Forget The Rest

by eadunne2

Summary

Leaning in close, Harvey murmurs, “You’re awfully mouthy for this early in the evening.”

Mike tilts his head, flirtatious confrontation as the car rolls to a stop. “Bit early in the evening to be discussing my mouth, don’t you think? Sir?”

“Tell you what,” Harvey muses lowly. “You make me look good tonight, I’ll do more than just discuss it. Fair?”

Mike gulps and nods, light-headed, and he doesn’t think it’s from yesterday’s blood loss. He can feel Harvey’s breath on his lips, smell his cologne, subtle and smooth, thinks maybe he’s gonna get luckier than he’d hoped, and then with a smirk Harvey reaches across his body and cracks open the door. “Out,” he commands, and Mike sighs, hauling his tired ass out of the car. Figures.

Notes

<3 Been working on this one for a while. I’ll try to post pretty frequently. So much love to you all. And to these idiots.<3
See the end of the work for more notes.
Chapter Notes

I hope you enjoy this. This type of fic really pushes my buttons, so I'm having a grand old time.

A thought:
I am hugely pro sex worker. I think it's a valid way to earn a living, and there's no shame in that choice. I try to mention Mike enjoying sex/enjoying clients bc I don't think he sees it as a curse. It's certainly not as mentally stimulating as he's capable of, nor is he helping people in the way he wants to, but it was just the most fiscally logical choice for him. No moral associations.

Another thought:
JEez I hope you like this.

<3

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Goddamn it, he got shot again.

The pavement is shiny, dark from the rain and it keeps turning slick at inopportune moments. The man in the hat is following but not too closely, maybe two blocks on foot. It’s enough.

The bullet is still in his leg and when the adrenaline wears off it’s going to be rough, but this isn’t the time to indulge in that kind of thinking. There’s an alley on his left. Nowhere to hide, just a few trash cans. Feet louder and closer on the sidewalk. Gaining. The next alley - yes. Onto the dumpster. Stretch for the fire escape.

He hauls himself up and lies flat on the iron grating, dragging air slow and steady in and out of his lungs to keep the aspiration silent. The man in the hat runs past the alley and Mike listens as the footsteps fade. Going, going, gone.

He starts gasping. The air tastes like oranges.

--

The weather’s getting colder - rain and exhaust in the air, but the scarf Gram knitted last winter is surprisingly warm and Mike buries his nose in it, trying not to shiver and tweak the screw in his shoulder.

He’s memorized the plate of the sleek black car by the time it pulls up to the curb, and before he can remove his hands from his jacket pockets the driver is out and around the vehicle, opening the door for him.

Mike tries to lower himself onto the leather seat as delicately as possible, deferring to his bullet wound, murmuring “Hey. Thanks.”

“Of course, sir.”
The volume of the blues guitar on the radio softens as Mike settles in and assesses the man across from him, street lamplight shattering across the sharp planes of his face.

Harvey is stupidly handsome, even more than in the pictures Mike managed to look up the night before - slicked back hair, well tailored jacket, and he’s eyeing Mike somewhat suspiciously, though he says, “Relax. I won’t bite.”

“That’s too bad. I signed off in it.” He freezes, worried that his exhaustion has already gotten him into trouble. Harvey’s response is immediate and indecipherable, a twitch of the muscles around his eyes, something hinting at humor. Or maybe surprise.

“You read the contract?”

Mike nods. “Of course. Everything's taken care of.”

“Nondisclosure?”

“Donna wouldn’t have let me at you without it.” He manages to stifle the yawn that’s trying to creep in, but Harvey notices.

“You’re tired,” he frowns.

“No, I’m -” Mike sighs and rubs his eyes. “Yeah. A little. I’m fine. I’ll be on my game.”

Last night had been a late one - that errand gone wrong, and with the morning shift at the market he’s officially running on a whole fourteen minutes of sleep, but he needs this gig.

“You’d better be.”

He could’ve done a line beforehand, or some Adderall, but Donna’d said the guy wanted the best, so he came sober as a judge and twice as prepared. He’s not sure how to address it without starting a fight, though, so he says nothing.

Harvey must notice the tension. Dark eyes flick over him once, twice, then he prompts, “Do you recognize the name Alonna Lafayette?”

Mike taps his fingers along with the music floating from the driver’s side of the partition. “Our hostess for the evening. Ex wife of business tycoon Harry Hatfield. Made off well with the alimony and even better with that bogus defamation suit. She’s about her horses, her clothes, her charities, and her men.”

“Bogus?”

“Your firm handled the case?” Mike guesses, amused.

“Why do you say bogus?”

News articles he’d read the night before swirl behind Mike’s eyes as he speaks. “Hatfield’s always had wandering hands - there was a generous provision for it in the prenup. She just cashed in on an inevitability. The defamation suit was for shits and giggles.”

“Hey. He dragged her through the papers, not to mention a circle of very powerful -”

“Defamation connotes injury. Hatfield was a prick. She wasn’t hurt by the rumors, hell, she probably made allies of other women slighted by rich and careless husbands.”

“The suit was won fair and square,” Harvey counters coolly and Mike waves a dismissive hand.
“Yeah, yeah, Hustler v. Falwell. Nice precedent. I’m not saying it wasn’t a clean win. Just a petty one.”

Harvey’s staring.

“What?”

“You study law?”

“I like to read.”

Approvingly then - “You like research.”

Mike shifts and winces as the scab pulls tight over the wound on his leg. “If it’s interesting.”

“Is that why you took me as a client?” His tone is casual, dryly amused, but Mike catches him shifting forward slightly, and it’s impossible not to respond.

“Senior Partner at Pearson Hardman.” He pauses, considering. “A dick, but a successful one.” Harvey grins outright, so Mike continues. “Harvard. Fifth in your class. Previously ADA under Cameron Dennis. I imagine that was a hoot.”

The atmosphere cools. “What makes you say that?”

Mike’s not too young to forget the news coverage. Dennis had been an effective DA but his methods were highly suspect. “Really? Wasn’t that why you left? The corruption…?”

Harvey’s face darkens and he sits back carelessly, dismissing the conversation. “I was recruited. New opportunities.”

“Yeah,” Mike drawls, disbelieving. “Alright.”

The shift in Harvey’s jaw is sexy as fuck, but it doesn’t bode well for the evening. He pulls out his phone and Mike’s pretty sure from the reflection in the window that he’s returning emails.

Nice going, dude. Piss off your client before you’ve even gotten to the event.

Mike closes his eyes, keeping himself occupied for a handful of songs before leaning toward the opening of the partition so the driver can hear him say, “Nice playlist.”

The guy glances up at him in the rearview mirror. “Thanks. Any favorites?”

“The Heavy is great. So was the song before. Coltrane, yeah? Village Vanguard? And when I got in - not many people listen to Sister Rosetta Tharpe these days.”

Surprised is evident in the guy’s profile. “Music aficionado?”

“Who isn’t?” In his periphery he can tell Harvey’s looking at him, maybe even with interest, but when Mike turns back he’s studiously buried in his inbox.

Rolling his eyes, Mike returns to the driver. “You know, Depeche Mode does this really great song - Personal Jesus… seems like it might be up your alley.”

“Thanks for the recommendation. I’ll look into it, though you should know, I just enjoy this mix - I didn’t make it.”
“Who did?”

The guy jerks his head back. “The successful dick.”

Mike grins. “I’m Mike.”

The driver smiles back, immediately endearing. “Ray.”

“Nice to meet you, Ray.”

“I like this one, Harvey,” Ray calls and Harvey sighs, put upon. “Be nice to him.”

“I don’t pay you for relationship advice.”

“No, you pay me to pick your sorry ass up wherever, whenever, and amuse you while I do it.”

Mike chuckles, settling back into the seat to focus on ignoring the fact that he can feel his pulse in his leg. It wasn’t his fault the guy he’d been delivering to happened to have a concealed carry and a sticky trigger finger. No one warned him. No one ever did.

For the night, he’s someone else entirely, playing a part - gainfully employed, Bachelor’s in Health Policy and Management from Columbia, amiable party boy, beer connoisseur. Not some busted up kid with no past and no future, half a dozen jobs and almost no family. It’ll be a relief to be someone else for the night.

“Don’t fall asleep.”

Eyes closed, he snaps, “Harvey. I’m a professional. I won’t ruin your image. I read the fucking contract cover to cover. I’ve got an eidetic memory, I’m an excellent actor, and charming as hell once I’m standing. Leave it alone.”

There’s a silence where he has time to ponder whether he’s lost his touch when the older man huffs. “Huh. And here I was gonna put out.”

Mike sits up ramrod straight and Harvey laughs. It’s teasing but not malicious, a heartwarming sweetness to it that hurts a little.

“Not that I’m not grateful but...why did you hire me?”

“You come highly requested.”

“No, I mean...you’re rich. Successful. Gorgeous. People’d probably pay to be your date.”

Harvey’s eyes glint, dangerous and lovely as he murmurs, “Why? You offering a discount?”

“You know what I’m saying.”

“Yes,” he sighs and his shoulders loosen slightly, suddenly tired. “I do. I can’t take anyone from work because the firm’s represented Alonna and it would be a conflict of interest for the associates.”

“And you couldn’t pick up some rando from a bar?”

“Please don’t ever use that word again.”

“What?” Mike wriggles his eyebrows. “Bar?”
“Don’t be an fuckwit.”

“I can’t say rando but you can say fuckwit?” Mike protests.

Harvey ignores the comment but he’s not frowning anymore. “I’ve been working a lot lately. I wanted someone easy. Someone who’d make me look good. Someone I wouldn’t have to babysit. Are you comfortable with this crowd?”

The grimace Mike gives can’t be subtle. “Comfortable? No. Competent? Definitely.”

“Fair enough.”

They slow, rolling up to a valet station and Mike presses his face against the window, breathing, “Holy fuck.” He probably shouldn’t let on to his millionaire client that this kind of money still blows him away, but Harvey surprises him yet again, switching seats in order to bump their shoulders together as he admires the view as well.

“Yeah. It’s incredible isn’t it? The building was her father’s. Don’t lay it on too thick, though. She’s pretentious enough as it is.”

“I thought you liked her.”

“I do, but she’s irritatingly arrogant.”

“Takes one to know one.”

Leaning in close, Harvey murmurs, “You’re awfully mouthy for this early in the evening.”

Mike tilts his head, flirtatious confrontation as the car rolls to a stop. “Bit early in the evening to be discussing my mouth, don’t you think? Sir?”

“Tell you what,” Harvey muses lowly. “You make me look good tonight, I’ll do more than just discuss it. Fair?”

Mike gulps and nods, light-headed, and he doesn’t think it’s from yesterday’s blood loss. He can feel Harvey’s breath on his lips, smell his cologne, subtle and smooth, thinks maybe he’s gonna get luckier than he’d hoped, and then with a smirk Harvey reaches across his body and cracks open the door. “Out,” he commands, and Mike sighs, hauling his tired ass out of the car. Figures.

Harvey steadies him with an arm around his waist. “Ready to turn on that charm?”

Mike smiles up at him. “Born ready.”

It’s breathtaking - all of it. Even the foyer is nicer than anyplace Mike’s ever lived. Marbled flooring, crystalline light fixtures, honest to god gold leaf designs on the moulding...it’s mind-boggling. Mike’s just got his sea legs when a butler takes their coats and he’s confronted with the sight of his date in formal wear. “Fuck.”

Insufferably smug, Harvey says, “What? Never seen a guy in a tux before?”

“Never anyone like you,” Mike clarifies truthfully, still staring, and if he didn’t know better he’d think Harvey looked almost flustered, but the expression is gone before he has the chance to double check.

“Yeah, well try not to swoon, I’m fresh out of smelling salts.”

“Ha ha,” Mike mumbles dryly, shoving his hands in his pockets, which turns out to be a bad call
as a blonde woman knocks into him on her way to assault Harvey.

“Karen, hey, good to see you.”

“Harvey.” There’s no effort to mask the hunger in Karen’s heavily mascaraed gaze and based on his research Mike’s half expecting Harvey to sweep her off into the sunset like the veritable womanizer he’s reputed to be. Instead, much to everyone’s surprise, Harvey puts his hand on the small of Mike’s back with a familiarity that makes Mike’s chest hurt for some reason.

“Karen I’d like you to meet my date for tonight, Mike Ross.”

Her jaw hits the floor and Mike categorically does not gloat. The thing with his eyebrows was just a tick. He even shakes her hand.

“Nice to meet you Karen.”

“You, too. I’ve got to...uh...” And she disappears into the crowd followed by Mike’s narrowed eyes.

Harvey’s face is impassive, but he doesn’t move his hand from Mike’s back, clearly clocking the jealousy. “Calm down, Hardy Jenns. She’s the wife of a client.”

Mike scoffs, trying not to lean into him. “Some Kind of Wonderful? Really?”

The corner of Harvey’s mouth twitches. “It’s a classic.”

Mike follows him into the crowd muttering, “Yeah, if you’re sixteen...”

Harvey hears him. “I’ll have you know I was a very advanced sixteen year old.”

“Of course. I bet you came out of the womb with that perfectly coiffed hair, talking shit and ordering people around.”

He’s laughing. “No need to get nasty. I didn’t start talking shit until I could walk.”

They settle into a rhythm, of a kind. Harvey shows him off, Mike charms the other guests with his blue eyes and agreeable nature. It’s the nicer side of this work, the opportunity to meet some genuinely interesting people, especially since first impressions are genuinely irrelevant apart from how they reflect on the client. Mike’s never going to see any of them again.

“Bionic Boy!”

“Roger! Hey man.” Mike’s unsurprised at to see Rog here dressed in service blacks despite being rich enough to never work again if he chose. Roger is a jack of all trades, fingers in every pie. Dealer of information (which is probably why he’s here) as well as substances, occasional pimp, hub of a functional criminal underworld governed by necessity, but also good conscience. It’s probably frowned upon for a guest to be conversing with the waitstaff, but Mike doesn’t give a shit.

“You on the clock tonight?”

“Would I be wearing this suit otherwise?” Mike chuckles.

“Nah man, you know I know the struggle.” He gestures to his own uniform, a far cry from the jeans and tank tops Mike’s used to seeing him in, even in the cooling weather. “You lookin’ for any work?”
“Not at the moment, but I’ll hit you up the second I do.”

“You’re our best, Mikey-boy. I love sending out out. Makes me look good.”

“You just think I’m cute.”

He winks, too enthusiastic, but charming, to be sure. “That too.”

A hand at Mike’s waist has him turning to find Harvey glowering.

“Hey, this is my friend Roger. Rog, my date Harvey.”

Roger nods at Harvey and offers a peaceable smile. “Hey. Good to meetcha. Don’t worry, I won’t try’n shake your hand or nothin’. Mike’s too nice for rules like that, but I know you got an image to maintain.” Straightening, he brings the serving tray back up to balance at shoulder level and offers, in a completely different tone of voice, “Champagne, sir?”

Harvey shakes his head but plucks one up for Mike knowingly, handing it off then turning away to give them a moment of privacy.

“It was good to see you, Rog.”

“You too, punk. Come around sometime.”

“Business or pleasure?”

Roger laughs, tossing his head back and still managing to keep the tray balanced.

“Why don’t you tell me when you come by.”

“Deal. What?” he asks Harvey as Roger disappears into the sea of grandeur. “I'm not gonna be a shitty friend just because you can't be seen mingling with commoners.

“You're on my dime tonight,” he chastises and Mike bristles, irritated by his own embarrassment.

“Yeah. And after tonight, while you go about your life in your huge fucking house and your glistening law firm, Roger’s gonna be the guy helping me make rent. I may be trash, but I’ve studied economics. The opportunity cost of losing that connection isn't worth your pride, and if you really think it is, you're more of a dick than you seem.”

Harvey stares at him, giving nothing away. Finally, he tugs Mike's arm from where it's crossed over his chest and says, “Come on.”

There’s always a wave of culture shock coming to events like this, going from sleeping on a mattress on the floor and eating stale muffins for all three meals a day, to bespoke suits and flutes of champagne. Easy as this job is, comparatively, it’s a struggle not to cop an attitude. These people don’t think about rent money or medical bills. They’re not sporting bullet holes. Hell, some of these patrons could pay someone to shoot guys like him - and get away with it too, but he resumes his role of pretty and polite, and other than a few moments of feeling profoundly out of place, Mike’s almost at ease when Harvey maneuvers them toward the hostess.

“Alonna,” Harvey croons. “So good to see you.”

She’s beautiful, he’ll give her that. Dressed to the nines in turquoise and diamonds, a display of dominance that extends to her posture and carriage and leaves no room for argument.
“Harvey.” She allows him to kiss her hand, then shifts her gaze to Mike. “And who’s your friend?”

“My date. Mike Ross.”

Her eyebrows quirk up, not angry, but the amusement there is almost worse, like Mike is some kind of joke, like she can see through his suit to the tattered piece of shit he really is.

Harvey settles a hand at Mike’s waist, and he can breathe again.

“I see. And are you enjoying yourself, Mr. Ross?”

“Mike, please. And yes, the event is lovely. Thank you.” He doesn’t quite manage genuine, but he thinks he sounds friendly enough.


“I was under the impression that this was a fundraiser.” It’s a challenge not to make a dig at her lack of need for more ‘funds’, but he’s not trying to get fired, at least not so early in the evening. Besides, he’s looking forward to those mouth related activities Harvey mentioned.

“That it is. Proceeds will be donated to the top three charities.”

“I’d vote McKinnon Fund.”

She looks surprised that he has a preference. “Why?”

He’s on sturdier ground here, facts instead of culture, numbers instead of upbringing, research still fresh in his mind. “They’re more intelligent with their overhead, so more money goes to the actual charity. They have one of the lowest employee turnover rates in the history of New York not-for-profits. And any investment in underserved youth is a gift that keeps giving. For all we know, McKinnon could fund the education of the next president.” He shrugs, unable to contain is ire. “Or they could grow up to be conmen and hookers, but hey, gotta play those odds right?”

Harvey laughs, pleased instead of pissed and Mike smiles shyly. “You’ll have to forgive him, he gets testy when he stays up past his bedtime.”

“Of course,” she murmurs demurely. “I’ll consider your input, Michael.”

“Just Mike.”

“Alright, Just Mike. I hate to do this, but could I have a moment alone with my attorney?”

He wants to say ‘fuck no.’ He wants to say, ‘He’s mine for tonight,’ but now is not the time for power plays. “Alright,” is halfway out his mouth when Harvey says, “Sorry, Alonna. Not tonight.”

Harvey silences both their protests with a look. “Thank you for the invite, but I’m not giving out legal advice for free. Call and make an appointment - I’d be happy to talk shop with you. At the firm.” There’s such finality in his tone Mike wonders if saying “No” was ever an option. “And I always take excellent care of you.”

Shockingly, she cracks a smile and kisses him on the cheek. “You do.”

Mike watches her walk away, waiting to be chastised for his lip, but it never comes. “This is easy for you. This...world.”
Harvey shrugs. “I'm good with people.”

“You are. When you want to be.” Though he knows from his reading that Harvey doesn’t always want to.

“Trying to learn from the pro?”

Shaking his head Mike retorts. “If I were, I wouldn't be sticking with you.”

Harvey grasps his chest. “You wound me, kid.”

“So sorry, Sir. Want me to kiss it better?”

There’s no blood left in Mike’s brain to process the exact inflection of Harvey’s voice when he growls, “Later.” It’s all moving swiftly downward.

“Is that a promise?”

He gets no reply, just a fucking wink that’s not helping the lightheadedness and then Harvey goes back to scanning the room.

There was a time he could have belonged here. It’s long gone now, buried under exponentially worsening indiscretions, but it’s hard not to think about the possibilities as he accompanies Harvey from one exhaustingly banal conversation to another. It’s not as stimulating as he might’ve hoped, but then again, neither is watching endless TV from his mangled couch or delivering carefully weighed and sealed plastic packages to every corner of the city, so he supposes neither life affords him much engagement. It’s about survival now.

On bad days, he’s angry about it. Angry at Trev for getting into drugs in the first place, angry at the universe for letting Gram get sick and old, angry that his life keeps getting ripped out from underneath him time and time again, but then he remembers that fuckups like him don't deserve second chances, and tries to let it go.

He barely notices how long they’ve been standing still and silent after hours of polite conversation until Harvey sighs at his phone for the third time in as many minutes.

“What’s up, Huffy?”

“None of your goddamn business,” he snaps, sharper than Mike had been expecting, but then he adds, “Shit.”

“What?”

Leaning in and dropping his voice, Harvey says, “The guy in the pinstripes over there is Evan Martell. He’s -”

“I know who he is,” Mike interrupts, suppressing a shudder of pleasure at the feeling of warm breath on his neck.

“Really?”

“I’m not just a pretty face, you know. What’s the problem with him?”

“Nothing, but I want to make a bid at representing some of his subsidiaries and the guy next to him, Travis Tanner, is his current lawyer, and he hates my guts.”
“What did you do?”

“Nothing! My job!” Harvey protests.

“Another lawyer, huh? What’d you do, beat him at his own game and then rub it in his face?” Harvey shrugs, absently. “Oh my god, you did, didn’t you?”

“He’s an asshole.”

“You’re an asshole.”

There’s a flicker of something sharp in Harvey’s expression before he says, “Watch it, you, or I’ll cut you loose early.”

“No you won’t,” Mike says softly, hip checking him and then regretting the movement when his leg twinges. “You think I’m cute. And besides, I’m gonna get you in with Evan Martell.”

“What? Mike - wait!”

But Mike’s already crossing the floor, combing his fingers through his hair and collecting his thoughts. “Dr. Martell?”

The doctor looks up from his conversation with Tanner and frowns.

“I'm Mike Ross. I’m a huge fan of your work. This is my date, Harvey Specter.”

Harvey stops at his side with an expression that says plainly he’s going to kill Mike for introducing the best closer in New York City as an afterthought, but he won’t do it in public so Mike just smiles sweetly while Tanner grinds his jaw in greeting.

“Fan, huh?” Martell’s eyeing them suspiciously and Mike can’t let that go any farther. It won’t help any of their causes.

“Yeah. I studied Health Policy at Columbia, and I find your work fascinating.”

“Oh really?” Contemptuous. “You’re an administrator. The hell do you know about my work?”

Mike steps forward, out of Harvey’s protective circumference and into battle.

“My Gran is my only living relative, and she’s a fighter, but I still spend too much time reading about blood thinners and assisted living and dementia. I’m a realist. And she’s...” He sighs, feeling strangely untethered at the vulnerability. This one’s all nonfiction.

Martell doesn’t reply, but he sets his glass down on the windowsill and removes the other hand from his pocket.

“She has good days. And bad. On the bad ones it’s hard not to think ahead. I know the tech won’t be ready in time for her, but reading about your work with preserving brain tissue via cryo and chemopreservation, your experimentation with brain mapping…” He shrugs, suddenly worn. “It gives me hope, something to focus my mind on, even with the demands of a really personal, really painful situation.”

Martell looks sincerely surprised as he plucks his drink back up. “I’m glad,” he says softly.

Mike feels suddenly naked, and now that the ice is broken he steps back to bump into Harvey’s shoulder, seeking an anchor, and it’s given freely, immediately, a warm kiss to his temple. Almost like this is real. Almost. “If Moore’s law holds, you’ll have the data processing power to out-think
a human brain within a few decades. That’s pretty amazing.”

“It would be, wouldn’t it? Who knows if I’ll live to see it though.”

Gently, Mike teases, “Maybe they’ll use your brain as the prototype.”

Martell actually smiles. “There’s a terrifying thought.”

“You’re nervous,” Harvey observes quietly. “About restructuring.” Mike’s expecting Martell to get defensive, but he just sighs and rolls a mouthful of whiskey across his tongue. “You don’t have to be. Pearson Hardman could keep your head above water no matter what happens.”

“So could Tanner here.”

“Yeah,” Mike interjects. “But Pearson Hardman’s also represented Avil Pharmaceuticals and Canon Medical Tech. Thanks to to the firm, and Harvey, both companies are doing exceptionally well.”

“Avil’s stock is up thirty eight percent from last year, and Canon just built a new headquarters in Chicago to accommodate their expanding business,” Harvey adds. “Besides. You’re smarter than those CEO’s. You look to the future on principle. I hear your funding is almost up.”

Looks like Mike’s not the only one who did his research. Martell confirms with a nod.

“You let Pearson Hardman take a look at your financials and I guarantee we’ll find you something to help subsidize that project.”

“And if you don’t find anything?”

Harvey shrugs. “You can go running to Tanner if you like. We’re better, but you’re a smart man, and you take good care of what’s yours. I’m just offering to expedite that process.”

The doctor’s squinting like they just proposed letting a dog shit on his lawn, but Harvey’s body language is relaxed, so Mike follows suit, breathing deep just as Martell says, “Give me your card.”

Mike beams up at Harvey. He doesn’t even notice, exchanging information with Martell and staring at Tanner pointedly in between. “Well, it was a pleasure doing business with you gentlemen, but Mike and I have some business to attend to. Have a good night.”

Before Mike can figure out what the fuck is going on, he finds himself being dragged away with a forceful hand ‘round his wrist. Harvey looks furious, teeth set tight and lines deepening around his eyes. It just serves to make him even hotter, but Mike’s not an idiot, and he’s had his fair share of bad nights with clients. He follows, stumbling down the hall through thinning crowds until Harvey drags him through the kitchen and out the back door.

“What the -”

“You -” Harvey growls, shoving him against the house. He’s breathing deep enough that Mike can see his chest heaving beneath the carefully dimpled double windsor, fists clenched like he’s restraining himself.

“I’m sorry,” Mike stammers. “I didn’t -”

Harvey’s body crushes him to the brick as he kisses Mike so hard his head knocks back against the mortar. Mike’s fists find their way into the lapels of Harvey’s jacket and he’s probably
wrinkling it something awful but Harvey doesn’t seem to care, hands cradling Mike’s jaw so he can lick into his mouth. It’s effective, Mike’s knees begin to weaken and an embarrassing noise creeps out, a moan that’s way more desperate than he would’ve hoped, and it must snap Harvey out of his frenzy because he withdraws.

“What,” Mike pants. “Was that for?” He probably just made Harvey’s firm an assload of money, maybe it’s a ‘thank you’ for that. Or that Mike helped him make Tanner look like an idiot in front of Martell. He’ll never know because Harvey straightens his tie, tugs his suit back into place, and turns on his heel.

“I—” Mike begins But Harvey’s already gone back into the building, a trace of his cologne lingering in the air behind him. Or maybe it’s on Mike’s skin. He hopes so. A souvenir, for the dusky hours of not-quite-yet morning when this adventure is just a memory and he’s still empty.

Harvey’s getting a drink in the ballroom but Mike’s got no interest in more champagne. He needs his wits about him, and he’s watching strong shoulders shift beneath a perfectly tailored suit jacket from across the room when a woman’s voice says, “You’re Harvey’s boy.”

“I’m Harvey’s date,” he clarifies coolly, turning to face the beautiful woman speaking over his shoulder. She’s tall and dignified and intimidating as hell, but he straightens to combat the feeling, clenching his fists in his pockets.

“I’m Jessica Pearson,” she offers with her hand, and Mike takes it, surprised.

“Harvey’s boss. Mike Ross. Nice to meet you.”

She gives him a casual once-over, and he ignores it in favor of scanning the room for the cause of the weird prickle at the back of his neck.

“How did you two meet?”

Mike opens his mouth, lie sitting especially easy on his tongue after her assessment, but Harvey interrupts.

“Jessica. Glad we caught you. We were about to head out.”

“We were?” Mike asks.

She nods towards Mike. “Interesting choice.”

“He is pretty, isn’t he?” Harvey grins.

“I hope you know what you’re doing.”

“Always.”

She scoffs but there’s a kind of fondness around her eyes. Mike’s not surprised. It’d be hard not to be fond of Harvey, though it’d probably be hard not to punch him in the face on a daily basis, so there’s that, too.

“And here he comes now,” Jessica murmurs, excusing herself into the throng without saying goodbye, and Mike doesn’t even have time to wonder what the fuck she’s talking about before Harvey is shaking the hand of a man in white, aging well, and clearly high ranking.

“Senator.”
“Harvey, how are you tonight?”

“Enjoying the evening. Good champagne. Good company.”

“Indeed. And who is this?”

Mike is entirely done with people talking over him, around him, about him, so he extends his hand to the tall, graying man and says, “I’m his date, Mike Ross.”

“His date, eh?”

“Yes, sir.”

“And what do you think of our Mr. Specter?”

Mike laughs. It’s just too funny, all these incredibly personal questions and he and Harvey have known each other for all of four hours. He’s done his research though, thoroughly. He’s here to do a job - be the best damn kept man on the face of the planet - and Mike never does anything by halves. Harvey’s smiling too, but there’s a flicker of nervousness, which has Mike feeling both powerful and oddly endeared.

“Honestly?”

“Of course.”

“I think he’s an asshole.” The Senator barks a laugh and irritation makes an aggressive appearance in Harvey’s expression. “But.”

“Yes?”

“He keeps his word, even when it’s inconvenient. He lives and breathes his job - hardest worker I’ve ever met. He’s brilliant and funny and persuasive, and don’t spread this around, but he cares about his clients.”

“Not all of them, surely. Some of his clients have been -”

“Tools? Douches? Fuckwits?” He grins at Harvey’s subtle facepalm. “Yeah. Maybe. But not all of them. He won a case for a family last week...their son had been killed in a car accident...he negotiated a payment that was more than fair, and took care of it personally. Two months ago, he took on a gender discrimination case, worked tirelessly, day and night for a month to get it done. So some of his clients are pricks. They still make the firm money. And the ones worth giving a damn about? Well. He does.”

Harvey’s got his hands clasped so tight the knuckles are white and his face is suspiciously blank, but Mike doesn’t have time to be concerned because the Senator is speaking. “I had heard… well… You know what Harvey? I’ll take you up on your offer.”

“Really?”

“Yeah. Your boy here believes in you, and if he does, then I do too. I’ll have Amy call Donna on Monday.”

“Amazing. I look forward to working with you.”

The Senator nods to Mike with a lingering look. “Hang onto this one, you hear me?”

Harvey huffs and Mike has to grasp his chest at the reminder that none of this is real.
“I’ll do my best, sir. If you’ll excuse is, our ride is here.”

“Of course. Have a lovely evening, both of you.”

It’s a relief to escape. Mike was starting to relax, to feel like maybe he belonged, and that’s never good. Never safe.

They retrieve their coats, bundle up, and trot down the front steps towards the car waiting in the roundabout. Harvey’s voices is strangely warm as he says, “You didn’t have to do that, you know.”

“Do what?” Mike mutters into his scarf.

“Vouch for me like that. With the Senator. I could’ve -”

“Yeah, whatever man.” He stops to watch the water pour from the fountain outside the front door. “It was my job, and I told you, I’m good at my job.”

Harvey pauses for him. “Right. Come on, rookie.”

Ray’s waiting, but it’s Harvey that opens the door for him, and there’s something unbearably sexy playing in the car when they slide in. Portishead, Mike thinks, and he goes from too cold to too hot in the span of an instant.

As they peel away from the curb, Mike has to ask, “So?”

“What?”

“That went well.”

“Sure,” Harvey answers slowly.

“I fulfilled my obligations.”

Expressionlessly Harvey adds, “Of course. I can drop you back at -”

“But you said -”

“Wait.” He blinks at Mike owlishly. “What?”

“If I made you look good. You said…” He’s too embarrassed to make eye contact, at least at first, but Harvey’s unresponsive for so long that Mike ends up looking straight at him, waiting.

“You want to come home with me.” Hope is too weak a sentiment for the great Harvey Specter, but Mike thinks there might be a tinge of it in his voice.

“I mean...you paid until morning.”

“I did,” he says softly.

“So I can?”

“Come?”

“Yeah.”
“I should hope so.”

It breaks the tension and Mike rolls his eyes, laughing.

Harvey gives him a crooked smile and pulls out his phone. “Forgive me, but if you’re going to be a distraction this evening, I have a few things I need to finish up.”

Mike nods and turns away, watching the world pass outside the window when he realizes, “You never intended to fuck me tonight.” Harvey looks up sharply, but doesn’t comment. “You would’ve finished your work early if you had.”

“What bothers you?”

“That I seduced you? Not in the slightest,” he ribs, self satisfied enough that he considers doing a victory dance.

“Easy there, Mrs. Robinson. Don’t get too cocky.”

Mike shrugs and snuggles against the seat. “Why not? I’m worth it.”

Harvey grits his teeth and breathes deeply. “See? Distracting.”

Mike gives him a shit-eating grin.

The ride is probably no longer than a half hour and Mike doesn’t sleep, afraid that if he closes his eyes he’ll be down for the count. In the end, he’s glad of it. Harvey lives in a ludicrously well-off part of the city and Mike’s so busy staring wide eyed at high rises and suits and stilettos that he barely registers the car slowing to a stop.

The chilly air brushes across the sidewalk and over his ankles as they cross to the front doors, burnished metal and spotless glass. The music floating from a bar down the street and the smell of autumn wind serves to amplify the ambiance, moneyed and easy and elegant.

Mike squeaks, “You live here?”

“Perks of the job,” Harvey replies, nodding amiably at the doorman as they slide into the elevator.

“Damn. I gotta get a new racket. Shame I’m so good at this one.”

Harvey scoffs, but as the elevator slides open on his incredible apartment, he murmurs. “You did very well tonight,” with his mouth far too close to Mike’s ear for it to be unintentional. “Beer?”

“God yes. And thank you. I’m glad you got what you needed.”

“Better than I could’ve hoped.”

“Jessica is terrifying.”

“She is,” Harvey admits amiably. “But she’s been good to me.”

“Then I like her.”

“Don’t go too far,” he laughs, handing off a bottle of beer. “She’d still kick your ass if it suited her needs.”

Mike shrugs and lets the island support him as he takes a swig. “I’d do the same.”
“She’d kill you.”

“She’d try.”

Harvey leans on the counter next to Mike. “Feisty.”

“I thought that’s how you liked it.”

His voice is significantly lower when he says, “Oh, I do.”

“So you admit it. I’m good.”

“And then some. Between Martell and Senator Birch, you’re the goddamn man of the hour.” The praise feels electric, and they’re so close Mike can see the pattern in Harvey’s irises, but the Senator’s name snags on something in Mike’s head. Lectures? Journals? News? There it is, top left column, page two of the Post, October 12th of last year. *Birch Slap, Senator Out As Gay.*

“So that’s why you hired me,” he whispers, eyes widening. Not because Harvey couldn’t find a date. “You needed a boy toy to get you your very own queer card.”

“I didn’t need shit,” Harvey bristles. “I earned mine decades ago.”

“Right, yeah, you’ve been with plenty of dudes.” There’s no reason for the bitterness in his voice. He’s with a fucking client for chrissakes.

“I don’t owe you an explanation.”

“Well, he makes the firm look good.”

“He does.”

“Puts money in your pocket.”

Irritably, Harvey snaps, “That’s what a job does, Mike.” Regardless of his tone, neither of them have widened the space between their bodies. “It’s how I can afford you.”

“You were using me.”

“I paid for you! I can use you how ever I want.”

Mike shoves Harvey, but catches him by the lapels, reels him back in, and mere centimeters from the man’s mouth whispers, “Then what the fuck are you waiting for?”

Harvey grabs him by the tie and crushes their mouths together. Without looking, he rips the bottle from Mike’s hand and drops it to the counter, miraculously managing not to spill, before tugging him down hall.

In an attempt to hurry the process along Mike pushes at Harvey’s jacket and receives a stink eye for his troubles, though Harvey does shrug out of the garment and drape it carefully over the back of a chair along with Mike’s jacket, shirt, and tie.

“Eager little shit. I use you, remember?”

Mike gulps. “Yes, please.”

“Then hold still.” Absolute command, and the sight of him in vest and shirtsleeves definitely helps with the desire to obey. Mike’s body freezes blissfully. “Hmmm,” Harvey murmurs against his
“Someone like orders?”

“Yes, Sir.”

“So that's what all this Sir business is about. You trying to persuade me, Mike?”

“No,” he protests.

Harvey bites down and releases. “Why then?”

“I-” Mike wants to shrug, he’s a physical communicator, but he’s also a good boy so he stays still. “It felt...right.”

Harvey shudders. “Jesus, kid.” Face still buried behind Mike's ear, he gets Mike’s slacks undone.

“What?” Mike's not sure what he's said that's so important, but Harvey gives him nothing, withdrawing calmly in order to slide Mike's pants off but then he drops to a knee quite suddenly. “What is this?” he rumbles, and Mike looks down.

“Oh.”

“Oh?” Harvey's voice rises. “Oh fucking what?”

Mike sighs forlornly at the bandage. If this damn thing keeps him from getting laid he’s gonna be so pissed off.

“I got...shot,” he admits hesitantly.

“Shot. With a gun.”

“No, a peashooter,” Mike snaps, embarrassed. “Yes with a gun.”

“Listen here you little shit-”

“It's more of a scrape than anything,” he says quickly. It’s an excuse, a ploy, and it’s obvious. He's not ready to leave, but the wound makes him damaged goods, so he mentally prepares to get sent packing.

“The blood on that bandage says otherwise.”

“Dude. It's fine. I took some aspirin, I’m keeping it clean. This really isn’t...I mean, are we not-”

“Don't ever call me ‘dude’.”

“Ok,” Mike sighs. He should’ve known. He bends to pull his pants up but Harvey catches his wrists and finally looks him in the eyes. Wishful thinking has Mike seeing concern inside the anger.

“Against the bed. Now.”

“Why?”

Harvey smiles wickedly. “Because when I'm done with you your bullet-ridden ass is gonna need a place to land.”

Mike takes a shaky breath and obeys, grasping for even footing. “It's a nice ass though, bullet-ridden or not.”
Harvey manages to make kneeling at Mike’s feet look like a position of power. “I’ll be the judge of that.”

“Oh, holy fuck…”

He swallows Mike down.

Harvey wraps strong hands around Mike’s calves as an anchor and goes at it, just as powerfully effective at this as every other damn thing he does. When Mike’s knees are trembling, Harvey pops off and bites the muscle of Mike’s thigh almost exactly adjacent to the location of the wound. With a pinch, he finally releases the skin and shoves Mike so hard the kid topples backwards onto the bed. There’ll be a mark there tomorrow.

“Wait, can I -?” Mike gasps.

There’s a sort of surreal quality in watching Harvey Specter get undressed, not that he gets naked by any means. The boxer-briefs and t-shirt stay on, but his fingers work the buttons of his vest and dress shirt open skilfully as he stares at Mike, eyes burning.

“Can you what?”

Mike blushes and whispers, “I want my mouth on you.”

Arrogance should not look that good on anyone, but Harvey’s smug, satisfied smile as he crawls over Mike and kisses him, deep and filthy and slow, has Mike losing his mind. Between the sensation of mouths grinding slick together and Harvey’s weight above him it starts to feel too close to a kind of perfect that will ruin him, so he shoves Harvey over onto his back and scrambles down to push his boxers away, too eager to be really professional, settling between Harvey’s knees.

He may be intimidating, brilliant, and way out of Mike’s league, but Harvey is also beautiful, especially like this. His skin is soft gold dotted with the occasional freckle, body muscular in a distinctively masculine way, and when Mike takes him into his mouth, he groans, arching backwards against the bed, biting out, “Jesus christ.”

Mike’s been with all kinds of people over the years. Male, female, young, old, fat, thin, rich, kind, cruel - the gamut. The job isn’t always unpleasant. He’s spent time with interesting people and eaten cuisine he could never afford on his own. A few clients have taken him on vacations to destinations Mike’s only ever read about. Some have been lovely. On lucky days, he’ll miss one or two of them, and forget the rest.

He’s never going to forget Harvey.

Not when the man looks so damn perfect in a suit. Not when he kisses like he’s drowning and then straightens his tie and sweet talks his way into the hearts and wallets of a hundred holier-than-thous. Not when those long fingers are twined in Mike’s hair like a promise, when he smells like smoky spice and linen and says Mike’s name like a prayer.

Mike whines and Harvey looks down with dark eyes growling, “On your stomach.”

There’s no hesitation in the movement as Mike rolls up to his elbows and knees. It’s a vulnerable position, but he’s not panicking. He trusts Harvey. And then he freezes.

Trusts? That’s the dumbest fucking thing you’ve ever thought, brainiac, and you got your dumb ass kicked out of Harvard. He shouldn’t be doing this. No way it ends well. But.
He wants it. Harvey wasn’t planning on taking him home, but he did. Mike doesn’t think his powers of seduction are all that remarkable, but maybe combined with his intellect… this doesn’t seem like a ‘thank you’ fuck. Harvey wants him, for whatever reason, and Mike hasn’t been wanted like this since...well. It was another lifetime ago.

Warm hands slide up his spine and back down, and Mike exhales the tension he hadn’t realized was accumulating under his skin as he accepts the comfort, whether Harvey would call it that or not. And then there’s the swipe of warm and wet between his cheeks and Mike gasps and cants forward.

“Fucking fuck,” he bites out, pressing his face into the bedding, trying desperately not to make any noise as Harvey eats him out.

It doesn’t work. He can’t stop swearing as Harvey mercilessly opens him up, and when Mike finds himself suddenly and inarguably full and whole for the first time in so long he’d forgotten what that felt like he cries out Harvey’s name like it’ll save him from something.

Getting fucked by Harvey Specter is one of the most confusing happenings of Mike’s life. Intense, sure. Erotic, definitely. But decidedly...conflicting. Because Harvey is full of contradictions.

Running gentle fingers through Mike’s hair as he fucks him roughly from behind. Scratching down his back then laving silky-soft kisses along Mike’s throat, hip bones, wrists. Not making a sound, not giving Mike any semblance of gauge or tether or anchor, but then flipping him onto his back at the very end to kiss him as they come together.

--

Mike may be perpetually exhausted, but his body’s always been unfortunately accurate at waking on time. This particular morning, his stomach is so empty it's attempting to digest itself, and he has to pee, but he spends some borrowed time anyway.

Harvey’s on his back, one arm thrown across his eyes, and Mike wriggles closer, enough to press his face into the tan line of tricep revealed by the sleeve of Harvey’s tee riding up. The skin is silk against his lips and he breathes deeply, clean sweat and smoky cologne and … God. He’s in too deep.

Rolling away, he perches on the edge of the bed and cracks his bad shoulder before shimmying into underwear and socks, about to rise and grab the rest of his clothes when Harvey stirs. Mike freezes, not wanting to wake him, and his heart clenches at how much younger Harvey looks like this with no attempt at distance or power or seduction.

He’s a stranger, Mike reminds himself. They’d met once before last night.

And they’ll never see each other again.

Fuck. Right. Time to go.

The tie and suit jacket are superfluous now, so Mike makes coffee and toast in rolled shirtsleeves. He should skip out, but even if he leaves now he won’t have time to swing by his place, and if he heads straight to work he'll be too early. Besides, there’s not damn thing to eat at his own apartment.

Plus, if he’s being honest with himself, which he really should be as he’s lying to literally everyone else, Mike wants to see Harvey once more before he goes. Say goodbye.

There’re newspapers in a stack on the marble island, and next to them is a pile of blue folders,
most unmarked, but the very top one has a blank yellow post-it on it, and Mike can’t help himself.

Just because he threw away his chance to practice law doesn’t mean he lost interest. The file sucks him in immediately.

It’s a lawsuit - a worker suing for wrongful termination after an injury. She wants workers comp, back pay, the whole nine, but her manager swears the employee was high on the job, not just that day, but all the time. The deposition transcripts provide a detailed account, though not so much as to suggest a cover up. Mike’s pretty sure the manager is telling the truth, but the employee’s drug tests came back negative. It looks like the company is going to settle, despite the fact that the suit will drain them of the funding needed to give bonuses in the fall. If the woman is telling the truth about an unsafe work environment, she has every right to sue. But if the manager is right, this dumb kid is about to screw hard-working employees out of their raises.

Mike frowns, drains his coffee, and settles in.

He reads the whole file in twenty minutes, cover to cover, does some quick googling on his phone, and reads it again before he notices the paperwork lying askew. Carbon copies come attached to one another with an unbroken seam of glue along the top, but these are severed. The tear doesn’t even match up. He frowns and flips the copy over.

“You know that’s privileged information.”

Harvey shuffles across the floor sleepily, and Mike is only distracted by the tan of his clavicle and the breadth of his shoulders for a few seconds. A minute, tops.

“I have no idea what you’re talking about.”

Harvey snatches the file from Mike’s hand in transit to dumping the rest of the coffee into his mug.

“Hey.”

“Hey yourself. I can’t let you look at that, and you know it.”

“Well that’s too bad, because if that company is your client, I just found you your smoking gun,” Mike says, sliding off the stool and grabbing his shoes. “Then again, if you’re defending Ms. Gatheright there, I just found your achilles heel.”

He glances up to gauge how far over the line he’s gone, but the frown Harvey’s giving him isn’t cruel, just confused. “Our client is the company. We’re suing Gatheright.”

“Well great. You’ve got your case then.”

“How?”

“She was high on the job when she broke her ankle.”

“The drug test was negative.”

“There’s no admissible drug test.”

“There is,” Harvey mutters, pulling the file towards him, and Mike stands. “The day after they filed. The lawyers insisted, hers and ours.”

“Yeah...no.”

Tone hardening, he says, “I was there, Mike.”
“Oh, she took one. Months ago, after her manager filed an initial complaint. A few weeks after the fact. Enough time to test clean if she laid off for a few weeks.” He fidgets with a button on his sleeve, adding, “Her boyfriend is a law student.”

“And?”

“Don’t play dumb.” Mike can’t help but argue despite the reality that he’s going to be late for work if he doesn’t leave right the hell now, and their contract expired forty five minutes ago. Harvey’s testing him. “Broke as a joke and a the foresight of knowing how the lawsuit would be structured? Check the dates on the drug test.”

Harvey flips irritably through the folder to the stapled packet.

“I’ve read them all, Mike,” he snips. “What are you getting at?”

“Not the originals, Harvey. Look at the date of request on the carbon copy. The “original” in that file is dated three weeks ago but the carbon copy...”

“Oh my god,” Harvey murmurs. “I should’ve seen this. They switched out the originals to reflect the date after her injury, but they needed the positive screening results under her real name. They used the old test with the new date.”

“Because they couldn’t get a new one that would pass.” Mike suppresses a grin and rewards himself by letting eyes roam over the man leaning over the counter and flipping through pages frantically with one hand so he can balance coffee in the other. “Might be a better idea to order a hair test this time, just to be sure.”

“Hell yes,” Harvey says distractedly. “I gotta call Jessica.” He wheels on Mike with a smile so lovely it hurts. “This is huge, Mike. Someone manipulated these dates, and I’m wondering if it wasn’t her piece of shit lawyers.”

Mike smirks. “You’re all pieces of shit.”

“Hey, I’m just a sonofabitch. Christ. Give me some credit, will you? Wait, where -” He stops and swallows hard. Maybe the coffee was too hot. “You’re leaving.”

“I got work, Harvey.”

It sounds like Harvey’s finally waking up, remembering why there’s a pretty boy wearing half a tuxedo in his kitchen. “Right. Well. Thanks for stealing my files. This...you may’ve won the case for us.”

Mike manages a shrug and half a smile. “You’re welcome. And thank you.”

“For what?”

“For pounding me through the mattress.” They both chuckle, and then Mike says more seriously, “For letting me play at the big kid table last night. For challenging me.” The time on the clock over the stove grabs his attention, and Harvey checks it too. “Shit. I have to go.”

“You stayed over time,” Harvey observes softly.

“I wanted to eat your food.”

“I’ll add the extra hour onto your check.”
Mike takes a step backwards. “I’d...you don’t have to do that.”

“It’s not a problem. Your rates are highway robbery, but I can afford them. And I’m willing to concede you might be worth it.”

The huff of a laugh that escapes is more raw that Mike was hoping for. He was hoping for composed. Refined. Hell, he was hoping for a kiss goodbye.

He got what he always does, Option D: none of the above. Mike’s always been a proficient test taker. This one stupid job is going to hurt for a while, and the least he can do is leave things on his own terms, so he shakes his head. “Harvey. I’d rather you didn’t.”

Bittersweet chocolate eyes flick over him, discerning, and Mike’s a pretty good liar but he has no idea what story Harvey reads on his face.

“If you say so.”

Pacified, Mike bobs his head in thanks and steps into the elevator. He’s one foot out the door when he hears, “You ok, kid?” and he can’t help turning back, towards the glass walled apartment, the smell of coffee, warmth, Harvey - frowning.

Mike grins at him and nods. *Come on, Ross. Another few seconds, and you’ll be out, gone, you can get baked or cry or whatever, but you gotta get the fuck outta here smoothly.* It doesn’t look like Harvey’s buying it though, especially when he tilts his head and fires back, “If you’re alright then say something.”

Mike’s brows quirk up in surprise. *Pulp Fiction? Really?* He jabs the button to send him down to the lobby, shoves his hands in his pockets, and somehow finds the bravery to stare back as he lets the word fall from his mouth. It’s a gift. Permission for them both to forget.

He even manages a wink. “Something.”

--

“Uh oh.”

“What?”

“You’ve got that look on your face.”

“What look?”

“That gorgeous combination of self-pity and sleep-deprivation. What’s eating you?”

Mike rolls his eyes. “You’re awfully mean for an old lady.”

“Is that any way to talk to the nearly deceased?”

“You’re not dying anytime soon, Gram,” he chuckles. It’s a morbid joke she’s only able to make because the new meds are working. The new arrangement is working. She’s better than she has been in years here in this new place. Makes it all worthwhile.

“What’s the problem, kiddo?”

“I met someone.”

“And that’s a problem?”
“I can’t...It’s not meant to be.”

“I see,” she murmurs.

“Do you?”

“That you’re a coward maybe.”

“Hey!”

She shrugs creakily. “You want her, go fight for her.”

“Him, Gram.”

“And that changes things how?”

“He’s out of my league.”

“He can’t possibly be kinder, or smarter.”


“Since when has money mattered to you?” she demands, and he can’t say, ‘Since I had to move you to full time care,’ so he shakes his head and lets it drop.

“It doesn’t, I guess.”

“Then figure it out.”

“I don’t think it’s that simple.”

“It could be. If you let it.”

“Maybe.”

“It’s your turn.”

He lays out his cards. “Straight.”

“No you’re goddamn not, but all I’ve got is two pair so I’ll let it go.”

Mike bursts into laughter. “Deal.”

Chapter End Notes

Chapter 2

Mike becomes the Pearson Hardman emergency delivery boy more or less by accident. One of his less legal employers advised this significantly more legal client that Mike on a bicycle could outpace any cab any day, and so one afternoon he gets a frantic call from an associate at Harvey’s law firm. He meets the kid near the hotdog stand down the street from the office.


“You must’ve,” Mike grumbles leaning on his bike, mouth full of cookie and coffee. “If you’re taking tips from Roger.”

The guy looks mortified, stammering, “I don’t know Roger. I got his number from one of my bosses.”

“Sure, sure, whatever helps you sleep at night. You know my rate. What do you need?”

“I need this delivered, signed, returned. Fast.”

Mike glances at the chicken scratch of an address. “Dude, this is halfway across the damn city.”

“You’re back here in under two hours, I’ll give you an extra five hundred.”

“I’m your man,” Mike says, snatching the envelope and tucking it in his bag. “I’ll see you in two.”

“Ok.”

“Hours, I mean.”

“I got it.”

“Not minutes.”

“Go!”

He rolls into traffic, grinning.

It is far but not impossible and Mike whips through traffic easily, enjoying the burn in his thighs. He’s spent the last few weeks working his ass off at the market, but monotony leaves too much time to think, and Mike’s done enough thinking in the past few weeks to last him a lifetime.

For example, why exactly he’s so loathe to do more escort work. He hasn’t. Not since Harvey. He could make the same excuse as before, that he’d rather not deal with the kind of guy that pays for company, but impending payments are huddling stormy and rough in the back of his brain and he’s got nowhere close to the amount he’s going to need. He’s even been taking risky fucking deals from Roger more often, drug drops and the like. He hates it. But the bite Harvey left has finally faded, and he’s not ready to let anyone else make more.

The sun sags behind skyscrapers as he tears down the street. Someone honks. He gives them the finger.

Getting the document signed takes less than ten minutes. Ten minutes of Mike thinking about how his life would be different if he were the lawyer instead of the errand boy. Rereading that useless Harvard acceptance letter again in his head just to pass the time.
Doesn’t matter. The speed of the job means he’s got over an hour to get back to the firm and his five hundred dollar bonus, and then he’s going the fuck home. It’d be nice to run into Harvey, but he’s not counting on it. Mike's never been lucky like that.

The light is waning, cars glaring and growling as he dips through them. There's no rush. He just wants a distraction.

A distraction. Maybe that’s what he needs. He’s been so fucking fixated on Harvey the past few weeks that he hasn’t even tried to get laid for real. Fucking Harvey.

Not like there’s any alternative. Harvey’s not the kind to date, especially not a hooker, and Mike just...can’t. Maybe a lifetime ago. When he was just a dealer with promise. But he’s too far gone to be of any use to Harvey. Even he knows that.

He sighs, breathes deep, loses himself in passing minutes and cooling air. He’s got his jobs, and Gram. He’s fine.

He’s less than a block from the firm when there’s a screech, bone-crunching impact, and Mike’s flying off his bike.

He slams into the sidewalk and skids. For a moment he’s frozen, pain and shock, but the anger that’s been swimming so close to the surface breaks free with a vengeance, and he hollers, “What the fuck, man! I had the green!”

A quick assessment of the situation reveals no broken bones, his shoulder’s still attached, but the whole side of Mike’s leg is torn up, ankle to hip, and his bike… “Fuck…” he breathes. At this point it's less a bike and more scrap metal that he's extricating his limbs from, and it's that fact - not the burn of his skin and muscles - that has the backs of his eyes stinging. “Fuck!”

How’s he going to deliver? And not just drugs - anything? His whole life is built on that damn bike. Panic begins to build, filling up every cell, erasing the pain and replacing it with cold sweat, which is how he manages to miss The Hulk getting out of his car.

The guy must be a bodybuilder, a tree trunk of a man, wreathed with sinew that swims under his skin as he cracks his knuckles. Mike struggles to sit up, dragging his bike closer in a weak and useless gesture of self preservation. He's suddenly exhausted.

“How’s he going to deliver? And not just drugs - anything? His whole life is built on that damn bike. Panic begins to build, filling up every cell, erasing the pain and replacing it with cold sweat, which is how he manages to miss The Hulk getting out of his car.

The guy must be a bodybuilder, a tree trunk of a man, wreathed with sinew that swims under his skin as he cracks his knuckles. Mike struggles to sit up, dragging his bike closer in a weak and useless gesture of self preservation. He's suddenly exhausted.

“What do you want?” Mike shouts. At first the guy doesn't respond. Mike thinks he looks a little surprised, maybe at the pool of blood blooming on the sidewalk. “What? You’re going to yell at me for getting hit by your car? Go ahead, bro,” he spits, ignoring the way the bull’s nostrils widen angrily. He sees it. He just doesn't care anymore. “Lay it on me, you piece of shit. I'm out of half a dozen jobs because of you, so give it your best damn shot.”

Lightening fast, a fist is at his throat, and the words are sneered out with such disgust they're practically viscous. “Listen here, you little bitch.”

Mike stares at him coldly and braces for an inevitable blow. He’s been a dead man walking for over a year at this point. At least now he’ll get to rest his feet.

Hulk is gone quickly and completely from Mike's field of vision, ending up on the pavement, lip leaking burgundy onto that scruffy chin. Enraged, the guy leaps up, only to be knocked back one, two, three steps by quick, even blows, finally collapsing on his ass with a grunt, staring up at his attacker and Mike’s saving grace.

Harvey’s suit isn't even wrinkled, though he brushes invisible dirt primly off one sleeve as the
bulky man stands and snarls. “I’m gonna sue your ass so hard you’re gonna be selling that suit for rent money!”

Confusingly, Harvey ignores the threat in favor of crouching next to Mike, knees to the dusty pavement and takes his chin in a gentle hand. “You ok?”

Mike shrugs, dazed. “Nothing's broken…”

“Good. Did you hit your head?”

He looks fucking beautiful, more than Mike remembers, angular and gentle at once and so potently masculine that it takes Mike a second to respond. “No. No, I'm - I'm fine.”

“How are not,” he says, frowning at the blood on the ground like its wronged him somehow. “When this is over -” but then he stops mid-sentence, pulls out his phone, and types hastily as if Lou Ferrigno 2.0 wasn’t still hollering his beefy ass off at the two of them. There’s a moment where Mike thinks they might just get up and walk away, but then the asshole fucks up.

“-The next time you’re not around to protect your little whore -” and something snaps in Harvey’s eyes.

Mike seizes Harvey’s wrist. “Don’t kill him. I’m fine.”

There’s the briefest of rueful grins, and then Harvey says, “As you wish,” before straightening up and rounding on the man. “Now.” His voice is a low, rough thing that carries over traffic and bystanders and settles in the base of Mike’s spine. “You are going to get back in that tacky, bougie car. You are going to email my assistant at this address for information on where to direct the even grand you’ll be paying to my client here.”

“I’m not paying shit!” the guy hollers at the same time Mike says, “Your client?”

“Oh you will,” Harvey says over both of them. “By tomorrow in fact.”

“Why the fuck would I do that?”

“Because,” and here, Harvey draws himself up to his full and impressive height, fastening his jacket button neatly. “I know everyone. If you ever want a car or a job or a condo or a lease or a loan ever again, you’ll do what I say. Besides,” he shrugs, dismissively. “A grand is fair compensation. You’re actually saving money compared to the cost if you don’t.”

“It wouldn’t come close.” The guy is protesting, but he’s also backing away.

“Oh. I’m including your medical bills as well,” Harvey delivers with deadly, icy calm, and the guy takes the proffered business card as Harvey checks his phone, reading, “By tomorrow - Jax Nelson of 562 W 42nd.” Harvey’s voice drops impossibly lower as he closes the distance between them again, pushing right up into the guy’s face. “If you don’t, I will find you. And paying my guy back will be the least of your worries.”

Mike’s not sure Jax would’ve moved, but Harvey flexes forward in a disturbingly controlled feint and the guy flinches harshly enough for it to be embarrassing. He takes the card, gets in his (satisfyingly dented) douche-mobile, and drives off.

“What?” Harvey says.

Mike hadn’t realized he’d been staring. “How did - I didn’t - what - … Do you fight? Like, professionally?”
Harvey chuckles dryly. “Not quite. Now get your dirty ass up to my office.”

The lightness of his mood descends rapidly though, as Mike struggles and ultimately fails to stand. The way he’d been lying hid the worst of the injury from view, but track pants and a hoodie don’t to much to stop asphalt and his leg looks pretty bad.

“Jesus fucking christ,” Harvey breathes furiously.

“It’s fine,” Mike repeats. “I’ve had worse.”

“I didn’t...realize your line of work was so rough.” Harvey’s trying to joke through clenched jaw as he leans down to help Mike up.

“Ha,” Mike huffs dryly. “There’s a hooker joke in there somewhere but I’m too tired to find it.” He thinks Harvey’ll be amused but instead the guy stiffens, tightening his hold on Mike’s waist.

“Don’t talk like that.”

“Why not? It’s pertinent. Also, did you call that guys car bougie? Are you allowed to call anything bougie? You spend more on your fountain pens than I do on food in a month.”

Harvey rolls his eyes. “We need to get you to a doctor.”

“No!” Mike shouts, he can feel the way the whites of his eyes are too visible and another wave of pain rakes down the ball and socket of his shoulder. “No, I can’t - Don’t - please,” he gasps, weak kneed from panic. “Please.”

Harvey gives him a stern look, searching, and Mike holds his breath, steeling himself for the inevitable brush off, or worse. The arm around his waist drags him into the giant slate office building.

The guards give him a weird look but Harvey flashes a badge and they wave them on, though not before Mike gives them a grin, made more obnoxious than intended by relief.

“Cool it,” Harvey mutters as they board the elevator. “You just dodged a bullet, and we both know that’s not your strong suit.”

“Too soon, man. And besides, I told you. I’m fine.”

The ice of blood loss and steel and florescent lights overwhelms him and he shivers. Harvey absently smoothes a hand at his lower back, relaxing him like a hot bath. Like coming home.

Mike’s distracted when the doors slide open, and he wonders if maybe he lied inadvertently, cracked the shit out of his head without noticing. Or maybe he died - went to heaven. And that’s how he knows it's real. No way he's ending up in the Good Place.

An honest-to-god law office. Everything is glass and wood and artfully tailored suits, and Mike would’ve stood and gawked until everyone went home except Harvey grabs him by the arm and maneuvers him down the hall to the glass office with his name on it.

“Whoa there.” The woman behind the desk gives him a once over and immediately begins rattling around in a drawer, emerging with a first aid kit. She goes to step out from behind the desk then pauses, watching Harvey, who’s staring at Mike, before changing tack and handing the tin over to him smoothly, as if that had been her intention all along.
“You must be Mike.” Both men startle, glance at each other and back to her in the space of a breath. She looks like she's laughing at them, but at least she's being silent about it. “I'm Donna.”

Mike attempts a smile. “How'd you know it was me?”

Her eyes flick to Harvey. “I'm good like that,” she says, and Mike can tell there's a whole conversation he just missed.

“Can I take this mess into my office now please?” Harvey asks tersely, and Donna steps back behind the desk murmuring far too sweetly to be sincere, “You're the boss. Why're you asking me?”

He sighs dramatically. “Let's go, Mike.”

“Nice me meet you in person!” he calls as Harvey shoves him through the door.


Mike huffs and flops down while Harvey pours them both a few fingers of scotch and settles next to him. As he sanitizes his hands he says, “Would it kill you to be more careful?”

“Good to see you too, Harvey.” His tone is sarcastic, but it really is, attitude and all. “How've you been? How did things work out with Dr. Martell? And Senator Birch?”

Harvey shoots him a look, a satisfying combination of exasperated and pleased. “They’re both clients of the firm as of two weeks ago.”

“Great,” Mike grins. “And Jessica?”

“Jessica’s...Jessica,” he says slowly. Mike follows Harvey’s gaze out through the glass wall and he sees Donna pretending like she wasn’t just staring in. Harvey rolls his eyes and adds, “You good?”

“Oh, yeah, barely hurts.” It's not true. His leg is burning so bad it's making him lightheaded.

“Don't lie, it's unbecoming. And I was asking more...generally.” He looks vaguely uncomfortable and Mike grins at him.

“Are you asking how I've been?”

Harvey shrugs. “Sure. Hold still. This's gonna hurt like hell.”

Mike drains his scotch and hisses at the chill as Harvey starts wiping blood off his leg. At first it's just the runoff, drips that have coagulated into his leg hair and tug uncomfortably as Harvey cleans, and Mike takes the time to say, “Been ok. My Gram’s doing better in this new place, hitting on the nurses like it’s her job.” Harvey snorts and pretends he didn’t. “Other than that, just work. Motherfucker!” The antiseptic stings against torn skin so badly he doesn’t notice Harvey clenching up, jaw, thighs, forehead.

“Anyone I know?”

“Huh?”

“...Work,” Harvey mutters, and for all the tension in his body Mike can tell he’s trying to be gentle with the wound.

“Oh.” He’s talking about escorting. The ‘Why do you care?’ has barely flitted across his mind.
when he lets it go. Harvey’s just making small talk.

“No. I haven’t…um.”

“Haven’t what?”

“I’ve just been delivering lately. And working at the market.”


“Work. Though who knows how that’ll go with my bike totaled.” He drops his face into his hands, trying not to tear up from sheer, overwhelmed exhaustion. “Fuck. This is really - goddamn it. What am I gonna do?”

“Mike, what are you talking about?”

He sinks his teeth into the fabric at the neck of his hoodie in retaliation to the pain, but manages, “I used to escort full time, but some shit went…wrong a while ago and I stepped out for a bit. But I’m the only one around to pay for Gram’s care, so I took on odd jobs until she had to switch facilities, and the cost was - is - astronomical. I escort when I need to. But that bike is my livelihood…”

He flops back, grinding the heels of his palms into his eye sockets. It’s embarrassing how worked up he’s getting about the damn bicycle, but Mike’s not surprised. That beauty’s been with him through a lot.

“Why didn’t you say anything?” Harvey mutters, eyes laser focused on the patch of torn skin he’s cleaning, but Mike wonders if there’s not a little hurt layered under the irritation.

He shrugs. “About the other jobs? I dunno. You didn’t ask.”

“I also didn’t ask you to look at my caseload, but you did that.”

“One file!”

“Is one too many.”

Mike leans forward. “Did you win?”

Harvey meets his eyes slowly, neutral only for a breath before a smile sweeps his face, cocky and beautiful. “You bet your ass we did.”

“Awesome,” Mike whispers.

“Wash this again when you get home, if you’re going to be an idiot and refuse medical attention.”

He won’t - can’t - but he’ll figure something out, so he says “Yeah.”

Harvey clearly isn’t buying it. “What?

“What? I’m agreeing with you.”

“Then what’s wrong?”

“Nothing!”

“Don’t lie to me,” Harvey growls Mike finds he doesn’t really want to.
“I don’t...exactly...have water right now…” Embarrassed, Mike glances down to the injury, which looks slightly less messy than before. “I can help with this, you know.”

“Yeah, yeah, roll up your pants so I can get to that hip.”

“Take me to dinner first,” Mike teases.

“I’ll make you dinner,” Harvey replies mildly. “At my apartment. But I need you to stop bleeding long enough not to ruin the upholstery in Ray’s car.”

“What? No, Harvey, you don’t have to do that for me. I was kidding.”

“I wasn’t.”

--

“Take a shower. Pour this over your leg. All of it.” Harvey hands him a bottle of hydrogen peroxide and a towel. “I’ll leave some clothes on the bed for you.

Mike nods, wincing at the soreness in his neck. “Thank you.”

Harvey mutters, “You need to be more careful. Next time I’ll let you bleed out on the damn sidewalk.”

“No you won’t.” Mike means to tease but it comes out as soft realization. Harvey was worried about him. By the time he shakes free from wondering what the hell that means, Harvey’s disappeared, leaving him alone in the bathroom.

Which, as it turns out, is not the best plan.

The second that door snicks shut, adrenaline smokes his ass. He’s shivery and buzzing like he took too much Adderall, and his whole body fucking hurts. He wants to sleep for a month. He wants to cry. He wants to suck Harvey off on that beautiful goddamn balcony. He wants to stay.

“Focus,” Mike breathes, and climbs into the shower, turning it on as he goes. The water’s too cold, but it wakes him up, keeps him alert for when he dumps the peroxide down his hip and onto his leg. Biting back a sob becomes the problem of the moment, and making sure he doesn’t leave any blood in Harvey’s bathtub.

It feels like a century, but it’s probably only minutes later that he’s pulling on a sweatshirt and slightly-too-large boxers, and padding out into Harvey’s living room where the older man is slumped on the couch, frowning at the portfolio in his lap. “Whoa, dude, you look like shit.”

Harvey barks a laugh. “Aren’t you a charmer.”

“You know I am,” Mike winks. “You wanna talk me through whatever you’re working on? See if it helps?”

“It’s privileged information.”

Right. Shifting perspective back. Harvey likes him enough to fuck him, take him home. Just doesn’t trust him.

“Mike -”

“Can’t I sign a non-disclosure or something?”
“That’s not how -”

“I know, I know.” Bitterly, he adds, “I get it. I was being stupid.”

“Quit interrupting me.” His voice is ice, and Mike freezes with it, but instead of reaming him, or kicking him out, Harvey sighs, waving him over, and says, “Let me look at you.”

Mike limps over to stand between Harvey’s legs, who pulls the boxers away from his skin carefully to check the wound. He hisses in sympathy then nods, satisfied, Mike supposes, at its cleanliness.

“Thanks for taking care of that guy, by the way. What’re you gonna do with the grand?”

“It should be in your account by tomorrow.”

“Wait, what?”

“It’s yours, Mike.” He looks kind of horrified that Mike would’ve thought otherwise. “Oof!”

Mike knocks the wind out of them both as he falls into Harvey’s lap, smacking them together in a grateful embrace. Harvey laughs, deep in his chest and Mike joins in as large hands sweep up his back, over his shoulders to cup Mike’s face.

Their laughter dies in the stillness of Harvey’s living room, Harvey in his (bloodsoaked, Mike realizes) suit, and Mike torn to bits in his lap. Gentle thumbs sweeping the line of Mike’s jaw aren’t enough to distract him from how beautiful Harvey looks like this. How open.

Harvey reads people for a living. Mike should’ve known to keep his affection to himself. The older man’s face shutters, and with haste that hurts in all kinds of ways, he stands, displacing Mike off his legs, and stalks to the kitchen.

“I’m hoping for a unilateral contract error.” There’s no inflection. Mike doesn’t know whether that means Harvey assumes he doesn’t know the term, or is sure that he does, but it’s enough to distract him.

“Hoping for?” That doesn’t make any sense. Even less logical is the way Harvey’s digging through his refrigerator and reemerging with random food stuffs.

“Our client signed with a business partner for co-ownership of the company, and now the new guy is trying to cut and run. I’m sure the partner is a shady piece of shit, but the contract isn’t illegal, as such.”

“And you want a rescission, but you’d have to prove unilateral error in order to get it.”

Harvey wheels around from where he’s fiddling with the stove, questions lodged in the furrow between his brows. “Exactly. How -”

Mike shrugs. “I told you. I like to read. Will you tell me about it?”

“Under one condition.”

“What?”

“You eat some goddamn food,” he grumps, turning back to the counter. Good. He can’t see Mike melting.

“Alright, old man. But I’m gonna be so disappointed if the best closer in New York turns out to be
“Alright, old man. But I’m gonna be so disappointed if the best closer in New York turns out to be a shitty cook.”

“Are you done with those pages already?”

Mike doesn’t look up. “Mm. One to go. There’ve been a few typos, but none that deal with the subject matter, so the best you’d get is a revision of the contract with that.”

“No, we want out,” Harvey grumbles through a mouthful of stirfry.

“Which is why,” Mike says pointedly, “I’m still looking,” and takes another sip of whiskey.

“You really shouldn’t be drinking.”

“Ok, Mom.” He tosses a bit of egg in his mouth and finishes the last page just in time to see Harvey roll his eyes. “Jesus. Tell me you guys didn’t write this.”

“We didn’t write that contract. But we are now legally responsible for it, so.”

Mike rubs his face and hisses at the shift of his shoulder muscles. It’s been a long day, but his brain is wide awake. They’ve been at it for hours - Harvey explaining how this VP of a manufacturing company recently bought in as co-owner, then tried to get out almost immediately with half the company. It’s a shady business move, but Harvey’s right. Poorly written or not, the contract is legal. Mike knows all two hundred and twelve pages of it.

Harvey has taken Mike’s ability to power through legal content like a wood chipper very much in stride, and it’s relieving in a way Mike hadn’t anticipated. People love a stripper with a heart of gold, but hooker with a genius IQ seems less palatable for some reason.

“Ok. What’s next?”

Something hard and angular hits his elbows where they’re resting on the counter but when he drops his hands, Harvey is no longer sitting next to him. “Wh - ohhh god…”

Strong thumbs burrow into the muscles of his neck, and it’s all Mike can do not to drool as Harvey speaks. “We go through assets, business portfolio, family history, the guy’s got almost a billion wrapped up in investments...lots of room for dirt to accumulate.”

“A billion…? And he still…I do not understand rich people. No offense.”

“I’m sorry, it’s hard to hear you over the sound of all the dough I’m raking in.”

Mike huffs a laugh that turns into a groan. “What’s on the laptop?”

Reaching around him, Harvey presses play, then resumes the attack he’s launching on Mike’s trapezius muscles. “Footage of Lund. Press conferences, speeches, that kind of thing.”

Harvey manages to turn him from statue to human again while Mike watches irritatingly banal footage of some sporty, middle aged dude schmoozing reporters and lying his ass off to investors. The hypnotic bite of fingers into his flesh is the only thing keeping him from making constant sarcastic quips, but as the guy walks down the steps of the courthouse, he can’t keep it to himself. “God, this fucking guy with his posturing.”

“You’re one to talk.”
“Not like that! Some ancient jock pretending he’s spry while he’s hobbling around with rheumatoid arthritis.”

“Arthritis?”

“Sure. See his hands gripping the podium? His knuckles are huge. And here - those steps are like four inches tall and he still has to mince down each one. Hey, why’d you stop?”

“How long do you think he’s had it?” Harvey comes back around to the island, flipping the contract open again.

“Advanced enough to hit larger joints like hips and knees? At least a couple years. What -?”

“Anticipatory repudiation,” Harvey says quickly, and Mike starts to get it.

“You think he knew he wouldn’t be able to fulfill some required responsibilities when he signed the contract.” He watches Harvey flip through the contract maniacally, smiling that crinkle-eyed smile that’s going to be the death of Mike someday, and since he’s a goner anyway, he adds, “Page one oh five.” He could recite the text back, but maybe it’s better to let Harvey do the reading himself. Mike can watch that way, while this world is still his, while he’s still useful.

“There’s no way he would have been able to -” Harvey breathes, looking up.

Mike nods. “If he knew…”

“You’re a fucking genius!” Harvey tosses the folder down gleefully, and leans in like maybe he’s going to kiss him, and Mike wants it so bad he can’t breathe but isn’t the least bit surprised to watch the shift on Harvey’s face when he remembers again - Mike is nobody. The smile Harvey gives instead hurts worse than the ribs Mike’s pretty sure are cracked.

“I gotta call Jessica. Good work, Rookie.”

“Thanks,” he gasps.

Harvey pauses. “You ok?”

“Go call your badass boss.” He’s learning not to lie, and become a master of half-truths instead.

When Harvey disappears onto the balcony, Mike drags his ass to the bathroom to retrieve his clothing. It’s late, Harvey’s already almost kissed him twice (god knows if either of them could bear a third), and the genius comment has been dropped, a sure-fire gateway to a conversation he’s absolutely not ready to have.

He’s in such a hurry to get dressed that he doesn’t hear Harvey lean in the doorway.

“Where are you heading off to?”

Mike whirls around. “Uh...I should be getting home.”

Harvey watches silently as Mike struggles into his pants until he goes to remove the hoodie.

“Keep it.”

“Thanks,” Mike whispers to his own hands.

“Why’d you drop out of school?”

“Who says I dropped out?”
“You’d be a lawyer by now if you hadn’t. Or a doctor, or whatever else you put your mind to.”

“Genius IQ isn’t as useful as you’d think.”

“No, but combined with passion and interest and empathy it’s pretty damn unstoppable, so do I need to ask you again?”

“I didn’t quit.”

“What did I say about lying -”

“I got kicked out.”

“Of?”

“Harvard.”

“Harvard Law.”

“No, the other one. Yes, Harvard Law. You don’t have to look so surprised.”

“Not surprised you got in, surprised they let you go.”

“Ha. Well,” Mike attempts to close off the conversation, limping back into the living room.

“That’s life.”

“What happened?”

“Harvey -”

“Mike.”

Fingers trembling, he perches on the couch to tie his shoes. “My friend Trev owed some money, we needed cash fast. He convinced me to memorize some tests, sell ’em.”

“And you got caught.”

“One of our clients was the Dean’s daughter.”

“Ouch.”

“Yeah.”

“But you could have -”

“You know what?” He hops off the couch, immediately regretting the rough movement, but he’s already heading to the door. “It’s been real, but I gotta bounce.”

“You should stay.”

He should leave. He doesn’t belong here. The further he lets this go the worse it’s going to hurt when it falls apart.

“I have work in the morning.” He shoulders his bag. Makes it to the door.

Harvey doesn’t quite manage to dampen the smugness in his voice as he says, “And how are you getting there?”
His bike.

“Fuck,” he gasps, and sinks to the floor, face in hands, wrung dry.

A warm body crouches behind him, and frankly, he’s bracing to get hauled up by the scruff. Instead though, warm hands come to settle on Mike’s shoulders, firm and unhurried.

“We’ll figure it out in the morning.”

Mike wants so badly to believe it that he takes his shoes off again.

--

He wakes in excruciating pain. The leg isn’t even the worst of it. The real culprit is his jostled muscles which have instigated a lockdown.

“Fuck the bike,” he grumbles. “I can’t fucking move.”

It takes a solid sixty seconds, but he manages to roll onto his back with a pitiful groan. Harvey’s lying next to him, watching with sleep-soft eyes.

“You gonna make it, kid?”

Throwing an arm over his face to put space between him how badly he wants to kiss Harvey, Mike considers. “I think I’m gonna quit my delivery job. Find something else. It’ll be cheaper than buying a new bike, and I’ve got the market to fall back on. It’s gonna be a bit before I’m back to a hundred percent.”

Harvey nods slowly. “Makes sense.”

“What?”

“What do you mean what?”

“Oh come on, Harvey. Say, like, one of the dozen things that almost came out of your mouth just now.”

Harvey’s mouth tucks in at the corners, trying not to laugh. “I’m hungry.”

“I can’t help you.”

“And horny.”

“It’ll cost ya,” he says lightly, ignoring his own thundering heart and aching morning wood.

“Good transition, now that you mention it. What are you doing tomorrow night?”

“Nothing.”

Hope swells so abruptly Mike mistakes it for a muscle spasm, only to identify it as it withers.

“I’d like to hire you for this company dinner, for the firm.”

“Oh,” Mike says, rolling over and up so his feet can dangle off the bed, back to Harvey. “Yeah. That should be fine. You can have - ah! - Donna email me the updated contract and I’ll bring it to the event.”
There’s a long pause before he gets a response. “Great.” Harvey sounds so subdued, exhausted. Mike supposes it is the asscrack of dawn, after all.

--

“I’d like to fuck your car.”

“I knew you had good taste. Get in.”

Slate gray Aston Martin One-77. Absolutely no complaints.

“Is this yours?”

“For the night.”

“You have too much money.”

“Impossible.”

Mike chuckles. “So what’s the game this evening?”

“Tonight, we are charming the pants off of every partner in the building.”

“Are you about to fuck them over?”

“What? No. Not them, but Jessica and I are going to try to convince them to fuck over Hardman - of Pearson Hardman - who happens to be conveniently out of town this evening.”

“Fuck him over? How?”

“We’re going to vote him out.”

“Damn. Why?”

“He’s been embezzling money from the firm, for his mistress. The relationship fell through, but he cost us...well. Too much.”

“Christ. Why don’t you report him?”

“I can’t actually prove it was him.”

“Then how do you know it was?”

“Oh, he copped to it - privately, of course. We knew there was money missing, more than one partner found discrepancies in our books from spans of time when he was overseeing most of our funds. But there’s nothing hard and fast. You and I both know how fickle the law can be. I don’t want to give him a chance to weasel anything else out of us.”

“Fair.”

“I never said this, by the way.”

“What are you talking about?”

“Good boy.”

Mike shivers. “Well. When it all goes sideways, you can call me and freak out. I’ll come pet you.”
Harvey looks at him sideways. “Thought that was my job.”

Mike shrugs. “Eh. I’m an equal opportunity cuddler.”

Harvey snorts. “Alright Casanova.” A bluesy bass walks down the speaker system for a whole eight beats before he adds, “You look good.”

Blushing and pretending he isn’t is not one of Mike’s specialties. “Thanks.”

It’s hard not to wonder how his life would’ve been if they’d met under different circumstances. Could they have been friends? Fallen in love? That thought gets put down. Not worth the ache.

There’s never been anyone like him in Mike’s life before. No one who cares in the way Harvey seems to, no one who’s ever been close to his level of intelligence. Even with a decade of pot smoking under his belt, Mike’s brain runs circles around everyone else’s and it's exhausting to pretend otherwise, though he’s pretty good at it by now.

Mike had forgotten how it felt to really utilize the entirety of his intellect, and he's worried he's becoming addicted to it.

When they drop the car with the valet Mike notes (internally, of course) that the building seems underwhelming. As the poster child for not judging a book by it’s cover, he really should know better. The cool air blows in behind them, and Harvey shoves his hands in his pockets, smiling small and private.

“Harvey,” Mike murmurs, awed. “Look at this fuckin’ place.”

The venue is an art gallery, privately owned and startlingly beautiful - whitewashed brick walls strung with golden lights, and the artwork is exquisite. It’s filled to the brim with people taking themselves too seriously but Mike can’t be bothered to care.

The night goes perfectly. They’re both on their game, a heightened state of existence other than the ache in Mike’s leg, flirting and arguing between conversations - Harvey showing off his boy and Mike making his date look good. He even manages to surprise Jessica with some well-played points about stock options backdating and Harvey glows at him. Other than a tingling in the back of his neck once or twice, over active hooker senses, Mike forgets who he is, if only for a night.

Harvey takes him home and fucks him against the sliding glass door of the balcony, hands pinned over his head. It’s just a touch too rough, and Mike begs so loudly for a mark that Harvey eventually sinks his teeth into the meat of Mike’s shoulder, branding him.

It doesn't settle in until Mike gets home, how much he wants this life with Harvey, how far into that world he's let himself fall. It's a fickle promise, a bad bet, odds that say he’s sure to lose.

He deletes Harvey’s number from his phone, like that’ll help him forget, and falls asleep wondering what kinds of drugs it's gonna take to delete the memory of Harvey's hands from his skin.

--

The grand Harvey negotiated for him goes straight to Gram’s care, minus a hundred for weed, and Mike spends one day, just one, mourning his bike and his job and his childhood, and wondering what kind of criminals, if any, get past the pearly gates. Maybe he could make a deal. He giggles to himself. Cheat on a test for Saint Peter or something.

It’s just that he’d like to see his mom again, just once. Even if he doesn’t deserve it.
That whole afternoon he lies in bed a watching movies he stole from his dad’s collection, smoking bowl after bowl and wriggling at the ache in his ass and shoulder - a hollow reminder of feeling full and wanted.

After a day of trying drown all the extra floating around in that too-busy brain, Mike gives into the insatiable curiosity simmering ceaselessly beneath his skin. It’s too persistent to ignore, so he doesn’t try. Not this time.

He takes the bus to the library and checks out everything he can carry. Law and medicine, sci fi and global economics, cooking, art history, and a few classics. In the space of two weeks he consumes sixteen books, and his brain buzzes so brightly with information that the desire to be separate from himself dissipates. He reads at work and in bed. He reads on the subway and at his kitchen counter eating egg noodles. To make rent he does a drug drop, and reads while he’s waiting on the count. After one of his clients falls asleep, he creeps into the bathroom at the hotel to finish a cliffhanger. It feels like the bursting of a bubble - relief from unnoticed tension.

He keeps himself absolutely occupied in a way he thinks Harvey might be proud of. Not that it matters. Not that he’ll ever see the man again.

--

It’s not like he actually thought it would last.

“It’s just a flu,” the nurse keeps saying, but they still recommended specialized care, and Mike makes sure Gram is transferred to the nearest hospital within the business day. He’ll worry about the money later.

She’s loopy on meds, barely coherent when she’s awake, and never awake for long. Mike takes the opportunity to get baked before he goes to visit (there's no way he could be there sober) so he floats pleasantly as he reads to her - Walt Whitman and Jules Verne. He does all the voices. Her fever hasn’t broken.

It’s going on day three of running to work, sleeping on the subway back, eating something from the vending machine, then waiting for anything to change. He’s been asleep in the chair next to her bed long enough to have developed a genuinely movement-restricting kink in his neck when he hears -

“I’m her goddamn lawyer!”

“I’m sorry, sir. You’ll have to come back later.”

“No, I won’t, because I’m legally entitled to visitation.”

“The doctor hasn’t left any -”

“You know what? The doctor can -”

“Miranda? Everything alright?” Mike asks gently, glaring at Harvey, who must be fucking wiped because he doesn’t quite manage to conceal his surprise.

“Of course, Mike, it’s just that this gentleman doesn’t understand visitation rights,” the nurse says tightly, and Mike nods at her with what he hopes reads as a pleasant smile and not a manic leer. He’s so tired it’s honestly 50/50 at this point.

“You know what, Miranda? I actually studied law for a bit, so I can tell you - if Mr. Specter’s her
“lawyer, he has the right to see her.”

“Mr. Specter? You know him?”

“Yeah,” Mike drawls, glancing between the two of them, thinking fast. “He’s a … friend. I know he comes off rough, but he’s trying to help, I promise.”

Miranda frowns at him. “He’s suing one of our doctors.”

“I’m sorry to hear that, but Har - Mr. Specter’s the best in the business. If you really think this doctor of yours is innocent, he’ll prove it. But he’s going to need access to his client first. Ok?”

She hesitates.

Mike suppresses a grin. They’ve got her. “All you have to do is give him the room number.”

Information tucked in his pocket, Harvey ends up following Mike past the nurses station on the way to his client’s room. They draw even, shoulder to shoulder, and Mike’s about to ask how he’s been, sass him with ‘who’s the closer now?’ when Harvey looks down disdainfully and says, “Are you high?”

Mike blinks in surprise. Not ‘thank you’ or ‘why are you here?’ Immediate disapproval, and not that Mike’s not used to it, but it stings from Harvey, this douche in a suit who keeps accidentally saving his life.

“Wow,” he counters with faux amicability, so grateful they’ve come to the fork in the hallway. “Fuck you.

He doesn’t look back.

--

Ten Thousand Leagues later the doctor knocks for the last check-in before her shift ends. Without looking up from his book he presents Gram’s vitals. “Heart rate and temp plateaued. Blood pressure is still low, but the diastolic number increased a little - I have no idea what that means for her heart, incidentally, but hey, one of us had to go to medical school, and it sure as shit wasn’t me.”

“Only for lack of trying.”

Mike whirls around. “I thought you were the doctor.”

“Clearly.” Harvey pulls a chair from the wall and drags it ‘til it’s even with Mike’s, handing off a blue folder as he goes.

“The fuck is this?”

“The patient you helped me see.”

“This is privileged information.” The mocking lilt dies on Mike’s tongue as he truly looks at Harvey. There are dark circles under his eyes. His suit is impeccably pressed, but the knot of his tie is a resting a little to the left over this lavender shirt. “When was the last time you slept?”

“I could ask you the same thing.”

“Twenty minutes ago.”
“In a bed.”

“Two nights ago.”

“Your own bed?” Damn, he’s sharp. And irritated, from the looks of it.

“That’d be four then. Sir.”

“Don’t be patronizing. You’re not on the clock.”

“And you still haven’t answered my question.”

Harvey groans and leans back in the chair to rub his eyes. “Tell you what, you give me a lead I haven’t thought of, I’ll tell you how long it’s been to the hour.”

Mike worries his lip for a second, then snaps the file open, resting it at the foot of the bed.

Anesa Oliver, daughter of Gale Oliver. She’s sick, and all her father’s money can’t make her well again. She was admitted with chest pains and shortness of breath, but things have only gone downhill from there. The new symptoms are varied and erratic: low grade fever, nose bleeds, tingling and numbness in hands and feet. It’s been three weeks and they have no idea what’s wrong with her.

He flips through the test results. Bloodwork is mostly normal, though her oxygen is low. She’s sleeping, eating (though not much), but she missed her period and she’s not pregnant.

The father wants to sue for misdiagnosis, but there’s no evidence to support any claim - the doctors have tried just about everything. The poor kid’s been through a fucking battery of tests and drugs, and she’s only sixteen.

They spread the documentation at the foot of Gram’s bed and across the bedside table, charts and files and medical histories. Harvey sifts through the doctor’s orders and how they align with recommended treatments while Mike rereads everything, letting his mind really wander. By the time Harvey finishes cross checking the treatment options, they’re both exhausted.

When Mike looks up from a hundredth read-through, Harvey’s asleep, face resting on his arm slung across the the mattress alongside Gram’s hip. If Mike weren’t still coming down he’d have cried at the sight, but as it is, he leans forwards and brushes a lock of hair away from Harvey’s temple. Warm brown eyes open slowly, sluggish, and he smiles, sleepy-sweet before the lawyer slides back into control and Harvey, Mike’s Harvey, has to take a back seat.

“Well? What’d you find?”

Mike’s still unsticking himself from the shards of his broken heart so it takes a second for him to grunt, “Why do you think it’s the doctor?”

“I don’t particularly.”

“Huh?”

“I don’t. My client does.”

“Why’d you take the case,” Mike asks roughly. “If you don’t fucking believe in it?”

“Because a kid is fucking sick!”

“...And you want to help,” he finishes, realizing.
“Her father’s a major benefactor to the firm.”

“Yeah, uh-huh, ok.” He could very well be, but if Harvey didn’t want the case he’d have pawned it off on someone else immediately, Mike’s sure of it. So he took this on purpose, didn’t trust anyone else to watch over this girl. He’s taking it seriously, and it’s not going well. Hence, the dark circles. “Ok. Let’s think about this logically.”

“Ha. I came to the wrong room then.”

“No you didn’t,” Mike retorts fondly. “And we both know it.”

“I don’t know what else it could be. They’ve tested and treated for every damn thing.”

“I know,” Mike sighs. “This is like a fucking episode of House.”

“Great show,” Harvey grumbles to no one in particular.

“Somewhere out there, there is a tree tirelessly producing oxygen so you can breathe.”

Harvey finishes, “I think you owe it an apology,” and they both crack up, though it’s quiet and tired.

“I think your argument is specious.”

“I think your tie is ugly.”

“Hey,” Mike protests. “I don’t even wear ties.”

“Do too. Those horrible, skinny things.” From quoting House straight back to insulting Mike. He’s not really upset about it.

“Oh shut up. You think I’m adorable.”

Harvey rolls his eyes. “Unless you’ve got some new ideas for me, all I’m inclined to think you are is distracting.”

Mike flips him the bird, but settles back to think. “She doesn’t have any allergies… Could the cause be environmental?”

“Something in the room, you think?”

“Maybe. You’re sure the Good Doctor is really legit?”

“His record’s is clean, and he wasn’t lying in the deposition.”

“I wonder… You know what? Hang on a sec.”

The whole task takes less than five minutes before he’s skidding back into the room looking, he’s sure, entirely too pleased with himself.

“What are those?”

“Files.”

Harvey’s brows shoot skyward. “No shit, Sherlock -”
Mike cackles. “On the last five patients in Anesa’s room.”

“That’s not even remotely legal.”

“Convincing flirtation is a powerful weapon. You of all people should know that.”

“Hey. I’m not that kind of girl,” Harvey sniffs, but the corners of his mouth twitch in a way that suggests he’s flattered by the observation and is also absolutely that kind of girl. Snatching the folders from Mike’s hands and opening them up on the table he adds, “Good work, Rookie.” Mike flushes all the way to his sternum. “Three of the last tenants shared symptoms with Anesa, but they’ve all been discharged with a clean bill of health.”

“Not clean,” Mike observes over Harvey’s shoulder. “Just sent home with medication.”

“If they hadn’t improved, they would’ve been back. None have been readmitted.”

“They’re away from whatever the environmental factor was.”

“Ok, say it is environmental. What could it be?”

“Mold? Water? Gas?”

He hasn’t finished but Harvey’s already dialing. “Donna. I know you’re asleep, but this is important.”

--

“Oh, hey Trouble.”

“Why am I Trouble?” Mike protests. “And why do you look like heaven at four in the morning?”

“Oh honey. I’m Donna.”

“I know. We’ve met.”

“It’s a title.”

“You’ve earned it,” he says in wide-eyed awe.

“Damn right.”

“Quit drooling and get to work, Puppy,” Harvey snips, handing off a cup of coffee.

“Trouble? Puppy? Jeez, thanks for the love, guys.”

“I brought you coffee,” Harvey points out.

“And I brought you a laptop.”

“Wh - huh?”

“Online research is much faster. And we’ve got a kid to save.”

Mike and Harvey remain in the chairs next to Gram’s bed, and Donna perches on the dresser along the wall. At one point Mike throws his feet up onto the mattress and Harvey toys absently with the cuff of his jeans, fingers dancing along the slender bone of Mike’s ankle. Donna pointedly ignores them, though Mike catches her rolling her eyes. He very deliberately doesn’t
move so as not to draw attention to it.

The water company is clean so they abandon that line of investigation; Donna digs around for inspection records, while Harvey and Mike deal with construction materials and potential gas leaks.

“The gas provider has no history of malfeasance. Maybe the piping…” Harvey mumbles to himself.

“Can we get someone in to test for a gas leak?”

Harvey shakes his head. “Not without a warrant.”

“Let’s find the evidence then.”

The gratified look on Harvey’s face settles Mike’s brain in a way it hasn’t been in weeks, focusing his next wave of research.

It's a good lead. Frowning at his results, Mike asks. “Donna, when was the piping installed?”

“That wing was refurbished ten years ago. They went in to keep the wiring up to code, decided to update everything while they had the walls open. Gas, electric, water, the whole nine.”

“Then why doesn't the piping manufacturer have business records before six years ago?”

“They could’ve sold, changed their name…”

“Is there a way to find that out?”

Harvey shakes his head and rubs his eyes. “Not legally. The records would be private.”

“Do you know how to access them?”

“I just said, not legally. Does smoking pot affect your hearing?”

“Does being a dick affect yours? I’m not high, and that’s not what I asked.” He opens a new browser window. “We can’t have the case thrown out because the prosecution acquired information illegally.”

“No,” Harvey echoes slowly. “No we can’t.”

“Great. Then how do I do this?” Harvey quirks a brow. “What? You're the one who loves to point out how not a lawyer I am.”

“You are something else,” Donna says approvingly, and Mike flashes his teeth at Harvey.

“See, some people appreciate my awesomeness.”

She grins. “Who do you think told me in the first place?”

“Donna,” Harvey warns.

She ignores him. Mike suspects she's one of the only people in the world allowed to do that.

“Alright. Let’s access some restricted information.”

The three of them fall back into relative silence as Donna points Mike through the process of
hacking into some business bureau nonsense. They’re in, but barely, when her alarm goes off at six and she excuses herself to the office to cover for Harvey in his absence.

“Anything yet?” Harvey grunts into his laptop right around six thirty.

“Not...quite…”

“Well get on it.”

“What the hell are you doing, then, huh?” Mike snips, exhausted and irritable and -

“I have three other cases on my plate right now, Mike.”

“Oh, right. Oh! Hey! Ohhh. Heeey. Wow. Look at this.”

“Rookie, we’re gonna have to work on that delivery.” Harvey’s laughing at him, but Mike figures they’ve both earned it.

“The company did change their name. They had to. They’ve got half a dozen lawsuits pending from twenty years of work - faulty seals, substandard materials… There could easily be a gas leak in that room, and you wanna know the best part?”

“Nah, I just came over so we could braid each other's hair.”

“Well fuck you too, princess,” he grins, then goes for the money shot. “They used to be publicly traded company. The lawsuits won't be privileged - we can use them in formal negotiations. We got ‘em.”

“Amazing work, Mike,” Harvey says, squeezing the back of Mike’s neck. It’s grounding, an embrace he relaxes into, however briefly.

The sunrise has come and gone, bright rays shining through the curtains as Harvey collects his things and Mike watches, subdued. Another goodbye. He's thinking about how maybe he could duck out and smoke up before work when Harvey pauses at the door - doesn’t turn back but says, heavy in the stillness, “Loved my dad more than life. He died of a drug overdose. I...overreact. About that. Sometimes.”

“Makes sense,” Mike whispers into the dust motes.

“I hope your Gram is ok.”

“I think she will be. Inherited my stubbornness from her.”

“Christ. Then she’ll be coming around any minute now.”

“Yeah,” Mike smiles tiredly, bracing for the loneliness. “Here’s hoping.”

Harvey nods at the door handle then says, “I’ll swing by later. Let you know how the meeting goes. Maybe bring some food for your skinny ass.”

It startles a laugh out of Mike, gratitude and unadulterated joy, but he has the good sense to says, “Ok. And Harvey?”

“Mm?”

“You’re welcome.”
The lawyer leaves without a word, closing the door securely behind him like punctuation, but Mike’s pretty sure he was smiling.

“Oh, sweet boy, you are in trouble.”

“Gram!” he shouts, frantically checking her vitals. “Your fever’s gone.”

“Course it is. I’ve been up for a while.”

“Why didn’t you say anything?”

She shrugs. “I wasn’t trying to cockblock.”

“God, Grammy,” He throws his hand over his eyes. “You are more important than my sex life.”

“That’s sad, Michael. Let’s just say we’re equal and leave it at that.”

“You are feeling better, aren’t you.”

“That depends on whether or not they have real coffee in this hell hole.”

He smothers the delirious giggle floundering in his throat. “I’ll see what I can do, ma’am.”

“Do. And I've got to ask...”

“Yeah?”

“Are you fucking that pretty lawyer?”

—

“Proposition.”

“Listening.”

“You were invaluable in shifting the direction of this case. You may well have saved Anesa’s life.”

“The Yankees are a superior team. You have incredible eyes. Connery is the best Bond.”

“Are you high?”

“Oh, I’m sorry, I thought we were just stating things that are obvious.”

“Look here, Lippy. I don’t bring pizza to just anybody.”

“Yeah, yeah, I am a god among men. Go on.”

“You think I have nice eyes?”

“I said incredible, and now who’s sidetracked?”

“What can I say? I’m usually the sweetheart in this duo.”

Mike scoffs. “If today’s opposite day.”

“Opposite day - Christ, what are you, twelve?”
“And lucky for you I’ve got daddy issues.”

“Boys, get to the goddamn point. All this sexual tension is wearing me out,” Gram interrupts, exasperated, and both men startle so hard they almost upend the box of pizza.

If Mike didn’t know better, he’d think Harvey was blushing, but he obeys Gram (like he has any choice) and turns back to Mike.

“I’d like to hire you.” Mike’s eyes go wide. Is Harvey literally trying to pick him up in front of his grandmother? Harvey smirks like he knows what Mike is thinking and continues. “You found the evidence. You charmed those files from the nurses. You store information like an irritating computer.”

“Irritating, huh?”

“You should be at the deposition.”

“What? That would be...I mean I…” Awe and excitement and inexplicable terror war within him. “I’d have to check my calendar,” he finishes hurriedly and Grammy chuckles.

“Pussy.”

“Gram!”

Harvey beams at her. “Oh, I like you.”

“You would, you charmer.” She opens her eyes, to wink at him. “Go to the damn meeting, Michael.”

“Yes, ma’am.”

“And eat your food,” Harvey adds. “You’re too damn skinny.”

With an eyeroll Mike replies, “Yes, sir.”

“So. Harvey,” Gram starts, suspiciously sweet. “Tell me what it’s like to be a ball busting lawyer.”

Mike grins into his pizza.

She’s been asleep for over an hour when Harvey finally gets up to leave. On his way out he stops at the door. “I’ll draw up a new contract for the deposition.”

“I still can’t believe you’re serious. And you don’t have to do that. The current contract is fine.” Mike adds, eyes still on Gram, on her chest rising and falling all in its own.

“Mike.” Harvey sounds disappointed. “You should always -”

“I know, I know. But I trust you.”

“You shouldn’t trust anyone.”

“And besides,” he glares. “There’s already a whole goddamn clause about making you look good. That’s what you want, right? A pretty prodigy to show off?

“Who said you were pretty?”

“You did. Couple’a times. Granted, you were balls deep in my -”
“Jesus Mike! Your Gram is right there.”

Mike throws back his head and laughs.

“Tuesday,” Harvey says, trying for disapproving and hitting amused instead. “Three thirty. We’ll go over strategy before the meeting.”

——

Harvey wipes the floor with the CEO of the piping company. It’s magic to watch. Hair swept back and eyes flashing, cold and calculated and efficient - Even Mike’s a little nervous, and they’re on the same team.

But they are a team. While Harvey twists the guy in knots with his own words, Mike has an encyclopedia of facts and figures from newspapers and lawsuits to throw fuel on the fire. He catches Harvey blinking in surprise once or twice, though it's doubtful anyone else would've noticed, and by the end of it, they're both stifling grins so as not to appear unprofessional in front of opposing counsel.

Donna looks beyond amused by Mike waving enthusiastically as they walk past and Harvey tosses, “Good show, kid,” over his shoulder.

“That was amazing. Every single thing he said you flipped it back on him. He just dug himself into a guilty conviction on video, that was so fucking cool, I -”

“Mike,” Harvey interrupts, grinning. “Shut up.”

“Sorry,” he pants, retrieving his coat from the arm of the couch in Harvey's office. “And thank you. For letting me sit at the grown up table.”

It's too bad his brain is hostile territory, immediately reminding him that this isn't his to keep, it's a fever dream, a dumb wish on a shooting star that turned out to be a satellite instead.

“You know, technically you're on until seven tonight,” Harvey observes casually, checking something on his laptop.

“Yeah, I noticed that.”

“You have work tonight?”

“No, sir.”

“We could extend your hours.” Easy as you please. “Seven a.m. instead?”

Trying not to appear too eager, Mike shrugs. “That’s acceptable.”
There's a nod to a client getting rough with Mike but it's offscreen, we just see him a little worse for wear afterward.

Also. FEELINGZZZ.

<3

Falling out of the elevator is entirely Harvey's fault; He's got Mike pinned to the door with a hand down his pants so neither of them notice when the door slides open.

Mike stumbles back and rights himself, grinning. Harvey, on the other hand, looks absolutely predatory as he drops his bag and leans against the wall, arms folded.

“Strip.”

Sauntering casually into the room Mike shrugs out of his jacket and drapes it over a bar stool, removing his cuff links next and letting them ping onto the counter. He takes the time to roll up his sleeves so Harvey can watch his wrists move as he unbuttons the dress shirt.

“You were impressive today, sir.”

“Just today?” Cool, but amused.

“No,” Mike replies honestly. “Not just today. But today was amazing.”

The tie slithers from his collar, and Mike tosses it on top if his jacket, followed by the shirt.

Harvey stalks towards him. “You're easily impressed.”

“And you like showing off.”

“What's that about showing off?” Harvey murmurs, gazing down to where Mike's slipping his slacks and boxers sinuously down over his legs.

Mike shrugs. “You saying you mind?”

“No,” he replies quietly, reaching out to graze Mike's hip bone with cool fingertips. “I didn't say that.”

Harvey subverting expectations of smart-ass banter in favor of something dangerously close to reverence disarms Mike's coy striptease in one blow. Off kilter, he uses a hand on Harvey's shoulder to keep balance toeing off his socks, and then he's bare, bathed only in the dusk light from the window-wall.

“You like getting naked for me?” Harvey asks, sneaking those stealthy hands up to rest lightly at the sensitive spot on Mike's sides, right over his widest ribs.
“Obviously,” Mike smirks. He's already a little hard.

“Why?”

It’s an unexpectedly difficult question, not because Mike doesn't know the answer, but because putting it into words feels more vulnerable than standing naked in the kitchen of a glass house. “I - like the way you look at me.”

“How’s that?” Harvey murmurs, closing the already tight space between them, letting his jacket brush Mike's chest, pressing the shivery silk tie against his sternum.

“Like you want me.”

Harvey looks surprised. “That can't be unusual.”

He doesn't understand, and how could he? “No, like you want me, not just a ... body to pretend with.” Mike blushes. It's true, but also definitely unprofessional to mention to a client.

Harvey lets his eyes wander to Mike's mouth, his clavicle, back to his face, and there's no time to interpret the softening of the lines around his eyes because he finally leans in for a kiss.

Mike's a physical person, always has been. It's one of the reasons this job is particularly good for him, despite the negative experiences with a handful of john's who think they own him. Mike loves sex and everything that goes with it - kissing and teasing and the warmth of another body against his own, the weight anchoring him.

He's also, for all his many (brief) relationships, not much of a dating person. He loves the idea of someone, the image they sell to the world, but when it gets down to it no one is ever quite as bright or captivating as he dreams up. Never enough.

Harvey is too much all the time, and Mike craves everything about him.

By some miracle they end up in Harvey’s room without falling or breaking anything, and it’s not until Mike feels the comforter against the backs of his thighs that he even realizes they’ve moved. There’s a lamp shining softly on the bedside table and Mike’s mouth is watering wanting to know what Harvey’s skin will look like gilded with it.

And because Harvey is apparently a mind reader he says, “You want me naked so badly, you undress me.”

Mike makes a small sound, grateful and overwhelmed, and drops to his knees.

He’s playing on borrowed time, he knows. There's deadline he’d pay not to have to honor, but that’s not how this works, and it’s not like he’s got cash to spare. Time either, so he doesn’t waste a second.

He slides Harvey’s shoes off, peels his socks away, and takes a moment to run fingertips over the delicate skin on either side of Harvey’s achilles tendon. It’s silly, an indulgence he hasn’t been given permission to take, but when he looks up those chocolate eyes have been swallowed by black, and Harvey’s got his bottom lip between his teeth like he’s afraid he’ll say something he shouldn’t. It’s a good look, so Mike keeps pushing his luck.

Slacks next, no belt, they’re tailored too perfectly for that, folded neatly and tossed onto a chair, then Mike sits back on his heels to observe.

He’s never seen Harvey work out, or even talk about it, but he must, absolutely, with legs like that
- long and sculpted, probably from running based on the muscle definition, and lightly tanned like
the rest of this goddamn man’s body, though it’s the ass end of winter and everyone’s been
wrapped up like expectant butterflies for longer than they care to remember.

Leaning forward, he runs a hand up the backs of Harvey’s calves, holding steady so he can slide
his mouth over the side of Harvey’s knee, up to his thigh and right below the cuff of his boxer
briefs where he bites, just for a moment. Harvey inhales hard through his nose, but other than that,
doesn’t make a sound. Mike’s not worried. He’s just getting started.

He ignores the underwear for now, instead tugging Harvey’s suit coat off and hanging it in the
closet, taking his time walking away. He knows it’s a good view. When he comes back, Harvey’s
looking incredulous.

“Really? I’ll be eighty by the time you finish.”

“You’ll be eighty, like, next week,” he giggles, and Harvey swats at his ass. “I don’t want to hear
it.”

The laughter fades into the room as Mike loosens Harvey’s tie, watching emotions flicker at the
corner of his mouth, his eyes, as he bares his throat for Mike.

Sliding the silk free, Mike drapes it over his shoulders and continues, unbuttoning the dress shirt
with less patience than before because, hell, it’s hard to be patient when unwrapping a present like
this.

As soon as Harvey’s stomach and chest are bare Mike leans in to lick and nip across his pecs,
down his sides, over his stomach, and it’s not until he’s sinking teeth into Harvey’s hip bone that
he realizes his boss is now so hard it probably hurts. Mike’s only response is to smile against the
skin he’s bruising, then straighten to finally pull the shirt off.

It brings them eye to eye and Harvey’s mouth is open just a little, wet and red, and he’s almost
panting, though not quite, so Mike buries his face into Harvey’s neck as he slides the dress shirt
away, and Harvey’s hands come up to cradle his face, tilt him up, kiss him deeply.

It takes mere seconds before Mike is whimpering, because there’s nothing sexier than a man
who’s losing control because of him, meaning they’re both a bit of a mess. He manages to get
Harvey’s underwear pushed down and wrap a hand around him, causing him to twitch forward
and grunt.

“You are - unreal,” Mike gasps. “How can you possibly look like this?”

Harvey chuckles, but Mike is so serious. The guy is gorgeous, strong and solid and lithe and tan
and he smells like the spicy, smoky stuff that dreams are made of, and Mike may not have
wrestled in years, but he manages to manhandle Harvey down onto the bed.

Mike always wants his mouth on this man, every second of every day, and he's not about to pass
up the opportunity now. It's not until he's got Harvey’s buried so far down his throat Mike's
gagging that Harvey finally fucking speaks.

Sitting up on his elbows he says, “Christ.” He's flushed but comfortable, not crawling out of his
skin with need like Mike. “Look at you. Fucking starving. Would you beg for it? If I asked you
to?”

Pulling off but making no effort to wipe the saliva dripping from his lips Mike says, “It? Nah.
You? In a heartbeat.”
Harvey's breath catches, maybe from the words, maybe from Mike's fingertips teasing the head of his cock.

“You want me, Mike?”

“Kinda obvious, don't you think?”

Harvey grins. “Tell me anyway.

It's not needy, not like he needs the affirmation, more like he’s curious about what makes Mike tick, and Mike's only happy to oblige.

“I want your hands on me, and your mouth. I want you to use me.” Harvey's hips jerk up, seemingly against his will because he slams his ass right back down to the mattress and growls at the ceiling. “Any way you want. Want you to mark me up, take me apart, let everyone know who I belong to -”

It's lucky for both of them that Harvey snaps then, tosses Mike over onto his back, knees hiked over Harvey's broad shoulders, and opens him up relentlessly. You really can't say shit like that to clients.

Wide eyed, Mike rallies for control, but it's getting progressively more difficult because Harvey seems in no rush to fuck him. He's discovered that just the hint of a knuckle rocking into Mike's prostate renders him an immediate mess, and seems to be enjoying the show.

“God,” Mike chokes out, grabbing at Harvey's shoulders. “Fucking -ah!- tease. Fuck!”

“What was that?” he inquires demurely.

With a strangled gasp he says, “I'm gonna - Christ, I can't -”

“Good,” he replies adding a third finger, and Mike arches into the orgasm crashing over him. Harvey watches, eyes fever bright as Mike's body finally loses all tension, slumping back into the bed, and finally pushes in until Mike's knees are on either side of his hips, ass in the older man’s lap.

A soft sighing sound escapes Mike's mouth - Harvey's name.

“Jesus,” he whispers, wrapping gentle fingers at the base of Mike's throat, an anchor and tinder all in one, igniting the beginnings of arousal with that press of flesh to flesh.

“More,” Mike demands. Harvey smiles.

And then he complies. But only barely.

So slowly Mike thinks he can feel it along his spine, Harvey fucks into him. The hand that's not functioning as a collar goes to Mike's cock, occasionally stroking, or squeezing hard at the base if he starts to sound like has having too much fun.

Mike's out of his mind. It can't have been more than a half hour but he's lost coherent speech, his hips are rolling of their own accord, and he's trembling.

He's trying so hard to be good, to let Harvey use him, but he wants to come so bad it hurts, so he gasps again, hoping this time Harvey just might listen, “More, please, please, however you want to, just -” He shudders and Harvey groans.
“You have no idea, do you?” he murmurs. “So fuckin’ gorgeous.” Mike whimpers and Harvey smiles, though it's heated. “You like attention? Someone telling you what a good boy you are?”

“I like you telling me.”

This time, it works. Harvey pulls out and turns him over roughly, tugging Mike up to all fours before thrusting back into him. Warm and strong, he arches his body over Mike’s, twining their fingers to have something to push against, to grip onto as he pounds the kid through the mattress.

Mike’s been strung tight for hours, and maybe Harvey has too, because instead of his usual stoic silence, he’s letting loose a tumble of choked off breaths into the back of Mike’s neck.

This fucking man. He bought his way into Mike’s life, dumped an encyclopedia of smart-ass comments and unsolvable puzzles over his head, and let him marinate. And Mike’s never going to be the same.

Teeth nipping at his nape wrings a jerky shout from him, and Harvey growls, reaching around to sink his fingers into Mike’s hair.

“Who do you belong to?” he snarls.

“You,” Mike gasps. “Harvey - you, always -” But then he’s coming too hard to speak, and Harvey grasps him like a life raft as they both shudder into a panting heap.

After long minutes, they extricate themselves from the shaky jenga stack of limbs they’ve made, and face each other on the bed. Sweat glimmers on Harvey’s chest, emphasized by its marked rise and fall, and Mike smiles at the aftermath of what he’s done.

“What’re you grinning about?”

“That was fun.”

Harvey reaches out. There’s a twinge on Mike’s neck that turns to a delicious sharpness when Harvey presses the pad of a finger into the bruise.

“You’ve got a bit of a possessive streak don’t you?”

Harvey shrugs, but he’s smiling small and sweet against the pillow, and Mike can’t help but brush a palm along his jaw and a thumb beneath that curving lip, fond and grateful. For a moment of gilded silence they lock eyes and Mike is ensnared by that omnipresent affinity with this impossible man, drawn to him like maybe they were made of dust from the same strange and fallen star, and after millennia have found their way home.

Perhaps Harvey sees that in Mike’s face and doesn’t care for his analysis. Or perhaps their starstuff isn’t quite as inextricably linked as Mike dreams. Whatever the reason, Harvey’s face shutters and he rolls over to sit up abruptly. Legs over the side of the bed he says roughly, “I’m gonna jump in the shower. Help yourself to whatever if you’re hungry,” and then suddenly he’s gone and Mike is freezing.

--

Mike’s ass hurts the next morning, but pleasantly, nothing like the raw gash behind his sternum. There’s no time for awkwardness though because when he wakes, Harvey’s already dressed and gone from the bedroom, and Mike is inarguably late to the market.

He skids out of the shower less than five minutes later, dressing sloppily in the kitchen, much to
Harvey’s amusement. At least Mike thinks that’s what it is - after last night he’s questioning his Harvey translating abilities. With a mug of coffee in one hand, Harvey’s sweatshirt over one shoulder, and a bill he has to mail between his teeth, he commences digging through his bag like a mole on amphetamines.

“Socks, socks, socks, shit -”

He hears a snort, Harvey, into his own mug, and settles for flipping him off since his mouth is full. Which of course is when his phone rings.

“Mike Ross,” he answers curtly, spitting the envelope onto the floor.

“Bionic Boy!”

“Roger, hey. Kinda early for business, don't you think?”

“Sorry punk, been up all night, lost track of time.”

“Blow’ll get your ass one of these days, man. Be careful.”

“Aw, thanks mom! I'll have you know, I am stone cold sober.”

“Then why are you up?”

“I was reviewing my financials.”

“Your financials,” Mike repeats dryly.

“Yeah, brain boy, not all of us got calculators in our heads. Anyway, I just kicked some cash over to your account.”

“Why? Ah hah!” He yanks the socks from his bag and throws himself to the floor to tug them on.

“Dude called me a while back, asked me if I had a guy for a delivery.”

“And you gave him my info. You don't owe me shit for that.”

“Mmmm, I woulda, but this guy didn't want a delivery. He wanted me to recommend you for one.”

“That's weird. To who?”

“Kid named Ryan? Lawyer wannabe.”

Mike's blood chills. “From Pearson Hardman?”

“Didn't say, and I didn't ask, just gave the kid your digits when he called lookin’, and a week later there was two grand in my account. Figured you're due some of that.”

“Thanks.” He’s not sure what else to say.

“You got a sugar daddy looking out for you Mikey?”

“Ha,” Mike laughs flatly. “Maybe. Thanks, Rog. I'll catch up later ok?” He hangs up, and ask, “You didn't call Roger, did you?”

“Who?”
Ice creeps down Mike's spine. “Nevermind.”

“Mike?”

“Forget I said anything.”

The scar from his bike accident twinges, along with a few that don't show anymore.

--

When Gram’s medical bills come due, Mike winces at the number. He still hasn't found another job, and the market is barely covering rent this month. He spends two hours on the phone with the insurance company praying for a loophole that someone might've missed, but they've got nothing for him. Neither does Roger; A recent DEA bust in the neighborhood has his contacts laying low.

Mike tries to sleep, but the number on the backs of his eyes settles into a sharp pain in his gut, and the hollow echo of the name he never learned bounces jarringly off the inside of his skull.

Talk about prophetic.

--

The client is bad news.

He's young, new to paying for sex, which means he's unaware of many of the protocols most Johns try to respect, but it also means Mike can charge double. At first, he seems alright. Shy and retiring, the pink cheeked kind that won't make eye contact.

Looks can be deceiving.

The venture capital firm he works for just made bank (Mike reads about it later on the news) so the kid's got the cash, just not the time. Opposite problems.

They end up in one of the nicer hotels Mike's worked at. The comforter is soft, the water pressure is great, Mr. Money To Burn pays up front and leaves immediately after.

Mike forgets his socks at the hotel and it doesn't matter even though he's down to four pair.

He's walking away with more than enough souvenirs from that night.

It's not the worst he's had by far, but it takes 'til the end of the week for him to stop limping and the bruises are turning an impressive assortment of colors. He wears long sleeves to his shifts at the market, which consists mostly of tossing inventory around, so it’s not like anyone would question a couple black and blue marks even if they did look at him.

He's jumpy, but not from this shitty client. Not really. He's used to people using him as a punching bag. Bruises fade. It’s the memories that won't.

Harvey texts around dinner later that very same week, while Mike is staring into his fridge, realizing there's not a damn edible thing in there and he's not sure how long that's been the case. “You around tonight?”

“What’s the event?” Maybe if the hours are short he can swing it without Harvey getting a look under his suit - go straight home from whatever party or meeting he’ll be arm candy for.

“No event,” Harvey replies. There’s a few minutes pause while Mike throws out old takeout
boxes and wipes down the folding table he’s using as a kitchen counter. When the phone buzzes again it says, “Unless pizza and a movie counts as an event.”

“For you, it might. Time?”

He absolutely shouldn’t, but honestly, Mike hasn’t stopped shivering in a week and the thought of curling up on the couch with Harvey is too good to turn down, consequences be damned, although Harvey seeing his body like this could very well result in him never wanting to see Mike again.

When Harvey doesn’t respond right away, Mike offers his preference - as soon as goddamn possible. “An hour?”

“Thanks.”

Thanks? Mike frowns at his phone, then pulls on his jeans. He’s not about to be late.

Harvey opens the door before the third knock, and immediately out of both their mouths is, “What’s wrong?” followed by a simultaneous, “Nothing.”

Mike laughs. Harvey grins as he rubs his face, and retreats into the apartment.

“You were being serious. Pizza. I wasn’t sure you knew what it was. It doesn’t have, like, caviar or anything on it, does it?”

Harvey rolls his eyes. “Hey, I was a broke law student once.”

“Are you watching Star Trek?” Mike asks incredulously of the paused TV screen.

“Bit rich of you to be judging my life choices don’t you think?”

It stings, but not so bad that Mike can’t cover his reaction by hanging his coat and bag by the door.

“No judgment. Surprised is all.”

“Good. Captain Kirk is the man.”

After that it's easy, good like it always is, and everything hurts worse because of it. It's a relief to relax on the couch in jeans instead of stand around in a tux, though he wishes didn't have to turn down Harvey's offer of pajama pants. It's just too risky. He might see.

This is so fucking dumb, Mike. You should've said no.

But he was lonely tonight, and hungry. And he likes Harvey. And he needs the money. And, and, and.

In the back of his mind Mike can acknowledge that this is a deliberate gamble. Part of him wants Harvey to see, to care, even as the rest of him is screaming to get the fuck out now.

After pizza and two episodes Harvey gets up to pee and Mike thumbs through his phone for the first time in over a week. He deletes some messages and a handful of emails including one he’d forgotten about from venture capital boy. It kicks a reminder of the reason Mike quit escorting the previous year into the forefront of his brain, so when Harvey offers a tumbler of whiskey over the back of the couch, Mike flinches so hard he drops his cell.

“Hey, easy.”

Without looking up Mike chuckles, desperately attempting to shift focus. “Sorry. Thanks.” Harvey
sits, watching him strangely so Mike has to deflect with, “Work rough today?”

His shoulder twitches minutely beneath that pressed button down. “Hardman.”

“Your boss.”

“That man,” Harvey says, brandishing the remote in Mike’s direction. “Is not my goddamn boss.”

“Ok…”

“He’s been gone.”

“Yeah, you told me. You guys were gonna vote him out.”

“Turns out we need a little more help with that than I’d hoped. He’s back until we can take a formal vote amongst the shareholders, which could take months… I don’t know. I’m starting to think maybe we should’ve just sued the bastard.” It’s more than Mike thought he’d get but Harvey doesn’t sound like he wants to elaborate, so Mike doesn’t push, just crosses his ankles in Harvey’s lap and steals the remote to press play on the next episode.

He's sleepy, pleasantly tipsy, and warm for the first time in ages, which is the only reason he forgets, and it's not all that good an excuse to begin with. Mike Ross is a certifiable genius and he's still too dumb to remember to keep his arms covered.

“Mike.” Harvey's voice is so harsh Mike follows his eyeline to see what’s freaking him out, all the way down to his own arms, purply green around the wrists with obvious bruises from a hand grabbing his left forearm just above.

“Shit.” He frantically shoves the fabric back down.

Harvey's voice is ice, iron, steel. “Who did this to you?”

“It's - I'm fine. Client got handsy.”

“You're not fine and whoever did this to you won't be either when I'm done with him. What happened?”

Mike doesn't want to leave and he obviously can't get away with lying, but he won't survive watching Harvey figure out he's paying for damaged goods.

“I'm sorry, I shouldn't have come.”

“You didn't answer my question.”

Fetching his bag from the entryway he says, “Pretty sure that's your answer.”

“What. Happened?”

“Every job has its hazards, Harvey. You know that.”

Harvey’s not shouting, but it's a close thing, “Why won't you tell me what the hell's going on?”

“Because most clients don't care for sloppy seconds!” Mike snaps, furious at his voice for breaking, and suddenly, it’s too much. He throws his bag to the floor and rips his sweatshirt over his head, kicks out of his jeans, tee shirt last, getting stuck only once, 'til he’s standing in the foyer in his boxers.
Mike’s still facing the door and it’s like kneeling for confession, waiting on an invisible arbiter, all shadow and massless weight. ‘How many Hail Marys for a broken whore?’ Mike wonders, startling as a gentle hand reaches to turn him around, but he complies.

Harvey’s standing close but not crowding him, face open and pleading, hands up, a signal he won’t touch but he’s not leaving either, and that’s what gets Mike talking.

“It's always the cute ones that need to be the boss. You think, “Oh they're young, nervous, it's fine. They're willing to overpay, they don't know any better,” - and they don’t. They think because they paid for it, they bought me. Soft limits, hard, safewords - none of it matters. Too late now,” he adds with bitter humor. “Besides, I needed the money.”

Harvey stiffens and Mike scoffs, “See? You don't like the reminder.”

“Why didn’t you come to me?” The question’s so loaded it shatters on the floor leaving Mike gaping at Harvey over the debris. “You'd rather get beaten to shit then ask for my help?”

Mike’s shivering again, but at least it’s not from hunger this time so maybe the shrug looks half-believable. “I’ve had worse.” His breath catches as that truth floods in, and he can feel himself beginning to crack. “That’s … god, that's why this is so bad. This stupid kid is just a fucking amateur compared to … I'm sorry,” he gasps again. “Really. I want to tell you so fucking bad, but I just can't right now. I'm so sorry.”

“Hey,” Harvey says gently, relenting. “It's ok. You don't have to … It's probably better I don't know. I’d kill him.”

Mike laughs weakly.

“Will you stay? I won't touch you if you don't want me to.”

“What if I want you to?” he begs into the stillness of their borrowed time.

Harvey step forward slowly, eyes locked until they’re chest to chest, his shirt soft against Mike’s skin, and wraps him up in an embrace. Mike shudders and melts into it with nothing more than a soft sound of hurt in the back of his throat.

“Christ, kid,” Harvey breathes, warm into Mike’s hair. “You scare me so goddamn bad.”

--

“What’s this?” Mike yawns into his mug.

“A new contract.”

“For what?”

“You.”

It’s still warm from the printer. “Did you write this last night?”

“I did, Sleeping Beauty. Now read up.”

“And you made breakfast. Did you sleep?”

“Mike,” Harvey groans, exasperated. “Read. And eat. We’ve got shit to do.

Grinning through a mouthful of blueberry pancake, Mike complies.
There are many ways in which this contract is similar to the current iteration, but in this document
the position is titled Freelance Contractor, and instead of Harvey’s pocket, the funds are coming
from Pearson Hardman.

“Jessica signed off on this?”

“She did.”

“Harvey, you can’t just hire your hooker to give you legal advice.”

“You wouldn’t be my hooker anymore.”

If that isn’t an emotionally loaded sentence, Mike doesn’t know what is. He’s got no response, so
he gets back to reading. There’s a no tolerance clause on weed, strict tardy policies. Hourly rate
plus bonuses if his work results in demonstrable monetary benefit to the firm. Health insurance.
The whole nine. It’s not salaried but at sixty hours a week it’s over twice what he was making
annually between his three previous gigs combined.

He doesn’t cry. Mike is (usually) pretty good about that stuff, but that's not to say his eyes aren't a
little damp when he looks up after flipping the file closed.

Harvey’s leaning casually on the marbled counter across from him, disguising the tension in his
posture almost completely.

“Harvey,” there's no tone to his voice, just air. “I - “

Bathed in the warmth of the sun, full and warm, Mike realizes this hasn't been a business
arrangement in months. Whether this is Harvey redrawing those boundaries or shredding them
completely Mike’s not sure, but this chance is too good to pass up.

“This says I'll be working for you.”

Harvey nods. “I'll be your direct report.”

“Generous salary.”

“Is it enough?”

“Enough?” Mike ogles him. “Harvey it's -”

“For this to be your only job? It won't be nine to five, but it won't leave you black and blue.”

“Yeah,” Mike breathes. “Yeah, barring more hospital visits, this is ... god Harvey this is -” Ok,
now he is going to cry, so he sits back in his seat, shrugging, “I mean, I have some edits, but this
seems fine.”

Harvey throws his head back and laughs the tension right out of his body. Mike grins back then
adds, “Seems like you're pretty set on us not fucking anymore.” There was a whole clause about
professional interactions between the two of them, and anyone else they work with.

“I'll be your boss,” he says gently, and it's not until then Mike realizes how hurt he'd sounded. “It's
a huge conflict of interest.”

“I know, I know.”

“Mike.” His tone is awful, an ‘it's nothing personal’ mixed with ‘a bit naive, don't you think?’ but
at least there's a hint of regret.

“Ok. Yeah, ok, I get it.” He does. It feels like dying, but he gets it.

“You work today?”

“Nah. I can clear out though -”

“Stay.” Harvey considers him, observing things on his face Mike's probably not even aware of. “I have something for you, anyway. I'll be home by six. You're welcome to the fridge and you can make those edits to the contract, although I'm sure I don't have to tell you, I'll be rereading every word before anyone signs anything. I'll feed you a last supper before you start.”

“Which is?”

“Tomorrow. I'll leave some case files for you to look through.”

It's a weird honor, a relief in the midst of pain. “Thought that was confidential.”

Harvey shrugs. “I trust you.”

--

After a shower, Mike gets to work. He edits the contract and prints a new copy before his coffee has even cooled then dives into the shit Harvey left. Most of it is easy - drafting and editing. The only time consuming task turns out to be researching what qualifies as a major event in a company's history so he can assess whether or not the information should have been made available to the shareholders. He has no experience with this stuff and ends up spending the rest of the afternoon researching precedent for his decisions.

By the time Harvey gets home Mike is cross legged on the floor, surrounded by Harvey's law textbooks.

“When I said you could stay, I didn't mean dismantle the place.”

“Too late,” Mike replies, still frowning at the fine print of page four seventy three. “Besides, I finished everything else.”

“You know I've had those since college. Laws have changed.”

“Since the Cretaceous period? Yeah I imagine, but precedent is precedent and I need some context.”

“Brat.” There's a pause where they're both smiling to themselves then Harvey says, “You really did finish all of this.” He's leafing through the stack of documents left out for that very purpose.

“Yeah.” Mike finally emerges from his book.

“This would take one of our associates a week.”

Mike shrugs. “Cool. Glad to help.” Harvey's looking at him like he's grown an extra head, but only for a breath.

“Allright hot shot. Give it a rest with mergers and acquisitions, I have something for you.”

Mike follows him to the door, but he doesn't go quietly. “Aw, look at you. Getting me shit, just because. That money burning a hole in your pocket? Better be careful Harvey, people might think
you actually care about m - Oh my god.”

In the hallway outside the door is a new bicycle.

“Oh my god. Harvey. I - Oh my god.”

The older man hands him a key. “This is to the supply closet at the end of the hall. You can keep it in there when you come over.” Mike can't do anything but stare, and try not to cry. “Relax, kid. It's just a bike.”

“No, it's not,” Mike whispers. “No, it's fucking not and you -”

Harvey knows it. He has to, and suddenly perspective comes crashing through, slapping Mike right in the face.

It's similar to his old bike, but the braking mechanism on this one is safer, more modern, and the tires are better quality. It's painted the same color but Mike's pretty sure this one's stainless. There's a new helmet hanging from the handlebars, top of the line, more expensive than Mike's ever been able to afford, which means Harvey did his research, about Mike, and about gear in general.

Mike slams into him, arms tight around his ribs, and takes several calming breaths into Harvey's lapel so he doesn't make even more of a fool of himself. “Thank you. Thank you so much.”

Harvey holds on for a moment with a hand to the back of Mike's neck, murmuring into his hair, “You deserve it.”

They eat. Watch TV. Go over some of the contracts Mike's fiddled with, including his own. He falls asleep on the couch. It's home, for one more night.

--

Harvey takes him to see Jessica first thing in the morning, Mike's wearing one of Harvey's suits which fits suspiciously well, but he has to admit, it makes him feel better - it’s armor, at least until Jessica opens her mouth.

“Here’s the thing, Mike. Harvey is my friend, protege, and one of,” she says pointedly, “The most valuable assets of this firm. He says you’re brilliant, of which I have no doubt if you’ve kept him intrigued this long, and abundantly capable. But you’re history would not look good if brought before a jury, and this is a law office, not a halfway house.”

“Yes ma’am.”

“I trust you read Harvey’s contract?”

“Yes ma’am.” A hundred goddamn times.

“I have an amendment.” She slides a page across her desk. “You sign this, I’ll welcome you on as an employee of the firm.”

“And if not?” he asks, retrieving the paper.

“Then no deal.”

He’s already signed non-disclosures, a non-compete, and a dozen other documents binding his loyalty to the firm, but this tops it all. It's the legalese explanation of how if anything goes awry under his watch, misinformation is filed, witness tampering is discovered, illegally acquired data is
used, he’ll be in jail with a fat lawsuit slapped on his back in the blink of an eye. He may work for Harvey, but he answers to Jessica.

There’s no choice. Mike wants this job more than he’s ever wanted anything, but as he reaches for a pen Harvey snatches the paper away. “Jessica, this is ridiculous.”

“No, what’s ridiculous is that you thought I’d allow your cute criminal boyfriend on staff without covering our asses.”

“Our asses are covered,” he argues.

“They will be once Mike signs this.”

“We never have and never would ask this of any of our other contractors!”

“This is a special circumstance.”

“Why?”

“Harvey,” Mike interrupts quietly, yanking the paper back. “You know why. If anyone digs into me it’s not like they’ll miss half a decade of turning tricks. A jury could throw out anything and everything I bring to you.”

“Mike, absolutely not, this is -”

“Too late,” he says, signing with a flourish and Harvey heaves a sigh.

“You never cleared this with me,” he says, voice hard, to Jessica.

“You’d never have let him see it. It's also a special circumstance, Mike, because for all intents and purposes you are now an associate.”

“What?” Mike and Harvey chime.

“You've been putting off hiring an associate for years. And Mike doesn't make you any more of an asshole than you already are.”

Mike stifles a laugh. “I'm … honored ma’am, but I -”

“Don’t have a degree?”

“Right.”

“And you haven't passed the Bar?”

“Actually, I did.”

“Pass the Bar?” Harvey spits, but Mike just shrugs.

“Some dickhead bet me I couldn't.”

The older man rubs his forehead, exhausted, but Mike thinks he looks kind of proud.

“There you go then. I'm not about to waste your talents. Think of this as a second chance.”

“That could land me in prison.”
“Hasn’t stopped you before.”

“Ouch.”

“Look, Mike.” She sits forward at her desk, steepling her fingers. “You want out? Shred that contract and walk out the door. But if you want to make some money, and a difference while you do, I need you to leave that document on my desk and go see Donna. She’ll show you your cube.”

He sneaks only one glance at Harvey. The bastard doesn't give him anything anyway.

“You give me this? I will work my ass off to be the best damn lawyer you've ever seen.”

“I'll take that as a yes,” she smiles with so much below the surface Mike has to pretend he doesn't notice. “Then get that ass to Donna. Harvey, a word?”

Everything's glass so it's not like he could listen from around the corner, and the doors are pretty soundproof, but not enough to miss Harvey start tersely, “If he gets caught -” and Jessica responding coolly with, “Then you make damn sure he doesn't.”

--

“You need some suits.” Harvey’s not paying him any attention at all other than the words he’s grumbling over his phone, thumb flying through emails.

“I have two.”

“I'm not even going to dignify that with an answer.”

Mike sighs. He has a headache already, but it feels good. He is now familiar with the firm’s organizational interface, met several of the associates and paralegals, got a tour of the library (he’s coming the fuck back to that one), the file room, the IT department. He already knows that Ryan's moved to another firm (thank Christ), Rachel is gorgeous, Harold’s a bumbling genius, and Benjamin can be bribed with bacon. He's feeling particularly powerful at the moment, headache be damned.

“Ok. Where, when, how - that salary’s sweet but It's not mine yet.”

Harvey blinks at him, like he's already forgotten Mike's not real. “I’ll take you to René. For now, get your ass up to my office. We've got some work to do. Christ,” he adds, giving Mike's attire a side eye. “You are so lucky Hardman’s not in.”

“Hiding out from the law?” Mike jokes.

Harvey walks out of the pen without checking to see if Mike is following him. (He is, of course. To the ends of the earth and the edges of time.)

--

They don’t make it to René’s for another two weeks. Harvey lends Mike what he can (there’s something particularly comforting about wearing his clothes) and they’re both so goddamn busy it doesn’t matter anyway. Mike spends fourteen hours a day reading and interviewing and reading and editing and researching and eating at the counter in the breakroom and reading. When Harvey comes to collect him, he’s asleep leaning against the wall of his cube.

A surprisingly hard shoe kicks his legs off the upturned wastebasket and Mike startles awake.
“We don’t pay you to sleep.”

Mike’s too tired to formulate a retort, instead shoving a stack of proofed briefs, a completed contract renegotiation, and the transcript dictation from a deposition video into Harvey’s hands. “Here. Take. Leave me alone.”

“Can’t. I have to make sure my protege doesn’t continue schlepping around the office looking like a sad Woody Allen knockoff.”

“Ouch. Jesus.”

“René?”

“Oh, shit! When is that?”

“Easy, killer. We’re taking my driver, and we’ve got an hour.”

Mike flops back. “Thank god. Thanks, by the way. For setting this up.”

Harvey shrugs. “Just protecting my reputation.”

“Yeah, yeah.” Mike remembers. That’s what this has always been about.

Ray is waiting downstairs with two cups of coffee and Thelonius Monk playing lazily over the speakers. “You’re a magician,” Mike murmurs gratefully, slurping down half the cup in one go, ignoring the burn.

“I was hoping you wouldn’t kill this one, Harvey.”

“I’m not doing shit to him.”

“Maybe that’s the problem,” Ray mutters, but Mike’s pretty sure Harvey didn’t hear, and he’s not sure what to make of the comment anyway. “How’re you adjusting to the life of a lawyer?”

“I’m not. But I think I’m doing an ok job adjusting to the life of an associate.”

“He’s exceeded the output of half the paralegals,” Harvey offers, typing quickly on his phone.

“Of course he is.”

“The other partners are jealous.”

“I bet that warms the competitive cockles of your icy heart doesn’t it?” Ray teases, and Harvey chuckles.

“I’m not certainly arguing.”

“For once.”

Mike blushes at the window, praying the pink gets swept away by the passing buildings and storefronts before anyone catches the vulnerability. Harvey’s not paying him for his feelings either.

It’s nice to have a few minutes where he’s not deciphering fine print, and he falls back asleep, waking warm and surprised under Harvey’s suit jacket. Barely moving, he watches his boss
lounge against the leather seat, tie off, collar unbuttoned, chatting through the partition with Ray about a photo on the driver’s phone.

“She’s getting tall.”

“She is. And pretty like her mama. I worry about her.”

“You’re a good dad,” Harvey says quietly. “She knows you love her, and she’s fierce. She’ll be alright.”

With an ember-warm smile into the rearview mirror, Ray replies, “Yes. Knowing you are loved can be very powerful, indeed.”

Harvey frowns, toying with the cuff of his shirt and clicks the phone closed, tossing it into the passenger seat. “Not now, Ray. He’s asleep.”

“Well you’d better wake him up, we’re only a block away. And take the coat back. It’s damn suspicious for a man who doesn’t care about anyone but himself to be keeping his fake employee warm with a coat more expensive than my first car.”

Harvey laughs and flips Ray off. “Your first car wasn’t worth the scrap it was built from.”

“I’m still right.”

“Maybe.” There’s a shift of body through limited space and Mike makes sure his eyelids are still. “Mike.” A warm hand squeezes his shoulder. “Hey. We’re here.”

The yawn isn’t an act - it startles out of him as the car rolls to a stop and Mike sits up, dislodging the jacket to slide down his front. He blinks down, surprised it wasn’t a dream. “Thanks. For letting me sleep. And the coat.” He offers it back with a small smile.

“Can’t have my associate dying of sleep deprivation in the first month.”

“You waiting for month two for that?”

Harvey rolls his eyes. “Out of the car, rookie. We have to get you looking like a person.”

“What do I look like now?”

Harvey catches his bottom lip with his teeth and doesn’t answer, but Ray is grinning.

The shop is small, clean, and fucking intimidating, but it’s nothing compared to the analytical look of the small man giving him a once over. “That suit is horrifying.” It’s one of Mike’s, not Harvey’s.

“Sorry?” Mike offers.

“You, on the other hand, are absolutely delicious.”

Dubious this time, he repeats, “Sorry?”

“Oh!” The computer behind the desk pings, and René’s eyes go round.

Harvey sighs, put upon. “I’m here for a fitting for my associate, not to watch you research criminal activity.”

The tailor sniffs, unhooking the laptop and palming it aloofly. “No law saying I can’t do both.
Let’s go, boy wonder. I’ve got some ideas for you.” René tugs Mike down the hall by his elbow.
“You’ve done a number on him, haven’t you?”

“Huh?” They both glance back down the hall to the showroom where Harvey’s arguing with some poor bastard on the other end of the phone, but René shakes his head, dismissing the conversation.

“I’m a foolish old man. But I know my menswear. So,” he adds, shoving Mike into the fitting area. “Strip.”

“Huh?”

“I was told you were a genius. So far, you are proving less than impressive in that arena. Down to your underwear. Now.”

“Jesus christ. Ok.” While he’s undressing and carefully folding his clothing on a table to one side of the raised platform, René is perches on the corner of the desk, typing furiously, and Mike can’t help but ask. “What did he mean, researching criminal activity?”

“Menswear is my passion and trade, but this is my hobby.”

“What is?”

“Finding people. Missing persons, escaped convicts, people skipping out on bail - a glorious puzzle, as it were.”

“Do you work with the police?”

René shakes his head. “I read the news. Talk to people. There are a number of public databases, and you’d be surprised by what someone will mention over a drink.”

“Bet I wouldn’t.” Mike mumbles, but the tailor doesn’t hear him, too busy continuing, “Right now, I’m looking for a conman.”

“Oh?”

“He’s been arrested under half a dozen aliases, mostly for assault, and recently there was a hit and run, near where you work actually, but it wasn’t reported - the bastard got away scott free. I think it was a set up. Broad daylight, the kid was super visible -”

“How do you know it was him?”

“Security cameras, and some suspicious bank activity.”

“That’s got to be confidential.”

“Not if you’re fucking someone at Bank Of America.”

“Ok then.”

René sighs at his computer screen. “It’ll have to wait. Let’s get a look at you.”

It’s weirdly calming to stand there while René holds up bolts of cloth, pinning and snipping and marking. The quiet saxophone over the radio lulls him into a trancelike state, and shockingly, he finds himself relaxed enough to let his mind wander.

For as absolutely, mind-numbingly exhausted as he is, work has been exceptional. Grammy keeps
saying he looks like excited roadkill.

Harvey is just as terrifying a boss in this context as the last, albeit for very different reasons. Instead of vulnerability as currency, they’re playing with actual money, and Harvey is a pro. Ruthless and charming and a stickler for detail, he’s the boss Mike never knew he needed, though Mike’s suffered half a dozen panic attacks at the mere suggestion of having fucked up a project. He hates how much he cares what Harvey thinks.

It’s still impossible to get a read on the man, which is both terrifying and comforting. Donna’s the only one who seems to have any idea what the fuck Harvey’s thinking, and she’s almost as scary as he is, though there’s plenty of evidence that she likes Mike far more than she lets on.

For whatever reason, Mike has been given a backstage pass into Harvey’s office and thought process, and it’s not a waste. Turns out, Mike’s actually kind of good at this job. He and Harvey are on the same wavelength, but they think just differently enough, come from world’s just disparate enough that they fill in the blanks, bridge the gaps, and catalyze incredible legal moves out of seemingly thin air. Sure, a good portion of MIke’s life consists of mainlining caffeine and recapping highlighters, but every other day or so, Harvey calls Mike into his office and they go in circles, sometimes for hours, pushing and pulling an idea until it spits out just what they need. In other words - heaven.

Mike hurts for what they had, on some days more than others. In almost every way, this gig is better, but Mike misses him terribly. He’s too busy to be lonely, but it’s a near thing, and his body still wakes in the night begging to be held.

Every once in awhile, Mike thinks he sees Harvey reach for him with more intimacy than a hand to the shoulder, or the older man’s eyes will focus on his face just a little too long, but Mike’s probably just so tired he’s hallucinating.

“You like those skinny ties,” René comments disdainfully as he hands off a button up shirt, folding the tape measure and tossing it to the desk.

“And?”

“I’m a professional, so I can make it work, but really child -”

“You’re not gonna make me give ‘em up?”

René observes him. “Fashion is about feeling more exquisitely in your skin. I don’t need another Harvey. I want a prettier Mike - god help us all. Now. This jacket. Turn. Let me see you.”

Shrugging into the grey fabric, Mike obeys, and René’s small smile is surprisingly satisfying. “It’s a start. Come on.”

Harvey’s sitting, one ankle resting on the opposite knee in the waiting room. He’s scanning a file from the stack he brought in, barely glancing up in favor of underlining something in the text, which would suck, except then the pen falls from his hand and clatters to the paper, stuttering to a halt as Harvey’s gaze comes to rest on the black leather oxfords René had forced Mike into before they left the fitting room. The stare turns molten as it drifts up the half break, tightly fitted slacks, just enough room to look professional (except in the ass, in Mike’s opinion, but he has a feeling even with the new contract provisions about physical interaction Harvey won’t be complaining about that), a crisp white shirt, and a cornflower blue tie. Slit pockets, lightly padded shoulder, and a trim waist in the jacket ties the ensemble together - René is everything he was cracked up to be and more.
Harvey stands and stalks over. Mike looks nervously over to where René is tucked behind his desk, engrossed in whatever’s on his computer screen.

“Well?” Mike mumbles. “Passable?”

Harvey’s closer than he’s been in long enough that Mike feels the absence acutely - like a forgotten wedding ring, something missing that used to belong. He smells of sun-warmed linen from sitting in front of the window, and it’s a good thing he’d tucked himself in and up before coming out or René would be getting a bit of a show as to how reactive Mike’s body is.

Slow enough to tease the hairs at the base of Mike’s neck, Harvey circles. A smooth palm brushes non-existent lint from his left shoulder, then there’s a tug at the base of the jacket which seems suddenly connected to his breathing pattern, and when his boss reappears before him, casual fingers adjust the double windsor at Mike’s throat. Mike makes a little noise of want, a sound he’s not even aware of until Harvey steps back in reaction to it, enforcing the space between them as law.

“I think that’ll do just fine.”

“High praise indeed,” Mike teases breathily and Harvey almost smiles.

“Get changed. We have to get you home before you fall asleep somewhere public and wake up in booking.”

“Yeah, yeah.”

René follows him back, helping Mike out of the garments to prevent him loosening any pins.

“Harvey is satisfied?”

“Never. But I think the suits’ll be acceptable.”

René chuckles. “He’s fond of you, you know.”

Mike hums, hanging the tie and avoiding a concrete response. He’s not sure fond is an emotion Harvey possesses, but it’s a nice thought.

Rene’s laptop pings and the man pounces on it. “There you are!”

“Who?”

“Carson Dye, the hit and run fellow I mentioned. He’s been picked up for drunk and disorderly, held on the rest of the charges,” René summarizes. “I would’ve loved to be the one to turn him in, but this is almost as good. Held at county ’til the trial...let’s see how you like being one of the herd, Mr. Dye…”

René continues talking shit to the computer and Mike rolls his eyes, grinning. This tiny, crazy frenchman is growing on him, attitude be damned, and the good mood lasts all the way up until Mike’s dressed and ready to go, on his way out of the fitting room when he catches a glimpse of the newly arrested criminal.

Mike’s phone bounces on the thick carpet. “Clumsy,” René teases, handing it back to him. He doesn’t notice the pallor ashing Mike’s features, but Harvey does as they’re leaving. “You ok, kid?”

“Yeah, yeah of course. Sorry. I...uh… you go ahead. I’m gonna head back to the office. I’ve got this thing I need to finish...”
“You need to get some sleep, Mike. We’ve got a lot coming up.”

“Ok.”

“So you’re going home.”

“Ok.” He let’s Harvey shove him into Ray’s car, so lost in thought he doesn’t realize until they’re there that it’s not his apartment they’ve arrived at, but Harvey’s.

“What -?”

“Come on.”

“But I -”

“You think I don’t know the second I dropped you at your place you’d be hailing a cab back to the goddamn office? I wasn’t born yesterday.”

He’s not wrong, just fucking irritating, but there’s no way to explain without throwing it all away, no way to justify his secrecy, so Mike resolves to research on his phone instead. Harvey’s wifi is probably just as secure as the Pearson Hardman servers anyway.

Harvey’s been asleep for a while by the time Mike manages to collect the necessary information; It takes a forty minute FaceTime with Roger, an hour of research, and then Mike looks up the number for the county jail.

Roger’s connection gets him the phone call, and when the surly man answers Mike can barely contain his rage, grateful he thought to call from Harvey’s balcony instead of the couch.

“Who is this?”

Off-handedly Mike muses, “I was just wondering why the fuck you hit me with your car.”

Silence.

“Here’s the deal, Jax - oh, no wait I’m sorry, Carson. I happen to be a bit of a problem child, and my buddy Rog? He’s ten times worse. We’ve got a couple friends in there, on staff and in cells. So if you think for one second you’re getting away from this phone call without giving up something you’re more of an idiot than I took you for.”

“You were in the goddamn road.”

“Ehhh, I don’t buy it. I had the signal, I was wearing a red fucking hoodie...”

“So?”

He throws the knockout blow. “And how did you know to call me his whore?” A muffled ‘shut’ comes across the line. “So I’ll ask again. Why the fuck did you hit me with your car?”

“W asn’t my car.”

“Who payed you, Dye?” Mike grits.

“He’ll kill me,” Carson whispers.

“Maybe. But if you don’t tell me, Jack Howard in the next cell definitely fucking will.”
“I don’t know his name.”

“What did he look like?”

There’s a rush of air, a sigh, and then - “Greying. Gap between his front teeth. Weird pink cheeks.” Mike’s praying he’s wrong, begging every deity and star and lucky number but he knows it’s useless. “Smelled like oranges.” The sob escapes Mike’s mouth before he can stop it but Dye doesn’t seem to notice. “Gave me the creeps.” He waits, like Mike’s going to be able to say anything ever again. “Is that enough? You’ll tell Howard to leave me alone?”

Mike hangs up.

He sits on the balcony ’til sunrise.
Two months, eleven cases, forty seven fights, and an indeterminable number of Redbulls later, Mike and Harvey find themselves settled into a rhythm. They both work too damn much, but they’re unstoppable, the battering ram and his boy wonder. Mike still wants Harvey, still feels the imprint of his body on and in and around him, but most days he manages to keep the desperation at bay, find someone else to fuck, though no one feels quite right. Mike suspects no one ever will.

The other man that matters now (albeit for very different reasons) seems to have taken a break in attempting to return the favor and ruin Mike’s life. Or maybe he’s just building suspense. He always was a vindictive bastard.

Mike tries his best to forget - all of it, the good and the bad, harder now that he knows his past is catching up to him, but Harvey’s been out wooing clients more often than usual and Mike’s desperately lonely, and so on this particular evening when he can’t focus and the office has gone quiet, he embarks on a now familiar ritual, creeping back upstairs in hopes of unwinding to a record and maybe a finger of scotch while Harvey’s out on the town.

Harvey’s at his desk, jaw etched in shadow thrown from the laptop screen light, captivating and otherworldly, shifting as he notices his associate leaning in the doorway. Mike doesn’t quite manage to disappear in time, so he goes for snark instead. “What are you still doing here?”

“This is my office. What are you doing here?”

“Wait a minute, are you the devious bastard who’s been touching my albums?”

“No…”

“Goddamn it, Mike.”

“Sorry.”

“No, you’re not.”

“I would be if you were here to listen to them with me every once in awhile.”

Harvey gives him a strange look. “You miss me, rookie?”

Mike starts to nod, then stops halfway through and shakes his head instead. “I do...not miss you.”

“What’s your poison?” Harvey laughs.

“Would Sinatra be too trite?”

“No at all.”

It’s late enough that the only sound around them is the vacuum in the hall, and then the scratch of a needle as Harvey starts the record, and Mike settles onto the couch with his work. He’s finished proofing a letter they need to send to a client, but as he drops it onto the desk Harvey sighs deeply.
“Hey. What’s up?”

Dismissively, he waves a hand, still focused on the screen.

“You know, you hired this super cute associate with an intimidatingly large...brain,” Mike intones solemnly. “For occasions such as this.” It’s just ridiculous enough that Harvey cracks a grin.

“Yeah, yeah.” Sitting back he sighs, “A client’s suing one of his employees for running the business into the ground.

“Yikes. Sounds messy, but standard.”

“Yes. On both counts.”

“You going to court?”

“Of course not.”

“So what’s the issue?”

Harvey shifts uncomfortably. “It just...doesn’t seem right.”

“Who are you? What have you done with my boss, Mr. Caring Makes You Weak?”

“That’s a bit dramatic.”

Mike’s too curious to continue teasing. “So what’s the deal?”

“The employee. He’s a punk kid, not a businessman. He’s shouldn’t have had to handle that shit in the first place.”

“Did he sign an employment contract?”

“Of course.”

“Then what?”

“He’s young. Inexperienced.”

“So am I, you trust me plenty.”

“Yeah, but you’re…”

“I’m what?”

“Mike,” he says, almost pleading. He’s carrying emotions closer to the surface than usual, and leaning forward like he can’t help it.

“I’m what, Harvey?”

“Remarkable,” he finally says, and Mike tries to calm the thrashing of his heartbeat. It doesn’t work, but he tries. “This kid is going to spend years in prison, and his life’s savings paying back a debt his employer should’ve known better than to trust him with in the first place.”

“You give me all kinds of information you shouldn’t.”

“First of all, you take most of it without asking, and secondly, I’d never sue you.”
“Never?”

“Not for fucking up!”

“Why don’t we hold off on making promises we can’t keep,” Mike jokes over the bile in his throat.

“You don’t trust me?”

“That’s never been the problem,” he replies softly, and Frank croons, ‘I'm a fool to want you.’ “It’s just … a lot, this job. I feel like a kid driving his dad’s car before he can quite see over the wheel.”

Harvey rockets out of his chair shouting, “Negligent entrustment,” at the same time Mike yells, “Winn v. Haliday!”

Clapping his hands, Harvey chuckles wildly, looking beautifully manic in the worn light. “See? I told you. Remarkable.”

Mike shakes his head. “You think too highly of me.”

There’s no sexual tension or teasing or power dynamic, and Mike wonders what Harvey was like as a kid, or in law school, what he’s like when he’s not playing The Game, because he’s so goddamn disarming like this it’s got to be a fucking weapon of mass destruction, that sweet expression on his face.

Harvey comes around the desk so he can put a hand on Mike’s shoulder, though it’s close enough to his neck that his thumb rests in the hollow of Mike’s throat.

“It’s a mutual problem.”

--

“Mikey-boy. Come on.”

“No, no, no, Louis I can’t. I have to get this done for Harvey.”

Things have been a little tense around the office lately. There's actually less yelling, which concerns Mike for a number of reasons. Harvey's amiable, thoughtful, and distant in a way that gets worse by the day.

It's unsurprising - the vote on Hardman is going down within the week, but Mike would have been completely unaware of the fact if weren’t for Rachel knowing all the gossip. Harvey sure as hell hadn’t communicated it. And maybe it slipped his mind under the stress of two huge cases they’re handling, but it still stings being kept out of the loop.

“Harvey’s not here. Besides, Johnson’ll be at this event.”

“So?” Johnson’s one of their bankruptcy lawyers, and Mike couldn’t give less of a shit about him.

“He’s on the fence about Hardman. Maybe you could sway him for the better.”

“What do you care?” Mike asks suspiciously.

“I don’t. But Harvey does. Harvey, who incidentally, isn’t here, and as it turns out, I outrank you. Which means, Mike, you have to do this. So. Get your ass out of that chair, and let’s go.”
“Wait, why me?”

Louis smiles, a vulture waiting for his meal to die. “I'm just trying to get you some real life experience. How else are you ever going to be any good?”

It's awful and unfair and ridiculous, and absolutely true.

The second his ass hits the leather of the black car, Louis hands him a file. “Here. Read up.”

“What is this?”

“Your job.” And he sits back, folds his hands in his lap, and closes his eyes.

The documents all relate to a Michael Cage, developer of several successful apps released within the past five years. He's young, charming, and in the market for a new lawyer. Mike knows of him, uses some of his applications.

“You're going to sign him.”

“I am? Why me?”

“You're his type.

“Uhhh…”

“Whatever it takes. Got it?”

“Whatever’ covers a multitude of sins,” Mike points out.

Louis nods once, short and sharp.

The restaurant is lovely, if a bit dim in the waning light - white cloth on the tables, and Mike can tell by the waitstaff’s attire that he wouldn't be able to afford a fucking appetizer here, much less a meal. He waits a pace behind Louis to be seated but instead of a table, they’re led to a small banquet hall at the rear, and Mike blinks around in surprise. He recognizes a few faces - not from the firm (nor, thankfully, the job before that), but from the news, business magazines, academic journals.

He doesn't even have time to be intimidated because Louis plucks him down next to Michael Cage without so much as a how do you do, then disappears to sit next to Johnson.

Mike mouths “Sorry,” just as the suit at the end of the table rises.

“Gentlemen, thank you so much for joining me. It's important to have fun every once in awhile. Keeps us young,” he adds, and there are a few chuckles, Mike can only assume over the fact that half the attendees look like they're one bad stock point plunge away from a heart attack. Not Cage though.

“Hey, I'm Mike.”

Cage accepts his hand with a charming smile. “Me too.”

“I know. I'm a fan of your work.”

His expression cools a little. “Oh really. Which?”

Mike can answer honestly on this one. “OurGlass. I probably rely on it more heavily than I'm
proud of. I schedule all my grandmother’s hospital payments through it, my rent…” He's rambling. “Anyway. It's saved my ass more than a few times.”

Genuine appreciation has returned, and Mike absently acknowledges the dude isn't bad looking. “I'm glad. Your grandma ok?”

Mike nods with a pang of guilt. It's been over a week since he's seen her, though they'd talked on the phone the night before. “Yeah. Just old.”

“Oh man. I hear that. I've got this aunt…”

And just like that Mike, slips into the role.

It becomes immediately and abundantly apparent that despite the opening statement, “fun” is not the goal of this evening. It's networking of the grossest, richest kind and Mike's simultaneously horrified and fascinated. He's not at home here, never will be, but he knows how to work a crowd, and how to flirt. He'd like nothing more than to spend the evening doing just that with Cage (the guy is fascinating in addition to being alarmingly handsome), but that's Louis’s long game, not his. Johnson is the priority tonight, because that's what Harvey needs, so shortly after the last course has been cleared away, he switches seats with Louis, opening the conversation with a champagne-loosened smile.

“Hello, sir. I'm Mike Ross.” Johnson looks neither pleased nor offended so Mike doesn't leave. “I want to talk to you about the vote on Hardman.”

The old man raises a brow. “Here to change my mind?”

“Nope, just to hear it.” It's not untrue. Knowing where Johnson stands can only help him build a case. “Why do you want him to stay?”

“I don't, particularly, but I don't know that I want him gone either.”

“Why?”

“He's a good businessman,” Johnson shrugs over a swig of gin and tonic. “And he’s a nice guy. Back when I was a kid in payroll, he’d visit us. Shoot the shit. Take some of the busywork off our hands. He's taken care of a lot of us over the years.”

“Ms. Pearson hasn't?”

“Jessica is a bit more tight fisted.”

“She keeps the firm running smoothly.”

“You prefer her?”

“I owe her.”

“And I him.”

“Is it worth it? To know he’d rather give kickbacks than keep the firm afloat?”

“You think rather highly of your own opinion, for an associate. Or is it Harvey’s opinion you’re selling?”

“I have the utmost respect for Harvey, but this has nothing to do with him.” First lie he’s told all night. “I like my job. I want to keep it.”
“You really think Hardman would tank the company?”

“I think he’s already lied and stolen before, and if you vote him back in, there’s not a goddamn thing stopping him from doing it again.”

Johnson frowns at him. “I’ll think about it.”

Mike sighs in relief. “All I can ask of you.”

“How did Harvey find such a reasonable young man to work for him?”

“I’m not actually that reasonable. I think he was looking for someone as stubborn as he is to argue with.”

“Did he find that?”

“Are you kidding me? I’m twice as bad. I have to be better than him at something.”

Johnson burst into laughter. “We all have our gifts.”

“We do.”

“Pardon me, sir,” someone says, and Mike looks to Johnson, assuming he's the addressed party but in fact it's Mike, and the server's trying to set a slice of chocolate sheet cake in front of him.

“Oh thank god,” Mike murmurs. “I was worried these guys had so much money they'd forget what good dessert was.” It occurs to him the sentiment might be a bit more ostracizing than intended, but Johnson just chuckles again and raises his glass.

The evening dissolves pleasantly into drinks a little too sweet for Mike's palate, and almost interesting conversation, from which Cage rescues him relatively quickly. They're standing off to one side, drinking and joking when he says, “Come on, sunshine,” tugging Mike's arm, and Mike goes easily until the guy adds, “Let's get high.”

“Wait, what?” he whispers. “I'm here with my boss. I can't -”

“You don't smoke?” Like Mike has a fucking sign on his forehead.

“Not on the job,” he protests.

“Oh come on, Mikey. Tell you what, you have a joint with me, I'll sign that contract your boss has been not so subtly flashing around all evening.”

Mike can hear Harvey's voice bite in his mind. “What the fuck do you think you're doing?”

And then Louis’s following after. “Your job.”

That's what he's here for, after all.

Mike sighs. “Let me get the contract.”

“Good,” Cage purrs as Mike makes his escape.

“Can I borrow you for a moment?” Louis frowns at Mike's tone, but he excuses himself with a toothy sneer to the men at the end of the table. “Cage wants to sign.”
“So take the damn contract out of my bag. You didn’t need to interrupt -”

“He wants me to smoke with him.”

Louis pauses. “Pot?”

“Yeah.”

“For fun, or in exchange for the agreement?”

“I get the feeling it’s both. Louis, Harvey expressly forbade drugs of any kind. I know you said whatever it take but -”

“Do it.”

Mike stares. “What?”

“You’re here to sign him, and this is what it’ll take.”

“Why don’t you smoke with him?” Mike asks bitterly, but Louis just bares his teeth.

“Cage doesn’t want me.”

It clicks. “You knew he was gay.”

Louis shrugs.

“And you knew I used to smoke.”

“I inferred.”

“What the hell? Do I have a sign over my head or something? And I don't want to! Can't you just say we have to leave?”

“No.”

“Harvey's gonna fire me if I do this,” Mike murmurs mournfully. Never speak to him again is more like it.

Louis snorts.

“And I'll fire you if you don't. Besides, Harvey's never going to know. I'm not going to tell him. Are you?”

“I…”

“Close him, Mike,” is all he gets, and he’s left with the folder slapped into his palm.

When he meets back up with Cage he doesn't hand over the document right away. “Alright. We’ll smoke. But you sign first.”

“You don't trust me?”

“I'm about to risk my job for you. We're both making an investment.”

The stealthy look disappears from Cage’s face, replaced by approval. “Good man. Take risks, but only smart ones. I knew I liked you.”
There's an additional problem with Mike getting high, aside from breaking the terms of his contract and Harvey's heart. For the most part, weed chills him out, but every once in awhile it makes him ... crazy.

He's not so dense as to pretend his mind is healthy just because it's brilliant. He's got a solid case of depression accompanied by the occasional manic episode, and fuck if that joint didn't just trigger one.

He breathes the dry elevator air deep into his lungs, and winces at the ding of the doors sliding open to dark and empty corridors.

Right. Work.

He and Cage had smoked on the golf green behind the restaurant. The weather was fair, the company was flirtatious, and Mike signed his first client.

He feels awful. This is not how it was supposed to be.

Mike doesn't remember typing Harvey's floor number into the panel but by the time his brain catches up to his body it's just easier to follow through. It's not like anyone's here to yell at him. He'll head down to the pen after he gets his wits back; Maybe the smell of leather and aftershave and Harvey will settle the panic trying to crawl up and out via his hair follicles.

His body reacts to the discomfort by drawing in on itself, head down, shoulders hunched, so he doesn't realize the light in the office is on until he's feet away. He startles, reverberations glancing off his bones and colliding with arteries, but the glass room is empty. With a sigh of relief he turns around, heading back to the elevator. No need to risk -

He runs right into Harvey's chest which, in spite of the danger, is exactly where he wants to be.

“Mike? What are you doing here?”

“Louis,” Mike mumbles vaguely. “Had me come with him to this dinner thing …”

Harvey frowns but doesn't move, though Mike's essentially plastered to his front.

“Didn't I give you work to finish?”

“Yeah, yeah, totally, and I tried - um - I tried to tell him, but he wasn't having it. You know Louis, he doesn't -”

Harvey holds him at arm’s length, letting the cold creep between them. “Are you high?

The rotation of the earth stills.

Worse than the panic in his gut, worse than the guilt skating across his skin, is the tiny bud of hope trembling in the back of his mind, fragile and frost sensitive and blooming too early this year. Maybe Harvey will go easy on him. Maybe he’ll even be proud Mike signed a client.

Harvey shoves him back. “Leave your keycard on your desk. We're done.”

“Harvey -”

“Did I stutter?”
“No, but -”

“No, but -”

“Then leave your goddamn keycard on your desk and go.”

“He threatened me!”

“What are your choices when someone puts a gun to your head?”

“What are you talking about? You do what they say or they shoot you.”

“WRONG. You take the gun, or you pull out a bigger one. Or you call their bluff. Or you do any one of a hundred and forty six other things.”

“This helped me sign a client today! You always say win at any cost - well this was the cost!”

“I assumed you'd be smart enough to read between the lines. I guess genius isn't what it used to be.”

Mike cringes, but he's so angry he barrels on. “Louis set me up! He brought me along to flirt my way in, and when this guy asked to me smoke I begged him to bail me out but he left me up shit creek without a paddle! Harvey, please, stop! I'm sorry!”

Rage works its way through Harvey's features then clears to a mask of nothingness. “Don't be. You aren’t my problem anymore,” and he leaves into his palace of an office.

Mike staggers back toward the elevator. He's too dazed to hear the sound of papers, files, a few records being thrown to the floor, and besides, he's already dialing the newest number in the contacts list stored in his broken brain.

“Michael? Hey. Turns out I don't have to work late after all.”

--

He doesn't leave his keycard, but he doesn't leave the house either. He doesn't smoke, but he doesn't eat. He doesn't cry, but keeps forgetting to breathe.

Mostly Mike lies on the couch, occasionally twisting the sleeves of Harvey's hoodie around his forearms to emphasize the comforting twinge of bruises left on his wrists.

Cage was just what he needed that night, and since Mike no longer works for the firm, it's not even a conflict of interest. There's no follow up, thank god, in the 48 hours since Michael had paddled his ass hot, pinned him down with Mike’s cock in a cage, fucked him until he wept, and then freed him just in time to come so hard he'd almost passed out.

They're great fuck buddies, but neither is looking for anything more.

Mike dreams of Harvey, nightmares and prayers and beautiful maybes that were never his to begin with. He's not Harvey's problem anymore.

Or maybe he is, because there’s a banging on the door and Harvey's the only one in the world who knocks like that. Granted, Mike hasn't eaten in long enough that he could be hearing things.

Perhaps it would have been better if he were hallucinating, because the real Harvey Specter is standing in the hall outside his apartment in jeans and a black tee shirt, so excruciatingly lovely Mike stops breathing in order to divert more energy to staring.

The older man blinks, like he's surprised that Mike Ross lives in Mike Ross’s apartment. Maybe
it's his own hoodie on the worn body of his ex associate that's throwing him off. Joke’s on him. Mike hasn't taken it off in days.

It's so quiet they can hear Jeopardy playing in the neighbor’s living room. Mike steps back to let him in despite every molecule of his body trying to give into the magnetic charge and crash forward, and leaves Harvey in the foyer to judge the interior in peace.

There's no food in the fridge besides ketchup and mayo, plus three PBRs left, and Mike's too numb to care, though he retrieves a beer. “What are you doing here?”

“The vote on Hardman was today.”

“Ok.”

“Jessica won. We’re going to press charges against him.”

“Glad to hear it,” he muses, intently observing the etchings on the top of the beer can.

“By one. Johnson tipped it.” For the first time in days, Mike smiles. At least he did something right. “He asked about you. After.”

“Can't imagine why.”

“Said you were stubborn. Argumentative.”

“Yeah, well-”

“He said you changed his mind. You didn't mention that the other night.”

“Would it have mattered?” Mike combats bitterly. Harvey doesn’t answer, just shifts his feet against the battered hardwood floor. “Yeah. Didn't think so.”

Defensively, and with surprising softness Harvey counters, “I put my money on you, Mike.”

Money. As if Mike hadn't been banking every cluster of cells in his bones, every whorl of ether in his soul on this job, this friendship, this stupid man.

“And I'm worth it,” he bites out. “I signed a fucking billion dollar client. And quit acting like I abandoned you - if anything it's the other way around. I had to find out about the vote from Rachel. Maybe I could’ve helped.”

Toying absently with the curling corner of a magazine Harvey murmurs, “Not in your job description, kid.”

“Fuck it then. I'm not your problem anymore,” he spits, and turns away, swigging the beer. Harvey appears not to have heard.

“You really told Louis? And he told you to do it anyway?”

“No,” Mike answers coldly. “He told me he’d fire me if I didn't, but, hey, at least I got a fuck buddy out of it.”

Harvey lurches and his growl feels like a kiss. “What?”

“You heard me.” Mike laughs bitterly. “What? You think Cage just wanted to smoke with me? Is it so crazy to think other people might want me? Just because you don't -”
Harvey jerks forward, and Mike's knees wobble as a strong fist twists into the fabric at his front, pulling the two men closer than they've been in weeks. “Don't you dare.”

“Or what?” Mike can't breathe. “You gonna tell me I'm wrong, or threaten me some more? Or hey,” he adds as a warm palm slides to his neck. “You could just fire me again -”

“What -” Harvey interrupts, tilting Mike's head to one side with his thumb. “The fuck is this?”

A bruise. Mike's sure of it. He's been pretending Harvey gave it to him. “I told you. Cage and I -”

“You let him mark you?” Harvey shouts.

Mike snarls back, pain coating his teeth. “Let him? I begged him to.”

The air around them cracks. Mike's waiting to be shoved away, left alone alone alone again, but instead there's a fist in his hair pulling his neck exposed, and Harvey's other arm is holding them together, and then there's a zing on Mike's neck. A bite.

“No,” Harvey grinds out as he releases the skin. “No one but me.”

Mike's knees collapse for real then. Harvey catches him. Drags him to the darkened bedroom, pours him onto the rumpled comforter and drops down after him, kicking off shoes as he goes.

They’re buzzing in an electrical storm, conductors for energies they inherited long ago, but for one still second, Harvey hovers over Mike, eyes drinking him in by the light filtering in through the window, and then with such sweet slowness it feels like a burn, he brushes soft fingers across Mike’s temple, pushing a lock of hair back into place. Mike grabs him and pulls him down.

Frantic palms push his hoodie up Mike's torso and Harvey doesn't even bother taking it off before dropping his mouth to Mike's stomach, laving his tongue across the delicate skin there. Mike arches beneath him, and when his hips descend, they drop right into Harvey's waiting hands.

With a yank, Mike's boxers are discarded, and he takes care of the sweatshirt, and then he's naked beneath Harvey again, finally and -

“God fucking damnit, Mike.” Eyes wide and mouth open, Harvey skims his hands over Mike's body, then leans down to suck a mark next to one Cage left on his hip.

“I'm sorry,” he gasps, desperate and aching..

Harvey reaches up to cover the apologies streaming from Mike's lips and sinks his own mouth down over Mike's cock.

Over the years, Mike's been the recipient of many a fantastic blowjob, though less perhaps than one would think based on his previous source of income, but Harvey is by far the best. He'll never hear that, he's too cocky already, but it's true - torturing with a slick hand and spit sloppy mouth, running the whole length with unwavering pressure, and just as Mike's about to crash through his release, he switches to velvety licks across the underside of Mike's cock, or tongue at his slit, his balls, drawing it out.

He never looks away from Mike's face, and his free hand keeps busy gripping bruises into his thighs, ass, calves. It's all Mike's can do to desperately press himself to the mattress in an effort to keep from fucking into Harvey's mouth.

He looks so fucking beautiful. It's probably not the word you're supposed to use when someone's got their lips wrapped around your dick, but it's not inaccurate. That whole masculine thing is sexy
as hell, but the delicate points of his wrists and neck and the noises he makes, like he's undone, that's the combination that makes this man so lethal.

“Ok, ok, Mike, baby, I got you. Roll over.”

*Baby? I got you?* It's not until he's done as asked and his face hits the pillow Mike realizes he's been saying “please” over and over like it's the magic word that'll save them. Fingers, cool and slick with lube, skim over his entrance and Mike mewls into the fabric, trying to push back, though Harvey winds an arm around his waist to keep him still.

They both seem to have a mantra on loop in their heads tonight. Where Mike's is begging, Harvey keeps murmuring Mike's goddamn name and it's more than anyone could be expected to handle.

Mike, into his spine with reverence. Mike, at the nape of his neck. Mike, as the kid reaches around to kiss him, but when the condom wrapper crinkles and Mike grabs his wrist growling, “Don't you dare,” there's nothing but a soft, hurt sound in the stillness and then Harvey's sinking into Mike's body, putting them back together again, at least for an hour or two.

This time Mike succeeds in fucking himself back onto Harvey's cock and both men groan.

“More.”

“Pushy little shit.”

“My bed, my rules. Now fuck me like you mean it.”

Harvey snaps his hips in hard enough to knock a whine from Mike’s throat as he falls forward onto his elbows.

“Yes,” he hisses.

They're both frantic, almost brutal, except the closer they are to shaking apart, the closer Harvey gets, reaching beneath Mike's arms and twining their fingers together over the pillow, curling around him, burying his face behind Mike's ear until there's nothing but him, them, this, now and then Harvey whispers, as if to himself, “God I missed you,” and warmth sears up Mike’s spine and he comes untouched, clenching down hard enough that the other man has no choice but to follow after.

It's not a conscious decision, but the moment Harvey rolls off him, Mike wrenches around and buries his face in Harvey's chest, twining their limbs together tight enough to banish bad memories and keep the good ones in. Without hesitation, the older man wraps him up, pulling him close and burying his face in soft blond hair.

“I'm sorry,” Mike whispers into his collarbone.

The radiator clicks and a siren sighs far away, and into the darkness Harvey replies, “Me, too.”

Mike wakes sore in the very best way, and also alone. “Goddamn it, Harvey,” he grunts, and without bothering with a shirt, pads out into the kitchen.

On the table there are two styrofoam cups of coffee and a grease soaked paper bag. “Best donuts in New York City,” Harvey mumbles through a mouthful, still buried in the business section. “Where's all your goddamn food?”

That question is avoided in lieu of one of his own. “So am I rehired?”
Discomfort flicks briefly through Harvey's body, flattening his lips and adjusting his posture. “You were never technically fired.”

“You can't do that again.”

“I'm your goddamn boss, I can do whatever the hell I-”

“No. Jessica is, and it's fucking shitty of you to be toying with my sole source of income because I hurt your fucking feelings.”

They're both gripping what are surely too delicate cups of scalding, life-affirming caffeine with a vengeance that's about to get them in trouble when Harvey says softly, “You're right.”

Mike's jaw drops. “I'm sorry, could you say that again?”

“Say what?” He's trying awful hard not to smile and Mike's about to really get going when he realizes -

“Are you wearing my shirt?”

He is. It's a little big on Mike but it's just about damn perfect on Harvey, which is how Mike finds himself standing between Harvey's knees, running a fingertip beneath the the sleeve draping one tanned bicep, then the collar, knuckle brushing his chest. “You look good in my clothes.”

Mike's waiting for an ‘I look good in everything.’ He gets, “Not as good as you look in mine,” instead and it’s a million times more painful. He's learned a lot from Harvey though, so he manages a cocky, “Well, you're not wrong.”

Harvey chuckles tiredly, leans back so Mike's fingers slip from the neck of the shirt, and something about his expression tells Mike what's coming before he speaks, so he beats him to the punch.

“If you're about to give me a speech on how we can't do this again, it shouldn't have happened, it's against workplace policy, blah bullshit blah, shut up. I don't really want to hear it.”

“So long as you know,” Harvey says quietly, clicking the lid of his cup with a thumb nail.

“That you can't get enough of this ass? Oh I know.”

“Get over yourself.”

“You first,” Mike replies indignantly, and Harvey snorts into his coffee.

There hasn't been time to consider it, but Mike kind of figured. Harvey's all about boundaries and last night broke a whole fucking load of them, though it's obvious neither of them regret how it went down. The knowledge aches, but distantly, like that broken arm that never quite healed right.

“Don’t -” Harvey starts, then pauses, maybe at the set of Mike's shoulders. “Jessica was pretty clear in your contract - she's not gonna cover for you. If you're gonna fuck up, at least make it something I can take care of.”

“You gonna fix me, Harvey?” Mike’s bitter, twisting at the bruising on his wrists with absent fingers. Harvey's hand shoots out to grab his forearm, squeezing.

“You're not broken.”
“You sure?” he laughs dryly.

Harvey’s frowning at him, mulling on this newly uncovered piece of information. “Kintsugi,” he murmurs, then like they’d never spoken about workplace professionalism Harvey pulls Mike's arm to his mouth and sucks a bruise into the skin just below the meat of Mike's elbow, marking the skin anew.

Mike gasps at the sensation, and the sentiment, more powerful and valuable than any Harvey’s given him before. Then the pressure is gone, and the warmth as Harvey shoves him gently backwards into the other kitchen chair.

“Eat up, kid. We can’t have you looking like the dead when we go talk to Evan Martell.”

“What?”

“Oh, didn’t I mention? And you've got a giant pile of proofing in your cube.”

“You’re an asshole.”

“Let’s not talk about assholes at the table.”

“So we can’t talk about you, then.”

“You're refired,” Harvey grunts through a mouthful of pastry.

Mike grins, and burns his tongue on some truly exquisite coffee.

--

Harvey’s an asshole, but he wasn't kidding, there’s a veritable mountain of work on Mike's desk, so he stacks a small pyramid of Redbulls next to his chair and falls into it. Rachel and Harold both greet him like nothing’s changed, making him wonder what exactly Harvey said to them to excuse Mike's absence for entire days at a time. Donna visits around dinner time with an apple, a granola bar, and a kiss to his forehead.

“I'm glad you're back.”


She nods empathetically but adds, “You hurt him.”

“I hurt -!” Heads turn in the pen and he drops his voice to an impassioned hiss. “I hurt him?”

“Mike. You have to know.”

“About his dad? Sure. Doesn’t excuse his behavior. My parent died in a car accident. Drunk driver. I don't flip my shit every time he has a drink.”

“No,” she replies watching his face carefully. “But he lo- he cares about you. You're dangerous in a way he's not used to.”

Mike smiles tiredly. “At least it's mutual.”

Perhaps sensing a fight best left alone, she benevolently lets it go. “He wants you upstairs. Something about files arriving?”

“Great,” he says, collecting his things. “‘Bout damn time.”
When he arrives in Harvey's office every surface of the room is covered in papers, some piles more neatly organized than others. “Your office exploded.”

“Always so observant. Here.”

“Thanks.”

He drops next to Harvey on the couch, flipping the folder open. The room falls still and Mike settles in.

He reads the whole thing cover to cover, then again. Halfway through the second reading he feels the hairs on the back of his neck prickle - someone watching him, but when he startles up Harvey's crouched at the bookshelf, frowning at tiny print, and Donna’s gone for the night. Shaking his head, he gets back to work.

“So Martell's switching from brain mapping to cancer research?”

“And prevention, yeah. He's trying to secure funding.”

“Are we finding backers? Or vetting them?”

“That's one way to go about it.” Harvey's got a pen in his mouth and Mike tries not to notice the way his lips curl around it.

“Ok. I'll bite.”

“Patents.” Harvey finally looks up, wide eyed and absolutely focused. “He's fucking brilliant. There's gotta be something we can patent, it'll ensure long term funding and we can draft the contract.”

“Awesome. What the fuck are we patenting then?”

Harvey has the decency to look abashed. “That's where you come in.”

Mike blinks. “Beg pardon?”

“Martell sent a list of things he thinks could be patented, but he's not sure what already has been...”

“You want me to search the patent registry,” Mike deadpans.

Too cheerfully Harvey replies, “Thanks so much for offering, it'd be a huge help.”

“You're evil. Evil in sexy wrapping paper.”

“You haven't been getting much sleep have you?”

“And who's fault is that?”

They stare for a moment, deciding whether to let shit get heavy again or not, then simultaneously chime, “Louis,” and fall into laughter.

“Alright, alright. I'll search your damn patents.”

“Good boy.” Mike doesn't particularly try to hide the shiver.
The list is thankfully less lengthy than Mike had guessed, and within an hour he's got three ideas to pursue, but it's going to take more than the internet to finish out his research.

“Where are you going?”

“Library,” Mike yawns. “I gotta check precedent for a few of these.”

“I'll come with you,” Harvey says, standing and buttoning his jacket. At Mike's incredulous look he adds, “What? I told Jessica I'd look into something for her.”

“Whatever you say, boss.”

The library is silent, the whole damn building has cleared out in the past hour or so, and Mike already knows the first case he needs to look into so he heads straight for the shelf, stripping his jacket as he goes and tossing it on one of the tables. Harvey picks it up immediately and hangs in on the back of a chair.

Mike rolls his eyes, but doesn't comment until an hour later when he mutters, “Fuck.”

Harvey grunts something that sounds like “What?” over an avalanche of texts strewn across two tables pushed together.

“We can't patent these genes.”

“Why not? He isolated the strands of DNA.”

“Yeah, but he didn't create them. There was...” Mike waves his hand absently, still digesting to text.

“A thing.”

“Myriad Genetics.”

“In 2013,” Harvey supplies, nodding over a disaster zone of open books, tie off, collar unbuttoned, sleeves rolled up. “Shit. I forgot about that.” Mike gulps. “But he could patent a process.”

Nodding, Mike stands and stretches. “It has to contain something absolutely original, or be a completely new way to generate an existing phenomenon. Honestly, we should probably meet with Martell and his team. I know a fair amount of molecular biology but I'm out of my league on this one. What?”

Harvey adjusts his collar and shakes his head. “Nothing. I'll get in contact with him, see what he thinks.”

“Cool.” Mike tosses the book onto a table, rubbing his eyes and feeling the Redbulls of the day in his chest. He's probably dehydrated. “You want a water?”

Harvey doesn't look up from the fine print he's glaring at so Mike strolls across the hall humming. After chugging a whole bottle of and tucking a few more between his fingers he turns back to the library.

It hits him in the doorway.

Oranges. Too saccharine to be flavoring, just cloying enough. Only one person in the world has ever smelled like that and Mike would remember even without the eidetic memory.
Heart racing in a way that has nothing to do with energy drinks Mike backs out of the kitchen like a cornered animal. It's impossible. Mike escaped. He'd done what he had to do. He'd made sure there was nothing to remember. He got out. He got even.

“Mike?” Harvey must be underwater, his voice echoes from ages away, or maybe Mike's the one submerged - it'd explain his trouble breathing. “Mike!”

It's not that Mike hasn't thought about him. He has - a million times. But as time has passed with Harvey, and at the firm, and with Gram getting better, he'd lost the panic that used to sink claws into his blood cells and sweep through his veins. He hasn't had a nightmare or a panic attack in months, not even when he and Cage took it probably too far.

Panic attack. Right. That's what this is. Identifying the issue isn't making him feel any better, nor is it doing anything about the vomit burning its way up his esophagus, which at this point is just water and energy drink.

He makes it to a garbage can just in the nick of time, heaving until there's nothing left but the occasional gag or whimper, so he rinses his mouth with some water from the bottle that fell from his fingers and dribbles it into the can. Harvey's crouched next to the trash, frowning and very deliberately not touching Mike if the way he's white-knuckling his slacks is any indication.

“Shit,” Mike gasps, rubbing at his bad shoulder. “Sorry.”

“Don't fucking - what happened? What's wrong?” Those dark eyes blaze up, worried, and Mike seriously considers telling him.

But the moment is a better reminder than it is encouragement. Mike's moonlighting but this is Harvey's life, and he fucking cares and Mike can't do this to him. He won't. The guy gave him a job and a family and Mike's not about to repay him by dragging him into this mess.

It's not Harvey’s fault that Mike forgot who he really is. Where he's really from. The past year has overcompensated the positive payout. Time to balance the scales.

“Too much Redbull, not enough food,” he chuckles self deprecatingly. It's a genuine sentiment at least. “Sorry. I'm gonna take off, if you don't mind. Let me know what Martell says, and I'll file the patent application.”

Mike feels the power dynamic shift back as Harvey stands, towering above him in spite of their relatively equal heights. He isn't buying Mike's story, it's obvious in his tone, but all he says is, “You need to take better care of yourself.”

And that's the worst part of it all. Because honestly, Mike had tried.

Chapter End Notes

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Negligent_entrustment
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kintsugi
In another life, it was just a dream. Mike had imagined the smell, it was a fluke, a weird one off.

In this life, he starts smelling it more often, usually in the evenings, though he does most of his late night work from home these days. Harvey doesn't mention it. They lock down Martell's patent, and go back to bringing in impressive billables.

It's another month before Mike even thinks about working with Louis, and if Jessica herself hadn't recommended he get in on the project we would've refused. As it is, he answers Louis in single syllables, keeps his head down and tries to make a good impression on the clients. It gets fucked to hell anyway.

He does everything he can to put it to rights but he's not real, so it doesn't work. He doesn't bother mentioning it to Harvey. He's not looking for readmittance to that world of disappointment. Statistically it'll be his life sooner rather than later anyway. No rush.

A file lands in his lap.

“Goddamn it, Harvey, I’ve got like fifty things to get done by the end of day.”

“Apologies, your highness. Should I come back later?” He doesn't sound as upset as he should.

Mike sighs and retrieves the folder. “Fuck. Sorry. Fuck.”

“Hey,” Harvey says softly, and Mike finally looks up at him. “What’s up?”

“Nothing. Sorry. I’m fine.” He brandishes the file. “What do you need?”

Harvey eyes him for a long moment then - “Come on.”

There isn’t time, but they haven’t talked much lately, Harvey’s been snippy about the weirdest shit, and Mike misses him like an addiction he never got around to kicking, so he follows the man outside into the insultingly cheerful sun. Initially, he turns down the offer for a bagel, but it makes Harvey pinch his lips together in what Mike eventually realizes is worry - a sentiment Harvey shouldn’t be wasting on him, so he acquiesces, though he has no intention of eating it.

They’re settled on a low stone wall when Harvey says, “What’s on your mind?”

Mike rubs his eyes. “Nothing.” Everything.

“We’ve already discussed how I don’t appreciate liars.”

There’s no way to tell the truth and make it out alive, so Mike picks a less awful but still painful reality he’s been wrestling with.

“I was working this job with Louis -”

“That’s why you don’t have time for my case?”

“Harvey.”
“Fine. What about it?”

Mike chews his nail, food abandoned on the bench beside him. “There was this woman - she was fucking lying, Harvey. She was full of shit, and I knew it. I tore her apart to get to the bottom of it, and I was right, except I wasn’t - the whole reason she’d been lying was because her boss had guaranteed health care for her sick kid as long as she went along with his bullshit.”

“She wasn’t charged with anything though, was she?”

“No.”

“This is the one from last week? You won.”

“Yeah. Settlement’s pending for today.”

“So?”

“So her kid’s still sick. And she doesn’t have health insurance. Because she doesn’t have a boss. Because I gots him arrested.”

“Your job is to win,” he says matter of factly. “Not to fall in love with every sob story out there. Caring makes you weak. They find out you care, they’ll walk all over you.”

“Not how I live my life, Harvey, sorry.”

“Then I’m not sure you're cut out for this job.”

Stung, Mike stands. “Thanks for reminding me.”

“Mike -”

“I tried to file a dozen requests, but no one’ll listen to me because I don’t have license.”

“What about Louis? It was his case -”

“He gives less of a fuck than you do. Man, just let it go. Let’s go over your case.”

Harvey frowns thoughtfully, but for once he does as asked. They talk through the witness statements and then Mike returns to his cube to finish a portfolio assessment, but he can’t concentrate, stuck on the family he failed in this case with Louis, and the one he’s sure to fail soon - the man upstairs at his desk, rereading deposition transcript, the one who’s actually worried about Mike.

Harvey should never have to worry about him. Mike should be a better liar, but that won’t help if he’s dead in a ditch somewhere. If something happens, Harvey should know, shouldn’t have to wait for a strung out eternity wondering if Mike finally bit the dust or if he’s just slept through his alarm.

He calls Roger.

“Bionic boy!”

“Hey man. How are you?”

“Peachy fucking keen. What can I do ya for?”

“You still have access to my hospital records?”
“Of course kid. I got all your files.”

“Could you change my emergency contact by any chance?”

“Change it? You don’t have any listed.”

“Yeah. Ok. Add one.”

“Hit me.”

Mike breathes deep. “Specter. S-p-e-c-t-e-r. Harvey. Yeah. Phone number is 2-1-2 …”

When he’s done rattling off the information Roger asks, “Mike. You ok?”

“Of course. Why?”

“What you need an emergency contact for?”

Mike sighs. “Have a good night, Rog. I appreciate the help.”

The long pause is followed by, “Of course, kid. Watch your ass, ok?”

“Of course. You too. Talk soon.”

There’s a smile in his voice as the other man says, “Bye, shithead.”

There. Done. At least Harvey won’t have to waste time wondering. When it goes down, he’ll be the first to know.

Hours later, Mike’s phone goes off. It’s Caroline, the mother from Louis’s case.

“Caroline, hello. What can I help you with?”

“Thank you,” She blurts, voice so different from the last time they spoken, warm now, and heavy with emotion.

“For…”

“It’ll be enough for Ryan’s treatment, and I didn’t think we’d see a penny and you didn’t have to do this for us, but it means so much -”

“What are you talking about?”

“Mr. Halpin’s lawyer called twenty minutes ago. Said Ryan’s care had been rewritten into the settlement. I can’t even believe -” She starts crying and Mike forgets to be comforting - he can’t stop staring blankly at his screen. Eventually he gets his head out of his own ass enough to say, “Of course. The firm cares deeply about your family. I’m glad we could help.”

After few more tearful rounds of confusing thank you’s, Mike’s frantically dialing Donna’s extension. “Is he up there?”

“He just left, but you might be able to catch him…”

Mike’s not much of a runner but he shoots out of his chair and sprints down a frankly ridiculous number of stairs, too impatient to wait for an elevator, slips across the marbled foyer, and stumbles out onto the street.
“Harvey!”

The older man blinks up from his cell just in time to intercept Mike’s tackle of an embrace. “Whoa! Hey. What -?”

“I don’t know how you did it, but thank you. You have no idea what that’ll mean to them, to that family…”

Harvey’s looking down, arms wrapped loosely around Mike’s waist. “What are you talking about?”

“Ryan’s health care.”

The glimmer in his eye gives it all away beautifully. “Wasn’t me.”

“Yeah it was. You do care.”

Harvey tries to shrug away the smile and his grip tightens (unintentionally, it seems) around Mike’s waist. “No.”

“You’re so full of shit.”

The grin is inarguable, though Harvey looks like he might try, and his body is warm and solid and Mike wants to disappear into him, kiss him, taste him, press his nose to that perfect dip at the base of his throat and he’s about to try all of it at once when a woman’s voice calls, “There you are!”

Harvey releases Mike immediately and turns with a roguish wink. “Right where I said I’d be.” He slips a hand around her slender waist and presses a kiss to her cheek and Mike feels his heart break, though maybe that’s just the stairs talking.

“And who is this cutie?” she asks.

Mike offers a shaky hand and a brave smile. “Mike Ross. Harvey’s associate.”

“Nicole.”

“Nice to meet you, Nicole. I hope you two have a lovely night.”

“I’m sure we will.”

God, the smile on his face feels like it’s cleaving him in two. “Thanks again, Harvey.”

Mike turns to go when a strong hand catches his wrist. He vaguely hears, “Would you wait by the car, Nikki? Just a minute,” then close, in his ear, “I just resubmitted your settlement proposals with my name on them. It was well written. The judge took one look and accepted the provisions. You did good work on this, Mike. And the kid’s going to be fine.”

Then the pressure is gone. Harvey Specter reinhabits his body and resumes a more casual volume. “You’re sweating like a pig. Is the firm offering some hot yoga I’m not aware of?”

“Shut up, Harvey.” Elated and demolished simultaneously is a strange feeling.

“I’m serious! I want to know. I love yoga.”

“You love yoga pants. On girls half your age,” Mike calls over his shoulder. “Good night.”

--
“What the hell is this?”

Dismissively Harvey mutters, “Gift from René,” and scribbles something in the margins of the document he’s reading.

“Why?”

“I mentioned I’d be dragging you to an event, he said you needed something, and I quote, ‘Festive.’”

“Oh god.”

“I agree, there’s a lot to be interpreted in that word.”

“So it’s a suit?” Mike fumbles with the box. “What’s it look like? How much do I owe him? Wait, there’s an event? When?”

“Try breathing between sentences.”

“And what? Give you a chance to get a word in edgewise?”

Harvey smirks, finally looking up. “I hope it’s not a suit, the firm is covering the tab, and the event is networking.”

“For what?”

He shrugs. “Partners, I’m guessing. Business is growing, Jessica’s been talking about new hires.”

“And she wants me there?”

Harvey shrugs, suddenly very interested in his pen. Donna coughs pointedly into the intercom.

“I want you there,” he amends, though it looks to be causing him pain. “Ok?”

Mike’s fresh out of smartass comments, too choked up by glee. “Yeah. Ok. Wh - when is it?”

“Tonight. You didn’t have plans, did you?”

“You gotta be kidding me. I’m getting ready at your place then.”

“What are we? Middle school girls? Get ready at your own damn place.”

“No can do, Harvey Reginald. My apartment is twice as far away, I have a million things to do before whenever the fuck this is, I may or may not have forgotten to pay my water bill last month, and I’ll just remind you - you want me there. So.”

Harvey shakes his head. “How did you know my middle name?”

Tapping this temple pointedly, Mike just raises his eyebrows.

“Oh right. Freaky brain.”

“Shut up. You love my freaky brain. You think it’s fascinating. You want to take my brain to di-”

“Don’t you have a million things to do before five?”

“Five? Shit, I gotta go.”
Donna’s laughing so hard she’s holding a tissue to the corners of her eyes to catch the tears, but Mike missed the joke.

Through sheer force of will, he manages to finish everything on his to do list by five fifteen, just as Harvey comes waltzing through the bullpen. “Come on, kid. Oh, and amazing revisions on that IPO.”

“Thanks, but that guy was an idiot,” he says, grabbing his bag.

The pen is strangely quiet as he exits, and when Mike looks up, the whole room is staring.

“What?”

“Did Harvey Specter just say you were amazing?” Harold marvels.

Another guy snorts, a douche who’s been down here longer than he should. “Ross is probably blowing him.”

“Hey, now. If you were a little better in the sack, maybe you’d be junior partner by now,” Mike fires back, amused and unperturbed, because Harvey Specter did indeed just say, ‘amazing’ about something he’d done. “Have a good night, Harold.”

In the car, Mike and Ray chat for the first stretch of ride, but Harvey’s been frowning at the same folder since they got in and it has Mike’s interest piqued. “What’s eating you?”

Harvey sighs. “Financials.”

After a solid minute of continued silent frowning Mike grunts, “Ok... Care to share?”

“It doesn’t add up.”

“Hardman?”

“Yeah, but - ugh.” He tosses the file over. “Look.”

It’s a clusterfuck. Mike's brain sorts through the flow, allocating everything where it belongs, but he comes up over a hundred thousand dollars short with no idea how or why. “Shit.”

“Yeah.”

“So you can't charge him?”

“Oh, I'm going to. It's just going to take a little longer than I'd like.”

Slouching back against the seat Mike’s just exhausted enough to wonder aloud, “Hardman's gone. Why do you care so much?”

He listens to the click of the turn signal, waiting for chastisement or avoidance. Amazingly, he gets neither. “It's mine,” Harvey finally says to his hands. “My money, my time, my life is tied up in this firm. It shouldn't be personal, but it is.”

“Easy there, someone might think you broke your rule and cared about something,” Mike teases.

Flicking his eyes up, Harvey adds softly, “I'm pretty sure we've already established some anomalies in that one.”
Mike's probably choking to death. This is the second time today Harvey's been a breath from admitting actual sentiment towards him, though not a week ago he went home with Nikki, so maybe Mike's getting ahead of himself. Regardless, the car rolls to a stop and Ray ousts them with a wink and a knowing, “Have a goodnight,” causing Mike to seriously ponder how much Harvey shares with his driver.

The elevator ride is silent, more of Harvey sifting through spreadsheets even as he walks out into the kitchen, but he notices when Mike doesn't follow. “What?”

Mike shakes his head. “I missed this place.”

Harvey's wearing an expression Mike's never seen before and doesn't have time to discern. “I'm grabbing a shower. You're welcome to it after. Have you eaten today?”

“Totally,” Mike lies.

“There's food in the fridge. Eat.”

“I'm really -”

“There's going be too much booze and not enough food at this event. I'm not looking to drag a sauced puppy around all evening. Make yourself a goddamn sandwich.”

Mike waves him away with a smile, but heads to the fridge to rummage around. “Yeah, yeah. You don't care about me at all.”

“Oh fuck you,” Harvey cops out amiably, disappearing into the bathroom.

“Wish you would,” Mike murmurs to himself.

He obeys though, makes actual sandwiches and everything, then spreads the financials out on the counter. Like a popcorn shell stuck between teeth, the discrepancy nags at him. There's something off. He can feel it in his bones. He reads the whole thing four times and is checking his math in the margins of a stray newspaper when Harvey emerges from the shower.

“Hey.” Mike can hear the other man’s bare feet on the hardwood. “I made you a sandwich. Also, do you think - Oh my god.”

“Oh thanks, honey,” Harvey teases and Mike doesn't care one goddamn bit because his boss is standing in nothing but a towel and a few lingering droplets, looking completely unconcerned as he takes a bite of ham and cheese. “Mm. Not bad.”

“What the fuck,” Mike whispers, and the way Harvey refuses to break eye contact as he catches a splash of mustard with that sly tongue gives the game away. “You think two can't play that?”

“What're you talking about?”

Asshole. Also - Mike can’t fucking believe he hasn’t noticed.

Harvey still wants him. Not love, but desire. As close as men like Mike are allowed to be on the receiving end of. His boss has been playing nice to simplify the job, make their lives easier, draw those lines thick and dark and clean - but they're both the kind of people to wallow in shadowy ink.

This chapter of his life is coming to a close. The past is catching up to him, closing in, and it’s not like Mike thought he’d get a long run. He’s not practicing law - he is what he’s always been: a
charming fraud. Mike’s a win big kind of guy - probably why the two of them get along so well. Up the ante, all in. Just means that when he loses, he’ll lose everything. So he raises the stakes.

Mike pops the button on his suit jacket and tosses it over a stool, then starts in on his tie. Even as bad as things have been he’s been eating better, taking care of his body, so there's some muscle where he used to be just bone, and he's not shy about it as he unbuttons his shirt and saunters over to Harvey. “You’re full of shit. You know that, right?”

Harvey stills. “What did you just say to me?”

“You want me just as bad as I want you. And you fuckin’ know it, on both counts.” He brushes his shirt open so one hipbone is exposed.

Warnings woven between his teeth, Harvey grits, “Mike…”

“Fine. Don’t touch me. But I'm still gonna come in your shower, with or without your help.”

Harvey makes a little wounded noise in his throat and Mike turns on his heel, grabbing René’s gift on the way.

It's not until he's safely ensconced in the bathroom that Mike realizes what he just said. “Fuck.” Harvey didn’t argue. But he didn't make a move either. And honestly, it's probably for the best. If Harvey does care, then Mike's unforgivably selfish trying to forge a connection. He's on the hit list of a dangerous man, never mind the workplace relationship thing.

There are a plethora of complications, all of them legitimate, but Mike can't help but feel a bit personally slighted. Unsurprised, but hurt. It doesn't stop him from following through on his threat though, coming so hard he has to catch himself on the wall to keep from falling to the tile.

Toweling off, he runs a nail beneath the tape on the sleek, ivory box and opens it. It’s not a tux.

The very top piece is a skinny tie, pearly white, and Mike runs gentle fingertips over it before moving onto the shirt beneath, a dove gray button up. Dark jeans are folded atop a smaller box at the bottom, stormcloud colored trainers and Mike literally has to sit down on the lip of the tub he’s so overcome. It’s perfect, exactly him, but classier.

Everything fits like a glove, obviously, and he puts a dab of Harvey’s cologne behind his jaw before stepping back out into the cooler air of the condo.

Harvey’s standing at the window, and turns around at the sound of him. The most jarring thing is how fucking trendy Harvey looks now that he's not wrapped up in a three-piece suit that screams ‘corporate sector.’ He’s wearing all black, jeans, button up with the top few left undone, and a loose, cowled sweater. Even his shoes are more relaxed than Mike usually sees, casual oxfords, adding to the soft, accessible look. It’s not an entirely honest sale, but Mike has a feeling not many people at this event will be all that interested in transparency.

Beneath casually styled hair, the older man’s face is shuttered and Mike doesn't blame him, but there's something in his eyes, a whole goddamn long jump past appreciation that should complicate things but instead settles him. Everything's fucked to hell, but they're not alone, at least in this.

“You ready to go, or are you going to stand there drooling all night?”

“Is that an option?”
Harvey rolls his eyes. “Come on.”

The guy at the door is taking tickets, but he doesn’t ask for one from Harvey or Mike, so they mosey on into the warmly lit bar. “What the fuck is this?” Mike murmurs.

“I think she’s trying to lower their defences,” Harvey murmurs from the corner of his mouth.

The guest list can’t be longer than a hundred people, many Mike recognizes from the firm, but several more are clearly well established strangers. Harvey greets every one of them with a catlike affability, and Mike enjoys fucking with the ones who are slow on the uptake. He drinks enough to feel cozy but not so much as to need a babysitter. Foolishly, Mike assumes Harvey will be one his best behavior, maybe even dismissing the dangerous conversation they’d almost had earlier. Obviously, he’s wrong.

Harvey seems to be testing out his ability to touch Mike without drawing attention - a hand to the small if his back, a gentle squeeze to the neck, or brushing past with slow deliberateness, tugging the heat from the center of Mike’s body up to the surface.

“You're being kind of distracting, boss,” he grits.

Harvey pockets his hands and murmurs, “Am I really?”

“You know you are.”

The gleam in Harvey's eye foreshadows trouble for them both if this conversation goes down in public. Thankfully, they're interrupted.

“Specter.”

“Bradshaw. How goes it?”

The graying man is fit and handsome but there's a whine to his tone Mike doesn't care for.

“The strangest thing happened the other day.”

“Oh?”

Mike smiles in spite of himself. He hears the challenge hiding in the boredom of Harvey's tone, but he doubts this poor sucker does.

“Yeah. Someone mentioned consulting with you on the Diageo account.”

Oh. Mike knows this guy, on paper at least, from an audit he reviewed weeks ago.

“Mm-hm…”

“They wanted me to meet with you!”

“Is that what this is?” He sounds amused.

“No! I'm their lawyer, why the fuck would I be talking to you?”

“It’s good to defer to an expert from time to time.”

“Why you -”
“Jason Bradshaw?” Mike interrupts, drawing attention to himself for the first time in the conversation, and the guy blinks coolly, surprised at his audacity. “You must be. The new guy for StatTech Global, right?”

“New guy? I’ve been there for four years.”

“And Dick Morsch was there for four decades. Anyone would have a hard time filling those shoes.”

“Even your boss here?” Bradshaw sneers, triumphant, like so banal a trap could ever throw Mike off his game.

“Maybe. But he’d have the good sense not to keep fucking up so publicly.”

Harvey snorts. Bradshaw lurches forward.

“Listen here you little piece of shit, I don’t know who you think you are -”

“Mike Ross.” He offers his hand and a grin. “Nice to meet you.”

The guy accepts neither gesture. “- But if you don’t step out of this conversation this very fucking second -”

“I mean, do you disagree? You’re harassing your company’s most recent hire at his firm’s party for chrissakes.”

“- You will have a goddamn dent where your face used to be.”

Mike’s heard worse, so he shrugs and tucks his hands in his pockets, but apparently that was one step too far for Harvey. Stepping between Mike and the douche, he speaks with terrifying calmness.

“I’m going to do you a favor, Jason. We’re going to pretend we never saw each other tonight. We’re going to pretend that you didn’t antagonize the closer your boss just hired to clean up your mess, and that you didn’t just threaten one of the best employees Pearson Hardman has ever seen, a man who, incidentally, is already ten times the lawyer you’ll ever be. We’ll just act like it never happened.”

Mike surreptitiously wipes his eyes on his sleeve as Harvey finishes, “But you aren’t going to forget this part. If you ever come after me or my guy again, you won’t walk right for a week and you won’t sit right for the rest of your goddamn life. Now clear the hell out, and the next time we meet you will play nice, because, same team or not, you threaten what’s mine? I will destroy you. Are we clear?”

There’s no answer. The message is received in the silence as Bradshaw abandons the discussion and fumes off to the bar.

Mike wants to cry, so he says, “That might’ve been a bit much.”

“Says the kid who poked the bear.”

“He deserved it.”

“Damn right he did.”

“You didn’t have to -”
“Shut up, Mike.”

He looks up shyly. “You said I was your guy.”

“You disagree?”

“No.”

“Then what?”

“It was just…” he blushes. “Nice. Is all. To give me any credit at all after everything you’ve done for me.”

“I offered you a job,” Harvey murmurs mildly but Mike can tell there’s something deeper swirling beneath.

“Harvey. You didn’t just give me my dream. You gave me a family.”

Harvey stares at him and the bar falls away. Every patron and brand and ounce of social leverage fades to crackling gray, bowing beneath the intensity of those dark eyes as he says, “For the record, you’re not the only one who got more family out of this deal.”

It’s a gift he won’t be able to bear to part with if he accepts it, so Mike elbows him lightly. “Yeah, yeah.” Family. Christ. It’s been awhile.

“You callin’ me a liar?”

Thank God. Scarface. Familiar ground. And it’s an easy diversion - not too far from how he’s actually feeling. “Let's just say I want things to stay the way they are for now.”

The warm approval in Harvey’s face softens his comment of, “Your Frank Lopez is fucking terrible.”

“And your Tony Montana is shaky at best.”

“Are you kidding me? I do a great Pacino!”

“Maybe if I drank a little more…”

Harvey laughs. “Then go get yourself a goddamn drink, punk.”

“Maybe I will. You want anything?”

The bar is busy but not swamped, so Mike wedges himself into a spot and tries to lure the bartender over telepathically, like every other poor schmuck at the counter. But it’s warm in here, and he still smells of Harvey’s cologne, so the wait is no bother, except...

The longer he stares, the more Mike is convinced he knows the bartender from somewhere, but the time and place elude him, and that's a problem. Mike remembers everything except the shit he's spent concerted effort to forget, or worse still, to never be present for in the first place.

It’s probably nothing. He stays put, and tense.

Uncertainty has been overtaken by low-grade fear when a polite voice says, “What can I get for you, sir?”

Mike startles back toward the counter, but the guy looks perfectly pleasant, if not bored.
“Do you know what you're having?”

“Macallan Double Cask, neat. Please,” he manages.

“Good choice.” He pauses. “Are you ok?”

Mike nods, and fishes his money from his pocket. He’s obviously overreacting.

“Ok then. Macallan neat, coming right up.”

What the fuck? The fear won’t subside, hovering just beneath his ribcage. It’s completely illogical, Mike tells himself. *Calm the hell down.* Breathing deeply, he counts out the tip and tries desperately to slow the pounding of his heart, returning the bartender’s easy smile as he returns with the glass. “Thank you.”

The guy leans in to take the cash, but just as the bills are about to trade hands he catches Mike’s wrist with an iron grip, jerking him in hard enough that the bad shoulder twinges.

“Watch yourself, pretty boy,” he snarls. “Payback’s a bitch.” And then he releases Mike, resuming that easy smile. “Have a nice night, sir.”

Stunned, Mike stands frozen next to the bar for seventy four seconds. And then he forces himself to move, draining the tumbler and leaving it on the counter.

He can’t be surprised. In one way or another, he’s always been fortifying his new life for this day, the day he knew was coming, the day he got himself into. Even if there was never any other choice.

For a moment he’d forgotten how vindictive that fucker had been. Brilliant, in fact - not as brilliant as Mike, but stronger in ways that made all the difference. Mike had been a kid back then, a whole two years ago.

He’s older now. So much more to lose, and yet he’s strangely at peace as he wades back into the crowd to find Harvey. There isn’t much time left. He should spend it where it counts.

Harvey sees him from yards away, gives him a once over, and quirks a brow. “What’s wrong?”

Mike scrapes a grin off the back of his ribs and screws it on tight. “Not a damn thing. Louis looking awful comfortable, though. We should probably go fix that.”

Maybe he’s not as rusty as the thought. Harvey chuckles and complies, wading through the crowd with Mike at his tail, so it’s no surprise the kid doesn’t see his boss frowning - worried.

--

“Hey, do you-”

“Not now,” Harvey grunts.

“But I -”

“Do I strike you as the kind of man who repeats himself?” The ice in his voice is more effective than the words themselves.

Mike backs out of the room.
“What's with him?”

Donna sighs. “Wish I knew.”

“You know everything.”

“True. Unless he asks me not to. In which case, I usually leave it the hell alone.”

“Is it … it's not …”

“About you? Shockingly, no. I don't think so.”

“Great,” Mike breathes. It still sucks, but it's not his fault. “I wish he’d just fucking ask for my help.”

“Why would he?” Donna replies, typing inhumanly fast. “You won’t ask him.”

Mike gapes. “Th - that’s different.”

She shrugs without looking away from the screen. “If you say so,” might as well be “You’re so full of shit.”

Figures she knows more about what he's hiding than anyone else.

“Donna, you don’t understand. It’s dangerous.”

This time she meets his eyes. “Mike. It’s Harvey.” The small smile helps, but only a bit. “Now get going. He’s literally sitting at his desk watching us talk.”

“Not so smooth, is he?”

“Not in the slightest, and don’t you dare turn around.”

“Wouldn’t dream of it.” But he heads down to his cube, mulling over something he has dreamt of, and the far fetched possibility of making it a reality.

Asking Harvey for help.

On the one hand, it’s a fucking terrible idea. The whole point of keeping his distance was that Mike’s past endangers his life and anyone in it.

On the other hand, Donna’s right. It’s Harvey. This isn't his problem and he's dug Mike out of enough shit already, but surely in all this recent fondness there's enough of a desire to keep his associate around that he might put up another fight, plot just one more scheme on Mike’s behalf.

Harvey, who closes every deal. Who never shies away from a fight. There's no bluff and the sight of this gun is firmly fixed on Mike, but maybe Harvey's got a bigger gun, or can try one of those hundred and forty six other things he’d ranted about. Maybe if they fight together, they can win. They’re already an unstoppable team. Maybe Mike won’t always be looking over his shoulder. Maybe there’s a future somewhere in this clusterfuck.

The floodgates of possibility have been opened, but it’s too much to dwell on right now. The ability to dive in and shut the world out is one Mike’s honed successfully over the years, so he sinks into work, disappearing into serif and neon and Latin.

Perhaps he’s too good at losing himself, because when Donna calls to let him know Harvey wants him upstairs, the sun has long settled away and he’s fucking starving.
“Hey.”

Harvey looks beautiful and put together, but there’s a rigidity to his body that belies a lack of comfort, of control. He’s exhausted, but Mike’s one of probably three people in the world who could tell. “Here,” the older man mutters, handing over the spreadsheet of company finances they’d been mulling over in trying to catch Hardman, but there are significantly more pages than before. “Read.”

“Again?”

“Yes, again. Hardman’s requested a meeting tomorrow.”

“What? Why?”

“I’m guessing to fuck with us. We still don’t have any hard evidence to make it stick. Time’s running out.”

_Don’t I know it._ Mike thinks. Aloud, he says, “Alright. Don’t worry. We’ll find it.”

“Naive optimism is useless. Keep it to yourself.”

“Jesus,” Mike murmurs under his breath. So the bad mood is here to stay. He gets to work anyway.

Two rereads and three hours later, Mike can no longer ignore the pangs of hunger tickling his ribs and he sets the documents and his laptop aside, stretching.

“The fuck do you think you’re going?”

“I haven’t eaten in twelve hours, Harvey. I’m gonna grab something from the break room and I’ll be right back.”

The disapproving ‘tsk’ is laden with so much irritation that Mike actually stops.

“Did you want something from the break room?” he asks as if speaking to a small child.

“Hell no.”

Turning to the door, Mike sighs in defeat, letting the, “Fine. Fuck you, too,” slide out softly under his breath.

“What did you just say to me?”

“Nothing.”

“Don’t you dare walk out of this office -”

Mike whirls around. “What the fuck is your problem, man?”

Low and terrifying, Harvey rumbles, “I beg your fucking pardon?”

Good thing Mike’s too worn out from a much scarier boogey man.

“You’re being a dick! Is this about that comment I made at your place? ‘Cause shit, I’m sorry - it was totally inappropriate, but I don’t deserve this. I got all your work done, plus this random Hardman crap, which sure as hell isn’t in my job description. So what the fuck is going on,
Harvey? Huh? Are you just gonna keep treating me like shit indefinitely? I mean, I guess I can’t stop you.” The bitterness in his voice almost surprises him. Almost.

All he gets for his trouble is a stare. Option B then. The metal of the door handle is icy under his palm when Harvey says quietly, “Jessica’s leaving.”

The silence of the office settles in his joints before the facts absorb into his brain. “What? Like… leaving the profession?”

“The firm. There’s this guy…and an opportunity in Chicago…” For the first time that day he sounds like himself.

“Harvey,” Mike says softly. “I’m sorry.” His shrug looks strangely casual beneath the structured shoulders of a suit jacket. “But this could be good.”

“How?”

“You said it yourself. This firm is yours. You’ve invested so much of your life here, and Hardman’s gone, and you’re the best fucking closer in New York. Next step is name partner. Why not?” he asks at the shake of Harvey’s head.

“I’m not sure I want to stay here without her.” What’s gonna happen to me? slaps Mike in the brain so abruptly he startles as it triggers a chain reaction of panic. He’s got nowhere else. And everyone knows it. So what happens when this gig falls through? What happens if Harvey closes up shop? What if he moves? What is Mike without this firm, without this man?

He has to lock the answer away in a secret, dusty place in his brain before he can speak. “It’ll be ok, Harvey. But if I don’t eat something I’m gonna pass out and hit my head and then you’ll have a whole new set of problems on your hands. So. Hang tight, I’m gonna raid Louis’s granola bar stash, and then we’ll find a way to nail Hardman. Ok?”

Harvey smirks, but it’s gentler, and lovely on him.

“Mike,” he interrupts mid-exit.

“Mm?”

“About the other night…I’m not upset about it.”

“Oh. Good.” Thank Christ.

“And I’m sorry. For being a dick.”

Mike has to give him shit - for both their sakes. He can’t let it get too heavy. “You gonna make it up to me?” The comment doesn’t quite work as intended.

“What do you want?” Harvey asks, voice a thin gust of air in the empty building.

What do you want? Mike hears the question. And then he feels it, let's it work it's way through his nervous system all the way back to his heart where it wreaks its havoc.

“I want to sleep. I want my parents back. I want to see if your laugh sounds the same when you’re sixty as it does today. I want to make you dinner. I want you to want me. I want to be something other than a menace. I want to be a lawyer. I want to die. I want to fucking live. I want you.”
Catching back the sob is the singular most difficult and impressive thing Mike’s ever done.

“Lemme think about it,” he manages, and escapes the room just quick enough that Harvey probably doesn’t hear the gasp of breath before the tears.

So much for asking for help.

--

It’s a relief, honestly, when it comes to a head. Not in a pleasant way, but at least it castrates the waiting.

Harvey sees him first. Mike gets the smell of disinfected oranges following behind.

“Specter!” he tosses out jovially, and Mike's hand snaps the pen he’s holding clean in half. Dread slows and blurs his vision as he forces his eyes up.

The Master's even older, worn in a way that time alone can't account for, and Mike feels a singular molecule in his brain shift from shock to triumph. He played a part in that gray hair, in painting the purpley veins beneath Hardman’s eyes. He should celebrate small victories here at the end of all things.

“And who might this be?” he sneers.

Calmly, Harvey replies, “My associate, Mike Ross.”

It takes an elbow to his ribs to remind Mike that handshakes are customary in greetings, and thank god it's his left hand now covered in ink.

“Daniel Hardman.” He sounds amused. “So good to finally meet you.”

Mike had assumed that when the time came, he'd be a wreck, and it's not untrue - the urge to call him Master instead of the curt, “You as well,” is nearly overpowering. Surprising though, is the lack of panic. The only thing left is ice-pure, blade-cut-clean, seething rage.

Harvey's giving him the side eye as they all sit around the table, but Mike makes sure his game face is bolted on tight.

“Let’s get this over with, Daniel.”

Mike’s sure they talk about something. Hardman definitely teases Harvey about having to drop the case against him if they don’t find any corroborating evidence. Mike contributes a comment or two, but it makes sense (thankfully) for him to remain quiet for most of the conversation. Harvey was right, Hardman just wanted to fuck with them, and it works - Mike can tell Harvey’s pissed, the muscle of his jaw clenching and releasing as he stands to dismiss the meeting.

Mike wonders what they discussed, but absently, far away, and completely unsurprised as Hardman says, “I'd like a word with your associate. Alone.”

“Absolutely not.”

“Harvey.” Both men look at him in surprise, but Mike’s ready. He knew this was coming, knew this was the beginning of the inevitable end since he smelled that acrid citrus. Time to face the music. “I'll meet you in your office. Ok?”

He lets himself really look at Harvey one last time. Beautiful man. It would’ve been wonderful to
see who they could’ve been together. Longing so deep it feels almost like hope sweeps through him. Say no. Say you’ll stay. Send this fucker packing. Please don’t let me go.

Without a word his mentor exits, and Mike turns slowly to face his nightmare - alone.

In slow synchronicity both men sink into their chairs on opposite sides of the table and Mike finds himself speaking first. “Do you know, I never learned your name?”

The cat-caught-mouse smile fades into grey anger. “What?”

“You gave me enough souvenirs.”

“Ah yes,” he leers. “How’s the shoulder?”

“Oh, great. You’re surgeon does excellent work.”

“Best money can buy.”

“That’s your modus operandi isn’t it? With your doctors and cars and whores.”

“I wouldn’t say the best.”

“Oh, come on Daniel. We both know that’s not true.”

Something about using his name snaps the shaky tightrope of decorum they’d been treading. “I’ve been having a lovely time fucking with you.”

“Mm.” Mike does his best to sound bored but it’s a toss up if it worked. “You fucking shot me the last time I saw you, though I’m shocked you did your own dirty work on that one. The car accident was fun. Carson Dye is a real treat.” Hardman seems surprised Mike knows his given name. “And that bartender - what a sweetheart.”

“I’m glad you enjoyed yourself.”

“You know I’m good at that.”

“And you know why I’m here,” and this time it’s the voice of the Master, dominant and nasal and cruel and Mike shudders.

“I’m not sure it’s wise to kill me in a law firm.”

Hardman’s guffaw ricochets off the glass. “Dumb bitch. I’m not that nice.”

Slivers of ice start to form around Mike’s blood cells. Casually, the greying man shoves his suitcase across the table.

“What is this?”

“You’re going to drop that off to a friend of mine. In person. The address is inside.”

Mike opens the case. It’s not a small amount of cocaine, but it’s not huge either. He frowns at it. “What...what the fuck?”

“What?” Hardman parrots innocently.

“This is … why? You could literally mail this.”
“Well. Let’s start here.” He slides a copy of what Mike can tell immediately is his arrest record. “This goes public if you don’t.”

“So? Prostitution is a Class B Misdemeanor in New York.” Mike’s served a total of seven months over three different stays. Not so bad. Right?

Then why can’t he breathe? It feels like his stomach is eating itself.

“I’m just thinking about Ann Dietrich. And Judge Malone. And Danella Carr. And Robert Watson. And Judge Collazo.”

Mike freezes.

They’re all clients or judges Mike’s worked with. Collazo’s been pushing for stricter prostitution laws for years, and the rest are nauseatingly religious in that way that turns people into crusaders for evil draped in the flag of their god. If they knew they’d colluded with a career hooker, he’d be away for years. They’d make sure of it. Maybe Hardman’s got someone waiting for him in prison. Still, it’s an easy choice. He’d take jail over this risk, of hurting Harvey again.

“Sure. Go ahead.”

“Oh, little bitch. Always so selfish. Think about who hired you.” He keeps his mouth shut. It’s a skill learned under the tutelage of this very man. “Jail would be a vacation for you. But for Harvey…”

“He didn’t know.”

Hardman tosses a photo onto the lacquered wood. “Didn’t he?”

It’s the two of them at Alonna Hatfield’s.

“This doesn’t…”

Another photo. The art gallery. The Aston Martin.

“So? We’re friends -”

The next one is a photocopy - bank records, deposits, and the checks are signed in Donna’s handwriting, but it’s Harvey’s name on them. The subject line of one even says “Rent Boy” with a little winky face. It’s funny - Mike’s always shared her sense of humor. He wants to laugh, but his lungs are staging a coup.

“These are inadmissible,” he whispers to the last paper with it’s damning, light-sensitive emulsion - Harvey, pressing him to the front door of the condo, and even though they can’t be seen, there’s no question as to the location of his hands.

Hardman doesn’t seem to care. “You do this drop. Or these make their way to all the right, or should I say wrong, people. You’ll go to jail, and that boss of yours will never practice law again.”

“For how long?”

“Pardon?”

“How long are you planning on holding these over me?”

Hardman’s smile is just as stomach turning now. “Oh. I think just this once will be plenty.”
“It doesn’t make any sense.”

Mike’s repeated that single phrase at least thirty five time in the past day. It just doesn’t.

He showers, dresses neatly, and double checks the latches on the briefcase. Won’t do to go spilling drugs all over the place.

His best guess is that Hardman’s setting him up for arrest, but there are worst things. The document Jessica had him sign will free the firm of any culpability, and Harvey’ll - well. Mike dealt with it.

In a sick twist the evening is actually mild, after a few grey days of rain, as Mike rides his beautiful bike down an alley and out onto the street. The 8.3 miles to the drop fly by in a sea of headlights and measured breathing.

It’s been a good run, Mike thinks. A chance to dabble in a world he thought he’d missed out on after getting kicked out of Harvard, a chance to love and lose a man who never could have been his anyway. If this plays out right, he’ll be free from the bullshit of his past, and even though it won’t, the only person he’ll be disappointing is Gram, and only if she finds out. He’d spent the previous day with her, laughing and getting his ass kicked at cards and praying that maybe Rog will post bail after this goes upside down. No one from work will be any wiser. There’s pound of gummy bears stashed in Donna’s drawer, and gourmet chocolate in Rachel’s. A silly note on Harold’s desk, and a letter of resignation on Harvey’s. He’s quietly excused himself from their lives. They’ll let him go. They have to.

A mile from the drop, Mike begins scanning his surroundings with more attention to detail. It’s a decent area, shops and restaurants and dogs on leashes, but he scours every face, every dark corner for someone that could be a cop, a narc, Hardman himself.

The building isn’t as tall as he’d been expecting, but it’s nice, pale brick and soft lighting, with only a few cars parked along the curb. It’s tucked back away from the street, too, making it an ideal drop spot. Mike dismounts and makes his way towards the back of the apartment, as Hardman had instructed. A wooden gate, a well lit alley, and then -

“He said you’d come.” The guy stubs out his cigarette on the step. “I didn’t think you’d be so stupid.”

It’s the bartender, and the wave of memory knocks Mike on his ass.

"Jackson!"

"Sir."

"Where the fuck’s the money?"

“She hasn’t returned any of the calls."

“I don’t give a fuck. Get it back.”

“It’s awfully late, Sir. I’m sure I could go tomorrow…”

“No. Now.” Then he’d waved absentely at Mike, far too sore and weary to respond as Hardman added, “When you get back, you can have him for an hour or two. He’s paid through ‘til
morning.”

Jackson had checked the safety on his gun and winked down to where Mike was sprawled on the floor. “Well then, bitch. I guess I’ll see you soon.”

Mike gags as he matches the name in the briefcase to the shadow perched on the stoop. “Jackson Todd.”

“Mike Ross.”

The sound of his own name in that mouth more than Mike can bear, and he throws the suitcase across the courtyard towards this stain of a man from his past. It strikes the cobblestones and springs open, spitting the bags of powder onto the pavement.

Jackson clicks his tongue disapprovingly. “Now little bitch, look what you’ve done.” He stands, voice hardening. “Pick it up.”

“No thanks.”

“Now.”

“No part of the job.”

Mike’s turned almost completely away when the click of a safety echoes through the night. He freezes.

“I said, Pick. It. Up.”

Slowly, Mike raises his hands, making his way over, crouching at Jackson’s feet. He’s numb, but as he gathers the bundles back into the suitcase he notices the trembling of his hands. Perhaps that’s why he doesn't see the boot coming.

“Ah!”

Thank god it’s not steel toe, but it’s a work boot nonetheless, spilling a bruise over Mike’s ribs immediately. It occurs to him as he rolls to the ground that just because Hardman didn’t kill him at the office doesn’t mean he won’t kill him here. It’d be easy. Mike’s sure the security cameras have been disabled, and for all he knows, the whole building is empty. Not one soul here to help.

“What an attitude,” he sneers. “Since the very beginning. What gives you the right, whore?”

Mike spits. “Quit saying that word like it means anything other than the fact that I’m better in bed than you. Ugh!”

He finds himself on his feet, but only so Jackson can pop a black eye onto him, and he’s back to the ground. Ears ringing, he rolls to his knees and is knocked back again. The blood rushing in his head sounds like sirens.

“It’s too bad I’m not allowed to kill you.”

Mike laughs a little blood disappointedly onto the cobblestone. “Why in god’s name not?”

Jackson sounds genuinely put upon as he says, “He’s not done with you yet.”

Everything hurts. “He said this would be the last one!”

Jackson scoffs. The wailing in Mike’s head grows louder. “Stupid bitch. This was never his
favorite way to hurt you.”

Another kick, and Mike lets his head drop to the pavement. Lights creep at the edge of his vision, and then they fade away, just like everything else.

Chapter End Notes

happy and fluff and sex and solutions are coming. I promise. <3
In middle school, Mike found a book tucked atop tattered gardening manuals on a library shelf - perfectly misplaced - a graphic novel about Dream personified. He devoured the first and then the series, almost as a plea. Give me control. Let me be more. If Dream was a man, maybe Mike could be Hope. Or Creation. Or a Family, all on his own.

Strangely though, the fragment that stuck was a throw away quote from the fifth volume, a bit of dialogue totaling four short sentences which sunk its talons into the fragile tapestry of his adolescent soul and gave him just two choices: rip it out, or make it his own. Mike’s always been bright.

“You hurt. It's okay. I hurt, too. Hold my hand.”

He's been looking ever since.

--

He’d woken in the ER. Turns out you can’t refuse treatment until you’re conscious.

After Mike ripped out the IV and bled all over the starched sheets, they’d agreed to transfer him to lock up. He didn’t explain why prison was better than a hospital. How could he? Thank god he’d fallen back asleep on the way.

His head is killing him now though, and he tries to protect himself against the noise outside his cell, pulsing in places he shouldn’t even be able to feel as he winces his way up to a sitting position on the thin blue cot. “Whaaa…”

A woman on the other side of the bars hands him a water bottle and a few aspirin. “Here.”

Reaching for them makes him nauseous. “What happened?”

“You’re a pain in the ass,” she says dryly. “And also under arrest. Possession with intent to distribute. You should call your lawyer.”

“No thanks,” he mumbles, words like stones dropping to the pit of his stomach.

“Suit yourself,” she shrugs.

“Thank you,” he calls to her retreating form. “For the aspirin.” She’s already gone. At least his life is consistent.

His abs give out and he flops down with a groan. Even the bottoms of his feet hurt, but all in all, it could be worse. The average sentence for the amount of cocaine he’d been carrying is three years, max of seven. Three square meals a day, and there’s a purity to prison’s cardinal rule which Mike thinks might be soothing - no law but survival.

He feels terrible about Gram. Roger will help look after her, and Mike drained his bank account paying ahead on her bills. Two years. And then who knows. Maybe he’ll fake his death, collect life insurance. If she dies while he’s away he’ll never forgive himself, but he’ll never forgive himself anyway, so he might as well add to the unpayable debt.
It’s just past ten a.m. He imagines Harold piling neat post-it stacks of to-do’s, Rachel tapping her pen as she zips through research, Donna simultaneously fucking with Louis and tracking down whatever obscure data or anti-social socialite Harvey’s looking for at the moment.

Harvey.

He’ll have gotten Mike's letter of resignation this morning. Cruelly, Mike kind of hopes he's bummed about losing his associate. Other than Roger, Harvey's pretty much the only real friend he has, if that’s even what they are. Were.

It'll be lonely without him, worse than he can imagine right now Mike suspects, but Harvey is safe. His license is intact, along with his unparalleled, if mixed, reputation. No harm, no foul, no price to pay for his amusing romp with the genius hooker. And he's got all those cars, and suits, and women to keep him warm, now. Never mind the idea of someone else pressing their mouth to that dip at the base of Harvey's neck makes Mike ill. Or maybe it's the aspirin on an empty stomach.

All that matters is that Mike got out before he could destroy something else he loves.

It takes the tinny echo of a voice three tries to wake him up.

“Hey. Hey. Ross! There’s someone here to see you.”

“Who?” he rasps, voice still down for the count.


He stands, gripping his stomach to keep his insides in as best he can with handcuffs. Nothing’s broken, but the bruises are going to be trouble enough.

Maybe it’s a public defender. Maybe it’s the arresting officer. Maybe it’s Hardman. As long as it’s over soon, he doesn’t care. He just wants to lie back down.

She opens the sterile steel door ahead of him to a bleak room with a metal table and two chairs, someone seated at the further of the two.

It’s Harvey.

Horrified, Mike whispers, “What are you doing here?”

“Apparently,” he replies. “I’m your emergency contact.”

Oh god. Oh no.

“You still have access to my hospital records?”

“Of course kid. I got all your files.”

“Could you change my emergency contact by any chance?”

All his files. Fuck.

“I’m sorry,” Mike says. “I never meant -”

“To get caught?” Harvey snaps.

“Well, no.”
“To fuck me over?”

“I didn’t -”

“Lie to my face?”

Mike sighs. “I didn’t!”

“What the fuck is wrong with you?”

“A lot,” he says dryly.

“I’ll say. Are you even going to try to explain yourself?” Harvey’s snarling, but far away, beneath rage so hot Mike finds himself shying away from the table. Was it wise for the guard to leave them alone in here? There’s the tiniest hint of something else - worry? hurt? - in Harvey’s face, and whatever it is, it’s the real reason he showed up.

And then it hits him, a ton of bitter, guilty bricks. After the weed incident, Mike had chastised Harvey for playing games with Mike’s life just because his feelings were hurt, and Harvey’d heard him, loud and clear. He’d even delivered a message of his own, though Mike’s been too stupid to realize until now.

“If you’re going to fuck up, at least make it something I can take care of.” He might as well have said, “Let me take care of you.”

Mike can’t let him do that. Every step of this messed up dance has been to keep Harvey safe, and the only weapon Hardman has against him now is Mike.

“No. You should go.”

Harvey stands abruptly and comes round the table to get in Mike’s face.

“How dare you -”

“Look, I’m sorry they called you but -”

“Who’s your lawyer?”

“I’m representing myself.”

“That’s the stupidest thing I’ve ever heard.”

“Coming from me, that shouldn’t be a surprise at this point.”

Harvey inhales sharply and clenches his fists, causing Mike to flinch which, strangely, deflates Harvey’s stance and he steps away, pinching the bridge of his nose, still vibrating with rage.

“What the fuck’s gotten into you, Mike? Do you need money? Were we not paying you enough?”

What’s he supposed to say? He needs to get Harvey out of here before he gets sucked into Mike’s shitstorm, and it’s as good an excuse as any. He shrugs. “You got me.”

“So you decided to do the one fucking thing I asked you not to.”

“I didn’t do the drugs!” he protests, an ignorant excuse he doesn’t really believe. “I just passed them along.”
Harvey’s jaw drops, bitterness painting his features. “Are you fucking serious right now?”

_No, god no, please call my bluff... “Sure.”_

“I don’t believe you.”

“Too bad, so sad, boss man. I mean, thanks ‘n’ all, for the starting salary, but we both knew that wasn’t going to last.”

Recoiling in hurt, Harvey bites out, “You could’ve been a great lawyer, you know. Too bad you -”

“Why are you here?” Mike interrupts venomously, unable to survive the end of that sentence, and it tears a hole in the room, acidic and angry and awful. “You should’ve left me to rot.

Harvey snarls, more emotional than Mike’s ever seen him. “You’re a piece of fucking work.”

_Don’t cry, don’t cry, don’t cry “You done?_

And like a light switch it’s gone, every ounce of feeling vanishes, and with it, the humanity in Harvey’s gaze. Mike had forgotten that look. He hasn’t seen it since the first time he’d slid into the back of Ray’s car, a bullet-ridden escort wrapped in his Gram’s scarf.

Harvey wrenches the door open behind him, as those dark eyes scan Mike, dismissive. “Absolutely.”

The slamming of the heavy metal rings in the room and despite previous bravado, Mike startles away from it.

It’s over. The end.

Mike curls into himself as the sobs constrict his posture ‘til he’s gagging wetly on the stainless steel table.

In the burnished metal his face is red and the shiner he’s sure to grow is still just a shadow around his eye socket. Not too bad, except the dead stare blinking back at him, but Mike accepts that as his own now. It’s what he deserves.

The guard leaves him alone until he’s cried himself dry, then walks him back to the cell. He briefly considers asking what happens next, but she leaves before he can start breathing again, and he doesn’t really care. Not anymore.

He counts ceiling tiles then begins to reread the lyrics of his dad’s old albums. Huey Lewis. Tina Turner. John Denver. Take me home, country road.

A sharp, metallic tapping, a pen on the bars of his cell, startles him out of a Velvet Underground album.

“Aren’t you looking lovely.”

It’s Hardman, and Mike has nothing left for him, not even malice.

“What the fuck do you want?”

The bastard throws an envelope through the bars to land with a flump on the concrete floor. “Here are your pictures. I thought you might like a souvenir.”
“You didn't think getting arrested wouldn’t cut it?”

The old man scoffs. “What? No. I don’t give a shit about that - I got two birds with one stone on this one.”

“What?”

“You and Harvey.”

“What are you talking about?”

“You ruined my personal life, and Harvey, my professional. It opened a whole new world of possibilities when I realized you two were falling in love with each other.”

“You’re wrong,” he gags, heaving himself up.

“I’ve been tracking you for years! You weren’t worth my time, starving to death and stretching yourself so thin you were more of a hazard to yourself than I could ever be. I thought about taking you out after you started working for that son of a bitch, but every time I saw you, you two idiots were dancing around each other like flirty school girls. What a gift.”

Mike’s shivering so hard he’s worried it’ll break his ribs for real this time.

“The two men who most deserved to suffer - and how? The best punishment is one the victim inflicts on himself. He’d have done anything for you - even let you break his heart.”

“I didn’t have a choice! You were going to - you made me!”

“But when he thinks about who destroyed him, it won’t be my face he dreams of.” Hardman laughs gleefully. “I win.”

The kid stumbles blindly to the toilet in the corner of the cell, but by the time he’s done puking, Hardman’s gone.

--

They can’t prove the drugs were his - no prints, nothing traceable.

Someone posts bail two days later. He doesn’t ask who.

Mike walks home.

--

He sleeps through sunrises and sunsets.

The black eye blooms spectacularly, but his ribs hurt less by the day.

When Mike can finally stay conscious for more than a few minutes at a time, he showers. Eats a freezer-burned burrito. Brushes his teeth. Cleans the apartment dressed in Harvey’s hoodie. The head injury must have knocked some shit loose - Mike does it all while drowning in memories pulled from chronology, swirling slivers of color and taste and sound and sensation.

He takes out the photos and documents Hardman had thrown into his cell. It’s fucked up to keep blackmail as memorabilia, but Mike likes the pictures of him and Harvey together. They look happy. He’s worried he’ll forget what that feels like. His only awareness now is emptiness, an aching void in and around his body. If someone were to touch him, he’d fall apart.
“Touch has a memory,” Keats wrote. “O say, love, say, What can I do to kill it and be free?”

Mike wants to offer the poor guy his belated consolation. Touch doesn't fade. You carry it in the ghost of bruises, the whisper of goosebumps, the omnipresent truth of emptiness only after having finally been full.

Donna calls. He ignores it - all seven times. He tells Gram he's got the flu, and that he'll see her in a week or so. Rog emails him. Mike texts back not to worry, then takes the battery out of his phone.

It hurts too much to stay conscious. He's lost days, but still, he falls back asleep.

He wakes to knocking. Harvey. It’s déjà vu of the last time they’d fought, except this time, instead of answering, Mike tucks his head back down under the pillow and closes his eyes.

“Mike!” It’s good to hear his voice, even furious as it is. “Open the goddamn door!”

Mike stays quiet. *Keep him safe.*

“I know you're in there!”

The smartass in Mike wants to call, “No I'm not,” but he's trying to kill that part of himself, so he keeps his mouth shut.

“I swear to god you selfish prick, I will break this fucking thing down!” There’s a manic tinge to Harvey’s voice that’s concerning, but it’s the sound of a shoulder being thrown against the rickety wood that gets him moving.

“Stop! Jesus,” Mike shouts, fumbling with the lock. “Give me a goddamn sec - WHAT?”

Harvey charges through the door in shirtsleeves and a tie, more beautiful than Mike remembers but thinner, too. He’s got a folder in one hand, and Mike’s first thought is that it’s a case, before he remembers that he’s fired forever and Harvey doesn’t want him anyway - except that the older man brandishes the file in Mike's face like it’s the proof that’ll turn a jury. “What the fuck, Mike.”

Mike snatches it out of his hand, retreating into the apartment and trying to keep his heart turned off but Harvey follows to the opposite side of the cracked plastic table, clenching his fists against the urge to throttle his ex-employee. “Your face looks terrible.”

Mike ignores the comment and opens the file. “Why do you have my medical records?” Harvey ignores the question.“Did you know my brother’s a doctor?”

“Didn’t know you had a brother.”

“He says the injuries listed are consistent with abuse.”

Mike tsks and turns away to tuck the pages back into the file. “Work accident.”

“Over a span of years.” A dry statement, feigning dubiousness so as not to make it a question. Maybe he’s afraid of the answer.

“Your brother tell you that, too? I’m fine.”

“So that’s it?”

“That’s it.”
With a hint of desperation Harvey counters, “Then why is Hardman’s name on the bill?”

Unbidden, tears start gathering behind MIke’s lids. It must be exhaustion. He’s fulfilled his crying quota for the century in the past week alone.

He pulls the sleeves of Harvey’s hoodie down over his hands and shakes his head. Distance. They both need distance, but as he’s walking away, forcing space between their bodies and their lives, Harvey cries, “Mike!”

The panic in his plea, genuine and needy, kicks Mike's teeth apart. He has to open the kitchen window and lean out, find his voice somewhere in the darkness, but eventually he says, “I worked for him for almost two years.”

This wasn’t how Mike had intended for any of it to go down, but Harvey’s license is safe, and the two of them are done - “absolutely” - so there’s nothing left to gain from withholding this part of the story. Perhaps there never was. Maybe Harvey’s known Mike’s worthlessness from the very beginning, and if nothing else, this can be a parting gift, closure, or maybe just a suture. He breathes deep enough to push on sore ribs from the inside out, then lets the words fall like too-hot coffee from his lips, burning and sour.

“It started out bad, and got worst fast. He stopped honoring safewords, he’d share me with his workers as incentive even though it was one of my hard limits.” Harvey makes an awful sound behind him but Mike ignores it. If he stops talking, he'll never start again. “Sex was rough, but when he got pissed, I was his punching bag.”

“Bionic boy,” Harvey realizes, recalling Roger’s nickname from all those months ago, and Mike nods tightly to the night air.

“Titanium in my shoulder, pins in my wrist and ankle. Spend a lot of unwelcome time in hospitals.”

There’s a loud bang, the sound of his flimsy little table being overturned and its contents flying everywhere, but Mike doesn’t turn around.

Down below, cars glimmer through the streets like jeweled beetles. Roberta Flack’s “For All We Know” tumbles, forlorn silk out an open window onto the rainy breeze. So love me, love me tonight. Tomorrow may never come. A few stars glint tiredly between scraps of foggy cloud, and Mike feels closer to them than his own body right now, ancient and exhausted and too far gone for forgiveness.

“I needed the money, but I couldn’t take it anymore, and I was so fucking angry… I didn’t know anything about him, but he left his PDA everywhere. Probably thought I didn't know the code, or maybe he didn't think I had the balls. Sucker. I changed a couple dates and times in his Google calendar. His wife and his mistress ran into each other, at an event they both thought was for them.

“Shit hit the fan, harder than I’d expected, honestly - well. You know. They both left him, investments fell through in the drama, and when his guys saw a crack in his armor, some of them moved on, too. I couldn’t leave New York, Gram couldn’t travel, but Rog helped me find a new place.” He cracks his knuckles against the windowsill, breathing into the ache. “The Master doesn't give his playthings away. He'd rather burn them. I figured it was just a matter of time.”

“Why didn’t you tell me?” Harvey grits.

“If didn’t know his name.”

Disbelief colors every syllable. “How could you not -"
When Mike interrupts, he can’t keep the venom out of his voice and he whirls around spitting, “I remember the digits on the license plate of the car my parents died in. The room number of my kindergarten class. Every lyric on every Creedence Clearwater album ever released. I remember things that happened twenty goddamn years ago in crystal detail. I don’t forget things, Harvey. If I don’t want to carry it for a lifetime, I have to never learn it in the first place.”

“You should have told me.”

“I was trying to keep you safe!”

“Safe?” Harvey laughs, so weary and bitter the sentiment is palpable. “God fucking dammit, Mike!” There’s a crunch, his fist into the drywall then he crowds Mike’s space, nowhere to run, but Mike’s done looking for an escape. “Safe,” he scoffs, steeling himself, then - “Show me the scar.”

“Scar?”

“From your shoulder surgery. Show me.”

“You’ve seen me naked before,” Mike reminds him, but he pulls the hoodie over his head anyway, standing in the wan kitchen lighting, and Harvey hisses. Oh, right. His ribs. They’ve healed enough now that the bruises are a pretty spectacular yellowish color, splotches that cover several square inches of his torso.

“Where the fuck happened to you?”


It’s hardly visible. Harvey touches the pucker anyway, with a gentle fingertip.

“What’s this one from?” A long-healed gash on Mike’s lower left arm.

“Stairs.”

Brushing across it he asks, “You tripped?”

“No. But I ended up at the bottom.”

Some sort of tension is filling Harvey’s body, pulling at his shoulders so the tendons in his neck stand out. “The bullet wound? From that first night? Was that him?”

Mike shrugs. He might as well be screaming in the affirmative, and Harvey looks like he can’t breathe.

With a gentleness Mike hadn’t know Harvey possessed, the older man lifts his hands and places them delicately over the bruises on Mike's ribs, one on either side. “These, too?

The hands feel like an anchor, a tether to a home he’d long abandoned. Mike stills, murmuring, “Yeah, but it’s fine. You don’t owe me anything. You know that right?”

But all the words in all the tongues from all the lives they’ve already shared aren’t enough - they get stuck at the base of Harvey’s throat, or maybe behind the lip that he’s biting, and then, dress slacks and all, Harvey Specter sinks to the floor at Mike’s feet.

For once, Mike’s too shocked to speak.
Harvey discards his tie absently, eyes roving, accounting for, Mike can only assume, each and every boot mark dried in blood beneath his skin, but then Harvey bypasses Mike’s torso and goes right to his hip, to a sliver of a scar from decades ago, running too fast past sharp tree branch. Harvey leans in, and kisses it. Not an affectionate peck, but a real kiss, feeling the texture of Mike’s skin beneath his lips, slow and sure and thorough.

Then he reaches out and presses his mouth to a knick in the knuckle of Mike's left hand. An accident at the market. Harvey turns him sideways to attend to a long-mended gash from his bike pedal - aware of the location on the back of Mike's calf before he’s shifted either of them - he’d known exactly where it was.

His face is adamantly closed off, but fragments of expression sneak out - pain and fury and fear and such affection for Mike, a coward.

Something cruelly like hope takes root in Mike's chest.

Maybe Hardman was wrong. Maybe his scheme hadn’t worked. His plan had hinged on Mike and Harvey’s stubborn, selfish need to keep unsightly things wrapped up tightly in their stiff and tattered hearts. Maybe it’s different now. Mike’s not scared anymore, and maybe Harvey wants to forgive.

He whispers, “I’m so sorry.” Harvey pauses his ministrations. “I never meant -”

“Shut up, Mike.” It’s not malicious, but it’s not warm either. Simple, awful punctuation.

“Please. I was just trying -”

“Stop. It doesn’t matter.”

“It...doesn’t?” And what would he say anyway? Some evil genius thought you loved me?

“No.” He rises to his feet.

“Wh-”

“I tried so damn hard to stay away. From all of this. And I can’t,” he says, defeated. “The thought of you - every single time you turn up bleeding or bruised or fucking shot -” Long fingers curl at his sides, like maybe he can hold Mike together in one piece if he squeezes hard enough as he whispers, “I can’t take it.”

Mike steps forward, hands around Harvey’s biceps. “It’s ok. Hey.” Somehow this ridiculous situation has gotten so turned on it’s head that Mike’s offering Harvey comfort, and it doesn’t seem to be doing much good, because Harvey shakes him off, shouting, “It’s not. You’re - god, Mike! Look at you! It’s not ok! I can’t protect you, and I can’t - fucking - leave.”

So Hardman was wrong. It’s not love, but Harvey's always taken care of him, from the very first night they met. Mike takes this chance to return the favor, holding out a trembling hand. “Then come to bed.”

The night is still, mimicking the emptiness in Mike's heart, so visceral it's a physical presence. It's familiar, the raw, wild, bitter weight. Maybe they'll both be broken forever but tonight he'll collect that feeling of being whole just once more, a life raft he anticipates clinging to for decades to come.

He lies down on the mattress and wriggles his way out of his boxers while Harvey strips, leaving
a pile of haphazardly folded dress clothes on the dresser. He’s not putting on a show, but is bewitching nonetheless, the graceful arch of his spine, the breadth of his shoulders.

He catches Mike watching and gives a small smile, confused by the gaze.

“You’re so beautiful,” Mike whispers.

Harvey shakes his head, sighing. “Kid...don’t.” But he can’t seem to elaborate, and kneels on the edge of the bed instead, bending forward and kissing the top of Mike’s foot, just below the ankle, then continuing up. He kisses a freckle on Mike’s shin, a bruise on his knee, up and out until every inch of Mike is skin is blazing, and the war between the desire to weep and come nearly chokes him.

When he finally presses their chests together, Mike realizes he hasn't been able to breath properly in over a week. He gasps in a mouthful of fresh air. Harvey freezes.

“Don’t stop. Please.” I never thought I’d see you again. Please. I thought you hated me. Please. I won’t survive if you walk away. “Please, Harvey.”


Mike thinks it's more shock at the bruises, but Harvey's eyes are fever bright and fond, following the path of his own hands over Mike's body. “I always think I’m remembering wrong.” He drops his head. “And every time,” he continues to Mike's sternum instead of his face. “How could anyone be so -”

“Frustrating? Stubborn?” Mike jokes dryly, but instead of taking the bait, Harvey presses his forehead to the younger man's chest and breathes deeply, accidentally letting a small, heart wrenching sound slip from the back of his throat on the exhale. “Hey. Harvey. It's ok.”

When those chocolate eyes meet his again, they're shuttered. It hurts worse than broken ribs, but it's probably safer that way so Mike smirks, “Are you gonna fuck me, or what?”

Harvey gives a ghost of a laugh. “Anything to shut you up.”

There's a ziplock baggie in the bedside table, lube and condoms and gloves, which Mike tosses to the bed. Harvey doesn't even give him the chance to open it. He literally smacks his hand out of the way and coats his fingers with slick saying, “I trust you to tell me if something hurts in a way you don't want it to.”

Mike shivers, “Yes, Sir,” then gasps, distracted, as a cool finger breaches him. Silk lips lave a trail of kisses down the inside of Mike's legs to the crease of his hip and he groans at the proximity. They both know what he wants but Harvey ignores it for now, sliding down onto his elbows and propping Mike's ass up with his hands, then easy as you please, licks a line over Mike's hole and up his balls. “Oh fuck.”

As conflicted as the two men are, overwhelmed with emotion too extreme for immediate processing, Harvey doesn’t seem to be in any hurry. He spends a heretofore unheard of amount of time eating Mike out, and there's nothing to do but take it, and beg. When Harvey finally gets around to adding a finger in alongside his tongue Mike let's go a shout that probably wakes his poor, Jeopardy-watching neighbors, and he feels Harvey grin against his skin. Progress.

“Harvey, please, fuck, please, you're killing me here.”

“Oh Rookie. You ain't seen nothin’ yet.” He slides his tongue up Mike's dick with such infuriating, featherlight slowness that it jumps up to meet him, and has the audacity to smirk about it.

“Who do you think you -”

“I'm the man about to ride you into oblivion. I suggest you move.”

Harvey shifts, grumbling, “You give a kid one fucking job and all of a sudden he thinks he's the goddamn president.”

“God no. I'm way too sexy for that job.” He swings a leg over to straddle Harvey, who’s lying against the pillows looking begrudgingly amused.

“And sassy.”

“Just right for this one,” he quips, but Harvey stills.

“This isn’t a job, Mike.”

He replies quietly. “No. I know it's not.”

“Good.”

“Now hand me the damn lube.”

Rolling his eyes, Harvey complies, but the attitude disappears as Mike sinks a finger into himself. “Jesus,” he whispers.

“What?” Mike pants, squeezing his eyes shut against the pleasure of a second finger nudging at his rim - Harvey’s. “God yes. Do it.”

Harvey complies, sliding a finger beside Mike’s own, watching intently, like he’s hell bent on memorizing Mike’s face for safe keeping. It’s heady, a position of power here, kneeling at the center of focus, familiar and new all over again after so long apart. Eventually, Harvey fishes around in the bag for a condom, though his gaze never leaves Mike’s face, so it takes a second for the kid to realize what’s happening. When the second finger leaves his body, though, he looks down to see Harvey about to tear the foil and he growls, “Don’t you fucking dare.”

“Mike -”

“Fuck you, Harvey. My body, my way. I wanna feel you.”

Harvey drops the rubber back to the bedspread and slumps, one corner of his mouth twitching up. “As you wish.”

By the time he begins sinking down onto Harvey’s cock, they’re both trembling, covered in sweat, and maybe that’s why Mike notices the deeper shadows, the sharper lines. When he’s finally seated in Harvey’s lap, he runs a palm over the muscle carving out Harvey’s hips and frowns.

“You’ve lost -”

And like Harvey knows where that comment is going, he rolls those hips up, fucking a groan from Mike instead and that train of thought goes right out the window. “Oh my god.” He lifts himself up and then sinks back down, filling himself with pleasure, keeping the emptiness at bay.

Tomorrow will be the very worst. He’ll still be stretched open and aching in places that no one but Harvey’s allowed to touch anymore, and Harvey will be gone, and Mike will be alone, and
the memory of this will have to be enough to last him a lifetime. Mike makes sure he fucks himself as deeply as he can, feeling Harvey in the bruises and along his spine and on his tongue. Remember. Remember. Don’t you dare forget.

And Harvey just watches, little gusts of air escaping from behind his teeth, fingers skating listlessly over Mike’s skin, worshipping the damage away and reminding them both that the heart beneath those busted ribs still beats. They’re fine. They have to be.

“Fuck, you feel so good,” the older man groans.

“I knew you couldn’t get enough of this ass.”

“It’s a problem,” Harvey admits, and Mike tries not to sound like he’s pouting as he says, “It doesn’t have to be.”

Harvey ignores him, reaching around Mike’s hips to brush along the rim of Mike’s hole where it’s stretched around him, he says, “Christ you’re tight.”

“Happens when you don’t fuck anyone for awhile,” he jokes, but Harvey seems confused. Mike shrugs. “No one since you.”

“But that was -”

“A while ago, yeah.”

“Why?”

“You know what? Why don’t you just lie there and look pretty.”

Harvey folds his hands behind his head with a leer. “And make you do all the work? Sounds so familiar.”

“I bet. Asshole.”

Harvey folds his knees up abruptly, forcing Mike to fall forward over him, catching himself on his palms. “You wanna keep talking shit, kid?”

Mike gasps, sassing, “You want me to, don’t you?”

“Always so mouthy.”

“Still discussing my mouth, Sir?”

Unlike the last time they’d made this joke all those months ago, Harvey’s comeback is more physical than wit. “I’m not discussing anything,” and he shoves two fingers past Mike’s lips to press down against his tongue.

A desperate whimper slips past the digits and Mike sucks hard, overwhelmed by the feeling of Harvey’s filling him up from every angle. “That’s right. Good boy.” The words knock Mike’s elbows out and he would’ve fallen except Harvey’s other hand catches him at his clavicle, almost to his throat, a collar and an embrace, a support system too perfect to depend on but Mike shuts his eyes and leans into it anyway, shuddering as Harvey adds softly, “Christ, kid. You’re so -”

Whatever he says after that gets lost in the roar of blood to Mike’s ears as they pick up the pace. Harvey’s abs contract magnificently, and Mike is entranced by the sight, too far gone to really be aware of how he slides away from Harvey’s hands to lick and bite along the other man’s chest, his neck, unintentionally staking his claim the the form of a small bruise below that treasured hollow at the base of his throat. Harvey pays him a short, raw sound for his trouble.
He reaches for Harvey’s face, desperate to feel that jaw scrape along his palm, to let the silk of those lips set his fingertips ablaze, but the older man intercepts his trajectory, grasping the one wrist, and then the other and securing them behind Mike’s back. The hold feels safe, but the denial hurts like a sucker punch.

“I’m sorry,” Mike gasps, blinking the tears away. Not for the drugs, or for the arrest. That was Hardman’s fault. And not for taking the job - either job - Mike’s loved working for Harvey in every capacity. No. He’s sorry he fucked up so badly in the first place. Sorry he let Trevor talk him into ruining his own life. Sorry for smoking weed over looking for a job that might make use of his magical mind. Sorry for failing to become someone Harvey might actually want to be with. “I’m so fucking sorry.”

Pain shatters the control on Harvey’s face, but Mike barely gets to see it before a quick movement throws him to the bed. He expects to be shoved face first into the pillows but finds himself instead on his back, impaled on Harvey’s cock so deeply that he can wrap his legs completely around the other man’s waist. He gets to use the leverage to fuck himself for only a moment before Harvey’s taken over. He gets a good hold on the kid’s waist and pounds into him like he’s trying to brand the inside of Mike’s body, like he’s worried Mike could ever forget this feeling. The expression and the angle throw Mike bodily to the precipice of orgasm absolutely without his permission, but in clenching down to assist in some semblance of self-control, he yanks Harvey right along with him. Leaning down to cradle Mike in his arms, he shifts so every limb between the two of them is wrapped around the other.

“God yes. Fuck. Harvey - ”

“Let go for me Mike.

The wave swirling his brain of I love you don’t leave me it’ll never be the same is this really the end is enveloped by endorphins, and then washed away in the wave of an excruciating and exquisite orgasm.

Harvey’s still coming when Mike opens his eyes again, the older man’s face pressed into the crook of Mike’s neck, intimate in a way even fucking hadn’t been, soft instead of lustful, and in a moment of weakness, of idiocy, Mike reaches out and cups the back of Harvey’s head, holding him close, safe, his, for one more moment.

One is all he gets - long enough to feel Harvey relax from his release, realize where he is, and tense up abruptly. He slides from Mike’s body, only slowing at the punched out noise Mike makes, but it’s not about pain, just the encroaching void, physical now as well as mental, emptiness that Mike would never have noticed if Harvey hadn’t come along first place.

Harvey’s up in the blink of an eye, leaving the bed suddenly freezing, and disappears into the bathroom. Mike listens to the whir of the fan, a squeak of the faucet handles, the sloppy gush of water from the rarely used pipes. He suspects Roger paid his water bill. He sure hadn’t, but the toilet flushes and there’d been a weak stream in the shower the one time he’d used it.

He rolls onto his side, stretching, and winces as other parts of his stretch as well, but he feels more gratitude for the pain than anything else. At least Harvey’d converted some of those wounds from bad pain to good.

The man in question emerges from the bathroom and grabs his pile of clothes, carefully avoiding Mike’s eyes. Like that’ll help.

“We’re really not going to talk about this?”
Harvey shimmies into his slacks and perches on the edge of the mattress to pull his socks back on. “What’s to say?”

“Other than everything?” Mike wonders. “I guess you’re right.”

The soft brush of fabric would be soothing if he weren’t watching the last person he’ll ever care about get ready to disappear into the night. As Harvey shrugs into his shirt he adds, “I gave you all the things that mattered most, and you betrayed me.” He’s not wrong, and the sentiment undoes him in a way he must not have been expecting, because he rubs his face with his hands then leaves them there, pressing the heels of his palms to his eyes, and sniffs hard. This is all Mike’s fault. The least he can do is try to cool the wound, but he doesn’t mean for his voice to break with emotion as he gives his goodbye - “I’m so sorry, Harvey.” He can’t say he’d do it any differently. His life for Harvey’s is a trade he’d make a thousand times over. But he is sorry.

Those beautiful brown eyes shimmer brighter than usual as he picks his head up and give Mike a blank, distant nod, burning dismissal. “Yeah. Ok kid.”

Crumpled boxers from the floor find their way to Mike’s body as he follows Harvey out into the living room, watching him right the table and collect the folder of medical records from the floor.

It’s too quiet; Mike feels insulated by it, cut off from the world and his own mind, and maybe that’s how he misses the trajectory as Harvey’s pacing takes him to the row of crates Mike’s been using as a coffee table where he notices something that throws everything off the rails.

Mike jerks in the general direction but he’s too slow, and besides Hardman’s blackmail envelope is in plain sight, restuffed so haphazardly that the frayed edge of Mike’s arrest record is poking out and the photo he hasn’t stopped holding for days is sitting curl-edged atop it. Harvey picks it up carefully, and Mike hallucinates that the edges of the glossy paper tremble a little as Harvey traces something in the image with one reverent fingertip, and then he flips it over.

It had never occurred to Mike to do the same, so he’s not sure what Harvey’s staring at, or why it’s prompted shredding Hardman’s envelope down the center to disgorge the contents.

He rifles frantically through the pile while Mike looks on, too scraped out to even consider hope as Harvey checks the back of each photo, each document intently, like he’s searching for something to glue their lives back together with.

Mike finally asks, “What?”

“I know this handwriting.” Handwriting? “Why the hell did Hardman have photos of us?” Mike’s not aware of moving, but he has the photo in his hand. It’s just their last names, plus the date and location of the shot. He tosses it down, shrugging out the simplest explanation. “Blackmail. He was going to have me arrested.”

Harvey laughs hollowly. “How’d that work out for you?” but Mike just sighs. Harvey’s trying to leave. Might as well make it easy. “Fuck you too, old man.”

There’s a beer in the fridge, just one, so Mike doesn’t offer any, just cracks it open, takes a pull, and waits. Does it hurt less, now? Or more?

He waits - for the slam of a door, footsteps, angry words. He gets none of it. There’s the gentle rustle of paper, and then nothing but breathing, until, with such softness Mike should’ve know right away that something had changed, Harvey murmurs, “Why would you lie about this?”

“I’m not lying,” he says tiredly.
“Dietrich. Carr. Watson.” Harvey reads them from where Mike had scribbled the names hastily on the back of the envelope.

He shrugs, heart quickening. “They could’ve questioned the outcomes of our cases.”

“Collazo. Malone.”

Half the beer disappears in the search for a response. “Collazo hates hookers. If he knew we were involved it would’ve -”

“Made me look bad,” Harvey spits. “Not you.” Mike’s too slow, too dumb, can’t find a half-truth quick enough because then Harvey’s repeating, soft and awed. “This whole time. You were -.”

Whipping around, Mike pleads, “Harvey -”

But he has to stop, because the most beautiful thing is happening. As if chipped away by a sculptor, the cold incredulity Harvey’s worn like a mask through this whole thing cracks and falls away, leaving raw and unfiltered hurt and sheer adoration. He’s figured it out, because of course he has, piecing the clues together. “Did Hardman threaten you?”

“No really.”

“Did he threaten me?” But the question is phrased such that they both know he’s already discerned the answer. “Why didn’t you tell me?”

And what’s Mike supposed to say? He can’t lie.

“He was going after your license! And I would’ve fucked you over eventually. I figured I’d save you the inconvenience.”

“Inconvenience?” Harvey bellows. “I don’t give a shit about convenience, Mike, I want to keep you!” His face trembles as he holds Mike still, hands on either side of his neck so there’s no avoiding the sincerity in his gaze when he says, “You don’t have to take care of me, kid. I’m a big boy. But...thank you.” Guilty, he adds, “I thought you -”

“Shut the fuck up, idiot,” Mike grins, hissing as Harvey’s thumb grazes the edge of the shiner, and the older man’s face shifts, perhaps a bit overly possessive in the wake of having almost lost one another. “I’m going to fucking destroy him.”

Mike feels his own expression light up. “Can I help?”

Chapter End Notes

Neil Gaiman Sandman Chronicles Volume V Endless Nights

Come visit me!

seasless.tumblr.com

<3
Chapter 7

Chapter Notes

Thanks for the wild ride, loves, and for helping me get my life back together..
I took many liberties with how a trial works, btw.
Sorry not sorry.

I hope you enjoy.

<3

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Harvey takes him home, and Mike lets his mind go quiet.

Not the forced silence of the past several days (years, if he’s being honest). Not the hyper focus of a fake associate. Just...quiet.

He’s still kicked to shit and unemployed. The wound on the back of his hand is still scabbing and itchy from where he’d ripped out the IV, and he’s got an amendment to his arrest record.

But Harvey holds the door for him, and in the shared and tentative smile, Mike finally feels safe enough to simply be. He enters, breathing in the cool, familiar scent - woodsy and clean. The condo is quiet. It’s also a mess.

“Harvey, what -”

“Keep it to yourself, rookie.”

There are binders scattered on the couch, and a frankly impressive number of empty beer bottles in the sink - cheap beer, too. Harvey remains impassive, but he wastes no time in tidying the place, crumpled napkins and files and take out containers all swept into the trash.

“What the hell happened?” Mike gathers a haphazardly folded newspaper and sets it to rights.

Harvey stills in the center of his cleaning whirlwind to pin Mike in place with a look. “You.”

They shower, rinsing sweat and come and tears from their bodies, reverent hands apologizing for wounds that are just as much their own fault as anyone else's. Harvey wraps Mike in a towel and shoves him gently into the bedroom, while he stays in the bathroom, tidying the mess of a counter next to the sink.

There's a little table on Harvey's side of the bed, the drawer filled with random crap: pens and a crossword book and earplugs and condoms and lube (and sour patch candy, but Harvey would flatly deny that), with the shelf below reserved for worn-soft sleep shirts. Mike rifles around for his favorite, a grey crew neck with Harvard emblazoned on the front, but something else catches his eye.

It's one of Mike's old tees - Harvey'd been wearing it the last time they'd fought and made up, that morning in Mike's apartment. It's set to one side and folded neatly, but when he shakes it open there are no wrinkles where the creases had lain. Hesitantly, he presses the fabric to his face and
breathes deeply.

“It doesn’t smell like you anymore,” a voice says from the doorway.

“You won't need it to,” Mike replies quietly.

Harvey buries his nose against Mike's throat as they sleep.

--

Sun, not pain, wakes him in the morning, stealing soft and rosy through the window-walls.

Over the warmth, echoes of the past few weeks make themselves known in surprising ways - the deepened hollows of Harvey's cheeks, the way Mike's back cracks all the way down when he stretches, in the absence of dread - a tangible lifting of weight from his chest. It's all very poetic until his stomach growls so harshly it wakes Harvey.

“Was that your body?” he grumbles into the pillow.

“Sorry.”

Mike assumes Harvey's gotten up to pee until the gentle clanking of cutlery and cookware rouses him, intriguing enough to entice him from the obscenely soft bed.

He makes it no further than the doorway.

Harvey's standing in boxer briefs at the counter, knife moving with almost disturbing efficiency through a bell pepper, an onion, zucchini. The lines of his clavicle and the veins in his forearms catch the honey of the morning light, more mouthwatering than the bacon sizzling on the stove. Harvey catches him staring and grins. “Mornin’ sunshine.”

Mike's response isn't particularly polite but Harvey doesn't seem to mind him crossing through the cool room to press his lips to the smooth expanse of silken skin over Harvey’s sternum; he lets the knife clatter to the wooden cutting board to wrap the kid up in strong arms.

It’s so spectacularly intimate, and the reality of what is, and was, and what could have been sweeps through Mike's bones. He could have lost this forever, this man just crazy enough to understand him, stubborn enough to put up with him, brilliant enough to keep up, and dumb enough to try. He only registers the panic once Harvey murmurs into his hair, “Hey. Breathe, kid.”

He hears his own gasp from a distance, coming back to his own body and the comforting pressure around it.

“You can cook,” he observes in lieu of an explanation, and Harvey huffs a laugh.

“Yeah, both my parents were pretty unhelpful in the whole raising kids department. I was responsible for Marcus - school, clothes, food. Good life skills.”

“I had no idea.”

“I know,” Harvey replies softly. “I'm...working on that.”

Mike sits on the counter, burning his fingers and tongue on bacon swiped fresh from the pan, teasing Harvey and mainlining coffee like his life depends on it.

They read through most of the afternoon, and though Harvey refuses to disclose what he's
They read through most of the afternoon, and though Harvey refuses to disclose what he's working on, he grips Mike tightly for an extra moment every time one of them goes to get up. Mike sprints through a copy of *The Elegant Universe*, then orders four hundred dollars worth of books on Harvey's credit card before settling into a law text so gargantuan he's pretty sure it's going to leave a bruise where it's resting on his knee, but it feels so goddamn good to be back where they belong that the twinge feels like a shout of celebration.

There's a knock at the door.

It's Donna, and Harvey lets her in and pulls on a tee shirt with a nonchalance that indicates he's been expecting her. He does not, however, seem to anticipate the way she flings her arms around Mike, voice tight as she whispers, “You idiot.”

“Sorry to worry you,” he murmurs, holding on. Harvey’s not the only one who’s become family. “Just explain yourself the next time you plan on doing dumb shit to keep us safe.”

“Harvey told you.”

“No, those champagne gummies told me.” She pulls back and daintily wipes beneath her eyes. Harvey blinks. “Gummies?”

“Mike left them in my desk the day he resigned. The chocolate for Rachel, the note for Harold - lovely, obvious gestures, but the champagne gummies … well. Our rookie is a lot more observant than either of us gave him credit for.”

“No way Harvey knows there’s a Secretary’s Day,” Mike says. “Which means your gift was from you, something you really like. You’re important, Donna. Couldn’t leave without telling you.”

“But didn’t feel the need to tell me,” Harvey interrupts.

Mike glares. “Excuse me, boss? I’m the worst luck you’ve ever had, I'm about to get myself arrested and there are so many options I'm not even sure what I'll get locked up for, but hey, I love you!”

The corners of Harvey's mouth creep up as he grabs Mike by the back of the neck and kisses him soundly, murmuring against his lips as he pulls away, “Watch your mouth.”

“Make me.”

The air conditioning clicks on in the charged quiet. Donna’s covering her mouth gleefully. Mike rolls his eyes and steps away to avert any untimely hard ons. “What are you doing here anyway?”

“I,” Donna declares. “Am pacifying your lunatic boyfriend. Also, doing my level best to help Hardman rot in jail.”

“He’s not my -”

“He absolutely is,” she declares, brushing past them both, tossing a file of papers in Harvey’s direction. “And here’s a question - Why were the fourth quarter earnings for the last eight years edited after the submission deadline?”

“What?” Harvey takes the folder and uses it to wave her onto the french press she’s eyeing. Mike joins her, pouring them both a steaming mug. “So that’s what he’s been working on.”
She nods. “The only thing more important to him than the firm is you, and you’re both caught up in this mess.”

Mike grimaces at the amount of sugar she swirls into her coffee. “Thanks?”

“What the hell?” Harvey grumbles. “Who made these edits?”

“We can’t trace it, and believe me, I tried. Benjamin says there’s some sort of encryption when we try to access the ID … I don’t know. What did Boy Wonder here think about the numbers from last week?”

“I haven’t had him look at it. Yet.” At her side-eye he adds, “I didn't want to stress him out! I'm the idiot that didn't believe in him in the first place!”

The sentiment is more warming than the sun and steam filling the room, but Mike covers the complexity with a chuckle. “It's ok. I'd like to help.”

“And the other thing?” Donna probes, and Harvey freezes. “He deserves to understand.”

“No,” Harvey says quietly. “And you need to leave it alone.” Mike peers between the two of them, another unspoken conversation until Donna drains the mug, gives Mike a kiss on the cheek, and heads for the door.

Wearily, Harvey teases, “What, no lecture?”

“No, you fuckhead.” She reels him in for a hug. “You’re gonna have to start putting that trust in your boy to good use. Or not. It’s your life. And Mike,” she adds over her shoulder. “Look through the new stuff. My money’s on you finding something Harvey missed.”

Mike takes the file from Harvey as she exits with a wink. “We’re lucky she doesn’t have her sights set on world domination.”

“Says who?” Harvey grunts.

To the first page he adds, “What did she mean about putting your trust in me to good use?”

“You misheard. She said it’s none of your goddamn business.”

Incredulous, Mike stares. After all this? “Fine.” The word sounds more exhausted than anything else.

Now that he knows the stack of documents on the coffee table are Hardman related, Mike makes his way with purpose to organize Harvey’s discard pile into something he can actually work with.

“Mike,” Harvey attempts.

“Which of this is new? From before I...quit? Or do you not trust me with this either?”

“Mike.”

“That old age affecting your hearing? It’s a yes or no answer, Gramps.”

Mike’s staring at the coffee table, but every synapse is focused on the sound of Harvey moving behind him, crossing to the bookshelf. There’s the hush of a book opening, paper against paper, and then nothing but the quiet of Harvey’s bare feet across hardwood.

The newspaper clipping flutters to a stop inches from his hand. Mike’s too familiar with the
formatting of obituaries to mistake it for anything else.

Gordon Specter. Drug overdose, the twelve year anniversary only days prior.

Harvey’s sitting on the couch, forearms on knees, head bowed. “I do trust you.”

“Is that why you're showing me this? Some sort of emotional bargaining chip?”

If he didn’t know better, Mike would liken Harvey’s tone to something close to begging as he shakes his head, insisting, “I don’t regret many things, Mike. But the way I treated you…”

A pang of guilt resounds behind Mike’s ribs. “Hey. I was a dick, too. I knew that stuff bothered you, and I still -”

“I just couldn’t stand the thought of finding someone else I love dead.”

Time scrapes to a tremulous, vulnerable halt.

“You found him?”

Harvey gives the smallest of nods, and Mike crawls across the floor to kneel at his feet.

Of course. Donna was right. It puts everything into context. Harvey loses his mind over drugs because in his mind, it’s a death sentence - the kind that haunts a man, sinks its roots in and never really lets go.

“Harvey. Hey.” It takes a hand on either side of the older man’s face to bring his eyes up, but he does finally look at Mike, one lip tucked firmly between his teeth as he vies for control.

“I forgive you for being a human being with complicated emotions,” he smiles wryly. “You can't scare me off.”

The older man reaches out to caress the breadth of Mike's brow. “If you leave...”

“I won't. Don't think you can get rid of me that easily.”

“You’ve always been good at rolling with the punches.” Thoughtfully he adds, “It'll come in handy when we work together again.”

Mike sits back on his heels, frowning. “Harvey, I can't go back.”

“No, of course not. I was thinking of a different firm. And a different senior partner.”

“Who?”

“Me.”

Mike blinks slowly. “You're crazy.”

“Hear me out. Jessica’ll be gone soon, and I can't stay there after all of this. You and Donna and I could do pretty damn well on our own.”

“I don't have a license!”

“So get one! You may have fucked up at Harvard but you could test into any school on the planet, and a law degree’d only take you a few years. You could work in the same capacity you do now, and you're so fucking brilliant I doubt anyone would question it.”
At some point Mike had gotten to his feet, and he finds himself pacing. “I don't know Harvey. Just the three of us…”

“Oh, come on Mike. We’d expand. Each of us does the work of five people already. And you can't let fear make decisions for you.”

Mike's about to add a smartass comment about reacting out of fear when the realization hits him so hard his knees buckle. “What did you just say?”

“What?” Harvey frowns. “You can't let fear make decisions for you?”

“No.” Mike slides to a halt next to the coffee table and sweeps entire binders to the floor in search of the document he's already reading on the back of his eyelids. “Doing the work of five people.” He whips a list in Harvey's direction. “Count the employees in each department.”

There's no snark or pushback, just a warm gleam in Harvey eyes as he tears them away from Mike and forces them to the page.

The frantic quiet is broken by Harvey depositing a neatly annotated spreadsheet at Mike's elbow. “What are you thinking?”

“It just doesn't seem possible, does it? That so much money could disappear into nothing? Johnson mentioned that he favored Hardman because the guy spent a shit ton of time schmoozing down in payroll. What if he wasn't down there just to gain approval? What if there was another reason he needed those guys on his side?”

“You think he got them to falsify something?”

“No. I think he got them complacent, and then added employees to payroll when they weren't looking.”

Harvey looks like a college kid crouched next to the coffee table and Mike has to take a moment to appreciate how fucking gorgeous he is. Fortunately Harvey's far enough down the rabbit hole he doesn't notice.

“How? There's no way to add people to payroll without their routing and Social Security number.”

“I'm guessing there is a routing number attached, and I bet it's not theirs. I don't know what to tell you about the social security numbers though.”

Harvey taps a packet against his chin thoughtfully. “Employees' Socials are kept in the system even if they don't work at the firm anymore. I wonder if he just added back people who actually used to work here.”

“OK, but are you telling me payroll really didn't notice a bunch of extra employees that don't even work for the firm anymore on their End of Year review?”

“Oh, rookie,” Harvey grins. “What did Donna just say about fourth quarter edits?”

Mike's jaw drops. “Holy shit. Harvey, we got him!”

“If we got him, it's because you're fucking incredible. But there's no proof yet.” He sighs. “Quit grinning like an idiot, ‘incredible’ is an objective assessment of your abilities.”

“Yeah, yeah, I get it, you love me. Now let's find that bastard.”
And just like that the two of them are sitting on the hardwood, shoulder to shoulder in worn pajamas tearing through page after page, Mike's cramped handwriting and Harvey's narrow, looping letters cluttering margins and indents.

It's kinetic, electric, a ceaseless flow of brain power until Harvey's breath catches. “You were right.”

Mike grins. “Sorry, can I get that in writing?”

In a flutter of paper Harvey tackles him, pins him to the ground and licks into his mouth. Want so fierce it takes Mike's breath away lances through him and he gasps against Harvey’s lips, sinking his fingers into the fabric of the older man's shorts.

“Like I said,” Harvey breathes. “Incredible.”

“Hey, you found the numbers. Although I'm guessing that one employee doesn't account for all of it. There must be more.”

“Right again. And there’s years of paperwork there.”

“Lucky I'm a fast reader,” Mike sasses.

“And talker,” he observes, bemused, leaning in slowly.

“You got a problem with that?”

Harvey rolls his hips against Mike. “Does it feel like I do?”

There aren't many feelings more heady than than knowing Harvey Specter wants you badly enough to dry hump you on the floor of his condo.

“It feels like you want me,” Mike mutters, sinking his teeth into the meat of Harvey's shoulder.

The older man groans. “You have no idea. But we're going to find the rest of this money first.”

“Really?” The air is cool and the lack of pressure is overstimulating as Harvey gets up. “You expect me to get anything done after that?”

“Thought you said you were a fast reader.” The tone is sarcastic but Mike takes comfort in Harvey having to adjust himself with a wince.

“You better make it worth my while,” he grumbles.

Thank god Mike's looking up to catch the fire in Harvey’s eyes as he says, “When we finish here, I'm taking you into the bedroom. You're going to strip for me, and you're going to listen while I tell you how gorgeous you are. I'm going to suck you off until you can’t think straight. Then I’m going to fuck you ‘til you’re covered in my marks, and you'll come when I do, because when I say every part of you belongs to me, I mean it.”

“Jesus fucking Christ, Harvey.”

Mike’s just about ready to crawl out of his skin and onto Harvey's dick, but the older man settles on the couch and flicks open a file, calm and disinterested, as if he hadn't just carefully planted specific, personalized, and eloquent pornography into Mike’s mind, taking root and setting him aflame.
Mike only barely manages to stifle the growl, but he realizes the long game will be more fun for both of them in the end. “Fair,” he concedes mildly, pulling a stack of paperwork from the table and setting it on the end table. He sees Harvey glance up and then pretend he didn’t.

Mike conceals his grin.

“What are you doing? I just said -”

“Years, of paperwork, man. I’m getting comfortable.” It’s the exact opposite, in fact, but Mike’s not the only tease in the relationship.

It’s not that he doesn’t want to catch Hardman. He does, and they will, he’ll make sure of it. But it doesn’t seem fair that Harvey can focus so easily and Mike’s so hard it hurts.

Mike kicks his feet up on the coffee table, flopping down with deliberate sloppiness, allowing the hem of his shirt to flip up, revealing a stretch of skin, the line of his hip running through it. Harvey stares blatantly for a moment - Mike catches the reflection in the window but manages not to give the game away, recording the current sum they’ve discovered on a notepad he leaves between them.

He’s a little shit, but his brain works on overdrive whether he likes it or not, so the room and the man and the arousal sink into the back of his mind as the numbers rush up to meet him.

To be honest, he’s kind of impressed with himself. Eidetic memory does not a mathematician make, but with numerous calculations on a scrap of scratch paper he sifts through variables easily. His body hasn’t forgotten Harvey’s words, even in his distraction, and he tugs at his collar absently, carrying a two and jotting a sum and Harvey makes a little punched out noise. Mike blinks up at him. “What?”

Harvey reaches out and ghosts his fingertips across Mike’s now exposed clavicle then shakes his head. “Nothing.”

Mike rolls his eyes, collar bone tingling.

He finds $20,783 in one go, and triumphantly records it.

“There’re probably only a few more, if these sums are any indication,” Harvey observes absently, staring at the page like it’s magnetized. He’s trying not to look up, Mike realizes triumphantly, when a realization of his own hits him.

Harvey doesn’t have scratch paper, and the notes in the margins are names and dates, not numerals.

“Are you doing this math in your head?” Mike chokes out.

Harvey blinks up. “Yeah.”

“H-how?”

“I’m good with numbers.”

“It’s years worth of information.”

“And…”

“Of random data entries! How could you possibly -”
“Chill out, kid,” he chuckles. “I told you -”

“Oh fuck you.” Mike dumps files to the floor as he gets up, pushing even more from Harvey’s lap before straddling those slim hips and grinding down, and then Harvey’s grabbing him by the hair and pulling him into a kiss.

It's enough to melt Mike from the inside out - turn him to shivering liquid gold and he whines, too overwhelmed to contemplate decorum. Unsurprisingly, Harvey doesn’t seem to have a problem with that.

He grips Mike’s waist, holding him in place and rocks up against him. “You are too goddamn much.”

“You want me to stop?” Mike laughs breathlessly.

“Not ever, but we do have to get to the bedroom at some point.”

“Why?”

“Lube.”

They’ve both done enough fucking to know that’s not really negotiable, but Mike’s not looking to prolong the wait, so he hops up and heads back, stripping as he goes. He hears Harvey chuckling behind him. “Thought I told you to give me a show.”

Mike retrieves the lube from the dresser and tosses it to Harvey. “Oh, don’t you worry. I’m getting there.”

The city throws colors across the floor, end of day, soft and warm and hazy, and it's glorious enough to catch Mike's attention, drawing him to the window.

“It's beautiful, isn't it?” The skyline sprawls lazy and majestic beneath them. “Bet you never get tired of this view.”

“No,” Harvey rasps, though his eyes are fixated on Mike. “I can't imagine I will.”

Heart in his throat, Mike unconsciously reaches up, brushing the pulse point with his fingertips. Harvey's eyes follow the path from across the room as that wayward hand drifts down across lightly bruised ribs, the cut of one hipbone, but a breath from wrapping trembling fingers around his cock, Harvey steps forward and knocks Mike's hand to one side.

He gets surprisingly close without touching, so close the delicate wrinkles beneath his eyes are visible, and he’s studying Mike more intensely than his work, than a contract, than those documents out on the coffee table. Like something exquisite and rare. And then he whispers, “You. Are. Mine,” and Mike's eyes slide closed of their own accord.

He finds himself backed into the glass, warming quickly against his ass and Harvey gives one firm press to his hips, indicating that he'd better stay put. Mike's lost the presence of mind to hatch an escape plan even if he'd wanted to, so he obeys, sinking his weight back, pawing at Harvey's shirt.

“Pushy little shit,” he says, but as he sinks to the floor, he discards the garment leaving that glorious torso exposed.

“God, Harvey,” Mike groans, about to elaborate, but then Harvey licks a torturous line up the crease of his hip. “Fuck.”
“Beautiful boy,” Harvey whispers and he's close enough that Mike imagines he can feel breath against his skin, but then Harvey takes him into his mouth and the only thing left in the world is heat.

He goes slow, though Mike can tell he’s out of his mind with lust. There’s an agony stretched beautifully across his brow, and his shorts are tented over what’s surely a painful hard-on. But his attention never wavers from Mike, hands roaming across his skin, and his gaze is only broken when his eyes flutter shut as if by necessity - overwhelmed and grateful.

After all they’ve been through, to taste and flirt and tease like they have time feels like the most terrifying of blessings, a too-good-to-be-true that might fall through at any moment, but they’re here, now, and it’s enough. Mike whines and it makes Harvey smile, tightening his mouth around Mike’s cock as he pulls off.

“You’re so fucking gorgeous like this.”

Mike blushing. He has no genuine response. If Harvey were a client there would be a million sassy responses, but they’re more, now. As if sensing his discomfort, Harvey continues.

“You always are,” he drawls, jacking Mike off with the slick of his spit. “But there’s something about you when you’re really gone, when you’re not paying attention to anyone else or what they think of you. Vulnerable, under all that bravado.”

He wraps his fingers under Mike’s balls and pulls him forward, in and down his throat again. It's too much, but out on the couch Harvey’d said Mike shouldn't come until he does, so he clenches every muscle in his body and sinks his fingers into Harvey's hair.

The click of a cap resonates, faint and distant, but Mike's understandably distracted, so he jumps when Harvey's finger brushes his hole. “Fuck, oh god, no Harvey, I won't last.”

The man on his knees grins wickedly. “Then how about that show?”

The idea of teasing right back has Mike's stomach flipping excitedly, and he swipes the lube on his way to the bed. Lying down on the comforter, he stretches, arching his back like a cat, and it's less performative than it is a necessity after being brought to the edge half a dozen times while leaning against a window. He pulls a pillow under his head and glances to the foot of the bed, where Harvey's standing.

He's absolutely naked, backlit by the evening glow, every inch of him strong and solid, but the look on his face is so needy and open it makes him look years younger. Mike's squeezing lube onto his hand as Harvey says, “For a minute there, I thought I'd lost you.” Mike knows what he's talking about, identifies exactly the raw pain scraping up the inside of Harvey's throat, but they're safe now, finally, and he pulls the older man from his own head by saying, “Wouldn't that have been a shame. You'd never have been able to touch me here,” and he brushes a slick thumb over one hipbone, leaving a trail of shine. “Or here,” and he runs a nail down his chest. “Or here,” and he pulls his knees up, brushing his fingers over his hole and Harvey hisses in sharply.

“That would have been a tragedy.” His voice is gravel.

“Wouldn't it, though?” He presses one finger in, and whines in spite of himself. He's still tender from the night before. It feels like heaven. With his free hand he adds a little more lube and let's a second finger toy at his entrance. “Somebody else would’ve had to fuck me senseless.”

Harvey growls and leans in but Mike catches him, holds him back with one foot pressed to Harvey's sternum. “Uh uh. Not yet. I'm not ready, and you're too big to do this without thorough
“How thorough are you planning on being?” Harvey snips, pretending to be annoyed, but actually preening. Mike wasn't exaggerating, and they both know it.

“Oh I don't - ah! - know. What do you think?”

“I think you're exquisite,” Harvey exhales. “I think I've never met anyone as incredible as you. I think you're a smartass. I think you're perfect for me.”

Mike's voice trembles, but he manages, “That might be stretching it a li-”

“I think if I don't get my mouth on you now, I'm going to go crazy.”

Mike slides his foot away. “Can't have that.”

Harvey's on him in a flash, and in him almost as fast, fucking deep and rough and perfect. Mike knows he's making a whole goddamn bunch of noise, but there's no stopping it, and he doesn't care.

It's the first time Harvey’s fucked him with adoration shining openly in his face and Mike almost weeps realizing that affection had been (poorly) hidden (just barely) below the surface from the very beginning.

“Harvey -”

“I know, kid.”

“I love you.”

He bites his lip, then, “I know, kid.”

It's not that Mike was expecting an even reply, and he's too far gone to be upset about it, and Harvey’s getting close, and Mike's been there for almost an hour, but it's nothing, all of it, compared to the vulnerable tension in Harvey's voice as he kisses Mike, then makes sure he's looking up as he says almost nervously, “You know I love you, right?” and Mike would laugh from sheer joy but instead he gasps, “Idiot,” and throws back his head and comes so hard he stops breathing for a bit. Harvey follows after.

When his brain rejoins his body, Harvey's lying to one side, a gentle hand on Mike's chest, watching him.

“What?”

“I'm serious. You mean so much -” his voice catches. “I fucked up enough times to know, I can't let you go now.”

Mike grins ruefully. “You might want to, at some point. I've heard I'm very difficult to work with.”

“I don't just want to work with you. Obviously.” Is he blushing?

“Dude, that's the worst pickup line I've ever heard.”

“Don't call me ‘dude’. And I don’t need to pick you up.” He raises his eyebrows and Mike’s bare body, covered in a thin sheen of sweat.
“Yeah, you do,” Mike teases, rolling over to prop himself up on Harvey’s chest. “Because you care about me. You don’t just want to fuck me, you want to take me to dinner. You want to date me. You worry about me, and you miss me when I’m gone and …” He’d been waiting for Harvey to cut him off, but there’s no protest there, just a soft smile, amused and sure as hell not arguing, waiting until Mike says, “Oh.”

“You done?”

“Not by a long shot.”

Harvey tugs him down against him, voice low and safe against Mike’s cheek and into his brain. “Good.”

--

“You're here,” Mike murmurs, surprised, into his coffee.

“You may have noticed,” Harvey responds dryly. “That I live here.”

“What about work?”

He brandishes a file. “This is work.”

“What about the firm?”

“This is about the firm.”

“What about Jessica?”

He doesn't answer, but there's a sadness in his expression, an acknowledgement that makes Mike hurt for him. He doesn't prod.

Harvey’s fridge is too big, but the eggs are easy enough to find. Bread, milk, butter then cinnamon and sugar from the cupboard. A giant pan.

“What are you doing? You don't have to -”

“Shut up, will you?”

He catches Harvey watch him a dozen times before he stops paying attention, too engrossed in the process of perfect caramelization to bother with it. At some point, Etta James makes her way onto the turntable, and there's an almost unreasonable pile of French toast stacked alongside a mound of bacon and an overflowing bowl of freshly washed berries before he realizes he’s been dancing and humming and generally looking a complete idiot, but when he turns, Harvey’s leaning against the island watching, many shades of hunger dancing in his eyes.

Mike grins. “Hey. How's the work coming?”

Harvey hums, noncommittal, and steps in to wrap Mike up in a hug, then bites gently at his neck. A diversion if there ever was one.

“Come on, old man. Help me carry this crap to the balcony.”

The air is warm and soft outside, and they eat themselves tired again, though it's not even noon.

“You're not too bad a chef yourself,” Harvey comments, sucking syrup from his fingers.
“My Gram used to make this when I was little. After my parents died.”

“How old were you?”

“Nine. Poor Gram. I was a mess.”

“I’m sure she handled you just fine. She’s crazier than you are.”

“Ha. True. How’d you get stuck taking care of Marcus?”

Harvey sits back thoughtfully, sipping his drink. “Dad was gone a lot for work, and when he was home he wasn’t always...lucid. When my mom wasn’t working, she was sleeping around. I told her if she ever brought them back to our house, I’d tell my dad. She fucked it up eventually.” He takes another long pull of coffee, looking forlorn and young. “Some days I wish I’d never said anything.”

“That wasn’t your weight to carry, Harvey.”

“Maybe..,” he says softly. “But I have a feeling you’ve taken on your share of responsibilities that weren’t intended for you.”

His smile is bittersweet and he replies, “Maybe.” And then because he can’t really bear to continue this line of discussion he says, “You find the rest of the money?”

To Mike’s surprise, Harvey shakes his head. “I’ve been -” But he’s cut off by his cell phone, a call he apologizes for, but takes nonetheless.

Mike watches him pace the length of the living room. He’s speaking with absolute focus, a set to his jaw that spells trouble for whoever fucked with him, and it’s enough to spark a whole forest fire of curiosity, but when Harvey returns to the balcony, he speaks before Mike can even formulate the question. “I have a favor to ask.”

“I’m listening.”

“How would you feel about going solo on the preparation for the embezzlement lawsuit?”

“Against Hardman? That’s huge. You trust me with that?”

“I do. There’s something else I’d like to prioritize my time around. Something that deserves my full attention.”

“Something you’re not going to tell me about, I’m guessing.”

“Not yet.”

“But it’s important to you.”

“Yes.”

“More than the money?”

Harvey reaches out, absently brushing the scar from Mike’s shoulder surgery with the tip of one finger.

“Absolutely.”

--
It's a schedule that doesn't leave much time for each other, but the lawsuit is creeping up, and they both feel it.

When Mike wakes around 10 every morning, Harvey's already been up for hours, sometimes still sweaty from a workout, sometimes having already gone to the office and returned, always vague and suspicious with his answers, but Mike leaves well enough alone.

It seems only fair considering he's got a few secrets of his own - like crawling out of bed after Harvey's fallen asleep each night to fill out endless college applications. He'd memorized the responses after the very first round. It should be a breeze, rote, but Mike finds himself second guessing, rewording his essay responses, editing the shit out of the short answer portions after obsessively researching the schools and their admissions departments...he knows he's overthinking it, but he wants a chance at this life, this world where he might really get to help people - himself included, so badly it terrifies him.

He sighs hard enough that something twinges in his back as he clicks 'submit'. Another one down, and his fingernails are looking worse for wear. It'd be easier to have Harvey look over his work, bounce ideas off of him, but that will absolutely not be happening. It's too heavy. Too much room for disappointment if he fails.

When Harvey gets home that night, Mike’s findings on the money trail are compiled into neatly sorted documents, with policy, precedent, and potential charges annotated on every square inch.

“That’s everything.”

Harvey nods approvingly as he reads through the summary options. “This is good work, Mike.”

He's a grown goddamn man. Statements of fact shouldn't make him grin like an idiot. “Thanks.”

“We need to talk.”

Mike’s heart sinks. The most menacing sentence in the whole English language. “Ok.”

“It’s about the other case I was working on. The reason I needed you to take this one.” Mike waits. “It’s against Hardman, too.”

“Why didn’t you tell me? It'd be useful to work together if -”

“I’m charging him with felonious assault.”

“What?” The room is freezing all of a sudden, and Mike stands to turn off the air conditioning. “Against me?”

“Amongst others. Look, Mike -”

“Harvey, no. It’s over. Let it go.”

The older man stares, incredulously. “What the fuck is wrong with you? Absolutely not, he almost killed you!”

“I was his employee, Harvey! He was paying me. I could’ve left any time I wanted.”

“Do you really believe that?”

“It’s the truth.”
“Unbelievable.”

“Why are you even telling me about this? You're obviously not interested in my help, or my blessing.” He pauses, sucking in a breath. “You want me to testify.”

Harvey’s mouth twists, but he nods.

The bruises are barely healed. They still ache, probably because Mike hasn’t been getting enough sleep; He’s been too busy with these fucking college applications, and the embezzlement case, and being fucked senseless by his ex-boss, and recovering from a terrifying encounter that really could have killed him - It’s a lot. It’s...too much.

“Fine,” he says softly, and he goes to the bedroom to shove his jeans and a few tees into his bag. Goddamnit, how did so many of his things get into Harvey’s dresser?

“Mike?” Harvey’s voice is soft from the doorway.

“I said fine. I’ll do it.”

“Where are you -”

“I need to go home, Harvey.”

He stills. “Home.”

“I can’t be here right now.”

“Mike, I know this will be hard, but we -”

“You don’t know fucking shit about any of this! I’ll tell you whatever the fuck you want to know, but only once, in the deposition. I’ll say what you need me to say in court. And then we're never talking about any of this ever again.”

“Mike, wait!”

He looks desperate, and even hurt as he is, confused and wrapped in his own mind, Mike gets it. “I’m not leaving you, Harvey. I just - need some time.”

Harvey reaches out then stops himself, sticking his hands into his pockets instead.

Mike sighs. “When's the deposition?”

“Look, if you can’t -”

“Harvey,” he bites out.

“Tomorrow. I'll have Donna call you with the schedule.”

“Then I'll see you tomorrow.” It hurts not to kiss him goodbye, but right now, Mike can't bear the idea of being touched.

It's bad. What happened in that penthouse had been the worst kind of pain - for all of Hardman’s playthings. Mike certainly wasn't the only one who’d suffered, though it’s possible that he got the worst of it. And even that had been his fault.

He rides numbly back to his apartment. It’s been vacant for almost a week. Fortunately there's nothing in the fridge or pantry to spoil, so it just smells like old smoke and aging furniture. He
curls up on the couch. The blackmail envelope is right where he left it on the crates.

The picture he’d held into wear is too poignant to dwell on, but he digs through the others, stumbling on a photo from that last night before everything fell apart - the networking event. There’re dozens of frames of a handful of conversations, and Harvey's looking beautiful and fond, but what really rocks Mike's world is how he looks, himself. Confident, capable, at ease. Whole.

That's the man Harvey loves. The cocky asshole kid with a comeback for everything.

But the kid who'd done whatever it took to survive... well, like he'd said to Louis - ‘Whatever it takes’ covers a multitude of sins.

---

Mike sleeps until noon, but his phone remains silent, so he sets about cleaning. The apartment could use it. The quiet helps. He hasn't been alone in a while, and he barely knows what to think of himself, much less anything else.

Around dinner time, Donna calls.

“Donna, hey. When’s the deposition?”

“Don’t worry it.”

“What?”

“Harvey changed his mind. We got a couple other people in, and a few more hands on deck. You’re off the hook.”

“Wh - I - does that mean I won’t have to testify?”

“Hell if I know, kid.” Her voice softens. “He's trying to keep you out of it as much as possible.”

“He still there?”

“Left a little while ago.”

“Thanks.”

“Hey Mike?”

“Yeah?”

“Don't go doing anything stupid now.”

--

He considers knocking, but to be honest, he doesn’t want to give Harvey the upper hand. And besides, the guy’s probably not even home.

Mike lets himself in quietly, just in case.

The condo is almost completely dark but for one lamp on an end table, and the glow of Harvey’s laptop balance on the arm of the couch.

“He was just a kid,” the voice on the computer is saying. It’s familiar. “He looked so young. But the balls on him.” There’s a snort in the background, Harvey maybe, though that’d be no way to
comport oneself in a deposition - not that he ever had much respect for that kind of etiquette.

“What do you mean?” It’s Harvey alright, his voice only slightly thinner through the computer speakers.

“He watched out for us, all of us. He was always sticking up for somebody, even when the old man got him fucked up.”

“Fucked up?”

“I know he’d come in high sometimes, we all did, but the old guy had no problems slipping him something now and again, especially when he got mouthy, which was just about always.”

The recorded Harvey says quietly, “I've noticed that about him.”

“It was real bad. The kid stayed longer than he needed to, and I know he needed the money, but he was worried about us, too.”

“You knew he was going to sabotage Hardman.”

She shrugs. “He warned us. Him and his friend Roger helped us make plans. Got us out. He coulda cut and run. But he didn't.”

Maybe Mike's imagining it, but Harvey's voice sounds rough as he continues, “Please elaborate on other instances of assault, towards any of his service staff, with as many specific details as possible, dates, times, witnesses, anything you can give us could help.”

Mike’s been quiet this whole time, one arm wrapped around himself, one hand pressed to his mouth, but Harvey hits pause and says into the darkness, “I thought I knew. But I -” His voice cracks and Mike comes around the sofa and slides down to crouch at Harvey's feet. Something glints on his face. “I'm sorry. I should never have asked to you go through that again.”

Mike toys absently with the fabric of Harvey's slacks. “S not what bothered me.”

Harvey moves to take Mike's hands, but hesitates, unsure if he's allowed, so Mike takes it upon himself to twist their fingers together. “What, then?”

Mike tries for nonchalance but they're too far into it now. “I let him use me. I was scared that maybe...you would realize I'm not the man you think I am.”

“You're right,” Harvey breathes and Mike's chest clenches, then burst beautifully as he adds, “You're so much more.”

“I’ll do it, if you need me to.”

Harvey nods. “I know.”

The distance is suddenly too much, the foot and a half between them. Mike crawls into Harvey’s lap and they cling to one another, almost too tight for comfort. It feels like being pressed back together, the filling of a hole, the mending of a crack - another streak of gold.

--

He’d left that morning intending to be gone for most of the day, but Gram is getting over a cold, and after she falls asleep in the middle of a meal, Mike figures he’ll let her be. He wants to get home anyway, with the trial so close.
He’s getting on his bike and pulling out his phone, about to hit Harvey’s number in speed dial when it rings.

“Speak of the devil,” he murmurs. “What’s up?”

“You don’t have to testify.” He sounds ecstatic, and a little out of breath.

“What do you mean? How the fuck else -”

“What’d I just say, kid? You’re a free man.”

“What are you hiding?”

“Why, whatever do you mean?”

“Hey Harvey -” someone says in the background, and it can’t possibly be, but it sounds like Roger.

“Does this have something to do with what Donna said about you calling more hand on deck?”

“Maybe.”

“Anyone I know?”

“Maybe.”

“Are you going to tell me what’s going on?”

“Maybe. See you at dinner.”

Mike decides to keep some secrets of his own, and doesn’t bother mentioning he’s going to be home early.

--

Harvey’s definitely going to regret having given him a key, Mike thinks as he lets himself in.

He needn’t have bothered. The living room is a small war zone. And also, he’s clearly fallen through an alternate dimension.

“What the fuck?”

Donna and Roger are shoulder to shoulder on the couch, the most ridiculous juxtaposition of human beings Mike has ever witnessed - she’s dressed to the nines in a form fitting aquamarine dress and he’s wearing worn cargo shorts, sandals, and a loose tank top with some bullshit quip about the beach. They’re looking at the same computer screen though, where it’s propped up on a stack of books atop the coffee table, and he’s pointing something out with the back end of his pen.

In one of the armchairs is René, sitting pretty with a small glass of what must be brandy. He’s got his own laptop, and he’s grinning manically at something in a way that both encourages and disturbs Mike.

“What are you doing here?” Harvey says softly.

Mike whirls around to see him standing there in very modified work attire - bare feet, slacks, waistcoat, and shirt sleeves rolled up - it’s impossibly attractive and it takes a moment for the shock of it to wear off.
He chokes out, “You look nice.”

“Don’t I always?”

“Yes,” Mike replies guilelessly, then, “Why are they here?”

It can’t be happening, anything less than blinding confidence would not be Harvey Specter, but he looks for a moment young and hesitant as he says, “I needed to find a way that you wouldn’t have to testify.”

“I told you I would.”

“I know. But you’ve been through...” his voice trembles just slightly, and he covers it with the casual clearing of his throat. “What kind of a lawyer, hell, what kind of a boyfriend would I be if I made you go through all that just because I’m too lazy to find my own evidence?”

“A pretty shitty one, if you ask me.” Mike teases, but he’s pretty sure the whole slew of emotions he’s feeling are showing in his face.

“Bionic Boy!”

“Roger!” He accepts the hug emphatically. “The fuck are you doing here?”

“Your man called me in, said you needed my help. I was here in a flash. Why didn’t you ask me before?”

“Not my case,” he smiles tightly, not trusting his voice further than that.

To pull these people together, to bring Roger into this mess though Mike knows what Harvey thinks, or at least used to think of him, to invite them into his home and his fight, to ask for help, that he cares that much -

More somberly, Roger adds, “This dude’s a piece of fucking work. If I’d’ve known how bad -”

“What’s past is past, Rog. What can I help with?”

“Come type out this chronology,” Donna says from the couch. “I have to head back to the office.”

“On it,” Mike says, snagging her up in a hug on her way to the door. “Thank you,” he murmurs into her neck, and she kisses his cheek.

“Puppy,” she says. “I wouldn’t miss this for the world. It’s a family matter.”

Mike swallows hard. “I’m starting to see that.”

For hours they pour over documents and deposition transcripts, leaning heavily on Mike’s remarkable mind, Roger’s vast knowledge of subterfuge, and René’s disturbingly effect web search skills. (Mike’s pretty sure some of it was blatant hacking, but he doesn’t ask.) Harvey sits to one side, listening in, contributing occasionally, but mostly immersing himself in his own work. He looks up a handful of times, frowning or cool, but Mike figures he’s down the rabbit hole and thinking in their general direction.

It’s good to work with Roger again. They used to spend nearly every weekend playing poker, getting high, talking endlessly. He’s a movie buff, too, and despite the rough presentation, and the whole criminal mastermind thing, he’s a genuinely decent guy. He pays his people well, treats the women in his life like human beings, and isn’t afraid to laugh at himself. Mike forgot how easy it
was to just be around him. There’s nothing to prove.

As the evening winds down Roger and Mike see René to the door, then steal some beer from the fridge and stand at the island, chatting.

“Trial’s coming up. How do you feel?”

Mike shrugs. “Harvey’s the best there is. He’ll win, always does. And he loves that firm.”

“And you,” Rog points out, gesturing with the top of his bottle.

Blushing, Mike nods.

“I’m glad. There was a time I thought you weren’t ever gonna let anyone in.”

“Let you in, didn’t I?”

“Nah. Not really. And it’s cool man, you were on my payroll, you had an image to maintain, and hey, you were a different person back then.”

“He and I haven’t spoken ten words to each other since you’ve been here. How do you know he gets the real deal?”

A small smile plays at Roger’s mouth. “Look at him.”

Mike glances over. Harvey’s got his feet kicked up on the coffee table, pen in his mouth, and he’s typing lightening fast with one hand while checking his phone with the other. He looks exquisite bathed in the dying light from the windows, wonderful in his rumpled shirt and increasingly messy hair, imperfectly perfect instead of an untouchable icon.

“That’s how,” Rog says quietly. “You can’t even look at him without giving it all away.”

“Shut up.”

“Make me.”

Quick as a flash, Mike has him in a headlock, and just as fast Roger pinches a spot under Mike’s arm that perfectly disengages the muscle. They stumble apart, laughing.

“Still quick on your feet, Mikey.”

“And you still play dirty.”

“Speaking of playing dirty, do you remember Amanda?”

“Ellis? Sure.”

“Oh man, have I got a story for you.”

Roger fills him in on the details of the life from which Mike has removed himself, without an ounce of accusation or malice, just shared acquaintances, memories, a million tiny details that feel good to relive. They’re in stitches over some shit one of his guys had pulled a few weeks ago when Harvey stands from the chair and says with a bit more roughness to his voice than Mike thinks is necessary, “Thanks for the help Roger, but I think we’re gonna to get to bed.”

Roger smiles knowingly and salutes. “Sure thing, big man. Let me know how it goes. I’m pullin’ for ya.”
“Thanks. Good night,” and he practically shoves the guy out the door.

“Jesus Harvey. What’s the issue? We both know neither of us is going to get much sleep tonight.”

A muscle twitch in his jaw and he shrugs. “He’s so loud.”

“So’m I,” Mike responds suspiciously. “You want me to leave?”

Like Mike’s ridiculous for suggesting it, Harvey scoffs.

And then it clicks. “Harvey Specter. Are you jealous?”

“Of course not.”

“Because guys like you don’t get jealous.”

“That’s right.”

“So your boyfriend talking to an ex-fuck buddy doesn’t bother you in the slightest.”

He stiffens. “You fucked him?”

Softly, Mike replies, “I’ve fucked a lot of people, Harvey.”

“That’s different.”

“How.”

“You like Roger.”

“You are jealous.” Mike moves into his space with a grin. “Of all the stupid fucking -”

Harvey kisses him roughly, effectively silencing Mike’s tirade, although now he’s making a whole different kind of noise. Harvey licks into his mouth again and again, biting at his lips then sliding his tongue across them, overwhelming and exquisite until Mike’s panting against him and relying heavily on the arm around his waist for balance.

“You done being a smartass?” Attitude or no, Harvey sounds gratifyingly undone.

“Never. But I am yours, you know.”

“I know. I just -” It’s an unusual sight watching him struggle for words, so Mike takes pity on him and interrupts.

“I get it, idiot.”

His smile is beautiful, then he sombers. “One more day.”

“And then the takedown of the century. And I’ll be sitting at the back, cheering you on.”

“It’s your call, kid. Whatever you’re comfortable with. If it’s too much to see him -”

“I want to be there. Just in case you need me to testify.”

“I’ll do my damndest not to let that happen.”

“I know. But don’t throw the case to protect me. I’m a big boy.”
Harvey smirks. “I’ll say.”

Mike smacks him. “Get your mind out of the gutter.”

“Or you could get in here with me.”

Mike’s never been particularly classy to begin with.

--

Day one goes to the larceny charges. And it’s over in a flash.

One minute Mike’s sitting in the gallery sweating at the sight of Hardman for the first time since their conversation from his jail cell, and the next Mike’s watching the color drain from the old bastard’s face as the jury finds him guilty on all charges.

Turns out Mike built a damn near foolproof case, and with René’s fuck buddy in the banking world they’d gotten some backstage advice that lay the money trail out for even the densest juror to see plainly. Routing numbers, safe deposit boxes, a car Hardman had bought for his wife, and the payroll document with edits that Mike and Harvey had torn apart - it was almost too easy. He can’t believe they put it off for so long.

The jury votes unanimously and the judge convicts for a Class C Non-violent Felony, though the fifteen year sentence comes with the possibility of parole.

One his way out of the courtroom, Hardman stops, sneering at Mike. “I’ll be out before my next birthday.

“And which would that be? Your hundred and fourth?”

“You’re lucky you had your Daddy to fight your battles for you.”

Out of the corner of his eye, Mike sees Harvey stand quickly as he notices the exchange, but Mike just smiles lazily and relaxes against the back of the bench.

“What are you talking about, Daniel? Harvey didn’t build that case. I did.”

The old man’s face flushes in a way that Mike recognizes as a sign of danger before he realizes - Hardman’s in cuffs. What’s he going to do?

“That explains why you couldn’t get me on anything higher than Class C.”

“We both know it was less than a million dollars. The best lawyer on the planet couldn’t’ve gotten it raised.”

“You better hope whatever bullshit Harvey throws tomorrow sticks better than this, or we might be seeing each other sooner than you think.”

“Oh don’t worry,” he says with a wink. “I’ll see you tomorrow.”

He’s shaking slightly when the old man leaves, but his breath comes easy and his mind remains unclouded. Their case is solid. He has to trust this.

Mike hadn’t asked, really about Harvey’s case. Maybe it would be in defense of Mike, but maybe it would be the girl from the deposition video, one of Hardman’s many mistresses, or the whole group of them on his payroll. Maybe the case would be about his wife. Assault in the first degree
is punishable by twenty five years in New York. If Harvey can prove it, they’re looking at forty years between the two lawsuits, which might as well be life for someone Hardman’s age.

“No matter what happens tomorrow, I wanted to say thank you.”

Night fell hours ago, and Harvey’s been leaning on the balcony railing, staring silent and somber over the city since the light faded. He turns now though, elbows propped up on the wrought iron, to observe Mike.

“You’re welcome. But this is as much for me as it is for you.”

“Because of the firm.”

“Because of you.”

Shocked, Mike manages, “What?”

Harvey turns away to collect his thoughts, and Mike joins him at the railing.

“The first night we met, you’d just gotten shot. Remember?”

Mike laughs. “Hard to forget.”

“Yeah. Well I remember this cocky fucking kid getting into my car with pain and more than a few sleepless nights in his eyes, and by the time we got to that goddamn party I fucking cared. At which point I probably should’ve driven your smart ass home, but I didn’t. Do you know why?”

“Why?”

“I liked you,” Harvey replies simply. “And I wanted you more than I’ve ever wanted anybody. And then I looked down, and you had a fucking bullet hole in your leg. And you wouldn’t tell me who, or how, and it wasn’t my business to ask, so I didn’t, just spent the next few weeks wondering which undeserving bastards were getting to touch you, and whether you were safe with any of them.”

Mike watches Harvey’s profile against the skyline.

“The next time I saw you I thought you were gonna bleed out on the sidewalk. And then that client bruised you up, and you flatly fucking refused to take care of yourself—”

“Hey, that's not fair.”

“And every time - Christ - I was so fucking angry.”

Small and defiant Mike supplies, “At me.”

Harvey jerks to look at him. “No, you idiot. At myself.”

“Why on earth?”

“Because I couldn't protect you! I couldn't keep you safe or heal any hurt, all I could do was stand by and watch. Helpless.”

“And with this suit, you're not helpless anymore.”

“Exactly. Why are you smiling?”
"You're very romantic."

"I am absolutely not."

Mike leans over and kisses him, intending something short and sweet but Harvey chases his mouth as he pulls away and it lingers.

"If you say so. You're the boss."

"Damn right."

--

Maybe it’s self preservation, but Mike’s not nervous as he watches the attorneys give their opening statements. He catches himself checking out Harvey’s ass a number of times (René’s work is a goddamn gift to humanity), zoning out, and it’s not until he realizes one cheek has gone numb from the way he’s sitting and the first witness takes the stand that Mike even tunes in.

It’s the woman from the deposition.

“Do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth so help you God?”

“I do.”

The judge nods, satisfied, and Harvey begins.

“Could you please state your name?”

“Mallory Jones.”

“Thank you Ms. Jones. Could you tell us how you know the defendant?”

“I was his Mistress.” She says it with a detached cool that jogs Mike’s memory.

There’s a murmur in the room, but the judge twitches a brow at the lookers on, and it falls silent.

“Could you define the terms of your relationship?”

“I would visit his penthouse when he stayed downtown, maybe three times a week. We were sleeping together.”

“Be clear for the record. By ‘sleeping together’ you mean ‘having sex’.”

“Yeah.”

“Were there other people at this penthouse while you were there?”


“And how did he treat the service staff?”

“Objection, leading the witness,” the defense says, bored, from his chair.

“Sustained.”

Other than a twitch in his jaw, Harvey appears calm. “Where were you on the day after
Thanksgiving two years ago?”

She sighs. “Daniel’s residence downtown.”

“The penthouse.”

“Yes.”

“Can you tell me what happened that night?”

Mike knows what’s coming, though he doesn’t remember the specifics. He’d been too fucked up to retain much of anything.

“He’d asked me to come over. I got there around nine. The kid,” and she gestures to Mike, “Was passed out on the couch.”

“How do you know Mr. Ross wasn’t just sleeping?”

She smiles sadly. “I mean, I didn’t give him a breathalyzer. But...it’s a look you learn. And I’m pretty sure he called me because the kid was out of commission”

“What happened next?”

“Danny was pretty drunk. We talked for awhile, but when we got down to business he had trouble performing. He got angry.”

“At you?”

“I guess. He started shouting. Slapped me. The noise must’ve woken Mike up, ‘cause he came upstairs to the bedroom to see what was going on.” She finds Mike in the audience, and as she speaks, the memory of that night begins to return. “He told Danny to let go of me - he had me by the arm, real tight - but Danny wasn’t listening. He started shouting about how we were pieces of shit, toys for him to use and throw away… Mike said something that distracted him, and I got free, but Danny kept this little handgun in his bedside table… He grabbed it, and when Mike saw, he screamed at me to get out, put his body in the way so I could leave. I got about halfway to the door when there was this crack. Danny pistol whipped Mike so hard he started to pass out again, and he fell down the stairs. His arm was at this awful fuckin’ angle.”

The sick thud resonates in Mike’s mind - the sound of a body coming apart within its own skin. Suddenly, it’s far too hot in the room.

“I was crying, I told him he had to take the kid the hospital or I’d call the cops.” She gags on the memory. “He put the gun to my head and told me if I ever told anyone what happened, he’d kill me.” She laughs bitterly. “So if I turn up dead somewhere…”

“Ms. Jones. We won’t let anything happen to you.”

“Oh honey,” she says sadly. “You of all people should know - his reach is farther than anything this court could enforce.”

“Then why are you testifying?” It’s Harvey, the man, not the attorney, who asks that one.

“Because that stupid kid almost died half a dozen times in situations like that one. It’s about time someone stuck their neck out for him.”

Harvey gives her a more genuine smile than most people get, and turns away. “The prosecution
submits evidence, item 3C, a hospital bill for November 27th - 30th of 2015 for one Michael Ross being treated for a concussion, a broken rib, and surgery to repair a fractured collarbone and acromioclavicular joint separation. Made out to and paid for by one Daniel Hardman.” He turns a steely look to the defense lawyer. “No further questions.”

Mike realizes his body’s been clenched for the duration of the interview - one of his legs is cramping and he can barely breathe. The defense rises and asks some questions of the witness, but Mike misses the first few because Harvey’s looking at him with what is an unnecessary amount of concern. Mike smiles disarmingly. He’s fine. He has to be.

“Ms. Jones, did you ever receive payment for your services?”

“Payment?” she repeats slowly.

“Sure. Checks, jewelry, cash…”

“I - He’s given me gifts…”

“In exchange for your services.”

Fire returns to her eyes, and Mike grins. He always did like her.

“And by services you mean sex. But prostitution is illegal in the state of New York.”

“That it is.”

“And since I plainly said gifts, given freely, and not compensation, it seems downright rude for you to insinuate otherwise, don’t you think?”

“I’m just clarifying. Since you’re not a hooker -”

“Watch your language, Counselor,” the judge murmurs.

“Apologies. You weren’t his escort, you were his girlfriend.”

“Sure.”

He flashes his teeth, a shark cornering its prey. “So, you could have left at any time?”

Harvey stands. “Objection, your Honor -”

The defense attorney puts up his hands in patronizing placation. “No further questions, your Honor. Defense calls Daniel Hardman to the stand.”

Mike’s palms ache - he’s been clenching the back of the bench in front of him so hard it’s left a purpling mark, and his hands are shaking.

Hardman, on the other hand, looks positively delighted. After what feels like an eternity of banal questions the attorney says, “Mr. Hardman. Ms. Jones has given us an account of that evening. Could you please explain your version of events?”

“Of course. Michael was helping around the house. My employees are like family, so I offered him a drink - Holiday cheer and whatnot. Perhaps he’d been drinking before work because after a few beers he passed out, so I laid him down on the couch to sleep it off.”

Tears of rage start to burn hot behind Mike’s eyes. It had been one part starvation - he hadn’t eaten since lunch with Gram the previous day, and before that it had been at least another 48 hours - and
one part what he suspects was a downgraded version of Rohypnol, one of Hardman’s favorites whenever Mike was particularly resistant.

He never gets blackout drunk. Never.

Harvey’s watching him instead of the Hardman, and Mike tries to school his expression because it looks like the other man is physically restraining himself from violence.

“Mal came over, we talked, had a few more drinks, started to get intimate. Mike must’ve heard us. He got jealous. He and I had come close to having a “thing” in the past, and with the beer I think he got carried away. He started shouting… I told Mal she should leave, tried to spare her an unpleasant scene… She was on her way out when Mike lost his footing and backed onto the stairs. Took a nasty tumble.”

“So you took him to the hospital.”

“Of course. I take good care of what’s mine.”

He sneers out at Mike.

Bile rises in his throat.

“What about the head wound?”

“What about it?”

“Did you hit him with a gun, as Ms. Jones suggests?”

“Lord no,” Hardman scoffs. “It must have been from the fall. I don’t own a gun. Check my record,” he smiles. “No license to carry. I’ve never believed in firearms. Nasty, dangerous things.”

Mike doesn’t hear any more. He’s in the bathroom, puking.

The first few recollections have knocked loose a whole other lifetime of memories, and while some of them are lovely - playing drinking games with Mal, cards with Rog, dancing with some of the other people he’d worked with - most are horrible. Echoes of pain and shame rise to the surface like scalding water.

“Mike, babe, hey, come on…”

Far away, Harvey’s voice is tugging at him, and reality begins to swim back. He’s on the bathroom floor, back to the wall, and Harvey’s on his knees in front of him.

“You’ll get your suit dirty,” Mike whispers, brushing at the slacks but Harvey catches him by the wrists and holds tight.

“I don’t give a damn.”

“Wait, why are you here? Shouldn’t you be -”

“Called for a recess.”

“Unnecessary. I’m fine.”

“I’m not.” Harvey pulls them up to standing, and wraps Mike in his arms. “Needed to touch you.” He shudders. “Christ, Mike. I’m so sorry I brought you into this.”
Mike shakes his head and pulls back to look Harvey in the eye. “Don’t do that. This isn’t just for us. He hurt a lot of people, and you’re going to make him pay.”

“We’re going to make him pay.” Harvey kisses his forehead, holding him there with a hand to the back of his head for a moment. “I gotta get back. We start again in ten minutes, but if you want to go home, Ray can be here in a half hour.”

“Harvey?”

“Hm?”

“I’m not gonna leave you to do this alone.”

He can tell Harvey hears the important part - “I’m not gonna leave you” - by the catch in the older man’s breath. Sweet and shy, Harvey gives him a wry smile, and disappears through the swinging door.

Mike washes out his mouth, straightens his tie, and goes back to the courtroom. It’s perfect timing, because he gets to watch the color drain from Hardman’s face as Harvey calls Carson Dye to the stand.

Dye looks much older than the last time Mike saw him, the wrong parts of him thinner, and thicker, than before. From their one conversation, Mike expects him to be the nervous type, but instead he sits at the witness stand resigned, like he’s headed to the chopping block and there was never any other option.

“Please state your name for the record.”

And so begins Harvey’s masterful set up - a magician with all his favorite tools at his disposal, and an audience waiting with bated breath. It’s glorious to watch. The facts paint an incredible narrative, and they have the added benefit of being absolutely true.

Ryan Kane, previously of Pearson Hardman, had been late on a deadline - a signature he hadn’t even known he was responsible for until the morning the deal was set to expire, when his boss, Daniel Hardman, informed the poor guy that he was about to get canned for his lapse in judgement, but that there was a saving grace, a delivery boy faster than any cab. Ryan called Roger asking for his fastest guy, Roger gave him Mike’s number, and the plan was in motion.

Dye describes how Hardman had gotten in contact - burner phones, different numbers each time, culminating in a face to face interview - and told him there was five grand in it for him if he’d do a messy job, half the money paid at their meeting, the other half to be delivered upon completion of the task. Hardman gave him the time, the place, and a photo of Mike.

The way Dye is describing the incident makes it sound like the incident had been a minor thing, a tap with a bumper. Harvey’d anticipated it, and after Dye gives his account, the prosecution plays a video of the assault. The jury watches with horror. Harvey grits his teeth so hard a muscle in his jaw bulges out.

Strangely, it’s not bad for Mike, in fact, the opposite is true. There’s a vindicating feeling in having survived, and thrived, in the face of such a vicious attack. He’s whole again, after everything that Hardman had put him through. And then -

“Defense calls Michael Ross to the stand.”

He has a memory from so long ago his life still looked normal - his parents had been chatting in the kitchen, long after Mike’s bedtime, about an incident earlier that day, at the park where Mike
had stood up to a bully on the playground.

“That boy was twice as big as him,” his mom had said, and he could hear the smile in his father’s voice, saying, “Yeah. But when something’s the right thing to do, Mikey’s gonna do it.”

“Even if he’s scared.”

“You know,” James had said thoughtfully. “I don’t know if it even occurs to him to be scared. When it gets down to it, all he sees is what needs to be done.”

And maybe his dad had been right, because as he walks through the courtroom, his pulse settles, his muscles loosen. It is as it should be. And he’s not afraid anymore.

He swears to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help him god.

It’s not until he’s seated in the surprisingly comfortable chair that he notices Harvey, expressionless and rigid behind the desk. Mike gives him a small smile, and a surprising number of emotions crack through Harvey’s shell before he seals it off again, regret and fondness and pain, but even the ice that settles again is less cold than when they’d first met. It’s closer to hope than despair.

“So, Mr. Ross.”

“Sir.”

“How long did you work for Mr. Hardman?”

“Two years, give or take a few months.”

“What did you do for him?”

“I was hired on to keep the penthouse clean and in working order.”

“Did you two have sex?”

The abruptness of the question has one of the jury members gasping, but Mike answers calmly. “Yes.”

“So you were in a relationship with him.”

“No.”

“But you were sleeping together.”

Mike smiles, and informs him of the objection Harvey’s a breath away from making. “Asked and answered, counselor.”

Irritation appears on the guy’s face, but Mike keeps his amusement to himself.

“Alright, was the sex consensual?”

“Some of it.”

“Some of it,” the lawyer repeats, dubiously, but it’s not a question, so Mike waits. “Was he the only person you were having sex with at the time?”

Mike knows what he’s asking, but he subverts it, if only for a moment. “You mean did we have
any threesomes? I mean, the old guy’s more flexible than he looks…”

Harvey laughs into his notes.

“Mr. Ross, don’t play dumb. Were you involved with anyone else at the time you were seeing Mr. Hardman?”

“Yeah.”

“How many others?”


“Speaks to character of the witness,” the lawyer replies.

Harvey stands, rebuttoning his suit coat, and Mike thinks he looks taller, power and rage barely contained. It’s a sight to behold. “Not in the slightest. There is no correlation between the number of one’s sexual partners and one’s morality. This line of questioning is irrelevant and you will desist.”

“Sustained.”

The lawyer rolls his eyes and turns back to Mike. “Do you do drugs, Mr. Ross?”

“No.”

“Did you?”

“Counselor, could we stop pretending like you don’t know the fifth amendment exists?” Mike asks calmly. “Actually, you know what, here’s what I’ll do for you.”

The guy looks suspicious, and even Harvey appears to be holding his breath, but no one interrupts.

“You obviously called me to the stand with the intent to discredit me, insinuating that I’m a hooker or a junkie. Maybe you thought you’d intimidate me. But you gave me the stand, and I intend to use it. For the record, Daniel Hardman raped me a number of times, assaulted me - the shoulder was not the only injury I sustained from him -”

“You never reported him, and you didn’t quit until months later.”

Mike nods, and cheats towards the jury. “My parents died in a car crash when I was a kid. My Gram took me in. We’ve been through a lot together. I wasn’t in a place where I could balance school and life so I never finished college, but taking care of her has always been my primary concern.” Several of the jurors are watching him with interest on their faces, but empathy is a close second, so he continues. “She got sick. Daniel paid me a wage that afforded her the best medical care, the best nursing homes, even without a degree. Gram saved my life. For a long time, she was my only family. So yeah. I stayed, even after things got fucked up. Because I wanted a good life for her. The kind of life she deserves. After everything she’s sacrificed for me, it seems like the least I could do.”

One of the jurors has tears in her eyes. The defense looks furious. “No further questions.”

In the shifting of the courtroom as Mike returns to his seat, he hears the lawyer whisper ferociously to Hardman, “You said he’d be -” but the rest is too quiet to be heard.
“Prosecution calls Jessica Pearson to the stand.” Mike startles.

“Ms. Pearson is not on the list,” the judge murmurs

“Nor was Mr. Ross, but in an effort to tarnish his credibility the defense called him and you allowed it. I’m just asking for the opportunity to reestablish that credibility.”

The judge shrugs. “Alright.”

Jessica looks resplendent as ever in a black dress and heels, and while he can’t for the life of him imagine why Harvey would call her as a character witness for him, he has to admit - any help she can give will have more weight than the other witnesses so far.

She’s sworn in, and Harvey asks, “Ms. Pearson, how do you know Mr. Ross?”

“He’s a contractor for my firm.”

“What kind of work does he do fr you?”

“A lot of clerical work, editing and revisions. Transcribing depositions, researching precedent - he’s a remarkable man with an incredible mind. We’re lucky to have him.”

Mike kind of wants to cry.

“And how would you rate the quality of his work?”

“Excellent. He’s meticulous and dedicated.”

“And in terms of his ethics, do they mesh well with the expectations given by the firm?”

She smiles. “Mr. Ross is a good man. He’s thoughtful and generous, to an extent which might prove a liability we’re he ever to become a lawyer himself. Then again, it seems to be a trait that serves him well, so perhaps he’ll prove me wrong.”

“No further questions.”

The defense attorney asks, “Did Mr. Ross help with privileged cases?”

“Of course.”

“So you violated attorney client privilege?”

“Except I’m not an idiot, and my firm is one of the best in the country, and every client signed a contract with a provision for Mr. Ross being a part of the team working on their case. Additionally, upon receiving his job with us, Mr. Ross signed a number of documents binding him to confidentiality. I’d dare you to find a loophole in our legal strategy, but that question was so low and poorly thought out that I don’t think you’d be able to get through the documentation, much less discern their meaning, so I’ll leave it at that.”

Suppressing giggles is apparently a weakness Harvey and Mike share. Jessica shoots them a dagger of a look, though Mike catches the smile on her face as she returns to her seat. ‘Thank you,’ he mouths.

She nods, wisdom and fondness for him alone, and it’s a better gift that he could’ve dreamed of, to have her blessing.

The defense calls Hardman back, wrapping up for their closing statements. The trial has been
remarkably calm, especially considering the depth of emotion held by all parties involved. Each side laid out their arguments, and aside from sloppy attempts to discredit the prosecution’s witnesses, both sides played fairly. The jury could go either way.

Mike’s honestly kind of surprised. He’d expected Harvey to have some ace up his sleeve to send them right on into a clinched case, but instead, the trial is winding down normally, a volley of information, and a wait for deliberation. As Harvey rises, though, to take one more shot at Hardman, Mike thinks he sees something different about the set of Harvey’s shoulders, less relaxed but without nervousness. It’s the tension of a predator about to strike, and weirdly, Harvey appears to give the judge some sort of nod. While the man doesn’t move, there’s understanding in his face. Awareness. Mike finds his heart racing.

“Daniel. Just one last question.” The room holds it’s breath. “How does it feel to know that some punk kid derailed your entire life?”

There’s a silence, and then Hardman snorts. “Ross didn’t derail my life.”

“Sure he did. He was the one who figured out how you’d been stealing from the firm.” Daniel looks surprised, like he hadn’t believed Mike’s declaration yesterday. “And he dismantled both of your primary relationships, which in turn had a lot of your guys ditching you… I mean, it’s kind of impressive really.”

His voice is tight as he says. “Mr. Ross is an intelligent man, but I take responsibility for my mistakes.”

Harvey nods, absently murmuring, “Sure, sure.” He walks a few steps, deep in thought. “You know, I had a fascinating conversation with the CEO of Itel Industries yesterday.”

It’s strange to see a flush appear and retreat with such alacrity, leaving Hardman’s face oddly grey. “Oh?”

“Yeah, Evan Mackeroy He says he’s been using Mike as a courier for ages.”

“Really, Harvey, what does this have to do with anything?”

“Mike’s just a kid, you know? I mean, he’s so young, and so sweet. So when he’d show up with bruises, Evan would always ask. He was concerned. And when I talked to him yesterday, he asked me if Mike was still alive.”

Hardman swallows, and says nothing.

“Which is a bizarre thing to ask, don’t you think? I mean, Mike’s a little reckless, but dead? So I asked Evan why he’d think that. You know what he said?”

“How on earth should I know?”

“He said the last time you visited his condo, you shot Mike.”

“I most certainly did not!”

“Evan’s not a liar.”

“Apparently he is.”

“Mike has this scar on his leg. From a bullet.”
“You said it yourself, Mr. Ross is reckless.”

“But he’s not stupid. He burned your empire to the ground, and helped everyone in it get out. And you couldn’t find him anywhere, but I bet you knew he couldn’t leave. He’s got his Gram to look after. It must’ve killed you to know that he was out, free, happy, and your wife left you, your mistress left you, your men left you… they believed him when he told them who you really are. They chose him over you.”

“Objection, argumentative,” defense spits. The judge remains silent.

“So I tried to put myself in your shoes. Picking up the pieces of your life, trying to keep up appearances, and who should show up at your evening with Mackeroy, one of your few chances at rebuilding, and the skinny little shit who took you down shows up at the door.”

“You’re making this up.” But he’s sucked into the moment, remembering, and Harvey’s not far off from the true course of events. Mike wonders how much Evan told him.

“Evan welcomes the kid with open arms, and Mike looks good, healthy, happy even, and you can’t have him, can’t touch him. Maybe he smiles at you. Tosses out a smart ass comment. Everyone laughs. Everyone loves him. He’s their golden boy.”

“Golden boys don’t have to make a living bringing cocaine to parties,” Hardman grinds out, and Harvey practically glows.

“So you were there.”

“Sure.”

“And so was Mike. What did you say to him?”

“Nothing.”

“Why? Don’t like talking to your victims? Or,” Harvey smiles. “Did he ignore you? I imagine that must have been salt in the wound. He’s still there, in your world, with your people, and he doesn’t even talk to you.”

“It doesn’t -”

“Doesn’t even look at you.”

“He’s not -”

“Because you’re nothing to him, now. He doesn’t need you. He doesn’t want you, he’s not scared of you.”

“He should be!” Hardman shouts, and the whole room sees something snap behind his eyes. “He’s mine! How dare he ignore me? How dare he pretend I don’t exist!”

“So you shot him?”

“No! No - I -”

The defense attorney interrupts desperately, “Your honor, objection, you can’t -”

“The hallway cameras show it clearly, Daniel,” Harvey interjects, patronizing. “The bullet through the wood of the front door, splintering it. And Mike running into the hall. He’s faster than you, though, always has been, always will be. You got nothing on him. You can’t shoot for shit.
You’re old. Your aim is -”

“If my aim is so terrible, why was there blood in the stairwell?” Hardman roars, then sits back, satisfied. “That’s right.”

Harvey nods, repeating softly, “That’s right.” He turns back to the jury, the judge, the room. “Prosecution rests.”

Shakily, the defense lawyer says, “Your honor, I move that this exchange be struck from the record. Mr. Specter was argumentative, inflammatory, that whole story was hearsay -”

“Sure,” the judge says casually. “Strike it.”

But the jury won’t forget. And they all know it.

--

Hardman is fuming and his lawyer looks exhausted and Jessica’s got this secret smile on her face, but Harvey is watching Mike as the head juror reads the verdicts of two counts of assault in the first degree, criminal possession of a firearm, and an attempted murder charge.

It doesn’t take a lawyer to figure out the sentences, and it doesn’t take a genius to figure out Hardman’s going to die in prison.

Somehow, though, it took New York City’s best closer over a goddamn year to figure out he wants to marry the stupid, skinny kid giving him exuberant finger guns from the back row. He laughs and discovers his eyes are wet. He gives the kid a thumbs up and knuckles a tear away before turning back to the judge. Harvey knows Mike saw. He doesn’t really care.

--

Mike forgets about his PO box until after the trial. Jessica and Harvey hand over the reins of the firm to Louis and tender their resignation on the same day. It’s a weight lifted, only barely bitter with so much sweet, and Mike sees it on Harvey’s face. They’re going to get bored someday, but for now, pizza and sex and movies seems like a good way to spend the first break either of them have ever had in their adult lives.

The PO box door is difficult to open because the compartment is so jammed full of envelopes, and they tumble onto Mike’s feet as the latch clicks up. He plucks the first one off his shoe. Cornell.

Fumbling, he grabs the other three that had fallen - University of Pennsylvania. Duke. Alabama. There are a few more in the box and he yanks the envelopes out, hands trembling so hard he drops them, so Mike sinks down, reading the letterhead from the tile of the post office. Stanford. New York University. University of Chicago. Columbia. Yale. Michigan. Berkeley.

He takes a bus home so he doesn’t get in (another) bike accident.

--

When Harvey gets home, it’s strangely quiet. Mike has a habit of cranking up the music and taking care of chores while Harvey’s out of the house, but there’s nothing today, though the kid’s bike is in the foyer.

“Mike?”
There’s a rustling from the floor in front of the couch.

He’s surrounded by paper, so much fucking paper, shredded envelopes, packets, stamps, and in his hands is a stack of crumpled cardstock, each page only slightly different in letterhead and font.

“You ok, kid?”

Mike looks up.

“Hey! What’s wrong?” Immediately he crouches down, brushing Mike’s cheek with a tender thumb.

He shakes his head and shoves the pile of papers into Harvey’s hands.

There are twenty two.

Twenty two pages.

Twenty two ornate seals bearing bold script.

Twenty two letters of acceptance to the top law schools in the country.

Mike makes a gasping noise and Harvey beams up at him. “You did it.” He’s not surprised in the slightest by the slew of acceptances, but his voice is creaky anyway. This goddamn kid and his contagious emotions. “I’m so fucking proud of you.”

“I’m gonna be a lawyer.” He sounds shocked.

“A damn good one, too.” Shifting an avalanche of paper, Mike leans forward and slides against Harvey’s body, arms ’round his shoulders, face tucked to his neck, and Harvey kisses the bit of cheek he can reach. “I think an ‘I told you so’ is in order.”

Mike scoffs. “Really? It’s been like an hour. Can’t I bask?”

“Sure you can. But I’m still going to give you shit.”

“Wouldn’t have it any other way.”

“Can I make you dinner?”

“Do you think our stomachs are capable of digesting anything that’s not pizza anymore?”

“Only one way to find out, hot shot.” He pulls them to their feet and makes a move toward the kitchen, but finds himself held in place. “Mike? What on your mind?”

Those blue eyes look up at him, brilliant and blindingly sincere. “Thank you.”

“For what?”

“Loving me. Believing in me. Giving me chance after chance after chance. I never could’ve done any of this without you.”

Harvey huffs a smile. “Oh come on. You’re a force to be reckoned with, and goddamn stubborn. You would’ve found your way eventually.” Something on Mike’s face dims, the expectation of something deeper, more, and for once Harvey finds himself wanting to give it. His voice is softer than intended as he adds, “But I thank whatever lucky stars we still have that I got to be the one to help get you there.”
The kids eyes start to brighten. Harvey slides an arm around Mike’s waist, and takes his face in the other hand, feeling the silk of his hair at the temples against his fingertips. “You better listen up kid, ’cause now’s the only time you’re going to hear this. You are, without question, the best thing that’s ever happened to me and I am the luckiest man alive that you haven’t gotten fed up with my bullshit and hit the road. I am so goddamn in love with you it terrifies me. So. You’re welcome. But thank you, too. For a life I almost missed, and wanted more than anything.”

Mike surges up, kissing him fiercely, and the salt on their lips isn’t from his eyes alone. Harvey melts against him.

This fucking kid. This ridiculous, incredible man who kisses with his whole heart and gives all of himself like he’s never been broken. He’s warm and strong and smells like soap and coffee and cotton and Harvey wants to breathe him in and never exhale.

“Who knew you were such a sap?”

“Well you’re stuck with me now,” Harvey replies, surprised by the inexplicable heat in his face.

“So,” Mike says casually. “How about that dinner?”

“Yeah, yeah, get us some beer would you? And then clean up this goddamn disaster zone. It looks like a shredder took a shit in here.”

“You’re just jealous.”

“Of some pipsqueak finally on his way to the big leagues? Please. I’m the king here.”

“King, huh? We’ll you get on your knees for me all the time. So what does that make me?” Harvey snatches Mike away from the open refridgerator and gives him a quick smack on the ass.

“It makes you a goddamn menace.”

Mike grins up over his shoulder. “And damn good looking.”

Harvey leans in and bites at his neck. “Easy. Cocky isn’t a good look.” The kid’s eyes widen comically. “On you. I can pull it off.”

Brows held high, Mike leans away, slowly shucking his shirt with an ease and elegance that belies experience. He folds it neatly on a chair, but when Harvey reaches for him, he waggles a finger.

“Eh, eh, eh. Someone’s got dinner to make.”

“Then why the hell’d you take it off?”

Mike glances around demurely. “You said something about ‘pull it off’, and then I got distracted, oh right I’m supposed to clean up.” He winks and goes, shirtless, to tidy the living room.

“A menace!” Harvey repeats.

Buoyant gold, Mike’s laugh sings out across the room. “But you love me!”

Harvey fetches the cutting board and sets it neatly across a damp towel, thinking about the small velvet box hidden in the back of his sock drawer. “Yeah, yeah. Put some music on, would you?”

“What do you feel like?”

“Your pick.”
Elegant. It’s the only fitting word. Even after two years of law school and helping Harvey run their firm, parties like this still intimidate him, but in the best way, driving Mike to be brighter and quicker on his feet, and charming as hell. Not that he needs help in any of those departments.

The ballroom has gleaming hardwood floors, and the lighting is low and lovely, bathing every jewel and champagne bubble in a soft glow. He’s spoken with half a dozen prospective clients, but the man they’re here to see isn’t here yet. Nor, indeed is Mike’s husband.

He sighs, about to find someone to dance with, when a voice over his shoulders says, “It’s an actual crime for you to be standing around on your own, looking so goddamn sexy.”

“Yeah, you should tell that to my husband. Ironically, he’s a lawyer, and always,” and now Mike turns around. “Fucking late. Oh my god, René was right. That tux is incredible on you.”

Harvey grins. “Why thank you.”

“Dance?”

“Raincheck. Preferably at home, naked. Right now, we need to go meet with a client.”

“Burrows is here?”

Harvey nods across the room and they move through the crowd with ease, accustomed to moving in sync with one another.

The client looks familiar, but it’s been a few years, so Mike is halfway through his introduction when he figures where he knows the guy from. Whoops.

The guy shakes his hand, eyes narrowed. “You’re a hooker, lot a lawyer.”

Harvey goes from startled to murderous with satisfying alacrity, and Mike can tell from the shift in his stance that he’s about to hit the guy. Calmly and without being seen, Mike begins speaking while simultaneously reaching back and pinching Harvey, hard, on the leg, just below his left ass cheek. The mutinous look gets turned to him, which is just where Mike loves to be, the very center of Harvey’s attention, especially when he gets to do shit like this.

“Mr. Burrows. I used to do a whole fuckton of things. But right now I’m the deciding factor about whether or not you end up in jail. So you can either figure out how to speak with respect to the team working on your case, or I will have you digging your own damn grave and then handing the shovel to the prosecution. You know the reputation of our firm. So. Are we clear?”

The guy nods, face a curious mix of ash and rose.

“Great,” Mike says with a smile. “Let’s get a drink, and sit down to discuss how Harvey and I are going to save your company.”

Burrows leads the way to the bar without a word.

Harvey grabs Mike’s arm. “That pinch fucking hurt.”

“I’ll kiss it better when you deliver on that naked dancing rain check. You ready to go kick this guy’s ass?”

“Born ready.” He let’s Mike go first so he can walk behind and admire the dashing figure his
husband cuts, and no one hears him as he grins fondly, whispering, “That’s my boy.”

Chapter End Notes

Come visit me!
seasless.tumblr.com

<3

End Notes

“We were together. I forget the rest.”
— Walt Whitman

Come visit me at seasless.tumblr.com
<3

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!