

“Look, just think for a second. What are you living toward, just lying there?”

“I’ll be *living*, at least.”

“Some life.”

He was tired.

It was nothing unusual, given the life he led. Or, in a sense, the life he was led by. He very much felt like a sometime presence in a much greater existence. Struggling to steer a body that moved to the whim of another, and chasing rest between however many long, arduous moments—‘downtime’ clashing with ‘service’ in the most half-hearted of clashes.

That being as much a trial as what he was put through consciously. There were times when he wondered whether he was living a wending, blending dream.

Well, some things never strayed far, in sleep or otherwise. Fear, of course, always kept a shadowy claw on his shoulder, and one he could never shake off when he had the chance to put his mind to it. As he squinted past the figures that enshrouded him, wrestling with the equally persistent weight of his long overdue dreams, it still stayed with him, behind his bleary eyes, a glint that would take a familiar face in suffering to sight.

While his acquaintance still stood there at the dramatically darkened border, fighting off the closer shadow of tension as he gestured and gabbled none-too-quietly. Really did see himself as being...someone, didn’t he? A real Washington-at-the-Delaware fancy.

If he wanted to dress himself up as a damn *target*. Trying to outrun the looming shadow of one’s half-life did require actually getting out from under it. He was spending quite some time and borrowed breath—he was stirred by the outside hand in his mannerisms, loathe as he was to still admit it. Plus, the fact that there was no becoming a martyr by the hand, foot, mouth or whatever of a being that only saw you as even existing when it suited him.

In addition to there being no enemies out there that could compare to the threat behind them. They wondered at times whether it was worse, him looking like them. It was certainly hard not to let a sense of betrayal creep up on them.

“You’re scared.”

“Yeah.”

“Christ.” He made to back off into the blurry unknown for what seemed like the hundredth time in a minute, only to spring right back...again, as if called. “You’re never going to get anywhere like this. You won’t amount to anything, just carrying on like that. Come on...”

“This is all I’ve known—all we’ve known for however long. Too much out there to have to learn how to deal with.” *And right now, I want to sleep. If you do care, you’ll let me sleep. It could be what lets me live another day. Can’t you see that—*

The half-asleep figure tensed. "You can dress it up how you want. You're no better."

"Well, at *least*," came the shrill response, kicking the sullied body of stealth in the face, "I'll actually take it upon myself to live my OWN DAMN LIFE!"

If it had to end in an argument, so be it. The sleep-deprived servant just yearned, by now, for anything that would get their dead-friend-walking to step off and let them hunt down a moment's rest.

"I'm going." His angered companion turned away, exhaling mightily. "I'm going to LIVE. And you can just lie there and keep sucking face with the thing that's going to—"

What brought their talk to a crushing halt was something that had overseen them for their whole lives, holding them in thrall whether conscious or not. At the back of their minds, both had expected it to end their debate, however bloodily. One saw it as less of a stopping point than the other knew it deep down to undeniably be.

It carried a heat, a scent and a sheer uncompromising weight that lorded over their senses, both dulling them to the happenings beyond and heightening them to the whims of their own private world. Everything lay as a consequence to it—the creeping, crawling exhaustion and nausea, the darkness of terror. The likening of thunder crashing through their deafened ears after lightning carried a fair way past the base parallels of ear-splitting sound and the play overhead of light and darkness.

For one thing, it gave the impression that when the now-alert figure heard it, the absolute agony of their hapless, hopeless overseer being pulverised between unmoving flooring and unstoppable flesh was long since over. The sight that met them after they'd pulled their shaking hands from their eyes was one past the stages of being mashed to pulp. What hadn't been flattened, popped and displaced was robbed of the capacity to feel pain. In off-white shards and reddish-purple globules, caught between shifting, shimmering, wrinkled walls, it only shook in response to its surroundings warping and flexing. Shuddering only from the aftershocks of those localised tremors. Hopefully.

"It's too early for this..."

As shaken as he was from awakening, the booming voice sent its own array of vibrations through the watcher's frozen form—enough to jolt them into, if not alertness then a degree of awareness that could admit survival.

And not the kind that would lead to...the harsh side of what they'd been resting under, or trying to.

Dark as it still was, there was no making out the features of the monolithic form above—and even if there were light enough to see by, the sheer scale of it offered no grounds for visual scaling. It shifted about behind the sticky, ridged surface, seeming paradoxically formless, hazy behind the proof of its powerful physicality.

“Little fucker...can’t pick an out-of-the-way place to get crushed. Ugh. What the fuck ever. As for you...”

The words taking a second to register given how the red and peach blur was moving towards them and OVER them and was about to carry on the exact same split-second stunt, not so much onto them but *through* them and god please god they only wished it would be too quick to feel—

What threaded its sickly, lazy way through his nostrils brought him back to awareness in a gentle fashion—and that may have been what set his heart racing by another mile, his mouth dry and gaze glazed as he was made to take it in. It seemed like every kind of smell at once: a bitter-sour addition, naturally salty and spicy from what he was familiar with...and the hint of horrifying sweetness by far the worst of it.

He couldn’t look away, even if he wanted to. The baleful tapestry framed his vision: testament to the giant’s power, to the eyes in the sky and the power they held over such scurrying nothings as himself; to the speed at which said power could come crashing down onto those with too many aspirations—aspirations of moving one limb separate from the strings that tugged their bodies about from on high.

Somewhere overhead, the deep tones rumbled on. “This works out, I guess. You know. Two birds. Or two bugs, one foot. Whatever the hell.” They broke off into a yawn. “Best take it or leave it. Not getting up for a few more hours, see. So get it while it’s hot. Probably like caviar to you guys.”

It was, all in honesty, up in the air, the fate of the wannabe escapee—and yet the holding of it over their head had lasted as long as the foot had. More control could have landed in their tiny hands than they otherwise knew, however...a second less deliberating could have sent them to fly more distant flags than the reddish-brown one spangling their home of however long.

Underfoot, the living body would have appeared frozen if not for the way their eyes snapped to the sight above. Their face was ghostly pale, overshadowed as it looked. Their breath barely moved them as it rasped. It was reedy, through a sandpaper throat.

There...would be some stormy waters to withstand, should he try to sleep again right now...

It was so simple, what he’d done, and yet Chase had to fight not to take pleasure in it.

However many thoughts of freedom—whatever that counted for in a head the size of a marble—amounting to a brief moment of resistance underfoot before popping. Ripped away in a split second, as said body ripped apart under his foot.

The convenience of resting it over one with a little more sense in their system, and knowing that, embraced or scorned, there was a lesson to be learned about what they got up to when

(they believed) his back was turned. Proof of the strength that service brings, and the emptiness outside of what had become their life.

And the fairy-light, tentative touch of something wet down there, gone as soon as it showed, before followed by deeper, probing but no less shaky presses into the stinking, scarlet smorgasbord that Chase's idly twitching toes framed...

Honestly, compared to grit, grime, sweat, lint...what his pet was licking, sucking and in some places chewing off the surface of his sole really was a different class of dining, depending on how it looked at it...

Currently on the verge of falling back asleep, Chase leaned his foot back into the pleasant little feeling of it being ravisly lavished with all the strength that little figure could give.

One day, maybe, there'd be a body down there made of the right stuff. One with the kind of vigour that didn't feed into less...desirable outcomes. Muscles that gave way to greater ones without standing by to a stupid degree—and would at least shred satisfyingly if he decided to keep moving the brick wall of his body against the equivalent of a slightly shakier-than-usual water balloon warping under it.

Hands that kept their touch for when the time was right. Legs that kept up. Stepped up.

A tongue that knew to work when it was *wanted*.

Now feeling a little annoyed, the giant let his head hit the pillow, knowing that the nice dream he'd been so rudely wrenched from was likely long beyond him by now. Not even a 'few more hours' would really be enough to bring it back, or anything close to it. Such a pisser.

He wouldn't have heard the quiet slurping had he not been holding himself in frustrated silence, and something about it dispelled the clouds—but not by the greatest margin. This one was obedient, and not too fanciful in the sense of funnelling said fancies towards...*outside* pursuits. It was nice to have one that listened, and loved.

...Not that they shouldn't have been grateful for what was granted them. And if the pet of the moment didn't feel like partaking of what they'd been granted, then...

Chase's smeared sole shifted about, a living mosaic of stinking gore. The message was likewise ground into the tiny body that fought not to fight it, only to revel in what it granted. Life that carried on over death.

Well.

How long did they feel like carrying on the cycle?

One that would spiral on regardless?