

## To Ashes

### Chapter 5: The Morning After

Asher bit down on his makeshift gag as he screamed into it, tears streaming down his face as he cursed his own birth. How could he be so stupid! How could he let Fynx get to him again, and again, and *again*! The drake collapsed into the ditch, the tall grasses hiding his shame as he lay there, beaten and bruised, the virile seed in his pussy oozing out around his thighs and dripping onto the earth.

How could he let this all happen again, how could he be so stupid. How could he be such an addicted slut to his rapist that he would keep crawling back. Even now his pussy ached for more, to be used and abused, beaten and scraped by that barbed prick!

Asher's claws dug into the soft earth, gripping a fistful of the grass and clenching so hard the mud welled up between his fingers as he continued to sob into his satin gag. His shoulder's heaved, his body basically bare apart from the tattered blanket of a dress he had curled around him. He wanted to simply cry in the dark. The overcast sky blanketed away the light from the moon and the scant light washed everything in inky blacks and mourning indigos as he sat there and sobbed his eyes out.

He didn't know how long he laid there. Could have been minutes, hours, hell it could have been days with how low he felt, but after his tears had run dry and he couldn't force any more out, he decided to shakily get up. His joints achy and cold from laying in the ditch for so long. He had pulled the gag from his mouth at one point and threw it into the ditch. He came up to the road, his heels making it incredibly difficult to catch the dirt. Half way up he tore the damned things off. They weren't going to make it any easier to get home.

Asher numbly picked up his work satchel and the contents that had been thrown onto the ground. The laptop's back hinge had cracked, wedging it open. His phone's screen was shattered, but at least it still lit up. He had light. He pressed the lock button to open it up, but the fingerprint scanner was broken and he couldn't slide across the screen.

"Of course," Asher sighed.

He grabbed the dress and tied a few of the ribbons together to kind of make a towel around his waist. At least it was something. He got to work picking up the materials from his satchel and putting them away, the light from his phone's broken screen surprisingly bright. He got his work laptop, tissues, calculator, a couple of snack bars, gum, and some pens. As the drake bent over to grab a stress ball, something gleamed in the light of his phone. Asher picked it up and realized it was the large pink diamond from the necklace Fynx got for him. He wanted to chuck it, to throw it on the ground and find a way to smash it, but he didn't have anything left inside of him. He simply sighed and threw it into his satchel with his other things.

Asher looked at his phone and frowned, the time flickered on the screen a few times. It was almost eleven at night. The image of himself taking a selfie while out camping distorted and cracked. Asher grit his teeth before taking a deep breath.

"You have no form of communication, a couple provisions, no water, and you have no idea where you are. Stay calm and think rationally."

Asher took assessment of what was on him. He had flavor packets for water, but they weren't going to hydrate him. He didn't know how far from town he was or how long it would take for him to walk and find a home or shelter. He was already getting cold and he knew he needed warmth. He

couldn't simply keep walking and expect to keep warm when the high tonight was in the low forties. People much more experienced than him have died in fifty degree weather.

"Fire," Asher sighed and made his way along the path, picking up sticks and using his satchel to gather them. It was hard to find room to hold them all with the shoes included, but he figured he could get them cleaned and sell them.

He walked back on the country road from the direction they came from and stopped once he found a nice little spot near the side where he could build a fire. He cleared it off, used the battery from his calculator, a paperclip, and the foil wrapper from his gum to set the tissues he had on fire and started to build it up with the twigs he found. It was small, and the twigs were still a little wet on the inside, but at least he had a source of warmth until the sun came up. He wrapped a few twigs with some satin rags and threw them in, making the fire grow.

His phone buzzed a few times, but he couldn't really see much or answer any of the messages as the phone itself wouldn't work, the screen shattered and ruined. He just sat, watching the fire before him and warming his muddy toes while clinging the larger rags of the dress to his body for warmth. A birch branch wrapped in the satin was currently in the fire, the white bark burning black, the gold fabric sizzling and burning and curling in on itself as the fire continued to consume it. That orange flame crackled and scorched everything in its grasp, turning it to soot and ash.

"I'm such a fucking idiot," Asher tossed another twig in and kept himself close to the fire, making sure it didn't spread.

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"Name and relation?" The little vole nurse asked.

"Amber Anouilh," the tall dragoness replied. "I'm his big sister."

“Oh, you’re his emergency contact,” the vole smiled. “Can I see some form of ID?”

Amber was already pulling it out before the nurse finished her sentence. The vole read the name on the card and looked at the dragoness. The woman was tall and imposing despite her attire. Her hair was a dazzling blond that brushed over her scalp in feathery locks, her amber eyes dazzling and mascara hastily applied. Her white fur had yellow highlights that melded with her hair and accented her onyx horns. Her dated Coach bag was champagne and went well with her emerald turtle neck. Her faded, jean, capris showed off her long legs, her running shoes were pink and blue with the logo stitched onto the side. Comfortable and sensible.

“Thank you Amber,” the vole thanked her, the dragoness nodding her approval. “One of the other nurses will take you to him.” She handed a clip board to an otter nurse and he motioned Amber back.

“Now, Asher is fine, just a swollen ankle and shoulder, but no serious damage. He was pretty dehydrated when we found him.”

“How long did it take to find him?” Amber asked.

“A local found him this morning on their property when they spotted the campfire. Apparently the smoke was enough of a red flag and the man found him passed out on the side of the road.”

“My goodness,” Amber sighed. “Was he trying to camp?”

“That would be the easiest explanation, but...well, he was found with hardly any clothes. We were hoping you could help him talk to us.”

“He’s refusing to talk?” Amber cocked a brow.

“We can’t say much more unless he gives us permission. You’ll have to ask him.” The nurse shrugged. “There is obviously more to the story, but we’re here to treat his injuries. Physically he seems fine, but mentally he might need someone he trusts to talk to.”

“Did you guys inform his roommate Marcus?”

“The black bear in the lobby?” The otter rolled his eyes. “He’s fully aware that Asher is here, but he doesn’t seem to listen when we tell him only immediate family can see him.”

“We really do need to get him on the emergency contact list,” Amber sighed, walking through the halls.

“Family friend?” the otter asked.

“I guess you could say that,” Amber smiled. “He was the longest relationship Asher ever had, but they just weren’t a good fit as partners. Though, that bear is still crazy for the guy he’s just not the one for Asher. Though, he is a great friend.”

“Sounds complicated,” the otter turned down a corridor and stopped in front of a door.

“It always is with Asher,” Amber shrugged as the otter opened the door for her. “Hey shrimpy, you alive in here?”

Asher was sitting in his hospital bed, his body clad in a simple gown as he looked at his hands in his lap.

“A-Amber?” Asher’s voice caught in his throat, his face already streaked with tears.

Amber looked in her brother’s eyes and realized in an instant this wasn’t just some camping trip gone wrong. She came over to him and pulled her brother into her arms.

“What happened now shrimpy?”

Asher just shuddered, his body shaking as tears rattled out of his skull as his hands came to clasp around Amber’s back.

“Please don’t make me say...” Asher whispered into her chest. “I’m so sorry Amber...I know how busy you are.”

“Hey there now, calm down, it’s okay,” Amber sat down on the bed and gently stroked her brother’s hair as he sobbed into her chest. “Everything is okay. The doctors said you’re all good to go, but they wanted me to come down and see if I could get some answers out of you.”

“Please...I just want to go home...I’m so sorry for making you come all the way down here...for me...”

“Hey, do you really think I wouldn’t come see my only brother? I know we haven’t always agreed upon everything, but you’ve got to get a grip or I won’t be able to get you out of here.” Amber chuckled. Her little brother looked up from the damp spot he was making on her sweater. “How the hell do you look cute even when you got snot dripping down your nose. Come here you dork,” Amber grabbed a tissue from her purse and held it to his nose. “Now blow.”

Asher didn’t like being treated like a child, especially from his sister, but he blew his nose and took a few deep breaths, sniffing.

“Sorry...”

“Oh my god, why are you sorry?” Amber rolled her eyes. “You’re the one who was found abandoned out in the countryside, and don’t tell me you were out there camping. My brother is never

underprepared for the weather. Remember when we were going up north in the summer and you had me pack a sweater?"

"Well..." Asher sniffed. "Yeah, people have died in seventy degree weather from exposure."

"That's what I mean," Amber shook her head. "You really think my little brother, the nature freak, would have been caught dead without six sweaters and an iodine kit for purifying water."

"Yeah," Asher swiped a tear with the butt of his palm. "I know...I...I just..."

"Who was he?" Amber's voice was very even and calm, but Asher tensed at the question. It was the most gentle pry his sister had ever done and he still felt himself closing off to her.

"It was my fault for even trusting him," Asher folded his arms across his chest.

"So it was a guy," Amber put a finger to her chin. If anyone were to look at the two you'd think it was mother and son in the same room. Amber looked much more mature for her age and Asher always looked younger.

"I just don't want to talk about it," Asher took a deep breath. "Can I have another tissue?"

"Of course, the single-ply sandpaper they stock these rooms with will chafe that beautiful nose of yours. Have I ever told you how much I hate you for having such baby smooth scales?"

"All the time," Asher chuckled a bit as he took the tissue his sister offered.

"You know I could audit them for you," Amber smiled. "Being in the IRS has its advantages. I'm able to go after the dude where it hurts the most. I might even be able to get a lean on his wages ya know."

"I don't think you're going to be able to do much," Asher blew his nose. "The guy has a lot of money."

"More money mean's more problems. Or more accurately, more to hide."

"Please stop prying...I...I know you're only trying to help, but I really want to go home."

"Well, I'm not going to drop this fully, but we can put it on the backburner for now."

"'Backburner for now?' Okay mom," Asher teased his sister.

"What can I say, she had a few good sayings," Amber shrugged. "Though, before we go, I need to ask. Do we need a rape kit?"

Asher paused, his ears drooping back and his eyes looking down at the blanket.

"They already took one," Asher sniffed.

"You're a terrible liar, you know that?" Amber put her hand on his. "Even if you don't pursue it, get the kit done. It can only help you."

"Don't they have to report that stuff?" Asher asked.

"They do, but nothing will come of it if you decide not to pursue it. A crime only exists if there is a harmed party willing to pursue charges." Amber had to bite her tongue. She wanted to demand why Asher would try to defend someone who raped him and left him for dead in the woods, but she had enough girlfriends to know that these situations are often far more complicated than they appear. She wanted to gut this guy from dick to lips, but she wanted to make sure Asher felt protected and safe. That's what mattered now.

"I...I just..." Asher pushed his legs together, his heart beating rapidly. "I don't want to...please don't make me." Asher had to bite his own lip at that point. He wanted the kit done...but...something more shameful burned at his cheeks. Refusing the kit...refusing the evidence would leave him more exposed...

"Asher," Amber squeezed her brother's hand gently. "Every woman I know who has ever had a situation like this regretted not having the kit. I know it's an admission of the situation, and I know it hurts to think this really happened to you, but I'm begging you as your sister and your friend. Get the damn kit."

Asher wedged his eyes shut, a duo of tears squeezing their way out as he gave a little nod.

"Okay," Amber smiled and brushed his hair back. "Don't worry hun, it'll be quick and painless. Then we can get you home and we can stop for Mexican food on the way."

"Okay..." Asher whispered.

"Okay?" Amber asked one more time.

"Okay," Asher nodded and took a deep breath. "Okay."

"I'll get the nurse," Amber smiled and gave her brother a kiss on his forehead. "I'll be gone for just a minute. Can you handle that?"

"Yeah," Asher gave a little chuckle, feeling small and safe. The sensation was almost warming. He felt like he was being treated like a kid, but for the first time in a long time, he didn't mind his big sister looking out for him.

"Be right back," Amber gave one last squeeze on her little brother's hand before going to find the nurse.

Asher sighed as he waited for her and the nurse to return. He knew it was the right thing to do. Besides...this dance he was doing with Fynx was dangerous by its very nature. It couldn't hurt to have a backup plan. His sister was right, as much as he hated to ever tell her so, but this was about protecting himself against a powerful man.

Despite everything between his legs telling him not to, he refused to fall into Fynx's palm so easily. Not this time, this time he would have the upper hand.

Even if he didn't want to.

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"When can we expect you back at work?" Judd asked over the phone. "I mean, not that I'm telling you to get back so soon, but the powers-that-be are asking."

"I make that much of a difference that even the higher ups recognize my absence?" Asher smiled weakly into the phone. "Sorry I couldn't make our little lunch date."

"Oh Asher, don't even think twice about it." Judd spoke back, his boss's voice full of genuine concern. "Though, please do consider the position while you're away."

"I don't know if that would be best to come back into a new roll after everything," Asher pulled his legs close to himself, his body completely swallowed in an oversized sweater. "But I'll let you know." Asher's shoulders slumped. "Sorry to dump all this on you when you're so overworked, and the busted laptop too."

"Hey now," Judd chided the little drake. "Don't be going about and blaming yourself. You had nothing to do with what happened. Tech is dealing with your new laptop, and as far as everyone is

concerned you're out due to a family emergency. No one knows besides me, and, well, the powers who needed convincing."

"I really appreciate it Judd," Asher sniffed and batted some tears away. "I honestly couldn't have asked for a better boss."

"And I a better employee," Judd's statement hung in the dead air for a moment until he continued. "You'll be missed while you're out, and you'll be welcome back when you're ready. We'll let you know when your personal days have expired. Just try to rest up and get the help you need, okay?"

"Thanks, I'm getting plenty," Asher paused to see Marcus walking by with a bowl of soup for the drake. Asher nodded and the bear set him up. "I've got to go now Judd, but I appreciate everything you're doing for me."

"Talk soon, Asher," Judd hung up and Asher put the phone down and took his bowl of soup.

"What did they say?" Marcus asked sitting down next to the drake on the couch and taking back his phone.

"I'm pretty much on leave until I'm feeling better," Asher sighed. "It's going to use my personal days, but my job is safe."

"Well, that's one less thing to stress about, huh?" Marcus gave the drake a little approving nod as an old anime played on the TV in front of them. Marcus' old gaming station buzzing as it processed the fast clips and various pixels.

"Yeah, I'm just glad I have such a nice support group."

"You're an amazing guy Asher," Marcus sipped his soup. "And no, I'm not hitting on you or anything. I'm just saying you're amazing, and great at everything you do. You light up a room and people

recognize that kind of positive energy. So it's no wonder these people are coming up to bat for you when you need it."

"Yeah," Asher sighed and pulled the soup close to himself, balancing it on his knees as he took little sips with his spoon.

"When is your sister going to get here?" Marcus asked.

"This afternoon. She's going to take me to get a new phone."

"You sure you don't want me to come with you?"

"And have you do all the upselling for the store? I think I'll just get a simple phone and nothing crazy like what you want, mister bells and whistles."

"Fair enough," Marcus rolled his eyes. "You know I'll be there for you for whatever you need?"

"Yeah," Asher took a deep breath, breathing in the steam of the soup before he took a few more sips. "Yeah, I do. I appreciate it a lot...even if I haven't been showing it much. Thanks Marcus."

"No problem hun," Marcus was going to nudge the little drake before he thought better about nudging someone who was balancing their soup on their knees. "Whatever you need I got you. Well, anything before and after my shift."

"I think I can keep it together during those hours," Asher chuckled, continuing to sip. "Do you have a busy day?"

"Nah, nothing too crazy," Marcus shrugged. "Mainly stocking the shipment that came yesterday. Nothing huge."

"Better Buy really got you workin' your little tail off, huh?"

“Nothin’ I can’t handle,” Marcus reassured. “I’ll be sure to get home right away. Anything you want for dinner specific?”

“Honestly, your soup is amazing,” Asher chuckled. “Though, maybe pick up some bread so we can make some croutons for it?”

“Sounds like a plan. I’ll pick up stuff for those salads you like too.”

“Soup and salad, just like our first date,” Asher chuckled. “We really couldn’t afford shit, could we.”

“Like we can now?” Marcus joked back. “Can’t even afford to go out and get the bottomless deal at that crappy Italian place.”

“Well, your soup is much better.”

“Cheaper too,” Marcus chuckled. “It’s the slow cook with the parmesan rinds that makes it so good without adding any calories.”

The two kept making small talk until Marcus needed to go to work. Asher was left alone in the apartment, the golden light from the world outside filtering in through their apartment windows as the old anime continued to prattle on from episode to episode. Asher felt the warmth of the light and the love and support of everyone around him, but it was tainted by a single thought.

*I put them all through this for my sake...I’m such...such a...*

Asher shook his head and decided to turn to the old adage.

“If you hate everyone, you need to eat,” Asher stood up and padded to his room. “If you think everyone hates you, you need sleep,” Asher snagged a clean fluffy towel, “but, if you hate yourself, you shower.”

Asher went to his bathroom and sluffed off his sweater and shorts, leaving himself naked. He hung his towel on the rung and went to turn the water on. He gave a light sigh as he leaned against the wall waiting for the water to get warm. It took forever for their old pipes to pull the heat for their apartment. That’s when he looked up and saw himself in the mirror.

There he was, Asher in all of his exposed shame. The little cboy with his arms crossed over his chest that had cuts and bruises, his hips scratched with scabbing wounds, his pussy bruised and blue. He looked like he got fucked by a rabid animal...or a fucking cactus. The bruises were starting to heal, turning green and various shades of red and purple. He bit his lip, his shame welling up inside of him and...

“Fuck...” Asher felt his pussy warm, his lips blush with the sight of himself. He looked like some used and abused fuck trash. Asher brought his thumb up to his mouth and bit on his nail, the black claw clicking against his teeth as he took his own image in.

Then he had an idea.

Asher popped his hip out, his other leg bending up to put his foot against the wall as he softened his eyes and looked at himself in the mirror. There she was...Ashly.

“You’re pathetic, you know that?” Ashly said to himself. He felt both powerful and weak at the same time. “You don’t have to let him walk all over you.”

*But it feels so good.*

“Does it?” Ashly said back at him. The memories of the past few days flooding his mind. “He treats you terribly. You have so many people in your life that care about you. So why are you attracted to the one guy who treats you like shit?”

*Because...because it's what I deserve...*

“Is it? You deserve better,” Ashly scoffed.

*But...I want him...*

“You can still demand better from him,” Ashly flipped her hair. “He’s just a dick. You deserve someone who makes your pussy pop and also gives a shit about you.”

*But...I like it...*

“I...” Asher’s voice shuddered as he continued to look in on himself, Ashly melting away as his confidence melted with her. “I...I really like it. I...I like being a...a dumb...” Asher swallowed hard, the words on the tip of his tongue, but did he really want to say that kind of stuff while he was in such a fragile state?

*“You’re not fragile,”* Ashly’s voice echoed in his mind. *“You survived. You’re tougher than you look. Say what you meant to say. Admit it to yourself, and maybe we can move past this.”*

“I’m just...just a dumb bitch,” Asher gave a soft sigh. It was so good to admit it. It felt right, he felt his legs go weak as his knees shook. “Just...just a dumb stupid bitch...who needs to be put in her place.”

Asher gave a little sigh as he slipped his hand down his abdomen. His fingers running through the fur as his fingertips brushed his bruised petals. The sting of pain threw him back into that car. He

was pinned underneath the massive snow leopard as he thrust into him. He was used, brutalized by a real, fucking man.

Asher's fingers slipped into his cunt, the pain in there a reminder of how rough Fynx liked to beat his pussy.

"Oh fuck, I'm such...such a slut for my fucking bully...for my abuser..."

*"That's right faggot,"* Fynx's voice growled in his mind. *"That pussy is mine now."*

"Fuck, it's yours," Asher moaned, his breathing hot and heavy. "You fucking marked it—" Asher cut himself off by biting his lip.

*"That's right, be a good girl, seen not heard,"* imaginary Fynx growled as he thrust in, Asher's knuckles instantly surrounded with hot, swollen sexy silk. *"I marked you. I fucking raked your pussy with my dick and marked you with my pleasure. I own that cunt now, bitch. Every one of your fantasies, every time your pussy pops, I'll be there."* Asher continued to play with his love tunnel, shoving in and moaning as his pussy clenched on his fingers, his honey already coating them.

*"See?"* Ashly mocked him. *"Look how pathetic you are? Practically falling to your knees at the mere thought of your rapist. Such a fucking pathetic piece of fuck trash."*

"Yes," Asher moaned. "Yes, I'm so fucking pathetic...I'm...so fucking lucky...to be even acknowledged by such a fucking stud." Asher gasped, his fingers slinking in and out of his depths, playing with his little love button, his thumb flicking over that bruised clit as it ached in pain while being stoked to life.

Asher's fingers were a blur as he played with himself, his thumb flicking his clit while he rapidly sank his fingers deep into his needy folds. He slipped lower and lower until he felt his ass on the ground,

his heart racing as he played with his pussy. The steam from the shower started to fill the room and the little drake felt the air get hot and heavy. He was back, pinned against that car seat and barely able to breath as he felt the pleasure building as he shoved against his pussy harder and harder, ignoring the pain, or maybe because of it he was getting close.

“Fuck me Fynx!” Asher gasped, his toes fanning as his legs twitched, his cunt squirting over the tile and splattering the floor in his slick as he continued to play with his love buttons, his folds blushing a deep pink as he came. His pubic fur matted with his juices, making it easier to see his bruises and the scratches around it from those barbs.

“Shit...” Asher gasped and pulled his dripping fingers from his cunny. He sat there, living in the glow of his release.

*“You’re a pretty bad bitch,”* Ashly complimented him. *“Taking all that and still gushing over him a couple days later.”*

“Fuck yeah I am,” Asher chuckled, Ashly’s opinion of him changing so fast it gave him wiplash. “You don’t know how to make up your mind, do you.”

*“Much like you, cum slut,”* Ashly’s voice echoed off the walls of Asher’s mind as he let the fantasy go.

For some reason, that odd back and forth was refreshing. It almost felt like he had more control than before. He didn’t quite understand it, but the fact he wasn’t just crying his eyes out was an improvement. Maybe he just didn’t have any self-pity left in the tank, but he knew this was a small victory and he was going to take it. Asher stood up and got in the shower to clean himself.

“I guess sometimes you just need a good nut,” Asher chuckled at himself before focusing on cleaning up.

Just as he was getting out of the shower he heard their buzzer go off. He quickly wrapped himself in his towel and padded out into the living room, a little smile on his muzzle.

“Sorry Amber, I just got out of the shower,” Asher spoke into his buzzer. “I’ll be down in a few.”

Dead air.

“Damn this stupid thing,” Asher pressed the button again. “Amber, I’ll be down soon, can you hear me?”

“Why haven’t you answered my calls?” The voice growled through the old buzzer. Asher’s eyes went wide as he recognized his rapist’s voice through the crackle of the old speaker. It was Asher’s turn to stand silent.

“1...”

“Why haven’t you ben answering your calls?” The voice demanded again, this time with more of an edge to it. “I’ve been calling since yesterday and I haven’t gotten so much as a text from you.”

Suddenly the room felt...unsafe. The only thing keeping Fynx out of his apartment was a metal cage at the bottom of the stairs, and his own restraint from pushing a button.

“Ashly!” Fynx barked. Something about that word name sent a wave of rage into Asher and he slammed on the button.

“Go away, I don’t want to see you.”

There was dead air for a moment before the mic crackled to life.

“The *fuck* did you just say to me?”

Asher fell down to the floor and pulled his legs to himself, cowering beneath the receiver.

*Holy shit...did I just say that?!*

“Listen here, bitch,” Fynx’s voice came through more distorted and breathy like he was hissing with his mouth directly on the mic. “That set of jewelry together costs over three hundred thousand. That’s my throw away money. And if you think for a second that I wouldn’t change the flow of cash from treats for my girl, to controlling them, then you’re way behind the curve. Just imagine what I could do with that cash? Who I could hire to follow you around or dig up dirt on your family and loved ones. Who in your life I could get to do my dirty work. Don’t get me wrong pussy boy, all that shit was for you, but it’s not because I’m sorry. I wanted to show you just how much power I have, and how easy it would be to control you with money alone, but I just love that you keep crawling back to me with a snail trail oozing from that cunt, begging to be mine again.

“So, when you finally get your bitch brain on straight again, and answer your damned phone, be ready to come back to a world of pain you dumb slut. Something tells me that’s why you’re doing this, you fucking brat. You want me to fucking beat you, crush you like old times. You came harder than you ever did for that little prom night shit. I’m going to remind you of all the other days you kept your secret from me. You better watch your back, because as soon as you think you’re safe, I’m going to pounce and make you pay for being such a dumb, stupid, skank!”

The receiver hissed and cut out. Asher had tried to cover his ears, but he could still make it out, he could still hear those words crackling through.

The receiver buzzed again and Asher stood up, slamming on the button again to scream back at him.

“GO AWAY!” Asher shrieked.

“Holy shit, Asher!” A new voice crackled over the line. “It’s Amber. Are you okay? Do you need me to come up?”

“OH shit, sorry, sorry, sorry,” Asher panted his apologies into the receiver. “No, I’m good, I’m good. I promise. I just got out of the shower and...I’ll be right down.”

“Take your time shrimpy,” Amber chuckled over the line. “But you sure you don’t want me to come up?”

“No!” Asher said more forcefully than he wanted, the thought of Fynx coming up after he buzzes his sister in only causing panic to roll up his spine. “No, I’ll...I’ll just be a minute.”

“Okay, but if you’re not feeling up to it, we can do this another day.”

“No, I’m...I got to let you go to get ready. I’ll be right down.”

Asher spun and dove into his room to slap on some clothes. He wore a similar outfit to the one he wore on the reunion night only with a different sweater. He clattered down the stairs, half expecting to see Fynx when he got down. Like it was some dark, fucked up trick, but he almost cried when he saw Amber leaning against the doorway with her phone.

Asher ran up and hugged her.

“Woah, Asher, what’s with the flying hug?” Amber smiled and patted his head.

“Oh, I just...It’s nothing. I was just...Really happy to see you.” It wasn’t a lie, but he felt a little bad not telling her. Knowing his sister, she would call up the damned national guard if she knew the guy who did this was on the block. Asher scanned the streets really quick, his eyes lingering on a black car rounding the corner before he was satisfied.

“You sure you’re up to this? I can just order take out and icecream or something.”

“No,” Asher pulled away and smiled up at his sister. “No, I really need a new phone and I’m due for an upgrade.”

“Asher,” Amber put her hands on Asher’s shoulders, forcing him to stand still and looker her in the eyes. “Are you up for this?”

Asher took a deep breath and nodded, a smirk playing at his muzzle.

“Yes, *mom*, I’m up for this,” Asher rolled his eyes. That was the most natural response he could think of for his sister.

“Sorry I asked, shrimpy,” Amber smirked, letting go of him and shouldering her purse up. “Come on, I’m parked right outside.”

Asher took one last look around, noticing a few people looking at him and then looking away, but maybe he was just paranoid. He simply shook it off and hopped down the steps to get to his sister’s car.

Fynx would have to just wait for now.