never been like this, never felt like he was in any less than one hundred percent control of everything, especially with
him, yet the man who’d just fucked him had felt tired, unsure…even a little desperate.

He was starting to wonder if it had all been a strange fever dream when Hunter’s hand cupped his face and turned him to look him in the eyes, and he found himself staring into clear brown eyes that were lucid but weary, the lines on his face seeming to deepen even further.

“Is…is something wrong?” he asked, voice rasping over his dry throat.

Hunter shook his head. “M’just tired…”

He proceeded to tell the story of how the taping had run long but relatively okay, and how the storm had rolled in and held some people up at the studio. And then they’d gone almost immediately into post-production, reviewing footage and sound clips, and Hunter had stayed late to ensure everyone had means of getting home safely, especially the Full Sail interns, skipping dinner and having only a bottle of water and some backstage snacks to sustain himself.

“Should’ve stopped to eat something…” Roman said as he rubbed down Hunter’s neck, easing some of the knots of tension there. “There’s places open 24 hours downtown,”

“No…” Hunter shook his head slowly. “Wanted to get back to you,”

Roman closed his eyes, swallowing the lump in his throat. He pressed himself closer to Hunter’s chest, ignoring the sweat and the sticky mess between them. “I’m not going anywhere…”

“Glad to know…” Hunter said, and he sounded like he meant every word.

—

On the fifth day Roman caught the sniffles, possibly brought on by getting rained on when he went for a jog around the apartment complex the previous morning. It wasn’t anything serious, and Roman’s pretty sure he’s wrestled through worse illnesses before, but Hunter seemed to use it as an excuse to spoil him even more and treat him like an absolute baby, fussing over him and checking his
temperature every few hours—which to be frank, Roman didn’t mind all that much.

It happened over the weekend, their first together, which also meant that Hunter didn’t have to take so many conference calls from Stamford or had meetings scheduled at Full Sail. For Roman it was a novelty, too—his weekends were normally a blur of house shows, fan meetups, or else gearing up for a Pay-Per-View. Now he was spending a Saturday afternoon in a heap of blankets on the couch, flipping through the channels on the television with a tissue box on his lap, while Hunter clattered about the kitchen.

Roman had absolutely refused to take any kind of medication, so Hunter had gone out to the supermarket earlier and promised to fix him up with something else, which he was evidently preparing now. With his nose clogged Roman couldn’t smell what Hunter was concocting, only that involved some pots and pans and a fair bit of chopping.

Finally, Hunter presented him with a mug of something steaming and savory, which Roman sipped quietly as Hunter sat beside him, clearing strands of frizzled hair from his forehead. His taste buds out of whack, Roman couldn’t quite identify the strong and pungent taste, only that it radiated warmth from the roof of his mouth all the way down to his stomach.

“So…what is this?”

“Chicken broth with ginger and garlic,” Hunter said. “When we were scouting in China last year I caught a pretty mean cold too, and one of the liaisons we had in Guangzhou made this for me, said it works wonders for flu and fever and the like…”

“Hmmm…” Roman said as he sipped some more. “Tastes better than NyQuil, anyhow…”

“Worked for me….” Hunter said as he wrapped an arm around Roman’s shoulder. “Only side effect is garlic breath.”

Roman snorted into the mug, letting some of the aromatic steam waft up his nostrils. “I’ll be sure to brush my teeth, then…”

The rest of the evening passed by quietly, Roman finishing the rest of the pot for dinner, nestled against Hunter on the couch as they watched a rough edit of the CWC premiere episode the production office had sent to Hunter earlier. Roman was in awe of the sheer athleticism on display, the high-flying moves from some competitors he’d never even heard of before, marveling at how he
could be in the same business as these people and yet they were doing such starkly different things.

“They’re fucking amazing…” he remarked at a slow-motion replay of a rather spectacular corkscREW moonsault.

“Aren’t they?” Hunter said with not a small hint of pride. “We’re gonna build an entire division around these guys, get them their own slot in the programming.”

“That’s cool,” Roman said. “Must be a headache to organize, though…”

“Between this and the brand split, I feel like there’s not enough hours in the day…” Hunter sighed heavily. “You think you’ve finished ironing out one kink, something else pops up that threatens to throw a spanner in the works.”

Roman traced a finger down Hunter’s chest, fiddling with the buttons of his shirt. “You…uh, any chance you can tell me where I’ll end up in the brand split?”

“Jesus, are you fucking kidding?” Hunter said. “Of course you’ll be on RAW, no way Vince’s gonna let you go to what he views as the ‘secondary’ brand,”

Roman winced a little. “That’s not fair, is it?”

“Vince is a lot of things, but ‘fair’ is hardly one of them…” Hunter said. “Things are changing, but slowly. Too slowly, for my liking.”

Roman’s hand reached up to Hunter’s neck, feeling the coil of muscles there. “It’s true, isn’t it… what everyone’s saying? That someday it’ll be you controlling everything?”

“Yeah…” Hunter said matter-of-factly. “Scares you, doesn’t it?”

“Oh, I don’t know…” Roman said as he looked up at Hunter. “I think you’ll do just fine.”

Hunter smiled and kissed his sweaty forehead gently. “Thanks for the vote of confidence.”
That night Roman found himself curled up in bed with a thermometer in his mouth and his head pressed against Hunter’s left hip, the older man sitting propped up against the headboard with his laptop across his thighs, typing away at some complicated spreadsheet that Roman didn’t quite understand, changing tabs occasionally to respond to an e-mail or two. The room was dark except for the bedside lamp on Hunter’s side and the glow of his computer screen, which he’d thoughtfully dimmed down so as not to hurt Roman’s eyes too much.

Once the thermometer beeped Hunter plucked it out of his mouth without looking, bringing it close to his eyes to inspect the digits. “Ninety-nine…you’re certainly on the mend,” he commented before putting the thermometer aside.

“I’ve been well looked-after,” Roman muttered sleepily.

Hunter chuckled as his left hand drifted to Roman’s head and stroked through his hair, fingers brushing across his cheek.

“If the weather’s nice tomorrow let’s have breakfast at this little place I know not far from here, yeah? It’s small, fairly private…plus you could do with a bit of fresh air.”

“Hmm…” Roman said as he nestled deeper into the blankets. “Sounds nice.”

“You’re not bored with me yet, are you?” Hunter asked playfully as he palmed Roman’s cheek.

“Far from it…” Roman said, turning his head to kiss the heel of the older man’s palm. “This is just fine…”

He meant to say, *I don’t want this to ever end.*

“You don’t have to wait for me to finish,” Hunter said. “Go to sleep, I’ll be five more minutes or so.”

“S’ok…” Roman said, even if he was admittedly feeling a little drowsy.
When Hunter finally did put his laptop away and turn off his bedside lamp, Roman was already halfway asleep, but still awake enough to feel Hunter settle into the covers next to him, reaching over to pull the blankets higher over Roman’s shoulders, whispering “good night, baby boy” before going silent.

——

On the seventh day, Roman was well enough again to do some light workout on the treadmill, Hunter warning him to go easy on himself before he walked out the door to do another round of meetings and oversee an NXT taping. Roman gave him an affirmative thumbs-up, slipping his headphones back on as he ran to the steady beat of a playlist Seth had made for him years ago, mercifully devoid of overly throaty vocals and screeching guitar riffs.

Seth had messaged him the day before, telling him to ‘enjoy his break’ and to ‘stay out of trouble’, which was rich coming from a man whose dick had been splashed all over the internet just a little over a year ago. Roman had sent him a short reply, without disclosing his whereabouts or what he’d been up to. He’d have told him if he’d been asked, but Seth hadn’t asked, so.

Dean hadn’t bothered him at all except for a short call on the first day, cussing the whole suspension thing out as bullshit and promising to keep the belt warm until he and Roman could have a healthy tussle over it again at Battleground. Since then, Roman hadn’t exchanged any words with the reigning Champion, which was probably just as well since he couldn’t predict how Dean would react to Roman’s little Hunter-imposed seclusion.

The months he’d been away from Hunter, Dean seemed to have been somewhat relieved, believing that Roman was ‘over it’, that he’d moved on the same way Seth had years earlier. That Seth had ‘moved on’ to someone like Randy Orton, whom Dean liked even less than he did The Game, seemed a moot point. Roman knew his best friend was worried about him at times, and Roman had given him plenty of reason for concern, but he also appreciated that Dean never tried to tell him what to do or judged him for his choices, expressing his dismay only in barely-concealed scowls whenever Roman walked into their shared hotel room laden with fresh bruises, his voice raw from being facefucked within an inch of his life.

But Roman hadn’t been ‘over it’ by any means—he’d simply been diverting his thoughts elsewhere, to his Championship reign, to the matches he was putting on, the program he had going on with Styles, which he’d enjoyed immensely. Hunter was always there somewhere, lingering in the back of his head, waiting patiently on the sidelines until he could surge back into prominence. And once he did, Roman could barely think of anything else. His whole world, it seemed, was Hunter.
There was a part of him still that believed that this place, this whole apartment, was just another elaborate stage set for one of Hunter’s endless mind games, this time taking the form of a weirdly long, drawn-out play of domesticity and security.

He had a growing sense that it wasn’t, though. Whatever this was, it was something genuine and new. And Roman didn’t quite know how to deal with that.

He could deal with their little games, the clear rules that were always set out in the beginning, the interplay of control and dominance and submission that allowed him to let go completely. He’d always counted on Hunter knowing all the steps and the moves, knowing all the right words to say, to dictate how everything went from start to finish. But the more he stayed with him, the more Roman had a sense that Hunter was taking this just as day-by-day as he was, that there was no overarching game plan in place, that what they were doing was simply living together, as strange as that sounded, and it sat uneasily in his gut despite the pleasantness of the whole experience.

The more time passed and the easier Hunter became around him, showing him affection and buying him food and clothes and fancy desserts without even demanding anything in return, the less grounded Roman felt. He fought not to let it show, going along with anything Hunter wanted to do—with often meant little more than a whole morning spent making out or an evening on the couch watching football games and letting Roman massage the knots in his shoulder from being hunched over his desk.

Those weren’t the kinds of things that fuckbuddies did, or friends-with-benefits did.

Those weren’t the kinds things that two people who only got together after TV tapings in hotel rooms or arena showers did.

Those were things that people who were in honest-to-fucking-Jesus relationships did, and the realization had hit Roman with the force of a flying headbutt from the top ropes.

Roman didn’t know what scared him the most—the sheer ease at which they were going about being with each other, or the fact that he wanted it so, so much. That he was starting to dread not having it anymore when their time was up. Would they go back to their old habits, Hunter stalking after him backstage, stealing him away to some fancy hotel and banging him through the floor before they would say goodbye in the morning?

A few months ago, he would’ve been satisfied with just that, wouldn’t have dreamed of ever having
anything more. But now he was being given *everything*, all at once, and it was overwhelming. And suddenly the prospect of just being another one in Hunter’s roster of easily accessible bedwarmers, of being *interchangeable* with anybody else, made him sick to his stomach.

Still, he didn’t want to seem ungrateful, nor did he want to shatter the illusion he knew Hunter had put a lot of effort into building around them, so he kept all of this to himself. Even as their clothes started to get mixed up in the bedroom closet, even as he started using Hunter’s toothpaste when his own ran out, even as Hunter didn’t even seem to think twice anymore about kissing him goodbye every time he walked out the door.

*Twenty-three days to go.*

Roman dialed up the treadmill and ran himself ragged, nearly collapsing in exhaustion in the shower later. Hunter was mildly upset with him when he came back to find Roman curled up in bed with a throbbing headache, but he brought him a bowl of soup to eat and spooned up behind him afterwards anyway, petting his hair and telling him he had to take better care of himself when Daddy wasn’t home.

Roman nodded and fell asleep, repeating the words ‘Daddy’ and ‘home’ inside his mind over and over until they all but merged into one.

——

On the eleventh day, Hunter left their bed early to take a phone call out in the living room, Roman listening sleepily to muffled words as he traced his hand along the still-warm patch on the bed next to him. They’d been having a pretty chill weekend, all things considered, fucking on the couch after dinner and watching some of Hunter’s old matches on the Network, Roman settling for some Attitude Era classics since Hunter had absolutely refused to let Roman watch any of the WCW stuff in his presence. There were still plenty for him to make fun of, from the denim jackets to the ponytail, not to mention the DX reboot that Hunter was still adamant wasn’t as bad an idea as some people made it out to be.

When Hunter came back to the bedroom, his expression instantly told Roman something wasn’t quite right.
“What is it?”

Hunter shook his head and got back on the bed, drawing Roman close to him before he spoke.

“I need to go to Headquarters,”

Roman’s eyes widened as his stomach sank. “Stamford?”

Hunter nodded. “Shareholder meeting—and some planning for the months ahead. Vince called for it suddenly,”

“An emergency?”

“No…this happens from time to time,” Hunter said. “It’ll be two, maybe three nights.”

Roman bit his bottom lip anxiously. “When…when do you leave?”

“Taking the company plane this afternoon,” Hunter said with a heavy sigh. “Listen…you can stay here, of course…I’ll leave you some money to get food or whatever, and you can use my driver to get around, but…I kinda want you to come with me.”

“I…what would I do there?”

“Nothing,” Hunter said as he stroked down Roman’s face. “You don’t even have to come near HQ if you don’t want—nobody needs to even know you’re there. I’ll find you a nice hotel nearby, nothing too fancy, and you can just chill out or whatever.”

Roman looked around the room, at the place he’d been calling home for nearly two weeks now. It would’ve made perfect sense for him to stay, look after the place, keep up with his workout regime and not have to subject himself prematurely to the pains of air travel and staying in hotel rooms until he absolutely had to. But staying would’ve meant being without Hunter, for days, and Roman couldn’t quite accept that. Time was already starting to go by too quickly for his liking, a contrast to the dreamlike slowness of the first few days, and the thought of spending three nights alone in a bed he’d always shared with Hunter made him shudder with dread.
“It’s your choice, baby…” Hunter said softly against his face. “I won’t make you come with me if you don’t want to.”

Roman swallowed hard and looked up at the older man. “I’ll go with you,”

Hunter’s eyes brightened at that, though he visibly fought to keep it off his face. “Really? You sure?”

“Yeah…” Roman nodded. “Change of scenery, and all that.”

They both knew that had nothing to do with it, but Hunter let it slide with a quiet kiss to his forehead. “Then I guess we should get packing, huh?”

Chapter End Notes

This son of a bitch totally ran away from me, you guys. I'd intended to wrap up all of the stuff from Roman's suspension in this chapter, but then I realized I'd gone over 10,000 words and hadn't even managed to say half the things I wanted to say. Not to mention I've had to eke this one out at a snail's pace, given that my work situation has really ramped up in the last few weeks and it's all been going a bit crazy at the office.

In any case, I know I've kept some people waiting long enough, so I thought I'd at least get this first chunk out of the way and wait until real life is a little less insane, so I can really refocus my energy into finishing the rest of their little adventure together with a clearer head and not feel like I have to rush the ending, which would've made the writing suffer, surely.

As always, thanks for your comments and kind words and patience in dealing with my erratic self. <3
Chapter Summary

But Roman Reigns had never looked at him with anything other than utter and complete trust, something he should know better than to give a man of Hunter’s disposition. No man with his ego should’ve been given this much of an opening to something he so single-mindedly wanted, and no man in Roman’s position should have ever given himself up so easily. And yet there they were, two years on, and the look in Roman’s eyes still left him dumbstruck and with a fire inside him he could never quell.

Chapter Notes

I don’t know if any of this makes sense or even gels as a chapter, given its immense size and the long stretch of time I spent writing it in disjointed bits and pieces, but here it is. The situation at work was pretty horrible last month, even for advertising agency standards, but things are (a bit) calmer now. It might be the calm before another storm, so I had to get this one out before I’m swallowed up again.

Specific warnings for this chapter: Pregnancy kink, mild feeding kink, quite possibly the most badly under-negotiated D/s relationship in human history, and two idiots spending a long, long time discussing their feelings and trying not to be awkward before having lots and lots of filthy, messy, irresponsible sex.

Whoever had the bright idea of holding a board meeting at eight-thirty in the morning ought to be taken out back and piledriven through a dumpster.

Hunter stared at his distorted reflection in the coffee urn as he poured his second cup of the day, already missing his espresso machine back in Orlando. The lounge adjoining the main conference room was slowly filling up with loose clusters of shareholders, boardmembers, and representatives from upper management and production, but Hunter was in no mood to make small talk—he’d barely slept the night before and he didn’t quite know yet what to expect from the meeting today.

“Go easy on the caf, sweetie…” a familiar voice said from behind him. “ Wouldn’t want you to get a heart murmur before we even wrap up the first session…”

Hunter smiled as he sipped at the frothy black liquid, turning around to face his wife. Stephanie was in one of her no-nonsense business suits, hair falling loose around her shoulders, the golden drop
earrings he’d bought her for their tenth anniversary adorning each side of her face.

“Didn’t sleep well last night,” he reasoned. “Wanted to make sure I came prepared.”

That was only half the truth—Hunter had been working on a presentation on the current projects within talent development, but he’d finished it up by the time they landed in Connecticut. What kept him up for most of the night was Roman, who slept fitfully and kept twisting and turning next to him, on a bed that while large enough to accommodate them was still decidedly smaller and less comfortable than the one they’d been sharing in Orlando for the better part of two weeks.

It had taken Hunter’s arm around him and the press of a warm, familiar body behind his back to finally get Roman to calm down enough to sleep in earnest, Hunter’s hand petting gently at his stomach as the bedside clock ticked over to 3 a.m.

“I like this new scruff,” Stephanie said as she kissed his cheek and the growing beard Hunter hadn’t bothered to shave for weeks. “Looks good on you.”

“Just skirting the limits of business appropriate, don’t you think?”

She nudged his shoulder lightly with hers. “You always did like to live a little bit on the edge, babe…”

Roman’s beard had been growing out too, to the point where Hunter had rather bluntly offered to shave it for him. The boy’s response was that the beard was staying until he got back in the ring, but that Hunter was welcome to shave any other part of him he wanted. That ultimately led to three nights ago, when Hunter had made Roman bend over the bathroom counter and took a razor to his backside, shaving him so carefully and meticulously until he was as smooth and bare as a newborn baby. Then he’d thrown Roman flat on his back on their bed, pulled his legs apart and eaten him out until Roman came twice screaming his name and his thighs were red and raw with beardburn.

_Fuck this meeting. Fuck the board. Fuck Vince and his agendas._

“You have any clue what all this is about?”

She shrugged. “You know how Dad gets…but judging by the people he’s called in I’m betting it has something to do with the brand split.”
“I thought we’d settled the roster issue last week,” Hunter said with a heavy sigh.

“Not until he signs off on the final list,” she reminded him. “Just…be ready for anything, okay, babe?”

He looked at her grimly. “I don’t like the sound of that,”

Patting his arm gently, she led him towards the door to the conference room. “Put your game face on, Hunter…could be one of those days.”

——

It turned out to be one of those days and then some.

By the time the meeting was adjourned for lunch, Hunter felt like he had a few veins ready to pop and his hands hurt from gripping his armrests to stop him from making one ill-advised argument too many. All through it, Steph kept shooting him wary glances, a mixture of sympathy and warning, but all things considered he’d managed to keep his composure quite well.

After a few minutes of staring blankly at the unappetizing spread laid out on the buffet in the lounge, Hunter decided to park himself in a corner of the room instead, nursing a bottle of sparkling water and staring out the window with his forehead pressed against the glass.

“You should eat something…” Steph said as she approached him from behind. “Gotta have some energy if you wanna win back some ground in the next session.”

“Is there any ground for me to win back?” he retorted. “I just lost the top half of my NXT roster, Steph…he’s pretty much stripped me bare. I’m gonna have to build everything from the ground up again.”

“Which we know you can do,” she said as she sidled up next to him, linking an arm around his waist. “You’ve got a great talent pool going down there, the scouts have done their work.”
He sighed deeply. “And what’s he gonna do with the ones he picked? Stick them on the main roster without a clear plan, a clear program, and hope they get over by sheer strength of will? We both know that’s not gonna happen.”

“It’s not a fair system,” she conceded. “Never has been, never will be.”

He shook his head. “Steph…I’ve got a whole Performance Center full of bright-eyed kids who want nothing more than to move up to the main roster. Times like this… I wonder if I should just flat out tell them that what’s waiting for them there is a whole lotta bullshit and an old man who can bury them on a whim.”

“Don’t be so harsh, sweetie…” she said as she rested a chin on his shoulder. “You can still get your way if you can convince him. You know he listens to you.”

“I wish he’d listen to me more,” Hunter said, staring at their reflection in the window’s glass panes.

“You need to give him time,” she told him. “You can’t push him too hard, Hunter…you know this.”

He took a swig from his bottle, trying to cool his parched throat. “I know…”

For a while neither of them said anything, just stood there together as the city bustled below, muffled noises of traffic and the occasional wail of a distant siren. Hunter’s mind drifted towards Roman once again, wondering what he was doing, what time he got up this morning and whether he was upset about waking up to an empty bed. In hindsight, Hunter probably should’ve woken him up even if only to let him know that he was leaving, but Roman had so much trouble falling asleep in the first place that Hunter simply couldn’t bring himself to do it.

“So…” Steph said as she scooted even closer, her voice barely above a whisper. “Did you bring him with you?”

“Yeah…” Hunter said, matching her tone. “He’s in a hotel room downtown.”

“And how is he doing?”
“Pretty good, all things considered…” he said. “Keeping out of trouble.”

She chuckled lightly against his shoulder. “How’s that possible when he spends all his time with you?”

He had to smile at that, even just a little. “Well, you got me there, babe…”

She reached up to straighten his tie a little, neatly-manicured fingers brushing against the lapel of his suit. "You know...all these years, watching them come and go, one after another…I knew eventually there was gonna be one of them you’d get all…precious about.”

Hunter felt his chest tighten slightly at her remark, though he fought not to let it show. She probably noticed anyway.

“When…when did you realize it was him?” he dared himself to ask.

“When you stopped telling stories about him a couple months in,” she leaned in closer. “Like he was something you wanted to keep all for yourself…something you didn’t want to share with anyone.”

He swallowed the lump in his throat. “That was two years ago.”

“Yes…and I knew even then,” she said.

He shook his head slowly. “I didn’t.”

“Well, I guess you’re lucky I’m around to tell you these things, then—” she said, the wistful tone in her voice skirting somewhere between fondness and mockery. It wasn’t her microphone voice, the one she used to address arenas full of booing fans who were clamoring to see her put in her place, or the one she used in front of crowds of sponsors and stakeholders. It was an altogether private voice, the one shared between them, the one he suspected even her father rarely heard.

“Does it bother you?” he asked after another long silence.
“You’d have known if it did…” she said matter-of-factly. “I would’ve said something then. That was our agreement, wasn’t it?”

The agreement, such as it was, had some stipulations and clauses to it, but what it essentially boiled down to was total and complete honesty. There was nothing he would hide from her, and vice versa, though in practice he rarely disclosed things to her without her prompting him for the information first. That she had waited this long to bring up Roman told him that perhaps she’d been as reluctant as he was to confront the reality of what was going on.

“I’m going to tell you something you’ve never heard me say before…” he said as he grasped one of her hands in hers. “I don’t know what I’m doing.”

She looked up at him, genuine concern coloring her eyes. “What do you mean?”

“Him. I don’t know what I’m doing with him—where it goes, how it ends, whether I’m doing him more harm than good…”

“Oh, sweetie…” she clasped his fingers tighter. “I can’t answer the first two, but I’m pretty darn sure you’re doing him a lot of good right now.”

“Am I, though?”

“Hunter, it wasn’t you that turned the world against him,” she reminded him. “You tried to fix it. We gave it our best shot.”

“And it didn’t fucking work,” he shook his head. “That whole program—it just got worse for him as it went on. And I should’ve seen it coming, Steph…I should’ve seen the signs.”

“Bullshit,” she said. “When spearing me into the mat doesn’t get somebody over, we both know that means the problem runs deeper and more complicated than just a few bad bookings.”

He made a pathetic attempt at a laugh, rubbing the bridge of his nose. “Yeah, that usually does the trick, doesn’t it?”
“I know you like the idea of being able to orchestrate or manipulate every outcome, babe…you’ve gotten so good at that over the years,” Stephanie said. “But there are things even you can’t control.”

He couldn’t help but smile mournfully at that. “Would it surprise you to know that last year, Dean Ambrose said the exact same thing to me?”

Steph raised her eyebrows a little. “The exact same thing?”

“Almost to the word,” he nodded. “Though he didn’t quite call me ‘babe’,”

“I’m glad he didn’t, or else I would have an issue,” she elbowed him playfully. “He’s not wrong, though.”

“No…no he isn’t.” Hunter agreed.

She took a deep breath and withdrew a little, where she could cup his jaw in her hands and look him in the eyes. “You’re a good man who’s trying to do the right things. There’s a lot of people out there who don’t see that, and they probably never will, but I see it.”

“I don’t need people to see it,” he said. “I just want to do what I do and make a real difference in this company.”

“Then go in there and fight for it,” she gestured her head in the direction of the conference room. “Pick your battles, state your case, and stand your ground.”

He exhaled slowly, closing his eyes around the warmth emanating from her palms. Her hands were soft and small by comparison, a waft of feminine perfume emanating from her wrists. It was the same scent she’d worn on their first real date together, back when they still had the privilege of calling themselves young and foolish, an anchor in his memory. There had been very few constants in Hunter’s life—wrestling was one, Stephanie was another.

“Thank you,” he whispered, not bothering to elaborate the extent of what he was thanking her for. She didn’t need it.
Dusk had descended over Stamford when Hunter could finally let himself back into his hotel room, letting his briefcase hit the carpeted floor with a muffled thud. Roman was standing in the middle of the room, hands hanging awkwardly at his sides, the look on his face a mixture of relief and expectation. Wordlessly, Hunter beckoned him close with one hand as the other loosened his tie and tossed it aside, still marveling at how quickly and unquestioningly Roman went to him, as if he’d been waiting all day for this very moment.

He pulled Roman close as soon as he was within reach, not bothering with preamble and going straight for the younger man’s mouth, kissing him fiercely with both hands clasping the back of his neck. Roman pressed close to him, the warmth and weight of him setting off a mixture of relief and aching need in Hunter’s own body.

This, this was something he could control. How he touched Roman, how he held him, the things that happened within this protected space he’d fought so hard to maintain around them. He wasn’t going to fuck this up. He couldn’t.

“You were gone so long…” Roman said breathlessly against his mouth, his voice deep and even but with a barely-masked tremble of urgency.

“I know,” Hunter said as he kissed Roman’s cheek. Since they’d been staying at Hunter’s place in Orlando, he’d rarely let Roman out of his sights for more than a few hours at a time, except when he had tapings down at Full Sail, and even then there would be a constant stream of text messages just to keep in touch with what the other was doing. Today was the longest they’d been away from each other without some form of contact—twelve hours. It did things to Hunter that didn’t bode well for how he would cope with the inevitable day when he could no longer keep Roman for himself, when he would have to get used to the idea of other people—trainers, opponents, referees, fans—even touching Roman again.

The thought made him shudder and pull Roman down with him as he sank to his knees, two grown men tumbling awkwardly with their thick limbs tangled around each other, still chasing at each other’s mouth. Hunter nipped none-too-gently at Roman’s neck as they fumbled with buttons and zippers, feeling the urgent need to make some kind of mark on the boy’s flesh. Roman was used to it by now—he let out a small gasp but didn’t pull away, letting Hunter manhandle him until he was astride the older man’s lap, his back to the wall as his legs wrapped around Hunter’s waist. Hunter latched onto every inch of flesh available to him as clothes were thrown aside, the sharp bite of teeth followed by long licks of his tongue, hands kneading possessively at Roman’s thighs.

Steph had called him a good man but Hunter knew better. He was a selfish man, through and through, who wanted things his way and wanted to keep what was his. And Roman? Roman was his
He could keep Roman happy, or at the very least—content, blissfully removed from the fickle mob or the nameless voices that clamored for his demise. He could keep Roman away from all that, what fool would knowingly let him back out into the world just to get torn down again?

You’re fooling yourself, the voice inside his head told him. You’re a lot of things, but a fool shouldn’t be one of them. That the voice sounded worryingly like Steph’s was something he vehemently chose to ignore.

He breached Roman almost dry, spit and sweat not nearly enough to ease his way in but he’d been rougher in the past and Roman had taken it, the same way he’d taken everything Hunter had ever done to him. Roman clapped his arms around Hunter’s back and moaned, the sound of it sparking off something primal and dark in the recesses of Hunter’s mind. He’d broken the boy’s body through tables, smashed his head into steel steps and cracked his nose against ringposts. Roman could give as good as he got. Except he never did, not when they were like this, not with Hunter’s cock splitting him open and the air between them foggy with lust.

Roman’s long hair was hanging in sweaty strands, plastered against his face and his gasping, open mouth, glassy brown eyes unfocused even as Hunter stared right into them. He was so fucking beautiful like this, open and pliant, breath hitching in his throat as his head thrashed against the wall behind it. Hunter knew that look so well—it was the look that had drawn him in the first place, the look that had his brain, devious to begin with, coming up with all sorts of ideas as to how he could lock this intoxicating creature in his possession forever, claimed for and forbidden to anyone else.

What the fuck have you done to me?

It wasn’t a fair question, and Hunter knew it even as it rang in his mind—it was Hunter who had done most of the doing in their shared, unbalanced history together. Roman had gone along with everything—obedient, eager to please, accommodating, trusting. The look in his eyes never changed, whether Hunter was making slow love to him and telling him how precious he was or slamming him to the floor and mounting him like he was nothing more than breeding stock. Nobody else in the world had ever looked at him like that.

Stephanie always looked at him like she had him figured out, like she knew him better than he knew himself.

Seth, by comparison, used to stare at him like he was egging Hunter on, like he was figuring out his next big tease.

Sami’s gaze was harder for him to bear—questioning, searching, like he could look right through
Hunter even without trying.

But Roman Reigns had never looked at him with anything other than utter and complete trust, something he should know better than to give a man of Hunter’s disposition. No man with his ego should’ve been given this much of an opening to something he so single-mindedly wanted, and no man in Roman’s position should have ever given himself up so easily. And yet there they were, two years on, and the look in Roman’s eyes still left him dumbstruck and with a fire inside him he could never quell.

Roman’s arms were flung loosely around his neck now, Hunter had coaxed his climax out of him with calloused hands and was now after his own release, fucking Roman against the wall. His knees would kill him in the morning but Hunter couldn’t care less, thrusting hard and fast until he thumped Roman one last time against the wall, holding him there, spilling wet and messy inside his boy until he could feel some of it leaking around the bruised rim where his cock was still lodged tight.

“Fuuuck…” Roman let out a long, raspy sigh as his head fell on Hunter’s shoulder. “Where’d that come from?”

“Heck if I know,” Hunter said in between short, gasping breaths. His ears were still ringing.

“You never go at me like that unless it’s after a big match,” Roman said. “What happened today?”

Hunter shook his head. “I wouldn’t call it a five-star classic…but it was definitely a fight.”

“Oh…” Roman stroked trembling fingers down his chin, sweat beading on his face as if he’d just gone through an Iron Man match. “Did you win?”

Hunter rubbed his palms into Roman’s stomach, coating his fingers with drying come and sweat. He hadn’t exactly been keeping score, but at the end of the day he’d managed to fight tooth and claw to keep Nakamura and Samoa Joe in NXT, as well as getting the board to sign off on the Blackpool venue he’d wanted to use for the UK Tournament. Vince and some of the older boardmembers had initially rolled their eyes at the initial concept of an all-female tournament, but Hunter had done his homework preparing the scouting reports and videos that eventually won them over. The future of those he’d lost to the main roster was still uncertain, but his long-term plans remained intact.

“I think…I think I just did.”
Roman gave him a small, trembling smile. “S’not fair…how can you call it a win when I never fight back?”

There it was again, the seemingly offhand remark that sent something rumbling in his chest. “I sometimes wish you would, just a little.”

Roman shook his head. “Don’t wanna fight you…not anymore. Not ever.”

Hunter kissed him then, deep and searing, if only because he couldn’t look in the boy’s eyes anymore. It was too much. His chest felt ready to burst with something that had been fighting its way to the surface for the better part of two years, something he hadn’t seen coming when he first laid his hands on Roman’s bruised back in a dimly-lit hotel room in Indianapolis.

“I’m sorry I left without telling you this morning,” he whispered against Roman’s jaw. “Didn’t wanna wake you,”

“It’s ok…” Roman assured him. “When…when can we go home?”

“Day after tomorrow,” Hunter said, trying to ignore how Roman’s intonation of home set a flutter of warmth down his neck. “I have one more meeting in the morning, then we’ll have the rest of the day free--but they can’t free up the company plane until Wednesday.”

“Ohk…” Roman nodded.

“You had dinner yet?”

“No…”

“Me neither,” Hunter said. “Don’t feel like going out, so let’s make the most out of room service and call it a night, yeah?”

“Yeah…” Roman agreed, then together they stumbled to get to their feet. Hunter’s legs had nearly gone to sleep but he steadied himself with one hand braced on the wall and one arm around Roman’s waist, still mouthing at the skin on his tattooed shoulder. He couldn’t get enough.
It turned out that Roman had skipped lunch just as he had, and it left both of them ravenous. Hunter ordered about half the items on the hotel’s sparse room service menu while Roman took a long shower, and had the bellboy who brought the food up arrange the dishes on the low coffee table in the living room area of the suite. He tipped the young man generously and started picking at some of the appetizers, quickly realizing it was much more comfortable to sit on the floor with his back against the couch rather than sitting hunched over on it.

“Started without me?” Roman said as he stepped into Hunter’s vision, draped in a hotel bathrobe that barely fitted over his shoulders.

Hunter merely smiled as Roman joined him on the floor, shower-damp body pressing against him. Soon all pretense of decorum was forgotten as he proceeded to hand-feed Roman, watching in rapt attention as the boy made a show of licking his fingers clean, each time waiting for the next handful that would be fed to him.

Hunter was hard again in no time, pulling Roman half onto his lap and chasing after the taste of food on Roman’s lips with his own mouth, ignoring half-hearted protests about how much of a mess they were making and how they would need another shower after this.

It was dessert that ultimately proved to be his undoing, because the sight of Roman’s thick, pinkish tongue licking frosting off his knuckles was just too much. He wrested Roman to straddle him, pushing the robe aside and gliding his fingers down to Roman’s ass, still bare and smooth after his thorough shave job, bucking up wildly into him.

“Feeling full yet, baby boy?” he said as he scooped up another handful of frosting-laden cake on his fingers, bringing it close to Roman’s mouth.

“S’long as you keep feeding me, Imma keep eating…” Roman said before he took nearly three of Hunter’s fingers into his mouth, unabashedly moaning and grinding himself down on Hunter's cock as his eyes fluttered shut.

“I thought you had a healthy appetite before, but you just keep surprising me…” Hunter remarked as his other hand patted Roman’s rump affectionately, marveling in its roundness and how the skin yielded to his touch. “If I didn’t know any better, I’d have sworn I’ve knocked you up or something.”

Roman gasped involuntarily around his fingers, a flush of color rising to his already warm cheeks.
“Yeah, you like the sound of that?” Hunter said as he drew his fingers out and cupped Roman’s jaw firmly. “Like the idea of me knocking you up?”

Roman just stared at him, swollen lips trembling. “I...I can’t--”

“Doesn’t mean you can’t enjoy the thought of it…” Hunter smiled, hand roving down to palm at Roman’s belly. Roman had never gotten the rock-hard abdominal definition of some of his colleagues in the business, there was always some leftover give and pudginess in his middle that Hunter had always found himself drawn to. “I know I’d love the sight of you, all swollen up and full of me.”

Roman’s cock jumped at the words, Hunter could feel the change of tension in his body. The flush on his cheeks was more pronounced now, even as his eyes went hazy with obvious arousal.

“Would you do that for me? Let me fill you up like that, get you so heavy with me you can’t even fucking walk?”

Roman bit his lower lip and hissed out, “Yes…”

“Bet you’d look so good…” Hunter let his hand drift up to Roman’s chest, fondling at his right pectoral. “Bet these would fill up nicely, too…”

Roman was completely gone now, not even pretending that he didn’t enjoy it. He watched, as if hypnotized, as Hunter’s hands roamed his body, feeling up the parts of him that would stretch and swell in their fantasized pregnancy, Hunter’s voice narrating each of them close to his ear.

“Turn around,” Hunter commanded.

Roman complied, sluggish with how quickly he’d fallen under, until he had his back to Hunter’s chest. Slowly, Hunter guided him down until Roman’s still-wet hole could sink down on his hard cock, legs splayed wide over each side of Hunter’s, fully seated on his lap with his head thrown back against Hunter’s shoulder. Hunter’s hands went everywhere, palming greedily at Roman’s chest and the slight swell of his belly, letting the feel of the skin under his hand drag them further and further into the fantasy.
                                                 “Boy as beautiful as you...you’d give me the prettiest little babies...” he said as he licked at Roman’s neck. “You’ve got a body others would kill to get to breed with, but that’s not gonna happen, is it?”

                                                  “No…” Roman gasped. “Only you…”

                                                  “Damn right…” Hunter said as he thrust upwards, holding Roman’s hips down as he fucked into the boy’s maddeningly tight hole. “Feel how deep I am in you right now, baby boy?”

                                                  “Y-yes…”

                                                  “I’d fuck you even deeper if I could,” Hunter growled against his neck. “Make sure you’re all nice and knocked up for me, full and ripe and fucking swollen…”

                                                  “Fuuck…” Roman threw his head back, hands reaching back to grasp the back of Hunter’s neck.

                                                  “Just think of what I’d be able to do to you then,” Hunter said. “I won’t have to give you up after thirty days--I’d get to keep you for nine fucking months, maybe forever…”

Roman gasped and came at that, untouched, his cock sputtering wildly between his legs as a stream of unintelligible words came out of him, voice hoarse and breathless. Hunter followed soon after, the intensity of it too much for him to hold back anymore. His hands cupped Roman’s stomach all through it, imagining that he was emptying his balls into a waiting womb.

And you thought you were fucked up before.

Roman quietly slipped off his lap and resettled himself next to Hunter as they both came down from the high, the sound of their ragged breathing filling the room.

“Too much?” Hunter managed to ask after some time.

“Fuck, no…” Roman said as he rested his head on Hunter’s shoulder. “Do that again sometime,”

“Would’ve done it to you long ago if I knew you’d be so into it…” Hunter said as he pressed his
nose into Roman’s forehead. “Learn something new every day, I guess…”

“You’re so fucking horny tonight,” Roman said. “I mean, you always are but you haven’t been this intense for a long time.”

Hunter sighed. “Hate to break it to you…but you might have to give that ass up again before the night is over.”

Roman gave him an exaggerated pout. “Oh well, it’s not like I have anything better to do when I’m traveling incognito with my boss…”

“Would make my business trips a lot less tedious, that’s for sure…” Hunter said.

“You need to give me another bath. I did it last time,” Roman demanded.

“You’ll always end up needing another…” Hunter reminded him playfully.

“Whatever, we’re in a hotel, it’s not your water bill to pay…” Roman said.

“Fair enough,” Hunter said.

True to his word, Hunter did manage to sneak in one more fuck before they both fell asleep that night, this time on the bed, a rather leisurely session compared to the previous two frantic encounters. He barely said anything throughout, not needing any fantasy to feed them this time, just kept his arm tight around Roman’s waist as he rocked his cock into that sweet, welcoming hole, nipping at the base of Roman’s neck.

Something had undoubtedly shaken loose inside him, something he couldn’t fully attribute to the stress of that day’s meeting and the long fight he’d had to put up just to protect his future interests. Maybe it was the unstoppable march of time, the inevitable ticking of the clock that reminded him that his time with Roman was finite. Maybe it was the confession that Steph had unwittingly forced out of him, the first time he’d had to confront his own uncertainty.

Or maybe it was Roman himself, who had followed him blindly out of the relative comfort of
seclusion and into this city and this hotel room, where the bed was a just a bit too small and the shower didn’t quite have enough water pressure, because Hunter had asked him to.

As Roman drifted off to sleep, Hunter kept watch over him for a long time, taking in features that had become so familiar to him over the last two weeks he was in danger of taking them for granted. Roman always curled a little in on himself when he slept, Hunter remembered learning that little tidbit from Seth many years ago. At first he thought it was because Roman felt the need to make himself small when he was sharing a hotel bed with two others and didn’t want to take up the most space, but he still did it on beds twice as large and with nobody else but Hunter to share it with. It was just a little quirk, one of those random things one learned about another person over time, but Hunter found it oddly endearing.

*You can’t keep him forever.*

No, but he could at least ensure there would always be something for Roman to come back to, something solid and clearly-defined, not just two grown men who’d spent the earlier part of the year beating each other up for public spectacle suddenly pretending to cohabitate like normal, well-adjusted people while the world passed them by. If Roman was willing to follow him anywhere, Hunter had to be sure he wasn’t leading the boy into a mental quagmire that would only weaken and confuse him the further they went along.

He’d waited nearly two weeks. It was long enough.

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Roman woke up with that familiar, pleasant ache in his body—the one that brought a smile to his face even before his eyes had fully opened. The bed next to him was empty, again, but that was to be expected—Hunter had left for his morning meeting but had promised that they’d have the rest of the day free.

Last night had been…fun, if a little bit odd. Hunter had come back from his long meeting like a caged animal set loose on his favorite prey, and hadn’t bothered to divulge any details about what drove him to such a mood. Roman wasn’t going to complain, though—he got a good meal and three amazing fucks out of it, which more than made up for the wholly boring day he’d had to endure while Hunter was away.

He went to the bathroom for a quick piss and came back to the bedroom to find his phone buzzing, and a familiar name flashing on screen.
“Well, if it isn’t the World Heavyweight Champ himself…”

“Oh, knock it off…” Dean’s familiar rasp said from the other end. “How you doing, Big Dog?”

“Pretty good,” Roman said. “All caught up on Game of Thrones now, just like the rest of the world.”

“Well, I’m glad you’ve put your free time to good use,” Dean said. “I take it you haven’t been following what’s been going on with us in the mad circus.”

“All I know is that you’ve been defending my honor and Seth’s been trying to dismantle it,” Roman said. “Closest you’ll ever come to chivalry and me being a medieval princess.”

“I don’t have three dragons at my disposal so my fists will have to do, I’m afraid…”

Roman grinned. “So you have been watching the show.”

“Renee’s really fucking into it, she made me sit through a couple of box sets…” Dean sighed. “But don’t expect me to give you a crown of flowers when you come back or some shit.”

“No, there’s a Snapchat filter that’ll do it for you,”

“Snap--what?”

“Forget it,” Roman said quickly. “Everything good on the road?”

“Brand split’s making everyone a bit antsy--looks like they’re purposely holding out on telling us where we’ll end up.”
“You haven’t had any hints?”

“I keep hearing SmackDown whenever my name’s mentioned...” Dean said. “Nothing firm. And I’ve got the belt, so it goes where I go, theoretically.”

“And how is the belt?”

“Heavier than I fucking thought,” Dean said. “I haven’t spilt beer or jerked off on it yet, though.”

“I’m so fucking proud,” Roman said dryly.

“Listen, the three of us are gonna have another tussle for it at Battleground, so...Seth and I thought it might be worthwhile for us to come down to Florida and work out some spots with you. You know, before you come back and get all swallowed up by the schedule again.”

“That’s a great idea, but...” Roman looked around. “I’m not in Florida right now, I’m afraid.”

“Oh,” Dean’s voice sounded mildly disappointed. “You decide to get yourself a cabin in the woods and go full-on lumberjack?”

“I wish,” Roman said. “I’m in Stamford right now.”

“Headquarters? Why the fuck--are those bastards trying to haul your ass over the coals again?”

“No, Dean, nothing like that--” Roman sighed, knowing it was inevitable. “They didn’t call me in. I’m with Hunter.”

The silence that followed lasted a good five seconds before Dean managed another awkward “Oh...” into the receiver.

“I’ve been...staying with him in Orlando for the last two weeks,” Roman continued. “He got called into a meeting at HQ a couple days ago, so...I went with him.”
“I see…” Dean said. “Well, I guess I shouldn’t be surprised that he literally took you off the radar.”

“Dean…” Roman rubbed at his eyes wearily. “He asked me to come down to Orlando. I said yes. It’s simple as that,”

“No, Ro…it’s not.” Dean said, his voice insistently. “You sure that’s how it went? He asked you? He didn’t just throw down an offer he knew you wouldn’t be able to refuse?”

Roman closed his eyes--times like these made him wish Dean wasn’t so damn perceptive. “Dean…”

“You’ve been without him for months, Ro. You were doing just fine. You don’t fucking need him,”

Roman gritted his teeth. “Maybe not, Dean...maybe I just want him. Is that so hard for you to get?”

“Oh, I get it just fucking fine, Ro…” Dean said. “I don’t have to like it. Not after the mess he put you through earlier this year,”

“That’s not on him, and you know it.” Roman said defensively.

“Look, I’m just saying...if he cared that much about you, he should’ve done something, pulled some strings, throw some of that fucking corporate weight around to actually fix things for you.”

“You think I’d have liked that?” Roman felt his voice rising in tone. “I don’t need him to pull strings for me, I never needed anyone to pull any fucking strings for me--not here, not in The Shield, not back in fucking FCW when we were still in those stupid trunks and you wrestled half-drunk most of the time, okay? I don’t want any strings pulled on my behalf, ever.”

He heard a drawn-out exhale from the other end. “Okay...okay, back the fuck up. That came out wrong. I didn’t mean it like that,”

Roman shook his head. “Just...let me have this, Dean...please? It’s probably the best thing that’s happened to me for a good long while.”
Dean sounded incredulous. “Better than the belt?”

“Fuck that damn belt…” Roman snapped. “I won it in a shitstorm, and I’ve put up with that shitstorm ever since. Seeing you wear it after cashing in on Seth was the high point for me so far this year, and I’m more than happy to let you keep it.”

“Ro…”

“I’m serious, Dean…”

“Yeah, I figured out as much three sentences ago,” Dean said. “Look, the whole time you been messing around with Hunter, I kept my mouth fucking shut, okay? It’s just hard to see you come back some nights, looking like you’ve been put through a blender, all those bruises on you that I know didn’t happen out in the ring…”

Dean’s voice sounded painfully earnest somehow, which made Roman’s chest tighten.

“Sometimes you’d get up for a shower or something, and I’d look over to your bed to find blood on the sheets--what’s a guy supposed to think, Ro?”

Roman stared down at his body. It had been a long time since Hunter roughed him up badly enough to cause him to bleed, but he could see the bites and bruises from last night already starting to turn blue.

“I know it’s fucked up, Dean…”

“Well, so is volunteering your head to be curb stomped through cinder blocks…” Dean said wistfully. “I guess that makes us even…”

Roman sighed heavily. “I never meant to make it difficult for you.”

“I ain’t a guy who gets easily bothered by things, you know…and I’ve seen plenty of shit in my
time,” Dean said. “I know some people have their arrangements or whatnot, some even sign papers for this kind of relationship...”

“That’s...that’s not what this is,” Roman said.

“Then what is it? Do you know? Does he know?”

Roman took another long glance around the room, at Hunter’s clothes from yesterday draped over the back of a chair by the window, at the open suitcase on the floor which showed a row of neatly-folded shirts in muted tones of grey and pale blue. His cologne bottle was on the bedside table, next to the writing pad bearing the hotel’s initials and the laminated paper with the list of TV channels. Even here, he was surrounded by everything Hunter. It had been the constant in his universe for the past two weeks, something he tethered himself to, something he was increasingly afraid he wouldn’t be able to do without.

“Ro?”

“I don’t fucking know, okay?” he said. “It is what it is, Dean...I don’t have any illusions about riding off into the sunset or any bullshit like that. I just wanna enjoy what I’ve got, for as long as I’ve got it.”

For a few moments, he heard nothing but the echo of his own breathing. Then Dean spoke again, his voice a little calmer and more even.

“Just...answer me this, Ro. Is he taking care of you?”

“Yeah, he is.”

“Then I guess...that’s all I need to know,” Dean said.

“You don’t sound convinced,”

“I don’t have to be,” Dean said. “If you say so, I gotta take your word for it.”
“Dean…”

“Doesn’t mean I’m gonna stop worrying, or that I like it any more than I did before. But you’re right-it ain’t my fucking business, and if it gets you through whatever, then what’s left for me to say? It’s gotta be enough for me.”

Roman stared up at the ceiling, feeling tired despite the early hour of the day. “Thanks…for checking up on me.”

“Miss you around here,” Dean said. “Can’t wait for you get back.”

“Yeah, I…” Roman’s word caught halfway in his throat. He couldn’t quite match Dean’s sincerity, but tried it anyway. “I can’t wait to get back, either.”

He had a feeling Dean sensed his reluctance, but decided against pressing the issue. “You take care, Big Dog…we’ll talk again soon.”

“Bye.”

Once Dean hung up, Roman tossed his phone on the mattress and sank his face into his hands, digging the heel of his palms into the corners of his eyes.

_Then what is it? Do you know? Does he know?_

It wasn’t the first time he’d heard those questions. Often enough they’d echoed inside his own head, but hearing them spoken in Dean’s voice, low and raspy and guttural, had made them all too real.

Roman stood up and walked towards the window, staring out at the rather dull and grey morning. Downtown Stamford afforded him a view of squat grey buildings mixed with Old World facades, making him miss the view out of Hunter’s apartment, the quietly swaying palms and the joggers trudging across the pavement in their neon-bright gear.
Faintly, he heard the door to the suite swinging open, followed by a click of the lock seconds later.

“Roman?”

The sound of Hunter’s voice always did something to him, even if it were something as simple as his own name. Roman had been following that voice for the better part of two years now, never questioning where it would take him. Now, he followed it out the bedroom and into the living room, where Hunter was setting down a white takeout box on the coffee table.

“Thought you had a morning session…”

“More like an informal breakfast at a restaurant downtown,” Hunter said. “Try those pastries. They’re good,”

Roman sat down and helped himself to a blueberry muffin that was about the size of his fist, catching crumbs with one hand as Hunter pulled out two takeaway cups of what smelled like fresh roast coffee.

“The coffee at HQ tasted like piss…” Hunter explained. “These are decent enough.”

“Hmm…” Roman mumbled over a mouthful of chewy muffin.

Hunter, who had taken a seat on the couch next to him, seemed to notice his subdued mood. “You okay? Still sore from last night or something?”

Roman shook his head and swallowed. “It’s fine…”

“Well, you definitely look like something’s bothering you,” Hunter pried the half-eaten muffin from his hand and set it back on the table. “What is it?”

Roman pulled his knees up to his chest. “Can I at least get some coffee first?”

“Sure,” Hunter smiled at him. Roman watched as he uncapped one of the paper cups and put sugar
in it--half a sachet, exactly how Roman liked it, and stirred it with a plastic spoon before handing it over, even blowing at it slightly to dispel some of the heat. Roman let some of the heat seep into his palms before drinking it, sipping at it gingerly so as not to scorch his tongue. Hunter helped himself to his own cup, which he took without sugar, one arm casually draped over Roman’s shoulders.

If Roman closed his eyes, he could almost imagine that they were back in Orlando, watching overly-chipper morning talk show hosts on TV with the volume turned down, bathed in sunlight from the tall windows behind Hunter’s desk. It was familiar enough to feel like it was a lifelong routine, even though they hadn’t been doing it for more than two weeks.

Then again, what came before those two weeks was fading into a haze in Roman’s mind, his points of recall reduced to a few choice highlights, like the crash of AJ Styles’ forearm into his chest, Dean holding aloft a golden briefcase, and Seth’s stupid mouth hanging open as he sold that moment for all it was worth. Even when he was in the thick of it, he’d felt more and more like a spectator, and truth be told he didn’t mind all that much--he’d had his time in the spotlight already, and it hadn’t amounted to much, really. Just a chorus of mounting disapproval that followed him from city to city, arena to arena, until the verdict came that would remove him from the ring altogether.

“You gonna tell me what’s up?” Hunter’s voice was gentle next to his ear, matched by the stroke of two calloused fingers down his cheek. Roman couldn’t help but close his eyes to the sensation, trying to remember if anyone had touched him like this in living memory. Maybe Seth or Dean, in one of those rare Shield-era nights when they were feeling mellow and touchy-feely with each other, but Roman’s skin didn’t keep a record of their touches the way it seemed to do with Hunter, each contact recalling those that came before.

“Dean called,” he said quietly. “He thought I was still in Pensacola--talked about coming down for a visit with Seth so we could work out a few spots for Battleground.”

“Did you tell him where you are?”

“Yeah…” Roman shrugged. “Didn’t feel the need to keep it from him.”

Hunter sighed as he took another sip of his coffee. “I’m guessing he still fucking hates me, then.”

“He doesn’t hate you,” Roman said. “He’s not...totally comfortable with it, but hate’s too strong a word.”
“He’s always worried about you,” Hunter said. “Probably still thinks I’m bad for you.”

“Yeah, well fuck what he thinks,” Roman said sharply. “I don’t care,”

Hunter regarded him closely. “Then why are you so upset?”

“I’m not,”

“Bullshit,” Hunter said as he scooted closer and gently took the half-empty coffee cup from Roman’s hand, setting it safely aside. “Come on, tell me…”

Hunter had a way of coaxing things from him, a gentle prod here and a prompting question there, one hand rubbing circles on Roman’s lower back while the other lay warm and firm against his thigh. There was nothing forceful in his gestures, but there was no escape either. Inevitably, the words would have to come out one way or another.

“He asked me if I knew what I...what we are doing,” Roman said. “If I even know what all of this means...if you know.”

Hunter’s expression wavered only slightly, like none of this came as a surprise to him. Roman couldn’t decide if he found it a comfort or an annoyance, the fact that Hunter seemed to always be one step ahead of him. Then again, Hunter was the EVP of a multi-million dollar company and Roman was a glorified circus performer whose act had gone rather stale.

“I used to think I know…” he continued. “It was simpler back then. Wasn’t hard for me to explain, even to him. But it’s not that anymore, is it?”

Hunter averted his gaze slightly, lower jaw working as he seemed to process the question. Roman’s eyes were fixed on him, a gnawing sense of desperation starting suddenly in his gut. He wanted--no, he needed Hunter to have the answer.

“Well...what do you want it to mean?” Hunter asked, eyes still downcast.

Roman shook his head. It wasn’t what he wanted to hear. “You really need to stop doing that…”
The hand on Roman’s back froze as Hunter looked at him. “W-what?”

“I’ve told you, so many times…I don’t want you to ask.” Roman said. “I don’t want to be asked. It beats the whole fucking purpose. I’m not here to call the shots, you are.”

“Roman…”

“I need to hear it from you. Not the other way around,” Roman continued, afraid he wouldn’t get the words out if he stopped now. “You tell me what the fuck we’re doing here, and I’ll nod my head and play along, because that’s how we both like it to be. Let’s not pretend we’re suddenly equals here just because shit’s getting real.”

Hunter withdrew like he’d been stung, and for a good few seconds Roman was afraid that he’d gone too far, that things had been broken beyond repair. The fear grew tenfold when Hunter stood up from the couch, and a cold sensation broke across the back of Roman’s neck.

Great job, you idiot. Fucking genius move, there.

But Hunter only walked as far away as his briefcase, and Roman watched as he unlatched it and pulled out what looked like a small flat cardboard box, plain and unmarked, and brought it back to the couch. Roman could barely look him in the eyes as he sat back down, choosing instead to focus his gaze on the box in the older man’s hand.

“I had this made for you earlier this year…around the same time I ordered Sami’s sideplates,” Hunter said, his voice calm and even. “Planned to give it to you during Wrestlemania weekend, but didn’t seem like a good idea then…”

Roman swallowed the lump in his throat, his heart hammering in his chest.

“I decided to pick it up this morning because I thought the time was finally right to give it to you,” Hunter continued, opening the box’s lid. “I guess my hunch was right.”

For a few moments, Roman couldn’t process what he was seeing. He saw a thick black band of braided leather, accented with silver clasps and something hanging from it like a pendant. He was
still dumbstruck, moments later, when Hunter reached for his left ankle and pulled it onto his lap, tossing the box aside in the process.

Wordlessly, Hunter wrapped the band around Roman’s ankle and fitted the clasps together, the pendant making a low jingling sound as he did so. It fit so snugly around him, like it was made for him and him alone, unlike store-bought watches or belts that always needed adjusting.

“The costume department still kept a set of your measurements from when you had your boots made…” Hunter explained further as he turned the band around Roman’s ankle. “I just gave them to the jeweler so he could make the band just right for you.”

When Roman could finally see the shape of the pendant, he finally let out the breath he’d been holding. It told him everything he needed to know.

A sterling silver ‘H’, large enough to not be dainty yet small enough to still be inconspicuous, dangling from a metal fitting looped around the braided leather. It was beautiful—probably the most beautiful thing Roman’s seen in a long, long time.

“You know what this means…” Hunter spoke again, his voice low as his hands cradled Roman’s newly-adorned ankle.

“I do…” Roman said. “I still wanna hear it from you, though.”

“Okay…” Hunter relented. “Come here, first…”

Roman withdrew his ankle from Hunter’s lap so he could move closer to him on the couch, letting two big, familiar hands take him in by the shoulders and pull him close. Hunter leaned back slightly, taking most of Roman’s weight with him, letting him settle comfortably against his chest.

“You were right, this did start out a lot simpler,” Hunter began. “I saw you, I wanted you, I went and got you. That was it. That’s how it usually goes with the others, too—not just Seth, even the ones before him, the methods may vary but the endgame was always the same.”

Roman just nodded slowly, his hand reaching up to fiddle with the buttons of Hunter’s shirt, another habit he seemed to have developed over the last two weeks.
“When you asked if we could take a break after the Royal Rumble, I thought nothing of it…” Hunter said. “It made sense. We were about to get into a regular schedule of beating each other senseless, and I wanted to give you whatever space you needed to keep yourself together.”

“I did a shitty job at keeping myself together,” Roman said.

“And I ended up doing a shitty job at Wrestlemania,” Hunter said. “Let’s not sugar-coat it. I thought I still had it in me to carry a Main Event with you, but a massive ego is no substitute for being, say, five years younger.”

Roman snorted a little. “I wasn’t angry with you.”

“I kinda wish you were,” Hunter said, his palm resting warmly against Roman’s back. “I was pissed with myself. All those times I’d roughed you up, smacked you around, bruised you to hell and back both out in the ring and in private...that was the one time I felt like I’d let you down.”

Roman sighed, his index finger idly prying a button loose from its hole. Maybe he had been angry, just a little bit, though back then he’d directed most of it at the hostile crowds, or at himself, or at the unfortunate circumstances which left him as the company’s poster boy for mishandled pushes. If he’d felt let down at all by Hunter, he couldn’t remember acknowledging it to himself.

“Maybe I wanted to make it up to you, and I saw my chance when you got suspended. Or maybe...and this is more likely knowing the kind of guy that I am, I just wanted you back.”

“Either way, you got me back,” Roman said against Hunter’s chest. “Doesn’t really matter,”

“I want to keep you this time,” Hunter said. “That’s all I’ve been able to think about since you got in that limo with me at the airport.”

Roman shuddered involuntarily, letting the ripple work its way down his body. “You’re doing a pretty good job of it, so far…”

“It’s not enough,” Hunter said. “In a matter of weeks, you’ll be back out there...and as much as I tell myself you’ll do just fine, that it’s where you belong, another part of me kinda wants to stay like this.
Just like this. You and me, and nobody else.”

“Yeah, same here…” Roman said. “Couldn’t even lie convincingly when I was telling Dean that I was looking forward to coming back.”

Hunter chuckled, a deep sound that reverberated through his chest. “What a mess we’ve made, huh?”

“Least it’s ours,” Roman said.

“Yeah…” Hunter agreed. “Yeah, it’s ours.”

For a while Roman just closed his eyes, focused on the rhythmic rise and fall of Hunter’s chest. None of this felt like a revelation, just confirmation of things he probably already knew. There was no stirring piano music playing in his head, no sudden lightness in his being. Just the noise of traffic and the low hum of the room’s air conditioner, an utterly mundane late morning in downtown Stamford where two guys just happened to finally decide to talk about their feelings.

“Yesterday was rough for me…” Hunter said, his fingers starting to coil in the strands of Roman’s hair. “I had to sit there and listen as some of my hard work got taken apart, all these things I’d planned just thrown out of the window because Vince suddenly decided he wanted this guy or that girl on the main roster, and that was that.”

“The more things change, huh?”

“Maybe he was trying to tell me something, you know? Maybe he was trying to remind me that it was still him calling the shots, that in the end it’s still his company.”

“It’s gonna be you someday soon,” Roman sighed against Hunter’s chest. “You said so yourself.”

“Not soon enough,” Hunter said. “If anything, it just reminded me that for all the weight I throw around, there’s so much I have no control of. What happens to guys when they move up, what happens when they get saddled with a gimmick that does nothing for them…what’s gonna happen to you.”
Roman could feel Hunter’s fingers at the back of his neck, and he moved into the warmth of the touch without thinking, trying to surround himself with as much of Hunter as possible.

“I can control this, though...us.” Hunter said, pressing ever so slightly into the point of Roman’s pulse. “I don’t have to just ride it out or let time do what it will. I can decide this for us. I’m deciding for us now.”

Roman dragged his leg to drape over Hunter’s, rubbing the leather of his anklet against Hunter’s calf, feeling like he could almost sob with relief. “Thank you…”

“You know why that thing’s around your ankle, right?”

“Yeah…” Roman said. “Because you can’t put it around my neck.”

Hunter let out a long, heavy exhale, and suddenly Roman found himself flipped over until he was lying on his back on the couch. Hunter hovered above him, his weight pressed down the entire length of Roman’s body, eyes clear and piercing.

“Let’s just make this absolutely clear, shall we? You want me to call the shots, I’m calling it.”

“Yes…” Roman nodded, letting Hunter take each of his wrists and grip them tight.

“You...all of you,” Hunter said slowly and deliberately. “...belong to me.”

“Yes…” Roman repeated, a slight shakiness creeping into his voice.

“I can’t always be with you out there, on the road, and both of us will probably still be messing around with other people like we’ve always done...but it’s always gonna be me you come back to, you understand?”

“Yes…” Roman said again, trying to fight off the thick haze starting to envelop him to focus on Hunter’s voice.
“When you’re alone with me, you’ll be a good boy and do as I say, and you’ll give me what I want, however I want it.”

“Fuck, yes…” Roman hissed, his eyes falling shut. There was unmistakable heat coiling in his gut now, spreading quickly through his body, his wrists twitching helplessly in Hunter’s grip.

“And I promise you, I’ll make it worth your while,” Hunter said. “Whenever you’re with me, none of that bullshit out there matters. Nothing touches you, nothing hurts you. Just me.”

Just you. Just you. It’s only ever been you.

“I fucking love you, you know that?”

Roman’s eyes flew open, but before he could say anything Hunter was kissing him, rough mouth and lips dry from all the talking, the sharp taste of coffee and a surge of something else altogether, messy and wet and overwhelming.

Fuck you, fuck you, at least let me say it back before you take my speech away, fuck you...

But Roman returned the kiss nonetheless, and realizing his hands were free he flung them around Hunter’s neck to pull him down even further, doing the same with his legs around Hunter’s waist. His thoughts were a rushing flood, half-words and feelings that flew by quicker than he could pin them down.

He had to wrench his mouth free in the end, gasping for air as his fingers raked through the coarse strands of Hunter’s beard, grey-speckled and glistening.

“Love you too…” he managed to whisper, watching a smile bloom over Hunter’s lips in reaction.


If he were more of a romantic he guessed he might have been disappointed at the lack of fanfare, at how fucking inevitable it all seemed. The last two years of building up to this, the last two weeks of dancing around it while they all but lived some kind of domestic fantasy together, all this claim of
ownership and obedience and finally, fucking finally, just that simple admission.

“How about we go all-out cliche and seal this whole deal with a fuck?” Hunter said.

“Jesus, thought you’d never get to it,” Roman snorted. “Yeah.”

The bed had gotten cold in their absence but it soon warmed up to them again, Hunter climbing on the bed on his knees as soon as he’d discarded the last of his clothes. Roman lifted his left leg and Hunter caught it, bringing Roman’s ankle close to his mouth so he could trace his lips around the leather strap that encircled it so snugly.

Hunter took longer to prepare him this time than he did last night, opening him up with fingers until Roman was fucking himself furiously down onto them, working his hips as Hunter’s lube-coated digits made slick noises against his hole on every thrust. All the while Hunter watched him unravel, keeping his fingers still and letting Roman work himself into a frenzy, until he mercifully pulled out and replaced the fingers with his cock.

Roman knew from the very first time, his first time, that he’d never get tired of the feeling of Hunter’s cock inside him. He’d never done this with anybody else, and maybe he never will. That feeling of being filled up completely until he was fit to burst, the heat and tightness of it splitting him open, just never got old.

Thankfully, Hunter wasn’t in the mood to play games once he was inside. He went straight into it, fucking Roman with a pace that felt like it would pulverize him, the obscene sounds of wet flesh matched only by the ungodly moans Roman couldn’t keep from wrenching his throat.

Hunter was all over him, mouthing at his neck, sucking at his collar bone, teeth scraping over his nipples until they were raw and swollen, like he’d done so many times before, like he’d undoubtedly do many times over again. Roman was too far gone to take any mental notes, to see if anything worked any differently now that things had been let out into the open, but it all just felt so familiar and close, so easy to lose himself in, and that’s exactly what he did.

They came nearly together, Roman into Hunter’s fist and Hunter mere seconds later, and Roman felt like he’d been wrung dry, throat parched and ears ringing. Hunter stayed inside him as they both came down, holding him through the convulsions of aftershocks that rocked them both, his sweat dripping down onto Roman’s body. In the bright sunlight coming from the window, Roman could see Hunter’s skin taking on the reddish tinge of exertion, his brows tightly drawn across his forehead.
Wordlessly, Hunter pulled out and situated himself on his side, pressing his chest against Roman’s back and a flinging a big, sweaty arm across his waist. Common sense would probably say that a shower was in order, or at least some kind of wipe-down, but common sense had no place in whatever they’d just agreed to, and Roman was okay with that. He didn’t need it. He had Hunter.

“Yesterday you said...we have the rest of the day off?” he asked once his voice had returned.

“Yeah…” Hunter said against the back of his neck. “I think I’ll just spend the rest of it right here.”

“Fine by me,” Roman muttered. He wasn’t going to fall asleep anytime soon, everything still too intense and prickly, so he settled for simply lying there and letting it all sink in, the weight of Hunter’s arm around him, the knee that was wedged between his wet thighs, the sound of Hunter’s breathing so close to his ear, the leather band around his ankle. The old, the new, the things previously simmering below that had now been pulled up to the surface, and the mental countdown that didn’t quite have the same ominous ring as it had before.

*Seventeen days.*

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When they finally made it back to Hunter’s apartment in Orlando the following day, the first thing they did--before they’d even unpacked--was run a hot bath in Hunter’s large tub and settle in for a long soak, Roman sitting snugly in the space between Hunter’s legs. It was such a relief to be home, surrounded by familiar sounds and smells, the comforting ripples of water against his skin and Hunter’s chin resting on his shoulder.

“I’ll get a spare keycard made for you,” Hunter said. “Feel free to stay here whenever you feel like it, don’t have to wait for me.”

“Cool…” Roman said as he sank deeper into the water, his left leg dangling over the rim of the tub. He hadn’t taken the anklet off since Hunter had put it on him, and didn’t intend to do so until he absolutely had to--probably once he was traveling with the roster again. Wouldn’t do for his colleagues to notice that he was wearing a piece of jewelry with his boss’ initials on it.

“Think you’re gonna tell Ambrose about all this?” Hunter asked quietly. “He did ask the question, after all…”
“I don’t know…” Roman shrugged. “Not sure having an answer would put him at ease,”

“Did it put you at ease, at least?”

“Fuck, yeah…” Roman said, shifting a little in the tub so he could face Hunter. “Like...I didn’t realize how badly I needed to know exactly where I stood with you until I asked, but I’m glad I did. It’s all clear now.”

“Good,” Hunter said as he pressed his thumb against Roman’s chin. “Because I don’t ever want you to question it again.”

“I won’t…” Roman said. “I promise.”

The night went slowly for them after that, a quiet dinner followed by Hunter working at his desk while Roman curled up in bed with his tablet, watching the first episode of an exhaustive PBS documentary about the history of New York City. He’d gotten as far as the part about George Washington’s retreat during the Revolutionary War when Hunter finally joined him, stifling a yawn as he got under the covers.

Roman switched off the bedside light, reaching in the darkness until he could find the warmth of Hunter’s body, pressing himself close against it.

“You good, baby boy?” Hunter said as he drew the blankets up over them, his other hand cradling the back of Roman’s head.

“Better than I’ve ever been…” Roman said. He meant it.

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They hit the halfway mark, fifteen days, and Hunter’s playful streak made itself known again. He made Roman sit on his lap all morning long, buck naked save for the leather band around his ankle, as Hunter sat at his desk and did his usual business, signing papers and writing e-mails and taking phone calls. Roman had his chest pressed flush against Hunter’s, the crisp material of the older man’s business shirt rubbing against his bare skin, seated in all his naked glory right in front of the tall window that let the sunshine through.
He wasn’t there to enjoy the view, though—Hunter always had one hand free and it went to town on Roman, fondling his ass and even smacking it whenever he got distracted, pinching just for the sake of teasing and making Roman grind down on his lap.

Roman was painfully hard throughout, his cock rubbing torturously against the buckle of Hunter’s belt and slicking it with pre-come, and he could feel Hunter’s own erection just under the material of his pants. Hunter kept his composure, though, casually going about his business as if Roman wasn’t there, purposely avoiding his gaze like he was nothing more than an oversized piece of corporate toy.

Hunter took a call from the production office down at Full Sail, something about getting some extra seating in for the Cruiserweight Classic finals, and a few minutes into that utterly mundane conversation Roman felt a finger sneaking between his asscheeks and breaching his entrance, teasing him open. It took every bit of self-control for him not to cry out, biting his lip so hard he tasted blood, grinding down on Hunter’s finger slowly like the world’s laziest lapdancer.

He was so open like this, so exposed, he could feel the heat of sunlight through the glass against his bare skin, Hunter’s voice utterly detached from what his hand was doing to Roman’s body, and it was almost overwhelming.

“If you need an extra camera crew, we could always ask the school,” Hunter said, his finger jabbing deep and nearly knocking Roman off his perch. “I’m sure those kids would love the extra summer credits…”

During the pause in which the other person spoke, Hunter moved his mouth away from his phone just enough to be able to latch onto Roman’s left nipple, pulling the bud between his teeth until Roman could feel tears in the corners of his eyes. He was so hard, Hunter had been teasing him like this for hours now, he was ready to shoot at any moment, but he couldn’t, not until Hunter said he could.

“Yeah, update me once you hear back from them okay? Thanks, bye.” Hunter hung up and put his phone back on the desk.

Roman’s head was lolling against Hunter’s shoulder by this point, breathing heavy, desperate for some kind of attention.

“Aww, look at you…” Hunter said mock-sweetly, brushing strands of sweaty hair away from Hunter’s neck. “Did I get you all worked up, baby?”
“Uh-huh…” Roman nodded.

Hunter worked another finger into him, the stretch causing Roman to gasp. “Fucking beautiful... all sweaty and naked and hot for me, my own little slut…”

Roman mewled at that, hands resting on Hunter’s shoulder. “Please…”

“Yeah, you like it when I do this, don’t you?” Hunter ran his mouth down Roman’s trembling neck. “Get you all hot and bothered, begging for it…”

Roman nodded enthusiastically, shutting his eyes against the sunlight that was bright enough to blind him.

“You’ll get my cock later, after I’m finished working,” Hunter said firmly. “For now, you can rub yourself off on me like the slut that you are. Come on, now.”

Shaking with relief, Roman started to move in earnest, grinding against Hunter, seeking any kind of friction on his painfully hard cock. It was the rub of the coarse leather of Hunter’s belt on his sensitive underside that finally did it, sending him sputtering and moaning aloud, holding on to the armrests to stop himself from falling off.

Once he was spent, Hunter scooped him up and carried him like he weighed nothing, walking the short distance between his desk and the living room couch and dumping Roman onto it.

“Keep that ass where I can see it,” he whispered in Roman’s ear before walking back towards his desk, utterly unbothered by the fact that his shirt and pants were soiled with Roman’s release.

Roman curled himself up on the couch, keeping his backside in Hunter’s full view, wondering how he must have looked, naked and shaking, hole glistening wet from Hunter’s fingering and belly splattered with his own come.

But Hunter barely looked at him for the next ten minutes, palming his cock casually through his damp pants as he worked on his laptop, even starting to hum a little tune as Roman lay there waiting for him, presenting himself.
Roman felt like he could cry in relief when Hunter finally stood, already unzipping as he walked towards the couch. He was pulled down to the carpet and Hunter mounted him from behind, fucking him on his elbows and knees with his head on the floor.

It was too soon for Roman to get hard again, but that was beside the point. Hunter was fucking into him just how he liked it, rough and fast and unrelenting, hands gripping at his hips for leverage. The pendant hanging from Roman’s anklet jingled in rhythm to their movements, a tiny noise that reminded him of his place.

He belonged here.

He belonged to Hunter.

He wouldn’t want it any other way.

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Outside of sex, Hunter wasn’t particularly strict about maintaining the power balance—or imbalance, as it were. Their cohabitation went pretty much the same way it had before they’d gone to Connecticut—sharing household tasks like dealing with dirty laundry or doing the dishes, taking turns in the shower or in the gym, eating takeout dinners in front of the TV, squabbling over who used up the last bit of toothpaste. The contrast between this utterly mundane existence and the stuff they did in bed, or wherever else Hunter wanted to do it, should’ve been nothing short of whiplash-inducing, but Hunter never once left Roman confused or uncared for, always making sure he knew exactly what was expected of him.

Then day twenty rolled by, and Hunter went a little berserk.

Roman literally couldn’t leave the bed all day, being given only enough respite to catch his breath slightly and recover before Hunter would be ready to go again. Roman didn’t know whether he wanted to curse or thank whoever had put Hunter on his current exercise regime, because clearly the man had more stamina than most men half his age, and Roman was bearing the brunt of it.

By the end of it all Roman was completely exhausted and boneless, their bed was a fucking mess, and he was beginning to believe that you could, in fact, fuck someone into unconsciousness.
Hunter soon returned with a warm washcloth and a bottle of water, letting Roman drink as he wiped down his body, checking ever so diligently for any unwanted damage.

“How you feeling?” Hunter asked, sounding mildly apologetic.

“As long as I don’t need to walk anywhere for another couple of days, I’ll be fine…” Roman said. “You’ll have to carry my fat ass around, I’m afraid.”

“Gladly,” Hunter smiled and tossed the washcloth aside, leaning down to kiss Roman’s forehead. “You did so good for me…”

Roman purred happily at the praise, the ache in his bones momentarily forgotten.

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On day twenty-seven, Roman’s phone started coming alive with work-related things again. An appointment for one last drug test to clear his way back to the main roster. E-mails outlining his program for the next few weeks, draft scripts for backstage promos. Schedules for autograph signings and company events.

He put in more hours in the gym, Hunter thoughtfully giving him more time and space there as he tried to regain his conditioning. Outwardly there wasn’t much that was different about Roman’s appearance, but he knew he’d lost some of his muscle strength with his lapse in training. Hunter made a passing joke about Roman’s sphincter probably being the most well-trained muscle in his body right now and nearly got a dumbbell thrown in his face for it.

On the evening of day twenty-eight, Hunter dressed him in a deep red button-down shirt and a pair of black denims and took him out to a sushi restaurant, where he sat back and watched amusedly as Roman proceeded to eat his way through what was probably half the contents of the restaurant’s storeroom, quietly slipping the waiter his credit card without letting Roman even peek at the numbers on the bill.

When they got back home, Roman was still feeling full and sluggish as Hunter undressed him and coaxed him onto the bed, following it up by fucking him as slowly and deliberately as he’d ever done, every motion long and drawn out, like it was meant to never end. It came as a bit of a shock to Roman when he finally climaxed, almost as an afterthought, drowning in the thick haze of Hunter’s
voice and the gentleness of his hands.

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The end, when it finally came, didn’t feel so much like an end, after all.

Roman had decided to leave his suitcase and most of his clothes behind, wanting to have something there for his next stay, so he was leaving Orlando with little more than the clothes he was wearing and his belongings stuffed in a backpack.

Hunter slipped the spare keycard in the back pocket of his jeans and kissed him goodbye at the door, muttering something about letting him know as soon as he was back in Pensacola, and how he was going to try to catch up with the touring roster as soon as he’d taken care of a few things down at NXT.

The ride to the airport and the flight home was uneventful, and by four in the afternoon on day thirty, Roman was back in his half-furnished place in Pensacola, staring at the framed portraits lying slanted against the wall that he hadn’t had time to properly hang, and the faint covering of month-old dust over his second-hand leather couch.

Roman sighed, tossing his backpack to the floor. He had a medical tomorrow and an appointment with the trainers straight after, so he might as well get his gear prepared and figure out what he was going to eat tonight.

Before getting down to that, though, Roman pulled out his phone and pressed Hunter’s name on his contact list. It barely rung twice before it was picked up.

“Hey…” the familiar voice said. “You home?”

Roman looked around, smiling wistfully. “I was…”
Chapter Summary

There’s always going to be a part of Sami that loves Hunter, adores him for everything that he’s done and everything he’s still trying to do, worships the very thought of him like the teenager glued to his TV screen years ago, utterly transfixed by the sight of this man and the all-encompassing charisma he wields so effortlessly. Sami knows the danger of putting people on pedestals but even if Hunter’s mystique has rubbed off since he started working for the man it’s been replaced by a sincere bond of mentorship and guidance, a faith that Sami feels he hasn’t quite repaid.

Chapter Notes

FILTH, GLORIOUS FILTH. I've been hinting at this since I wrote Chapter Two waaaaaay back during the Triassic, it seems. But here it is, some filthy Triple H/Roman Reigns/Sami Zayn goodness for all who might enjoy such a thing. There's been a lot of sweetness and angst and mellow tenderness in the last few chapters and I thought I'd spice things up a bit--and give my boy Sami some care and attention in the process.

Specific warnings for this chapter: Hunter being the supreme Daddy and domming the living fuck out of both Sami and Roman, double penetration, spanking, light bondage, and some oddly misplaced fluff. Proceed with caution--and hand sanitizers.

Sami Zayn’s not much of a gambler.

He’s never understood the appeal of the gaudy Las Vegas strip, the incessant noise of slot machines lined up in blinking rows under vaulted ceilings painted in some kind of Renaissance mimicry, nor has he ever felt dazzled by the competing spectacles of dancing fountains and pirate ships and bursting volcanoes or whatever else the hoteliers have conjured to attract visitors to their establishments.

Right now, though, right now he feels like a high-roller who’s just hit the jackpot.

Up high in a hotel suite with a balcony view overlooking the Strip, knees planted in burgundy-red bedding which provides a soft counterpoint to what’s happening to the rest of his body, Hunter
kneeling behind him, hands fitted comfortably in the dip of Sami’s hips as he fucks him in a steady pace, his cock angled just right to hit Sami’s sweet spot every time he thrusts in. Sami’s missed this, missed the feeling of Hunter’s hands and mouth and that dick, he’s looked forward to this ever since Hunter mentioned it on the phone, and he wants to savor it for all its worth.

“How you doin’ so far, Red?” Hunter’s voice muttered close to his ear.

Sami can’t quite vocalize his answer—his mouth is currently occupied by Roman’s cock, Hunter’s every thrust bobbing Sami’s head on Roman’s length as he concentrates hard on trying not to graze Roman too much with his teeth, so Sami just makes an affirmative noise in his throat and pushes his ass back enthusiastically to communicate his opinion about how all this is going.

He’s certainly doing better than Roman, who has his wrists bound with Hunter’s belt around the fancy headboard, and a red ballgag in his mouth muffling his moans. His legs are spread to give Sami access to his cock, and at Hunter’s instructions Sami has his arms looped under each of Roman’s thighs, holding him in place.

“Look at him, Red…”

Sami really, really doesn’t want to look—if only because the sight of Roman, bound and moaning incessantly around the gag in his mouth, saliva creating slick trails down his pretty lips and onto his ample, bronzed chest, is enough to make any man shoot his load. But he looks up anyway, meeting Roman’s half-lidded gaze, trying to communicate something through the movements of his tongue on the underside of Roman’s cock, even as Hunter’s thrusts continue to rock the both of them off their equilibrium.

“He’s so jealous of you right now,” Hunter says as he flicks his tongue across Sami’s left ear, causing gooseflesh to rise all the way down Sami’s back. “He wants my cock in him so bad, but you’re getting it first and there’s nothing he can do about it…”

Roman lets out a pained little whimper, but there’s nothing like anger or frustration in his eyes. He just looks completely surrendered to his predicament, undulating his hips up to push a little more of his cock into Sami’s mouth, more pleading than insistent. The sight of him does something unspeakable to Sami, hits him squarely in a dark, murky spot inside his mind he never even knew existed before, and he digs his fingers into Roman’s thighs tighter in response.

“He’s beautiful, right Sami?”
Sami nods emphatically, that much he can agree to. Roman’s always beautiful, whether he’s standing victorious atop the turnbuckles, being bathed in a flood of arena lights, or just flashing an easy smile in the locker room with his hair held back in that messy knot of his. But this…this is something else entirely. Sami feels oddly like a child being given the most expensive, pliant toy in the world by a doting father, which is a million degrees of fucked up considering what Hunter’s doing to him, but then again any thought of tonight being anything other than incredibly fucked up had abandoned him the minute he and Roman entered the suite earlier that night and found Hunter standing there waiting for them, stern-faced but with the glimmer of playfulness in his eyes.

Really, they should’ve known what to expect when they collectively decided to send Hunter that picture. Sami had a feeling Roman was sort of asking for it, really, and Sami’s nothing if not curious to see how far they could take it, so he went along. It didn’t take Hunter long to figure out who was the mastermind behind the whole idea, so he singled Roman out for ‘punishment’, if it can be called that. Roman was a mess by the end of it, ass beet red with Hunter’s palm prints all over him, while Sami had been made to sit on a chair and watch, increasingly hard inside his jeans.

Sami’s not much a of a role-player, nor does he consider himself particularly susceptible to the sort of mind games he knows Hunter likes to play. He likes exploring the kinds of things Hunter seems to know so much about, and they serve as useful distractions whenever his mind got too jumbled up and wiry even for his liking, an endless cacophony of thoughts and ideas that needed to be silenced with a pair of firm hands, a gravelly voice, and a cock that Sami was all too happy to be reacquainted with.

It was the sight of Roman, reduced to a mess of begging and pleading under Hunter’s hands, that dragged Sami down to a place in his mind where he could begin to understand the appeal of it all. Every smack of Hunter’s hand on Roman’s skin sent a jolt down Sami’s own body as if he was the one who’d been struck, and he could only watch dry-mouthed as Hunter heaved Roman off his lap and onto the bed, the Samoan naked and hard and dripping, and utterly pliant as Hunter maneuvered him into position and cuffed his hands to the headboard.

Then Sami’s own ordeal had begun, being told to strip of all his clothes, a flush rising to his cheeks as he realized how exposed he was, erection bobbing as he followed Hunter’s orders and climbed onto the mattress. His hands were trembling when he was given the red ballgag and told to put it on Roman, all the while Hunter was shuffling around behind him. Sami fastened the straps of the gag behind Roman’s head as tightly as he could while maintaining some measure of tenderness, not wanting to hurt and yet so utterly transfixed by the reaction it produced. Roman looked up at him, eyes glazed over and wet, accommodating the gag between his teeth with an ease that told Sami that this was hardly the first time Roman had worn it.

A part of Sami felt a twinge of sympathy for him, wanted to savor him and comfort him in a way, and yet another part of him just wanted to wreck Roman, wanted to take everything that was so easily offered up, the beautiful body that now lay helpless under him, almost at the mercy of his hands and mouth.
Almost.

Because it’s still Hunter calling the shots, after all.

A loud smack lands on Sami’s rump then, as if to punctuate his thoughts, and he cries out around Roman’s cock, unable to keep his teeth in check as they scrape lightly on Roman’s length. Roman mewls out in a mixture of pain and what Sami hopes to God is some kind of pleasure, hollowing his cheeks out and sucking gently as a gesture of apology.

“Don’t let him come, Sami…” Hunter mutters darkly against his ear. “None of you get to come before I say so.”

Sami just nods, holding Roman’s hips steady as he stills his mouth, as much as he can with Hunter fucking into him harder and harder. At times like these he sometimes envies Roman’s apparent ability to surrender himself so completely into the moment, forget everything else that exists and just lose himself in the obscene tableau they’re creating. Sami can’t quite do that, even in the midst of all this a part of him is always analyzing, always recording for posterity, always trying to anticipate what comes next.

Right now, he’s anticipating Hunter to strike again, and scratches a notch down his mental scoreboard when it happens, Hunter’s palm striking his ass with not as much viciousness as he’d dispensed on Roman, but still enough to sting. Sami just pushes back, digging his knees further into the lush bedding as he angles his ass up, loving the burn and friction of Hunter inside him, the swell of Roman inside his mouth, the sweat-slick skin of Roman’s thighs under his fingers.

“So fucking beautiful, both of you…” Hunter remarks fondly, as if commenting idly on a family photograph. “Think you could get away with teasing me, huh?”

Roman and Sami both make a noise from their throats—unintelligible, guttural, pleading. Hunter just chuckles darkly and leans down, licking a wet stripe up Sami’s back.

“Sami’s taking me so well, baby boy…” he says. “He feels real good around my cock, bet that mouth of his feels good around you, doesn’t it?”

Roman nods frantically, looking somewhere behind Sami’s shoulder where Sami suspects Hunter’s face is hovering. He makes a desperate noise from behind his gag, another beady trail of saliva
“Oh, don’t you worry about it… we’ve got all night and I’m just getting started,” Hunter says, leaning back and starting to pound into Sami really hard, the formerly brisk pace now downright brutal.

Sami can do nothing but wrap his lips tight around Roman and moan through it, his prostate hit over and over by the blunt head of Hunter’s cock, lifting his hips up to minimize friction between his own cock and the mattress, lest he shoot his load before Hunter commands it.

“Fuck, fuck…just like that, Red, just like that…”

Sami braces himself as Hunter thrusts two, three more times before holding himself still, fingers digging almost painfully into the skin of Sami’s hips, surely leaving their marks there. Even with the condom on Sami can still feel the white-hot pulses of Hunter coming inside him, the shockwaves they send down his body. Sami rides out the aftershocks quietly, giving swiping licks up Roman’s cock to get his mind off just how painfully hard he still is.

Hunter pulls out slowly, ripping the condom off and tossing it aside before pulling Sami off Roman’s cock and upright, until he has Sami’s back to his chest and twists his head around to kiss him, not caring or even enjoying the fact that Sami’s mouth is slick with Roman, his hand cupping lightly around Sami’s throat.

For awhile, Sami just indulges himself in the feeling of Hunter’s solid presence behind him, arms wrapped tightly around him, the searing heat of his kiss and the raw scratch of his beard against Sami’s chin. It’s been too long, too long since he’s been manhandled around and fucked so thoroughly the way only Hunter can, and a twisted part of him revels in the noises he can hear Roman making, the muffled protests and desperate mewls cutting through the air as Hunter continues to ravage Sami’s mouth, as if on purpose.

Hunter’s playing them both against each other, Sami knows this, and both he and Roman are loving every second of it.

Besides, Sami allows himself to think, Roman gets to feel this on a regular basis, if not quite every day—he can wait a little more for his turn.

*Told you I wasn’t innocent, Big Dog*...
Hunter reaches down and cradles Sami’s erection, jutting out from his nest of reddish curls, stroking lazily. “Got you all excited, didn’t I, Red? You still holding it for me?”

Sami nods, still unable to produce words despite his mouth being unoccupied.

“Good boy…” Hunter praises him, kissing the side of his neck. “Now, how do you wanna get off? You want my hands, or do you want to finish yourself off?”

“I…” Sami chokes out. “I want…”

Roman jangles the belt binding his wrists against the headboard to get their attention, mouthing something behind his gag, eyes dark and wild and huge. Sami takes one good look at him and feels a surge of something inside him, knows this is an opportunity he probably won’t get again.

“His mouth…” Sami says tentatively, craning his neck to look at Hunter. “I want his mouth,”

Roman’s shoulders sag in what Sami chooses to interpret as relief, while Hunter rewards him with a lopsided smirk. “Good choice, Sami…”

Sami’s head is enveloped a thick fog of lust as he crawls up Roman’s body until he’s kneeling astride his chest, scarcely able to believe what he’s about to do. Hunter’s lying next to Roman, clearing sweaty strands of hair from his face and kissing his forehead affectionately. “You hear that, baby boy? Sami wants to come in that sweet mouth of yours…you gonna be good for him?”

Roman nods, looking up at Sami who’s now hovering directly above him. Sami can see his own chest heaving with the sharp breaths he’s letting out, tugging at his cock slowly as Hunter’s hand works the gag out of Roman’s mouth and lets it hang under his chin, wet with spit and glistening.

“Fuck his mouth, Red…” Hunter says, a hand at the small of Sami’s back nudging him forward. Sami complies, acutely aware that he and Roman are no more than puppets on a string at this moment, pushing his cock into Roman’s waiting mouth in one swift move. At Hunter’s urging he starts moving, bracing his hands on the headboard as he fucks in and out of Roman’s mouth, the velvet heat enveloping him almost too much to bear. He’s had Roman’s mouth on him before but never like this, never with both of them so keyed up and Hunter pulling their strings, orchestrating every moment for his own viewing pleasure. Roman, bless him, just lies there and takes it, thick lips pouted to perfection around Sami’s length, eyes shut and hands dangling limply from his bindings.
“How’s that?” Hunter asks as he looks up from the pillow, one hand cupping the back of Roman’s neck.

“Fuck, he’s…he’s…” Sami struggles with the words. “Perfect…”

“You hear that, baby boy?” Hunter says, kissing Roman’s cheek with a tenderness that seems to be misplaced considering that he’s directing Sami to fuck Roman’s throat as hard as he can. “Sami thinks you’re perfect…”

Roman just mewls out something high-pitched and throaty, his lips tightening around Sami even more.

“Shit, shit…” Sami says, his fingernails scratching against the wallpaper.

“You gonna come, Sami?”

“Yeah….fuck!” Sami exclaims, his vision starting to gray out at the edges.

“Go on, come on…let Roman swallow all of it, he’s fucking hungry for you, come on…give it to him.” Hunter coaxes, and Sami can’t take it anymore. He shoots his load deep in Roman’s mouth, head resting against the wall as the convulsions take over his body, faintly registering the sensation of Roman sucking him dry. It’s too much, too much to take in at the same time, Sami’s nerve endings sparked like crosswires, trapped between the tight heat of Roman’s mouth and Hunter’s palm splayed against his back.

Sami opens his eyes and looks down to find Roman staring straight up at him, lips still wrapped tight around his cock, tears prickling the corners of his eyes. A bead of white escapes his lower lip and trickles down his chin, where Hunter’s index finger scoops it up and pushes it back into Roman’s mouth.

It’s all so very, very fucked up and yet it’s also the hottest thing Sami’s ever seen all his life, especially when Roman swallows around his length and lets Sami slip from his mouth, a messy trail of come painting his chin and splattering the dark strands of his beard.
“Mmm…such a mess you’re making, baby…” Hunter wipes his thumb across Roman’s chin and kisses him, lapping messily at the remnants of Sami’s release and that’s almost enough to get Sami hard again. He feels like he’s under some kind of spell, mesmerized by the grade-A pornographic images being played out before him and the heat of intimacy encircling the three of them, at how debauched Roman looks and how self-satisfied Hunter seems to be.

“D-daddy…” Roman mutters, and Sami’s spent dick twitches in response. Fuck, that’s still the hottest thing he’s ever heard in his life. “Daddy, please…”

“What’s that, baby?” Hunter says, trailing his fingers down Roman’s chest, spreading the mess of sweat and spit pooling there.

“He hasn’t come yet,” Sami supplies dumbly, moving to lie on Roman’s other side.

“Oh, that’s right…” Hunter says playfully, hand trailing down until he finds Roman’s hard cock, taking it in his palm and tugging lightly. “Do you think he’s deserved it, Red?”

Sami feels an odd rush of something—power, control, whatever it is that Hunter wields so effortlessly over them both. He can’t believe Hunter is sharing it with him—it feels at once like a privilege and an unbelievable burden.

“Yes…” he manages to choke out. “He’s done good…”

Hunter smiles and kisses Roman’s cheek again. “What do you say to that, baby boy?”

“T-thank you, Sami…” Roman lets out, panting heavily.

“Sami, why don’t you relax for a bit, yeah? I’ll take care of this…” Hunter says.

Sami nods, leaning back to watch as Hunter takes Roman’s cock in the firm grip of his left hand, stroking slowly at first. Then his right hand sneaks between Roman’s legs and searches under, and while Sami can’t quite see what he’s doing there it’s plain from Roman’s reaction that Hunter’s breached him with his fingers, causing Sami’s own well-used hole to twitch in sympathy.
Roman’s squirming, pulling against his binds as Hunter’s hands work him, biting his lip down hard until Hunter pries them open with his own mouth, swallowing down his moans in a wet, messy kiss that makes Sami’s throat run dry. It’s way too soon for him to get hard again but his body sure has a go at it, buoyed by the sights before him.

It doesn’t take long for Roman to come, his cock shooting in Hunter’s fist and sending messy spurts everywhere, staining his chest and stomach. Sami licks his lips involuntarily at the sight, listening to the long, drawn-out moans Roman’s letting out and Hunter’s murmurs of appreciation. Hunter reaches up and undoes the belt binding Roman’s wrists together, while Sami reaches behind Roman’s head to unfasten the strap of the gag. As soon as his hands are free Roman reaches, surprisingly enough, for Sami, pulling him down to share a kiss with him, lips trembling and tasting like an odd mix of relief and gratitude. Sami’s eyes catches sight of Hunter behind Roman’s shoulder, seeking silent permission, but the older man just smiles knowingly at them both, like a pleased teacher.

Hunter leaves the bed soon after, leaving Sami with Roman, holding each other’s sweat-soaked bodies on the damp bedding as they both come down from their shared high. Roman’s eyes look bloodshot and tired but he’s smiling, which delights Sami to no end, resting their sweaty heads against the pillowcase.

“Fuck, that was…” Sami manages to say. “…that was intense.”

Roman nods, rolling over to lie on his back, rubbing at his wrists. “He’s not done with us, you know…”

“Yes…” Sami says. “I know.”

Hunter returns with two bottles of mineral water and a pair of towels from the bathroom, draping one over each of them as he watches them drink. Sami chugs down a few good gulps but Roman just sips carefully, Hunter’s arm wrapped around his shoulder.

“You okay, baby?”

“Yeah, yeah…” Roman says. “Just…gimme a minute.”

“Take your time…” Hunter says, pressing a quiet kiss on Roman’s temple. “Take it easy, lie down for a bit…”
Sami watches intently as Hunter gently maneuvers Roman to lie flat on the bed, toweling him down to wipe off the mess of bodily fluids staining his body, stroking his hair and whispering words Sami can’t quite make out into Roman’s ear. They seem to put Roman at ease, his breathing evening out as he curls up and the soft blankets are pulled up to his shoulders. To Sami’s eyes it looks almost like Hunter’s tucking in a sleeping child, which is ridiculous considering what’s just transpired between them minutes ago, but then again maybe that’s part of the whole appeal.

Roman’s asleep before long, and Sami suddenly feels acutely aware of the sticky mess of his own body, the prickly sheen of sweat covering him from head to toe. He excuses himself to go to the bathroom, retreating from the bed as quietly as he can so as not to jostle Roman awake, and feels Hunter’s gaze following him every step of the way.

The Vegas night air is blowing cool and dry against Sami’s face, bringing with it the waft of noises coming from the Strip and the incessant pulses of garish-colored lights. He’s sitting out in the balcony with a can of Coke poured over a glass of ice cubes, knees pulled up to his chest on the deck-style chair. He’s not tired enough to fall asleep, he’s had a shower and a light snack, and Roman’s still napping quietly in the bedroom, so he figures he might as well get himself a bit of fresh air out here.

Hunter soon joins him, and Sami scoots over to make room for him on the deck chair, letting Hunter arrange himself before he pulls Sami close to lie against him, resting his head against Hunter’s bare chest.

“How you feelin’?”

I was just treated to a sex show between two of the hottest men I’ve ever known, and came so hard I almost blacked out.

“Fantastic…” Sami says. “Wish I got to do this more often…”

Hunter chuckles and runs his fingers through Sami’s hair. “Missed you, Red…”
“Yeah, maybe we should make this a pre-Wrestlemania ritual or something, so I’ll at least have something to look forward to every year.”

He didn’t mean to make it sound like a complaint, but his tone must have betrayed him. Hunter sighs and strokes down his back in response. “I’m sorry things aren’t quite working out for you yet…”

“Don’t be,” Sami says. “You said it yourself last year, it’s not up to you what happens to me once I get moved up.”

“Are you holding up okay, though? I know it gets tough when you put in so much work into it and don’t see things working out…”

Sami sighs heavily. “It’s harder some days… but what else am I gonna do? It’s what I love doing, so I’ll just keep on doing it.”

Hunter says nothing in response, just rakes gentle fingers down his back before nestling them in his hair again.

“Anyway, thanks for taking my mind off things for a bit…” Sami says.

“Oh, there’s plenty more where that came from, Red… just wait a bit,” Hunter says, a playful promise in his voice.

“You sure we haven’t worn Roman out yet?”

“Nah, he’s taken a whole lot more than this from me…” Hunter assures him. “He just needs a breather.”

“God, you’re so fucking lucky, you know that?” Sami can’t help himself from saying. “He’s… he’s unbelievable.”

“I know…” Hunter agrees. “Believe me, I know.”
“The way you two are…I’m surprised you’d even think of sharing him with someone else.”

Hunter tenses slightly, his hand stilling at the small of Sami’s back. “Yeah…that…didn’t always work out so well.”

Sami looks up. “How do you mean?”

Hunter shakes his head. “After the Royal Rumble, he wanted someone…a very specific someone, that is. Needed this person to…mess him up, target this very specific thing in his head that he needed after that night.”

Sami feels himself coil up in tension as he puts two and two together. “It was Orton, wasn’t it?”

“Yes…” Hunter nods.

“What happened?” Sami asks, dreading the answer.

“Randy got a bit…overzealous,” Hunter says uneasily.

“Fuck, did he hurt him?” Sami rises up off Hunter’s chest. “He did, didn’t he?”

Hunter’s expression was grim. “I didn’t realize it until it was over—Roman didn’t signal me anything, didn’t try to stop it.”


“If it were up to me, I’d have thrown him down a flight of stairs or run him over with my car or something…” Hunter says. “Unfortunately, the best I could do was book him a loss against John Cena and have him kneel to Bray Wyatt,”

Sami shudders, a cold sensation prickling the back of his neck. “That…that was you?”
“I try not to over-exercise it, but yeah…” Hunter nods. “Nobody else needed to know what it was for, but Randy does…and that’s enough for me. Also, he’s never getting near Roman again.”

“Oh, I sure hope not…” Sami says, feeling oddly angry. “Why’d…why’d you let me near him, then?”

“Oh, Sami…” Hunter’s expression brightens slightly. “You know Roman likes you. A lot. And I’m kind of fond of you as well in case you haven’t noticed…”

Sami feels a flush of color rising to his cheeks. “Thanks…”

“In any case, I trust you. We trust you. I know you’d never hurt Roman like that. And I kinda like the sight of the two of you together…”

Sami squirms a little, though not from discomfort. “Well, I…kinda like you pushing him and me around to do all kinds of things to each other…it’s oddly… liberating, in a way.”

“Yeah, that’s kind of the idea,” Hunter says. “You get to let go, Roman gets to let go, and I get to watch my boys play together…”

“So everybody wins,” Sami says.

“Everybody wins,” Hunter agrees. “How often can you say that?”

“Not often enough,” Sami says.

Hunter smiles and tips his chin up, kissing him slow and sweet, a sharp contrast to the wild, lustful puppet master of not two hours ago, and Sami finds himself melting a little, swayed by the easy affection and the warmth Hunter projects.

There’s always going to be a part of Sami that loves Hunter, adores him for everything that he’s done and everything he’s still trying to do, worships the very thought of him like the teenager glued to his
TV screen years ago, utterly transfixed by the sight of this man and the all-encompassing charisma he wields so effortlessly. Sami knows the danger of putting people on pedestals but even if Hunter’s mystique has rubbed off since he started working for the man it’s been replaced by a sincere bond of mentorship and guidance, a faith that Sami feels he hasn’t quite repaid.

He won’t ever occupy the same space in Hunter’s life that Roman does, Sami knows that for sure, but he’s grateful for what he does get, and the rarity of these encounters makes them all that sweeter. He gets to enjoy Hunter’s solid, uncomplicated presence, the wrap of strong arms around him cradling him like a baby, and having Roman be part of it feels like an added bonus.

“Sami…” Hunter whispers after a long silence. “There’s something else I wanna try tonight, something Roman’s been asking me for…”

“Hmm…what is it?”

Hunter leans in close to whisper in his ear, and Sami’s body jolts with a mixture of excitement and dread.

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Roman wakes to the low hum of conversation happening somewhere above his head, and a pair of mismatched hands stroking down his abdomen. He blinks, trying to bring his vision into focus and vaguely sees the outline of two dark shapes hovering above him, reaching out blindly to grasp at them.

“Sshh, baby…we got you,” Hunter’s voice says as he catches Roman’s hand in his, squeezing his fingers tight.

Roman curls towards the voice instinctively, seeking out the familiar warmth of Hunter’s body. “Daddy…”

“Right here, I’m right here…” Hunter soothes him. “You ready to play again, baby? Is that it?”
“Mmm-hmm,” Roman nods without thinking, Hunter’s voice lulling him into that sweet, comfortable hazy space in his head where all his other cares are stripped away.

“Sami, can you get him ready for me?”

Roman feels his hips being hitched up, a pillow slid underneath him and a pair of hands gently prying his legs open. He looks down and finds Sami there, smiling a little sheepishly up at him, and Roman smiles back, eyes fluttering slightly when he feels lube-slick fingers at his entrance.

“Let Sami open you up nicely, baby…that’s it…” Hunter coaxes his legs further apart, his other hand stroking gently through Roman’s hair.

“Daddy…” Roman rasps out. “Are we…are we—“

“Yes, we’re gonna do that thing you said you wanted to try,” Hunter says calmy. “Which is why you gotta let Sami prep you real good, okay?”

Roman nods, his legs falling open further, awash in the sensation of Sami’s fingers opening him up and Hunter’s soothing presence next to him, peppering his mouth with soft kisses.

Sami’s fingers aren’t as thick as Hunter’s but they’re longer, more nimble, and Roman soon finds himself rocking against them, trying to work them further into his hole, every jab against his sweet spot sending tremors down his body. Vaguely he hears Hunter instructing Sami to add another finger, and soon Roman’s stretched wide around three, a flare of pain shooting up his spine which he fights not to let show on his face. He wants to be good, wants to be good for Hunter, for Sami, they’re being so good to him, he wants to be good for them, do whatever pleases them, make them happy, make them keep touching him like this, like they want him more than anything else in the world.

“You wanna get Daddy ready with that mouth of yours?”

Roman nods, letting his lips fall open as Hunter pushes his half-hard dick between them, sliding in slow and easy, filling him up. He feels like he’s floating on a bed of fire, bookended by the twin sensations of Sami’s fingers fucking him open an Hunter fucking his mouth, both holes occupied and used like that’s all they’re ever meant for. He bucks his hips into the movement of Sami’s hand and tightens his lips around Hunter’s cock, eager and desperate in equal measure, needing something more, more, more.
“I think that’s enough, Sami…” he hears Hunter’s voice.

“You…you sure?”

“Yeah,” Hunter says as he pulls out of Roman’s mouth gently. “You need it bad, don’t you baby boy?”

“Please, Daddy…” Roman begs.

Hunter smiles down at him and resituates his body, lying flat on his back and beckoning Roman to get on top of him. Faintly he registers the feeling of Sami’s hands guiding him into position, and soon Roman’s sinking down on Hunter’s hot, hard length, his lube-slicked hole squelching wetly as he’s penetrated.

“That’s it, baby…you’re doin’ real good…” Hunter encourages him, hands firmly planted on Roman’s hips.

For awhile Roman just rides Hunter slowly, enjoying the way Hunter’s cock rocks up into him with every thrust, his own cock rubbing hard against his stomach. Hunter’s hands guide their pace, thumb rubbing circles into Roman’s pelvic bones in rhythm to his slow, methodical thrusts. Sami’s plastered against Roman’s back, breathing against his neck, dotting his shoulder with kisses.

“Push him down on me, Sami…slowly,” Hunter instructs, and Sami’s hand moves to the back of Roman’s neck, pushing him down until Roman’s head is resting on Hunter’s chest, both of Hunter’s arms coming up to envelop him, holding him in place.

“Fuck, that’s…” Sami makes a noise of awe from behind them and Roman’s cheeks heat up, aware of the sight they must be presenting, his hole stretched around Hunter’s length and bobbing up and down on it slowly.

“Yeah, you want in on this, Sami?” Hunter says as he strokes a hand down Roman’s face. “You want Sami to fuck you too, baby boy?”

“Yes…” Roman says. “Fuck, yes…please…”
Hunter smiles and kisses him, distracting him from the sound of a foil packet being torn open from somewhere behind him, and soon he feels Sami’s weight shift behind him, the head of a condom-wrapped cock poking tentatively at his entrance.

“Go slow, Sami…” Hunter says over Roman’s shoulder.

“Okay…”

Roman buries his head in Hunter’s chest and closes eyes, fighting to relax his muscles as Sami begins to push inside. For a few moments he thinks it’s impossible, that he can’t possibly take it, but then the head of Sami’s cock slips past the tight ring of muscle and all three of them cry out, Sami with a shocked gasp and Roman with a whimper that he muffles against Hunter’s skin.

It’s too much, the feel of both of them inside him, he’s stretched so wide and it hurts, it hurts but he wants it, wants to be overwhelmed by the feel of them, wants to get taken over completely until he can’t think, wants to forget that he exists for any other purpose than to be fucked open like this.

“Sami…” he gasps out. “Keep going."

“Do it, Sami…” Hunter says. “Go real slow.”

Sami has one hand on Roman’s hips and another at the back of Roman’s neck, pushing him further down against Hunter’s chest, breaching Roman inch by agonizing inch alongside Hunter’s already deep-seated length. Roman feels like he can’t fucking breathe, his hands fist the pillowcase on either side of Hunter’s head, tears starting to stream from his eyes. Then, almost unexpectedly, Sami bottoms out, the full length of his dick sheathed within Roman’s impossibly stretched hole, and Roman gasps in response.

“Fuck…fuck, Daddy…Sami…”

“Shhh….we’ve got you, baby boy….?” Hunter soothes him, kissing the side of his face. “You’re good…”

“Yeah…you’re amazing, Ro…” Sami says, and his voice sounds so earnest and in awe that Roman
can’t help but smile.

“Am…am I?” he asks shakily.

“Yeah, you are…” Hunter clears a strand of sweaty hair away from his face. “Fucking love you, you’re such a good boy, my precious baby…”

If he weren’t so deep in subspace and so completely fucked out, Roman would remark about how Hunter always seemed to choose the most unorthodox moments to declare his feelings, like when Roman’s nearly unconscious with two dicks inside of him, but as it is he just lets the words wash over him like a pleasant breeze, relishing the way they sink into his being like footprints in soft sand.

There’s not much vigorous fucking they can do with Roman being so completely full, but Sami can still rock into him gently, making Roman gasp and whimper with each thrust, letting himself get carried by the motions of the two men he’s currently trapped between. It’s not that the friction and burn itself is pleasurable, but the feeling of being completely at their mercy, the total loss of his own control over his body, is what keeps Roman floating in a haze of bliss.

“Sami…” he hears Hunter mutter shakily over his shoulder. “When you’re almost…you know, pull out before you come…”

“Okay…” Sami replies, and Roman sinks his head further into Hunter’s chest. Of course, of course, how could he forget, his ass belongs to Hunter, his everything belongs to Hunter, and only Hunter gets to come inside him from now on, condom or not.

Sami stays inside for a few more languid minutes, moving slow and gentle, until he withdraws with the same care and deliberateness as he had when he pushed in, cock sliding wetly out of Roman’s hole.

“You can come on his back…” Hunter says. “Go on…”

Sami takes up the invitation, Roman can hear the condom being peeled off, mere seconds before the first spurt his his back, Sami’s grunting noises accompanying them. He can’t see the look on Sami’s face but he can see the pleased expression on Hunter, which is enough for him.

Before Roman can adjust to the feeling he’s being moved again, pushed up and over until he finds
himself lying flat on his back, legs hitched up over Hunter’s shoulders, and Hunter starting to fuck him steadily. This is Roman’s favorite position, where he can feel the solid weight of Hunter pressed down on him, the firm grip of Hunter’s hands around his wrists letting him and whoever else watching know without a shadow of a doubt to whom Roman belonged.

“Damn, you’re still so tight, baby…” Hunter remarks playfully, even though his voice is fraying slightly, signaling his impending climax. “Your hole’s just made to be fucked, isn’t it—so sweet and tight, taking my cock so good, like you’re fucking made for it…”

Roman whimpers, eyes falling shut as he focuses on those words, the utter filth Hunter’s so good at verbalizing that never fails to pull Roman over the edge.

“Gonna come in you soon, gonna drench you in it, fill you right up until you can’t hold it in anymore, that’s what you like, isn’t it?”

“Yes, Daddy…” Roman gasps out with the last remnants of coherent thought. “Please…”

Hunter smiles down at him, nostrils flaring. “Yeah, keep begging for it, baby…love how you sound when you’re split open on my cock, like you can’t get enough of it—”

Roman comes, untouched, a sharp wailing cry wrenched from his throat which Hunter silences with a kiss, thrusting savagely several more times until he shoots his load, hot and wet inside Roman, hips pumping all the way through it. Roman feels like he’s drowning, wrists clenched tight in Hunter’s iron grip, breathing through a thick fog, Hunter’s tongue roving inside his mouth. He’s never felt better in his life.

Hunter retreats slowly, kissing a trail down his nose, his neck and his chest, pulling his cock out gently and replacing it with a single finger, smearing the spillover come around Roman’s hole and pushing some of it back inside. His other hand takes hold of Roman’s left ankle, rubbing the thick leather band enclosing it, toying with the pendant that bears his initials.

When Roman can breathe easily again, he finds himself maneuvered once more until his head is resting on a pair of fresh pillows, and Hunter’s spooned up behind him, an arm thrown lazily around his waist. In front of him lies Sami, looking tired and a little frayed but smiling from ear to ear, the lovable smartass, one hand reaching out to stroke Roman’s face.

“You okay, Ro?”
“Never been better…” Roman says, shuffling to press his back against Hunter’s chest.

“Stay, Sami…” Hunter says. “Go to sleep…”

Sami nods and lies his head down next to Roman, still with that dopey smile on his face as if he’s the one who’s just been fucked within an inch of his life.

“How’s that for a show, Sami?” Roman asks casually.

“I’ll take this over the Cirque du Soleil any day,” Sami says. “And that’s coming from a Canadian.”

Roman laughs and kicks Sami’s foot gently, the pendant around his ankle jingling with his movement.
Chapter Summary

It had all gone to script, for the most part, and Roman had done his job, whatever the repercussions may be, but he feels like he’s been hollowed out, the day’s noise and din and flashes of color echoing across an empty chamber inside of him.

“Remind me again, Seth…” Dean says, staring incredulously at the white-gold garment hanging from the hook outside the bathroom door. “Which Power Ranger are you meant to be?”

“Shut up, Ambrose…” Seth snarls from the couch, where his head is pillowed on Roman’s lap. “You’re not helping.”

Roman shoots Dean a warning look, which the other merely rolls his eyes at. “I’m just saying, not sure what the costume department is going for here, trying to make you look like the lovechild of Goldust and an 80s aerobics instructor…”

Seth promptly grabs one of the cushions on the couch and launches it at Dean, who dodges it casually.

“Dean…” Roman says. “Enough.”

Dean just shrugs and joins them on the couch, having just enough presence of mind to be gentle with Seth’s knee as he lifts both of Seth’s legs to rest on his lap. “Okay, Princess…no need to get your panties in a twist.”

“This is so fucking annoying,” Seth hisses under his breath, his voice even raspier than usual on account of the severe flu he’s still trying desperately to shake off. “My nose is still all clogged up, my head hurts—I’m lucky if I don’t hurl all over the canvas tomorrow.”
Roman just reaches over and fetches another tissue for Seth to wipe his nose with, petting his frizzy hair. “You’ll be fine…as soon as you walk out there, you’ll forget you’re even sick.”

“Yeah…” Seth sniffs weakly. “I hope so.”

It’s the night before Wrestlemania and all three ex-Shield members are holed up in Seth’s hotel room, each of them filled with the same nervous, keyed-up buzz that only being in each other’s company can distract them from. Seth’s a little lethargic due to this sickness but still antsy, going from lying down on the couch to pacing around the room to lying down again, while Dean has spent the last fifteen minutes alternating between sneaking a cigarette out on the balcony and making fun of Seth’s Wrestlemania gear.

Seth’s laptop is on the coffee table and they’re watching Takeover: Orlando with half-interest, all the buildup and hype surrounding the year’s busiest weekend rendering it little more than white noise. Roman has an arm draped over the back of the couch and the other hand tangled in Seth’s hair, trying to rake through the messy, fever-soaked knots.

“Prometheus…” Seth mutters out suddenly.

Roman looks down at him. “What?”

“Prometheus,” Seth repeats, closing his eyes. “That’s what the costume ladies told me. Some Greek god who gave fire to humans, or some such. That’s the idea behind it.”

“He was a Titan, actually…” Roman supplies. “He challenged Zeus and stole fire to give to humanity. Zeus got pissed off, had him chained to a rock as eternal punishment, where every day he’s pecked to death by an eagle but resurrected, only for the same punishment to repeat the following day.”

Dean snorts. “Nice one, college boy…”

Seth sighs heavily. “Well, that’s comforting…”

“Although, I think the symbolism is a bit off because I don’t remember Zeus being described as a leather biker daddy…” Roman says.
It was Seth’s turn to snort, holding a bunch of tissues against his nose. “Says the man who’s been riding that biker daddy for the last three years…”

Roman feels a slight flush rise to his cheeks, while Dean noticeably squirms a little in his seat. “Well, the man’s gotta think of some kind of entrance for every Wrestlemania, so I guess this year the biker card came up…”

“Probably just wants the transportation so he doesn’t have to walk his old ass all the way down that stupid ramp,” Dean says derisively.

They share a good-natured chuckle at that, and Roman looks down at Seth. “How’s your prep? Everything okay?”

“Yeah, we ran through the spots several times, spoke about it on the phone—he’s just too busy to rehearse the full match with me,” Seth says. “So much going on…”

“Yeah, crazy week…” Roman says, pinching the bridge of his nose. The days leading up to Wrestlemania always left him in a bit of a state, tired yet unable to sleep, a strange buzz under his skin that he can’t quite shake off, swallowed up by all the cacophony and organized chaos happening all around him. He still doesn’t understand how someone like Hunter does it—managing NXT’s events, making nice with sponsors, doing interviews, all the while still having to get himself ready for a match.

Dean’s phone rings, and he fishes it out of his jeans pocket to answer it. “Hello? Yeah, babe…I’m just up here with the two knuckleheads, talking shit and taking care of the sick princess…”

Seth kicks at Dean weakly, but Dean just smiles and gets off the couch, carefully re-arranging Seth’s legs on the couch before continuing his conversation with Renee out on the balcony.

“Ro…” Seth says. “I never…I mean, we never talked about last year.”

Roman stills the movement of his fingers in Seth’s hair. “I don’t know if there’s much to talk about, Seth—we all saw how it played out.”
“Yeah, but…” Seth pauses to sniff. “Did you really, like, not talk to Hunter for months? Outside of work?”

“Actually…I stopped seeing him after the Rumble,” Roman says. “Apart from meetings and going over who’s gonna be punching whose lights out on a given night.”

“I saw him a couple nights before Wrestlemania last year—I didn’t really wanna be there, with my knee being fucked and not being able to take part, and I gotta say he looked worse than I did.”

Roman shrugs. “Shoulda seen me…I didn’t even know where my head was at that week, I was convinced they’d torch the place down the minute I pinned him.”

Seth rises, lifting his head off Roman’s lap to sit upright on the couch, his nose red and eyes bloodshot from lack of sleep and anxiety. “I feel weird, man…”

“How do you mean?”

“Weird, like…for the last few weeks we’ve been staring each other down, Hunter and I, spitting out all this stuff about how he took everything from me, twisted me, used me up and spat me out…”

“Yeah, the writers gave you some pretty good shit to throw at him,” Roman says. “I just gotta keep repeating this ‘yard’ thing over and over,”

“He does this thing—Hunter, I mean…where he can look right through you, just reach in and grab at whatever part of you is weak or insecure, and just…” Seth throws his hands up. “…for a moment, I really believed that I was that guy three years ago who took up a steel chair, betrayed my brothers, and signed my soul over to the Devil himself.”

Roman reaches over to fetch the whole box of tissues and sets it on Seth’s lap. “Yeah, he’s good at that…makes for good television, don’t you think?”

“Was it like this…for you?”

Roman shakes his head. “Not quite. I had a belt. He took it. I wanted the belt back. It wasn’t…well,
they tried to make it personal but we never got that deep…least not in the storyline.”

Seth throws a wad of used tissue away, narrowly missing the wastebasket in the corner. “They were using him as a hurdle…for you. That one last obstacle to get you to the top.”

Roman laughs bitterly. “Yeah, that was the idea…not that anyone bought it,”

Seth falls silent for a long moment, pulling his knees up to his chest. Roman takes in the sight of him, the normally proud stance now turned inward, his shoulders hunched and dark eyes deep with unspoken thoughts. Roman knows that look—he saw it often enough in the mirror while he was preparing for his own Wrestlemania match last year. He knows they’re coming from totally different places—Seth’s arc is all about redemption, both in character and in reality because of his long absence, while Roman’s whole deal was having to engage in a bitter feud with the last person on this Earth he wanted to trade blows with.

Seth’s grievances with Hunter are public, they’re part of the overall story. Roman and Hunter had to make the most of a storyline demanding them to project absolute hatred towards each other while trying to not let their actual feelings slip through the cracks. It often did, in brief flashes in Hunter’s eyes when he’s banging Roman’s head into the mat, the quiet whisper of I’m sorry spoken through a curtain of fake blood that matted Roman’s hair against the announcer’s table, the absolute disgust in Hunter’s face whenever the crowd cheered him for beating Roman to a pulp, the look that passed between them before Roman speared him that one final time last year.

Do it. Get it over with.

“Are you worried that he won’t be able to do the job?” Roman asks as gently as he can manage. “That he’ll fall short like he did last year with me?”

Seth exhales heavily, resting his forehead on his knees. “Yeah…”

“Did you try to talk to him about it?”

“Fuck, no! Why would I do that?” Seth says. “I’m not gonna rile up Hunter before our big match… shit’s intense enough as it is.”

Roman puts his hand on Seth’s knee, the good one, and squeezes gently. “I think you’ll both do just
fine. Gonna be a bit slow, probably, but that’s part of the story, right?”

Seth brushes back his hair, staring up at the ceiling. “They got, like, twenty billion spots where he’s going after my knee or something. I can’t even remember all of it…”

“Sledgehammer?”

Seth smirks. “Of course.”

“Something involving Steph?”

“Damn sure.”

Roman smiles. “Then you need to just go out there and sell the fuck out of everything—and I know you’re good at that.”

Seth offers him a weak smile in return. “Did you ever…did you ever talk about your match last year? Like, you’re both capable of having a good match, I don’t know what I was watching when I saw the two of you just slog it out for thirty minutes…”

The criticism isn’t new, but it still stings a little. Roman just shrugs, trying to shake off the memory of a night that he’d been happy to simply survive. Sure, he’d put on a brave face and lifted that belt up high and for a moment, it did feel like he was on top of the world, but as the adrenaline wore off he soon realized he hadn’t quite delivered a solid main event and if anything it only added to the argument that he was an overrated, hyped-up golden boy with no actual wrestling merit.

“I was tired…” he tells Seth. “He was tired. I hated every waking minute of that program, just trading blows every night until it came to the big one.”

“He must’ve hated doing that to you,” Seth muses thoughtfully. “He didn’t exactly say it to me when I saw him last year, but I could tell from the look on his face…”

Roman sighs deeply. “Well…that’s just how it went, I guess. I was glad to get it over with.”
Seth nods before he’s overcome by another coughing fit, hoarse and ugly-sounding, trying to stifle them with his hands as Roman rubs the back of his sweat-soaked t-shirt. Dean pokes his head from the balcony door, still on his phone, a look of concern on his face. Roman just waves him off and continues rubbing Seth’s back as he calms down.

“God fucking dammit…” Seth curses under his breath.

“You need to sleep…” Roman says.

“Right, as if any of us could ever get a good night’s sleep before the big one…” Seth mutters bitterly.

“If only Hunter were here with some of his magic chicken broth…” Roman says. “That’ll fix you right up.”

Seth just stares at him. “Really?”

“Yeah, he made some for me when I got sick last year…” Roman says. “Stinks up your breath like a motherfucker, but it works.”

Seth leans back against the couch, turning his head in Roman’s direction. “Dean told me…that you were with Hunter, the whole time you were suspended.”

Roman nods, waiting for him to continue.

“That’s…how were you even walking when you came back to us, man?”

Roman has to laugh at that. “Well, there were days when I couldn’t, but he eased off towards the end.”

Seth looks genuinely amused. “Still…thirty days, man…I don’t know if I can stand being with him that long, I could barely last a couple of nights back in the day...”
Roman doesn’t quite know how to respond to that, so he just shrugs it off.

“Can’t even imagine what you guys got up to for thirty days…”

“Eh, nothing like what you’re probably thinking—” Roman says. “We get up, get breakfast, he goes to work down at Full Sail, comes home with dinner, we eat, we fuck, we sleep. That’s pretty much it.”

Seth blinks at him. “Seriously?”

Roman stares at him, dumbfounded. “What?”

Seth laughs, like he’s just heard something profoundly funny. “You’re kidding, right? Next thing you’re gonna tell me that you do the dishes while he’s out, and he walks in from work and kisses you and asks you how your day was, like in some fucking sitcom…”

Roman just stays silent, chewing on his bottom lip as Seth waits for his response. Then he catches on, slowly, and his eyes go impossibly huge.

“Holy shit.”

“Whaddya want me to say, Seth?” Roman asks. “It is what it is.”

Seth’s expression is borderline comical right now, and Roman would laugh at him if he could. “When he told me he was going after you, I thought he just wanted to be the one who popped your cherry, Ro…like, one more notch in his bedpost or something.”

“I think that was the original idea,” Roman says.

“And now he’s gone all sweet on you? Being all nice and shit?”

“He can be nice, you know…” Roman says a little defensively.
“Oh, he could play nice when he wanted a piece of my ass, but he was never sweet with me…” Seth smiles toothily. “Looks like you got him whipped.”

Roman shakes his head. “Can we stop talking about this, please?”

Seth does his annoying little laugh, the bothersome little shit, his illness momentarily forgotten. “What else? Does he cuddle you in bed? Buy you nice little trinkets? Does he call you some lovey-dovey pet name or some shit?”

“Jesus fucking Christ…” Roman mutters under his breath and stands up. “Dean! He’s being an asshole again! Come back here and make fun of his costume some more!”

“On my way, Uce!” Dean’s voice calls out from the balcony.

Seth continues to laugh, lying his head back down on the space on the couch Roman’s just vacated, tissue box balanced precariously on his stomach.

“Get some rest, you little bastard…” Roman ruffles his hair a little roughly, before grabbing his phone and making his way towards the door, noticing on Seth’s laptop that Takeover: Orlando has just gone off the air.

—

Roman waits about half an hour or so, enough time in his estimation for Hunter to conclude his post-show talks to the NXT roster, conduct some interviews, and so on. Then he dials Hunter’s number and sits on his bed in his own room, waiting for the older man to pick up.

“Hey, baby…” the gravelly voice greets him from the other end. “Did you watch the show?”

“Not really,” Roman says a little apologetically. “We had it on in Seth’s room but we weren’t really watching…too distracted.”
“How’s Seth doing?”

“Still sick,” Roman says. “Still being an annoying little shit.”

Hunter laughs, but his voice is thin and worn out.

“You sound tired…” Roman says.

“Yeah, it’s been a long day.”

“Are you coming back now?”

“No, I can’t…” Hunter sighs. “I gotta get to the stadium. There was a last-minute snafu with the logistics, one of the rigging trucks got held up on the way, so they’re only installing the last bits of staging now…”

“Jesus…” Roman mutters. “Can’t they do it without you? Or have you check it in the morning? You’ve been working all day already.”

“I know…” Hunter says. “But I gotta make sure they get it right, tomorrow might be too late to change things around.”

Roman rubs his face in his free hand. He hasn’t slept well for days now, too on edge and teetering between nerves and excitement. His last hope of getting at least one good night of rest before Wrestlemania requires Hunter being present, and now it seems that’s not going to happen.

“When…when will you be finished?”

“I don’t know,” Hunter says, sounding equally resigned. “Wish I could tell you.”

“I…okay,” Roman sighs. He doesn’t like the sound of his own voice when he’s on the verge of whining, telling himself that he’s a grown-ass man who should be able to manage on his own without Hunter.
“Listen…call me crazy or whatever, but why don’t you grab your gear, all your stuff, and come down here and join me?”

Roman perks up a little at the suggestion. “Really? But you said you’re gonna be working…”

“Mostly I’ll be directing traffic,” Hunter says. “Stash your gear in my dressing room, we’ll spend the night here, so no rushing tomorrow morning.”

Roman’s already up, glancing around the room and making a mental checklist of all the stuff he needs to bring. “Okay, I’ll be down there in…twenty minutes.”

“You remember where my dressing room is located?”

“Yes,” Roman says. “We walked past it during rehearsals yesterday.”

“Alright, I’ll see you there.”

—

The long corridors of the Camping World Stadium are eerily quiet, which takes Roman a little by surprise. He can hear the echo of human voices and the clattering of rigging and machinery somewhere, and he concludes that the bulk of activity must be happening in a different part of the stadium. The backstage area is cordoned off by black curtains and guarded by a few WWE security people, who recognize him and wave him in with only a cursory check, not even asking him what he’s doing there so late at night.

Roman wheels the suitcase containing his gear down the empty halls, eyeing the dressing room doors with printed names on them, every thud of his footstep on the concrete floor seeming to reverberate through his body. It’s stronger here than it was back at the hotel, the buzzing under his skin, the tiny pinpricks of excitement mixed with dread and nerves that he always gets before Wrestlemania. He’ll be fine once he’s in gorilla, listening for his cue, but right now his stomach does a flip everytime he thinks about what he’s going to do tomorrow, so he tries to push it as far away from his mind as possible.
He opens the door to Hunter’s dressing room, finding it dimly lit by the single lamp on the desk. All of Hunter’s dressing rooms are converted into mini-offices wherever they go, given his position in the company and the constant need to take care of other parts of the business even when Hunter is actively wrestling. Roman wheels his suitcase in as quietly as he can manage before clicking the door shut behind him.

Hunter’s napping on the couch, his shoes off and his tie and jacket chucked haphazardly on the floor, his shirt unbuttoned to his stomach and his hands cushioned behind his head. Roman smiles, setting his backpack on the floor and kicking off his own shoes before slowly, carefully planting his knees on the couch. There’s nowhere near enough room for the both of them to lie side-by-side on it, so he just gently lowers himself on top of Hunter, little by little resting his weight on him, until Hunter shifts and his eyes open.

“Well…” he says, reaching up to stroke Roman’s face. “Aren’t you a sight for sore eyes…”

Roman smiles, nuzzling into Hunter’s palm. “Thought you’d be out and about somewhere…”

“They’re still setting up some light rigs, they’ll call me when they’re ready to run the tests,” Hunter draws Roman further up his body, until their noses are touching. “Thought I’d catch a little nap, but this is even better…”

Roman kisses him, wetting Hunter’s chapped lips and letting himself sink a little further, Hunter’s arms clasp ing him across his back. “You’re working so damn hard…”

“Somebody’s gotta do it,” Hunter whispers against his mouth. “I’ll be fine…”

Roman nods and lets his head rest on Hunter’s shoulder, feeling his own muscles uncoil and relax a little. Hunter’s fingers are threading lazily through his hair, toying with the knot at the base of his neck.

“Seth’s worried about the match,” Roman mutters. “He won’t tell you, but he is.”

“I know,” Hunter says as he strokes his other hand down Roman’s back. “I haven’t had time to properly run through it with him, except for a few spots.”
“You’ve just been so busy, running around doing everything…” Roman says. “He’s afraid you’ll wear yourself out before tomorrow.”

“Hmmm…scared I’m gonna plod through it like I did with you last year, isn’t he?”

Roman winces a little. “Yeah…”

“Well, tell him he’s got nothing to worry about…” Hunter lifts Roman’s face up to look him in the eyes. “…because unlike with you, I’ve got no problems heeling it up and kicking the living shit out of him,”

Roman laughs, the sound of it echoing loudly in the otherwise silent room, a laugh Hunter shares with him, the lopsided smirk returning to his tired, deeply-lined face.

“I’ll make sure to let him know,” Roman says, before Hunter pulls him in to kiss him again. There’s nothing particularly heated about it, their lips moving slowly against each other, just the familiar wash of comfort that always puts Roman at ease.

“You wearing my little gift?” Hunter asks.

“Yeah…” Roman shakes his left leg a little, letting Hunter hear the jingling sound of the pendant hanging from his ankle. “I put it on before I left the hotel.”

Hunter’s smile widens, a spark of appreciation lighting in his otherwise tired-looking eyes. “I’m glad you’re here…” he whispers, thumb rubbing down Roman’s cheek.

“Me too…” Roman says as he kisses along Hunter’s bearded jaw. “Love you,”

“Love you too, baby boy…” Hunter says as he curls his fingers around Roman’s neck.

Roman lies his head back down, allowing himself to get lulled by the steady rhythm of Hunter’s heartbeat. They can’t quite sleep comfortably like this, Roman’s weight resting on top of Hunter on this narrow, squeaky couch, but he just relishes the feeling of being there, with Hunter, here in the bowels of the stadium where they’re about to put on their biggest show of the year.
They won’t get to do this tomorrow—Roman will be deep in his own head, in his own pre-match routine, and Hunter will likewise have his own matters to take care of. Tomorrow the place will be a hornet’s nest of activity, everyone hyped up and aching to go, every performer up and down the card crowding the hallways alongside the Hall of Famers, the legends, the trainers, the production crew, the makeup ladies chasing after people with curling irons while runners shout into earpieces and security people stand aloof every few feet.

For now, it’s just the two of them behind the safety of a locked door, and Roman breathes easily for the first time in a week.

—

It’s a quarter past midnight when Hunter’s phone finally rings, some technician informing him that they’re ready to start running the tests. Roman follows Hunter out of the dressing room, rubbing at his sleepy eyes, hoodie pulled over his head as they ascend up to the nosebleed levels of the stadium, where Hunter can observe the full breadth of the stage and the myriad of rigging and lights that they’ve installed. Roman’s already seen the stage during yesterday’s rehearsals, but the sight it presents at night is something else entirely. It’s probably their most elaborate, ostentatious setup yet, with the roller-coaster loops and the obscenely long entrance ramp.

Roman feels giddy like a child as he watches the lights play out across the stage in different colors, lighting the whole set up in washes of purple and blue one second, red and green the next. He’s sitting on one of the seats while Hunter hangs back a little and talks to a few techs, muttering something into his earpiece every now and then. Roman’s content to just sit there and watch, alternating between observing the flurry of human activity happening below and Hunter.

There’s something about the way Hunter carries himself when he’s working—just working, not grimacing or flexing for the cameras or tearing some poor babyface a new one in a cutthroat promo. He’s in his element, at ease and hands-on, describing things with his hands and signaling at the various crewmembers stationed around the stadium. Roman’s spent so long watching him between the ropes that he gets a real kick out of seeing Hunter like this, doing the things he seems so destined for.

Wrestler. Champion. Executive Vice President.

Creator. Destroyer. King.
Roman reaches down furtively to rub at the leather band around his ankle, concealed under the fabric of his sweatpants. It’s been around his ankle for ten months now, longer than all of Roman’s title reigns combined, and he wears it prouder than he’s ever worn any belt. He loves it, keeps it stored away safely whenever he can’t quite wear it in public, and sometimes puts it on before slipping into his wrestling boots, whenever he feels he needs that additional touchstone.

He’s already made up his mind that he won’t wear it tomorrow—he can’t, it has to be all him that takes on the might of the Undertaker and the public damning that will surely follow him afterwards, he’s not going to have any part of Hunter with him when he does it. That will be for later, when the crowds have gone home and the stage dismantled. Later, when he can retreat back into whatever safe space Hunter will find for them, where the noise and the blinding lights have no place, cannot penetrate.

“Everything seems to be running okay,” Hunter’s voice breaks his reverie. Roman looks up to find Hunter standing next to him, casting a wide glance across the stadium’s vast expanse. “Impressive, huh?”

“We just keep getting bigger every year…” Roman muses with admiration, leaning his head against Hunter’s hip. “It’s amazing.”

He feels Hunter’s hand gliding across his cheek before cupping his jaw lightly. “You like your entrance pyro?”

“Love it,” Roman says with a smile. “Not everyday I get to Superman-punch a row of fireworks into the sky…”

“Come on,” Hunter says. “We’re done here, let’s get what sleep we can…”

The walk back to the dressing room takes a while, Hunter pausing every few steps to talk to someone, a tech or a producer, none of whom seem to pay Roman any mind. They stop by gorilla and the production booth so Hunter can make sure all the monitors are functioning, then another stop at the medical room to grab an exercise mattress off a stack in the corner. Back in Hunter’s dressing room they throw the mattress down on the floor and arrange it as best they can, grabbing a few cushions off the couch as makeshift pillows.
It’s not quite a bed and they both barely fit into it, but Roman can’t complain. He sends a text to Seth and Dean, telling them not to look for him in the morning and that he’ll see them at the stadium, stifling a yawn as Hunter wraps an arm around his waist.

“So we’re doing this again, huh?” Hunter says with a hint of amusement in his voice as they lie there together.

“Yeah, at least I’m not an emotional wreck and losing my mind this time around…” Roman says.

“You held up so well,” Hunter says. “Not just on that night, but everything that came after…I’m so proud of you.”

Roman smiles, his hand resting across Hunter’s on his stomach. “Say that again to me after tomorrow…I’ll probably need it.”

Hunter kisses the side of his neck. “I will…”

—

The stadium’s only just beginning to fill out with people, a steady trickle of them being let through the gates a few hours before the pre-show kicks off. Roman’s still in his warmup clothes, watching the live feed from the monitor in the dressing room that shows a fixed-camera angle of the ring and the area surrounding it. He’s on last tonight—no need to start gearing up until the show proper starts, but most of his co-workers are already in various states of readiness, especially those taking part in the pre-show.

Seth is still shaking—more from nerves now than anything else, so much so that he can’t even seem to lace up his boots properly. Dean’s still got half a sandwich he picked off from catering shoved in his mouth when he finally has enough and bends down to kneel in front Seth, swatting his hands away. “Calm down, Princess, let me do this…”

Roman smiles a little at them. For all of Dean’s gruff, sometimes abrasive nature and Seth’s tendency to be an annoying brat, Dean still regards the little shit as their baby brother, crossfit muscles and post-injury bulk notwithstanding. Seth just sits there and lets Dean help him, being extra careful with his knee brace and squeezing him into the gold pants that was the source of so much ridicule last night.
“You sure you wanna do this now?” Dean grunts as he works the tight garment over Seth’s hips. “Your match is still hours away…”

“They’re new…” Seth mutters. “The tights, the boots, everything. I gotta stretch them out a bit, get used to the feel of them.”

“Well, at least I can say the gold really does make your ass look amazing, honey…” Dean can’t help but remark.

“Fuck you, my ass looks amazing in anything.” Seth snaps back, but there’s a hint of mirth there.

Roman chuckles, draping a towel around his neck. “You feelin’ better, Seth?”

“Yes…” Seth says as he tests the stretch of his new gear. “Nose cleared up this morning. Fever’s still there a little…”

“Won’t feel a thing by the time you step out,” Dean says, returning his attentions to his half-eaten sandwich. “Just don’t burn yourself with that torch.”

Seth adjusts the position of his knee pads, shifting from feet to feet to test his movement, before turning to look at Roman. “Prometheus, huh?”

“Yup,” Roman nods. “Maybe the story here’s that you’re meant to be breaking your own chains…”

“I’ll keep that in mind…” Seth says.

Roman’s about to say something else when the door to the dressing room swings open and lets in Sami Zayn, trailed closely by an almost breathless Sasha Banks.

“You guys…” Sasha gasps. “You’re not gonna believe this…”
Sami, only slightly more composed, is grinning from ear to ear. “We just saw the Hardy Boyz arriving.”

Dean spits out a bit of lettuce and Seth looks like he’s about ready to pass out.

—

“You know, every year I come and talk to you like this, I always wonder if it’s gonna be the last time…” Hunter says, rubbing his palms together. “I can’t believe it’s actually happening.”

The tall, black-clad figure seated in front of him just huffs quietly, leaning a little back in his chair. “Everything ends eventually.”

“I still remember that match we had a few years back…you and me inside the Cell with Shawn…that was one of our best, I think.”

“I agree,” the other man says with a thick drawl. “Can’t quite deliver on the same pace tonight, m’afraid…but I sure as hell will give them something to remember.”

Hunter sighs. “Look, this is gonna sound stupid coming from me, but…be careful, okay? Your wife will skin me and Vince alive if anything happens to you out there.”

“Oh, she’s already jumpin’ down my throat about taking this match, son…but she knows I gotta do it.”

Hunter nods quietly, glancing at his watch. They’re one hour into the pre-show, meaning he’ll need to take up his position in the production booth soon, before gearing up for his own match. “Well, I just wanted to say, Mark…thank you. For everything.”

The Undertaker gives him a rare, thin-lipped smile. “The years have made a gracious person out of you, after all…”
“Oh, I’m still a selfish asshole, make no mistake about it…” Hunter chuckles. “But why am I even telling you? You saw it all.”

“I sure did…” The Undertaker says as he cracks a few knuckles in his left hand. “You and your stupid antics backstage, all your scheming and plotting, all the strings you pulled…and then one day you woke up and realized you’re gonna be responsible for the future of this business someday, so off you went in your fancy suit and tie, putting all your pieces together…”

“You ever been to the Performance Center?”

“I have…” Taker says. “You done good.”

Hunter smiles. “Thanks…”

“I gotta ask you something, though…” Taker says as he leans a little forward. “That boy…Sika’s boy…”

“Roman? What about him?”

“Is he…one of yours?” Taker asks slowly.

“Yes,” Hunter says almost without thinking, but then he reconsiders his answer. “Well, actually…he’s my only one.”

Taker arches an eyebrow at him. “Is that so?”

“Yeah,” Hunter nods.

Taker leans back, his lips curled into a smirk. “Well I’ll be damned…you have changed.”

Hunter shrugs, trying to be nonchalant about it. “I’m just trying to do right by the business…and the
people I care about.”

That earns him a hearty, gruff chuckle from the Undertaker. “Whatever you say, son…don’t forget I seen you back in the days, sticking your dick in anything pretty with a pulse…”

Hunter has to smile at that. “Like you said, everything ends eventually…”

“Ain’t that right,” Taker nods slowly, staring at their reflection in the dressing room mirror. “Well, I’ll be sure not to bang up your precious little doll too much, then.”

—

Hours later, long after the last trail of smoke from the fireworks have faded from the Orlando night sky, Roman finds himself with Seth again, this time in Roman’s hotel room, nestled comfortably together on the king-size bed. Seth’s right knee is tightly braced and cushioned—more as a precaution than anything else, since the trainers noticed some swelling after his match.

Dean stopped by earlier to bring some ice for Seth’s knee before he had to go back down to the afterparty. Roman and Seth had been excused from attending—Seth on account of his knee and Roman because he was due to ‘lay low’ after retiring the Undertaker, to keep some kind of mystique around the whole momentous occasion. Dean seemed like he wanted nothing more than to just laze around in the room and chill out with them, but as a titleholder he had to be present, so he left with a promise to bring up some food for Seth and some vodka for Roman later.

“You know what…” Seth mutters lazily against Roman’s chest. “I don’t remember most of it.”

“That’s not new,” Roman assures him.

“Yeah, but…I still remember my match with Randy from two years ago clear as day,” Seth says. “That curbstomp into RKO that we spent so long rehearsing, how pissing hot it was, running in and cashing in on you and Brock…everything.”
“What do you remember about this one?”

“Just…getting hit by that wall of noise when I walked out. The sledgehammer. The leglock. Steph going through the table. I don’t even remember the pinfall.”

“It’ll come back to you,” Roman says. “Bit by bit.”

Seth rubs his fingers over his eyes. “Was it any good? I don’t even know…”

“Wish I could tell you…but I wasn’t exactly watching.”

“I know…”

Roman stares up at the patterns in the ceiling, still feeling strangely adrift and detached even with the anchor of Seth’s presence next to him, the ache plaguing every joint in his body hardly registering in his mind. He doesn’t quite know how to process this strange non-feeling, the muffling numbness that settled over his being the minute he raised his fists over his head and the fireworks exploded behind him. It had all gone to script, for the most part, and Roman had done his job, whatever the repercussions may be, but he feels like he’s been hollowed out, the day’s noise and din and flashes of color echoing across an empty chamber inside of him.

“You okay, Ro?” Seth asks, noticing his companion’s stony silence.

“I don’t know…” Roman says, truthfully. “It’s all…none of it’s sinking in yet.”

Seth looks at him, dark eyes tired and red-rimmed, a glimmer of sympathy within them. “Some night, huh? We both win, and yet here we are, two miserable fucks…”

Roman manages a little “Hmpff…” noise and pats Seth’s shoulder.

Roman’s phone buzzes on the bedside table, and he retrieves it one-handed without disentangling himself from Seth. It’s a text message from Hunter.
Roman types back, *My room. With Seth.*

He waits as the three dots that signify the person on the other side is typing manifest into words.

*Ask him if it’s okay for me to come up.*

Roman turns to Seth. “You okay if Hunter comes up here to see us?”

Seth seems to consider this for a few moments, before nodding his head slowly.

“You sure? It’s okay if you’re not ready to see him again just yet…”

“S’fine…” Seth says. “It’s over. It’s done. Just…tell him to bring more ice.”

Roman smiles and types in his reply to Hunter, setting his phone back down on the bedside table before flopping back onto the mattress next to Seth.

“One of us has to get up and let him in when he gets here…” Seth mutters sleepily.

“Nah, I gave him my other keycard,” Roman says. “He can let himself in.”

It takes around ten minutes before the scanner by the door beeps, followed by the sound of the door being opened. Hunter steps into view at the foot of the bed, carrying a bunch of icepacks in one hand. He’s still in his suit but no tie, a minuscule cut on his forehead serving as reminder of the hell he and Seth had put each other through just hours before.

“Hey, little prince…” Hunter says as he moves to sit at the edge of the bed, close to Seth. “Got you some more ice for the swelling…”
“Thanks…” Seth says weakly.

Roman watches as Hunter replaces the icepack resting on Seth’s knee, holding it in place. It’s hard to believe that a few hours ago he was doing his best trying to destroy that same knee, with all the viciousness his character is capable of. Seth seems equally transfixed by the dichotomy, eyes following every move of Hunter’s hands.

“You fucking scared me on that sunset flip…” Hunter says finally. “I thought you’d hurt your knee again for real,”

Seth quirks a little smile. “I sell that shit good…”

Hunter smiles in return, the lines around his eyes even deeper than they were last night. Roman can tell he’s tired, beyond just his normal wear and tear and the balancing act of his on-screen and backstage roles. He looks significantly older than the man Roman beat for the title in Dallas, though only a year has passed since.

“Is… is Mommy okay?” Seth asks.

“Mommy’s been through a lot worse than being put through a table, Seth…” Hunter assures him. “She’s fine.”

Seth sighs, leaning his head back against Roman’s chest. “I think my fever’s coming back…”

“I don’t think it ever left, you just didn’t feel it while you were out there…” Roman says.

“Make sure you hit the fluids before RAW tomorrow,” Hunter says. “You’ll be on last, with Finn.”

“Okay…” Seth says. “You sure Finn’s cool teaming up with me?”

Hunter nods. “He told me he’s so glad to be back he’ll team up with Gillberg if that’s what the bookers give him…”
Seth manages a weak, little laugh. He reaches for Hunter’s hand, grasping it tight, their knuckles still indented from being taped up.

“Thank you…” Seth whispers, his voice breaking.

Hunter’s expression softens, his other hand coming up to pat lightly against Seth’s cheek. “You did good, little prince…”

Seth makes a pleased little noise in his throat, withdrawing his hand from Hunter’s. The older man stands, and for a second Roman thinks he’s about to leave, but Hunter merely pads over to the other side of the bed, Roman’s side, sitting himself down again.

“How about you? Everything okay?”

It’s the first time they’ve looked at each other since this morning. Roman’s throat is parched dry, there’s something clawing at his chest to get to the surface but it’s too faint, the walls he’s built around him to brave tonight’s onslaught still too firmly in place.

“Numb,” he manages to say. “I don’t feel a damn thing…”

There’s a flash of concern in Hunter’s eyes. “You good for tomorrow?”

Roman nods slowly. “It’s only five words, right?”

“Yeah, even he can’t fuck it up if it’s only five words…” Seth mutters.

Roman cuffs him on the shoulder, while Hunter glares at him. “Be nice, Seth…”

Seth mumbles a half-hearted apology, but Roman isn’t really listening. Hunter’s eyes are still going over him, scanning, like he’s looking for a way to get through.

Finally, he leans in close, one hand reaching to curl his fingers around the back of Roman’s neck. “Tomorrow night, once you’re done with your promo… I’m taking you straight home, okay?”
Roman bites his lip, a swell of heat rising in his throat. He hasn’t been ‘home’ since he came back from his suspension, the roster’s schedule and Hunter’s business activities simply not affording them time to steal away even only for a night. But they’re in Orlando now, and the prospect of home—and all that comes with it—seems so tantalizingly close.

“Okay…” he says, a little choked.

Hunter smiles, and something loosens inside Roman, something that’s been wound up tight since he laced up his boots that afternoon. Then he’s being pulled in for a kiss, a slow and gentle one, the warmth from Hunter’s mouth radiating through his body. Only the soft gasp coming from Seth reminds him that they have an audience, but Hunter doesn’t seem to care.

“Hang in there,” he says against Roman’s bottom lip.

Roman nods, chasing after more contact even as Hunter withdraws. He kisses Roman once more on the forehead, then reaches over to ruffle Seth’s hair.

“See you boys at RAW tomorrow…”

Once Hunter leaves, Roman looks down at Seth, who’s staring at him with a mildly shocked expression. “What?” he asks.

“Jesus, I honestly thought you were kidding yesterday…” Seth laughs nervously.

“About what? About him being nice?”

“Fuck you, I think that went beyond just being ‘nice’, Ro…” Seth says. “He sure as hell never looked at me like that.”

“Probably ‘cause you were getting on his nerves most of the time,” Roman says.
Seth smiles into the pillow. “Yeah, that was kind of my thing… I egg him on until he snaps, he takes me down, puts me in a world of hurt, fucks me silly and then we say goodbye in the morning.”

“Sounds familiar…” Roman says, stifling a yawn with one hand.

“You must’ve given him something more than that…” Seth says.

Roman turns his head slightly, looking in his companion’s dark, inquiring eyes. “I gave him anything he wanted from me…” he says. “I still do.”

He wonders if Seth understands, if there’s enough in his words to explain what he’d rather not say. Seth says nothing, but there’s a glimmer of realization in his eyes, and he doesn’t push the subject any further. When Dean finally arrives with the promised food and booze he stole from the afterparty, Roman’s already thinking past tomorrow, repeating the word home inside his head in Hunter’s voice.

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Five words.

Probably his most effective work on the mic until that point in his career. Five words, nothing more.

“This is my yard now!”

It satisfies him, the deafening roar of boos that hits him like a wall of sound, buoying his steps as he makes his way up the ramp, making sure the cameras catch the smug little smile he has on his face. He knows how to play them now, how to ride on all that negativity and make it work for him. He’s never going to be their babyface darling, their lovable underdog, or the champion they want to see on top of the world. He’s Roman Reigns—take it or leave it.

Stepping back into gorilla, he receives a few pats on his back for a promo well done, the noise of the crowd still audible behind the black curtains. It’s like he’s just gone out there and wrestled a match,
even though all he did was hold the mic for ten minutes before uttering those five words.

Hunter’s seat in the production booth is already empty.

He’s waiting for Roman at the base of the stairs leading up to gorilla, no discernable expression on his face. Roman gets handed a towel and a bottle of water, then Hunter motions him to follow. He walks a few steps behind Hunter through the crowded corridors, exchanging little nods with other wrestlers and crew, one neon-lit passageway after another, until Hunter muscles open a side door leading to the parking lot.

“Get in,” Hunter gestures at his car. “Someone’ll bring your stuff later.”

Roman nods, buckling himself into the passenger seat while Hunter starts the ignition. It feels strange to still be in his ring gear, his hair soaking wet and the heat of the arena lights still on his skin, but he breathes a sigh of relief as the car speeds away, the arena’s marquee growing distant in the rear view mirror.

“I grabbed your phone and backpack during your segment—it’s in the backseat,” Hunter says. “You wanna let anybody know where you’ll be?”

Roman shakes his head. He just wants to be as far away from all the craziness as possible. Every inch of him aches, not just from last night but from all the buildup, the tension, the lack of sleep and the sheer effort of holding everything together.

When they get to the apartment and Hunter opens the door to let them both in, Roman steps inside a little hesitantly. He feels like an intruder, standing there in his ring gear, all strapped up like a fighter in black, muscles coiled with the promise of damage. None of it feels right against his skin anymore, especially here.

He makes his way slowly towards the bathroom, pausing only to glance at the neatly-made bed. Hunter clearly hasn’t been here for a while too, the place lacks his smell and the lived-in quality that Roman finds comforting. He stands before the bathroom counter and looks up, studying his own reflection in the large mirror.

There’s a cut on the bridge of his nose and reddish rims around his eyes, several visible bruises on his shoulders and arms. Roman starts to undo the straps and buckles of his vest, letting the heavily-padded garment fall to the floor. His gloves follow, the velcro making a horrid noise as he pulls it off,
joining the dark heap on the bathroom tiles. He has to bend over to unlace his boots, kicking them off before he starts to peel his pants off along with his underwear.

Finally, he’s standing there naked under the harsh glare of the bathroom lights, staring at his own body. He can see more bruises now, ones he didn’t notice this morning or were probably still taking shape, patches of purple-blue where his blood vessels have burst under his skin, reddish welts of impact across his torso, a scattering of minuscule cuts and scratches all the way down his arms. There are marks around his neck, imprints from the choke slams, and he knows his back must look like a train wreck, too.

When Hunter moves to stand behind him, still fully dressed, Roman can feel the warmth of him pressed against his back, the rustle of fabric against his naked skin. Hunter’s hands gently cup both of his shoulders, before skating down the length of his arms.

“You ready to let go now?” he whispers in Roman’s ear.

It starts slowly, in the base of his spine, but then he can’t stop it. He shakes, violently, to the tip of his fingers, to the nerve endings in his scalp. He barely registers Hunter’s arms coming around his waist to support him, of some of his weight being pulled back to rest against Hunter’s chest. The shaking is bad enough to buckle his knees, until he finds himself sitting on the cold tile floor, bracketed by Hunter’s knees, his own legs kicking and spasming intermittently.

“Sshh….I got you…”

Roman can’t speak, his tongue is a thick and heavy weight inside his mouth, and he grasps at Hunter’s hands where they’re locked around his waist, the rough and leathery knuckles rubbing like sandpaper against his palms. He just wants to feel again, having worked himself into this uncompromising numbness just to get through last night’s main event and tonight’s fallout, the unwelcome distinction of having been the one to retire one of the most beloved figures in sports entertainment. Whether Taker chose him, or Vince chose him, or fate chose him, it mattered little to Roman. It will be his cross to bear for the rest of his life.

He doesn’t cry—there’s nothing to cry about, nothing to shed tears over. He just breaks, little by little, the shaking of his body crumbling the facade he wears so comfortably whenever the cameras are on him. Hunter lets him work it through, holding him in place until the convulsions subside, until Roman’s breathing again, every exhale heavy and labored, echoing loudly in the bathroom.

Hunter kicks at the pile of Roman’s ring gear and boots, shoving them under the sink away from view. His arms loosen a little, and Roman can feel Hunter’s nose dragging along his right shoulder.
“One of these days…” Roman says, the words rolling difficultly off his tongue. “One of these days, I swear…I’m gonna walk away from a Wrestlemania without being a complete wreck…”

Hunter kisses him behind his right ear. “You’re okay. You’re home with me now.”

Roman swallows heavily. “How…how much time do we have?”

“The rest of the week,” Hunter says. “I’ve pushed back all my meetings, and you can re-join the roster before next Monday’s RAW. No house shows, no interviews, no events.”

“How’d…how’d you manage to pull that off?”

“Told creative and management that the guy who retired the Undertaker ought to keep a low profile for a bit…” Hunter says.

Roman breathes a heavy sigh. Other times, he probably would’ve objected to Hunter trying to move things around in his favor, but right now he just feels grateful. “Thanks…”

“Let’s get you showered and fed, and we’ll take it from there, okay?”

Roman nods, allowing himself to get pulled back up to a standing position, letting Hunter gently coax him into the shower booth. The spray of warm water hits him, lighting his body on fire as it washes across the cuts and bruises that are still raw and open. Hunter leaves him there, walking out of the bathroom quietly and closing the door behind him. He’s so accustomed to Roman’s strange moods now—the various states Roman’s mind goes into after big matches or Pay-Per-Views, the ones even Roman doesn’t understand.

Later, while they’re eating dinner that Roman’s forcing into his mouth more for sustenance than enjoyment, he finally speaks up.

“It didn’t feel like I actually accomplished anything…” he says, twirling his fork absently.
Hunter looks up at him, waiting for him to continue.

“Like, what was it all for, in the end? For him to go out in one last match? A match that’s not even gonna be remembered as one of his best?”

“He knew going in that he’s not the worker he used to be,” Hunter says. “He couldn’t have given you a five-star match even if he wanted to.”

Roman shrugs. “Do you…do you think I could’ve done more? Carried it better, somehow?”

“Not without risking injury to him or to both of you…” Hunter shakes his head. “You did what you could.”

“Yeah, I picked one hell of a night to suddenly turn into a botch monkey,” Roman rubs his eyes wearily. “I couldn’t even think—it was so humid, he was starting to breathe funny, I didn’t know how much further we could take it…”

“It is what it is,” Hunter says.

“What a way to end a Wrestlemania…” Roman mutters. “Not exactly a celebration,”

“It ended the way we always intended it to end,” Hunter assures him. “That finish was agreed upon months ago.”

“I don’t think I can watch it back. Not for now, anyway.”

“You won’t be the only one,” Hunter says. “Let’s put it behind us, move on to the next thing.”

Roman smiles bitterly. “The next thing…is for me to get thrown to Braun Strowman as his personal chew toy for a couple of months.”

“Vince wants to put him over—he can sense that Braun’s on the verge of something.”
“Destroying me should do the trick,” Roman says. “We’ll have a bit of fun, as long as he doesn’t drop me on my head or botch a powerslam like he almost did last month,”

“The minute he does that, I’m punching his lights out…” Hunter says, his tone grim.

“Hunter…”

“I mean it,” Hunter says. “Vince may be all about him right now, but if he starts injuring people—if he injures you, he can forget about his push.”

Roman chews his food and swallows, knowing there’s no arguing with Hunter at this point. He can feel the strange shift in the air between them, sliding into something more familiar, more grounding.

They don’t talk for the rest of the meal, and Roman retreats back into the bedroom, feeling slightly less like a stranger in his own skin as he sits at the edge of the mattress. Hunter follows about five minutes later, closing the door behind him.

“Where is it?” he asks.

“My backpack…front pocket. There’s a small pouch where I keep it,” Roman says.

Hunter goes to retrieve the item in question, and he returns with Roman’s anklet in his right hand, the silver pendant gleaming in the otherwise dim bedroom.

“Up…” he gestures at Roman, who shuffles himself onto the bed until he’s backed up against the headboard, his legs stretched in front of him.

Hunter takes his left leg and wraps the anklet around it, securing the clasps firmly, letting the pendant dangle where Roman can see it. Roman feels a quiet surge of something inside him, a lightness he hasn’t felt for days, and he can see the change in Hunter’s eyes, too. He’s crawling up the bed, eyes locked with Roman’s and full of intent, until his face is hovering above Roman’s, breathing heavily down onto him.
His hand takes hold of Roman’s jaw, firmly though not roughly, forcing Roman’s mouth slightly open.

“I talked to him before your match…” Hunter says. “The Undertaker. You know what he asked me?”

“W-what?”

“He asked me if you…are one of mine,” Hunter says, a playful little smirk toying at the edge of his lips. “One of mine,”

Roman’s breath hitches a little, unsure of how to process the information.

“Told him you most definitely are…” Hunter says as his fingers skate over the dry ridges of Roman’s lips. “that you’re the only one.”

Roman takes one of Hunter’s fingers between his lips, suckling on it slowly. He can feel Hunter’s words wrapping around him like tendrils, warm and thick with control.

“He said he was gonna try not to bang you up too badly, said he was gonna be careful with my ‘precious little doll’…”

Roman gasps around Hunter’s finger, the cloud in his mind thickening into a sweet, murky fog.

“So you see, baby? Even the mighty Undertaker knows…he’s not supposed to mess with my property.”

Something breaks inside Roman then, like a bursting dam, and he’s pulling Hunter down before he knows it, kissing him like it’s what’s keeping him alive. Hunter allows him this split-second of aggression before reasserting control, taking each of Roman’s wrists and pinning them down onto the pillow. He licks at the cut on Roman’s nose, causing Roman to flinch a little, before turning his attentions to getting rid of their clothes.

Once they’re both naked, Hunter goes after each bruise on Roman’s body, seemingly intent on
covering them with new ones. Roman lets him, biting his lip to stop himself whimpering when Hunter sucks fresh, deep bruises into his neck, marks up his collarbone, bites deep into his arms. He knows what Hunter’s plan is—make sure that the next time Roman looks in a mirror, the only bruises he’ll see will be those Hunter made. Not the Undertaker, not anybody else.

His body arches off the bed when Hunter pushes inside him, the long slow burn of it sending sparks up his spine. They’re both still aching from their matches, movements a little stiff and stilted, but Hunter’s mouth is as aggressive as ever, sucking the breath right out of Roman’s when he’s not busy marking up other parts of his body.

“Three years in a row, huh, baby?” Hunter says as he licks up Roman’s jaw. “Not bad for a needy little slut like you…”

Roman bares his neck, clenching around Hunter even more, letting his legs hang over either side of Hunter’s hips.

“Yeah, those fuckers can say how much they hate you…but it’s your pretty face that fills the seats, keeps ‘em coming back every week…” Hunter digs his fingers into Roman’s scalp, tangling in his hair and pulling. “Daddy’s beautiful boy…”

Roman makes a noise in his throat, somewhere between a moan and a pleased little giggle. He’s delirious with Hunter’s praise, wants to keep hearing them, wants Hunter to fuck them into his being until all he knows of himself is whatever Hunter tells him, nothing to do with what anybody else thinks or says of him.

“Who owns you, baby? Huh?” Hunter grunts into his skin. “Who gets to make a mess of you, fuck you up until you can’t even move?”

“You…” Roman manages to rasp out. “Only you…”

Hunter growls, his teeth latching onto the inked skin of Roman’s shoulder. Roman wails sharply, the mix of pain and the intense stimulation pulling him over the edge. Hunter picks up his own pace, fucking into Roman’s increasingly limp body until he’s spent, collapsing forward and thumping their foreheads together. It’s dirty and graceless, no finesse in it at all, and it’s just what Roman needs.

He’s still getting his breath back as Hunter moves around him, gathering him into an embrace and hitting the dimmer switch of the lights down to its lowest setting.
“Better?” Hunter asks, fingers skating down Roman’s ribs.

“Much…” Roman says, curling a little further into the older man’s body. “Could do with another dose before I have to hit the road again…”

Hunter chuckles. “Don’t you know by now you gotta be careful what you wish for with me?”

—

They spend the next two days pretty much in isolation, Hunter conducting all of his business from his home office while Roman lazes on the couch watching TV. They watch Wrestlemania 33 on the Network several times, though Hunter always stops the playback before it gets to Roman’s match against the Undertaker. Roman keeps repeating the moment when the Hardy Boyz are revealed, wanting to feel some of the giddiness he’d been too walled-off to experience firsthand when it actually happened.

“Shoulda seen the look on Seth’s face when he found out…” Roman says. “He nearly wet himself.”

“I’m just glad we managed to keep it under wraps,” Hunter says. “Hard to do in this day and age…”

They watch Seth’s match with Hunter, Roman finally being able to appreciate the little storytelling details and how the layout protected Hunter’s diminishing pace, focusing the attention on Seth’s knee.

“You look so mean…” Roman remarks, still amused by the contrast of what he’s seeing on screen with the man who’s currently got both arms around him, lying back on the couch with Roman’s head pillowed on his chest. “You always look mean, but you really took it up to another level here,”

“I’m good at being mean…” Hunter says, his fingers stroking absently through Roman’s hair. “You like that entrance?”

“Hmmm…” Roman murmurs appreciatively. “I’d love to get a ride on that bike if it doesn’t look so
“Yeah, that thing was a bitch to steer…” Hunter says. “I got a better idea, though…”

“Yeah?”

“One of these days, we ought to sneak into the warehouse…where they keep all the props from all the Pay-Per-Views from years past…”

Roman looks up, intrigued. “And…?”

Hunter tugs him up by his chin, his other hand moving down to fondle Roman’s ass. “I’m pretty sure they still got my throne from 2014…the one I came out on for my match with Bryan,”

“Oh yeah…I remember that one,” Roman smiles, liking where this is going.

“I wanna fuck you on it,” Hunter squeezes his ass shamelessly. “Wanna have you sitting on my dick while I’m sitting on that throne…make you feel like you’re really fucking the King…”

Roman grins, licking his lips. “Always with the best ideas…maybe I should sit on your dick now for a practice run?”

“While we’re watching my match?” Hunter smirks. “You’re starting to catch up with me on how kinky you get…”

It turns out that, rather strangely, watching some of Hunter’s old Mania matches is a great turn-on for Roman. They skip theirs, of course, but there’s plenty to choose from given Hunter’s long career. There’s a rush of satisfaction in seeing Hunter standing tall over Randy, for example, while the very same man is shoving his dick in Roman’s mouth, or watching him beat the crap out of Brock while he’s pounding Roman’s ass on the couch. Hunter’s lost more at Mania than he’s won, his most recent loss to Seth bringing his tally up to twelve, an impressive number considering how he’s often accused of not willing to lose to put other people over.

“This gonna happen every year? They trot you out to threaten some underdog babyface until he gets
to beat you at Mania?” he asks Hunter one night when they’re in bed.

Hunter shrugs. “Maybe? Though it’s getting past the point where I can pose a considerable threat anymore…at least in the ring. You young guys still have a lot of bumps left in you, but I got no choice but to play it a little safer…”

Roman contemplates this, feeling the ridges of Hunter’s abdomen under the sheets. He’s still in great shape for a man his age, but watching all those matches has made him realize just how much punishment Hunter’s taken over the years at Wrestlemania alone, not to mention the weekly shows and other Pay-Per-Views.

“I wonder who they’ll get to retire you…” he mutters. “I just hope it’s not me.”

Hunter sighs and draws him closer, kissing the bridge of his nose just above the cut. “We’ll cross that bridge when we get there, baby…don’t you worry about it now.”

—

It’s Thursday when Roman gets news that Dean—and the Intercontinental Title—is being moved to RAW. Hunter tells him not to read too much into it, that The Shield reunion hasn’t been discussed and isn’t likely to happen anytime soon, but Roman’s excited nonetheless—it puts a lot of possibilities in place that wasn’t there before, plus he’s missed having Dean on the road with him ever since the brand split. He talks to Dean on the phone about it, making arrangements to be road buddies again.

“I could get a rental and come get you…” Dean offers. “You’re still hanging around the Orlando area, right? Shacking up with the old man?”

“Yeah…” Roman says. “I’ll text you the address.”

“I’ll be there Sunday morning,” Dean says. “It’s a long-ass drive to New York, man…”
“You take the first leg, I’ll take second,” Roman says.

“Deal,” Dean says. “See you on Sunday then, Big Dog.”

When Sunday morning arrives, Roman has his bags ready by the door and he’s busying himself in the kitchen, while Hunter’s at his desk gathering some paperwork together before making a trip down to Full Sail for a meeting.

There’s a loud knock at the door and Roman goes to open it, finding Dean standing there in his week-old scruff and oversized sunglasses.

“Hi, I’m here to see a man about his yard…”


“Please, please tell me you’ve got coffee here somewhere…”

Roman jabs his thumb in the direction of the kitchen. “Just made some. Come in,”

Dean walks in, taking in his surroundings before nodding in Hunter’s direction. “Hey, Trips…”

“Dean…” Hunter acknowledges him a little stiffly. “Ready to get back on Team Red?”

“Red, Blue, whatever…” Dean shrugs, hands shoved in his jacket pockets. “Doesn’t matter to me. You suits keep signing my checks, I keep showing up to work.”

Roman sets a mug full of coffee down on the kitchen table in front of Dean to distract him. “Here…”

Dean takes a sip, and whistles appreciatively. “Oh, that’s what I’m talking about…hot damn…”

“Sit down, we’ll have breakfast before we go…” Roman says, plating up some scrambled eggs he’s
made. He's not much of a cook but neither he nor Dean are particularly picky about their food, as long as there's plenty of it. “Long drive ahead…”

Dean pushes his sunglasses up over his head and starts eating. “You look good…better, I mean. I remember a zombie from that night after Mania,”

Roman shrugs. “Needed to lay low for a bit, get my head together…”

“How ‘bout you, Trips?” Dean calls out to Hunter. “We gonna be graced by your menacing presence some more on RAW, or is it back to business as usual?”

Roman kicks Dean’s foot under the table, but Hunter seems utterly unbothered.

“Hate to disappoint you Ambrose, but business as usual it is…” Hunter says as he grabs his jacket off the back of the couch, then walks over towards Roman. “Baby, you seen that blue folder with the assessment forms that I was working on?”

“Check the bedroom,” Roman says, pointedly ignoring the way Dean nearly chokes on his mouthful of eggs. “Pretty sure you were reading it last night.”

“Right,” Hunter says as he disappears through the bedroom doorway.

“Shut up…” Roman warns Dean before he’s able to say anything. “Just shut up, okay?”

Hunter reappears a minute later, folder clutched in one hand. “Right…I’m heading out. You boys all set for the road?”

“Yeah…” Roman says.

“Drive safe,” Hunter says, leaning in to give a quick peck on the side of Roman’s head. “And call me when you reach New York.”

Dean holds his tongue for as long as it takes for Hunter to leave, but as soon as the door clicks shut
“Well…my brain can’t seem to decide whether that was mildly romantic or very, very disturbing…”

“Fuck you,” Roman says, though his words lack real venom. “You’re the one who wanted to pick me up here…”

“Hmmm…maybe that’s why he’s decided to stay off RAW—wouldn’t do for him to slip up and call you ‘baby’ during a promo, would it?”

“Dean, for fuck’s sake…”

“Alright, alright…” Dean holds his hands up. “Gotta give the man credit for his choice in coffeemakers.”

“Are you gonna spend the next ten hours on the road like this, teasing me about him?”

“Nope, I was thinking I’ll sing Johnny Cash for the first five hours, Justin Bieber for the next five…”

“I think I much prefer that, thanks…”

They finish breakfast and take Roman’s bags down to Dean’s rental, shoving them in the back alongside Dean’s luggage. Roman takes one last look at the apartment building, wondering when he’ll get his next break to spend here, knowing it could be months away. Slipping into the passenger seat next to Dean, he buckles himself in and readies himself for the long road ahead, rolling the windows down to feel the cool morning breeze.

Dean starts singing as soon as they hit the highway, and Roman pulls his sunglasses down over his eyes, the heat of the sun warm against his skin.
Chapter Summary

He makes a low, inhuman noise in his throat as his hands move up to cover his ears—as if that will help, as if it makes any kind of difference. It shouldn’t be bothering him this much—not after all this time, not after hearing it a million times over up and down the entire country, venue after venue full of people cheering for his destruction. He’s supposed to be stronger than this, strong enough to ignore them, to shake it off with no more than the proverbial ‘fuck you’ and carry on with his business.

Chapter Notes

Okay, so...way back in Chapter 6, the one covering the aftermath of Wrestlemania 31, I sprinkled a hint of infantilism alongside the angst and hurt/comfort that was the backbone of that chapter. Someone in the comments asked me if I would consider exploring this further, with Roman basically being pampered like a baby/little boy by his Daddy. I thought, 'why the hell not', and given what Roman's been through lately, I felt like I wanted to write a chapter just like that.

So heed the warnings, readers: This chapter contains bottle-feeding, mild ageplay, and a person regressing into a childlike mental state as a coping mechanism to external stress. I personally think it's relatively mild compared to other ageplay fics I've read (and loved), but still...it may not be everyone's cup of tea.

Also, this story is now officially part of the "Orbitverse" series, which will soon accommodate the outtakes that I've hinted at that don't quite fit into the main narrative of the main arc.

Onwards and upwards (or downwards into the gutter), we go.

It’s just another midnight drive down a nondescript stretch of highway between cities, the radio off and the only noise inside the car being the drone of the bland female voice from the GPS and Dean noisily munching through a bag of potato chips they picked up at the last gas station. Roman’s teetering on the brink of sleep, the lights of oncoming traffic painting soft yellow streaks between his half-cosed lids, arms folded across his chest.

They’re fresh off a house show with a pretty raucous crowd, the kind that leaves Roman buzzing for hours afterwards, driving towards the next city to do an episode of RAW. Roman’s due to take over driving duties at the next stop so he might as well get some shuteye, an endeavor that gets interrupted when his phone buzzes inside the pocket of his jeans. Retrieving it, he recognizes Hunter’s name on the notification screen, but the wording of the message puzzles him.
Which one do you like?

Roman thumbs open his messaging app, finding that Hunter’s sent him a few images in quick succession. He squints his eye at the screen, waiting for the images to load—and when they do, he feels a hot flush rising up to his cheeks.

He’s staring at a selection of feeding bottles. Actual, honest-to-God feeding bottles like those made for babies, though these seem to be adult-sized. They come in variations of squat hard plastic and taller, more malleable ones with pinched-in sides, rimmed in a multitude of colors from baby blue to bright neons, and even a bright pink one which he’s damn sure Hunter threw in there just for the heck of it.

He types in, -r u serious?

The reply comes in barely a minute later.

-I think it’s time we move on from using the protein shaker. You said the nozzle hurts your gums.

Roman shifts a little in his seat, hoping Dean doesn’t notice. He remembers saying those words to Hunter, more as an offhand remark than anything, something he never gave much thought to afterwards. Well, apparently Hunter has given it plenty of thought, because he carries on typing.

-Want my baby boy to enjoy his feeding time.

Roman bites down hard on his lower lip—he feels like he can almost hear those words in Hunter’s voice, echoing low and sultry inside his head. Heat prickles up his spine and he fights to suppress the shudder that’s threatening to ripple through him.

It’s not really a kink they visit all too often—not by choice, anyway. Sometimes Roman just needs it, physically wrecked after a match and so mentally exhausted by all the hype and hoopla that his sole coping mechanism is to retreat into himself even further than he normally does. If it happens when Hunter’s around, he’s always ready to ease Roman through it, knowing what to do and what to say. The few times Hunter’s not with him, they’ve had to resort to lengthy exchanges of text messages—Roman’s words short and clipped, Hunter’s full of endearing encouragements.

-I can find more if you don’t like any of these.
Roman scrolls up with slightly trembling fingers, studying the images again. There’s a tight coil in his gut just from looking at them, a heady mix of shame and heat, Dean sitting just inches away with his eyes on the road and his mouth still munching loudly. He can’t help but imagine himself drinking from them, tasting the rubber in his mouth, probably with Hunter holding one end of the bottle, his other arm propping up Roman’s back, face hovering just inches above Roman’s own as liquid sloshes inside his mouth. Warmth washes over him, pooling just below his belly, and Roman has to look away from the screen, blinking at the dull highway scenery passing outside the window.

-Baby?

He looks through the pictures again, willing himself to make some kind of decision, zooming in and out, unable to find one that sits comfortably in his mental picture. All the designs strike him as a little too clinical, too modern—utilitarian and sanitized rather than comforting. He can’t quite bring himself to type those words, though—merely thinking about the subject has already put him about halfway into that strange headspace, where everything can only be articulated in the simplest of terms. Hunter calling him ‘baby’ just thickens the misty haze inside his mind.

-too hard. too cold.

Roman hits send before he can second-guess himself, tongue suddenly heavy at the back of his throat. Resisting the urge to lift his legs up into the seat and curl in on himself, he waits nervously for Hunter’s reply.

-Let me find something nicer. Hold on.

Roman lets out the breath he’s been holding, smiling down at his screen. It shouldn’t surprise him anymore after all this time—the extent to which Hunter gets him, knows the twisting pathways of his oscillating mental states better than anyone.

“Ro, I swear to God if you’re sexting with your sugar daddy Imma turn this fucking car around,” Dean says suddenly from the driver’s seat.

Roman startles, but tries to look nonchalant. “What?”

“You’re squirming like a virgin on prom night there, Uce…” Dean clucks his tongue. “…don’t need rocket science to figure out who’s got you hot and bothered.”
“Fuck you,” Roman snaps back lazily. “And we’re not...sexting. He just wants my opinion on something,”

“Like what?” Dean asks, before his face scrunches into a tight grimace. “You know what? Forget it. I don’t want to know.”

Roman looks down at his phone again. “Yeah, you really don’t.”

Dean scowls, mumbling something that sounds like “Kinky motherfuckers” under his breath, and Roman has to smile a little. Unlike Seth, who’s pretty much shameless in his questioning, demanding to know all the salacious details—which Roman gracefully withholds just to piss him off, Dean teeters somewhere between acting uninterested and lapses of badly-concealed curiosity. The teasing’s still there, though tempered with the knowledge that Roman has more than enough to fire back and make him uncomfortable should he choose to.

Ten minutes pass before Roman’s phone lights up again, a single image accompanied by a short message.

-You’ll like this one.

The bottle is tall and straight, gently sloped at the top and bottom, with thin red strips as measuring units. The plastic rim around the teat is sky blue, while the rubber itself is golden-yellow, just how Roman remembers them being when he was a child. A flutter of warmth in his stomach tells him all he needs to know.

-Yes.

He can almost see the satisfied smile blooming on Hunter’s lips, hundreds of miles away.

-Okay, baby. I’ll get this one for you.

Roman doesn’t even bother to hide his own grin this time, taking a quick screencap of the image and settling back into his seat.
“Oh God, it better not be a collar…” Dean groans. “Please tell me he’s not getting you a collar.”

“I ain’t telling you shit,” Roman says as he pockets his phone. “Besides, I already got one…well, sort of.”

“Fuuuck…” Dean thumps his head against the steering wheel, and Roman’s grin lasts all the way until the next rest stop.

—

The subject matter is forgotten, for the most part, over the next few weeks as Roman continues his role of playing human punching bag to Vince McMahon’s latest pet project, Braun Strowman. The monster isn’t exactly the smoothest worker in the roster yet, but he’s getting better every week, and Roman’s less apprehensive about taking the bumps he’s meant to take from the behemoth each time they’re trotted out to face each other. Roman knows his body’s capacity to withstand punishment, doesn’t mind selling the fuck out of a beating if it furthers the story along. He’s built a tolerance for physical pain required to last in this business, and he’s willing to test it and take it up a few notches if necessary.

Still, getting your gut busted from above with steel ring steps is not a pleasant feeling, by any stretch of the imagination.

He’s sitting on the exam bench in the medical room as he contemplates this, an hour or so after Payback went off the air, the trainers giving him a thorough check. Every inch of him is aching, his mouth sticky with the residue of all the fake blood he’s coughed up for the cameras during the backstage segment. There’s the telltale iron tang of real blood mixed in with it somewhere, though he suspects it’s more from his split lips and battered nose than anywhere else. He doesn’t need a mirror to know that he looks like a trainwreck in an abattoir, as the trainers’ gloved hands check over him with clinical precision.

The trainers are good—they know his body quite well by now, where his old injuries and his surgery scars are located. Their touches are firm, methodical, and they don’t engage him in pointless conversation or small talk. Which is just as well because right now, the last thing he feels like doing is talking to another soul.
Roman closes his eyes. They’re phantom chants ringing in his head, echoing in the silence of his surroundings. He grits his teeth to will them to shut up, but they only seem to get louder the more he tries.

“You deserve it.”

Thank you Strowman.

“You deserve it.”

You deserve it.

“You deserve it.”

Thank you Strowman.

“You deserve it.”

“You deserve it.”

“Fuck them all…” is what Dean whispered in his ear as he helped Roman limp through the backstage area towards medical after the cameras were off. “Fuck them all, Ro…don’t listen to them.”

Roman’s not listening. He hasn’t listened, hasn’t cared for quite some time now. But he can’t stop hearing them.

“Are we done here?” a rough, familiar voice interrupts his thoughts.

Roman looks up and sees Hunter standing in the doorway of the medical room, his features a carefully-schooled mask of calm, even though Roman can see the tense coil of his muscles and the veins standing out at his temples.

“He’s fine…” the head trainer says. “Lots of bruising in the lower abdomen and the left shoulder, but nothing internal. We’ve been told to wrap him up for the next few weeks, but it’ll mostly be for
Roman can see Hunter’s shoulders sagging in relief, though his face remains impassive. “That’s good to know. Thanks, Doc.”

“I’ll give him some painkillers and some salve if he needs it,”

“No…” Roman says hoarsely from the exam bench, voice straining over the pain in his chest. “No drugs. I’ll take the salve.”

The trainer shrugs. “Okay, then.”

“Gentlemen…can you give me a moment with my talent?” Hunter asks.

“Sure…”

The trainers vacate the room quietly, and Hunter clicks the door shut and bolts the lock. Roman takes a deep breath, the very motion filling his ribs with pain.

Hunter moves until he’s standing right in front of Roman, their foreheads nearly touching. His hands raise up to rest on top of Roman’s knees, barely putting any weight on them. They’ve agreed a long time ago that this gesture marks their neutral ground, a blank slate from which they can proceed in whichever direction they choose. Roman doesn’t look up, feeling Hunter’s breath ghosting warmly across the roots of his hair, letting it wash over him.

He’s suddenly aware of how cold everything else feels—the room, the bench underneath him, the garish white neon lights, the chill creeping up the base of his spine. He shivers, hands gripping the edges of the bench until the leather squeaks.

You deserve it.

You deserve it.
Thank you Strowman

You deserve it.

He makes a low, inhuman noise in his throat as his hands move up to cover his ears—as if that will help, as if it makes any kind of difference. It shouldn’t be bothering him this much—not after all this time, not after hearing it a million times over up and down the entire country, venue after venue full of people cheering for his destruction. He’s supposed to be stronger than this, strong enough to ignore them, to shake it off with no more than the proverbial ‘fuck you’ and carry on with his business.

Hunter pries his hands from his ears gently, fingers closing over his wrists, tugging with only the slightest hint of force. “Look at me…” he says.

Roman looks up, vision going fuzzy with moisture collecting at the corners of his eyes, Hunter’s face a plane of furrowed lines and a grim mouth surrounded by his dark, coarse beard. A thick, calloused thumb rubs carefully along Roman’s bottom lip, mindful of the still-bleeding split and the soreness of his jaw. Roman takes it into his mouth without thinking, like it’s the most natural thing to do, throat convulsing as he sucks weakly on it, eyes never leaving Hunter’s.

“I think I know what you need…” Hunter says, his voice deep and calm. “You gonna let me take care of you?”

Roman nods, tongue heavy in his own mouth. He’s not much of a talker on his best days and times like these he tends to get completely non-verbal, not that Hunter needs to hear him say anything. Two strong arms wrap across his back and ease him off the bench gently, setting him down on wobbly legs. He rests most of his weight on Hunter for a good long moment as he tries to find his balance, nose filling up with the familiar scent of his older lover, of something that feels like safe.

The voices are more faint now—muffled by Hunter’s presence and the hands stroking down his bare, sweaty back. “Let’s get you out of here…” Hunter whispers against his ear and Roman nods again, hands fisted in the lapels of Hunter’s expensive suit. Hunter’s whispering again, though the words don’t register in Roman’s mind, only that they promise him relief and comfort and attention.

The next few minutes are a blur—Hunter finding his clothes and gear, coaxing him into a Tapout shirt and a hoodie, even zipping it up for him. Roman has his eyes downcast as he’s led through the mostly-deserted corridors, Hunter’s hand guiding him at the small of his back until they reach the parking lot. He’s gently maneuvered into the backseat, Hunter climbing after him while he directs his driver to take them back to the hotel. Then he feels himself get pulled down until his head is resting
on Hunter’s lap, a hand stroking his hair while the other is draped loosely over his torso. Roman exhales, the tension of his muscles easing for the first time in what feels like an eternity, eyes falling shut as fatigue overtakes him.

He doesn’t remember much of the ride back to the hotel, or the elevator journey up to the floor where Hunter’s suite is.

His next moment of lucidity comes in the spacious bathroom, with steam rising from the tub of hot water and Hunter easing him into it, one leg after the other. The water stings over the cuts in his skin but feels like heaven against his bruises, uncoiling the knots as he leans his head back, resting it against the rim of the tub. He lets out a long, heavy sigh, eyes fixed on the ceiling, barely registering the sound of Hunter shedding his own clothes before slowly, carefully getting into the tub with him.

Roman curls up the instant he’s pulled against Hunter’s chest, tucking his head under Hunter’s chin. It’s ridiculous, him being the size that he is and the tub barely large enough for the two of them, but he’s desperate to feel small, small enough to crawl within the protective confines of Hunter’s arms where the rest of the world can’t find him. He’s not completely under yet, still floating somewhere in an unanchored fugue, needing something else, something more cathartic to finally pull him beneath the surface.

“Poor baby…” Hunter said as he rubbed soothing circles into Roman’s wet scalp. “Had a rough night, didn’t you?”

Roman huffs out a small, wordless noise into Hunter’s collarbone.

“It’s okay…Daddy’s here…” he feels the soft press of lips against his forehead. “They can’t hurt you while Daddy’s here.,”

He twirls his fingers in Hunter’s beard a little, mouthing shaky breaths as the bathwater ebbs and ripples against his skin, silently asking for more.

“We’re gonna get you nice and cleaned up, put you in that nice warm bed out there…and then we can try that new bottle I bought for you,” Hunter says.

Roman blinks, a surge of lightness popping up in his chest. He melts a little bit more, a sound of contentment escaping his mouth, which prompts Hunter to smile at him.
“That’s right…Daddy’s gonna make it all better, okay?”

If he has anything more left in him Roman might just cry at this very moment, but he’s just exhausted, wrung dry and hurting all over his body. Hunter washes him up gently, emptying the entire bottle of complimentary hotel body wash into one palm and working it into a thick lather over him, mindful of the spots where he’s bruised the most. On other occasions, he’ll go so far as to wash Roman’s hair for him, fingers still practiced from days when he still had his own locks to tend to, teasing Roman every now and then about how particular he is about the conditioner he uses.

There’s no teasing now, just quiet and insistent touches that speak volumes. He’s being thorough but not indulgent, something Roman appreciates when he’s aching to move on to something else, something that will really put this God-awful night to rest and let him forget about it, even for a while. Hunter rinses them both off and drains the bath, reaching effortlessly for the pile of white towels on the rack just above the bathtub. He sits Roman at the edge of the tub while he dries him down, wrapping the towel around his shoulders when he sees that Roman is shivering slightly.

“You cold, baby?”

Roman nods a little, tugging the towel a little tighter over his shoulders.

“We’ll warm you up after this, don’t worry about it…” Hunter says as he pulls Roman to stand and guides him back out to the bedroom.

There’s really not much different about how they go about this when Roman’s in this kind of mood —no special attire, or toys, or terminology. It’s more about tending to whatever’s going on inside Roman’s head, and not the actual physical environment. The bottle’s about as advanced as they’ve gotten thus far, and Roman doesn’t think he needs much more than that, really. Hunter helps him to a clean pair of plain boxers and dries his hair some more with the towel, massaging his scalp gently as Roman’s eyes grow heavy-lidded and hazy.

“We’ll stay here a couple more nights…” Hunter says as he unravels a knot in Roman’s thick, damp hair. “You’re not scheduled for anything tomorrow, I’ve checked with the production office…”

Roman nods again, already half-asleep in the comforting lull of Hunter’s voice.

“Try to get some sleep, okay?” Hunter says as he guides Roman to lay flat on the bed, wrapping the blankets thickly and snugly around him. Roman tries to reach out for him, not wanting to be left
alone, but Hunter quietly shushes him. “It’s okay, baby…I won’t be far, I’ll just be right outside that
door.”

Roman makes a half-hearted noise of protest, but Hunter’s hands are threading through his hair,
willing him to close his eyes, and he’s asleep before he knows it.

It’s mercifully dreamless, nothing but the faint echo of distant crowds and the voice of ring
announcers—nothing distinct, nothing that pins him down to a place or time. He’s drifting through it,
anchored by the sound of Hunter’s voice coming from the living room through the door he’s left
open, a voice he’s fallen asleep to countless times before. Roman doesn’t know how long he sleeps
but he wakes to the sound of rustling near the bed, just enough to bring him back to consciousness.

“Hey, baby boy…” Hunter says as his weight causes the mattress to dip slightly. “You hungry yet?”

Roman opens his eyes, willing his sight to focus in the dim bedroom light. He instinctively crawls
closer to the warmth he can feel from Hunter’s body, as limited as his movements are in the thick
nest of blankets he’s been swaddled in. Hunter maneuvers him with practiced ease, grabbing a few
pillows to himself up against the headboard, letting Roman settle comfortably across his lap before
reaching over to the bedside table.

Seeing the bottle for the first time jostles something inside Roman, like the last remaining shred of
rationality trying to tell him how strange and wrong this all should feel, but Hunter’s got the rubber
tip pressed against his lips and all that resistance just melts away, Roman’s mouth opening just
enough to allow it inside.

“There you go…” Hunter says in a low whisper as Roman gives it a first, tentative suckle.

At first he’s struck by the warm, sweet fluid filling his mouth, not the grainy consistency of protein
shakes or anything else Hunter’s tried to feed him before. Then he recognizes the texture, the mild
vanilla taste and the faintest hint of honey—formula.

Hunter’s gone and bought him not just a baby bottle, but actual baby formula to feed him with it, and
Roman’s chest tightens instantly, a flood of unfamiliar though not unwelcome emotions rushing
through him. He’s suckling hard before he knows it, desperate for something, for the sweet comfort
of the milk and the hand of the man feeding it to him, for everything and anything Hunter.

“Go easy, baby…” Hunter warns him as he tilts the bottle back a little, slowing the flow of fluid into
Roman’s mouth, but Roman just keeps pawing at the bottle, wanting more of it, throat convulsing as he swallows.

Finally, they find a nice comfortable rhythm that agrees with both of them, Hunter rocking him gently as he drank and drank and drank, warmth filling him up, muscles loose and relaxed as he rests his weight against Hunter, coarse strands of beard tickling against his forehead. He might be bruised and battered worse than he’s ever been throughout his career, but for now Roman thinks he’s the luckiest boy in the world—his Daddy’s right there, big strong arms and warm hands and a deep, soothing voice telling him that everything’s going to be okay.

“That’s a good boy…” Hunter coos about halfway through the bottle. “You wanna finish the whole thing?” Roman nods enthusiastically, which causes Hunter to smile and lean down to kiss the bridge of his nose. “You’re such a good boy, baby….such a good boy for Daddy…”

Roman closes his eyes, aware of the moist heat at the corners of his eyes. That’s all he’s ever wanted, ever needed to be—a good boy for Hunter, a good boy who deserves all the kind praise and nice things his Daddy keeps doing for him, who’ll be kept safe and close for as long as he needs to be.

“Daddy loves you, you know that?”

Roman sucks hard around the bottle, a single tear finally rolling free of his eyes. He nods once in acknowledgement, hand closing over Hunter’s hand where it holds the bottle near the bottom, trying desperately to communicate some form of reciprocation.

“That’s right…you love Daddy too, don’t you?”

Roman makes a small noise of agreement at that, the bottle nearly finished, his stomach full and warm and the aches in his body momentarily forgotten. Hunter withdraws the bottle gently when it’s empty, a small trickle of it escaping the corner of Roman’s mouth which he leans down and kisses away. Roman turns his head slightly, wanting to kiss his Daddy in earnest, and is rewarded when Hunter closes his lips over Roman’s and holds him a little tighter. If Roman was melting before, he’s utterly boneless now, sated and safe, welcoming Hunter’s tongue in his mouth, chasing the remnants of milk.

Faintly, he registers that he’s at least half-hard, and Hunter’s own cock is pressing into him somewhere at the side of his waist, a calloused hand dipping just under the waist band of his boxers to stroke softly at his thigh.
“You feel good now, baby?” Hunter says against his mouth, Roman nodding his response. “Want Daddy to make it even better?”

Roman smiles at that, kissing the side of Hunter’s chin just above the line of his beard. Hunter rearranges their bodies until Roman’s lying flat on the bed, still wrapped in a thick mound of blankets as Hunter undresses himself and gets into the huddle with him. He seems perfectly content to take it slow, pulling Roman close to him and kissing him senseless as they lay on their sides facing each other, bodies lined flush in familiar intimacy. Roman’s world shrinks in an instant, as if nothing exists beyond the circle of Hunter’s arms and the little nest they’ve got wrapped around them, no sensation apart from the soft touches and kisses he’s being lavished with.

“Precious baby boy…” Hunter mutters against the shell of his ear. “You gonna let Daddy inside you?”

Roman nods, lifting one leg slightly so Hunter’s hand can sneak between them, warm fingers contrasted with cool, thick gel coating the tips. It’s slow going, Hunter’s clearly trying not to jostle his boy’s bruised body too much and Roman lets his leg rest across Hunter’s hip to allow him time and space to work him open, whimpering quietly whenever those experienced fingers brush against a sensitive spot.

“Baby’s so tight…” Hunter says. “Gotta get you nice and open for Daddy…”

Roman dots a line of open-mouthed kisses against Hunter’s shoulder, the comforting warmth inside him now stoked into a more urgent heat of need, sighing contentedly when Hunter finally pushes him to lie on his back, fingers withdrawing as he gets up on his knees. The blankets fall away from them a little, causing Roman to shiver involuntarily, but Hunter rubs at his stomach with one hand.

“Don’t worry… Daddy’s gonna get you filled up nice and warm soon…”

Roman feels the fulfillment of that promise moments later, when Hunter’s hot, hard length pushes into him slowly. He arches his back against the intrusion, willing his muscles to relax and accept it, knees splayed wide over Hunter’s hips. Life on the road haven’t afforded them too many opportunities to take it this slow lately, Hunter being away for business most of the time though he’s always backstage at the Pay-Per-Views. For now, though, he seems insistent on making Roman the center of his world, rocking his hips in slow, shallow thrusts until every inch of him is buried inside Roman, a solid knot of fullness to accompany the fullness Roman feels in his belly after the feeding.

He likes being full—the sensation of being so utterly stretched to accommodate the girth of the cock inside him, which never lessens despite how many times they’ve done this before. In the haze of his
mind, so overcome with how small and protected he feels right now, Hunter feels somehow bigger, not just inside of him but around him, as if his legs are spread even wider to fit him in between them, barely able to wrap around the older man’s muscled waist.

“You feel good around Daddy, baby boy…” Hunter leans down to kiss him. “So sweet, so perfect…”

Roman bites his lip, arching up to meet another slow thrust, Hunter’s arms looping under his shoulders and hands coming up to wrap around his head. Roman lets his own hands rest on the pillow on either side of his head, not even having enough left to reach up and wrap around Hunter’s neck as he normally would.

Hunter makes a move then, turning them over until he’s lying flat on his back with Roman on top of him, arms secured across Roman’s back to hold him in place. Roman lets out a soft little gasp, knees digging into the mattress he suddenly finds under them, reflexively trying not to rest his entire weight on Hunter, chest lifting slightly.

“It’s okay, baby…” Hunter presses him back down. “Just relax now, you know Daddy’s strong enough to carry you…”

Roman sniffs, nose buried into the juncture of Hunter’s neck as the tension melts from him, buoyed by the assurance as he lets Hunter’s body support him completely, focused on the warmth and bulk of him, wide-shouldered and thick-armed, stomach solid like a rock under Roman’s softer, pudgier one.

“That’s it…that’s a good boy…” Hunter presses a kiss into his hair as his hips resume shallow thrusting, hands grabbing at Roman’s backside to guide his angle. “Daddy’s gonna fill you right up soon, just how you like it…”

Roman whimpers appreciatively, letting his tongue out to lick at the base of Hunter’s neck like a pleased kitten. His own cock is trapped between their bodies but he pays it no mind—he’ll get his release in the end but it’s not really what times like these are about, it’s all about the closeness and contact he craves, Hunter’s hands and words guiding him every step of the way without even once asking anything of him other than to relax and let himself be taken care of.

When Hunter’s speed picks up, Roman holds onto his shoulders to anchor himself, letting the rest of his body go boneless in anticipation. His dick is almost painfully rubbing between their stomachs but it’s negligible next to the sheer mind-numbing pleasure of Hunter’s cock moving inside him with urgency, the gruff noises of exertion emanating right next to Roman’s ears. Hunter’s arms are tight
around him to the point of bruising when he comes, dick pulsing a thick, generous load into Roman, adding to the fullness and warmth and the thick blanket of comforting haze inside his head. He sighs, kissing the underside of Hunter’s chin in gratitude, letting the older man ride out the aftershocks while still snugly sheathed inside his body.

Roman thinks he can’t possibly love his Daddy any more than he does in this moment, but of course Hunter’s nothing if not thorough, so they flip over one more time and Hunter pulls out gently while still keeping some of his weight on top of Roman, one hand reaching down to tug at Roman’s neglected cock. It takes just three, maybe four gentle pulls before Roman’s coming—not a big, shouty orgasm but still a satisfying one, his head buried into Hunter’s chest and his cock spurting in Hunter’s tight grip.

“Good boy…” Hunter says, voice still even in tone despite the slight shakiness. “You came so much for Daddy, see?”

Roman opens his eyes to see Hunter bringing his hand close between their faces, coated in his thick come, some of it dripping between his fingers and down onto his wrist. He’s leaning forward before he knows it, licking at the salty trail from the lines of Hunter’s palm, taking each thick digit into his mouth and sucking them dry. He’s a good boy, he’ll clean up his messes, especially after Daddy’s been so good to him. He opens his eyes with his mouth sealed around Hunter’s index finger and sees a warm, approving smile there and a spark in Hunter’s eyes, which makes Roman’s chest flutter. He likes it when Hunter looks at him like that—like he’s done something right, like he’s proud, like Roman’s done well for him.

Hunter rewards him with a kiss after that, just soft and sweet, his relatively cleaner hand stroking through Roman’s hair.

“We’re gonna sleep now, okay? And when you wake up, we’ll try getting some more food in you.”

Roman nods, burrowing closer as Hunter rearranges the thick wrapping of blankets around them. It’s as close to getting swaddled as he can get with what they have, but it’s good enough. The last thought on Roman’s mind before he drifts off is how quiet everything is—no more voices, no more chants, no more crowds. Just his Daddy’s warm chest and the sound of their breathing, and the fingers softly stroking through his hair.

—
Roman’s used to waking up to smells. Usually it’s strong coffee being brewed in a pot, or Dean’s cigarette breath, or Seth’s obnoxiously fruity shampoo whenever he decides to jump back in bed after a shower. This time, the smell that rouses him is milder, nothing pungent or overly strong. His brain registers it as food before his eyes open, finding Hunter sitting on the side of the bed with a small, shallow bowl of something steaming in one hand.

“Morning, baby…” he smiles. “You sleep well?”

Roman nods, one hand reaching out of the thick folds of blankets to rest against Hunter’s thigh, just wanting the physical contact.

“Room service’s got a pretty extensive breakfast menu, but I don’t think you’re in the mood for all that big, heavy stuff yet, are you?”

It’s Hunter’s way of checking what sort of headspace Roman’s in right now, if he wants to continue, so Roman just shakes his head in affirmation.

“I thought so…” Hunter said. “Well, I did order a nice potato gratin, asked them to hold back a little on the seasoning, and I’ve got it mashed up here so you can eat it easily…”

Roman stares, unblinking, at the bowl in Hunter’s hand. It’s not hotel-issue dinnerware, for sure, looking like it’s made from sturdy blue plastic, and the spoon that Hunter’s stirring it with is also plastic, edges rounded with a rubberized blue handle. Realization hits him that it’s probably part of a set, the same set his bottle comes from, and he pulls a little at the fabric of Hunter’s pants, a tightness seizing his chest.

“What, you think I’m gonna put some hotel’s cold, hard cutlery in your soft little mouth?” Hunter chides him playfully, his smile widening. “Told you I wanted my baby to enjoy his feeding time, didn’t I?”

It definitely helps that Roman’s on a non-verbal spell right now because there’s really, really no words to describe how he feels—gratitude and want and desperation all rolled into one, even as Hunter climbs onto the bed with him, propping him up until he’s at an angle where he can take food into his mouth comfortably.

Hunter blows on each spoonful before feeding it to him, pushing the plastic gently into his mouth.
and patiently waiting for Roman to swallow before he digs into the bowl again. There’s not much in
the baby-sized bowl—certainly not enough to feed a man of Roman’s size even halfway to fullness,
not that Roman cares. He eats slowly, chewing until the food is all but mush inside his mouth before
swallowing, Hunter praising him with every spoonful he takes in.

When the last mouthful has been swallowed, Hunter pats him affectionately on the cheek and leaves,
presumably to clean the feeding utensils, leaving Roman alone on the bed, staring at the thin threads
of sunlight peeking through the thick, heavy curtains. Hunter left them closed, probably to spare
Roman’s eyes from the jarring brightness, keeping the room enclosed in a dim cocoon, purposely
keeping them walled off from the real world, at least for now. Roman rubs at his eyes, feeling a little
more clear-headed than he’s been for a good twelve hours or so, taking a quick mental check of his
body. The aches and pains from last night are still there, the one in his left shoulder feeling more
pronounced than the one in his abdomen, enough that he knows it’ll give him some trouble during
his next training session. He pushes it away from his mind, though, determined to enjoy this respite,
brief as it is, while he’s still got time.

Hunter returns with the tub of salve from the trainers, coaxing Roman to sit a little upright as he
gently massages it into the worst of the bruises, Roman muffling his grimaces and pained little
whimpers into the pillow he’s hugging close to him. It stings, like a cold burn against his flesh, and
once the salve’s absorbed Hunter follows it up with a strip of heat patches, applying them to
Roman’s shoulder and his lower back.

“You need one on your tummy too, baby?”

Roman nods and turns over, lying flat on his back so Hunter can place the strip just above his navel,
pressing it down gently to make sure it sticks. Then he leans back a little, one hand still stroking
Roman’s stomach gently, the other brushing a stray lock of dark hair from Roman’s face.

“That should do for now…” he says. “You want anything else?”

There’s an undercurrent of something else to that question, probably driven by the fact that Roman’s
not so wrapped up in his own head anymore, something Hunter’s gotten good at sensing—probably
was an expert at it before Roman himself came to grips with his own shifting moods. Roman sighs
deply, placing his hand over Hunter’s and pulling it down, over the folds of the blankets that still
covered his lower body, and letting it rest against his left knee.

Hunter cocks his head to one side, processing the gesture for a few seconds before something shifts
in his demeanor, his fingers squeezing Roman’s gently. “Something on your mind, baby?”
Roman uses his other hand to pull Hunter towards him by his shirt collar, using his big-boy strength, until Hunter’s horizontal on the bed next to him, still smelling of salve and traces of soap. He breathes in, nose pressed into the hollow of Hunter’s throat like he’s done so many times before, the solid body shielding him from the creeping brightness that seems intent to penetrate.

“I thought…” he begins, voice rough from disuse. “I thought you’d be upset with me last night.”

“Why would I be?” Hunter asked gently, a large hand splayed over Roman’s back.

“I didn’t tell you,” Roman said. “Didn’t tell you all of that was gonna happen…”

Hunter lets out a heavy sigh, his fingers drawing circles in Roman’s skin. “You scared me… especially the bit with the ambulance and you coughing up blood all over the place…”

“Wasn’t my idea,” Roman mutters out.

“I know it wasn’t,” Hunter says. “It didn’t matter to me. I just wanted to make sure you were okay,”

Roman closes his eyes, swallowing the lump in his throat as he thinks about his next words. “I didn’t tell you because I knew you were going to try and stop it.”

He can’t see Hunter’s face, but he can feel the change of tension in the way the older man’s finger stills in its movements. “Roman…”

“I know you tried to talk the bookers into changing the layout,” Roman says, forcing the words out of his mouth with each painful breath. “I know you tried to talk to Vince about ending this feud early,”

“Roman…it’s not working. It’s as simple as that.”

“What? What’s not working?”

“This! This whole trying to feed you to a monster to see if they can win some sympathy for you,”
Hunter says, voice cracking slightly as ‘sympathy’ leaves his mouth. “They’re trying every trick in the book, and the crowd’s just not buying any of it.”

Roman chuckles bitterly, looking up at Hunter’s concerned face. “The whole point was to make something out of Braun. And it’s working damn fine, if you ask me.”

“Roman…”

“I know what the crowd was chanting, okay?” Roman says. “So be it. They think I deserve to get beaten to death. They love him for doing it to me. Let them have it.”

Hunter shakes his head. “You have no idea…how hard it was for me to just sit there and listen to them, all those fuckers cheering him on while you’re sitting there bleeding…”

“I can take it,” Roman says. “At least it wasn’t you doing it.”

Hunter inhales sharply, arm tightening around Roman almost reflexively. “That’s never going to happen again.”

“Don’t say that…” Roman shakes his head, rustling the fabric of Hunter’s shirt. “You don’t know. You don’t know what you’re promising me.”

“Baby…”

“They could still make us do it, for whatever reason…” Roman continues. “Somewhere down the line, it just might happen again…and you’ll step up just like you’ve always done.”

“Is that what you want me to do?”

Roman sniffs, nods his head slowly. “I want you to stop trying to change things on my behalf.”

Hunter sighs deeply. “Roman…”
“Someone’s gonna notice,” Roman continues. “If you keep doing it, regardless of what your reasons are…someone’s gonna fucking notice sooner or later. I don’t want that.”

The exhale Hunter lets out at that feels a lot like resignation. “I know…”

“You have to let things…just happen to me,” Roman says. “Good, bad, anything in between—just like you let it happen to the other guys, even when you don’t agree with it.”

It’s not easy, Roman knows it, Hunter’s increasing frustration at how some of his NXT graduates have been used on the main roster has been the source of a lot of tension backstage lately, and he knows a man of Hunter’s pride can never accept just sitting still and just watch his meticulous work get taken apart. It’s a miracle he hasn’t lashed out at the entire creative department yet, or exercised his corporate muscle to move things in the direction he wants them.

“You haven’t lifted a finger to make anything happen for Sami,” Roman says. “You haven’t pushed them to give Finn the rematch he’s owed,”

“Roman…”

“So why the hell would you suddenly speak up to change things when it conveniently involves me?” Roman looks up. “It doesn’t make any sense. It shouldn’t.”

He’s got his fingers raking through Hunter’s beard now—it’s growing out thick and dark, speckled with bits of grey. Hunter’s hand is squeezing his knee—not hard, just enough to let Roman know he’s paying attention.

“I can’t be anything special. Not out there. I gotta be the guy, you know? The guy. Whether they hate me, love me, or don’t give a fuck about me, it’s something I have to go through,” he pauses to breathe deeply. “In here, it’s a different story. It’s your call. Whatever happens to me, you decide.”

Hunter tilts his chin up, looking at him straight in the eyes. “You trust me that much, baby boy?”

Roman nods. “Always.”
Hunter smiles, finally, brushing his lips against Roman’s fluttering eyelids. “Okay…” he whispers quietly. “I promise I’ll leave your booking alone, but you have to let me know if bad shit’s gonna happen in the ring, yeah? At least give me some warning so I don’t lose my mind in the booth.”

“Okay…” Roman agrees, another little knot in his chest working itself loose, rubbing his face contentedly against Hunter’s hand.

They’re quiet for a few long moments, no sound passing between them save for their own breathing, Hunter’s fingers twirling idly in Roman’s hair.

“Daddy?” Roman asks after a while, voice receding into a bare whisper.

The shift is almost imperceptible, but Hunter responds to it nonetheless. “Yeah, baby?”

“Can I have another bottle?”

Hunter’s smile widens, reaching down to pat Roman’s stomach gently. “Baby’s still hungry, huh?”

Roman nods. “Please?”

“Alright, let me go fix one up for you,” Hunter says as he vacates the bed, pulling the covers up over Roman’s shoulders again.

When Hunter returns five minutes later, they slip easily into the same comfortable haze, Roman’s mind settling like a quiet breeze as the enveloping warmth takes him over. He opens his mouth at Hunter’s prompting, lips sealing over the rubber of his feeding bottle, welcoming the first mouthful of milk that fills him up, like it’s the most natural thing to do—like it’s all he’ll ever need.
“Desperate times, call for desperate measures…” Seth braces himself even as the words leave his mouth, the microphone gripped in one hand while his other hand clutches Roman’s vest tightly, Dean pacing anxiously around him. “…and if there’s one trick I’ve learned in the last few years, it’s to always have…a Plan B.”

Happy Birthday, my darling braintwin. Thank you for keeping me entertained for endless nights as I flood you with half-finished drabbles and mutual gushing.

“Desperate times, call for desperate measures…” Seth braces himself even as the words leave his mouth, the microphone gripped in one hand while his other hand clutches Roman’s vest tightly, Dean pacing anxiously around him. “…and if there’s one trick I’ve learned in the last few years, it’s to always have…a Plan B.”

God help us if this doesn’t go over well.

There’s a blast of green lights as the arena speakers explode with Hunter’s entrance music, and the Glasgow crowd all but ignite in a cacophony of screams and camera lights and raised fists, the shockwave of it hitting Seth squarely in the chest. His fingers tighten around the vest until his knuckles hurt, not even bothering to mask the nervous anticipation on his face as Hunter himself appears at the top of the entrance ramp, leather-clad and imposing.

You still got the look, old man…

“Taking his sweet time, ain’t he?” Dean whispers to him as Hunter makes his way down the ramp, casting a glance around the arena like a conqueror assessing his domain, basking in the spotlight and the deafening cheers.

“Shut up and let’s just get through this…” Seth hisses back.
He knows Dean doesn’t like this—he likes it even less than when Kurt had been hastily shoved into their team just days before TLC, even though neither he nor Seth could’ve come up with anyone they’d be okay with taking Roman’s place. Dean would’ve much preferred tag-teaming it just with Seth until Roman is healthy again, but management thought otherwise. If anything, this will give social media something to buzz about and raise the profile of their UK tour.

Best for business, Seth thinks of Hunter’s on-screen mantra, as the older man does his customary pose on the ropes, all but spraying the first two rows of fans who seemed more than happy to take it.

Their mini-standoff is tense, just as they’d planned it out backstage, and Seth’s arm is heavy as he extends it towards Hunter, offering Roman’s vest to him. Hunter takes the vest, wraps it around himself a little awkwardly, and Seth forces himself to swallow the lump in his throat. It’s never going to look right on Hunter—Roman’s bigger in some aspects, leaner in others. Hunter manages to snap the buckles close anyway, and as he does so Seth notices a minute change in Hunter’s expression, as if struck by some unexpected memory.

That thing probably still smells like Roman, Seth thinks, even as the moment passes.

Seth exchanges one last nod with Hunter before they prepare to get down to business, while Dean cracks his knuckles and bounces off towards their assigned corner, brushing past Hunter as he does so. Seth just shakes his head and casts a glance up to the heavens, praying to any divine entity worth a dime that everything goes to plan.

This is gonna feel like the longest tour ever.

—

- Do you want me to call?

- Talking hurts. Sorry. :(

- It’s ok. How’s the swelling?
- Not so puffy anymore, but I can still feel it. Swallowing hurts.

- They gave you painkillers to sort it out, right?

- Don’t rly wanna take em

- I know you don’t, but if the pain gets bad you need to take them, okay?

- Okay. How’d it go? the show?

- You’re bound to see it crop up on social media soon. Place went berserk.

- Of course they did. it’s you.

- Almost couldn’t get your vest to buckle on, but i got there in the end.

- :) bet u looked good in it

- Eh, I did alright.

- pls come home soon

- the minute we get back stateside, i promise

- it sucks

- I know, baby. Just hang in there, okay?
If anything, at least the media buzz aspect of Triple H joining forces with The Shield did deliver as expected, causing Seth’s feed to blow up with mentions and fan-captured photos and videos, accompanied by exclamations of shock and disbelief. Overall, at least, the response seems to be positive—fans are well aware that house shows don’t really play into the story continuity as a whole, and most regard Hunter’s cameo as a nice bonus of getting to see a bonafide WWE legend strut his way down the ramp in their hometown.

By the time the tour rolls into Minehead, there’s already banners and signs in the crowd combining The Shield and Triple H’s logos, and they’re cheering for Hunter well before his introduction. It certainly raises the excitement level in the arena, giving off the kind of buzzing energy that Seth thrives on, reminding him of his indie days wrestling in small, packed houses reeking of cheap beer and sweat, with near-fanatical crowds shouting themselves hoarse from opener to main event.

Hunter was never known for having blistering pace even at the peak of his career, his body of work consisting mostly of carefully-crafted methodical wrestling peppered with heat-generating moments of absolute bastardry and a generous application of sledgehammers. Take the latter two out of the equation, and even Seth has to admit that his one-time mentor isn’t quite as exciting a performer as he used to be, though he can still take a bump or two and deliver a rather mean clothesline. Slotting him with Dean and Seth allows them to do the riskier spots, leaping off turnbuckles and diving over top ropes, while Hunter typically closes the match with a Pedigree.

Once they step back behind the curtains, Hunter always takes the vest off first, handing it back to Seth with a smile and a pat on his back before going to his assigned dressing room. Usually, by the time the rest of the touring roster is packed up and ready to board the tour bus, Hunter will already be in one of his immaculate business suits, usually with his phone in hand and talking to someone back in the States, whether it’s Head Office or the Performance Center or the countless other departments within their organization that he needs to stay coordinated with. Seth has always admired Hunter for that, his tireless dedication to the business and its future, things that may take years and countless hurdles before they come to fruition—the sort of patience Seth can never hope to have.

He’s waiting for Dean one time in the lobby of the hotel, getting ready to travel to the next city, when he spots Hunter sitting on one of the lounge chairs in the lobby with his phone held to his ear, talking in a soft voice that’s decidedly not business-like.
“Doctor been to see you today?” Hunter says, pausing as he listens to the response. “I know, just
don’t give him a hard time, okay? He’s just doing his job…”

Seth’s standing just close enough to be able to hear the words without really trying, and at first he
can’t quite work out who Hunter is talking to.

“I miss you too, baby…” Hunter sighs into his phone. “Yeah, I know…just one more week, okay?
One more week and I’ll be home.”

Is he talking to Steph? Seth thinks, but dismisses the notion almost immediately. Stephanie and
Hunter aren’t much for sentimental endearments nowadays, though they’re still affectionate with
each other.

“Look, when the doctor clears you to start training again, you have to do it at the PC, you hear me? I
wanna make sure someone can be there to spot you, see how you’re doing…” Hunter says. “No, no,
Roman…don’t fight me on this, okay? I’ll sleep better knowing that you’ve got experts monitoring
your progress.”

Seth’s breath hitches, cursing himself for missing the obvious. Of course. Of course he’s talking to
Roman.

“Yes, yes, I know…” Hunter says, rubbing at his eyes. “Just hang in there, okay? I’ll be home
soon…”

It shouldn’t surprise Seth anymore, the tenderness in Hunter’s voice when he’s talking to Roman. He
remembers that night after Wrestlemania months ago, when Hunter had gone up to Roman’s room to
check on them, bringing ice for Seth’s swollen knee and a kiss for Roman. It’s an unguarded sort of
kindness that Seth’s only glimpsed occasionally back when he was still regularly sleeping with
Hunter, understandable since Seth was always more interested in baiting the darker, more aggressive
side of Hunter to come out and play.

Still, it doesn’t quite prepare him for what he hears next.

“I’ll message you again when we reach Manchester, okay?” Hunter says, his pause punctuated by a
thin-lipped smile. “Love you too, baby…bye.”
Wait…what?

A hand on his shoulder startles Seth, and he turns around and nearly whacks Dean in the face.

“Jesus!” Dean exclaims. “You didn’t hear me calling you from down the hallway?”

Seth blinks, shaking his head. “No…no I didn’t.”

Hunter notices them then, and Seth pointedly avoids eye contact, trying his best to look casual and not like he’s spent the last few minutes listening to Hunter’s phone conversation with Roman.

“You boys all packed up and ready to go?”

“Yeah…” Dean says. “Why don’t you join us on the bus this time, Trips? At least for one leg of the tour, just be one of the guys again, for once…”

Seth grimaces at the thinly-veiled barb in Dean’s offer, but Hunter just shrugs as he stands and pockets his phone. “I would love to, actually…but I need to be at the arena for the setup, before any of you show up, check everything’s in place.”

“A requirement of the job, huh?” Dean says.

“One among many,” Hunter says. “Speaking of which…I’d best be on my way.”

Hunter’s rental SUV and its company-assigned driver has just pulled up in front of the lobby, prompting him to quickly gather his luggage with the help of a bell boy and make his way towards the entrance, exchanging one last nod with Dean and Seth. Seth watches him go, a part of his brain still trying to process what he’d heard mere seconds ago.

“S’matter?” Dean nudges his shoulder.

“No, nothing…” Seth shakes his head. “Umm…you spoke to Ro yet?”
“Texted him last night. Said he’s getting better, but he’s bored out of his mind.”

“Yeah, must be…” Seth says sympathetically.

“Didn’t seem to be in the mood to talk much, y’know? Says his energy’s way down, still. I didn’t wanna bother him, told him he should just rest and burn through Netflix or something.”

“Did he say anything about….the tour? About us being here?”

Dean sighs heavily. “No. I didn’t bring it up, either. Figured maybe he didn’t want to talk about it, you know?”

“Yeah, I know…” Seth says. “This really sucks, Dean…I really wish he could be here.”

Dean offers him a rare, uncynical smile, squeezing Seth’s shoulder as their tour bus slowly pulls up to the hotel’s entrance.

—

- i started on the treadmill and some weights today.

- How’d it go?

- got tired way too easily. didn’t even do that much.

- That’s to be expected, according to the doctors.

- dont feel like myself
- These things take time, baby. Don’t worry about it.

- having dinner now. watching u from wm20. white boots? really? :)

- You shouldn’t eat while watching that one. Too much blood.

- im just going thru the whole network watching your stuff

- Well, lucky for you there’s plenty to watch until i get back.

- miss you

- I miss you too, baby. A few more days, okay?

- Feels like forever.

- Yeah, same here. Just be a good boy until Daddy’s home, okay?

- okay. I love you, daddy

- Love you too, baby boy…

—

They lose the Tag Team titles in Manchester, just as planned, though it doesn’t make the experience any easier to swallow. Cesaro hugs Seth for a long time afterwards in gorilla, the crimson belt now draped over his shoulder digging almost painfully into Seth’s collarbone. Seth flashes him an easy, well-practiced smile and a pat on his back, before following Dean down the steps leading back to the dressing rooms.
“Was good while it lasted…” Dean says casually, in that tone that indicates he’s merely saying something to fill the uneasy void between them, the phantom presence lacking actual footsteps. He’s walking a little hunched over and dejected, even though his face betrays no real emotion.

“We’ll get it back…” Seth tries to sound reassuring, even though he knows there’s never any certainty in this business.

Dean flings an arm around Seth’s neck, hooking him in with an elbow—his good one—and holds him a little closer as they continue their walk down the corridor. “Here’s hoping…” he mutters, though his voice doesn’t exactly sound optimistic.

It’s not until much later, back at his own hotel room after a good long shower and a few minutes of flipping through the unfamiliar channels, that Seth checks his phone to find a single line of text message:

- I’m sorry.

Sighing, he flops onto the bed to type in his reply.

- Not your fault, Ro.

- Feel like i shoulda been there.

Seth bites his lower lip, trying to think of a good answer. For all he knew, their loss had been engineered specifically to take them out of the bout against the Usos at Survivor Series, so they could take on The New Day as a three-man team with Roman. The three-man team that should’ve been rolled out at TLC, before an illness of the sort that he didn’t even know hadn’t been eradicated from the face of the earth took that from them, kept Roman confined to a hospital bed with a high fever and swollen glands.

It’s not a stretch to say that everything’s being arranged so that Roman would still get his full-on Shield match at a Pay-Per-View, and the time bomb that is Dean’s elbow means that their window is rapidly closing. It’s all a confluence of bad luck and shitty timing, but he knows Roman feels somewhat responsible for it, that management and creative are doing somersaults trying to frame him in a favorable light while Dean and Seth just have to be along for the ride, even though they’ve repeatedly assured him that they don’t hold it against him.
Seth knew from the moment it was pitched to them that The Shield 2.0 isn’t going to be the same all-conquering beast that their initial run had been—they were no longer upstart underdogs, and there’s no solid wall of opposition to test themselves against. The Miztourage and The Bar don’t quite present the same threat that Evolution or even the Wyatt family did in their heyday. Still, the three men had made a pact between them to make the most out of whatever they’re given, however limited their run may be. If anything, just being able to travel and train and perform together again is a blessing, something Seth suspects all of them are more appreciative of now, a little older and wiser and marked by injury and illness and other setbacks.

- Like I said, not your fault. Just focus on healing up, Uce.

- I feel better. started training again.

- That’s good to know. Don’t go too hard.

- not much time left till SS.

- I know, but pls be careful.

- Ro??

- Ok.

——

They’re loading the tour bus with all the roster’s luggage, getting ready to head to the next city when Seth spots Hunter in a corner of the hotel’s parking lot, phone held against his ear and pacing with agitation. Hunter’s not going to travel with them—he’s due to fly over to Portugal to join the SmackDown tour for one night, before going to some kind of conference the day after, and even at
this distance Seth can see the weariness on the older man’s face, mirroring some of the fatigue Seth can feel in his own bones.

He doesn’t know what prompts him to step a little closer or try to listen in, but he thinks he hears a mention of “Roman” and his heart skips a little.

“I want daily—no, make that hourly reports, you get that? Tell the doctors I don’t want any medical mumbo-jumbo bullshit, they need to give it to you straight and simple, and you forward them directly to me. Nobody else, just me. Understood?”

Alarm bells flare up in Seth’s mind as soon as he hears the word ‘doctor’, and he grabs the sleeve of Dean’s jacket almost by reflex.

“Wha—?” Dean looks at him quizzically, and Seth gestures his head in Hunter’s direction.

“I don’t care—tell Matt if to lock him out of PC, block his access card if he needs to…” Hunter continues, brows tightly knit together as his voice escalates. “I am not overreacting! Why wasn’t anyone observing his training session in the first place?”

There’s a lump sitting uneasily in Seth’s throat the more he listens, and Dean stiffens next to him as he begins to catch on.

“Look, just do whatever you need to do, and if he gives you any kind of trouble, you tell him this is coming directly from me. Okay? Get to it!”

With that, Hunter hangs up, and for a moment Seth suspects he’s considering throwing his phone across the parking lot, though he stops himself and shoves it back into his pocket instead. Spinning around on his heels, Hunter’s suddenly face-to-face with them, a surprised look on his face.

“Jesus—” Hunter started. “The hell are you two doing standing there?”

Dean’s about to open his mouth with some kind of retort but Seth squeezes his arm to stop him, stepping forward instead. “Is something wrong with Roman?”
Hunter’s face sags, his normally unflinching gaze darting away to break eye contact, and Seth feels his stomach drop.

“Fuck…” Dean hisses beside him. “What the hell happened?”

Hunter takes a few long strides to close the distance between them and leans in, his voice lowered to barely above a whisper. “Look…this can’t get out, okay? Not to the rest of the roster, not to the press, not to anyone.”

“Jesus, just fucking tell us!” Dean says.

Seth grabs his arm again, a little warningly. “We won’t tell…promise.”

“He had a minor incident at the Performance Center,” Hunter begins. “Collapsed on the treadmill.”

“He’s been training again the last few days, must have pushed himself a little too hard, too soon—his energy levels aren’t quite back up yet and he’s still fighting off the last of that damn virus…” Hunter shakes his head, eyes on the ground. “Doctors are still evaluating him.”

“Is he in a hospital?”

“They took him to a local ER, but he’s been released…he’s been staying in my place in Orlando since he got out of hospital a couple weeks ago. I’m having him monitored by our medical staff and kept off any training for the time being.”

“Dammit,” Seth shakes his head. “I told him not to go too hard, that stubborn motherfucker…”

“You know what he’s like,” Hunter says with a shrug, turning to Dean. “Not the best at the taking care of himself, right?”

“That’s putting it mildly…” Dean says. “So what’s the prognosis?”
“I don’t know yet…they’ll let me know within the hour.” Hunter says. “It might be nothing, but as it is we’re playing it safe…”

“Think he’ll have to sit out Survivor Series?” Seth is almost too scared to ask.

“Not likely, he’s been well on his way towards recovery the last few days…” Hunter says. “…let’s just hope it’s nothing more than a minor setback.”

Dean stares up at the sky, shoving his hands in his pockets. “That stupid sonofabitch…why won’t he just listen, for once?”

“He’s scared, Dean…” Seth tells him. “Scared he won’t get back in shape in time for Survivor Series, that he’ll…let us down, somehow.”

Dean casts his gaze back down to the ground, shaking his head before looking back up at Hunter. “So…what do we do?”

“I’m having my people report his condition back to me,” Hunter says. “If I have any updates, I’ll let you know. Just you two. Nobody else.”

Seth can’t help but think about what he’d overheard a few days ago, the exchange between Hunter and Roman over the phone. He thinks of how Hunter’s really feeling, if indeed he heard it right, what it must be doing to him to hear that news and yet be too far away to do anything about it.

“You’ll…be back in America before us, right?”

“I should be back Friday night,” Hunter nods. “I considered canceling Portugal and heading straight home, but…can’t really back out of that summit in Lisbon, since I’m signed on to be one of the speakers.”

“Yeah, wouldn’t want to deprive the good people of Lisbon of your charms…” Dean mutters.
Seth jabs him with an elbow, but Hunter barely acknowledges the remark. “You two best get on that bus…as soon as I have any news on Roman, I’ll let you know.”

“Yeah, sure…” Seth grabs Dean’s arm before he can say anything further. “Just…stay in touch, okay?”

He doesn’t wait for Hunter’s reply before turning on his heels and shoving Dean in the direction of their tour bus. Dean grunts in annoyance but doesn’t fight him, boarding the bus and picking his seat near the back while Seth settles in next to him.

“You need to stop antagonizing Hunter…” he mutters close to Dean’s ear. “It’s getting old, Dean…you still pissed at the idea of him and Roman being together?”

“It ain’t that…” Dean mumbles. “I put that past me a long time ago, Seth…I know Ro likes that old bastard’s dick enough to stick around.”

Seth stares at him incredulously. “You still think that’s all there is to it? Really?”

Dean sighs and leans his head on the bus window. “I don’t…fuck, I don’t know, okay? I just know that for the last week or so on this tour, he’s been loving every moment he gets out there, all those people screaming his name, like he’s having the time of his life…”

“He’s Triple freakin’ H, Dean…” Seth says. “Would you expect anything less?”

Dean looks at him, a knowing glimmer in his eyes. “Exactly…he’s still Triple H. You get me? Who’s to say he didn’t volunteer himself to fill Ro’s place, knowing that he can just put himself back in the spotlight whenever he feels like?”

“No,” Seth says adamantly. “That’s not what he did.”

“You sure about that? ‘Cause I got about twenty-something years of backstage history that tells me he’s just the kind of person who would do something like that.”

“Look, any other string-pulling antics, fine…I’ll give you that. But not this, Dean. Not taking
Roman’s place,” Seth says.

Dean looks unconvinced. “Why not?”

Seth swallows the lump in his throat, on the verge of sharing with Dean what he’d overheard in that lobby, how Hunter’s voice had sounded when he spoke to Roman, how Seth knew there was no chance he was being anything other than genuine, not even knowing that anyone else was listening. And yet, he doesn’t. It doesn’t feel right, somehow, like it’s not his to share, like he wasn’t supposed to know in the first place. And what if Hunter or Roman didn’t even want anyone else to know, what if it was supposed to be a secret?

“You know what? Let’s not talk about this anymore…let’s just get this tour over and done with so we can head home and get with Ro again…”

“Fine by me…” Dean says, pulling his beanie down over his forehead and turning his attention back to the view outside the window again.

Seth just huffs and looks away from him, wishing Roman was here just so he can talk some sense into their stubborn teammate. Roman was always better at getting Dean to understand things, always more patient with him, whereas with Seth they always tended to devolve into pointless bickering. They’re not quite whole without their Big Dog, regardless of who dons that vest each night to take his place in the ring. Fishing his phone out of his jacket pocket, Seth types in a quick line, knowing it might be a while before he hears anything back.

- We heard. Hope ur okay.

—

Hunter enters the apartment quietly, wheeling his suitcases in and parking them close to the entrance. There’s no need to unpack—he has a flight to catch to Boston in the morning to attend a fundraising event, before joining up with the RAW roster in Atlanta for the go-home show before Survivor Series. There’s a few unwashed bowls and dishes in the sink, and most of the apartment is dark, save for a sliver of light he can see coming from the bedroom, the door slightly ajar.
Sighing heavily, he kicks off his shoes and gets rid of his jacket and tie, before making his way to the bedroom.

Roman is sleeping, curled up on what is usually Hunter’s side of the bed, the bedside light turned to its dimmest setting. In the darkness, Hunter can make out the outline of his back and shoulders just peeking above the covers, and the mess of dark hair bunched up on the pillow. There’s a slightly weird smell in the air which Hunter soon identifies as antiseptic hand gel, and a half-empty bottle of vitamin water on the bedside table next to Roman’s phone.

He gets on the bed as quietly as he possibly can, feeling the mattress dip under his weight as he crawls towards Roman, until he can wrap one arm around the younger man’s torso and press his chest close to Roman’s back.

Roman’s body is giving off heat, but no longer the feverish heat of illness that Hunter last felt in him. Sighing in relief, he kisses the back of Roman’s exposed neck and tightens his arm a little, letting the proximity of the other’s body loosen some of tightness in his muscles, the long hours in flight and the ride back from the airport.

Roman stirs after a few minutes, rustling in Hunter’s embrace before craning his neck to look back over his shoulder, sleep-worn eyes blinking in the dark as Hunter smiles at him.

“Hey, beautiful…” he mutters. “How you feelin’?”

Roman doesn’t say anything in reply, just turns around so he’s facing Hunter before burrowing even further into him. The sensation can perhaps be likened to a gentle shove from a baby rhinoceros—he’s a big boy, after all—but Hunter goes with it, letting both arms wrap around Roman and kissing his forehead.

“N-not dreaming?” Roman asks, voice muffled against Hunter’s chest.

“No, baby…I’m right here. I’m home,” Hunter assures him. “You okay?”

“I am now,” Roman says, and Hunter winces a little.

“I can’t stay long, okay? There’s a trip I need to make to Boston tomorrow but I’ll catch up with you guys again in Atlanta,”
Roman lets out a heavy sigh. “It’s fine…”

Hunter pulls back a little, brushing the hairs away from Roman’s face. “You know…you been telling me that the whole time I’ve been away—and it’s not always true, is it?”

Roman inhales sharply, eyes darting away from Hunter’s for a brief moment. Hunter takes his chin gently, turning his head back towards him.

“Roman…” he starts. “You wanna talk about what happened?”

“I didn’t…it’s not like I felt it coming, you know?” Roman begins. “I was feeling good, like I wasn’t all that tired or anything—I felt good right up to the moment everything just kinda went fuzzy and I blacked out.”

Hunter rubs him up and down his back. “You went a little too hard, too soon…gave me a quite a scare.”

“I’m sorry,” Roman lets out. “I just…I felt like I needed to get back to it, like I was losing my mind not doing anything…”

“They gave you clearance to start training again, that’s not the problem…” Hunter says. “You just kept going and didn’t stop.”

Roman shakes his head. “I was thinking about what’s next…like I know what’s on my plate for the next few weeks…”

Hunter nods, knowing the weight that’s beginning to re-settle itself on Roman’s shoulder. He’s been without a championship win for the better part of the year, not that it’s affected his stock much. There’s an argument to be made—and one that Hunter himself made to the creative team—that Roman didn’t really need to have a belt on him, that doing so is likely to trigger another wave of backlash, but the decision-makers seem to think that it’s time, and that Roman’s in-ring performance and workrate has reached a point where the fans will be more accepting of him as a titleholder.

“I know you’ve got a lot to do in the next couple of months…which is why you gotta be healthy for
“Yeah, but…imagine knowing all that and being out of action for so long, like what if I don’t get in good enough shape in time? What if I’m not up to it when the day comes?”

Hunter sighs and presses their foreheads together. “Listen…I’ve seen you wrestle with a hernia, a broken nose, a busted-up shoulder, and God knows what else…you got nothing to be worried about. You’ll get through this, just as you always do.”

“I don’t… I don’t want it to be like that,” Roman says difficulty. “Not like it’s been in the past. I want it to be better.”

“I know,” Hunter says. “You’ve got this. Right now, you just need to take it a little easy on yourself…”

“Did you…did you tell Seth and Dean?”

“They caught me talking on the phone to my P.A. after your little mishap…” Hunter says. “I’ve just been sending Seth short updates ever since. You haven’t talked to them?”

“Seth sent a message,” Roman says. “I didn’t reply.”

“Why? You know they’re worried about you,”

“I dunno…” Roman shrugs. “Didn’t feel like talking about it. Just wanted this whole thing to be over.”

“It will be over soon,” Hunter assures him. “A few more days, you’ll be back out there, the crowd will go nuts, and you’ll feel good as new.”

“I hope so…” Roman says. “There’s been a…noted reduction in the number of tweets I’m getting from people hoping I’ll die of this illness and never show up again. Like a few thousand less than what I expected.”
Hunter winces. “Didn’t I tell you not to bother checking social media? Let the digital division handle it…”

“I was bored, so sue me…” Roman huffs. “There were a lot of well-wishers, too. More than the haters, even. Never thought I’d see the day.”

“Maybe hating you’s gone out of fashion…” Hunter remarks casually, not wanting to jinx it. “Or they’ve moved on to something else.”

Roman snorts. “I’m not reading too much into it—if only half the place is booing by the time I win that belt, I’ll be happy.”

Hunter’s people within the company’s Media Monitoring division have been doing just that, trying to read the potential audience appetite for another Roman Reigns title run for the better part of a few months. Crawling through various digital platforms and news outlets with their fancy algorithms, their weekly e-mail reports littered with jargon so convoluted Hunter’s convinced they’re getting paid by the word count. The results so far have been disappointingly inconclusive, but he’s not going to disclose any of it to Roman. No point getting the boy even more worked up and nervous about the future that awaits him than he already is.

“Seth and Dean give you any trouble on the road?”

“No, just…” Hunter stops himself, deciding it’s not worth mentioning the lip and cold shoulder Ambrose was throwing his way throughout the tour. “They covered well for me, when we were teaming up…though they had to cut back on the throttle a little.”

“I saw a few short clips…” Roman says. “You’re right…the vest wasn’t that bad of a fit.”

Hunter smiles. “It’s a bit…constricting. I was sweating like crazy.”

“The cargo pants, though…” Roman stifles a giggle. “Never thought I’d see you in those.”

“Shut up…” Hunter cuffs his shoulder gently. “It wasn’t that bad…I just didn’t fill them out quite the way you do.”
Roman makes a pleased noise of contentment in his throat and pulls Hunter a little closer. “Thanks… for doing that. I don’t know if I could live with it being anyone else…even Kurt.”

“You’re welcome,” Hunter says, running his mouth down the length of Roman’s jaw. “Now go back to sleep, okay?”

“Don’t leave without waking me up…” Roman says, climbing over Hunter so he can get back to his normal side of the bed.

“I won’t. I promise.”

—

When Hunter stirs awake, the first thing he registers is that the space next to him is empty, and there’s tingling warmth somewhere below his waist. Slowly, slowly his senses return, hands reaching down to find his fingers caught in a tangled mess of thick hair, and he can feel himself smiling even before his first conscious thought can formulate itself.

He opens his eyes, looking down past his chest and stomach, where Roman’s head is poking above the folds of the blankets that are pooled around his shoulders. He’s got his mouth around Hunter’s cock, which he’s evidently managed to pull out and start on without waking Hunter up, an achievement unto itself. Roman can sense he’s awake, looks up at him, the glimmer in his eye a fair substitute for a smile as his mouth continues working, a slow and languid pace that suits Hunter just fine.

“So…I’m guessing swallowing doesn’t hurt anymore?” Hunter teases.

Roman snorts a little, his tongue flicking playfully just below the crown of Hunter’s cock. His hands are holding Hunter at the base, thick fingers wrapped warmly around him as that mouth keeps sucking, the noise of it amplified in the relative silence of their bedroom.

Hunter runs his fingers through Roman’s hair, stroking down his cheeks and his nose. He loves the healthy glow that’s starting to return to his boy’s skin, the spark that’s evident in his eyes. He’d left Roman in quite a miserable state, one that nearly drove him to cancel his part in the European tour altogether, sickly pale and distraught about not being medically cleared to travel.
“Nice to see your appetite’s back, too—” Hunter says, patting Roman’s cheek. “Been a while since you had your fill of Daddy, huh?”

Roman nods, an appreciative little noise emanating from the back of his throat. Hunter’s half-tempted to just grab the boy by the hair and fuck up into his mouth, but decides it’s better to just sit back and enjoy himself, just as much as Roman seems to be enjoying it.

Even at this leisurely place, the sensation of his boy’s sweet mouth and tongue coupled with the look of utter focus on his face drives Hunter to the brink pretty quickly. He warns Roman a little, tapping the underside of his chin to signal him, and Roman pulls back until only the head of Hunter’s dick is in his mouth, one hand stroking slowly up and down his length.

“Be a good boy and don’t make a mess of Daddy, okay?” Hunter says, voice a little shaky.

He gets a nod out of Roman before he starts coming, unloading in the younger man’s mouth as Roman swallows it all down, wet lips a tight seal around Hunter and his hand coaxing every last little drop out. It’s not one of his more intense climaxes but it’s still enough to have him shaking, finally having to let his head fall back on the pillow to wait for his breathing to even out. Faintly, he can feel Roman tucking his spent cock back into his pants, even zipping it up for him.

Roman climbs up his body until he’s lying on top of Hunter, a sleepy yet satisfied smile on his face as they share a messy kiss, his warm weight settling on top of Hunter.

“Baby, you know I gotta get up to catch that flight…” Hunter says, pushing half-heartedly at Roman’s shoulder, who refuses to budge. “Can’t do that if you’re not gonna move…”

“That’s the whole point,” Roman says mischievously. “This is a pinning predicament. The objective is to stop you from getting up.”

Hunter smirks, bringing his arms around Roman’s back. “Well, in that case I think you’ve got me down for the three-count already.”

“I don’t hear a bell…” Roman says. “I think I need to keep you here longer.”
Hunter sighs, bringing Roman’s face up to look in his eyes. “I want to stay longer…you know I do. But I really need to leave now or I’ll miss that flight,”

Roman nods, seeming resigned. “I know…”

He shifts his weight, allowing Hunter to roll them over until Roman’s on his back again. If it were up to him, Hunter would love nothing more than to pull the covers up over them and pretend the outside world doesn’t exist for a few more hours, but a glance at the bedside clock lets him know that his driver will be here to pick him up soon, and he can just about sneak in a piss and a quick brush of his teeth. Not even enough time for a shower, which he’ll just have to do once he gets to Boston.

“I’ll see you in Atlanta on Monday,” he tells Roman as he rises off the bed. “Just stick to your light training, listen to the doctor’s advice, and take it easy, okay?”

“Okay…” Roman mutters.

Leaving never gets any easier. It’s hard enough when Roman’s still asleep, even harder if he’s awake and seemingly watching every move. Hunter’s just about finished tying the knot of his tie and getting himself to look halfway decent when his phone beeps with a message from his driver, informing him that he’s outside.

“I gotta go, baby boy…” he says as he leans over Roman to kiss him goodbye.

“Love you…” Roman whispers once he breaks off the kiss, an index finger stroking through Hunter’s beard.

It’s never gotten old, hearing his boy say those words, even if it does make what is already a difficult predicament almost impossible.

“Love you too…” Hunter whispers back, extracting himself from the warmth of Roman’s body and their bed before he can be tempted to linger.
When Seth finally sees Roman again for the first time in weeks, just hours before the next RAW goes on air, he nearly trips over the bench in the dressing room trying to get to him.

“Motherfucker!” he says as he launches himself at Roman, catching a flash of the Samoan’s goofy grin before he hits the solid wall of Roman’s chet. “The fuck didn’t you tell us you were heading in?”

Roman looks healthy—feels healthy, Seth hugs him tighter than he’s ever had before, the relief flooding his chest almost shocking him in its intensity. Roman hugs him back, those big strong arms that could crush Seth’s ribcage if he wished to, the void that’s been nagging at Seth’s mind filling up with his presence.

“They flew me in last minute,” Roman explains. “Had my last blood test and medical this morning. I didn’t have time to let you guys know…”

Seth pulls back, studying Roman’s face. “So you’re good? Good to go?”

“Yeah,” Roman nods enthusiastically, clearly as relieved as Seth is to be able to say those words. “Full medical clearance.”

“Oh thank fuck…” Seth thumps their foreheads together. “We missed you out there, Big Dog…”

“Woof,” Roman says, squeezing Seth’s shoulder. “Where’s Deano?”

“Went to get a sandwich from catering,” Seth says. “He’ll be back soon.”

Dean appears at the doorway about a minute later with Renee, whose gasp at seeing Roman in the room is nothing compared to the noise her husband makes. Dean howls, crossing the distance in two long strides before he’s plastered himself all over Roman, nearly clawing his hands at the back of Roman’s jacket as if making sure he’s really there.

“You’re back…” Dean sounds awed, almost in disbelief. “You’re really back…”

“Yeah,” Roman assures him. “I really am.”
Renee leans against the doorway and smiles. “Welcome back, Roman…”

“Thanks,” Roman says as he pulls back a little from Dean. “Hope he wasn’t giving you too much trouble while I was gone?”

“Nothing I can’t handle, really…” Renee says casually. “But I could always use the help,”

“We’ll take him off your hands for the next couple of hours,” Seth offers kindly, ignoring Dean’s glare.

“I’ll be over at the broadcast truck, then. You boys settle in and get ready—it’s a packed show,” Renee throws them a wink before turning to leave.

“But…but baby!” Dean calls out after her dramatically. “You’re just gonna leave me here to be ravished by these two lusty gentlemen?”

Roman laughs, flashing his toothy grin and the folds around his eyes. There’s a glimmer in his eyes that Seth hasn’t seen since the end of summer—fatigue clearly playing a factor in why his body had broken down the way it did.

“How’s this thing?” Roman taps Dean’s right arm just above his tightly-wrapped elbow.

“Eh, it’s got a few more hits left in it…” Dean shrugs, trying to brush it off.

“So…” Seth rubs his hands together. “You ready for tonight?”

“Fuck, yeah…” Roman says. “Let’s go kick some ass.”

—

It goes even better than Seth could have imagined.
The almighty pop that explodes around him when Roman steps out behind him and Dean, revealing himself to the WWE audience for the first time in a month is deafening, made even more so because Roman—whose grasp on theatricality has clearly improved—waited his sweet time too, letting Dean and Seth stand there for a few seconds before appearing behind them.

The promo that Roman cut on Stephanie is concise and to the point, setting up their clash with The New Day at Survivor Series. He seems confident, at ease with himself, even more confident than when he was standing there trading barbs with Cena not long ago.

And then there’s the match. Their first match back as The Shield, as a three-man team.

Evolution may have been a more menacing trio of heels but The Bar and The Miz have frenetic pace and energy going for them, and Seth finds they always have good matches with those three as far as chemistry is concerned.

They let Roman have the final Spear on Miz—because of course—and Seth has to stop himself from grinning ear-to-ear when they deliver the Triple Powerbomb. It’s a decisive, impactful victory, telling the crowd and the audience at home that The Shield are well and truly back, and they haven’t missed a beat.

There’s a buzz backstage too when they go through gorilla, people congratulating them and welcoming Roman back, asking after his condition. It’s a good feeling, one Seth knows now that he needs to relish and enjoy, because it never, ever lasts. Roman seems to be taking it all in his stride, repeating words like ‘thank you’ and ‘yes I’m completely recovered’ and variations thereof to anyone and everyone who approached him for a chat—the relief to be back doing what he loved most palpable in his eyes.

Seth accompanies Dean to get some ice from the trainers for his elbow, and when they make their way back down the hallway leading to the dressing room, they see Roman’s silhouetted figure at the far end of the hallway, seated on top of an equipment crate with his legs dangling over the edge—except he’s not alone.

“When did he get here?” Dean hisses.

“Probably just got here from the airport after that fundraising thing he had in Boston,” Seth says.
Hunter is talking to Roman, standing inches from him even though they’re not really touching. It’s nothing anyone would pay any attention to if they didn’t know what was going on between them, but Seth knows, so of course he pays attention. There’s that softness to Hunter’s eyes that Seth only sees these days around Roman, and when they talk they let their hands hover over each other, ghosting semi-touches that look like they’re speaking in hand signals. Roman’s got a white towel around his neck and his hair pulled up in a knot, smiling at something Hunter says in a manner that’s almost shy.

“Boys…” Hunter says when he sees them approach. “Congratulations, heard the crowd popped big for that match.”

“Thanks…” Dean says. “Too bad you missed it.”

“My flight from Boston was delayed…” Hunter shrugs. “I’ll be sure to catch it on replay.”

“It was great—it felt great,” Roman says.

“Yeah,” Seth agrees. “Like old times…”

Hunter gives them one of his trademark smirks, then turns towards Roman. “You tell them the good news, yet?”

“What?” Roman blinks. “Oh. No…no I haven’t—haven’t found the time…”

“Well, you wanna tell them now? Or should I?” Hunter offered.

Dean and Seth can only trade confused glances, while Roman shrugs and says. “You tell them, then…”

Hunter nods and turns to face Dean and Seth. “This time next week…your brother here is going to be our new Intercontinental Champion.”

Seth gasps. “Really?”
“Yup.” Hunter nods. “And a Grand Slam champion, at that.”

“Wow, that’s…congratulations! That’s really cool, Ro!”

Roman looks almost embarrassed. “It ain’t happened yet, Seth…”

“Still, I’m real pleased for you.” Seth says, finding that he actually means it. He lost his own title a week ago, the one that he’s beginning to admit to himself means more to him than all those months shouldering the big black belt of the WWE Championship—because he held that Tag title with Dean, and with Roman before that. Looking in Roman’s eyes, he can see how much this impending win means to him—this time I will make it count, is the unspoken line that hangs in the air between them.

“Dean?” Roman turns, realizing Dean hasn’t spoken the whole time. “You okay?”

“I’m f-fine…” Dean says, stuttering slightly. “It’s just that…fuck, when you said you had some good news to tell I could’ve sworn you were gonna tell us you’ve knocked him up or something, Trips…”

Hunter laughs, while Roman ducks with embarrassment, a red flush rising to his cheeks. Seth has to smile because yeah, it did feel like one of those announcements.

“I’m sorry to disappoint,” Hunter says, one of his hands landing on Roman’s left kneecap. “But I can assure you, it’s not for lack of trying.”

Roman punches the older man’s shoulder, looking like he wanted to crawl into a hole and die, while Dean just sputters a little, and Seth wonders if he’s been transported into some bizarre rejected sitcom pilot from the waning days of the Attitude Era.

Thankfully, the awkward tableau is interrupted when a producer approaches Hunter and taps him on the shoulder. “Sir, you need to take your spot. Your cue will be in less than five minutes.”

“Okay, kid. I’ll be right up,” Hunter tells him, before turning back towards The Shield. “Well, I’d best go do my bit.”
“Yeah, go and be your mean old self…” Roman tells him, though his tone is affectionate.

Roman’s gaze follows Hunter until he disappears behind the curtains leading to gorilla, the same light in his eyes that Seth saw in Hunter weeks ago on tour, when he was on the phone talking to Roman.

“What’s he up to now?” Dean asks.

“I have no idea…” Roman shrugs. “Knowing him, probably nothing good…”

“So…” Seth sidles up to Roman. “I take it you won’t be riding with us tonight for the attack on SmackDown tomorrow?”

“No,” Roman says a little apologetically. “I’m staying with him tonight. I’ll join up with you guys tomorrow afternoon. He’ll get me there on time.”

“He’d better…” Dean mumbles.

—

It really, really shouldn’t come as a surprise to anyone who’s watched Hunter’s on-screen persona for the better part of the last twenty years.

Still, there’s an audible gasp that goes through the gathered roster in the locker room when the EVP of Talent and Live Events saunters into the ring, delivers a Pedigree to Jason Jordan, and declares himself for Team RAW at Survivor Series.

Judging by the backstage reactions, it seems that the segment’s ending was only known to those involved and the people running the show—probably a last minute change, something Seth knows all too well.
If Roman feels any of this shock at all he certainly doesn’t show it—he has his bags packed and ready by the time Hunter makes his way backstage, and Seth watches as they disappear beyond the doors leading towards the parking lot.

Judging by the look on his face, Dean most certainly has opinions about what he’s just seen happen out there, but one icy look from Seth as they climb into their rental car is enough to silence whatever tirade he’s about to launch into.

Seth drives the entire four hours to Charlotte while Dean stews in the seat next to him, bland late-night radio music filling the air between them.

—

“I don’t care…” Roman says, voice hitching a little as he does so. “It doesn’t bother me.”

“Not even if it bothers your friends?”

There’s a minute pause that renders Hunter’s shoulders momentarily tense, but then Roman lifts his head off Hunter’s chest slowly and looks up at him.

“So what? You’re a selfish, arrogant bastard who loves to be in the limelight—and you’ll use whatever influence you have to make sure you stay in it. What part of this don’t I already know?”

“Roman…”

“You make it sound as if this is some kind of revelation,” Roman ducks down and kisses Hunter’s collarbone. “It’s not.”

Hunter has to smile at that, his hands moving down to Roman’s hips to pick up their pace a little. “You’re right…it’s not.”
“Besides… I love my selfish bastard Daddy,” Roman says playfully, arching his back just so and clenching his hole around Hunter. “He wants me all for himself tonight.”

“Of course I do,” Hunter says, skating his hands up and down Roman’s torso. “Daddy’s missed you, baby…”

“Mmm-hmm…” Roman smiles, biting his lower lip. Being back in action and flush with health seems to have put Roman in a flirty mood—not that there’s much flirting to be done when Hunter’s already balls deep inside him. Still, it’s never not fun to play up a little.

“You miss this, don’t you baby? Miss me filling you up and making a mess of you…”

“Yeah…” Roman nods frantically, his hips moving to meet each of Hunter’s thrusts.

“I can’t wait to see you wear that pretty white belt,” Hunter grunts. “Wanna fuck my new Grand Slam slut, watch him come all over his new title…”

“Fuck…” Roman falls forward, bracing himself on Hunter’s chest, eyes wild and hazy as Hunter’s words stir images up in his mind.

“Maybe we’ll get them to watch, huh? Your brothers… show them how the Champ really likes to get fucked—maybe they’ll pick up some pointers for next time…”

Roman gasps, blinking profusely in that manner that lets Hunter know he’s hit a mark—and not an unwelcome one. He starts working Roman’s ass harder with his dick, letting the words spill out of him.

“Oh, you like the sound of that? Like the thought of them seeing me fuck you? Bet you do, don’t you? It’s about damn time they know who you really belong to…”

“F-fuck, I…” Roman stutters. “I…”
“Yeah, go on and come, baby…think of how good it’s gonna feel, me making you come all over yourself with those two watching us, knowing they can never fuck you the way Daddy does…”

Roman loses it, collapsing onto Hunter’s chest fully as he unloads, the wet spurts of it painting the skin between them. Hunter doesn’t let him rest through it, renewing his forceful thrusting until his own climax hits, holding Roman’s hips in to make sure he gets all of it in him, the clench of his post-orgasmic aftershocks only milking Hunter further.

“Fuck…” Roman mutters breathlessly against his chest. “You…you…”

“Yeah?” Hunter waits patiently.

Roman licks his dry lips. “You really mean that? I mean, would you…” he coughs a little. “I didn’t think you’d ever want it.”

“We don’t have to do it for real, I’m happy just painting a picture for you, if you want…” Hunter says as he brushes the hair away from Roman’s face. “But if they’re game…”

Roman bites his lip. “I don’t know. Seth’s up for it probably, but…”

“Ambrose is a tricky one, isn’t he?”

“To say the least…” Roman says. “Just…let’s just see how things go.”

“I’m still fucking you when you win that thing,” Hunter says. “That’s non-negotiable.”

Roman nods. “You’ll have me.”

“I don’t care if they wanna have their little celebration with you, too…either they wait till I’m done, or they play along.”

He puts as much firmness in his voice as he can, more than Roman probably needs—it’s not in his nature to deny Hunter anything he wants. Roman bends down, kisses his mouth reverently, moving
down to nip at his jaw.

“You’ll get me however you want me…with or without them.”
Chapter Summary

He grabs at his left ankle, feeling for something underneath the layers of clothing and the canvas of his boots, closing his eyes as he feels the outline of the leather strap wrapped around it. He doesn’t wear his anklet too often to the ring, not wanting to risk anyone seeing it when he’s putting on his gear, or that it would get damaged somehow through his movements. This night, of all nights, he wants it there—wants a part of Hunter to be there with him.

Chapter Notes

It's a long one, folks. It's another damn long one. Just wanted to point out a few things:

• It's useful to know what happened at the end of Survivor Series 2017 to fully understand some of the story points
• Contains Dean/Seth/Roman, in combination with Hunter/Roman. If that bothers you, then feel free to skip.
• Basically, what Hunter and Roman discuss at the end of the previous chapter is made real.
• When your headcanon involves devoting whole paragraphs to the discipline Media Monitoring, you know you're beyond help.
• The article quoted is a combination of several actual articles published on Whatculture in the aftermath of Survivor Series 2017.
• As always, thanks to my dearest P for being the best enabler, cheerleader, and keysmashing enthusiast one can ever hope for.

“I didn’t want you to hear about it from anybody else…” Hunter says, the fingers of one hand curled at the back of Roman’s neck. “Thought I might as well be the one to tell you.”

Roman is still staring at the laptop screen resting on the table in front of them, an e-mail attachment of a large poster image advertising an upcoming WWE Live event in Abu Dhabi. It’s the sort of poster he’s been featured on plenty, a cobbled-together collage of the superstars that will be performing at the event, complete with venue and dates.

Except this time, the face being featured prominently alongside his own is none other than Hunter’s, probably the first time their images have been side-by-side like this since their much-maligned bout at
Wrestlemania 32. He’s still trying to process it in his mind, what this means for them, eyes glued to Hunter’s glowering countenance on the screen, the big capital letters proclaiming “newly-added event” above their names, announcing it to be a one-night only marquee match between Roman Reigns and Triple H.

“When we decided to add an extra show there, they started coming to me with potential matches to make it more interesting…” Hunter explains. “This came up as the one we all felt would get the most buzz.”

Roman pulls back a little from the screen, leaning back in his chair. They’re a few nights away from Survivor Series, spending a rather quiet day in a hotel in Charlotte following Team RAW’s counter-attack on SmackDown the previous night. It’s become some sort of routine for them, staying behind from the rest of the circus just to sneak in a night or two of being together before the demands of the road would swallow them up again.

He’s sitting in nothing but his boxers and Hunter’s shirt from last night, bare feet digging into muted grey carpet of the suite’s dining area, anklet snug around his left foot. Their half-eaten breakfast is still on the table, a rather indulgent selection of waffles doused in blueberry sauce and an assortment of pastries. Hunter tended to keep himself on a healthier diet of salads and grains on most days, but he’s always willing to let go a little when he’s with Roman. It’s a moment of quiet on a cloudy November morning, with the curtains habitually drawn shut and the bombastic spectacle being advertised on the poster seemingly worlds away.

“It’s just a live show, right…” Hunter says, noticing Roman’s silence. “Not a big deal, we can just go there and have some fun, get Seth and Dean involved, arrange for a nice finish so the crowd goes home happy…”

Roman nods, fighting to speak over the lump in his throat. Just a live show in a rarely-visited country where the crowds are more appreciative and less hostile, and with little consequence for any ongoing storylines within their programming. Not an overhyped main event with a stadium crowd actively raining death threats and curses on him for the better part of thirty minutes, not the blowoff for a badly-booked angle supposedly devised to crown him as the next big thing. It’s not surprising that the poster for the Abu Dhabi encounter stopped short of calling it a “rematch”—no point reminding anyone of the disappointment that was their first one-on-one encounter on what should’ve been the grandest stage of them all.

“I would’ve asked you before I signed off on it, but—“

“You didn’t need to,” Roman cuts him off. “It’s okay. Like you said, just a live show right? No big deal…”
Hunter studies his face for a few long seconds, the fingers at the back of Roman’s neck splaying out to stroke him lightly. “I don’t want you to feel like you need to go crazy covering for me on this one, okay? We’ll figure out a pace that works for both of us, plan out a few spots to get the crowd going…and that’s it, really.”

“So…not another thirty-minute sleeper?”

“Hell, no…” Hunter shakes his head. “I’ve got no business bumping around for more than fifteen minutes these days—and you’re no lightweight, in case you haven’t noticed.”

Roman manages a small smile, reaching behind himself to lace his fingers through Hunter’s. “You can still take a spear from me, surely?”

“And a few of your so-called ‘punches’…” Hunter teases, laughing when Roman scowls at him. “I’ll put you over nice and clean, then we can come up with some shenanigans for after…”

“Because it wouldn’t be a match involving you without shenanigans, would it?” Roman quirks an eyebrow at Hunter.

“It’ll be fun…” Hunter assures him. “Well ok, getting speared by you is never fun, but you know what I mean…”

Roman nods. Sometimes he prefers the looser atmosphere of house shows and their touring gigs, where things can be a little more silly and the wrestlers aren’t under so much pressure to perform for the TV cameras. Foreign tours, in particular, give him a glimpse of just how global their company has become, and it’s always fascinating to experience an overseas crowd’s energy.

“Anyway, let’s put it out of our minds for the time being…” Hunter says as he gently closes his laptop screen. “Still got plenty to do over here before we head out.”

“You look tiread already,” Roman disentangles his fingers from Hunter’s to reach for the older man’s face, stroking the deeply-furrowed lines around his eyes. “Worse than before ‘Mania this year…”

“Yeah, that European tour was intense—schedule was so packed, and I was wrestling most
nights…” Hunter sighs. “Working backstage is stressful, but at least you’re sitting down with a headset and a cup of coffee doing it,”

“We’re not getting any rest anytime soon,” Roman says. “We’re doing India right after the Middle East, right?”

“You’ll love India,” Hunter tells him. “Great crowd, a lot of energy…plus you won’t be carrying an old-timer like me through a match, so you and your brothers can just let loose.”

Roman snorts a little. “I’d be a lot happier if we can catch a break after…doesn’t look like it, since Christmas and New Year are both on Mondays,”

Hunter sighs, then reaches over to tug Roman closer by the hem of his shirt. “Come here…”

Roman stands from his chair and takes a short stride over to Hunter, seating himself comfortably on the older man’s lap, his arms around Hunter’s neck.

“If I can work something out…” Hunter says. “Maybe we can take some time off, the week before Christmas? I can find somewhere quiet, away from all of this…maybe a nice little getaway spot out in the country.”

“But…” Roman begins. “I’ll have to put in some kind of notice, won’t I?”

“I’m sure they’ll let you off TV for just one episode,” Hunter says. “We’ve been trying to get a healthier rotation in anyways, make sure the guys take turns getting some downtime.”

Roman bites his lip, trying to picture in his mind just what ‘downtime’ entails. His last two breaks have both been forced upon him—once due to his suspension last year and the other due to his recent illness. That last one could hardly be called a break, though—he was miserable for most of it and Hunter wasn’t around to alleviate his misery. This year hasn’t given them too many opportunities to spend a good chunk of time together, the most being the few nights they spent after Wrestlemania, seemingly a lifetime ago with everything that’s happened since.

“Where would we go?” he asks. “If…I could get the week off, that is…”
“Lemme think of something…” Hunter says. “Orlando’s nice, but it’s also still within the neighborhood of work. I kinda want to take a break from everything, too.”

“Would they let you?” Roman asks. “More importantly…would you let yourself?”

Hunter smiles, rocking Roman a little on his lap. “Company’s not gonna go defunct if I switch off my phone for a couple of days,”

“Sure, sure…” Roman says, unconvinced. “Says the man who’ll go so far as to give handwritten notes to people doing the light rigs for house shows…”

“What can I say? That’s just how I am…” Hunter shrugs, leaning close to rub the tip of his nose against Roman’s. “Now, wouldn’t you like a few days of me giving all that attention and focus only to you?”

Roman smiles, twisting his fingers in Hunter’s beard. “If we can make it happen…I’d really love that, I really would.”

Hunter mirrors the smile and kisses the corner of his mouth, his arms tightening around Roman’s back.

—

Roman finds Sami backstage an hour before the Survivor Series kickoff show, warming up for his match with Kevin against Breezango. For a while they just sit together on an equipment crate parked near the loading dock, sharing half an orange that Roman stole off the catering tables.

“I can’t believe you beat me to it,” he tells Sami, spitting an orange seed at the far wall. “Years they’ve been calling for me to turn heel, and there you went, sweet smiley Sami Zayn gone over to the dark side…”

Sami laughs, spitting a seed of his own to match Roman’s effort. “I didn’t think it would work,
honestly…but it has been more interesting since then.”

“It works because it’s you and Kevin,” Roman says truthfully. “All that history, all those years you guys spent together…it’s not something any writer could’ve come up with.”

Sami stops chewing for a bit, hawking seeds into the palm of his right hand. “When I was pulling Kevin off that table, when Shane’s body made impact…I was seriously lost for a few whole minutes, you know? Like there was all this noise around me, and all I could think of was, ‘what the hell did I just do’?”

“Yeah, I remember that look on your face,” Roman says. “I knew it was real, Sami. We all did. I mean, you’re always gonna be better at working an angle than I am, but I saw you literally shake that night, man…”

“I sure did,” Sami nods, licking a trail of sticky juice and pulp off one finger. “So much for being a career babyface, huh?”

Roman looks over. “Do you regret it?”

“On principle, I try not to regret anything,” Sami says. “I’ve put too many years, too much of myself into this to allow myself to look back and think, ‘oh hell I wish I’d done something differently’, you know?”

Roman studies his companion for a while, noting the way Sami’s hands peel at his orange, diligently picking away at the fibers, wrists already taped, knuckles hardened and chafed by years of plying his trade.

“How long…?”

“Sixteen years, in a matter of months…” Sami says.

“Jesus,” Roman shakes his head.

Sami laughs it off, pulling the edge of his cap down over his forehead. “I know…sometimes I can’t
“And you’re still having fun with it,” Roman says.

“I am, actually…” Sami says. “I really am.”

“Good,” Roman says.

“How ‘bout you, Big Dog? Back to full health, I hope…”

“Pretty much, yeah…” Roman says, popping an orange slice into his mouth. “It’s been a crazy couple of months, man…”

“All good with Hunter, too?” Sami asks casually, though his voice drops slightly in volume.

Roman smiles, fiddling with a bit of orange rind before tossing it into a nearby trash can. “We’re good…”

“Cool, I’m happy to hear that…” Sami nods. “Is it weird knowing you guys are having a rematch in a few weeks?”

“Yeah, we talked about that…” Roman says. “Tryin’ not to make too big of a deal out of it. It’s a one-off live show, anyway…just need to make it fun for the crowd so they get their money’s worth.”

“I’m sure you’ll figure something out…” Sami says, finishing off the rest of his orange before hopping off the crate. “I gotta go find Kevin and get ready for this match…I’ll catch you later, Ro…”

“Go kick some ass, Sami…” Roman calls out after him, before spitting his last orange seed a rather impressive distance, sending it clattering against the metal rolling door of the loading bay.
Opening a Pay-Per-View is a refreshing change for Roman, after a few years spent being slotted in the middle of the card or as the main event. What’s more, it’s refreshing to do it alongside Seth and Dean, who are bouncing balls of barely-contained energy before they even step out into the crowd for their entrance. They haven’t tussled with The New Day for a long time and it feels good—like rediscovering an old playlist that’s gone out of rotation. Roman feels himself get buoyed by the collective energy of everyone he’s sharing the ring with, the raucous crowd cheering for every spot and on their feet for every near-fall.

Finishing with the Triple Powerbomb and letting Dean have the pinfall gives Roman a sense of satisfaction he can’t even put words to—it’s the closest he’s felt to the sense of wholeness they shared as a team back in the days since this reunion angle got going. Every move, every setup they did, Roman can’t help but flash back to those days, how the arena lights caught the streak of blonde in Seth’s hair and the way Dean would leap off turnbuckles to pound people to the ground. He was a different person then, too—naive, relatively green, wholly unprepared for what he was being groomed for.

Now he’s raising his arms in victory alongside two brothers, two fellow World Champions, three men who have spent the last three years carrying the company and its titles in some form or another, and the significance of it isn’t lost on Roman. Judging by the looks he gets from both Seth and Dean, it’s not lost on them either.

Back in their dressing room, Seth all but collapses into him, nearly tackling Roman onto the low bench, beating his chest in a mix of shaky laughter and something a little more visceral, something Roman feels in his gut, too. Dean adjusts the tight wrapping around his injured elbow and joins them, flinging his good arm around Roman’s shoulder and using his fingers to tweak at Seth’s earlobe.

Roman holds Seth as tightly as he can with one arm while his other hand squeezes Dean’s knee, trying to communicate through his touch what he can’t quite verbalize.

Thank you.

I’ve missed this.

I wish we could do this forever.
I never thought we’d do this again.

Thank you.

I love you two idiots more than I probably should.

Thank you.

The silence lasts until Seth lifts his head off Roman’s chest, sniffing lightly. “That…went by quickly, didn’t it?”

“We went twenty minutes,” Dean says. “At least.”

“Damn…” Roman exclaims. “Sure didn’t feel like it.”

“Must be a good sign, then…” Dean shrugs. “That’s one for Team Red on the scoreboard.”

“You hear anything about the finish?” Seth asks. “What the final score’s gonna be?”

“Nope…” Roman says, truthfully. “Bookers are keeping tight-lipped. Maybe they’re planning some kind of surprise?”

“Well, then…” Dean extracts himself from the other two, moving to grab a towel from a rack on the wall. “You guys wanna stay here and cuddle, or do we wanna go out and see Asuka kill everyone?”

“Sign me up for that…” Seth raises his hand. “Let’s drop by catering and see if there’s any tortilla chips left…”

Roman grins and shoves Seth off the bench, before following his two teammates out the door.
The other thing about being the first match on an actual Pay-Per-View card is that it means a lot of sitting around and waiting for the show to wrap up. By the time the Men’s Elimination match comes around, Roman’s managed to get himself showered and changed, and is hanging around backstage with the rest of the combined roster, watching the action go down on a flatscreen monitor.

Hunter’s involvement had all but guaranteed that something screwy was about to go down, but nobody seemed to expect that it would go down quite the way it did. It’s a head-scratcher of a finish, to say the least, one that even the people backstage can’t seem to make sense of.

Roman keeps his composure for the most part as he watches the aftermath, trying to ignore the looks he keeps getting from Seth and Dean, the uneasy silence that descends between the three of them even as they get in Seth’s rental SUV for the ride back to the hotel.

Roman’s behind the wheel, keeping his eyes fixed on the road while Seth fiddles with his phone in the back seat and Dean shuffles around uneasily next to him. Finally, about three blocks away from the arena, Dean lets out a loud exhale, evidently unable to contain his reactions anymore.

“Ro…”

“I don’t wanna hear it, Dean…” Roman cuts him off, keeping his voice even. “Save it.”

“But…”

“Dean, you’re welcome talk my ear off about anything else—how the women’s match went down, AJ bumping around for Brock, Charlotte, The Usos…” Roman rattles off. “…but I don’t wanna hear anything about the finish of that elimination match.”

Dean stares at him, mouth curled into a deepening scowl. “I know what I saw, Ro…”

“Good, you have eyes. So do the rest of us,” Roman says tersely, making a right turn towards the road leading to their hotel. “But if you’re looking for an objective opinion, you damn well know you’re not gonna get it from me.”
Behind him, he can hear Seth heave a long, exasperated sigh.

“Fine…” Dean says. “Fine, just get us back to the hotel and we can forget about it.”

—

Roman’s in his room not twenty minutes before he hears a knock on his door. Leaping off the bed, he opens it and finds Hunter standing there, looking a little worse for wear but still smiling, a fresh bruise blooming at the base of his neck.

“Bastard…” Roman says as he yanks the older man into the room, kicking the door shut and shoving him up against the wall. “Why didn’t you tell me?”

Hunter grabs him by the sides of his face in a placating gesture. “I’m sorry, baby…it’s hard to explain, and we came up with that finish really last minute…”

“No, not that!” Roman shook his head. “I don’t care about the finish, I couldn’t care less if it ended with you challenging Brock to a bra-and-panties match for Universal title, for fuck’s sake! Why didn’t you tell me you were gonna get mauled by Braun, of all people?”

Hunter stares at him, processing Roman’s words before his face softens into another smile. “You were worried about me?”

“Fuck yeah!” Roman digs his fists into Hunter’s chest. “I know what Braun can do, okay? I got the worst of it for months, and suddenly you’re out there taking more bumps from him than you’ve done all year long?”

“Sshhh, it’s okay…” Hunter caresses his face gently. “I’m okay, Roman. He did his job well, didn’t botch anything, everything went exactly how we told him to.”

Roman shakes his head. “I couldn’t…I thought you were hurt, for real. He was choking you in that corner, and…”

Hunter takes one of Roman’s hand and pushes it up against his own throat, where the bruises are.
“It’s gonna leave a mark, but it doesn’t hurt…see? I’m okay, baby. I really am.”

Roman sighs, resting his forehead against Hunter’s left shoulder. “Fucking scared me…”

“Well, now you know how it felt for me, watching him throw you around week in and week out…” Hunter says, holding him a little closer. “He did a lot worse to you than he did to me.”

Sniffing, Roman pushes himself off the wall, pulling Hunter further into the room. “It’s a whole lot worse watching it than having it done to you.”

“I know…” Hunter moves to sit at the edge of the bed. “He did good, though…probably made him extra careful knowing he was power slamming the boss.”

Roman winces, but allows himself to get pulled down onto Hunter’s lap, where he feels his hands roaming the older man’s body, as if still wanting to assure himself that Hunter is in one piece.

“You…uh, you wanna talk about that finish?” Hunter asks gently against his ear.

“No…” Roman says. “I told you, I don’t really care. I just wanted to know that you’re okay.”

“Oh, baby…” Hunter pats his thigh affectionately. “I’m more than okay. I think we both did what we needed to do tonight.”

Roman trails a line of kisses down Hunter’s neck, letting his mouth linger over the fresh bruise that Braun Strowman’s massive hands left there. He feels Hunter’s breath in his hair, the quiet rocking motions of his body, the slow and sure calming of his own racing heart pressed against Hunter’s chest.

“I love you…” he whispers.

Hunter turns his head slightly, pressing his nose into the side of Roman’s head. “I know, baby boy. I love you, too.’”
Triple H is the most divisive figure in the entirety of modern wrestling.

This is the guy who is either in the all-time great conversation, or whose CV is littered with some much boring trash that, if anything, he is the most overrated 'legend' in pro wrestling history. This is the guy who either loves making a right tw*t out of everybody underneath him, or securing the very future of his inherited company through the awesomeness that is NXT. This is the guy who is either deeply insecure, or incredibly self-assured.

Six days after inserting himself into the Survivor Series main event, Triple H completely dominated proceedings. He was in and out of the ring throughout, engaging in oddball exchanges with Bobby Roode and Shinsuke Nakamura, but nepotism didn't take hold until the last five minutes, when the match devolved into another twisted McMahon family drama.

WWE set up three individual storylines for 'The Game' during this spell. Meanwhile, Nakamura, Balor, Roode, Cena, and Orton left with nothing. It was exactly the kind of spotlight-hogging booking we've come to expect in such situations, but that doesn't make it any less disappointing, particularly with such a star-studded line-up

He got to tussle with his NXT graduates to remind everybody why they were there, but they weren't there for long: this match, in its crucial final act, was all about the 'Game'; in setting up potentially three WrestleMania programmes (Shane O'Mac, Braun Strowman, Kurt Angle), Triple H gobbled up not just the story, but every conceivable subplot of it. He also, just for laughs, booked himself as one of two survivors...all while wearing his own t-shirt.

He also "put Braun Strowman over" - which is Triple H-speak for "securing my WrestleMania match" - so look forward to Trips getting the already-over Strowman over in a 25 minute sleepwalk.

Smirking to himself, Hunter hands the tablet back to his wife, returning to adjusting his suit in front of the mirror. “Well, you can certainly count on the internet to deliver the goods when it matters…”
“That’s just one article from one website,” Stephanie says, swiping at the tablet. “Media Monitoring says at least ten more have cropped up since this morning, all more or less with the same tone…”

“My, they sure write fast when there’s something to get pissed off about, don’t they?”

Stephanie smiles at him knowingly. “You did give them plenty of material to work with…”

They’re a few hours away from the start of RAW’s live broadcast, the night after Survivor Series. Hunter and Stephanie are due to take part in the opening segment, following up on what happened at the Pay-Per-View itself. Hunter’s body is still aching from the effect of Braun Strowman’s post-match beatdown—even the most careful application of a powerslam from a man that size will still involve some kind of pain. How Roman managed to take so many bumps and hits from Braun during the course of their feud and escape with only minor injuries, Hunter will never know.

“Well, you’ll be happy to know all the old memes are resurfacing.” Stephanie says as she looks down at the tablet screen. “You with the shovel, you draped in all the title belts in existence—including the old Divas one…”

Hunter scowls. “Can’t they come up with something new?”

“Give it a few more hours, I’m sure a few will start appearing,” Stephanie assures him. “All in all, I think you outdid yourself, babe…that was some pretty effective heat generation for just one appearance.”

“Do you think it’ll do the trick?” Hunter says as he knots his tie.

“We’ll have to wait until the end of tonight to find out,” Stephanie says. “I’ll get a liaison from Media Monitoring to send you the topline report as soon as it becomes available.”

“Good…” Hunter says. “How soon can I expect it?”

“Social media reactions can be monitored in real-time, so they’ll crawl through that first…” Stephanie explains. “Articles like the one I showed you won’t show up until tomorrow morning, probably…”
“That’s fine,” Hunter says. “In the meantime, keep them looking into the responses to last night, as well…”

“They’re on it,” Stephanie says as she reaches up and helps him correct the position of his tie. “I’m sure the internet’s not quite done bitching and moaning about you, honey…”

“They’d better not be,” Hunter says.

Stephanie rakes her fingers through his beard, trying to comb them into some semblance of neatness. “So…did you have to explain in to him last night? About the finish?”

“No…” Hunter shook his head. “He was more worried about Strowman hurting me than anything else that went down last night,”

“Well, ain’t that sweet…” Stephanie chuckles. “In all fairness, though…he was the one getting beat up regularly by Strowman earlier this year, so no wonder he’s worried.”

“That’s what he said,” Hunter shrugs. “I told him not to worry about me…all he should be thinking about is tonight, about his match, and about getting that IC belt in as convincing a manner as possible.”

“Sound advice,” she nods agreeably. “You’re getting better at that. Almost as good as you are in cooking up a firestorm, apparently.”

Hunter smiles, giving her a quick peck on the cheek. “Well, on that note, let’s go out there and add more fuel to the fire, shall we?”

—

Being the target of so much concentrated heat and vitriol is a familiar sensation for Hunter. He’s
grown rather accustomed to it, really—it always suited his character better than any short-lived babyface run, and even those were always tinged with the audience anticipation of his inevitable heel turn. Standing in the middle of that ring, with Stephanie doing her best to exaggerate his accomplishments and using that voice of hers that she knew could curdle milk and rupture eardrums, Hunter feels oddly proud at this little scenario they’ve composed.

It’s *working*, he can feel it even without Media Monitoring’s jargon-laden report sheet.

The heat ratchets up even more when Stephanie comes between him and Braun, devising a match pitting the monster against Jason Jordan instead, conveniently letting Hunter off the hook from answering for his actions. It’s a classic trope, dusted off the archives from the heyday of The Authority, a surefire way to get a crowd riled up.

Walking away from that segment, the boos chasing after him as he goes, Hunter knows he’s done everything he can.

The rest will be up to Roman.

—

“Ten minutes till we cue the main event,” the producer announces as he pokes his head through the dressing room door.

Roman nods in acknowledgement, before bending down to check the ties of his boots as he sits on the long bench. There’s a faint rumble starting somewhere deep in his chest, an anticipation that’s tinged a little differently than any of his recent matches. He hasn’t felt this for a long time—not since his match against the Undertaker, the way his stomach flips and flutters when he pictures the end result that’s been booked.

He grabs at his left ankle, feeling for something underneath the layers of clothing and the canvas of his boots, closing his eyes as he feels the outline of the leather strap wrapped around it. He doesn’t wear his anklet too often to the ring, not wanting to risk anyone seeing it when he’s putting on his gear, or that it would get damaged somehow through his movements. This night, of all nights, he wants it there—wants a part of Hunter to be there with him.

“Something wrong with your ankle?” Seth asks him, and Roman looks up to find him and Dean
“No, it’s fine…” Roman assures them. “I’m good.”

Seth huffs quietly and kneels in front of him, while Dean sits down on the bench next to him.

“Ro…this is your big night, man…” Seth begins, one of his hands resting on Roman’s thigh. “Whatever happens out there, however that crowd reacts, whatever bullshit they spew at you…just remember that me and Dean got your back, okay?”

Roman smiles, nodding quietly. “I know, Seth…I know.”

“Yeah, if they decide to get rowdy, we’ll be standing right there with you, and none of us are gonna give a fuck…” Dean adds. “If they wanna boo, they’re gonna have to boo all of us.”

Roman flings an arm around each of his teammates’ shoulders, holding them close, their foreheads bumping against each other. “Thanks…”

Truth be told, he hasn’t really thought about the reactions he might be getting tonight, how a fanbase so locked into their dislike of him will respond to seeing him given another title run, so close to what they feel is an inevitable spot at yet another Wrestlemania main event. Roman’s learned the hard way that perceptions are tricky things, and trying to change them is a bitch and a half when all one can do is go out there and do his job as best he can.

Still, it bolsters him, the thought that if he’s to be greeted with another angry mob, his brothers will stand beside him through it. And Hunter may not be there with him physically, but a token of him is safely wrapped around Roman’s left ankle like a charm, another touchstone he can rely on.

“Let’s go out there and get my title, shall we?” Roman says.

“Aye, Big Dog…” Seth nods.

“Woof,” Dean adds.
Hunter’s wedged into his spot in gorilla, watching intently as the match plays out on the monitor in front of him, listening in on his headset. His feet are twitching nervously, hand rubbing the back of his neck out of habit. They’re about five minutes into the Intercontinental title match, The Miz and Roman going all out with a white-hot crowd around them, and Hunter’s cautious optimism is slowly unfurling into something more akin to disbelief.

He looks around, finds himself exchanging glances with Mike Hayes. “You hearing what I’m hearing?” he asks.

“Yep,” Hayes nods and gives him a thumbs-up sign before turning back to his monitor.

Hunter’s throat is dry as he hits the channel switch connecting his headset. “Gorilla calling Audio,”

“Audio here,” a voice responds into his headset.

“Are you guys tweaking with the crowd noise? Pumping in some effects?”

“No, sir…” the voice says. “You’re hearing it live, just like the rest of us.”


He turns back to his monitor, watching Roman set Miz up for a Samoan drop, the impact of bodies against canvas complemented with the roar of the crowd, and the chants that Hunter wasn’t even sure were real just moments ago. He lets himself smile, for the first time since the match started, covering the mic of his headset so his labored breathing doesn’t carry over the channels.

They’re chanting your name, baby.
“Dean…” Seth hisses, reaching over to grasp Dean’s wrist tightly.

“I know…” Dean says. “I know.”

“Are you hearing this? Am I tripping?”

Dean shrugs. “I’m hearing it too, Seth…”

They’re seconds away from their scheduled run-in, tipping the odds back in Roman’s favor after The Bar interfered just minutes ago. Behind the sweep of black curtains separating gorilla from the entrance ramp, Seth can hear the crowd roaring, chanting, Roman and Miz doing their best to work them into a frenzy.

“They’re chanting for him, Dean…” Seth says, dumbstruck. “They’re really…fuck, they’re really doing it.”

Dean flashes him a wide, toothy grin, adjusting the long black wrap around his injured elbow. “Let’s go out there and make it a real party, then…”

The next few minutes plays out like an out-of-body experience for Seth, running out there with Dean to deal with Sheamus and Cesaro, chucking them out of the way to clear the path for Roman to hit his final Spear on Miz. Seth hasn’t shaken so much since he won the Tag Titles with Dean back at Summerslam, his body registering the noise of the crowd and the energy inside the arena like a shockwave rippling through him.

He hangs back with Dean outside the ring, perfectly positioned to watch Roman launch himself off the ropes and intercept The Miz, spearing him down into the mat. Time seems to slow into a crawl as the referee slides into position, checking that both shoulders are on the mat before starting his count.

Seth’s bracing for it—boos, cheers, thrown objects, whatever—as he counts alongside the ref and
everyone else in the building.

The referee’s hand hits the mat for the third and final time, and everything in the air around them seem to erupt.

Seth can barely contain himself, Dean already losing his mind and leaping all over the place. They both slide into the ring, buoyed by adrenaline and the blaring volume of Roman’s music, snatching the Intercontinental belt from the referee’s hands and shoving it against Roman’s chest. Seth’s vision goes fuzzy as he casts a glance around the arena, Roman prancing around it in uncharacteristic glee, Dean screaming profanities he knows won’t be heard over the noise of the crowd.

And the noise of the crowd is music to Seth’s ears, he can’t even begin to imagine how it must sound to Roman.

They’re on their feet, cheering, fists in the air, a sight Seth knows Roman hasn’t seen much of, and he grabs his brother by the waist to hold him close.

“Listen to them…remember this…” he says in Roman’s ears. “That’s all for you, Big Dog! All you!”

Roman lets out a loud, wolf-like roar, before falling back against the ropes and kissing his bright new belt, white-gold and gleaming, looking small in his large hands. Roman’s expression is one of unbridled joy, and Seth can see his knees buckling slightly. Dean is still prancing around like a crazy person, as if daring anyone to come and voice their objection, but none seem to be forthcoming.

They hug, in the middle of the ring, The Shield, and Seth can feel Roman sagging slightly against them, legs on the verge of giving out.

“Thank you…” he hears the shaky voice whisper.

“No need, Uce…” Dean says. “It’s all you, baby. All you.”

They raise Roman’s fists in the air, Dean on his left side, Seth on his right, and for one perfect moment Seth’s world slides back into equilibrium—a world without banged-up elbows, surgically-repaired knees or badly-booked pushes, without steel chairs and golden briefcases. Just him and his two best friends, the unlikeliest trio you could ever put together, standing together in victory.
There’s still odd bits and pieces to do in the aftermath — their big sendoff to the Miz, backstage photos, shaking hands with everyone in gorilla and down the corridors, cameras following them every which way, especially focusing on Roman. It’s as if the entire machinery of the company has been geared towards this moment, on this night, and Seth knows why. If things stay on their current trajectory, Roman’s next big moment will be at Wrestlemania 34, and by then it’s more than likely those who are cheering him tonight will be booing him once more, such is the nature of the crowd’s favor, but this night he can say that he closed out the show winning a title that the audience is happy to see on him, even if it’s just this night in this city on this one particular show.

Backstage, past the handshake brigade, the long hallways and the pats on the back, they finally make it back to their dressing room, Dean shutting the door behind them. Roman gathers them both into a bear hug, those big strong arms clasping tight around Seth’s torso, and Seth’s breath is knocked out of him a little, though he wraps his arm around Roman and Dean in return.

“Thank you…” Roman repeats, still shaking.

“You okay, Ro?” Dean asks.

“Yeah, yeah…” Roman says. “Just…give me a minute.”

“Take your time,” Seth assures him. “It’s your night.”

“Did they…was I hearing right? I thought I heard—I didn’t think, thought I was fooling myself…”

“Yeah, you heard them right, Uce…” Dean says. “They were chanting for you, that whole place was cheering for you.”

Seth smiles, squeezing Roman’s shoulder. “All for you.”

Roman looks between the two of them, his expression one of such relief and elation that Seth feels something tighten in his chest. He knows how much it means to Roman, this moment, as much as he’s put effort into not even caring about the people who wish misery and death upon him on a daily basis, the moments when he actually gets a crowd behind him are precious.
“Grand Slam, baby…” Dean knocks his fist against the metal plate of the Intercontinental Title draped over Roman’s shoulder. “Join the club.”

Roman smiles, looks over to Seth. “We’ll make it three for three one day…you’ll get your shot at this, too.”

“Maybe,” Seth nods. “It’s all about you tonight, though.”

Roman hooks his elbow around Seth’s neck and wrenches him close, kissing the top of his sweaty head. Seth laughs—Roman’s displays of affection with him and Dean are endearingly sloppy and enthusiastic, especially when he’s high on a victory such as this night.

“So…” he says after he’s disentangled himself from the other two. “How are we gonna celebrate?”

“I’d say we start with a few beers, take it back to the hotel, and see where it goes…” Dean says.

Roman bites his lip a little. “See, I’ve thought about that…would you mind terribly if we skipped the beers?”

Dean shrugs. “Not really. It’s your night, Uce…you tell us how you wanna celebrate, and we’ll go along.”

“Yup, just tell us what you’re up for…” Seth agrees.

Roman sighs. “Well, I—“

He doesn’t get to finish his sentence because at that precise moment the door to the dressing room flies open, and all three find themselves staring at Hunter, his large frame filling up the doorway, eyes fixated on one thing and one thing alone—Roman.

He kicks the door shut behind him, and before anyone can say anything he’s suddenly surging forward, grabbing Roman by the waist and backing him up against the lockers, Roman’s back connecting with a clanging noise as he gasps in surprise.
Dean and Seth stand rooted to their spot, too stunned to even react as Hunter proceeds to grab Roman’s face in his hands and kiss him fiercely, Roman’s newly-won title belt caught between them. Seth has to blink profusely to convince himself this is actually happening, a few seconds of blankness before it registers in his brain that what he’s witnessing is—to be perfectly honest—kinda hot.

Seth’s been on the other end of Hunter’s ministrations enough times to know that the older man holds nothing back, and he’s not holding anything back now, kissing Roman with such dominance, hands already wandering to caress other parts of Roman’s body. He’s never seen them like this, never thought he’d ever get to see it, and when Roman unabashedly moans into Hunter’s mouth Seth is almost embarrassed to feel a distinct tingle in his groin.

_Goddammit._

“Uh…” Dean clears his throat. “Should we…uh, should we just…leave the two of you alone, then?”

He’s about to make his way towards he door when Hunter tears his mouth away from Roman, the sound of their lips separating a loud smack that causes Seth’s vision to go hazy for a split second, and Hunter turns around to look at the two of them, Roman still enclosed in his arms.

And _damn_, the look on Roman’s face nearly does it for Seth. He’s flustered and panting, looking like he’s about ready to melt, forehead resting on Hunter’s broad shoulder, sweaty fingers gripping at the older man’s suit lapels.

“Wait…” Hunter says, before turning to Roman. “Did you ask them?”

Roman shakes his head, a flush rising to his already reddened cheeks as he looks away.

“What…ask us what?” Dean says.

“You see, boys…your brother here isn’t in the habit of asking for what he wants,” Hunter says over Roman’s shoulder, regarding Seth and Dean calmly. “Either he’s a bit shy, or…he doesn’t want to make either of you uncomfortable.”
His eyes drift towards Dean at that precise moment, and Seth feels a ripple of something up his spine. The look on Dean’s face suggests he’s hovering somewhere between being uncomfortable and curious as fuck, and Seth knows Dean well enough to know which of those he’ll eventually gravitate towards.

“We all know what he really wants, don’t we?” Hunter says, voice at the edge of taunting as he leans down to nip at Roman’s shoulder, eyes never leaving Dean’s. “The question is…are we gonna give it to him?”

Dean exhales sharply through his nose, hands balling involuntarily into fists. Seth reaches over to grab his wrist, recognizing Dean’s fighting stance, but Hunter seems entirely unperturbed. Roman can barely look at either of them, head hidden behind Hunter’s neck and a curtain of sweat-soaked hair, but Seth can read from his body language that he’s tense with anticipation, nearly trembling with it in Hunter’s embrace.

Seth can’t take his eyes of them—the way Hunter’s arms are solidly wrapped around Roman’s broad back, possessive and tender at the same time, the way Roman’s leaning against him the way Seth has never seen him lean on anyone before. It’s nothing like the way Roman behaves around them, nothing like the way they touch or even fool around with each other, all their bickering and fighting over who gets to do what first, and he knows Dean can see it too.

“He wants…all of us?” Dean can barely get the words out of his mouth, scarcely believing it’s even possible.

He can see Roman’s breath hitch at those words, turning his head around to look at them for the first time in what feels like forever. God, the hungry, desperate look in his eyes is enough to make Seth lose it—he still remembers the last time all three of them were together, their first night back as The Shield, and Roman went further with them then than he’s ever done before. Judging by the looks of it, though…he’s willing to go even further.

“It’s his night…” Seth finally manages to say. “I don’t see why he shouldn’t get what he wants.”

“But only if you two are willing participants,” Hunter quickly adds. “Don’t do it just for him if you two aren’t gonna end up enjoying yourselves…ain’t that right, baby?”

Roman nods frantically, seemingly having lost all ability to verbalize. Seth looks over at Dean, who looks back at him with a mirroring expression of what the fuck are we getting ourselves into.
“Well…” Dean starts awkwardly. “Why don’t you tell us how it’s gonna go down, then?”

“Dean,” Seth hisses a little warningly, not wanting Dean to get standoffish.

“Look, it’s only fair, right? That’s what we did last time, too…” Dean shrugs. “Made sure we understood he rules before we did anything.”

Hunter smiles a little. “I’d say that’s wise…”

Seth swallows hard, still torn between the sight before him and the implications of what they’re discussing. “So…how’s it gonna be?”

“First…I’m gonna take him back to his hotel room, get him cleaned up and sorted out, and you two can join us once he’s ready.”

Seth decides not to ask for the definition of ‘ready’ for the time being. “And then?”

“I won’t be ordering the two of you around, obviously…” Hunter says, sounding almost casual. “Not my place to do that. Besides, he’s already told you the general rules.”

*Use protection. Don’t come inside me. Anything else is fair game.* “Yeah…” Seth rasps. “We remember.”

“Good.” Hunter nods at them. “But remember this also: I will do whatever I fucking want with him, and he will let me. You two might like what you see, you might not. Doesn’t matter to me…or to him.”

Seth can only imagine what he’s going to see, but he’s willing to bet he’s gonna end up liking most of it. Dean, on the other hand…

“Okay,” Dean says, sounding as if he’s resigned himself to some kind of inevitability. “Got it.”

Roman looks like he can hardly believe what he’s just heard. “You…sure?” he asks, finding his
“It’s your night, Ro…” Dean shrugs, trying to feign some kind of nonchalance. “We all want you to be happy tonight.”

“Yeah…” Seth agrees. “Your celebration, right?”

Roman inhales sharply, fingers tightening around Hunter’s collar. The older man just smiles, kissing the side of his head soothingly, arms still firmly locked around Roman. Seth’s no fool—he knows the message that’s being broadcast here, the unspoken agreement he and Dean has just signed. This is Roman’s night, indeed—but he is Hunter’s before anything else, and if Seth and Dean want in on the celebrations, they’ll have to accept that part of it as well.

“I’ll see the two of you back at the hotel then,” Hunter says as he starts for the door, Roman in tow. “Don’t worry about his stuff, I’ll send someone to come pack them up.”

“Okay,” Seth manages to say before the two of them disappear out the door, leaving him standing there with Dean, looking at each other as if they’ve just broken some kind of spell.

“Holy…shit…” Dean mutters. “Did we just—“

“Yeah, we did…” Seth finishes for him. “And I say we’d better pack up and head back before any of us changes our minds…”

——

“Come here, Champ…”

Roman smiles and crawls up the mattress, to where Hunter is seated, still half-dressed in his pants and shirt unbuttoned, leaning against the headboard. Roman himself is naked—save for two bands of leather, black and white, one wrapped around his ankle and the other around his waist. Roman doesn’t habitually wear his title belts around his waist, says he doesn’t like the look of it on him on
camera—but he’s not doing this for the cameras.

“Look at you…” Hunter smirks as Roman straddles his lap. “All dressed up for your own little party.”

“Think this one looks good on me?” Roman asks, hands skimming over the top of the belt. It’s a narrower strap than any belt he’s worn before, the white standing out starkly against his skin, the golden plates shiny and polished.

“You always look beautiful…” Hunter says truthfully. “The belt’s just the cherry on top.”

Roman grins, leaning down to kiss him. Hunter can feel the buzz under his skin, the tingle of anticipation and slight nerves that permeates his whole body. Roman hasn’t stopped smiling since he scored the pinfall, it seems, and what a sight that truly is.

“So proud of you…” Hunter says between their kisses. “You really went out there and gave it all tonight…got everyone rooting for you.”

“I still can’t believe it…” Roman sighs against his lips. “I thought I was imagining it, hearing them…”

“You’ve worked hard for this,” Hunter taps at the belt around Roman’s waist. “You deserve it…”

Roman smiles and kisses him again, grinding hungrily against him. Hunter moves them around until he’s the one lying on top, stomach pressed into the metal plate of the belt and Roman’s body below, hands roaming to every inch of skin he can touch.

“Think your brothers will go through with the plan?” Hunter asks. “Or will they chicken out?”

“They’ll come,” Roman assures him. “I saw the look on their faces…no way they’ll miss out on this…”

Hunter smirks, reaching for the bedside table where a tube of lubricant lay waiting. “Well, I better make sure they have something nice to look at when they arrive, then…”
Seth stares at the grains of wood running down the door to Roman’s hotel room, hands shuffling nervously inside his pocket. He takes out his phone again, checking the message Roman sent him for the umpteenth time, as if assuring himself that he read it correctly.

*Room 219. Come here.*

He’s stood here for at least five minutes waiting for Dean — hopes to hell that his tag team partner hasn’t backed out of the whole deal. Finally Dean arrives, a flurry of footsteps coming from the direction of the elevators, still shaking excess water off his damp hair.

“Finally…” Seth hisses. “At least you bothered to shower.”

“Didn’t wanna stink up the whole joint,” Dean says. “Man, hotel shampoos are the worst—got all this sticky residue to it.”

Seth rolls his eyes. “We’re really gonna discuss the merits of hotel toiletries here? Now?”

“Jesus, just knock on the goddamn door!” Dean snarls at him. “Let’s get on with it.”

“Promise me you won’t start any trouble?”

“It’s Ro’s night. I wouldn’t do that to him,” Dean says. “Seth…just do it. Come on.”

Seth takes a deep breath and knocks three times, pausing a few seconds before repeating the gesture again. It takes less than a minute before the handle turns and the door swings open—and they’re greeted by Hunter, who looks every bit as calm and collected as he had back at the arena, save for the telltale flush to his skin that Seth knows all too well.
“Great, you two are here…” Hunter smiles, as if welcoming them to a family Sunday brunch. “He’s been waiting for you…”

Hunter steps aside to let them into the room, Seth followed by Dean, and closes the door behind them.

“I’ll leave you three to get acquainted,” Hunter says as he goes into the bathroom. “Be right back.”

Seth walks past the entrance corridor and into the dimly-lit room itself, and nearly trips over himself when he sees the sight that awaits them.

“Holy shit…” Dean mutters from beside him, and yeah, Seth couldn’t have said it better himself.

Seeing Roman naked is really nothing new—they’ve long since been intimate with each other’s bodies to the point of nonchalance, something that happens naturally over the course of so many years spent on the road together, sharing rooms, sharing showers, sharing beds, drunken nights of sloppy handjobs and the occasional fucking. But this time Roman’s spread out on one of the beds, the mussed-up sheets a stark contrast to the pristine state of the bed next to it, hair tousled and his body covered with a light sheen of sweat, his newly-won title belt resting on the pillow beside him. His expression is one of hazy satisfaction, eyes half-lidded and mouth juicy and wet, regarding Dean and Seth with a pleasant grin.

The kicker, though, is the state of him below the waist—dick hanging soft between his legs, belly splattered with tell-tale beads of white, and holy fuck his asshole looks puffy and used, slick and leaking white droplets of come, staining his thighs. Seth’s mouth goes instantly dry and his groin tightens, even as Roman lifts one hand to reach out to them.

“There you are…” Roman says, and even his voice sounds a little wrecked. “Thought you wouldn’t show up…”

“Like hell he wouldn’t,” Dean says, though he’s lost any semblance of defiance in his voice.

“Don’t just stand there, then…” Roman beckons them closer with his hand. “Come here.”

Seth moves like he’s under some kind of spell, clothes discarded on the floor, drawn in by Roman’s eagerness. Soon all three of them are tangled together, Seth and Dean both half-undressed, Dean
grabbing the title belt and draping it over Roman’s waist.

“Champ…” Dean comments, smiling down at him. “Looks good on you.”

“Yeah…” Seth agrees, lying down next to Roman. “Not that you needed any kind of validation,”

“I think I got all the validation I’ll ever need right here in this room,” Roman smiles, pulling Seth in close to kiss him.

The meaning of it isn’t lost on Seth, especially when his senses register everything that’s going on around him. The bed, the sheets, even Roman himself—they all reek of Hunter. It’s a flash-flood of memories for him, having known the older man so intimately years before—the taste and smell of him, how he liked to fuck, how much he liked to be in control. Everything that’s being presented to him and Dean here, despite what they’re being allowed to do, is exactly what Hunter wants them to see.

_Crafty old bastad_, Seth thinks appreciatively as he breaks off the kiss and smiles at Roman. “You got enough left for us, Uce? Or has he worn you out?”

“Oh, I think there’s plenty left…” Roman smiles back, craning his head back to where Dean has settled in on his other side. “You guys are cool with this, right?”

“We wouldn’t be here otherwise…” Dean says, gaze wandering down the length of Roman’s body. “What’s this?”

Seth lifts his head to see what Dean’s referring to, and notices for the first time the black band of braided leather wrapped around Roman’s left ankle. There’s a pendant of some sort hanging from it, the shape of which Seth can’t see at first until Roman turns his ankle slightly, giving them a clearer view.

“Oh, that…he put that on me last year…” Roman says.

Seth inhales sharply, taking in the unmistakeable silver “H” dangling against Roman’s skin. He recalls how Roman had reached for it earlier tonight, just before the match, feeling for something underneath his boot, and finally understands what the gesture means.
“Damn, he does go all out, doesn’t he?” Dean comments, though his voice is sapped of the edge that’s often accompanied his commentaries on Hunter and his antics.

“I do have a reputation to keep up, Ambrose…” a new voice enters the conversation, and Seth looks up to find Hunter standing at the foot of the bed, smiling knowingly as he dries off his hands with a towel. “But don’t let me interrupt.”

Seth chews on his bottom lip, examining the shifting dynamics between the four of them. He doesn’t mind really going at it with his brothers with Hunter in the room—Hunter knows too well about Seth’s not-so-secret kink about performing for an audience, but he doesn’t know how Dean feels about it. Roman’s clearly not in the headspace to make tactful decisions at the moment, and Seth really doesn’t want to break the spell for him. Dean just swallows hard, looking between Hunter and Seth, as if quietly communicating to him what now?

“For fuck’s sake…” Roman exclaims and yanks both Seth and Dean down towards him, displaying the strength that’s left many an opponent flat on their backs. Seth yelps, but then he’s got a mouthful of Roman’s lips and his fingers laced with Dean’s and something just clicks, the easy rhythm of their togetherness, never mind that Hunter’s there, or that every inch of Roman is tinged with him, or that all three of them are essentially doing this by Hunter’s playbook. Seth can live with that—and Dean seems thankfully accommodating.

“How do you want me…” he whispers against Roman’s ear, though he thinks he’s got the answer figured out when Roman wrestles him to lay on top of the Samoan’s large frame, kneading his ass along the way. “Oh…that how we gonna play this, big guy?”

Roman just smiles dreamily, and Seth feels Dean’s hands yanking his pants and underwear the rest of the way down. It’s a familiar setup, and Seth hisses pleasurably at the first intrusion of slick fingers, not even caring whose hand they belong to. Faintly, he registers Hunter sitting down on the only chair in the corner of the room, keeping himself out of the way and in relative darkness.

Everything after that is a hazy blur of hands and mouths, Dean fetching a condom from the box left on the bedside table and helping Roman into it, Roman slipping inside with ease and Seth mumbling appreciatively at the pleasant fullness, leaning back against Dean for support. He’s soon rolled onto his back, under Roman’s weight, with the title belt lying on the pillow next to him.

“Champ…” Seth repeats Dean’s sentiment, hanging his hands at the back of Roman’s neck. “You’re the man, Big Dog…”
“Woof,” Roman says as he grins down at Seth, rows of white teeth and glimmering eyes, and then his hips start moving and all rational thought flees Seth’s mind, knocked clean out of him by the force of Roman’s thrusts.

Hunter sits tapping idly at his knee, watching the scene unfolding in front of him. It’s not that he’s expecting much of a show, content to be an observer rather than a spectator. It’s nice to see Roman playing more of a dominant role for once, made easier by the fact that Seth, bless him, has always been and always will be accommodating if the prospect of an orgasm is dangled in front of him.

From this angle, he can’t see much of Ambrose, though he suspects it’s by design—he doesn’t blame Dean for not wanting to ‘perform’ for him, however casual he tries to be about it. Still, he sees enough to know that Dean’s helping things along, moving Seth’s body to better receive Roman’s thrusts, holding his leg open, kissing him to keep his mouth occupied.

A well-oiled machine, indeed.

Hunter hasn’t been intimate with Seth for years, and he can appreciate the way Seth’s physique has changed—a world away from the scrawny brat in tight white trunks he first coaxed into his bed almost six years ago, all raw talent and youthful energy. He’s behaving for Roman right now, more so than he ever did for Hunter, but that’s to be expected. Experience has mellowed him out a little, the same way it’s smoothed Roman’s rough edges and sharpened Dean’s focus.

Dean, too, has been surprisingly quiet all night—he’s playing along, not even visibly bristling at Hunter’s mere presence the way he did all throughout the European tour. Hunter suspects it’s for Roman’s sake more than anything, but he’s glad for the ceasefire, regardless of the terms.

In the end of course, his attention is on Roman, that muscled back rippling beautifully as he fucks Seth into the mattress, knees firmly planted on the bed and giving Hunter a view of that still-glistening hole, which he fully intends to revisit sooner rather than later.

A nasally half-scream announces that Seth’s just climaxed, the sound familiar to Hunter’s memory, and Roman follows a few seconds later, collapsing against Seth’s body in a tangle of limbs. Hunter tosses a clean towel and a bottle of water onto the still undisturbed mattress of the other bed, catches Roman looking over his shoulder at him as if to seek some kind of approval, and Hunter smiles back at him benignly.
His phone buzzes in his pocket, and he reaches for it to find Stephanie’s number calling him. “Gotta take this call boys, excuse me…”

Calmly, he stands up and wrenches open the sliding door leading to the room’s narrow balcony—it’s blustery outside but not quite freezing, and he slides the door shut behind him before taking the call.

“Hello?”

“Enjoying yourself, I hope?” his wife asks with a knowing tone in her voice.

“As much as I can…” Hunter chuckles. “Whaddya got for me?”

“Well, our antics at the top of the show certainly has made some people very angry…” she says, sounding quite satisfied with herself. “Web tracking shows multiple mentions of me in correlation with other choice keywords such as ‘tyrant’, ‘delusional’ and the usual profanities,”

“Nothing new, then…”

“Nothing compared to yours, however. They weren’t even done dragging you for what happened last night at the Survivor Series, and now they’re flipping because you didn’t even hint at any impending blowoff…”

Hunter smiles. “So I just did it all for me,”

“Is that the narrative you were aiming for?”

“Only if it does its job at the other end,” Hunter says.

“We won’t know until tomorrow morning, earliest. But they’re telling me that early indications show no overwhelming negatives—so what we saw at the arena is pretty much echoed on the internet.”
Hunter nods quietly. “We’ll go with that for now.”

“They’ll contact you with the full report once they have it,” she concludes. “Good night, babe.”

“Night…”

When he re-enters the room, the scenery has shifted somewhat. Roman’s now busy with Dean, while Seth is seated on the other bed, towel around his neck and the bottle of water half-empty, his hair scrunched up into a knot at the base of his skull. He sees Hunter and offers a little smile, as if not sure how else to greet him, and Hunter takes his seat once again.

“You good?” he asks casually to Seth.

“Yeah…” Seth nods. “I…uh, it’s just that sometimes I forget, Ro fucks like a freight train after he’s just won something big.”

Hunter chuckles. “Interesting analogy—you must’ve gotten quite a nailing when you won your first tag titles with him.”

“I didn’t fuck you for two days after that, in case you forgot—“ Seth says, then stops himself, as if unsure that bringing up their past arrangement is acceptable within this hastily-negotiated encounter.

“Oh, I remember quite well…” Hunter assures him. “You said you need timeout for—what did you call it? Rest and restoration?”

Seth blushes a little, shaking his head. “It’s not like you had a habit of going easy on me.”

“True,” Hunter nods. “You didn’t like it when I went easy,”

“I sure as hell didn’t,” Seth sighs, a fond look in his eyes as if searching the depths of memory. “No regrets, though.”

“None at all,” Hunter says. “Why don’t you come over here?”
Seth stares at him, mouth slightly agape, before looking in the direction of Roman and Dean, who are currently occupied with each other. Roman is taking Dean’s length in his mouth, knelt over Dean’s lap with his backside towards Hunter, still glistening with his come.

“Nothing like that,” Hunter assures him. “Just come here and sit with me, you look a little lonely there all by yourself.”

He leaves unsaid the fact that there’s no other chair in the room, and the way he’s tapping his toe against the carpet should be enough of a message for Seth—another callback to old times. Hunter can practically see the moment it registers in Seth’s brain—the slight widening of his eyes and the way he looks at Hunter as if asking, *are you sure?*

“Baby boy…” he calls out, getting Roman’s attention. “Your brother here looks a little lonely—should I keep him company while you two are occupied?”

Roman’s mouth pops off Dean as he turns his head around, eyes dark and hazy and that dopey, unrestrained grin on his face. “Yeah…I think he secretly misses you, Daddy…”

Seth flushes a little bit, looking down on the carpet as if he’s been caught.

“Does he now?” Hunter says amusedly.

“Go ahead, Seth…” Roman says, throwing in a wink for good measure. “It’s fine…”

Seth’s shoulders seem to slump a little as he stops resisting, slides off the bed rather gracelessly and takes a few deep breaths before he starts slinking towards Hunter. He seems disinclined to outright *crawl,* instead doing a slow and rather awkward shuffle, but Hunter’s not gonna hold it against him. Crawling was for back then, when he held Seth in his power and wanted the boy to learn to submit and obey. He’s learned enough.

“Is this…okay?” Seth asks, a little tentatively. He’s got that soft, almost puppy-ish look in his eyes, his chin resting on Hunter’s knee.

Hunter just smiles down at his former protege, fingers reaching down to run through Seth’s damp,
dark curls and gently angling his head up so they can have eye contact.

“Little Prince…” he says affectionately. “It’s been a long time since you’ve had my hands on you, hasn’t it?”

Seth swallows noticeably, nose inching further towards Hunter’s crotch. “Please…”


Seth blinks the sweat out of his eyes, lips hovering a breath away from Hunter’s semi-hard dick where it tents his dress pants. “Ro….” he says, voice croaking slightly. “Ro, I wanna suck on Hunter’s dick…”

Roman licks his lips, a playful glimmer in his eyes. “Yeah…keep that thing warm for me, Seth…” he says, before diving back down onto Dean.

“Can you do that, little prince?” Hunter says as he strokes Seth’s cheek fondly. “Keep my dick nice and hard until I can stick it in your brother again?”

Seth gasps as he nods. “Yes…”

“Go on, then…”

Seth’s fingers are shaking slightly as they work Hunter’s zipper and pants, as if every touch is retreading an old footpath long since overgrown with weeds, seeing its first harsh light of day in years. His mouth, though, his mouth welcomes Hunter’s cock like an old glove, soon stretching to accommodate him, muscle memory evident in the way Seth’s throat and hands work in tandem.

“Still got it…” Hunter remarks with a smirk, stroking through Seth’s hair.

Seth looks up at him, eyes dark and soft, keeping his movements slow and steady, not meant to induce intense pleasure or bring him to completion.
Hunter can see from the corner of his vision that Dean is getting ready to fuck Roman, ripping another condom out of its foil packet. He chooses to focus on Seth instead—it’s probably what Dean would have preferred anyhow, and he’s been a good sport so far so Hunter isn’t going to make it uncomfortable for him by watching him going at it with Roman.

“I always did like the sight of you with a dick in your mouth,” he reminisces, looking down at Seth. “Mostly because it shuts you up.”

Seth snorts a little, but doesn’t offer any rebuke. His tongue is working slow, languid strokes on the underside of Hunter’s cock, a trick Hunter taught him.

“Always giving me so much trouble…” Hunter pats at Seth’s bulging cheek. “Worth it, though.”

Seth smiles around him, a glimmer in his eye. He always did love praise, especially coming from Hunter because they were always hard-earned. He’s reaching down furtively between his legs, stroking himself back to hardness.

“Sucking dick still turns you on almost as much as getting fucked, doesn’t it?” Hunter says, and Seth can only nod slowly.

Hunter leans forward a little, until he can whisper to Seth without the other two overhearing them—not that they would, with the noises they’re making for themselves.

“I need you to do something for me, Seth…you listening?”

Seth nods again, holding Hunter still in his mouth.

“After this…when Dean’s done with Roman, I want you to go get Dean, and I want the two of you to get on that other bed. Can you do that for me?”

Another affirmative nod.

“Good…because I promised Roman that I’m gonna fuck him again, and this time I want you and Dean to watch me doing it…”
Seth gasps around him, his own hand tightening around his cock.

“Yeah, I knew you’d like the sound of that…” Hunter smirks. “Roman thought so, too.”

The noise from the bed is ratcheting up, Roman moaning in cadence to Dean’s grunts, which means they’re both probably nearing orgasm. Seth seems to compose himself too, pulling back until only the head of Hunter’s cock is encased in his mouth, making soft little suckles at the tip. Hunter murmurs appreciatively and strokes his face with both hands—noting to himself how it’s rather ironic that this is Seth at his best bedroom behavior, all without Hunter even demanding it from him.

Dean comes first, slumped over Roman’s back and mumbling muffled profanities against Roman’s shoulder, and Hunter gives him about fifteen seconds to catch his breath before he signals to Seth. “Go,”

Seth slips off him and onto his feet, a little wobbly-legged as he staggers towards the bed and gently pries Dean off from Roman. Dean makes a motion as if to protest, looking at Seth indignantly. “What the fuck, Seth?”

“You’re done,” Seth says, voice a little hoarse. “Come over here with me, Dean…” he gestures at the other bed.

“But…” Dean looks down at Roman, who’s still blissed out and boneless. “He hasn’t—“

“I’ll take care of it,” Hunter says, with the same nonchalance in his tone as if offering to pay for someone’s tab. “You go and take a breather, Ambrose.”

Dean exchanges one look with him, blue eyes narrowing as he seems to remember the rules they laid out earlier. “Huh…” he says. “Okay, then.”

“C’mere, big boy…” Seth pats the mattress on the other bed, before laying himself down on it invitingly.

Dean smiles and joins him, gathering Seth into a tight, sweaty embrace and a sloppy kiss, leaving Roman alone on the increasingly-wrecked bed. He’s on his stomach, face nearly completely hidden.
under a thick mass of hair, sweat-drenched and panting, his puffy hole slick with the lube Dean used on him.

Hunter stands, not even bothering to undress himself the rest of the way. His cock is nice and hard from Seth’s ministrations, and the sight of Roman like that is nothing if not an outright invitation. Quietly he pads over and gets on the mattress on all fours, Roman seeming to notice his presence right away, lifting his head off the pillow to look back at him.

“D-daddy?”

“Right here, baby…” Hunter smiles and presses a kiss against Roman’s hip as he crawls up. “I’m right here.”

Roman smiles hazily, pushing himself up to lay on his side and lifting one leg as Hunter slides in behind him. He barely even looks at the occupants of the other bed as Hunter lines up and enters him easily, his leg thrown back to hook over Hunter’s waist.

“Daddy’s home…” Hunter whispers against his ear and starts to move.

—

Fuck. Fuck. Fuck.

Dean’s never been much for cleverness or words, but it’s still rather telling that the best his brain can muster at this very moment is nothing but an endless stream of profanities.

“Fuck…”

At least he can console himself that Seth isn’t faring any better. Given what they’re witnessing though, Dean thinks they should get credit for being even conscious.

He is utterly transfixed, even as he’s clutch ed tight around Seth, fingers clawing bluntly at his tag
team partner’s back just to anchor himself into some kind of reality. Seth’s not complaining though, his gaze is equally locked onto the two figures on the bed next to them, his breathing sharp and short against Dean’s throat, the grinding of their bodies like an unconscious mimicry of what their eyes are seeing.

Hunter’s got Roman lying on his side, broad chest gleaming with sweat and nipples peaked and swollen, one leg swung behind Hunter’s hip as Hunter pistons into him relentlessly, mouth permanently locked with Roman’s and swallowing his throaty, high-pitched whimpers. Seth and Dean can see everything—the movement of Hunter’s cock as it pounds into Roman’s hole, the way Roman’s body ripples with each thrust, the way Hunter’s arms are locked around Roman’s torso like a cage of bone and muscle.

Dean doesn’t need words to know that Seth is sharing his exact same thoughts—they’ve never seen Roman quite like this, and he’s fucking beautiful. So utterly lost in his pleasure, helplessly fucked by his older lover, whose hands and mouth are playing him like a fine-tuned instrument. There’s no denying the expertise and knowledge with which Hunter is handling Roman—the almost maddening self-assurance that Dean knows, just fucking knows, Hunter is putting on full display just for them.

Seth’s teeth is nipping at the base of his neck and Dean doesn’t even bother registering the sting of them—all he can focus on is the spectacle of Hunter nailing Roman within an inch of his life, his pace brutal and sharp, Roman’s keening wails shooting jolts of electricity to Dean’s brain and his dick.

Truthfully, he knew walking into this room that he might see something like this—knew it the instant they found Roman lying wrecked with Hunter’s fresh come leaking out of him, like a goddamn crime scene. Knew the culprit would be returning to double down. This is Roman’s night, but it’s still Hunter’s show, and Dean got that message loud and clear back at the arena.

*And I agreed to pay the admission fee,* Dean reminds himself.

He catches the glint in Hunter’s eyes, sees a flash of that infuriating smirk on the older man’s face and yeah, okay, Dean’s cool with conceding this one, wasn’t a fight to begin with, and fuck it, Roman’s having the time of his life right now judging by the way he’s reduced to a mess of unintelligible whimpers.

“Dean…” Seth rasps against his face, nose rubbing into Dean’s stubble. “Touch me, c’mon…”

Dean’s hand moves on autopilot, reaching between them to find Seth’s dick, hard and dripping into his palm.
“You’re enjoying this, aren’t you?” he hisses against Seth’s ear.

“So are you, don’t fucking lie,” Seth grits out as Dean starts stroking him.

And yeah, okay, no point denying that, Dean’s last orgasm is too recent for him to get hard again but damn it if he isn’t getting worked up, nipping at Seth’s arm around his neck as he watches Hunter flip Roman effortlessly until they’re lying on top of each other, Roman’s back against his chest.

_Damn who’d have thought Ro could ride a dick that good?_

It seems to last forever, at least to Dean it does, and he hates the fact that he’s even counting it but he’s pretty damn sure Roman comes twice, once untouched, before Hunter even shows any sign of nearing his climax. Seth’s come into Dean’s hand too, panting loudly in his ear and looking almost as wrecked as Roman is. Almost.

Dean knows it’s going to happen soon when Hunter angles Roman’s body just so, giving Dean and Seth a clear view of where their bodies are joined, Roman’s hole stretched around that cock and Hunter’s thrusts becoming more erratic.

_He wants us to see_, Dean thinks to himself, and knows any pretense of objection on his part is useless. He wants to see.

_And Jesus fucking Christ_, when it does happen it seems to go on forever, Hunter stilling himself inside Roman aside from a few short jabs, Roman’s whole body tensing and his loudest moan yet wrenched from his throat before Hunter’s large palm covers his mouth, muffling it. Roman’s leaking even before Hunter pulls out, and when he does his cock is trailed by a stream of white from Roman’s swollen, puffy hole, clenching at the emptiness as if desperate to hold it all in.

_Fuck._

He slumps against Seth, feeling almost as if he’s the one who’s just been fucked damn near unconscious, and Seth’s trembling fingers are threading through his hair, both of them breathless.

Hunter proceeds to kiss Roman, muttering soft words in his ear that Dean can’t make out, stroking
down Roman’s broad, sweaty back until his breathing steadies. Roman just smiles dreamily at him, that fond look in his eyes that Dean knows isn’t for anybody else.

Quietly, Hunter slides off the bed, tucking himself back into his pants and then drawing the covers up over Roman’s shoulders. He takes the IC title belt, still lying on the pillow next to Roman’s head, and places it in the champion’s hands, like tucking in a child with his favorite stuffed toy. Kissing Roman one more time in the forehead, he slips away towards the bathroom without a word to either Dean or Seth.

“Ro…” Seth calls out, his voice hoarse.

“Hey, you two…” Roman mutters sleepily at them, as if registering their presence once again.

“Holy shit, dude…” Dean manages to say, and Roman chuckles.

“Thank you…” he says. “…for me letting me have this.”

“Eh, not like we didn’t get anything out of it,” Seth says.

“True…” Roman clasps his title belt a little closer. “You guys staying?”

“I…I’m not sure I can walk back to my room right now,” Seth confesses. “That okay?”

“Yeah…” Roman says. “Stay.”

Dean settles himself next to Seth, draping his good arm over Seth’s back. He doesn’t even realize how tired he is until he finds himself drifting off within minutes—the last thing he sees before he falls asleep is Hunter climbing back onto the bed with Roman in a t-shirt and a pair of sweatpants, one arm pulling Roman close.
“I hope you don’t mind me calling you so early, Sir… but Ms. McMahon’s instructions were to get in touch with you as soon as the report comes in…”

“It’s okay,” Hunter says, rubbing at his eyes. It’s six-thirty in the morning and he’s back out in the balcony, having been roused from sleep by his phone buzzing on the bedside table with an incoming call from Stephanie’s liaison in Media Monitoring. “So what’s the verdict?”

“It seems that the overall reaction to Roman Reigns’ Intercontinental Title victory last night is positive,” the female analyst tells him. “Not unanimously so, but then again nothing yields that kind of result.”

“No kidding,” Hunter huffs. “Percentages?”

“To round it up, we’re at 72% positive, 23% negative, and around 5% being… well, I wouldn’t use the term ‘neutral’ but they’re not leaning heavily one way or the other.”

“That’s…” Hunter exhales. “Better than I expected, actually.”

“This is from the automated crawl using our targeted algorithms, of course…” she says. “To verify we’d need to actually read every single tweet, post, comment and article out of the thousands we sampled, and I’m afraid that’s not possible.”

“It’s good enough,” Hunter says. “And what about the other thing I asked you guys to keep your eyes on?”

“Hold on…” she says, and Hunter hears the tapping of keyboard keys. “Still overwhelmingly negative. But I was told that… this is the result you wanted?”

Hunter sighs—it’s way too early in the morning for him to properly enlighten a digital analyst on the subtleties (or lack thereof) of sports entertainment storytelling, but he can give her the abbreviated version.

“I wanted to know how effective my actions were in inciting a certain kind of reaction,” he says. “Can I assume from your data that it worked?”
“Definitely, sir…” she says emphatically. “And the conversation is still ongoing, in fact we saw a spike of it after your segment aired last night.”

“Good, good…” Hunter nods as he stares out at the still-dark sky, shivering as a chilly wind blows past. “Did Stephanie brief you on the last thing that I wanted to know?”

“Ahh yes, about that…” she says, sounding apologetic. “I’m sorry, sir…but there is no algorithm or even manual verification method in existence that can tell us if one set of findings is the direct cause of another. I mean, I can give you the data points, sure, but I cannot show you any correlation. Quantitative data doesn’t lend itself to that kind of conclusion”

Hunter has to close his eyes — it’s also way too early for analytical jargon, but he thinks he gets the gist of it. “So…you can’t say whether one has anything to do with the other,”

“Yes…” she says. “I’m afraid the only way to get that kind of information would be qualitative research — focus groups or direct interviews, and even then I can’t guarantee the results would be free from bias.”

“No need…” he assures. “This isn’t data for the shareholders, anyway. It’s for me. It’s enough.”

“Shall we continue monitoring then?”

“Give it another week,” Hunter says. “And just e-mail me the next report.”

“Will do, sir.”

“Thanks.”

Hunter hangs up, shoving his phone back into his pocket. He turns and nearly jumps when he finds Dean Ambrose standing on the balcony next to him, holding out Hunter’s jacket.

“Jesus!”
“Put this on, for fuck’s sake…it’s freezing out here,” Dean shoves the jacket at him.

Hunter takes it, wrapping it snugly around himself. It’s not much for warmth but it does keep the winds at bay, at least. “Why are you up so early?”

“Seth snores really, really loud sometimes…” Dean says. “I swear it’s like someone’s flying a turbo-prop next to my ear.”

“Does he?” Hunter leans against the balcony railing. “Never had that problem…then again he didn’t stay overnight much.”

“Lucky you,” Dean shrugs, one hand rubbing at his eyes.

For a while neither of them say anything, staring out at the slowly-waking city, the rumbling of garbage trucks and the early-shift commuters below, the silhouette of tall buildings starting to materialize into the overcast morning sky.

“So…” Dean starts awkwardly. “Couldn’t—uh, couldn’t help but hear a bit of your conversation just now.”

“Yeah?” Hunter looks over at him. “What did you catch?”

“Something about measuring the effectiveness of your actions? Gathering data?”

“Hmm…” Hunter nods. “I could explain the whole thing to you—it’s actually fascinating once you get over all the complicated terminology the analysts are so fond of…”

“Nah, no need man…” Dean holds his hands up. “Just…I gotta know something, okay? I mean, I think I know already, but I wanna be sure.”

“What is it?”

Dean sniffs a little, regarding him with steely blue eyes. “You did it for Roman, didn’t you?”
“Did what?”

“All of it… your antics at the Survivor Series, what you and Steph did at the top of RAW last night… hell, I thought for sure we were gonna get another Authority angle, with you at the center of everything…”

“That’s what the internet seems to be thinking right now,” Hunter nods.

“It didn’t hit me until last night… until I was standing in the middle of that ring with Roman,” Dean continues. “I haven’t heard them cheer like that for him since… way too long.”

“Too long,” Hunter agrees.

“And I don’t know, Trips… I guess my brain had a rare moment of actually putting two-and-two together…” Dean shrugs. “I thought about how they reacted to you, how they’ve been reacting to you over the years, anytime you rear your ugly head back up again, and everyone’s just waiting to see who the poor schmuck getting buried is gonna be.”

Hunter chuckles heartily at that. “It did become quite a pattern, didn’t it?”

“Except when they put you against Roman,” Dean adds morosely. “It didn’t work for Roman.”

“No,” Hunter nods. “The one time I really needed it to work… and it didn’t.”

“So you tried again…” Dean says. “Indirectly this time.”

Hunter looks over at him and smiles. “Indirect is the keyword here, Ambrose… I sure as hell won’t meddle with his booking, and he’s made me promise not to do that.”

“But… you can book yourself into a spot guaranteed to get so much heat… that it might just deflect things off him,” Dean concludes.
“Hmm, maybe I don’t need to explain too much to you, after all…” Hunter says appreciatively.

“Did it…work?”

“Well, my analyst was telling me that Roman’s win has been well-received overall, better than any of us dared to expect, and I’m still a pretty effective heat magnet…” Hunter says. “But they can’t tell me whether one is directly caused by the other.”

“And you did it all for him,” Dean says. “For Roman,”

Hunter stares out at the sky, where the first rays of sunlight is starting to streak the clouds with a yellowish-gray hue. “You have no idea, Dean…what I’d be willing to do for him. No idea at all.”

“I’m starting to get the idea,” Dean says. “I’ve never…I mean, he looked so goddamn happy last night, like he didn’t believe it was really happening.”

“I wanted him to have this,” Hunter explains. “To win something and actually have the crowd behind him for once…I don’t know if the next one stands any chance of being well-received.”

“Wrestlemania…” Dean sighs. “They still proceeding with that plan?”

“As of now, nothing’s changed,” Hunter says. “Nevermind that everyone can see it from a mile away.”

Dean moves to lean against the railing next to him, leaving the arm with the injured albow hanging. “They’re…they’re not letting him keep this belt for long, are they?”

“No…” Hunter shakes his head. “Just as long as it takes for Miz to finish filming his movie.”

“Thought so…” Dean sighs mournfully. “Well, at least he had this moment. At least he had last night.”

“And you were there for it,” Hunter says. “That’s why you’ve been putting off the MRI, right?”
Dean seems a little caught off guard, though the defensive look on his face soon fades into one of resignation. “I wasn’t gonna miss him winning that title. Seth and I, as much as we hate to admit it, we knew Roman stood a better chance of having a crowd on his side if we were with him…” he explains, sounding almost offended at the idea. “It’s fucking stupid, but it’s how it is…”

“So we were all trying to do the same thing…” Hunter says, a thin smile over his lips. “Trying to give him the best chance at a win that he can really enjoy.”

“Yeah, I guess so…” Dean says, looking down at the black wrap around his injured elbow. “This… this whole Shield reunion thing, man…we knew it wasn’t gonna be like the first time around, right? We’re just trying to make the most of it,”

“Dean, the only reason you haven’t been strapped to a gurney and taken to the nearest hospital with a scanner is because I haven’t authorized them to do so…” Hunter tells him. “But you need to have that thing properly looked at.”

Dean chews his lip thoughtfully, heaving a painful sigh. “It’s bad. I know it’s bad. I can feel it.”

“So we need to fix it,” Hunter says firmly. “Let’s fix it.”

“Give me another week? At least enough for that rematch?”

Hunter rubs his face wearily. “Fine. But I’m still briefing creative to start on your exit angle today,”

“Fair enough,” Dean says.

“M’going back inside…” Hunter says as he reaches for the sliding door handle. “Can still catch a few hours of sleep…”

“Yeah…” Dean follows him inside.
Seth’s snoring has quieted down into a soft purr, allowing Dean to lie next to him without feeling like his eardrums are about to rupture. He doesn’t go back to sleep, though, even as Seth instinctively burrows close to him, his dark curls tickling Dean’s nose.

On the opposite bed, Hunter isn’t sleeping either—it seems that either HQ or their operations down in Florida has a lot of matters for him to attend to. He’s thumbing through his tablet with one hand, as Roman sleeps in a thick bundle of blanket wrapped in Hunter’s other arm like a giant baby. The light from Hunter’s tablet is at its dimmest setting to avoid hurting Roman’s eyes, necessitating the older man to squint every so often to make out what looks to be a stream of e-mails and spreadsheets.

As Dean watches, Roman shifts a little in his sleep, making a soft unintelligible noise in his throat like a purring kitten. Hunter puts his tablet down on the bed for a second, adjusting the blankets around them and kissing the mass of dark curls that’s the only visible part of Roman’s head from where Dean is lying. He whispers something in Roman’s ear, too low for Dean to make out, and Roman mumbles something sleepily in reply.

What Dean hears clearly enough is the press of Hunter’s lips against Roman’s forehead, and the subsequent whispered “I love you” that he can read plainly on those same lips.

He doesn’t hear Roman reply, but he can see two thick fingers sticking out from the blankets just enough to stroke down the greying strands of Hunter’s beard, and the fond smile Hunter gives as a result.

“You’re going back to Florida?” Roman asks sleepily, propped up on one elbow as Hunter gets dressed, knotting his tie in front of the mirror on the hotel room’s closet door.

“We’re gonna be abroad again soon…” Hunter explains. “They want me to look at the last batch of tryouts before I’m not available again for the next couple of weeks…”

“Oh…”
“I’ll catch up with you guys again before the next RAW,” Hunter says.

On the opposite bed, Seth yawns and stretches, nearly whacking Dean in the face with his right arm.

“Jesus,” Dean exclaims. “Too early for you to start blind-tagging me, Rollins…”

“Hungry…” Seth drawls out. “When’s breakfast?”

“I took care of that…” Hunter says as he zips up his toiletry bag and tosses it into his large travel bag. “Room service should be bringing up a big enough breakfast for all three of you in the next ten minutes.”

Seth positively beams at that. “Awesome…thanks.”

“I suggest you…uh, make yourselves presentable before then?” Hunter quirks an eyebrow at them.

Roman merely pulls the blankets up over his shoulders again, covering himself up. “Done.”

“Lazy asshole,” Seth mumbles, but goes to fetch his underwear from the mess of discarded clothing on the floor.

Chuckling, Hunter shoulders his bag and moves to stand next to Roman’s bed, leaning down onto him. “I’ll call you from Orlando, okay?”

“Okay…” Roman smiles, giving him a quick kiss goodbye. “Love you…”

“Love you too, baby…” Hunter says as he pulls back. “You two behave yourselves,” he tells Seth and Dean.

Once Hunter leaves, Roman looks over to his side, where his Intercontinental title belt is resting against his pillow, its plates starting to gleam in the morning sun coming in through the window.
Beyond that, Seth and Dean’s faces, both set of eyes looking at him.

“What?” he asks.

“Whipped,” Seth says. “I was right. Totally fucking whipped,”

Roman just laughs at that, not even bothering to offer any kind of objection.
Chapter Summary

He remembers the night before their ill-received encounter at Wrestlemania 32, when Roman had broken their agreement to maintain a degree of separation, all but calling Hunter to his room, a mess of anxiety and frayed nerves that only Hunter’s presence managed to calm down. Now, halfway around the world, with another match booked for the following night, he feels none of the unease and fear that had nearly paralyzed him that time. There’s no pressure on them to wrestle a five-star classic, or to cap off a multi-month buildup on a Pay-Per-View. Just two performers squaring off against each other to entertain the crowd to the best of their combined abilities.

Chapter Notes

Well, it has been a while, hasn’t it? I think I’m hardly alone in saying that WWE is an utter shitshow at the moment, especially for long-suffering Roman fans. I am not going to rant about it here, though -- my task is to offer some kind of temporary solace through my word vomits of equal parts filth and fluff. Well, maybe more fluff in this particular chapter because Lord, we need it.

• Specific warnings for this chapter : possibly unrealistic depictions of the male sexual stamina, pregnancy kink, all the romantic cliches normally found in Lifetime movies, and tooth-rotting self-indulgent fluff.
• The property where Roman and Hunter are taking their holiday can be found here.
• As always, much love to the ever-patient, ever-enabling, ever-encouraging P.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

They’re on the long-haul charter flight heading towards Abu Dhabi, for the two-night live event that will culminate with Roman once again taking on Hunter in a singles match, this time with Roman’s Intercontinental Title on the line. Seth swapped seats with Hunter about an hour ago, after most of the company had dozed off or were otherwise too engrossed in their in-flight entertainment, allowing Roman and Hunter a bit of quiet time together.

“Here, see if you like any of these…” Hunter says in a low voice as he slides the tablet across the tray table towards Roman, who’s staring out the window at the empty darkness and the flashing lights on the airplane’s wingtip.

Roman squints at the display—even at its dimmest setting, with the cabin lights turned down and everything else around them dark, it still takes his eyes a while for the images and text to come into focus.
“What’s this?”

“It’s a little place in Connecticut that someone recommended to me…had my assistant ask around and look at some reviews, seems pretty good…"

Roman starts to scroll through the website, scanning through the lines of copy. The ‘little place’ is actually a 113 acre estate in Litchfield Hills, Connecticut called ‘Winvian Farm’, advertised as a quiet getaway and a place to ‘recharge and indulge’. The accommodations, from what Roman can read, seem to consist of a series of unique themed cottages in varying sizes and nightly rates, with weekend and ‘honeymoon’ packages being offered complete with amenities such as spa and wine tastings.

“Aren’t themed cottages a bit…you know,” Roman cringes. “…over-the-top?”

Hunter leans over and looks at the list. “Well, I’m not suggesting we pick the golf-themed one or—Jesus, this one with the helicopter in it…”

Roman rolls his eyes, glancing down at what seems to be a pimped out interior of a disused helicopter, decked out like a trendy love nest. “What the actual fuck…”

“…but I’m sure there are ones that are less kitschy,” Hunter says. “Go on, just have a look at them, see if anything interests you.”

“Hmmm…” Roman mumbles as he pauses at one of the cottages, simply titled ‘Log Cabin’.

From the pictures on the website, it seems a smaller, more intimate cottage than the other ones on offer, complete with all the cliche staples of what a ‘log cabin’ would entail, like a wood-burning fireplace and deer antlers over the mantlepiece.

Hunter notices his interest. “You like that one?”

“I mean, I wouldn’t say it’s authentically ‘rustic’, but it’s pretty charming…”
Hunter studies the cottage’s listed features also. “I think going to an actual cabin in the woods is out of the question. You and I have spent far too long getting accustomed to room service and pre-packaged nutritionist meals to be trusted with real ‘off-the-grid’ living.”

Roman chuckles at that. “So…sacrificing authenticity for convenience?”

Hunter shrugs. “Not exactly gonna get much rest if we have to get up and chop wood for the fire every morning…”

Hunter had first brought up the idea of the two of them finding some time for a quiet getaway just before Survivor Series. While he stopped short of using the word ‘romantic’, Roman understood it well enough—even with the nights they’ve been spending together after shows and pay-per-views, it’s still not quite the same as actually escaping somewhere, away from the daily circus of their jobs and the endless grind of touring and public appearances.

Right now, it seems that the retreat would benefit Hunter more than it would Roman—he’s been in fairly good shape since recovering from his illness, and his run with the Intercontinental Title has so far been pretty fruitful, allowing him to take on a variety of opponents and putting on a good show at every opportunity. Hunter, still juggling the job of being EVP and managing NXT, as well as being a semi-active wrestler on the roster, has barely had time to put his feet up since the European tour, and the strain is starting to show.

“Bathtub sure looks nice…” Roman says as he browses the images again, already imagining having a nice relaxing soak in the large tub with Hunter next to him.

“So…should we go for this one? You’ve put in your notice, right?”

“Yeah, couple days ago…” Roman says. “Vince already signed it.”

“Good,” Hunter says as he takes back the tablet. “I’ll get my assistant to book it,”

Roman smiles at him, reaching up to stroke a knuckle down the older man’s bearded cheek. It’s not something he should be doing—even with most of the airplane asleep a flight attendant or someone on their way to the toilet could easily walk by them at any second, but right now he doesn’t really care. The prospect of finally, finally being able to spend some time just with Hunter, away from everything else, seems worth it.
“Think there’ll be snow?” he asks sleepily, stifling a yawn. “In Connecticut, I mean…”

“Don’t know,” Hunter says as he arranges the airplane blankets, never large enough to cover a full-grown heavyweight wrestler’s body, as best he can across Roman’s shoulders. “Maybe a little bit of it.”

“Be nice if it snowed…” Roman sighs.

Hunter smiles, leaning down to kiss him quietly on the forehead. “Get some sleep, I doubt there’ll be much downtime once we land…”

—

In Abu Dhabi, the skyline spreads out like an establishing shot from a sci-fi utopia, impossibly tall skyscrapers in complex shapes that seem to serve little purpose other than to one-up each other, like some weird architectural wank-off. Every surface has a glossy, futuristic sheen to it and a glaring desert sun baking everything to a harsh, high-contrast glow, making Roman glad that most of their press engagements took place indoors, with sleek tall air conditioning units positioned like robotic sentries at every corner.

The venue, by contrast, isn’t that much different from any venue that has hosted their live events both in the States and abroad, an open-top tennis stadium with curved white canopies held up by steel supports, installed with light rigs and an entrance stage off to one corner and a ring encircled with white ropes. The crowd is loud, enthusiastic, holding aloft camera phones and signs just like in any other country, cheering match after match with the sort of consistent fervor they rarely experience during TV tapings.

To Roman, it could’ve been any city, any live show, any stop in their endless itinerary—until he’s in the makeshift backstage enclosure that serves as gorilla position, and Sasha Banks comes stumbling through the curtains with tears running down her face, followed by Alexa Bliss moments later. Both girls are welcomed by Hunter, whose big arms enclose them in a tight embrace, everyone around them applauding and cheering even as the girls cried and Hunter held them.

Roman’s aware of the significance, of course—it was part of the pre-show briefing, that the girls were taking part in the first ever women’s watch to be held in the UAE. A producer had mentioned in passing that the last time the company toured this region several years ago women weren’t even allowed to attend the shows, making the milestone that much more significant.
He watches Hunter talk to the girls, congratulating them and calming their emotions down a little, tries to imagine what that feels like—to watch two people he’s brought up from developmental and nurture into superstars make their mark in history like this, in something that goes beyond just wrestling or entertaining a paying public. He thinks briefly of the future Hunter is carefully laying down for this company, the agonizingly slow pace of change, the impenetrable brick wall of Vince’s resolute ways of seeing the business and conducting it that Hunter has to constantly push against or try to subvert whenever he can.

He can’t think of any person other than Hunter who could be up for such a job—or in whose hands he’d rather place the future of the business where he makes his living.

“You ready, Ro?” Dean claps his shoulder, jostling him from his reverie and indicating that their cue is about to come on.

“Yeah…” Roman nods.

He catches Hunter’s eye briefly, a knowing smile exchanged between them as Roman follows Seth and Dean up the steps that will lead them towards the curtains just behind the entrance stage.

The Shield’s match against The Bar and Samoa Joe is like swimming through a well-traveled current, the spots going off without a hitch, Dean being kept off any moves that will further aggravate his elbow, Seth flipping off turnbuckles like he was re-enacting his ROH glory days, Roman providing the power and brute force. All three are savoring it, relishing each moment, each tag and coordinated move, knowing that their time together as a unit won’t last much longer. Roman knows that as sure as he knows that his days as Intercontinental Champion are numbered. Nobody’s told him where and when he’s meant to drop it, under what circumstances, but he knows. He’s being primed for something even bigger. Better, he’s not sure. But bigger.

The match ends with The Shield raising their arms in victory in the middle of the ring, and then a blast of green lights up the stage and Hunter’s music hits, igniting the roar of the crowd. Out strolls the man himself, wrapped in a black leather coat and sunglasses, for some reason—making his way down the ramp with purpose, eyes locked with Roman’s the whole way. Roman keeps his expression calm and his stance fight-ready, Dean and Seth on either side of him, though his heart is hammering inside his chest.

“Careful you don’t pop a boner and scare those poor kids in the front row…” Dean mutters in his ear, and Roman shoves at him playfully.
Hunter does look good though—buoyed by the crowd noise, looking ever so confident and poised, stepping through the ropes and getting right up in Roman’s face, so close their noses are almost touching. Roman steadies himself, grounds himself in the moment, in the scene they’re meant to act out, fighting the natural tendency to reach out and touch, or to go down to his knees. This man, this big handsome brute who’s smirking at him, grabbing his title belt and holding it in the space between them, the man he’s meant to take on tomorrow in this very same ring, is the same man who can take him down without speaking a word or raising a finger, and with whom Roman’s life has become inextricably entangled with.

“You think I flew halfway around the world to walk out of here tomorrow night with nothing?” Hunter says into the microphone. “I’m leaving here with that Intercontinental Championship… believe that!”

He tosses the mic to Roman, who catches it easily.

“Hunter…” he calls out as Hunter retreats back up the ramp. “You flew out of here for nothing… because this is always gonna be my yard.”

Roman lifts his title aloft as he lets the mic fall onto the mat, holding Hunter’s gaze even as the older man smirks and walks back up the ramp. The crowd roars their approval, Seth and Dean hyping them up, and Roman’s job is done for the night.

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The hotel has laid out a special late-night buffet for the WWE roster, a dizzying array of flatbreads and meat-filled pastries, and nearly a dozen varieties of long-grained rice flavored with exotic spices Roman’s palate can’t even begin to identify. He snaps off a few pictures and sends them off to Sami, who responds by identifying some of the dishes and even linking websites and Wikipedia entries. He still insists that the hummus can’t possibly be as good as the one his aunt makes back in Montreal, promising Roman that one of these days he’ll bring some back for the guys to taste.

Roman smiles as he stuffs his phone back in his pocket and eats — he wishes Sami could be here, standing in the middle of that ring with a microphone in hand, firing up the crowd, speaking in his mother tongue with a passion so palpable it would transcend any language. He knows this is as close to a hometown crowd as Sami will probably get in this part of the world — the actual one mired in conflict and suffering, rendering it all but inaccessible.
Seth can’t stop gushing about the coffee, saying something about wanting to bring back sackfuls of the stuff as he sips from a cup lined with ornate golden filigree.

“Easy on that stuff, Princess…” Dean mutters. “We’re supposed to get a good night’s sleep, remember? Unless you wanna spazz out on me in the middle of that steel cage tomorrow…”

“I bet you Cesaro’s mainlining this stuff like crazy too…” Seth says. “The man knows his coffee…”

“Yep, and with jetlag and caffeine neither of you are gonna know your elbows from your asses tomorrow,” Roman says, turning to Dean. “Maybe you and Sheamus should just have an impromptu singles bout?”

“I’ll be fine…” Seth says dismissively. “Besides, we got that big finish we need to do for your match…”

Roman snorts. “Yeah, if you miss your cue it’s gonna be hella awkward for me and Hunter out there…”

“You could just fill up the time by making out in the center of the ring,” Dean suggests jokingly.

“As progressive as they’ve been with allowing the women’s match, I don’t think they’re quite ready for that, Deano…” Roman says.

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Later, after he’s done brushing his teeth in a marble sink in front of a large mirror framed by decorative wrought-iron light sconces, Roman undoes the knot at the base of his neck and lets his hair fall loose, wiping his mouth with one of the complementary towels before making his way back to the bedroom.
Hunter has opted for a regular room than a suite, though you wouldn’t know by the look of it since regular hotel rooms here are larger and more ornately-decorated than any suite Roman’s ever seen back home. Hunter’s waiting for him on the extra-large bed, the heavy jewel-red jacquard bedcover thrown back to reveal pristine white sheets, an abundance of pillows and tasseled cushions piled up near the headboard. Roman climbs up onto the mattress and slips under the soft blankets, easily finding the warmth of Hunter’s body as an arm wraps around him.

He remembers the night before their ill-received encounter at Wrestlemania 32, when Roman had broken their agreement to maintain a degree of separation, all but calling Hunter to his room, a mess of anxiety and frayed nerves that only Hunter’s presence managed to calm down. Now, halfway around the world, with another match booked for the following night, he feels none of the unease and fear that had nearly paralyzed him that time. There’s no pressure on them to wrestle a five-star classic, or to cap off a multi-month buildup on a Pay-Per-View. Just two performers squaring off against each other to entertain the crowd to the best of their combined abilities.

“G’night, baby…” Hunter whispers faintly against his forehead, already halfway asleep.

Roman smiles, brushing his lips against Hunter’s collarbone for a quick kiss, one palm resting on top of Hunter’s chest, laid over his heart.

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Roman wakes slowly, stirred by a strange noise that registers in his brain like a kind of distant music, a voice carried by the winds. When he blinks his eyes open and lifts his head off Hunter’s chest, he recognizes that there’s more than one voice, one on top of the other, not really in unison but all seeming to vocalize the same sort of strange, melodic lament. It’s coming from outside, he knows this much, but there’s barely any sunlight yet and a quick glance at the bedside clock shows that it’s barely past 4 am in the morning.

“Dawn prayers…” Hunter says groggily, stroking Roman’s arm. “That’s the call being sounded from every mosque in the city.”

Roman looks around, listening to the voices, the nearest of which allowing him to make out some syllables in a language he doesn’t understand.
“Like…a person? Or a recording?”

“A person,” Hunter says. “I forget what they’re called—Sami told me once, a person standing on the top of every minaret of every mosque, five times a day…”

Roman can hear that there’s a multitude of voices now, some distant and some quite near, like a gently rising and flowing tide, and he settles his head back down on Hunter’s chest.

“You know, it’s always funny to me…”

“What?”

“Anywhere we go in the world, any arena, any crowd, you get the feeling that everything’s the same— the faces are different, but they wear the merch, they know the chants, they cheer your entrances and so on…and you feel like you’ve never left home.”

Hunter sighs, stroking his back. “Yeah, I know the feeling…”

“But then when everything settles a little bit and you get a moment to really take in how different things are, like now…” Roman says. “You realize just how far from home you really are.”

Hunter tugs his chin up, a faint smile Roman can see in the dim light of the bedroom. “Well, I don’t know about you…but right now, this doesn’t feel too far removed from home.”

Roman returns the smile, kissing Hunter’s knuckles. “Yeah, I guess you’re right…”

“Go back to sleep,” Hunter tells him. “I’ll wake you when it’s light out.”
Hunter’s one of the few people to be allocated a personal dressing room at the Zayed Sports City Tennis Stadium, the rest of the roster having to share rooms or congregate in the communal backstage area as they prepare for their matches. Roman has secluded himself in Hunter’s dressing room since the show started, accompanied only by Hunter himself and the occasional runner knocking on their door telling them how many minutes they have until their cue.

There’s a slow, methodical, almost ritualistic air to the way Hunter prepares himself for a match — warming up his body, taping up his wrists and hands, pulling on his trunks and kneepads. Left before right, over and under, flexing and contracting to test both strength and mobility. Roman watches from his seat on the bench, saying nothing, the silence of the room interrupted only by the squeak of tape and Hunter’s rhythmic breathing, the harsh downlighting painting every curve and dip of his well-defined muscles.

There’s no space or context in events like this for Hunter’s more excessive entrances—no regalia, no masked attendants, no soldiers heralding his arrival, no throne to sit upon and glower from. Still, Roman can’t deny the air of dignity and authority radiating from the man before him, biased though he may be.

*Perditor. Aedificator. Rex.*

_Destroyer. Creator. King._

When Hunter starts to bend down to do up his boots, Roman stands off the bench, walking towards Hunter and stopping his movements. “Let me…” he says quietly, before sinking to his knees in front of his lover’s feet, fingers picking up the laces and starting to tighten them through each eyelet.

At Hunter’s inquiring look, Roman merely smiles up at him and says, “Kings don’t put on their own armor before going into battle…”

There’s a moment of contemplation on Hunter’s face, but then he returns the smile and runs his heavily-taped fingers through Roman’s wet hair. “Are you buoying me up because I’m meant to lose to you tonight?”

Roman chuckles a little, tightening the knot of laces on the left boot, kissing Hunter’s kneepad. “As far as I’m concerned, you won this one a long time ago.”

There’s a deep exhale from Hunter as Roman starts on the other boot, bowing his head to the task,
pulling the laces tight, securing the knot before he repeats the gesture of kissing the kneepad. He knows where Hunter’s surgery scars are on each knee, has run his fingers along them often enough, felt the ridges under his own skin.

“I did, didn’t I?” Hunter says, lifting Roman’s chin with one hand. “and what a prize you turned out to be…”

Roman smiles as he’s pulled back up to his feet, Hunter grabbing both sides of his face and pressing their foreheads together. Roman closes eyes, feeling Hunter’s breaths as they fall across his face, hoping that none of the producers choose this particular moment to come knocking at the door.

“Go out there and give me all you got,” Hunter whispers to him. “This isn’t about your title, or any title. This isn’t about trying to live up to anyone’s hype or paying off some massive buildup.”

“I know,” Roman says.

“This is about us, Roman… we’re here to entertain the good folks out there who paid a ticket to see a wrestling show. It’s as simple as that.”

Roman nods, his own hands coming up to curl fingers around Hunter’s wrists.

“We go out there, we do our jobs. You hit me with everything you got, I’ll make a winner out of you,” Hunter presses his lips against Roman’s forehead. “Then we’ll go back to our quiet little place, and you’ll make a winner out of me.”

Roman smiles, a warm swell in his chest quelling the flutter of nerves starting to coil below it. “I love you…”

“I love you too, baby…” Hunter says. “Now go out there and give your old King an ass-kicking, okay?”
As much as he tries not to, Roman remembers Dallas far too clearly than he would like — not the details of the match itself or the moves, but the night itself. The muggy air that clung to his skin, the stale din of the crowd that had already sat through five or more hours of spectacle that too often offered little substance. The looks he and Hunter kept exchanging, trying to communicate wordlessly without breaking character, spots called during rest holds as each of them grew increasingly impatient for the referee to relay the go-home message from gorilla.

Tonight, the air is clear and cool, and so is Roman’s head. Wrestling Hunter in a one-on-one is never going to be a spot-laden affair, given Hunter’s methodical style and the fact that they’re wrestling in a non-stipulation match, no sledgehammers or announcer tables to slam each other into. Still, there’s ring steps and ringposts and Hunter can still nail a pretty mean spinebuster, which Roman sells to the best of his ability. The final Spear, preceded by the tiniest hint of a smile that Roman knows is only meant for him, is far from his most impactful execution of the move, but Hunter dutifully goes with his momentum, laying down for the three-count and the bell being rung for Roman’s victory.

On cue, Samoa Joe and The Bar come storming in, for awhile seeming to do Hunter’s bidding in ganging up on Roman and kicking him down, the loose coalition of heels holding him up for the King of all heels to deliver the final blow. Roman has to fight to suppress the grin from breaking across his face prematurely, anticipating what’s to come next.

There had been a few raised eyebrows when the finish was laid out in the briefing earlier, though it was casually brushed off with a “well, it’s technically a house show match anyway” and “it’s not any weirder than Triple H suddenly teaming up with The Shield for the Euro tour”. Roman knew Hunter had a hand in crafting the scenario, and for once he can’t bring himself to mind at all.

Hunter makes as if to charge for Roman, but changes his target and starts beating up on The Bar and Samoa Joe instead, Roman recovering to assist him. It’s probably the one and only time they’ll get to team up, and Roman is determined to savor every second of it. Just when it looks like they’re being overwhelmed, out comes Dean and Seth, running down the ramp like two hounds unleashed, evening up the odds and allowing Hunter to score a decisive Pedigree on Cesaro.

Once the heels have cleared out, Roman and Hunter are left standing in the middle of the ring, Dean and Seth standing at Roman’s side, and Roman extends his hand to his on-screen former nemesis, offering a symbolic end to their hostilities. Hunter sells his hesitation for a good long while, milking the moment for all its worth, before he accepts the gesture, shaking Roman’s hand and holding it. And hold it he does, for a bit longer than perhaps necessary, and something in Roman’s knees give a little, his face struggling to suppress the emotions bubbling underneath.

It’s nothing, if taken in context of the greater narrative. It doesn’t count. It’s a house show thing, a one-off thing. It doesn’t count. It doesn’t matter.
But it does.

Of course it does.

It’s putting an endcap to unfinished business they left in a stadium in Dallas nearly two years ago, a victory that Roman never really cherished, a forced rivalry that drove a wedge between them that took months of silence to to repair. It’s not the match to end all matches, Roman had no illusions going into it and Hunter certainly didn’t either — but it was one in which they were in control of the situation, instead of having everything dictated to them to appease an increasingly unappeasable audience. Roman’s moved past the need to please anyone but the man standing before him since, and he feels it in Hunter’s hand, even through the thick padding of tapes and his gauntlet, the look in Hunter’s eyes that speak louder than words.

On top of the ramp, bidding farewell to a crowd that had screamed and cheered and chanted for them two nights in a row, The Shield and The Game join their fists, Roman proudly displaying the wide grin he’s fought to contain all night long. His brothers on either side, and Hunter’s hand right next to his own, a moment perhaps never to be repeated, a moment he wants to keep in memory for the rest of his life.

There’s a narrow corridor between the back of the stage and the makeshift gorilla position, black curtains on either end, and all four men walk slowly through it, Roman shaking a little in his boots, as if the magnitude of what’s just transpired is only now being allowed to hit him. Seth, up in front, pauses just before the curtain that would lead them back to the area where everyone else is waiting for them, and he holds the curtain shut with one hand, looking past Roman and Hunter’s shoulders to Dean, who’s closest to the stage. Dean nods, and draws the curtain shut on the other end, enclosing them in the tiny space, a thin little bubble of privacy.

“Go ahead…” Seth says almost inaudibly to Roman, who has a moment of blankness before he understands what his brothers are doing for him.

“Thanks,” he hears Hunter say, before he feels the older man grabbing at his waist and pulling him in, embracing him tightly. Roman feels more than a little overwhelmed, a rush of something coursing through his veins, pounding at his chest, his arms clinging around Hunter, sweat making their skin slippery. He doesn’t know whether he’s laughing or crying — the noise coming from his throat could very well be either, but he knows this feeling.

Relief.
“We did it…” Hunter whispers in his ear, his voice a little shaky. “We did it, baby.”

Roman sniffs and nods, unable to offer his own words. This match, this night, may well be forgotten in the annals of the company’s history as little more than a footnote — a live event on foreign soil, eclipsed by other milestones, not even properly documented except by still photography. It’s fleeting, as flimsy as the curtains Dean and Seth are pinching shut on either end to give them this moment.

“Thank you…” he whispers back, not knowing what else to say.

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Hunter doesn’t say much for the rest of the night, not even when Roman follows him back to his hotel room, to the large bed and its overabundance of pillows. He lets Hunter push him down to the soft mattress, undress him, a trail of kisses from his throat all the way down to his navel as his clothes are stripped off. Roman closes his eyes and lets his other senses take over, the tingle in his skin, the sound of Hunter breathing next to his ear, the smell and heat of him, the taste of his kiss.

There’s an urgency to the way Hunter fucks him tonight — as if the adrenaline that carried them through the match is still working its way through his system, barely giving Roman any time to settle. He lets Hunter have his way, content to be pushed this way and that, letting out little murmurs of appreciation when Hunter does something that sends tingles up his spine. Finally, Hunter pushes him flat on his stomach on the bed and mounts him from behind, the full weight of him pressing Roman’s body to sink even further into the mattress as Hunter tangles their fingers together and grunts harshly next to his ear. Roman presses kisses into the older man’s knuckles, rough with age and the faint traces of leftover adhesive from his tapes, pushing back against Hunter’s thrusts and opening himself up as much as he can.

Everything seems all that much more tactile somehow — the soft hairs of Hunter’s chest against his back, the ridges of his dry lips when he drags them up Roman’s neck, the rough patches in his ankles as they lock Roman’s legs apart and in place. Roman loses himself in it, unable to do much more but produce the noises that he knows Hunter likes, holding himself still when Hunter comes, working his muscles to clench around Hunter and milk him dry.

Hunter flips him over and devours his mouth with kisses as his hand finds Roman’s cock and strokes him to completion, Roman clinging to him with both arms around his neck, one leg hooked over Hunter’s knee, unwilling to relinquish any proximity. He feels exhausted and wrung out when he opens his eyes, the near-constant traveling and performing seeming to catch up to him in one instant, but all of that is pushed aside by the satisfaction he sees in Hunter’s eyes, a spark that offsets the deep lines of fatigue and the dark circles.
He sleeps better that night, with Hunter wrapped around him, not even roused when dawn arrives again and the choir of voices calling the citizens to prayer begin sounding throughout the city.

——

In New Delhi, the streets are a riot of noises and smells, a stark contrast to the fabricated sheen of Abu Dhabi and its sterile, multi-lane highways.

Delhi is chaos, sure, but far more *alive* for it. Colonial government buildings squeezed together with modern skyscrapers and red-brick tenements, swirling traffic, the occasional waft of street cooking and thick incense smoke billowing from temples tucked in behind shops. Roman sees most of it from behind the windows of their tour bus as it trudges along, navigating the seemingly impossible traffic with the practised ease of the local driver, taking in the sights he knows he won’t have proper time to savor.

The Shangri-la Hotel they’ve been booked into is all elegant curves and marble floors, with a grand lobby lined with smiling members of staff and the local journalists snapping away with their cameras from behind a security cordon. It’s a sight that seems to welcome them wherever they go, young fans waiting outside for photo ops and items to sign, while passersby look on in wonder as to what the fuss is all about. There seems to be a particular commotion around Jinder, as expected, and Hunter as both his opponent for the marquee match and the ambassador of all things WWE from the corporate aspect of things.

Roman’s always been fascinated by the dichotomy Hunter seems to wield effortlessly, that fine line between his on-screen persona and his backstage role, letting one feed into the other in a carefully-orchestrated narrative that he’s convinced Hunter devised for himself — the creative department from Roman’s experience simply aren’t capable of that kind of foresight. Hunter engages with the journalists and the sponsors with an easy smile and well-prepared sound bites, glowing praise for the local fans and the promise of getting their money’s worth, never giving away too much but just enough to keep the hype machine rolling.

They go to the arena the afternoon before the show, familiarizing themselves with the setup and the ring, the production crew testing out the audio-visual cues and the timing of each entrance, before the wrestlers are allowed backstage to begin their warmup and preparations.
In the dressing room, Dean pulls him and Seth over to a corner with a somber look on his face and Roman’s chest tightens—he knows what this is about.

“The scans came back,” Dean starts, looking glumly at the floor. “They told me I need to have surgery. Like, as soon as possible.”

Seth exhales, staring up at the ceiling while Roman just pats Dean’s right shoulder, letting his hand rest there. “I’m sorry, Deano…”

“Hey, we kinda knew it was coming. I put it off as long as I could so I—so **we** could have something,” Dean says.

“We did…” Seth nods his head. “We really did.”

“They’re writing me an exit angle for the upcoming RAW…something involving Joe or the Bar injuring me.” Dean shrugs, turning to look at Roman. “Probably something that you’ll get to avenge me for when you come back the week after.”

Roman offers a weak smile. “I always love a chance to kick ass on your behalf, Dean…” he looks up at Seth. “Like when this fucker stomped your head through cinderblocks that one time…”

Seth grins, but the corners of his mouth fold back into themselves rather quickly. “Did they…did they say anything about timeline?”

Dean shakes his head. “They’ll know after the surgery, once they get a good look at the extent of the damage—but looks like I’m sitting out ‘Mania next year.”

“Shit,” Roman says. “That…that sucks, Dean.”

“It does,” Dean agrees. “But whaddya gonna do?”

Seth takes a deep breath and puts his own hand on Dean’s shoulder, fingers linking with Roman’s. “We’re gonna go out there tonight and have one last good match as The Shield, that’s what we’re gonna do…”
Dean smiles, finally. “Sounds good to me…”

Roman sighs and draws both of his brothers close, clasping his arms tightly around them. He can feel Dean’s fingers digging into his back, Seth’s chin on his shoulder, a collective shudder that starts from one of them and ripples through all three.

They have fun that night, Seth playing to the crowd and inciting their cheers, Roman grinning from ear to ear nearly the whole time he’s in the corner waiting for a tag. There’s a relaxed, playful atmosphere to the whole thing, Sheamus and Cesaro exaggerating their heel act to an almost comical level, Dean being extra hyper with his ground-and-pound moves, Roman being tagged in late to deliver the damage that’s expected of him. It ends with a Triple Powerbomb, because of course it does, and they each climb a turnbuckle to celebrate with the fans, Roman holding aloft his Intercontinental Title, eyes nearly blinded by the flashing camera lights.

—he—

He doesn’t sleep so well that night, the traffic noises coming from the busy roundabout right next to the hotel not helping any. He’s still awake when Hunter enters the room well past midnight, having just finished a conference call back to the States, God knows how many time zones away, rubbing his face wearily as he kicks off his shoes and changes out of his business suit into something more comfortable.

“Everything okay back home?” Roman asks as Hunter climbs onto the bed with him.

“Just tying up some loose ends — seeing as how I’m gonna be AWOL for the better part of next week.”

Roman smiles at that. “I can’t wait…”

“Just a little bit longer,” Hunter promises him as he turns down the bedside lights. “One more sleep, a few more flights…”
The ‘sleep’ portion of it turns out to be just as elusive for Hunter as it is for him. At two in the morning, Roman wakes up after another spell of uneasy sleep to find the space next to him empty, though there’s still some leftover warmth in the rustled sheets. Lifting his head off the pillow, he scans the darkened room with bleary eyes for its missing occupant.

Hunter is standing next to the window, looking out at the city and the traffic below from a small gap he’s opened between the curtains, stirring a mug of what looks like one of the hotel’s complementary English teas in his hands. From this angle, watching him from the bed, Roman can clearly see the lines of fatigue in the older man’s face, the slight slump in his broad shoulders.

“Hunter?” he calls out, keeping his voice low.

“Hey…” Hunter says as he turns his head towards Roman. “Couldn’t sleep…didn’t wanna wake you with my tossing around.”

Roman shakes his head. “Wasn’t sleeping that well anyway…” he shuffles to the edge of the bed and stands up, feet sinking into the carpet.

He walks over to where Hunter is standing, who extends an arm to curl around his waist and draw him in closer. Through the gap in the curtains, Roman can see the lights of New Delhi all the way to the horizon, the huge sprawl of an ever-awake city, watched over by a yellowish grey half-moon hanging in the sky.

“What’s that?” Roman gestures at the mug of tea in Hunter’s hand. “Darjeeling?”

“Earl Grey…” Hunter lifts the mug closer to Roman’s lips. “Try some…”

The tea is hot but not scalding, the taste more rounded and smooth than some of the stronger, minty teas they were served in the Middle East.

“Nice…” Roman says. “Remind me to pick up an assortment gift box from that tea shop we saw in the lobby — my Mom would love it.”

“I’ll get someone to send it for you, make sure she gets it before Christmas,” Hunter says.
“Thanks…”

“Figured I owe her one, you know?” Hunter shrugs. “Since the reason you put in your leave request was to ‘take time with the family’, when in fact…”

Roman grins and tightens his arm around Hunter’s waist. “She’s happy to know I’m getting some time off, especially after the year I’ve had…of course, I didn’t tell my parents that I’d be spending it holed up in a cabin in the woods with my boss…”

Hunter chuckles and kisses the side of his head. “Is it weird that even though you’re a grown-ass man, I still think that Sika would have my balls if he knew?”

Roman gives Hunter a pointed look. “You should be afraid. Dad can still be pretty scary…”

“Oh, I have no doubt…” Hunter says.

Roman smiles and threads his fingers through the grey-streaked strands of Hunter’s beard. “You’re overdue for a trim…” he comments casually.

“Mmm…you think so?” Hunter says, one hand reaching down to fondle Roman’s ass through his sweatpants. “I need to renew your shave job down here, too.”

Roman snorts. “I don’t know why you’re so obsessed with having me baby-smooth down there—never stopped you before…”

“Hey, you said anything but the beard, right? I made my choice, I’m sticking with it.”

“Admirable,” Roman kisses the ridge of Hunter’s forehead. “Can’t remember if I packed my razor or not, guess I’ll just grab one at LAX when we touch down…”

“No need,” Hunter says. “We’re transferring to the company jet as soon as we get there. Anything we might need, I’ll get someone to fetch for us.”
Roman blinks at him for a while. “Wait… the jet? We’re taking the jet?”

“That place is in Connecticut, Roman…I’m not in the mood to drive cross-country in a rental and wear ourselves out even more…”

“But…I thought…”

Hunter smiles at him benignly. “What, we’re gonna fly commercial for another five hours? Nah, don’t feel like getting recognized, especially if it’s just you and me traveling together.”

Roman understands the logic of it well enough, but still… “they let you take the jet for, uh, personal reasons?”

“We bought it largely for my use, anyway…” Hunter reasons. “I can cover the operating costs out of my own pocket for this one occasion, keep it off company books.”

“Wow…” Roman says, still a little dumbfounded. “Going all out, aren’t we?”

“And why shouldn’t we?” Hunter says. “I wanna make the most of it. It’s long overdue.”

Roman finally smiles, rubbing his nose into Hunter’s neck. “Yeah… yeah it is.”

“Five days, four nights,” Hunter says. “Just you and me.”

“Finish that tea and come back to bed,” Roman says, tugging at Hunter’s sleeve. “Please?”

“Okay,” Hunter says, squeezing Roman’s hand. “I’ll be right there;”

When Hunter returns to bed, Roman draws him close and lets the older man rest his head on Roman’s stomach, beard tickling slightly at his navel. Neither are going to get a particularly good night’s rest with the few hours they still have, but Roman just wants him there, his fingers stroking Hunter’s scalp, feeling the breaths that blow warmly against his skin. He can sense when Hunter finally falls asleep, body going a little lax, his head still a warm weight on Roman’s stomach. Roman
stays awake for a little longer, a hand on Hunter’s cheek, staring up at the patterns in the ceiling until he dozes off also.

—

They’re about two hours away from touching down at LAX, a chartered plane full of tired, jet-lagged wrestlers who want nothing more than to land, pick up their luggage and get whatever rest they can before the next broadcast of RAW. Roman’s at the back of the plane with Seth and Dean seated on either side of him, the former slumped against his shoulder while the latter flips disinterestedly through the in-flight magazine before shoving it back into the seat pocket in front of him.

“So…” Dean says as he leans back. “Is there, like, a gift registry that I need to sign up for?”

Roman just stares at him. “Huh?”

“Well, if you’re being whisked off to a romantic getaway, the general outcome is usually an engagement.”

“Engagement? What the—” Roman pauses mid-sentence, then groans when he sees Dean’s wide, toothy grin. “Dean, what the fuck, man…”

“No? So I don’t need to start pre-ordering monogrammed towels or anything?”

“Shut up,” Roman shoves him playfully, the movement causing Seth to grumble a little in his sleep. “God, to think I was starting to feel guilty about spending a week without you two motherfuckers…”

“Fuck you, you love us…” Seth mutters, squeezing Roman’s shoulder a little too tight just to be an annoying little shit. “You’ll miss us…”

Roman sighs, ruffling Seth’s hair and mussing it up, then turning to Dean again. “I’m gonna miss you, that’s for damn sure….”
“I have that effect on people, Uce…” Dean winks at him. “Anyway, y’all be nice to my missus while I’m gone, you hear?”

“And you better not give her too much trouble while you’re convalescing,” Roman nudges him. “Seth and I can always make a detour to Nevada and smack you around for a bit if we hear from Renee you’re being too much of a big baby…”

“I’ll be a good boy…” Dean says, but then his face regains that mischievous look and he leans over to look at Seth. “Hey Seth, how much you willing to bet the Big Dog comes back from his romantic holiday with some new bling on him?”

Seth snuggles a little closer to Roman, muttering “All hail the Kingfucker…”

Roman groans and thumps his head back against his seat.

——

Once they’ve grabbed their luggage off the carousel at LAX, Roman hugs his Shield teammates one last time, giving Dean a particularly long one since he knew it would probably be months before he saw him again, wishing him luck for the surgery and recovery. He spots one of Hunter’s personal assistants out of the corner of his eye, and gives him a nod before peeling off from the main group and moving as discreetly as he can, following the man as he leads Roman towards an exit.

A short car ride later, Roman finds himself at the smaller terminal reserved for private jets, a decidedly welcome break from the din and crowding of the main buildings. Hunter’s already there, in a pair of faded denims and one of his trademark leather jackets, sunglasses perched high on his forehead. Roman smiles when he sees him — he’s gotten used to the sight of Hunter in his sharp business suits for the past few weeks, always representing the company in some official capacity, so it’s nice to see the older man in more casual attire.

“So…does this mean you’re officially off duty?” he asks while their luggage is being checked in. “No late-night conference calls or e-mails?”

“Emergencies only, that’s what I told my staff…” Hunter assures him. “Like I said, company’s not gonna implode just because I don’t answer my phone for a few days.”
The last time Roman had been on the company’s private Bombardier jet, with its black and red WWE livery, he was following Hunter to Stamford during his suspension last year—a trip that had a significant effect on their relationship. Since then, they’ve always managed to steal time away for a day or two, here and there, but the opportunities have become increasingly rare and they’re about to enter what is traditionally the busiest time of the WWE calendar — the buildup to Wrestlemania. This, Roman knows, could be the last real ‘holiday’ either he or Hunter would be getting for a while, and as much of an overkill as the private jet may seem, he does understand the need to make the most of it.

As the plane starts to taxi to the runway, Roman looks out the window and smiles as he feels Hunter’s hand in his lap, lacing their fingers together.

—

If not for the rustle of gravel under the SUV’s tires as it veers into a country lane, and the beep of the GPS mounted on the dashboard, Roman would swear he was in some kind of dream, the scenery passing outside the window of the rolling hills and bare trees a stark contrast to the madness of his last few weeks. The sun is low on the horizon as the driver pulls up to the gate of the Winvian Farm property, a lightly-wooded area with a large country house serving as the main reception building.

They stay in the car while Hunter’s assistant goes inside to take care of their check-in, Roman rolling down the window on his side. There’s a chilly bite to the air outside, quiet save for the squawking of birds, Old-World style lampposts along the driveway starting to light up. Roman tugs his coat a little tighter around his shoulders as he breathes the air in, cold against his nostrils, dry wood and damp earth.

“It’s nice, isn’t it?” Hunter comments from the seat next to him.

“It’s quiet…” Roman says. “I like it.”

Their cabin is located a the far northern end of the property, flanked by a forest of trees that have gone mostly bare with the season, though some still stubbornly retain their foliage. There’s a short stone footpath leading up to the small, intimate log cabin, a large recliner placed in its lantern-lit porch. Roman follows Hunter up the footpath and into the cabin itself, an instant gust of warmth coming from the roaring fireplace facing the large bed, decked out with all the rustic cliches like deer antlers and oversized leather armchairs.
Shrugging off his coat and sitting at the edge of the bed, Roman waits patiently as their luggage is wheeled in, a member of the property’s staff explaining to Hunter about the many package activities on offer, from wine tastings to spa treatments to horseback rides. He smiles to himself as he hears Hunter politely declining, asking instead for their meals to be delivered directly to the cabin. The staff member wishes them a pleasant stay, undoubtedly happy with Hunter’s generous tip, and Roman hears the front door of the cabin being shut and the locks bolted in.

Finally.

“Guy says there’s a possibility of light snow tomorrow morning,” Hunter says as he walks over from the front door to the bed. “So you might get your wish…”

Roman smiles up at him. “I’m already getting my wish now…” he says as he loops his arms around Hunter’s waist and pulls him close.

Hunter runs his fingers through Roman’s hair, letting Roman lean his head against the older man’s chest. “What’s on your mind, baby?”

“Nothing…” Roman mutters. “Just you.”

There’s a hearty chuckle that reverberates from Hunter’s chest. “Well…here we are now. You’ve got me,”

“Finally, huh?”

“Yes…” Hunter tugs his chin up, kissing his forehead. “Finally. So tell me, what do you wanna do first?”

“Well, you, of course—did you have to ask?” Roman yanks him down by the lapels of his jacket. “How much time do we have until our dinner gets here?”

“Told the guy to give us about an hour or so,” Hunter says with a smirk, pulling at the buttons of Roman’s coat. “That should be enough, right?”
“More than enough,” Roman says as he kicks off his shoes. “Get up here…”

There shouldn’t have been a need to rush anything — Hunter had inducted Roman into the Mile High Club during the plane ride, so they don’t even have the excuse of needing to take the edge off. But still, Roman’s fingers are nearly trembling as he struggles with his buttons and belt loops — an itch in his skin clawing its way to the surface.

Hunter flips a switch that turns off all of the lights, save for the warm glow of the fireplace painting dancing shadows across the wooden logs lining the walls of the cabin. The bed is slightly smaller than the one in Hunter’s apartment in Orlando, but sturdier and bouncier — Roman mutters a silent prayer that the springs will hold out over the next few days.

“Think we should…uh, call the front desk for some extra blankets and pillows?” Hunter asks playfully as he slots into the space between Roman’s helpfully spread legs, one spit-wet finger already trailing the rim of Roman’s hole.

“Mmmm…maybe wait till tomorrow morning,” Roman says as he pulls Hunter down by the back of his neck. “Let’s not scandalize them too much on our first night here,”

Hunter smirks, before leaning to down to nip at Roman’s jaw. “You’re being awfully considerate for a cock-hungry boy…”

Roman swats his arm. “One hour. You’re on the clock, Mr. Executive Vice President. Get to work.”

“So fucking demanding…” Hunter grunts as he slips his finger inside, sucking a fresh bruise at the side of Roman’s neck. “Gotta remind you of your place,”

Roman licks his lips. “…and where is that?”

“Wherever I wanna put you for me to stick my dick in,” Hunter says with a growl to his voice.

“Such a charmer—fuck!” Roman gasps as Hunter makes good on his words, his finger replaced with his cock after the most minimum of prep. Roman’s not gonna complain, though—he’s taken it rougher from Hunter before and he’s just as eager, not wanting to let a single minute go to waste.
Whatever Roman wants to say next is swallowed up in kisses, his ankles instinctively locking behind Hunter’s back as their bodies rock together, jetlag and aching muscles momentarily set aside. Roman’s already got plans for what he wants to do about that later, but for now, he needs this. He needs Hunter.

He digs his fingers into the flesh of Hunter’s back, the skin blooming with tiny pinpricks of sweat. Hunter’s not holding anything back — there’s already teeth marks all over Roman’s neck and collarbone, safe in the knowledge they won’t need to be covered up tomorrow. Even in Abu Dhabi, with all that feeling of relief and release, they had been careful about each other’s bodies, about the scrutiny of cameras and live audiences. Here, it was only them, a pocket of seclusion in their otherwise crazy lives, where their bodies belonged only to each other.

Hunter comes with a sharp snap of his hips, holding Roman still underneath him, while Roman jacks himself off with one shaky hand, not wanting to be left too far behind. Afterwards, they wrap themselves in the thick winter duvet, listening to the crackle of the fireplace and watching the shadows flicker across the ceiling.

“By the way…” Roman says as he gets his breathing back. “Thanks…for all this.”

“Don’t mention it…” Hunter says. “I needed this, too.”

“Yeah, you really do…” Roman strokes a hand down his face. “You’ve been running yourself ragged…like, since before I got sick, even. You’ve looked real tired for the past few weeks…”

“I know…” Hunter sighs. “ Doesn’t look like anything’s gonna slow down, anytime soon.”

“Crazy, innit?” Roman mutters. “I don’t know anyone in any other line of work that just keeps going like we do…”

“At least people get to take actual breaks now and not, you know, lose their jobs over it…” Hunter says, stroking a hand down Roman’s back. “So, what do you wanna do after dinner?”

“Hmmm?”

“Like, should we try the bathtub? Or spread out a blanket right in front of that fireplace over there?”
Roman smiles, lifting his head to look around the cottage and the sheer wealth of options they have. “Well…there is something I wanna try,” he says. “Something I feel I should’ve done a long time ago.”

“Oh?” Hunter looks intrigued. “And what is that, exactly?”

“Well…” Roman pushes himself up to a sitting position, placing a hand over Hunter’s chest. “You know that TV show that everyone loves, the one I won’t shut up about?”

Hunter’s expression turns to one of mild panic. “Baby, please don’t tell me that we’re gonna spend the rest of our first night here on a Game of Thrones DVD marathon…”

Roman laughs, shaking his head. “No, no, we’ll save that for another time.”

“Thank fuck…”

“But what do you know about that show, off the top of your head?”

“Pffft…” Hunter shrugs. “Something about fighting over a throne, duh, lots of gore and people dying, snow zombies, that one time when some guy had to hold a door…and dragons.”

Roman blinks at him. “That…well, that’s actually a pretty good summary.”

“Oh, and a lot of fucking, apparently.” Hunter adds.

“Yup,” Roman nods. “I swear at times it’s only few full-frontal shots away from being a full-blown porno.”

Hunter chuckles. “That why you like it so much, then? Or is it the…uh, political intrigue?” he says, adding air quotes.
“Fuck you, it’s a good show…” Roman shoves at his thigh playfully. “But yeah, fine, for the purpose of our little exercise here, let’s consider the amount of fucking on it…”

“Tell me,” Hunter says, running a hand up Roman’s arm. “I like it when you get imaginative.”

“Well, just look around…” Roman says. “Big roaring fireplace, stone chimney, deer antlers….whatever _that_ thing is supposed to be…” he points up to the ostentations, three-tier chandelier hanging over head, with its blown glass baubles and carved deer heads.

“Hmm,” Hunter mutters thoughtfully. “It does stray a bit towards the medieval, doesn’t it?”

“Yeah…” Roman says, smiling wider as he runs his fingers through the soft hairs on Hunter’s chest. “And I am in the presence of a King.”

Hunter’s eyes light up as he catches on, his hand encircling Roman’s wrist. “You are…so what are you going to do about that, beautiful?”

“I think it’s about time that you relax and let me look after you, for a change…” Roman says. “It’s only right for the King to have his needs taken care of.”

Hunter’s smile widens. “I have many needs…you sure you can take care of it all by your lonesome?”

“I think I can manage…” Roman says playfully.

Their dinner arrives on a small trolley, arranged on a covered warming tray. Roman bundles up just enough to fetch it from the front porch and wheels it back inside, where Hunter is waiting on the bed patiently for him.

Roman has vivid memories of times in the past where Hunter had to do this for him, cut up his food into tiny pieces and feed it to him when he’s too sick or too distraught to eat properly. Now he’s doing it for pleasure more than anything else, smiling as Hunter takes each bite Roman offers, comfortably reclined on the mound of pillows on the bed.

There’s a complimentary bottle of red wine and two glasses as part of the dinner package, though
Roman doesn’t touch it because he knows Hunter won’t drink any.

“Have some if you want,” Hunter says. “I don’t mind…”

“Maybe later,” Roman says. “Wouldn’t do for the King’s attendant to be inebriated…”

“True, and it’s not like you need any more loosening up…” Hunter jokes.

They finish the meal and Roman wheels the trolley out of sight into the kitchenette area, fetching a small towel wetted with hot water and bringing it back to the bed. He proceeds to give Hunter a thorough wipe-down — well, as thorough as he can manage with Hunter constantly trying to distract him by fondling parts of his body that he can reach, evidently starting to get into the mood of things.

Roman reaches the older man’s legs, kissing each knee in turn, repeating the gesture he’d first performed before their match in Abu Dhabi. Without kneepads covering them, he can see clearly the faded surgery marks on each joint, the signs of a body that’s seen more than its fair share of bumps and injuries.

“Admiring my…uh, battle scars?”

“You’ve had quite a few,” Roman says as he rests his cheek against Hunter’s right knee, tossing the damp towel aside. “More than what I can probably see here.”

“A good King stands his ground,” Hunter remarks, reaching down to stroke his knuckles down Roman’s face. “But I’ll fight as many battles as I need, if it means coming back to you…”

Roman purrs softly as he leans into the touch, the familiar rub of Hunter’s calloused fingers. He doesn’t resist when Hunter tries to pull him closer, ending with him sprawled pretty much on top of Hunter, the older man’s hands holding him at his hips. He kisses Hunter slowly, as if in an act of reverence, his hands pressed against Hunter’s chest.

“There is something else your King needs, boy…” Hunter says, a glimmer in his eyes.

“Hmm…what is it?”
Hunter pulls him close by the back of his neck with one hand, the other reaching down between his ass cheeks to tease around his still-slick hole. “I could use an heir… and I think I know where to put one.”

Roman shudders, a soft gasp escaping his mouth.

*Oh, we’re playing that one, are we?*

They haven’t done it for so long that Roman’s almost forgotten what a mess it made of him the first time Hunter did it. He’s instantly reminded of it though, just from the suggestion implied in Hunter’s words, like a thick fog suddenly descending over his thoughts — undoing any semblance of control he might have cultivated over the preceding half hour or so. Hunter’s so good at this, at getting to the core of what makes Roman literally weak in the knees, that even the sheer absurdity of the scenario barely registers at all.

“You like the thought of that…” Hunter says as he nudges Roman’s legs further apart. “I can tell, you’re fucking wet already, and I’ve barely touched you…”

Roman bites back his moan and just buries his head on Hunter’s chest, feeling deft fingers toy with him, his body rippling as he rubs suggestively against Hunter’s torso.

“What do you say to that, beautiful?” Hunter says as he traces his mouth along Roman’s throat. “Should we see if you’re as fertile as you are eager?”

“Yes…” Roman hisses sharply. “Please…”

Hunter hitches his hips up, pitching Roman forward a little and his ass up, dick hard and ready to go again. Roman whimpers at the feeling of it rubbing against his hole, hands reaching back to open himself up further.

“Go on then, show the King how much you love that dick…” Hunter encourages him. “I could do with knocking up a beauty like you.”

Roman can barely offer any words in reply, just gets in position where he can sink down on Hunter’s
cock in one long, slow glide until Hunter’s all snug inside him, the heat of his belly radiating warmth that travels all the way up Roman’s spine, unable to stop himself from smiling as he pushes himself up with his hands on Hunter’s chest.

He rides that dick like his life depends on it, making a show of snapping his hips and clenching around Hunter, encouraged by the murmurs of appreciation and the satisfied smirk that’s on Hunter’s face. It’s been too long since he’s been able to be this loose and carefree with it, not caring for how much noise they’re making, how many marks Hunter leaves on his body, whether or not he’ll be able to walk the morning after.

Hunter talks up a storm of filth all the way through it, something they haven’t done for quite a while either, hands roaming Roman’s body and his eyes never losing that playful, maddeningly self-assured spark in them.

“Big strong boy…” he grunts as he palms Roman’s stomach. “Gonna give me big strong babies too, gonna get you even bigger than you are now, you’re gonna look so good…”

Roman’s pretty damn close to suffocating on the intensity of it all, squeezing his eyes shut, letting Hunter’s hands and words take his mind on a ride, his skin hot and prickly with oversensitive nerves.

“Look at these, huh…” Hunter grabs at Roman’s chest. “They’ll swell up nicely too, I bet…I’ll have you walking around leaking all over the place in no time, full and pretty…”

Roman keens loudly and falls forward, registering a moment later that the shudder rippling through him is his own climax, wrenched so unexpectedly from him by the sheer force of Hunter’s words, and he can see the older man’s smirk through his hazy eyes, that dick still fucking him hard and fast, not letting him catch a breath. Roman’s limbs are useless at this point, limp and slippery with sweat, just managing to hang on to Hunter’s large frame as he’s fucked into with all the force Hunter can manage, his hole clenching weakly around Hunter’s length.

Hunter flips them over before hecomes, rolling Roman up until he’s nearly folded over himself, giving him a few more hard, jabbing thrusts before he comes. He stills himself as he unloads, gripping Roman’s thighs to keep him in place, Roman’s cock giving a pitiful little twitch as he waits it out. Hunter’s panting heavily above him, face knotted into deep lines of exertion but smiling just the same, a deep guttural laugh emanating from him.

“Such a pleaser…” Hunter says, his cock sliding out followed by a messy, sticky trail. “Much as I hate it going to waste, gotta admit that I love the sight of me leaking out of you,”
Roman bites his lip and eases his legs down, feeling the wet squelch of Hunter’s release between his wet thighs, reaching down to trace fingers through some of his own come that’s now drying on his stomach.

“Looks like we’ll both need a bit of cleaning up…” Hunter remarks, though he makes no move to leave the bed, instead slipping under the duvet again and pulling Roman with him. “Tomorrow.”

“Tomorrow,” Roman repeats, finding his words for the first time in what feels like forever.

He’s slept in worse messes before — it never really bothered him, as long as the mess was Hunter’s making, he rather liked waking up and being reminded of who has free reign over his body. Hunter’s chest is slick with sweat, his veins standing out like he’s just been through one of his midnight workouts, the light from the fireplace catching each curve and bulge of his body as Roman strokes his arm.

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“Baby, wake up…”

“Hmmm…?” Roman mutters groggily, his eyes still feeling like they’ve been glued shut.

“Look…look outside.”

Roman opens his eyelids just a little, startled by the brightness that welcomes him. For a while he can’t quite remember where he even is, just that he’s with Hunter, and he’s on a nice warm bed, and it seems a shame to wake up. He blinks awake, finding Hunter hovering over him, his face lit by a strange bluish-white haze and the warm glow from the fireplace.

“Hey…” Hunter kisses his forehead. “You said you wanted snow, right?”
Roman turns his head and sees it, the gentle drift of white flakes falling down outside the cabin’s windows, the bleak winter sunlight just enough to reflect on the sheet of white covering the earth. It’s not a heavy snowfall by any means, barely clinging to the leafless branches and the dried, dull bushes lining the stone footpath, but the vast expanse of ground it covers still takes Roman’s breath away, a wintery haze of white as far as his eyes can see.

It’s not like he’s never seen snow — but rarely does he ever get to experience it like this, sitting still and watching it fall, without needing to hurry through it to get to the heated interior of an arena or a hotel.

Hunter spoons up behind him, a solid block of warmth he can lean into, his breath tickling the back of Roman’s neck. “Let it fall and settle on the ground a little…” he says. “We can take a walk in it later.”

“Okay…”

“Unless you’d rather just stay indoors and watch it, and we can do something else,” Hunter says.

“Well…that sounds good, too.”

He can feel Hunter’s smile against the skin of his shoulder. “See, the beauty of all this is that you don’t really have to choose — can do both, far as I’m concerned. We have time.”

Roman nods and places his hand over Hunter’s where it rests against his stomach. In truth, they don’t have that much time — certainly not the thirty days they had last year, but it’s still more time than they’ve been able to squeeze from their schedules all year long.

“Did you sleep well?” he asks.

“Better than I’ve slept for weeks…” Hunter says. “I got up at five to put some more wood in the fire, but you slept right through it…”

Roman stretches himself out a little, flexing his toes, listening to the soothing crackle coming from the fireplace.
“I kinda feel like we should be…I don’t know, out there, doing stuff, taking advantage of the surroundings or whatever…” he says. “…but another part of me just wants to do fuck all,”

Hunter chuckles. “Yeah, I know the feeling…”

They end up not quite taking a walk in the snow-covered grounds, opting instead for the next best thing, having breakfast out on the front porch of the cabin, huddled together on the large recliner under a mound of knitted blankets. The staff member who delivers their food doesn’ even bat an eye at them, just sets out their trays on a low table and wishes them a pleasant day, asking them if they intend to come to the main building for lunch. Hunter tells him they’ll think about it, before sending the young woman on her way with another generous tip.

“God, we’re gonna be one of those weirdo couples who never mingle with the other guests, aren’t we?” Roman says as he extends an arm out of the blankets just enough to grab at one oven-warm roll.

“From what I hear, this place is pretty popular with honeymooners, so I think they’ve encountered their fair share of guests who just wanna hole up in their cabins all day…” Hunter says.

“None of this is compliant to your strict dietary guidelines, by the way…” Roman comments, gesturing at the plates piled up with sweetened rolls, cooked egg dishes, toast and sausages.

“I’m on vacation,” Hunter reasons defensively.

“So you are,” Roman bites off a piece off his roll, ignoring the crumbly mess it results in, offering the rest to Hunter. “I’m not done with this whole ‘taking care of you’ bit, by the way.”

Hunter grins, his bread streaked with crumbs. “Baby, you can take care of me as much as you want…”
The caveat, as it turns out, for this whole thing of letting Roman be the one taking care of his man for once, is the constant interruptions to have sex, during which Hunter is still as all-controlling as he ever is.

Roman pretends to mind, he really does, but the charade lasts only for as long as it takes for Hunter to slick up and enter him, after which any kind of resistance is a lost cause.

They’re in the bathroom, Roman making good on his promise to give Hunter’s beard a neat trim, when Hunter suddenly lifts him up onto the sink counter and shoves his legs apart, pushing aside the material of the bathrobe Roman’s wearing to get at his prize. Roman has just enough presence of mind to let the razor he’s holding clatter into the sink, his protests muffled with Hunter’s kiss, smearing shaving cream all over their faces.

“Shit, Daddy…” Roman gasps as he looks over Hunter’s shoulder, at the small window that’s facing the driveway in front of the cottage next to theirs. “The window…shut it first.”

“Nobody’s outside,” Hunter assures him. “Last I checked, the one next door is empty.”

“Yeah, but—”

“And if anyone just happens to walk by and they see me fucking you,” Hunter says as he pushes inside. “They can damn well see me fucking you.”

“Jesus Christ,” Roman hisses at the intrusion, thumping his head back against the mirror.

“Yeah, Him too…”

Roman swats at Hunter’s shoulder playfully before he just relaxes and lets Hunter have his way with him, wiping the residue of shaving cream on the older man’s forearms.

He does manage to finish the job later, and Hunter does his own bit for Roman’s ass, getting him as smooth and as hairless as possible down there while they soak in the hot tub, making use of the expensive-looking bath salts and the aromatic candles with French names Roman can’t pronounce.
Hunter announces that his handiwork is finished by slapping Roman’s ass rather loudly, the sound echoing across the bathroom tiles along with Roman’s exclamation of midly annoyed pain.

“Scoot forward, baby…Daddy wants to take this thing for a test drive.”

Roman shakes his head, but complies with the request anyway, crawling forward inside the tub until he’s on all fours, the water splashing against his chin, his ass pushed back and shoved rather blatantly at Hunter’s face. The first swipe of Hunter’s tongue against his newly-shaven hole nearly makes him slip under the water, and he hopes that Hunter doesn’t plan on making him hold that position for too long, because his arms can barely hold him up, palms dug into the slippery edges of the tub.

“Perfect…” Hunter remarks fondly, grabbing handfuls of ass and licking around Roman’s rim. “Absolutely perfect…”

Roman laughs shakily, inhaling the scent of the midly perfumed bathwater and the steamy air of the bathroom, gooseflesh prickling all over his skin.

Hunter gets him all nice and loose back there, adding fingers to the mix alongside his tongue, before pulling Roman back to sit on his lap, leaning back against his chest as his dick finds its way home again, Roman’s legs flung wide and apart over Hunter’s knees.

It’s the mellowest fuck they’ve had since checking in, Hunter taking his sweet time with it, playing with Roman’s cock under the water, kissing his neck and shoulders, fingers trailing the woven lines of ink down Roman’s right arm. Time seems almost inconsequential, held at bay by the thick logs separating them from the cold outdoors, remnants of the morning’s snowfall still visible outside the window. In the end, it’s only when the water becomes too lukewarm to be comfortable that Hunter decides to finish off, jacking Roman off gently to the rhythm of his own thrusts, until they both came.

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They do take a walk around the property in the afternoon, the ground crunching under Roman’s boots as his breaths become puffs of ghostly white in front of his face, a waxy yellow sun shining through the bare branches of trees. Not far from the cabin is a lake that hasn’t frozen over, the water almost still save for the gentlest of ripples, a misty haze descending over it. He snaps a few pictures from his phone, though it hardly does the landscape justice.
“I hear it’s really beautiful in the spring and summer, too…” Hunter comments. “All green and with flowers in full bloom, lots of birds in the trees…”

“I think it’s prettier like this, actually…” Roman says, linking his arm around Hunter’s.

“Hmm…you think so?”

“Yeah,” Roman says. “I don’t get to see sights like this often — least not long enough to walk around and enjoy it.”

Hunter smiles, brushing a stray lock of hair from Roman’s face. “Should we make this, like, an annual thing?”

It’s a casual enough question, but there’s a softness to the tone of it that makes Roman’s chest swell a little, the promise of continuation, of some form of permanence. It’s not something he has much of in his life, either.

“Yeah…” he says in a whispered hush. “That’d be nice…”

Hunter squeezes his arm tightly and leans in to brush their foreheads against each other, breaths mingling in the chilly air.

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Their second night is a quieter affair, sipping mugs of marshmallow-topped cocoa out in the front porch until it becomes way too cold to remain outdoors, retreating back inside to the warmth of their bed and the roaring fireplace.

Roman would have slept through the night, if not for Hunter rousing him in the middle of the night, breathing hot against his neck in a way that Roman knows all too well. He smiles as he hooks his leg
back over Hunter’s hip to signal his welcome, one hand reaching back to stroke the back of Hunter’s neck.

No words exchanged, none needed, Roman just opens his body up and closes his eyes as Hunter fucks him slowly, snug under the thick covers.

He hasn’t looked at a clock or a calendar since they arrived, noting the passage of time only by the shifting lights in the sky and the length of shadows, not even caring what day of the week it is. Right now, he’s living as if inside of a snowglobe, suspended in a bubble of winter, untouched by the outside world. Safe. Peaceful. Happy.

Roman strokes a hand down Hunter’s cheek, feeling a warm kiss on his open palm. Neither seem inclined to speak, as if unwilling to break the spell of this precious, fleeting existence, soon to be a memory.

He’s not much for motivational quips of the sort often printed on t-shirts and coffee mugs, or written out in cursive fonts over color-corrected images of sunsets, but if ever he understood what it means to ‘live in the now’, this is it.

—

They decide to give the bed a bit of a rest on their third night, pulling the blankets and pillows off and arranging them in front of the fireplace instead, having a lazy indoor picnic with their dinner, Roman finally uncorking the complimentary bottle of red wine and allowing himself at least two glasses to go with the meal.

Hunter makes love to him by the fireplace after that, because of course he does, they’ve been living some kind of Hallmark winter fantasy for the past 48 hours, it’s only right that they tick off all the cliches. The thick rug and the cushion of blankets they’ve laid down doesn’t take much away from the hardness of the floor, but Roman can’t bring himself to mind — the way Hunter looks in the glow of the firelight and the way the flames reflect in his eyes are more than worth it. There’s a vigor and vitality to the way Hunter moves that Roman’s missed for the preceding few weeks, so swept up in the responsibilities of the job and the schedule that went with it.

Afterwards, Roman makes two mugs of tea stirred with cinnamon sticks and brings them back to
their makeshift nest, letting the heat seeping from the ceramic warm his fingers as he sits in front of the fire.

Hunter is shuffling around his bags for something, returning with something clutched within the palm of one hand.

“Whatcha got there?” Roman asks as Hunter sits next to him.

Hunter’s smile is a little nervous as he says, “Consider this my Christmas present…” and produces a small, black velvet box.

Roman nearly drops his mug, prompting Hunter to quickly loop an arm around his shoulders.

“Hey…hey, it’s not what you think it is, okay?” he says. “I mean, not that I wouldn’t want it to be, if it could…”

“I…” Roman stutters. “Hunter…”

“Just…just see it first, okay? Tell me what you think…”

When the box is opened, Roman sees a large, signet-style ring, tiny white diamonds arranged in concentric circles on a thick band of gold. He’s still stunned silent as Hunter gently lifts his right hand, slipping the ring onto his pinky. It’s a snug, perfect fit, the diamonds glittering in the firelight, and Roman can only stare at it, his throat tight and his heart thudding loudly in his chest.

“Remind you of anything?” Hunter asks quietly.

Roman examines the ring as it adorns his finger, the interplay of white and gold that catches the light from the fire. “It looks…looks kinda like the IC belt.”

“Exactly,” Hunter says, a palpable relief in his voice. “I saw it in a storefront in Abu Dhabi, and that’s the first thing I thought of…and then I thought of you.”
Roman looks up at Hunter, still feeling a little choked up. “I…thank you, I didn’t—*shit*, I didn’t get you anything…”

Hunter smiles and shakes his head, tugging Roman closer. “It’s okay…”

“No, no it’s not—“ Roman says. “You’re always…you’re always doing things for me, like this whole trip, buying me stuff, and I never—“ his voice trails off. “I don’t do enough.”

“Baby, you don’t need to,” Hunter assures him. “We’re here, you’re with me. That’s all I can ask for.”

Roman stares back down at the ring, the corners of his eyes feeling suddenly moist. “Thank you…” he mutters again.

“Roman, listen…” Hunter tugs him up by his chin. “I need you to understand something…”

Roman nods, waiting for him to speak.

“I can’t…change how the world works,” Hunter says heavily. “I can’t even change how the company works, much as I want to. The crap you have to put up with, all the bullshit that’s going on with the booking, things that get decided when I’m not around…”

“Hey, I know all that, okay?” Roman says. “I’m the one who asked you to just let things play out, remember?”

“I know…” Hunter nods. “But damnit, baby…if you’d asked me to do otherwise…”

Roman shakes his head. “No…”

“You won’t ever ask that of me, I know that…” Hunter cups Roman’s face in his hand. “You’re a better man than I ever was at your age. You want to earn things, not trample your way to the top like I did…”
“Hunter…”

“Just…just listen, okay?” Hunter says. “I don’t know if telling you this makes anything any better, or if it makes things worse…maybe this is for me as much as it is for you to hear.”

Roman swallows the lump in his throat, one hand coming up to curl around Hunter’s wrist.

“If you’d asked me to, I would’ve turned this whole company upside down for you,” Hunter says. “I would. I shouldn’t, and you’d never go that far, but I totally fucking would.”

Roman closes his eyes, digging his fingers into the skin of Hunter’s hand. “I know…”

“When you won that IC belt, I knew it was special…but I also knew it probably wouldn’t last.”

“I figured as much, too…” Roman nods.

“When I saw this,” Hunter lifts Roman’s hand to examine the ring. “I thought, if I can give you this, then this is something they can’t take away from you, something you’ll still have long after you don’t have the title anymore.”

Roman smiles weakly. “So this is…my Grand Slam ring, then?”

“You can call it that, yeah…” Hunter returns the smile.

Roman kisses Hunter softly on the lips, muttering another “Thank you…” with a trembling voice. “I love you.”

“Love you too, baby…” Hunter says, a wash of relief seemingly coming over him.

If there are better words to articulate his feelings at the moment, Roman can’t seem to find them. He just holds Hunter close, still transfixed by the sight of the ring adorning his finger, tracing the pattern of diamonds with his other hand as he turns it in the firelight, chest heaving with the weight of things that’s left unsaid.
They have one more night, though. Maybe he’ll have the words by then.

For now, he just wants to revel in his new gift, in Hunter’s presence, in the precious little world they’ve somehow managed to orchestrate, and Roman smiles as he remembers something.

“As the way…you just made Dean Ambrose a hundred bucks richer.”

Chapter End Notes

If you're wondering, the ring mentioned in the chapter is the one Roman wore to the NYSE on the morning of RAW 25, a rather impressive piece of bling.

Now, I explained earlier how the current state of WWE in regards to Roman's booking is just utterly shit. As someone whose writings have always closely followed real-life events, weaving them into the narrative of the Roman/Hunter relationship, it's increasingly hard for me to look ahead at all the chapters I still have to write and contemplate the sheer amount of angst I will have to dole out. It's inevitable, of course, but I just wish I already have one bright culminating happy moment to write towards, instead of the frustrating limbo we find ourselves in at the moment.

Let me make it clear: I am NOT abandoning Orbitverse. I can't. Those chapters, painful as they may be, still need to be written, because it's still Roman's story.

But I also know that I need my own version of escapism from it, a place where I get to dictate what happens, what the results are, a place where I can have them just be happy, for once.

On that note, I will be starting an AU "Mirrorverse" soon, an utterly self-indulgent story that shares the same background as Orbitverse but splits off after about Chapter 14, to explore an alternate timeline where things play out a lot differently than they have.

I won't divulge too many details here, as the first chapter has yet to be written, but the AU elements I explore within it may not be to everyone's tastes, let me just make that clear -- but I'm ever hopeful that at least some of you will be willing to come on board as I steer this ship towards new and uncharted waters.

Stay tuned. :)
Chapter Summary

Roman closed his eyes briefly, trying to quell the mounting distress in his system. That was the kicker with all these hospital gadgetry connected to you—everything recorded in microscopic, by-the-second detail. God forbid his blood pressure spiked and they all come rushing in only to find a man who’s broken about not getting to wrestle in a Pay-Per-View. They wouldn’t understand.

Chapter Notes

I think we’re long overdue for a flashback chapter, aren’t we?

Roman drifted in and out of sleep, the passage of time marked only by the lengthening shadows painted by the sunlight coming through the windows of his hospital room, and being woken up by the nurses coming in to change his IV. There was still lingering numbness in his abdomen, and if he skated his fingers over the flimsy hospital gown covering his body he could just about trace the lines of the fresh surgery scar.

People came and went — doctors, his surgeon, company people taking care of his medical insurance, a small film crew sent by Head Office to document his recovery and conduct a short interview. He was groggy for most of it, lingering effects of anaesthesia making his voice drowsy and his words semi-slurred, the hospital staff lingering by the door and reminding the crew that he needed to be left to rest and recover.

So it came as a bit of surprise when he opened his eyes to find the room dark and dim, the noise out in the hallways having died down to the quiet din of the night shift, and found someone sitting next to his bed, a figure clad in a business suit and an unmistakable silhouette, despite Roman not being able to see too clearly through his haze of medication.

“H-hunter?”

The older man looked up from where he’d been checking on his phone, and offered him a little smile.

“Hey, you’re up…” he said, voice gravelly and sounding a little drowsy.
“W-what are you doing here?” Roman asked. “Isn’t it past visiting hours?”

Hunter shrugged. “I sweet-talked the hospital staff into letting me in…I was planning to come in to see you earlier, but had to stay back and work the event.”

Roman allowed his eyes to fall shut. The event in question was the Night of Champions, which he’d had to pull out of owing to this sudden emergency. “Yeah, sorry about that…”

“What do you mean, ‘sorry’?” Hunter said as he inched his chair closer to the side of the bed. “If you hadn’t called for an ambulance, God knows what would’ve happened to you—I’m just glad you acted quickly enough.”

Roman sighed deeply, hovering his hand over his lower abdomen.

“Does it still hurt?”

“It’s…numb, for the most part,” Roman said. “Dr. Amann thinks it’ll be a heck of a scar.”

“Yeah, I spoke to him at the arena…” Hunter said. “Did he tell you about the estimated healing time?”

Roman felt his shoulders sag. “December…”

“That’s what he told me, too.”

Roman averted his gaze away from Hunter’s face, staring down at the IV tube connected to his arm, the stark color of the hospital gown against his skin, and a miserable haze descended upon him—this wasn’t where he was supposed to be, what he was supposed to be doing.

“I’m sorry…” he muttered again.
“Stop saying that,” Hunter said. “You did everything right. You were aware of your own body, you knew something was wrong and you took action—“ he shook his head. “Do you have any idea how many people had their earning years cut short by ignoring the signs until it was too late?”

Roman closed his eyes briefly, trying to quell the mounting distress in his system. That was the kicker with all these hospital gadgetry connected to you—everything recorded in microscopic, by-the-second detail. God forbid his blood pressure spiked and they all come rushing in only to find a man who’s broken about not getting to wrestle in a Pay-Per-View. They wouldn’t understand.

Hunter would, though.

“I didn’t want to make any problems—you know, for the company…”

“Jesus, kid…” Hunter rubbed his face wearily. “We’re not living in the dark ages anymore. Forget all those horror stories about people being threatened they’d lose their jobs if they didn’t show up and wrestle. We’re trying to run a better, healthier operation here.”

“You mean, you are…” Roman looked at the older man and offered the weakest of smiles. “You’re the one who’s been implementing all the changes where talent’s concerned.”

“Not on my own,” Hunter corrected him. “But I know how it feels like, Roman…better than most people who are decades removed from their ring years. I know what it’s like to have to perform in this day and age, with everyone looking at you and dissecting every little detail…”

Roman watches as Hunter’s hands come to rest on each of his own knees, thumbs rubbing at where Roman knew his surgery scars were. One for each knee, six years apart. Each injury putting him on the sidelines for nearly one year apiece.

“December isn’t that long…” Hunter said in a comforting tone. “It’ll pass before you know it.”

“I guess,” Roman relented, trying to shake off the air of discontent around him, the source of which he couldn’t quite pin down. Missed Pay-Per-Views. A cut to his earnings. Four months of recovery. No, they couldn’t be it.

“Hey…” Hunter reached over and quietly, a little awkwardly, touched his hand, grasping Roman’s knuckles in his palm, careful not to disturb the IV. Roman felt a quiet surge running through him,
something that had nothing to do with medication, something he knew was due to Hunter’s presence alone.

He looked up at Hunter, who was now looking directly at him, slightly hunched over the edge of the bed with his head hovering above Roman’s own.

The view was familiar — except Roman wasn’t naked and neither were Hunter, and they were in a hospital room instead of locked away in one of Hunter’s fancy top-floor suites. Roman bit down on his lower lip, not quite knowing how to react. It was easier when they were together in Hunter’s bed, knowing exactly what was expected of him, listening for Hunter’s commands or the older man’s hands moving his body this way or that, to whatever arrangement pleased him.

At this moment, they both seemed to be grasping for some kind of clue, for some lost pages of script thrown to the air and blown haphazardly by the winds.

“I’m…” Hunter started, clearing his throat. “I’m just glad you’re okay.”

“Thanks…” Roman muttered.

It felt like such a mundane exchange, a boss checking on one of his employees, a hospital visitor and a patient. It shouldn’t carry the charge that it did, like something passing unspoken between them, and Roman wondered if it was due to the drugs coursing through his system.

But then Hunter lowered his face, slowly and tentatively, and Roman closed his eyes before he felt those lips softly over his own, the gentlest of any kiss he’d ever gotten from the other man, a kiss that wasn’t a precursor to anything else. A kiss that wasn’t meant to weaken defenses or soften him up for further devouring.

A kiss that was just that, a kiss.

When he opened his eyes again, Hunter’s face was still there, the slightest of tugs at the corner of his lips like a half-smile, but his eyes looked regretful.

“I gotta go now…” he said softly. “They need me back at the venue, and I think the nurses are gonna call security on me if I stay here any longer.”
Roman nodded, even though his chest felt immediately heavy. He didn’t want Hunter to leave—like a child afraid of sleeping in the dark, and he grasped Hunter’s hand firmly in his own. “Will…will you come see me again?”

He even sounded like a child, what the actual fuck.

“I don’t know, baby boy…” Hunter said. “I don’t know if I can — I hear the plan is they’re gonna transfer you back to Florida soon as you’re well enough to be moved, and I gotta stay on the road with the roster…”

Something in Roman’s expression must have shifted, because Hunter quickly added, “You don’t have to worry about any paperwork or anything, company’s taking care of all that, okay? Dr. Amann will be monitoring you closely and updating us, and we’ll take good care of you every step of your recovery…”

Roman could only nod his agreement, though his mind was far from the thought of his recovery process, of doctors and training and paperwork. It just struck him, the thought of spending all those months without Hunter, after the intensity of the last two months or so, where he must have spent every other night in the older man’s bed.

It’s a stupid, childish longing, he told himself— it’s not like Hunter was any source of comfort or stability— quite the opposite, in fact. He put Roman’s body through far more difficult ordeals than his opponents on some nights, it would probably do Roman a world of good to take a break from that as well, in addition to recovering from his surgery.

And yet.

“I’ll be making trips down to the Performance Center every month, to check on NXT…I’ll make sure to check up on you as well.”

Roman lifted his head at that. “You will?”

“Yeah…” Hunter nodded. “Now get some more rest, okay? And just…just take it easy.”
He kissed Roman’s forehead then, a quiet gesture Roman didn’t expect, and he was still a little dumbfounded from it when Hunter collected his jacket and phone and exited the room silently, leaving Roman alone once more.

Almost immediately, Roman felt the urge to go after him—IV and wiring be damned. The lack of Hunter’s presence made the whole room feel cold and dreary, like it was closing in on him. It had felt so much better when Hunter was at this side.

*Damn, these drugs are strong…* Roman thought to himself.

How else do you explain wanting to hang on to a man whose connection to you boils down to two months’ worth of fucking in every conceivable position and on every conceivable surface, whilst calling you all sorts of names and using you pretty much for his own pleasure?

Hunter was just doing his job, being a considerate and caring boss, checking in on one of his talents who’d been unfortunately sidelined by a medical emergency. Granted, Hunter didn’t go around calling just about any talent ‘baby boy’ and kissing them—at least Roman hoped not—but still, he shouldn’t give it that much thought. The man had a job to do, and now he’s off to do just that.

And Roman’s job now was to rest, recover, and return to action when he was deemed fit to do so.

*It’ll pass before you know it…*

Roman sure hoped to heck it would, because even the last half minute since Hunter left the room already felt like forever and a day.

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The worst part about the whole recovery process, at least initially, was how limited he was in terms of moving his own body, like he was suddenly living in another person’s vessel, one that wasn’t capable of doing all the things he’d taken for granted. His abdominal area still felt tight and taut, like if he were to overstretch himself reaching for something on a high shelf, or doing too strenuous of an exercise, something would burst inside him.
They’d moved him into the talent housing complex near the Performance Center, so he wouldn’t have to commute from Pensacola or live out of a hotel room for the duration of his closely-monitored therapy and recovery sessions. The accommodations were sparse, but at least he was given a unit for himself, and it was definitely more convenient to live so close to the facility he had to visit almost daily.

The doctors and trainers kept a close eye on him, monitoring him throughout the simple exercises he was allowed to start doing. He wasn’t allowed to lift any weights or do anything high-impact yet, restricted to fast walks on the treadmill and light conditioning. It felt like moving through molasses, the pace of his progress, but he tried to keep his frustrations out of the sessions and followed the instructions of the people who were, after all, looking after his best interests.

He kept up with what was happening on the program out of necessity, to get a good sense of what he would be jumping back into when the time came, but otherwise didn’t watch it with the kind of rapt attention that the Performance Center recruits training alongside him did, discussing what happened on RAW or SmackDown on a particular night while they were on break or spotting each other in the gym.

They didn’t bother Roman for the most part, the trainees, aside from the casual greetings and handshakes, or the odd request for a photograph.

Looking around the Performance Center, at the machine that was shaping the next generation of superstars and the next one even after them, Roman had an acute sense of Hunter’s master plan in motion—the carefully calculated investment that would assure the company’s future, the quality of people doing the assessment, the training, the medical, even the production facilities.

It was ironic that so many of their fates would, eventually, still be determined by the flip of a McMahon coin or whichever side of the bed Vince woke up in on a particular day, if the old man slept at all, and it reminded Roman of just how precarious everything was in this business, if his medical emergency hadn’t drilled it into him already.

Roman did well enough being alone—it didn’t bother him as much as some people, who felt that the whole world was moving on without them and leaving them behind. He knew what he needed to do, recover his strength, regain his conditioning, get back in the ring, start the ascendency that he’d been promised—though not guaranteed. He ate his meals, took his medications, did his training regime, reported in for his daily medicals like clockwork—until it was time to go home to his allocated accommodations.

And an empty bed.
Well.

Of all the things that had concerned him about this whole recovery thing, the God-awful realization that he was *pinning* for Hunter was not something he’d planned for, or had any idea how to deal with.

At first he simply pushed it to the back of his mind, figuring it was the after-effect of their last meeting, that night at the hospital, and made an effort not to think about it too much.

It was increasingly difficult though, when every time the doors to the Performance Center swung open, he looked up half-expecting it would be Hunter walking in, making good on his promise to come ‘check in’ on him.

When late at night when he was one of the last to leave, Roman would glance up at the CCTV cameras he knew were feeding the footage directly to Hunter’s office back in Connecticut, wondering if the older man was watching him from a distance.

When he would linger in front of the production offices, casually refilling a cup of coffee he had no intention of drinking, trying to pick up any mention of when Hunter was scheduled to come around.

Each time, he chided himself for being stupid and selfish, told himself to stop.

Each time, he failed.

What was he expecting, anyhow? For Hunter to reciprocate the juvenile, unrealistic longing? Surely the man had enough on his hands to worry about and do, and he would come only when his job necessitated him to. He would not come here just for Roman, would he?

And why should Roman assume that Hunter’s bed would remain as empty as his, in his absence?

The thought made something inside him churn, but he told himself to accept it. Did he really expect Triple H to keep it in his pants while his current favorite fucktoy was off recuperating in another state, when he could simply take his pick of the roster? He could probably have Seth back in his bed with the snap of a finger, borrow him from Randy Orton for a couple of nights a week, a simple enough arrangement to make.
That it didn’t sit well with Roman was probably not high on Hunter’s consideration, and Roman had no business feeling that way in the first place, surely.

There were never any promises made to him, any kind of commitment—Hunter took what he wanted when he wanted it, and Roman gave it to him. It worked well that way for both of them.

And now that Roman wasn’t around to give it to him, it made sense that he would just get it from somebody else.

Perfect, absolute sense.

Didn’t stop him feeling like crap about it, though.

—

It was mid-November when Roman was finally allowed back into the practice ring to start working on skills again.

He ran the ropes for about ten minutes before the trainers got him started on doing falls and taking bumps again, checking off all the basics. He asked to be given someone to spar with, but there wasn’t anyone available on the day and there was no chance in hell they were going to ask one of the PC trainees to step into the ring with him.

The next day they brought in Tye Dillinger, a reliable old hand as far as ring experience went, who didn’t seem to mind playing the role of sparring partner for a recovering talent on the main roster.

“No superkick to the gut,” Roman said with a smile. “Otherwise, come at me.”

“Let’s start with the simple shit,” Tye said. “We’ll work our way up.”

It felt good to be doing moves again—elbow lockups, arm drags, getting himself reacquainted with
the basics. Roman had never been out of action long enough to gauge his own susceptibility to ring rust, but his session with Tye went smoothly. Matt Bloom observed them from the turnbuckle, taking notes and warning Roman off any moves that he hadn’t been medically cleared to execute.

“You could try going for a Spear…” Matt suggested. “But dial it down for starters.”

“Define ‘dial it down’,,” Roman said as he adjusted his kneepads.

“Don’t break me in half,” Tye said with a laugh.

They did a few different setups for the Spear, mostly to get Roman’s sense of timing back up to scratch. The ones preceded by bouncing off the ropes were a bit tricky, since it required his opponents to match his momentum, but Tye was experienced enough to adjust to Roman’s pace that they were soon pulling it off without a hitch.

“Good, good…” Matt commented from ringside. “You should be back to ring shape in no time.”

“Maybe we could rope in someone bigger?” Roman said as he checked his abdomen, feeling for any kind of knot or soreness. “No offense, Tye…but they told me that my next feud will be against The Big Show, so I’ll need to work with someone approaching that size.”

Matt chuckles. “Well, maybe I could step in there for a bit just for old times’ sake?”

“How about I give it a go?” a new voice entered the conversation.

Roman knew that voice. He turned around so quickly he thought he’d give himself whiplash, and sure enough—there was Hunter, God only knew how long he’d been standing there watching, proud little smile on his face as he walked up to the ring Roman and Tye had been working in.

“Well, look who decided to come and visit the children…” Matt hopped off the ring to welcome him.

Tye did the same, but Roman was rooted to the spot for a good few seconds—trying to convince himself that what he was seeing was real, and not some hallucination thrown up by his own longing.
But there he was, Hunter in the flesh, suit-clad and his beard looking neatly-trimmed, and damn if he didn’t look good. Roman had to shake himself out of his momentary daze before he slid under the bottom ropes to offer the older man the customary greeting.

“How you doing, Juggernaut?” Hunter said as he shook Roman’s hand and clasped his shoulder casually.

“He’s getting there…” Matt said, consulting his notes. Started work in the ring yesterday, we already ran through all the basics—no indication that the surgery’s gonna hinder him.”

Hunter nodded and turned to Roman. “You feelin’ good?”

“Y-yeah,” Roman stuttered a little. “Was tough at the beginning when I could barely do lifts, but… definitely better now.”

“Yeah, the start of recovery is always the hardest bit…” Hunter agreed.

“You’re not seriously thinking of getting in there just to take a Spear, are you?” Tye said.

“I think you did well enough for him this time around, Tye…” Hunter said. “I just need a quick word with Roman, if you guys don’t mind…”

“Sure…”

Roman swallowed the lump in his throat as Tye and Matt retreated back towards the offices, leaving just him and Hunter alone in the room.

“You look good…” Hunter said.

“Thanks, so do you—“ Roman started, then immediately caught himself. What the fuck, he mentally slapped himself in the face. Hunter, for his part, merely smiled.
“Show me…?” Hunter said as he stepped closer, pointing at Roman’s stomach.

Roman’s hands seemed to move out of their own volition, lifting up his sweat-soaked tank top just enough to reveal his stomach, and the surgery scar that was rapidly healing. Hunter bent down close to inspect it, and Roman could swear he could feel Hunter’s breath on his skin, sending him reeling slightly.

"Does it hurt, still?"

"It's a little--I mean, just touching it is fine, but I'm told I need to avoid any hard impacts on it, well good luck with that," Roman snorted.

“We could announce that to the rest of the roster, so people know to avoid that area when they’re in therw with you,” Hunter said.

"Fuck, is that necessary?" Roman winced. "I mean, people get hurt all the time..."

"And we need to stop people getting hurt all the time," Hunter said sternly. "I'm trying to run a healthier program here; Roman... everyone needs to look after themselves and each other.”

*Touch me. Fucking touch me, Christ, what the fuck are you playing at.*

“Anyway, looks to be healing nicely…” Hunter commented and straightened back up.

“Yeah…” Roman said as he adjusted his tank top, trying to mask the disappointment he felt. What the hell had he been expecting anyway, for Hunter to touch him here, in full view of CCTV cameras and whoever else was in the Performance Center?

“Sorry it took me awhile to come here and check in on you…” Hunter said quietly.

“You’re a busy man,” Roman said. “I’m sure you had your reasons.”

A look that could almost pass as apologetic flitted across Hunter’s face, though he was quick to mask
it with a smile. “Listen, I’m not in town for long…catching a flight to Connecticut tomorrow first thing and I’ve got a couple meetings this afternoon with people here and down at Full Sail…what time’s your training done?”

“Uh…I finish around five, then I check in with the trainers and the doctor before I’m done for the day…usually about 30 minutes?”

“Okay, well…why don’t you wait up for me a bit, and then we can go grab a bite or something?”

Roman stared at him blankly, dumbfounded by the seemingly mundane yet entirely unexpected offer. “Uh…”

“What, we can’t just have dinner like two normal people?” Hunter chuckled. “Come on, I’m buying…”

“Okay,” Roman said quickly. “Sure—thanks,”

“Alright,” Hunter patted him on the shoulder and walked towards the direction of the offices. “See you later, kid…”

Roman stared after him for a good long while, then stalked off in the direction of the showers, resisting the urge to bang his head against the walls every step of the way.

—

We can’t just have dinner like two normal people?

Roman heard the echo of those words over and over again as he stood under the spray, as much as he tried to drown them out.

Normal? What the fuck was normal? And what was that smug bastard thinking, even saying
something like that? Since when did anything they ever did together pass as normal by anyone’s standards?

And what was Roman supposed to make of it, that Hunter wanted to treat him like just any normal person on the roster now? That the whole other thing they had going on between them was over? Swept under the rug of time’s passing and—and moving on?

Roman turned off the shower, the noise around him reduced to the steady drip of water falling off his body, and his own breathing echoing against the cold tile walls.

He couldn’t believe he was getting so worked up over this. What the fuck had he been hoping for, anyway?

It wasn’t like Hunter had broken a promise, or violated some kind of agreement between them. No such thing had ever existed. All Roman had to go on were words whispered in his ears in the heat of passion, words that by default shouldn’t carry much weight beyond the confines of whatever bedroom they happened to be sharing anyway. Roman was simply too naive, too hopeful to leave them at that. And if he was looking for any kind of commitment, surely he was looking for it in the wrong person.

But still, he waited—just as Hunter told him to—hung around the Performance Center a little bit after his daily medical check was completed. The physician commented on his slightly elevated blood pressure, but put it down to the increased intensity of the training regimen.

It was nearly seven when Hunter emerged from his meetings, gesturing for Roman to follow him out to the parking lot where his rental was parked. As Roman buckled himself in to the passenger side, he noticed that there was a folder resting on the dashboard, filled with brochures and leaflets advertising property developments and apartments, some of them scribbled with notes he recognized as Hunter’s handwriting.

“You…uh, entering the property market?”

“Wha? Oh, those…” Hunter said as he started the engine. “I’m thinking of getting an apartment here in Florida—maybe in Orlando. With the amount of back and forth traveling, and the fact that I still have to be at the shows, it’ll just be nicer to have a place that’s not a hotel room for a change.”

“Hmmm…” Roman said, thumbing through a few of the leaflets. They were all of fairly high-end
developments, not exactly out of Roman’s own budget but he definitely would not splurge so much for a place that would serve only as a temporary crash pad of sorts.

“Now, Seth told me that you could absolutely demolish an entire conveyor belt’s worth of sushi…” Hunter said. “You up for that? Hungry?”

“Yeah…” Roman said. Regardless of how else he was feeling about the whole situation with Hunter, it would certainly not put a dent on his appetite. And if Hunter was footing the bill, even better.

—

Two jumbo dragon fusion rolls and countless plates of tuna sashimi later, Roman’s mood was decidedly improving—Hunter did most of the talking while they ate, updating him on stuff going on with the shows while Roman had been away. Roman got a sense that Hunter actually enjoyed the sight of him stuffing his face, which could simply be down to being happy that Roman was healthier, or it could be an altogether new kink that Roman had never heard about.

“The appetite on you young guys never cease to amaze me…” Hunter remarked after Roman had cleared his plate.

“I’m a simple guy,” Roman said. “Pay me well, feed me well, I’m yours.”

He hadn’t meant to be so glib about it, but Hunter seemed to find it amusing anyway. “That so, huh?” he said with that smirk of his.

Roman made a non-committal shrug and washed down his food with a healthy chug of water.

“You been quiet all night…” Hunter said.

“I’ve been occupied,” Roman said, waving his hand to indicate the tower of empty plates on one side of their table. “But I’ve never been that talkative to begin with, in case you haven’t noticed…”
“True,” Hunter said. “Plus I tended to occupy your mouth with other things…”

Roman felt his pulse quicken slightly at that, but he fought to keep it from showing on his face. He must have failed, though, because Hunter gave him an inquiring look.

“What?”

“Uh…it’s just not a subject matter I expected from ‘dinner like two normal people’,” Roman said.

Hunter chuckled as he plucked a lone, leftover roll from one of the plates and popped it into his mouth. “Would you rather I drop the subject?”

“Only if…” Roman paused to consider his words. “Only if there’s not gonna be a follow-through.”

Hunter placed his elbows on the table and crossed his arms. “Not tonight, I’m afraid…I don’t wanna fuck up your recovery, and half of my body is still in a different time zone…”

“Oh…” Roman muttered. “Okay then…”

“Hey…” Hunter reached across the table and took one of Roman’s hands, squeezing it—and it instantly threw Roman back to that night at the hospital, when Hunter had touched him in a similar fashion. “I’m just glad to see you’re doing well, okay? No need to rush into anything, just focus on getting back to your absolute best shape…”

Roman could only nod, staring at their joined hands, almost wishing Hunter would never let go.

—

Hunter drove him back to his temporary lodgings near the Performance Center, and even kissed him on the cheek as a farewell, but Roman still found himself laying alone on his empty bed that night feeling hollowed out and incomplete, like he was somehow worse than he’d been before Hunter had
shown up.

It’s not a rejection, he kept telling himself. It’s not. It’s not.

*Sure as fuck felt like one, though.*

Roman gritted his teeth and punched his pillow as the words *not tonight* kept repeating inside his head like a broken record, until finally he couldn’t take it anymore and angrily kicked off his boxers, hand finding his soft dick and starting to stroke it slowly.

*Fine. I’ll fucking do it myself.*

It took a frustratingly long time to get himself to full hardness—probably because he refused to use thoughts of Hunter as a means to get there. Once he started jacking off properly, though, it was hard not to think of the older man, of his touches and words, the way he’d loom over Roman with that knowing smile, his voice gravelly and lulling at the same time, easily coaxing Roman to do whatever he wanted.

Roman was fucked. Well, not in the way he wanted to be, but fucked all the same.

He dug his feet into mattress, bent his knees and arched his hips up into his own hands, imagining that they were Hunter’s hands instead, rough and demanding but not unkind, toying with him, teasing with him. Roman bit his lip and stifled his moan—God knows how thick these walls were, and he didn’t want to scandalize whoever happened to be occupying the unit next door.

Hunter liked him to be loud, though. Liked him to be vocal beyond what he was comfortable with. Liked it most when he went beyond his moans and whimpers and forced himself to verbalize what was running through his mind. Loved it whenever Roman screamed out words that proclaimed his submission and devotion, of how it pleased *him* to please Hunter, how much he wanted to be good, to be a good boy, be a good boy for Hunter, for Daddy, for only Daddy…

Roman came so quickly it shocked him, eyes flying open as his dick sputtered into his own hands, his thighs splayed wide and spasming, toes curled into the sheets.

He sighed, rolled off his bed and went to the bathroom to clean up — no point licking his own come off his hands if his usual audience wasn’t around to enjoy the show.
They brought him back on TV in December.

Not a full match yet, just an interference, Roman still had one more medical to clear before he could go all out again, but he didn’t care.

He was back, that was all that mattered.

Back in gorilla, he was welcomed with handshakes and pats on the back, with Vince clasping him across the back and mentioning something about the ‘program being back on schedule’.

Roman didn’t know exactly what he meant by that, must be some conversation that took place while he was away, but he smiled and nodded at the boss as he was expected to.

Hunter’s seat in gorilla was empty — not an unusual sight, he was probably backstage talking to talent or checking in on the guys in the production truck.

Roman had just made it to the base of the staircase leading down from gorilla position when someone grabbed his wrist and violently yanked him behind the thick black curtains that covered up the scaffolding supporting gorilla, and for a moment he was plunged into total darkness.

“What the fu—“

“Ssshhh…” a pair of lips whispered next to his ear, and instantly Roman’s knees felt a little weak. “Wouldn’t want them to find us here, would we?”

“H-hunter?”
“Well, if there’s anyone else in the company you’d allow to pull you into darkened rooms when nobody’s looking, I certainly don’t want to know,” Hunter said, turning Roman around to face him, grabbing him by the sides of his face.

Roman’s eyes had adjusted enough to just make out the glint of Hunter’s eyes when he was pulled in to a kiss—not a hint of slowness or gentleness to it but raw and hungry, and a full-body shudder rippled through him. His knees felt like they would buckle but Hunter was ready for it, arms around Roman’s waist and half-supporting his weight.

“Looked good out there, baby boy…” Hunter whispered. “Better than you ever have…so good to have you back.”

Roman was still dazed from the suddenness of it all, but there was no mistaking the elation he felt in his chest. He’d missed hearing those words, that endearment, didn’t think he’d ever hear them again.

“You…you still…” he stuttered. “But I thought—“

“What, that I’d give up an ass like this so easily?” Hunter teased as he fondled Roman’s backside. “Not to inflate your ego or anything, but you’re a tough act to follow in that department.”

Roman chuckled shakily. “You…in Florida…we didn’t…”

“You weren’t ready,” Hunter said. “I didn’t want to do anything until you were completely healthy again—you might have felt that you were, but trust me… I read the reports every night. You were 75, 80 percent at best. And I didn’t have time that night to treat you the way you deserved.”

Roman was honest-to-God swaying now, Hunter’s words filling him with a heady mix of relief and desire. “So…you missed me?”

“I sure did…” Hunter said, kissing the side of his head. “I mean, I gave myself the solo treatment plenty enough times, but my own hands don’t feel half as good as your sweet little mouth—or your juicy hole, baby boy…”

Roman could hardly believe his ears. “You mean…you didn’t—you could have had…Christ, you could’ve had anyone else…“
“Maybe I could…” Hunter smiled as he held Roman’s chin between his thumb and index finger. “But I didn’t.”

If he had his wits about him, Roman would have probably told himself that he was way too old to fucking swoon, okay, but the thought of Hunter not touching anyone else in the time he’d been away—when he literally had an entire roster’s worth of bodies at his fingertips…

“I recalled a boy who was in my bed not long ago, saying how much he liked being mine, how he didn’t want to be anyone else’s, you remember that?”

Roman nodded, feeling his breath go hot and wispy against Hunter’s face. “Y-yeah…”

“Figured it’s only fair I waited until he could be mine again…” Hunter said, dotting a kiss on the tip of Roman’s nose. “And here he is now, all of him, perfect and healthy.”

Roman fucking beamed at that, sweaty fingers digging into the lapels of Hunter’s suit. “So what are you gonna do with me now that you’ve got me again…” he licked his lips. “…Daddy?”

He felt the shift in Hunter’s body when he said it, the word that hadn’t been uttered between them for months.

“I still got a bit of business to take care of tonight…” Hunter said. “You go on and get changed, wait for me by the side exit to the parking lot, okay?”

“Okay…” Roman nodded.

“Good, now get on out of here before someone reports you missing…” Hunter turned him around and marched him towards the opening in the curtains, smacking his ass for good measure.
As promised, Hunter's car drove up to the side exit where Roman was stood waiting with his bags. The driver got out and helped him stuff his gear into the trunk—not letting him do any of the heavy lifting, and Roman wondered if Hunter had briefed him to do exactly that.

They couldn’t do much during the ride back to the hotel, what with the driver being there, but Hunter kept giving him these sidelong glances and smiles -- each making Roman's stomach do a little flip.

In the hotel room, Roman excused himself to use the shower. He hadn’t showered back at the arena, and the warm water felt so good against his skin. There was still a buzz running through him from being back in action, warm and tingly, coupled with the anticipation of what was to come.

Then the glass door to the shower slid open and before he could say anything Hunter had stepped into the shower with him, naked and close, both of them standing in that tiny space that was barely big enough for just one of them, wet and steamy.

Hunter moved to touch the scar on Roman’s stomach—his touch featherlight, exploratory.

Roman suddenly felt a surge of nerves over what was to come — he knew what Hunter wanted out of him, he knew how the older man liked to fuck, toying with him like a ragdoll and putting him into whatever position he pleased, but despite being cleared for action he still had some limitations.

"I...the doctor told me...not to put too much pressure on it..." Roman started awkwardly. Better to get it out of the way quickly. "Like, I can't really roll up, or...or be on my stomach for too long...so..."

He hated the thought of disappointing Hunter, of not living up to his expectations, but he had to say it.

“So I don’t know if I can…you know…” he swallowed nervously. “Like we usually do…”

“Shhh…” Hunter silenced him. “Stop talking.”

And he surprised Roman by descending to his knees, keeping his hands on Roman's hips, pressing his mouth against Roman's navel before moving gently towards that scar. He kissed it, the most gentle of pressures, and Roman felt his groin stir and his heart starting to hammer.
He had to stretch his arms out, hold himself up against the slippery tile wall and the glass of the shower door as Hunter started working his cock slowly, massaging it in his hands before slipping it inside his mouth, his beard tickling Roman's balls. Hunter just looked up at him, that glimmer of knowing in his eyes, firm grip on Roman's hips to hold him in place.

Roman's gone hazy—not just from the temperature and the steam but from the unexpectedly tender treatment, though still unmistakably controlling, Hunter holding his length in his mouth and working him. Hunter had played with his dick before, held it and sucked on it, teased it with his mouth, but never gave him a proper blowjob.

Roman, on the other hand, had gagged on Hunter's dick and swallowed his come more times than he could count.

He thought Hunter was just gonna play with it like he usually did, tease it and leave it for later, but Hunter proceeded to give him an honest-to-God blowjob, sucking him down deep and massaging his balls, and Roman could only stare down at him, the shower spray going lukewarm at the back of his neck in comparison to the heat coursing through his body.

“D-daddy...” he gasped out.

Hunter looked up at him, let Roman slip from his mouth momentarily. “You like this, baby boy?”

“Y-yeah…”

“You sure feel good in my mouth…” Hunter kissed the tip of his dick. “And you’re already so hard for me, I could probably make you come in no time…”

Roman nodded, chewing on the inside of his mouth. “Please…” he muttered.

True to his word, Hunter went back to the task at hand and sucked him off intently, determined to get him off. Roman saw no point in holding it back, either.

“Daddy, I'm...” he gasped.
Hunter took his mouth off Roman long enough to say, "Yeah, you gonna come for me now, baby boy...give Daddy a taste of you."

And Roman heard himself make this long, ungodly moan and did just that, Hunter's mouth sealed perfectly around him, swallowing all of it neatly, looking up at Roman and half-smiling around him the whole time. It felt like something had been set right in their world, the way things should be -- Roman standing there at Hunter's mercy, his body manipulated and brought over the edge by the older man's touch and his words and his mouth.

Hunter stood, turning off the shower dial. Roman could feel the older man's hard dick poking against his thigh, and he looked down at it—it looked so good, dripping with excess shower water, hard and curved and thick, and he felt himself tremble with anticipation.

"Come now...let's get you somewhere more comfortable," Hunter said as he opened the shower door.

Roman felt like he's being led on a leash, all he could do was follow. Hunter dried them both off with a towel, before taking his hand and leading him back to the bedroom. Then Hunter laid him down on the bed gently, arranging his body to lie flat on his back, with no pressure on his abdomen, before Hunter knelt at the side of his head. Roman, still reeling from all this uncharacteristic gentleness, still had enough sense to know what he was expected to do. He opened his mouth hungrily and Hunter fed him his dick, filling the entire cavity of his mouth, poking at the flesh inside his cheeks, before Roman turned his head slightly and took it deeper into his throat.

Hunter placed an encouraging hand at the back of his neck, supporting him there but also dictating his pace and direction, and Roman felt himself relax into it, letting Hunter fuck his face. He mewled around that dick like it's giving him life, his tongue darting around it, just like Daddy taught him, and Hunter smiled pleasantly from above him, a look of approval on his face.

"You feel just as good as ever, baby boy..." he said. "...if not better. Daddy's missed his little cockslut's hungry little mouth. You missed Daddy's cock too, didn't you?"

Roman nodded around him, took him down even deeper, didn’t mind the slight gagging and the way his eyes are getting misty from it. He loved feeling that dick in his mouth—felt almost as good as having it in the one other place where Roman loved having it.

Hunter pulled out after a while, dick wet and glistening, as if he read Roman’s mind. There's a
residual look of concern of Roman's face when Hunter knelt between his spread thighs, but Hunter lifted his legs up gently and caressed the undersides of his knees reassuringly.

"Don't worry, baby….Daddy's gonna be real gentle with you tonight, not gonna hurt you…”

There's a surge of something inside Roman at those words, something other than lust or carnal desire, something that caught him off guard. Hunter set about fingering him slowly, opening that hole up to prepare for him, asking him every few moments if he felt any pain. He was really playing it safe, and didn’t even look like he minded all that much.

Roman bit his lip, willing his body to relax—at this slow pace, every sensation was heightened, every poke and prod of those fingers inside him, the press against his sensitive spot, every new jolt of arousal rippling through his body.

When Hunter judged him sufficiently loosened up he took his fingers out and pulled Roman's ass onto his lap, a gentle heaving motion and not the rough jerking of their past encounters, and Roman felt like he was floating.

"Tell me if it hurts at any point, okay?” Hunter said as he leans forward, balancing on one arm next to Roman's head while the other angled his dick inside.

Roman just stared at him, at his handsome face and the look of concentration on it, that undivided attention that he's giving Roman, and everything else seemed to fade away. If he felt any residual pain at all, he certainly didn't register it.

Once he was lodged inside, Hunter didn’t turn on the usual piston-fucking mode, either. He kept things slow, working his hips into Roman, kissing him, stroking his hair and his face, as Roman flung his arms around that thick neck.

It felt to Roman like…dare he say it? Like they were making love, like it's not just about Hunter’s dick pounding Roman's ass, or the way Roman had been conditioned to be such a slut for it. Hunter wasn’t even talking anymore, just kissing every inch of Roman his mouth can reach from where he is, rubbing their noses together, nibbling at his earlobe, Roman hyper-conscious of every point of contact, the slow pace allowing him to take everything in.

Normally he’d feel like hewas drowning in some kind of violent storm, overwhelmed, only coming up for air when Hunter allowed—now he felt strangely afloat, easy and comfortable, and he kissed
the hollow of Hunter's cheek reverently, gratefully, unable to verbalize his feelings even as they bubble up inside his chest.

"You feelin' good, baby boy?"

"Uh-huhh..." was all Roman managed.

"Good...that's what Daddy wants," Hunter kissed his chin. "Daddy wants his boy to feel good,"

And there's that surge again in Roman's chest, sudden and unexpected, a burst of feeling he's never felt before. He didn’t know what it was, could only hold on tighter in response -- it's new and a little unsettling.

These are just words, he told himself, just words from a man so expert in using them he could talk his way into anything, it seems. No different than words he’d used in all their previous encounters, those filthy degrading names he liked to call Roman sometimes, just words, just words.

It wouldn’t mean anything past tonight, beyond this room and this city. It'll be a new game next time they meet, with new words too.

Roman repeated this to himself, over and over, even as the lightness continued to ebb and flow through him, He was hard again, he could feel it, leaking steadily against his own stomach. Hunter didn’t make any moves to intensify his fucking, making sure he didn’t make Roman fold himself over or put any pressure on his healing scar, just continued on his slow, languid pace like there was no other way he'd rather be doing it.

Roman knew that couldn’t be true—this man liked to fuck hard and rough and bring him to the verge of unconsciousness, he was just doing this out of courtesy, out of common sense—but damn if he's not hella good at looking like he's enjoying himself too.

“"You want Daddy's come in your ass, baby?" hunter asked. "Or somewhere else?"

“Ahh, my... my ass, Daddy..." Roman answered with what felt like his last shred of coherence. He could tell Hunter's struggling to keep it slow, his muscles seeming tight and his face contorted to a look of utter focus, holding himself back from letting go and just pounding away.
"Help Daddy out, baby... squeeze that pretty hole around me, make Daddy come..."

And yeah, Roman couldn’t talk anymore but he could do that, he clenched around Hunter's length, milking him, and was soon rewarded with the sensation of Hunter coming inside him, thick jets of it, a copious load, and he sighed in contentment. Hunter kissed his jaw and his neck when he was done, pulling out slowly before setting Roman's legs down as gently as he'd lifted them before.

He was soon lying at Roman's side, stroking his hair, reaching down to tug at his dick."Think you can come again for Daddy?"

Roman bit his lip. He was still some ways from it, his last orgasm was not that long ago, and he really didn’t know. “I’m not sure..." he said truthfully. “Feels... feels good what you’re doing though."

Hunter just smiled and scooted in closer, holding Roman against his chest. "I'll just keep doing it then..."

Roman thought he couldn’t be serious but that’s exactly what happened next, that hand working him slowly and leisurely while they were having a post-coital cuddle, Hunter saying little, choosing to use the moment to kiss Roman senseless until he was woozy and half-asleep with the pleasurable warmth.

His orgasm snuck up on him, cock jerking slightly in Hunter's hand, twitching and spewing its pearly load, nothing to compare with what Hunter's unloaded into him, but Roman isn’t concerned with comparisons right now. it never was about that.

His last conscious thought was Hunter kissing his forehead, mumbling "Daddy's got you, baby.." as he fell asleep.
Wrestlemania 34 - 2018

Chapter Notes

This was always going to be a hard chapter to write, since we all know how badly Wrestlemania 34 ended for Roman. Still, if there’s a chance to write fix-it hurt/comfort, you damn well know I’m gonna take it.

From the upper floors of the Hyatt Regency, one gets a good look at the Mercedes-Benz Superdome, a great white anomaly of a structure sitting round and squat in the middle of New Orlean’s central business district. Roman presses his face against the window, watching the flicker of traffic criss-crossing the streets and elevated highways circling the dome, the colored lights surrounding the structure changing hues every few seconds.

Viewed from this vantage point the dome looks almost dormant. Benign. Roman knows it’s anything but.

There’s a beep from the door, signaling that someone’s just used the keycard to open it. Roman doesn’t turn around, hearing the shuffle of footsteps and the trudging of suitcase wheels before the door clicks shut again.

“Roman? Why are you still awake?”

“Couldn’t sleep,” Roman says, finally turning towards the source of the voice. “Then again, that’s kind of become my pre-Mania thing, hasn’t it?”

Hunter doesn’t say anything, just proceeds to kick off his shoes and take off his jacket, draping it over the back of a chair.

“How was Takeover?” Roman asks, then quickly adds, “Never mind, it was probably a home run, wasn’t it? It always is…”

Hunter smiles thinly at him. “They did well. Ladder match blew the roof off the place, and Gargano and Ciampa…well, they’re Gargano and Ciampa. I could book those two in a gravy bowl match and they’d still kill it.”
“Aleister won?”

“Yeah.”

“I like Aleister,” Roman says. “Down-to-earth guy, good head on his shoulders.”

“He likes you,” Hunter says. “Told me he’d love to have a match with you someday.”

“I’d like that,” Roman nods quietly. “Well, at this point I’d prefer anyone to...well, you know.”

Hunter sighs heavily, sitting at the edge of the king-sized bed. “You wanna talk about it?”

“What’s there to talk about?” Roman shrugs. “I sat through a two-hour meeting where the outcome was me agreeing to have my skull cracked open and there was a discussion on, fuck it, how much blood is acceptable.”

“You’re allowed to be pissed off, you know…”

“Yeah, at this point I can’t even be bothered to get pissed off anymore, I just…” Roman clenches and unclenches his fists. “…this feels like Dallas all over again.”

Hunter expression turns grim at that. “I don’t think that’s a fair comparison—“

“Really? Cause I’m pretty sure I’m gonna walk out of there with no sympathy from anyone in that dome,” he gestures at the window. “At least you tried to give me something.”

“Enough,” Hunter says firmly. “Come here, sit down.”

Roman walks over and sits down heavily next to Hunter, the mattress sagging under their weight.
“I don’t like this anymore than you do,” Hunter begins. “It’s gonna be a tough night, no getting around that.”

“You can’t tell me it’s gonna be anything other than a complete fucking disaster,” Roman says. “I know it, you know it, the entire booking team and creative knows it…heck, I bet even Heyman and Vince know.”

“They’re thinking long-term,” Hunter reasons.

“They’re thinking money,” Roman snaps back. “They’re thinking of Saudi Arabia and how to get Brock to commit to those events.”

“Roman…”

“Don’t…don’t even try to soften this for me, okay?” Roman shakes his head. “He’s Brock, and I’m…the furthest you can get from Daniel fucking Bryan, right?” he laughs bitterly. “It’s not like the universe is clamouring for me to win this one.”

“You ask me, the universe would probably prefer you,” Hunter mutters.

“Only as the lesser of two evils,” Roman says. “I’ll do the job, okay? I don’t have to like it, I just need to get it over and done with—and maybe have a soundbite or two ready for the backstage cameras.”

Hunter moves to stand in front of him, their knees almost touching as he takes Roman’s chin in hand, tilting it up to look him in the eyes. Roman holds his gaze, watching as a million thoughts a minute flicker behind those clear brown eyes, waiting for him to speak.

A year or two ago, Hunter would be offering him assurances and encouragement, trying to cushion the blow of the inevitable with kisses and endearments, but they both know better now. The cold, bitter reality of the business can’t be held back by whatever flimsy barrier they try to put up, not with the Superdome sitting imposingly just a city block away and the hours ticking by until the doors open.

“I know you’ll do the job…” Hunter says, his thumb caressing Roman’s cheek. “That’s what you always do, regardless of all the bullshit and the booking and the crowds…maybe they won’t
appreciate it, but I know I will, and I know that everybody else in that locker room will. If nothing else, those guys and girls will know that you put yourself through that mess and kept it together for the sake of the business, for better or worse.”

Roman inhales deeply, his mind conjuring up the faces of his colleagues, of all those hours traveled together, the shared spaces in locker rooms and arenas, the late-night drives with aching bodies and sore bruises.

“Brock wouldn’t give any of them his time of day,” Hunter continues. “But you’ve always done that. They look up to you, Roman. What happens tomorrow isn’t going to change that.”

Roman reaches up with one hand, pressing it against Hunter’s where it rests against his face, letting his eyes fall shut as the words seep into him. He’s long past expecting Hunter to have the answer to everything, and Hunter is long past pretending that he does, but the need to have something to cling to, some kind of proverbial light at the end of the tunnel no matter how dim, is as strong as ever.

“They know who their champion is…” Hunter says. “…and so do I.”

Roman smiles, finally, turning his head so he can kiss the lines of Hunter’s palm. “Thank you…”

“What do you need from me tonight?” Hunter asks.

Roman sighs heavily, casting a wearily glance outside the window at the distant sight of the Superdome. “Tomorrow night… I expect to have a throbbing headache and a few staples in,” he says. “So you might as well get what you can from me while I’m still whole,”

Hunter traces his thumb along Roman’s jawline. “You sure?”

“Yeah…” Roman nods. “If nothing else, it’s something nice for me to think about while I’m out there getting my ass kicked,”

“Well, in that case…” Hunter steps back. “I’ll give you something real nice, indeed.”

Roman smiles and scoots himself further up the bed, peeling his t-shirt and sweatpants off and
waiting patiently for Hunter to get undressed.

As a rule, they don’t usually have sex the night before Wrestlemania, preferring to put it off until after the show when Roman’s not so anxious and jittery and Hunter doesn’t have so much to juggle on the business side of things.

“Lie back, baby…” Hunter says as he gets on the bed.

Roman does so obediently, opening his legs and letting Hunter settle on his knees between them, helpfully tossing him the half-empty tube of lubricant that’s sitting on the bedside table. He watches as Hunter pops the cap and slicks up his fingers, lifting his ass up slightly when Hunter starts probing around his hole.

He tries to put tomorrow out of his mind, to focus on the here and now, to think of nothing but the way Hunter is touching and prepping him, thick fingers finding their way inside their body, rough and familiar. He keeps his eyes open, taking in the sight before him in minute detail, the broad expanse of Hunter’s chest and the way his own legs are hanging off the older man’s thighs, the tiny electric jolts of pleasure that course through his body whenever Hunter manages to touch his sensitive spot.

“I do have plans for tomorrow, you know….” Hunter says as he twists his fingers. “What we’re gonna do after—“

“Shhh,” Roman stops him. “I don’t wanna hear it.”

“No, listen, it’s not about the show or anything to do with it…”

Roman places a firm hand on Hunter’s arm. “I know. I just…I don’t need to hear about it now, okay? Tell me about it tomorrow. Surprise me.”

Hunter seems to consider this for a moment, but then gives Roman an understanding smile. “Okay, baby…if you say so.”

“Just…right now I just need to get fucked,” Roman says, wiggling his ass around Hunter’s fingers. “Like, right now.”
Hunter grins and withdraws his fingers, lifting Roman’s legs up to rest on his shoulders. Roman’s never been the most limber or flexible, but he can manage getting rolled up like this just fine, and the press of Hunter’s cock on his puckered entrance is worth any soreness to his back — he’s destined to take a few dozen suplexes anyway, what’s one night of rigorous fucking compared to that?

Hunter leans down far enough for Roman to fling his arms around his neck and pull him down, kissing him just as the older man starts moving, hips going at a steady rhythm, pumping his dick in and out, starting to slow to let them both feel the full glide and friction of their bodies against each other. Hunter tastes like breath mints and backstage coffee, his body warm and strong and taut, thick beard rubbing against Roman’s face.

Roman might have been the one asking to get fucked but it’s Hunter who determines the pace, as always, deciding that he’s done with the languid, introductory phase and that it’s time to ramp things up. Roman knows him so well by now that he can feel it in Hunter’s body, how those muscles coil up before unleashing his full strength, the change in his breathing, the way it makes Roman shudder in anticipation.

Soon, Hunter is pounding him hard enough that the bedframe is thumping against the wall, and Roman’s being fucked so deep he swears he can feel the older man’s dick through his tailbone. It maybe unwise or irresponsible for both of them to be going at it like this, the night before the company’s biggest show, but considering the stuff that Roman’s gonna have to endure tomorrow, this all seems tame by comparison.

Normally, Hunter would be unleashing a storm of filth through his words, but this time he’s putting his mouth to other uses, sucking deep bruises and teeth marks along Roman’s shoulders, strategically choosing spots that would be covered by his gear. Roman encourages him, grabbing the back of his neck and pulling him in closer, wanting those bites to still be stinging when he walks out for his match tomorrow. Anything, anything to hold onto other than the inevitability of disappointment that awaits him.

“Baby…” Hunter grunts harshly against his ear. “Whose boy are you?”

Roman squeezes his eyes shut, fingers digging into Hunter’s thick arms. “Yours, Daddy…”

“And who are you gonna be with tomorrow, after all is said and done?”

“You…” Roman gasps out, kissing the line of Hunter’s jaw. “Just you, Daddy…”
“That’s right…” Hunter leans back a little, hands gripping Roman’s wide hips. “That’s all you need to remember.”

With that, he ramps up his pace yet again, his shallow and sharp thrusts shattering any trace of coherent thought Roman might have lingering in his brain, turning it all into a mush of garbled moans and whimpers, reducing him to nothing but the basest of all his senses. He reaches with one hand to find Roman’s cock, hard and leaking against his stomach, rough fingers twisting and tugging with very little concession towards tenderness. Roman’s eyes are watering, his breath caught in his throat as Hunter jacks him off, dragging his orgasm out of him in a way that makes him feel gut-punched, his eyesight fuzzing as he feels himself spilling over, wet and hot and messy, his ass still being fucked relentlessly.

He can’t tell how much time passes until Hunter himself comes, muscles seizing up and hands digging so hard into Roman’s skin he feels like his bones might break, flooding into him as he clenches weakly around it, wanting all of it and more. Hunter slumps onto him afterwards, heavy and almost suffocating, Roman’s hands skimming along his sweaty back as they both struggle to regain their senses.

Roman’s still trembling as he dots kisses along Hunter’s face, their breathing uneven as they find each other’s mouths and share another kiss, deep and longing, and Hunter slowly rolls over until they’re both lying on their sides, still tangled up in each other.

“Thank you, Daddy…” Roman whispers faintly. “Love you…”

Hunter squeezes his shoulder tightly. “You know what’s the hardest part of all this?”

Roman just stares into the older man’s eyes, seeing the forlorn hint in them.

“To lie here, knowing what’s gonna happen to you…” Hunter mutters. “…to know that this time tomorrow, you’ll be in some kind of bad shape, and yet doing nothing about it…”

Roman sighs heavily. “It’s not your call…we’ve been through this before.”

“It should be my call,” Hunter says.
“It is what it is,” Roman says, tracing a finger along Hunter’s dry lips. “All we can do is deal with it.”

He knows it’s not enough for Hunter, for someone so itching to be in control, whose pet project has just put on another show for the ages in the Takeover and yet still has to defer to someone else’s whims when it concerns the brand’s flagship products, who’s waited decades and worked so hard to have the influence he does now and yet still be ultimately powerless in stopping last-minute swerves and changes.

Another time, another occasion, Hunter will be telling him that one day, this will all change for the better. One day. One day. But both of them know that day has yet to come and speaking of it seems a futile exercise in sugar-coating the harsh reality.

“I’ll be okay…” Roman tries to assure him.

“You won’t, though,” Hunter says grimly.

“Maybe not,” Roman concedes. “But you’ll make me okay again…at the end of it.”

Hunter kisses him on his sweaty hairline. “Yeah…you bet I will.”

——

“You don’t think they’re a bit much?” Seth asks for what feels like the hundredth time this hour alone.

“I think they’re cool,” Roman says with a casual shrug.

“Really? I thought they were cool when I suggested them, but now…”

“Hey, hey…” Roman grabs Seth by the chin and looks him in the eyes. His very, very icy blue eyes, courtesy of the contacts he’s wearing for his entrance. “You look amazing. Menacing.”
Seth smiles at that, the expression somewhat unsettling coupled with the artificial gleam of his blue eyes. “I feel like such a nerd right now…”

“Which you are,” Roman nods. “Heck, we all are. And you chose to own it. So own it, you geeky fuck.”

After last year’s whole deal with Prometheus and the torch and the golden pants, Seth had taken it upon himself to suggest his own entrance theme for this year, throwing around an idea based on his love for Game of Thrones which the production team latched on to. So it is that he’s now standing in the locker room, his gear tinged with grey and decorated with lines approximating the look of armor, while his eyes are shining an electric, icy blue.

“The Night Prince,” Roman says fondly. “…and soon, a Grand Slam Champion.”

Seth exhales deeply at that, exhibiting the same pre-Wrestlemania jitters he seems to have every year. As far as Roman can tell he’s in much better condition this time around, no illness or lingering injury, though his right knee remains tightly wrapped under his gear as a precaution.

“Have you sent a picture to Dean?”

Seth snorts and shakes his head. “He’ll fucking laugh at me, you know that…”

At that moment, there’s a knock on the door and a producer peeks his head into the locker room. “Ten minutes till your cue, Seth…”

“I’ll be right out,” Seth answers, before looking back at Roman. “I’d…I’d invite you over for beers tonight to celebrate, but…”

Roman smiles and pats his shoulder. “Don’t worry about it. Just go out there and do your thing.”

Seth’s expression turns dour. “It ain’t right, Ro. I can’t believe they’re gonna make you go through this…”
Roman tries to wave it off. “The old man must be thinking a swerve is a better idea at this point than going with the expectations…”

“It’s a swerve for the sake of having a swerve,” Seth argues. “It’s not right.”

“I’m not getting any love for it one way or another,” Roman says. “I just need to do it, Seth. That’s all I can do.”

Seth looks like he’s about to protest some more, but Roman lays both of his hands on Seth’s shoulders. “Listen…Dean’s not here, and I’m gonna close out the night being beaten to a bloody mess, okay? So you need to go out there and kill it, Seth…at least one of The Shield is gonna leave this arena a champion, and it’s you.”

Seth just gives him a sad look — the icy blue contacts doing little to obscure his emotions. “Okay, Ro…”

“You’d best hop over to gorilla,” Roman gestures at the door. “It’s showtime,”

He bumps his fist against Seth’s and bumps their foreheads, too — being a lot gentler with the latter, before turning Seth and shoving him towards the door.

“Dracarys,” Roman says as Seth is walking out. “Burn it all down,”

—I will fucking burn this place down if this doesn’t end soon.

Seth is sitting in a chair in gorilla, nervously tapping his toes against the floor and looking around at the tense, grim-looking faces all around him. He can’t bear to look at the monitor anymore, not since the boos and the chants started raining down and Roman just keeps taking a beating, every near fall only seeming to incite the crowd even more. Seth can’t remember the last time he felt so helpless, the last time he’s watched a match where everything seems so futile that no outcome could possibly be
satisfactory.

He glimpses at the screen briefly and immediately wishes he didn’t, because the bloodletting has just started.

*Jesus Christ, just end this. Pin him already, you big fucking bastard.*

If it were up to Seth, he’d be running out there with a steel chair, something, anything, booking and storyline be damned, a distorted mirror image of three years ago when he cashed in on Roman and made himself a Champion. Roman had laid down for him then, took his pinfall, relinquished the dream of being champion for almost another year, and now here he is laying down for a guy who Seth damn well knows won’t bother to thank him for it.

He catches Hunter’s eyes, the look on the older man’s face almost unbearable, fist clenched tight and held against his mouth as if to stop himself from cussing out loud. Hunter just shakes his head every so slightly at Seth, confirming what they both already know.

*There’s nothing we can do.*

The bell, when it finally rings, does so almost in mercy as anything else, and Seth shuts his eyes tight, relieved that it’s over. When he dares to cast a glance at the monitor, all he sees is red. Blood and anger and resentment. He averts his eyes again, as his phone buzzes in his pocket.

He knows it’s Dean. It has to be Dean. Angry, rageful, threatening carnage and destruction, but Seth can’t bear to pick up his phone right now.

*I’m sorry, Ro. I’m so fucking sorry.*

—

In the trainer’s room, Seth watches as the doctor and the medical staff work on Roman as he lies down on a gurney under glaring white lights, wiping the matted, caked blood off his forehead with
gloved fingers and starting to staple his wounds shut. Roman looks unreasonably calm for what he’s just been put through, one hand folded neatly on top of his abdomen while the other is hanging off the side of the gurney, his fingers laced with Seth’s.

Roman hasn’t said anything since the camera crew left, having gotten the requisite footage and quotes to stitch together into some slick video package for the network, and Seth hasn’t said anything either. He keeps wanting to, but fails to find any words suitable to describe the fuckery he’s just witnessed—the best he can do is hold Roman’s hand and let himself get squeezed whenever the medics are working on a particularly painful spot.

It’s not the first time Roman’s bled for the job, but Seth can’t remember it ever feeling this…*senseless*, for lack of a better word. Like it was all for nothing and did nobody any favors, least of all Roman.

“We’ll do a concussion test tomorrow before RAW to see if you’re cleared for action,” the doctor says as he wipes a swab of antiseptic across Roman’s forehead.

“Whatever you say, Doc…” Roman says, his voice sounding so full of resignation that Seth’s gut clenches in reaction.

Seth’s phone is still buzzing — his notification screen is full of profanity-laced messages from Dean, hastily written and full of typos, and Seth can almost see him in his mind, pacing around his living room, arm in a sling, cussing and kicking at the walls and angry enough to start throwing objects.

“Is that Deano?” Roman asks when Seth’s phone buzzes with another incoming message.

“It must be,” Seth says. “I’ve had more messages from him in the last half hour than all of last year.”

Roman smiles thinly. “I thought he hated texting,”

“Yeah, well…” Seth shrugs. “He must have hated what he just saw happen to you even more.”

Roman sighs, squeezing Seth’s hand lightly, and Seth squeezes in return.
Hunter arrives in a flurry of footsteps, the door to the medical room being swung open almost violently, and Roman is shocked to see the state he’s in. Not only does he look visibly upset, but he’s also red-faced and breathing hard, the veins on his forehead looking ready to pop, as if he’s about to tear everybody in the room a new one.

“Out,” he says to the medical team and Seth. “Everybody out,”

They all know better than to argue with the Executive Vice President in such a state, the staff scurrying out the door and Seth giving Roman one last look before following them out the door, which Hunter proceeds to slam shut behind him.

It’s only then that Roman notices the way Hunter’s normally immaculate suit is slightly rumpled, and the way he’s clenching and unclenching his right fist, his knuckles looking freshly bruised.

“Oh my God…” he gasps. “What…what did you do?”

“Tried to give that son of a bitch a piece of my mind as he was leaving…” Hunter says. “He didn’t wanna listen, so I gave him a piece of my fist instead.”

Roman can only stare at him wide-eyed. “You didn’t…”

“I fucking did,” Hunter says. “I’d have given him a whole lot more if they didn’t pull us apart…”

Roman shakes his head, still fuzzy from the blood loss, the fresh staples in his forehead stinging despite all the antiseptic. “You shouldn’t have…”

“How? Because I’m gonna get in trouble?” Hunter chuckles bitterly. “Trust me, it was worth it.”

“Hunter…”
“The fucker threw his belt at Vince when he came through the curtains!” Hunter snaps. “After all we’ve given him…the money, the lighter schedule, the special treatment…he just came strolling through like a big hulking chunk of an entitled iceberg and threw the goddamn thing!”

“W-what?”

“Yeah, he did that…” Hunter says, angrily pacing around the room as if looking for things he can put his fist through. “…I wasn’t gonna let him get away with it. Not after everything he did to you.”

Roman feels his shoulders sag as he stares dejectedly at the floor. “He didn’t…he didn’t go through the spots. Didn’t let me get anything in. Just did his moves, one after another, repeating the same thing over and over…like he didn’t even want to have a match.”

“Probably didn’t,” Hunter mutters darkly. “You know we tried calling in an audible when the crowd got really cold? Told him to open you up quicker and just end it early? Bastard fucking ignored us.”

“You know…I can’t even say I’m surprised anymore,” Roman says. “I kinda expected that of him,”

“You could’ve had a half-decent match even if it ended with you losing,” Hunter shakes his head. “Guess he decided he wasn’t gonna put in the effort since we’re making him do it again in a few weeks for a lot more money,"

“I tried getting something out of him,” Roman says morosely. “I really did.”

There’s a palpable shift in Hunter’s whole bearing then, ceasing his relentless pacing as he stands in front of the gurney Roman’s sitting on, taking both of Roman’s hands in his. “You did all you could…” he says, voice sounding gentler despite the anger Roman can still hear simmering underneath. “…we couldn’t have asked more from you.”

Roman’s eyes are fixated the marks on Hunter’s knuckles, bringing the hand up so he can brush his lips against them.

“I don’t want to talk or even think about this anymore…”
"I know," Hunter says. "Let's get you out of here."

Roman looks up. "What about the--"

"Fuck the afterparty, fuck everything." Hunter cuts him off. "I’ve already put your stuff in the car. We’re leaving now—I’ve had it with this place and all this bullshit,"

Roman's certainly not going to say no to that--he's just about had it himself.

Thankfully, nobody seems inclined to stop them on the way out--Hunter’s walking like he’s looking to punch everybody's lights out, fuming and seething, and Roman trails behind him with his eyes locked front, not even acknowledging anybody they pass by in the corridor.

Hunter waits outside the locker room as Roman changes out of his gear and into street clothes, trying to be as quick as he can with the way his head is hurting everytime he bends down or makes any sudden movements.

In a matter of minutes they’re in the car, leaving the parking lot through the side gate that's reserved for talent and crew, so they don't have to mix in with the all the other vehicles queuing to leave the arena. Roman watches the Superdome fade into the distance through the rearview mirror as Hunter barks directions to his driver.

"How hard....did you hit him?" he finally dares to ask.

"Not hard enough," Hunter says.

Roman falls silent, leaning back in his seat as the car enters the city roads.

"How are you feelin'?" Hunter asks, voice softer, when they're quite some distance away from the Superdome.

"I don't know..." Roman says. "I don't know if I wanna vomit, cry, or kill someone."
Hunter reaches over, grabs one of his hands, squeezes it tight. Roman squeezes back, a little forcefully, but he knows Hunter's not going to mind.

Hunter's phone rings, and he answers with a terse "Hello?"

Roman faintly hears a female voice at the end of the line, but Hunter's clearly in no mood to talk. "Tell them whatever you need to tell them, just make sure nobody bothers me or him for the rest of the night," he says before hanging up.

He turns to Roman then, gently cradling his face to examine the medics’ handiwork. There’s still residual specks of blood on Roman’s face and in his hair, but the staples are in neatly and the minor cuts have also been treated. They’ll hurt for days, Roman’s sure of it, but it could’ve been a whole lot worse, given how little his opponent gave a shit about anything tonight.

“Yeah, definitely didn’t hit him hard enough…” Hunter mutters as he strokes Roman’s face.

Roman manages a weak smile, but he’s soon distracted by the view outside the window, realizing that they’ve been on the road far longer than it normally takes to get back to their hotel.

“Wait…didn’t we already pass the Hyatt?”

“We’re not going back to the Hyatt…” Hunter says. “Remember I said I had plans for tonight?”

“Yeah?”

“We’re going to a hotel in the French Quarter. That’s all I’m saying for now. You want to be surprised, don’t you?”

Roman’s smile widens, the persistent buzzing of his headache momentarily subsiding.
Hunter points out the hotel as they approach, and Roman stares at the ornate colonial facade, the word ‘Monteleone’ spelled out in cursive font across the signage. Hunter directs his driver to the basement parking lot, and Roman sighs in relief at not having to go through the front doors and the lobby. Someone’s obviously checked Hunter in for him as usual, and before long they’re going up the private access elevators which he assumes will take them straight to their floor.

The corridors are all gilded mirrors and floral carpets, cherubs frolicking about in the ceiling murals, with Roman half-expecting apparitions in corseted gowns and powdered wigs to come dancing through the walls at any second. It’s a bit kitschy and definitely not the sleek, minimalist lines Hunter usually prefers, but it does have a kind of fairytale charm to it.

The suite itself is preposterously ornate, old-world furnishings and upholstery, baroque carvings and chandeliers and delicately painted porcelain vases, and Roman wishes he were in a better state of mind to appreciate all of it. Hunter tips the bell boy hurriedly after all of Roman’s luggage has been wheeled in, and closes the door behind them, bolting the lock in place.

“Must be what Versailles looked like before all their heads got chopped off,” he offers a weak joke, but Hunter just loops an arm around his waist, pulling him close.

“I thought we’d try something different…” he says.

“I definitely feel like I’m in another place and another time,” Roman nods. “I like it.”

"Nothing but the best for you..." he whispers in Roman's ear. "I don't care what the results are. You deserve this. You deserve more. But for now, I can give you this."

Roman uncoils slightly at those words—he's still tense, unbelievably knotted up inside, but he breathes a little easier as Hunter walks him towards the bedroom. The bed is a four-poster affair with tasseled curtains and a heavy, flounced canopy, everything richly patterned and woven through with gold threads, looking like it belongs in walking tour of a European monarch’s palace rather than a hotel room. Roman sits at the edge of the bed, slowly undressing as Hunter scuttles about between the bedroom and the bathroom, letting the damp, discarded clothes rest in a messy pile on the lush carpet.

"Bath or shower, baby?" Hunter asks as he shows up with a glass of water and a tablet of aspirin. Roman chugs it down, letting it wash over his dry throat.
"Bath...I don't know how much longer I can stand up," he says.

"Okay..." Hunter says, starting to move away before Roman grabs him by the wrist, stops him in his tracks. "What is it?"

"I need....something else first," Roman says quietly. "It's in my bag--the usual place."

Hunter nods. "Okay, lemme get it for you..."

Hunter leaves the room for about a minute, leaving Roman to his thoughts--what little of it remains. When Hunter comes back, he kneels in front of Roman and grabs his left ankle, quietly wrapping the leather band around it, snapping the closure shut.

"Thank you..." Roman mutters. It's not much, but it's something that's all his at least, something he doesn't have to share with the rest of the world and the mess of it all, something he can be sure about, something solid, not subject to fickle public opinion or booking decisions or anything else.

"Come..." Hunter gently pulls him off the bed. "Let's get you cleaned up."

—

Hunter insists on putting Roman in the tub and cleaning him thoroughly first, before getting in it himself. For a long time they just sit there soaking in the water, Roman leaning against Hunter's chest, resting between Hunter's legs.

“Ever wish..." Roman says. "there's such a thing as a hard 'reset' button? for life?"

“Yeah..." Hunter nods.

“I could use one right about now...." Roman sighs. “It feels like everything's just one long road paved with bad decisions."
“They weren’t yours,” Hunter says. "heck, some of it were mine."

Roman finds Hunter's hand under the water's surface, brushes over those still-bruised knuckles.

"You made one good decision tonight..." he says, and he can hear Hunter chuckle next to his ear.

"That's my proudest Wrestlemania moment, I'd say,"

Roman cranes his neck around to look at Hunter. "Really?"

Hunter looks at him, not even the slightest hint that he's joking in his eyes.

"Baby, you know you mean more to me than all those titles, all those wins, all those ridiculous entrances..." he says. "It was the least I could do for you."

Roman's chest seizes up a little, unexpectedly, a wallop of emotion suddenly bubbling up over him.

Hunter curls a hand around his neck and pulls him close, letting Roman's head rest in the crook of his shoulder, and before Roman knows it he's sobbing—for what, he doesn't even know, if it's anger or frustration or sadness, and he just grabs for Hunter and holds on as tight as his sore muscles can manage.

"Let go..." Hunter says. "Let go."

Hunter's told him that so many times, over the years, over so many Wrestlemanias, and there's some residual resistance inside Roman, some last stubborn bit that wants to be strong, wants to be proud and unyielding, but Hunter knows him too well.

"I told you there's a lot I can't fix in this world...so many things that are out of my hands," Hunter says. "Please let me fix the things I can. Just let me take care of you,"

And Roman feels himself heaving at that, floodgates open, and he just clings to Hunter like a child, tears mixing with bathwater, unable and unwilling to stop.
Hunter lets him have his moment, saying nothing, arms tight around him, as if he's afraid Roman would shake himself to pieces if he didn't keep hold. Roman loses track of time, eyes going fuzzy, feeling the day's worth of bumps and sores and hits finally settling in his bones, soothed only by Hunter's touch. Finally he calms down, the rise and fall of his chest slowing to a steadier rhythm, Hunter's fingers in his hair, careful not to touch the head wound.

"I love you," Roman whispers faintly. "I don't know much else about what the fuck is going on in this fucking world, but that I know for sure."

"Love you too, baby..." Hunter replies, a quiet kiss against the side of his head. "You've always got me."

Roman reaches for Hunter's chin, twirling his fingers in wiry strands of his beard, tilting Hunter's face towards his own.

"Make love to me tonight, Daddy..." he asks. "I just wanna forget everything else."

There's a milisecond of hesitation on Hunter's face, as if 'are you sure' is at the tip of his tongue, but he doesn't say it. He strokes down Roman's face, smiling benignly. "Anything my baby wants..."

They finally get out of the tub when the water turns lukewarm, Roman sitting gingerly at the edge of the tub as Hunter dries him off, but when Roman tries to stand up Hunter stops him. "Let Daddy do this..."

Roman's world spins for a second until he realizes that Hunter's hefted him up into his arms, carrying him like he weighs nothing, one arm under his back and the other under his knees.

"Glad you didn't put in those extra hours at the gym just for the sake of Instagram..." he quips.

Hunter chuckles, starting to carry him out of the bathroom. "You could weigh as much as the entire Wyatt family combined, I'd still carry you."

"The one with Rowan or the one with Braun?" Roman asks. "Never mind, I don't really care."
Hunter laughs, setting him down on the bed, pulling down the coverlet to let Roman rest on soft white sheets. Roman leans back on the big oversize pillows, stretching out, feeling something resembling relaxation for the first time in what feels like a lifetime. Hunter unties the tassels and pulls the curtains shut, enclosing them in a sort of cocoon of fabric and bedding, then crawls over him until he's on top of Roman, looking down and smiling. "Hey, beautiful..."

He leans down, kisses Roman's forehead, just below the staples, in a gesture that feels like healing, somehow. Roman pulls Hunter down and finds that mouth, locks his lips around it, puts his arms around Hunter's back.

For a few long minutes that's all they do, kissing and holding each other, Hunter being careful not to jostle him too much, Roman letting himself just enjoy the moment.

Eyes closed, with nothing but Hunter's breathing as background noise, he can almost imagine themselves in their bed back in Orlando, on the mornings when they decide to sleep in for a while longer, the curtains drawn shut and keeping the sunlight at bay.

Sometimes, sometimes, the world just needs shutting away, like now, and Roman can exist in a world where nothing matters but the two of them.

"How do you want it...?" Hunter asks softly when they’ve broken the kiss.

"Like this," Roman says as he slowly rolls over on his back. "Wanna see you..."

Hunter takes his time preparing Roman, taking much greater care than he did last night, even starting him out with one finger and making out with him the whole time before he adds another one. When he enters him, he does it deliberately and slowly, in no hurry at all, letting Roman feel every heated inch, letting him relish something that feels right for a change.

Roman's head falls back when Hunter bottoms out, more in relief than anything else -- part of his existence, at least, making sense in this moment.

Hunter rocks into him slowly, never taking his mouth off Roman's too long, just enough to mutter 'love you' against his lips before kissing him again.

There's nothing else to say, really. It’s all Roman heeds to hear right now.
He almost wishes they could stop time right there, Hunter inside him, holding him, here in this enclosed space away from everything else, that handsome face hovering above his, the smile that lets him know he's safe, he's protected, he's loved, that nothing bad can happen to him here.

Roman's orgasm comes almost as a surprise, sneaking up on him, probably because he hasn't been focusing on the physical sensations, but it arrives nonetheless, spilling over Hunter's fist and his own.

Hunter doesn't stop moving into him through it, pausing only to lift his come-stained hand to his face and lick some of it off.

He picks up his pace ever so slightly, letting Roman cling to him for those last few minutes, and Roman inhales sharply when he can feel Hunter coming, that bone-deep throb he can feel inside him, Hunter stilling his movements so they can both focus on the sensations.

Roman doesn't even realize he's closed his eyes until Hunter kisses them open, dotting his eyelids with his mouth, a gesture so tender it almost feels sacred.

They stay like that long after Hunter's pulled out, tightly enclosed in each other's arms, lying on their sides, Hunter reaching down to pull the soft blankets up over their shoulders.

"I'd ask you if you feel any better, but..." his voice trails off.

Roman smiles, sighs against Hunter's neck. "In here? In here everything's perfect."

Hunter traces his thumb along Roman’s bottom lip. “I'll keep making 'here' happen...whatever city, whatever country, whatever fucking place we’re in, there'll always be a 'here' for you to come back to...”

Roman smiles, sucks the tip of Hunter's thumb into his mouth. “Thank you, Daddy…”

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