

bleeding out in your bathtub

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bleeding out in your bathtub

by Anonymous

Summary

“I take it you haven’t been sleeping well either.”

If looks could kill, Red would be six feet under with a layer of topsoil shoveled over him.

Notes

vaguely a marble hornets au! u dont actually need to know anything about mh to read this, it'd be helpful and you'd pick up on the why of how theyre reacting/references etc but again, not rilly necessary (ty to willow for helping out w that <3)

ash experiences absence seizures throughout the fic, tho red doesnt fully realise whats going on. i dont experience seizures, and i dont personally know anyone who does, so if ive portrayed it insensitively here i'd appreciate it if anyone could let me know, thanks

Red knocks at least eleven times before Ash bothers to open the door.

He can hear Ash from behind the door too, so it's fairly obvious that he's just taking his sweet time for the sole reason of being an asshole. The cold from the floor is slowly seeping into his feet. At some point one of the residents had passed by, blond haired and clad in spiked boots that looked

sharp enough to puncture a tire. They'd looked him up and down and at the bag slung around his shoulder and said, "You should've brought flowers."

Red had blinked. "This is not what it looks like."

"Uh huh. Good fucking luck," and they'd walked away without giving Red any time to reply. He'd been almost tempted to yell after them anyway, but Ash had started laughing softly, faintly audible, and Red had immediately pivoted back on his heel to aggressively knock on the door again.

Seconds afterwards, Ash finally opens the door – Red's halfway through the motion of slamming his fist on the wood again and almost hits him right across the jaw. There's a momentary fumble where they both flinch and stumble back from each other, Red's bag hitting the floor with a dull thump and Ash very nearly slamming the door right back in his face.

Spiky-Boots pipes up from the other end of the hallway. "Three out of ten for effort."

"*Shut up,*" they snap back, voices overlapping with each other. Ash squints, peering from around the frame and pointing a finger at them, "Hey, didn't you steal my mail once?"

They squint back, keys clinking together as they twist it into the lock. "You can have it back if you want. Why does one man need so many cameras?"

"Class project," Red interjects smoothly, placing a hand on Ash's shoulder. He goes eerily still. Red doesn't look back at him, but lets the hand drop back to his side. "You know stealing mail is a federal crime, right?"

There's a sniff, the thud of boots on the floorboards, and the door slams shut behind Spiky-Boots as they walk into their apartment. Ash makes a disgruntled noise at the back of his throat.

Red coughs and adjusts his glasses, picking up his bag from the floor. Miraculously, it's still holding itself together despite the years of wear and tear and the seams slowly unraveling at the edges. He dusts it off and swings it back over his shoulder, wincing when the motion pulls at a still-healing bruise on his back.

When he looks back up, Ash is eyeing him, gaze lingering on his mouth. Red bares his teeth slightly into the shape of a grin, as subtle as he can, just to watch some of the tension drain out of Ash's shoulders. It does nothing for the dark circles under Ash's eye – Red does his best not to stare at the gouges on his cheek, leading up to where medical tape and a patch of gauze covers his right eye – and the weariness lining his face.

"I take it you haven't been sleeping well either."

If looks could kill, Red would be six feet under with a layer of topsoil shoveled over him.

"No shit, sherlock," Ash mutters, looking past his shoulder. He doesn't move to let Red in through the doorway, leaning against the frame in a way that was probably meant to look casual but only just highlights how exhausted he looks. A pang of guilt and sympathy echoes in his stomach – Red shoves that down as firmly as he can manage when running on *maybe* half an hour of sleep. "Did you seriously walk all the way here only wearing socks?"

"No," Red grins, blinks past the blurriness surrounding his vision, "I called a taxi. Obviously. Who do you think I am, Ash, some guy who just walks around in socks all the time?"

"Obviously," he echoes. "You already do that."

“I wore boots last time.” Red places his foot halfway through the frame, nudging him lightly. Ash blinks slowly down at the point of contact. His next words are stilted, halting.

“Of course you did, we were in a goddamn forest – and those were *my* boots.”

Red shrugs, slipping past him and into the warmth of the apartment. “But I *did* wear them.” He’s half-expecting a noise of protest, but there’s only silence as he drops his bag next to a plant nearby – helpfully labeled ‘FOLLOWER #12’ in black marker – and walks in, footsteps muffled by the socks covering his feet.

There’s newspapers covering the windows. Each corner is meticulously taped over, light barely filtering through the thin paper. It’s a sharp contrast to the mess everywhere else; plates stacked high in the sink, small potted plants – each labeled in the same format as the first one – wilting on the sills and on seemingly random flat surfaces, camera records scattered everywhere as though they’d been put down for a second and then promptly forgotten about. It looks exactly like the apartment of a part time student living on the paychecks he gets from working two different jobs.

One less job now, maybe. He wasn’t sure how Ash was still even managing to hold onto one after, well, everything that had happened over the past several months.

Perks of freelancing. He’d consider looking into it if when he wasn’t so fucking tired.

None of it looks familiar, even though Red knows he’s been in here before. There’s no *deja vu*, no sudden recollection or even a vague hint of familiarity, but they’ve both seen the videos. Red’s been here before. The faded stain on the carpet is his blood, the scratch on the lone table a relic from when Ash had shoved him into it and Red had lashed out in return, snarling and frustrated and both of them nearly out of their minds with terror and misplaced anger.

It’s all second-hand information gleaned from their own recordings. When Red tries to think of being, existing in this space before, the memories evade his grasp like fish in a stream.

When he looks back, Ash is still standing at the doorway. He’s half-turned, staring into the hallway with a far-away look on his face. Red clears his throat. “Ash?”

A beat. He’s about to step closer when Ash finally blinks and turns to face him. “Yeah?” he says.

“...Nothing. Close the door, will you?” He walks further indoors without waiting for an answer, taking in the detail in hopes that it’ll actually stick this time. Ash follows after him like a moth to a flame, looking a little bit dazed and like he wasn’t sure what had just happened.

A lumpy, sad looking couch takes up a spot near the table and Red sinks into it – something like muscle memory that tells him how to lay down to avoid the springs poking out. Ash looms over him, his already considerable height even more noticeable now that Red is barely two feet off the floor.

“What,” he says, looking at Red like he was a small child who’d somehow wandered into Ash’s home and started scribbling on the walls with blood or crayons or something equally as horrible, “are you doing?”

“Taking a nap. You should try it sometime.”

“It’s the middle of the day???”

“Perfect time to take a nap. C’mon,” he says, almost coaxing, and because it’s Ash it feels like tearing out teeth, “I’m tired. You’re tired. Have you even slept since- since last week, because I

definitely haven't."

Part of it is the static ringing in his head, the prey-instinct that makes the hairs on the back of his neck rise and keeps him up at night, wary of faces in the dark. Neither of them had slept well in months, too many restless nights looking through video tapes to fill in the gaps of their missing memories. Pacing for hours, looking through cracks and carefully shut curtains for someone – something that wasn't quite there.

There's never anything when he looks outside the windows, of course. That didn't mean anything – only that whatever was outside either wasn't there *now* and had been before, or was just good at hiding itself. Red didn't like either of those options.

And last week–

His gaze flickers to the patch over Ash's eye. The fabric of the couch is suddenly stifling, burning against the bruises crawling up his back and over his neck. His throat feels clogged, the persistent need to cough coming back as easily as it had faded.

Ash wavers, some indecipherable emotion crossing over his face – and that itches like an open wound, because a month ago Red would've known exactly what it was and how to pick it apart – before he shoves Red's legs off the couch – "What the fuck, dude," – and sits down in the newly vacated spot.

Red places his legs back on Ash's lap. Ash stares at the brightly colored socks for a long moment, eyelid twitching, enough seconds ticking by that Red starts to wonder if he's overstepped. Then he looks at Red right in the face before lifting up a different potted plant from the ground, this one labeled 'FOLLOWER #4' and tilting it threateningly over his legs. A speck of dirt spills over with the motion, crumbling into pieces when it hits the fabric.

"Okay, okay, okay–" He jerks away, sitting upright, then flops back down in the opposite direction, head falling onto Ash's lap.

Ash raises an unimpressed eyebrow. Really, he could be raising both of his eyebrows and Red wouldn't be able to tell. It seemed like the kind of thing Ash would do though, practicing how to raise one eyebrow in the mirror.

"Did you practice that in the mirror?" Red says out loud. Ash sighs loudly.

"Did you come here to sleep or to annoy me?"

"It could be both," he grins up at Ash brightly.

Ash smiles back at him, distinctly unfriendly. "Sure. I could also *put* you to sleep."

"Somehow I get the feeling I wouldn't like that," Red mumbles, warily keeping an eye on the pot still hovering over his face, until Ash notices and sets it down without a word.

He still hasn't actually moved Red off his lap. He'll take that as a win.

Red isn't sure exactly when it happens, sometime after they both make themselves comfortable, but it's surprisingly easy to slip into a half-conscious state like this – back pressed against the couch, Ash's arm over his shoulder and the faint sounds of him breathing steadily. The feeling of something watching him fades into a background simmer, helped by the newspapers covering the windows.

It's gradual. It's the closest thing to safety he's felt in months. If he was slightly more awake he'd be thinking of ways to persuade Ash into letting him stay indefinitely.

It would be very easy to break in, regardless.

He tenses slightly when a hand drops into his hair. Ash runs his fingers over the shorter hairs of his undercut, nails scraping against his skull lightly and shifting through the longer hair. Red just barely manages to keep from shivering at the sensation, the hungry, possessive streak in him soaking up the attention greedily.

There's a pleasant buzz crawling up his spine and spreading over his skull in fissures. His limbs are loose, splayed out on Ash's lap and over the edge of the couch. It's— good, nice to be held gently when kindness is so hard to come by. The contact seeps like the warmth of a low fire, a cotton-soft fog that's—

—too close to the feeling of static filling his brain, to be honest.

It occurs to him, slowly, still on the verge of not-quite-conscious, that maybe going to Ash wasn't the best idea — vulnerability was a double-edged sword, and it was too easy, after everything, to let him in.

But wasn't that what had gotten them here in the first place?

("Let me *help*," Ash had said, eyes gleaming with fury and hurt in equal measure. Red had laughed at him — mean, a live-wire edge. There was nothing he *could* do. Both of them knew Ash wasn't strong enough to force Red into getting any help that he didn't want anyway.

In the end it hadn't mattered, because Red had gone back to him eventually, desperate, and dragged the thing — the disease — the infection right along with him, tore both of them open until there were barely enough pieces left.

Sometimes he wonders if they'd picked up the wrong pieces while patching themselves back together.)

Static. He blinks his eyes open. Ash's shadow looms over him, spreading onto the floor, fingers tracing over the back of his ear and up over his cheekbones, nails digging into his eye sockets—

Blink. When his vision clears Ash is still tracing patterns, tugging lightly at his hair at irregular intervals.

He shivers. Static rings in his head. There's something dripping down his face and he can't tell whether it's tears or blood or the viscera of a burst eyeball, and none of it mattered because it would've been fair game for Ash to take one of Red's eyes and place it into his own empty socket. Payback. Something like retribution, even though Ash had been the one to step in front of him and dare to spit back in the face of a creature that might have not even existed, shaking and teeth stained a vivid crimson.

The worst part, Red thinks, is that he can barely even remember it. All they had were the videos — they had to *watch* those, to realize with creeping dread and horror, what had happened to them. They could've woken up one day, miles away from home and neither of them might've even known *why*.

"Wait- *wait*," he rasps out, and Ash is pulling away like he's been scalded before Red even manages to get through the first word.

Red pulls himself upright, limbs wobbling slightly, shakes his head and loses the last vestiges of the comfortable haze of sleep. Next to him, Ash stays still – it’s like looking at a broadcast of a person sometimes, one that’s a bit out of sync with everyone else. Red does nothing except lean against him carefully, having seen it enough times to know that Ash would snap out of it on his own.

He breathes, measured and steady, like it would rinse away the leftover fear clogging his throat. Ash turns to him after a second, something cautious in his eye when he nudges Red to lay back down again.

He doesn’t ask. Red’s glad for it. Easier to pretend, that way. Maybe they’re too close to being one person, boundaries melded and voices overlapping, stumbling forward as the only participants in a never-ending three legged race.

His throat still itches.

Ash doesn’t run his fingers through Red’s hair this time. A part of him mourns the loss; of losing the ability to appreciate this, of being unable to fall asleep without someone next to him – a lot of things, really.

Mostly it’s just the grief of losing themselves, becoming warped by something entirely out of their control.

“It’s fine,” Ash breaks the silence, hands flitting over his shoulder and coming to a stop on top of Red’s hair – not moving, just resting there, fingers threaded through the strands lightly. “Go to sleep.”

“...Is that an invitation to have sleepovers more often?” Red says into his thigh, voice muffled.

“It’s gonna be the last if you don’t shut up,” Ash says mildly, and Red laughs, raw and softened around the edges.

When sleep finally takes them, it’s a tangible relief.

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