

Note: This was an alternate epilogue for Sanctuary.

Elijah

“Baby P, what are you doing with that dog? It’s bigger than you!”

Baby Paris is walking... no, stumbling down the street in six-inch heels, being dragged by some kind of dog/horse hybrid with patchy skin and visible ribs.

“Elijah, sweetie, help your sister out. Had to relieve a client of his dog. Asshole had him tied up in the front yard, no water, no food.”

I run to help her out and grab the makeshift leash, which is really just a pair of her ripped up pantyhose. The dog is easily up to my waist, and looking at him a little more carefully, it looks like he’s a cross between the Marmaduke dog and a greyhound. He’s beautifully dappled, and it's a shame that he wasn’t better taken care of. His poor skin is so rough and has so many hotspots.

“Baby P, what were you going to do with this dog? They're not gonna let you bring him into ARCH, sweetie,” I say, referring to the homeless shelter where she and I met.

“Oh baby, I’m not at the shelter anymore. I couldn’t stand it any longer. I’ve been staying with that older gentlemen who showed up at Nikki’s Valentine’s Day show.”

“So... sugar daddy?”

She nods. “Sugar daddy.”

“Then why are you still tricking?” I say, pointing to the huge dog between us.

“Well, honey, the problem with a sugar daddy is that if you want to buy him a gift, you’re buying it with his money, and I want this to be from me.”

“Does he know what you’re doing?”

“Oh hush, you old prude. Let me take care of mine and you take care of yours.”

“Your sugar daddy going to be okay with a 150-pound monster with about a thousand dollars’ worth of vet bills waiting for it?”

Baby Paris looks up at me, blinking through her plush metallic false eyelashes.

“You don’t intend to keep this dog, do you?”

“No, of course not honey, there’s a weight limit on dogs in our building, even if you’re in the penthouse. Can you imagine? But I couldn’t leave him there, you know that. We probably need to take him to the animal center, and I’m not about to put him in my honey’s Bentley. Do you think you can help me take him to the animal shelter?”

I bite my lip, and as I’m trying to figure out the best the course of action, Baby P’s mini horse leans against me, unable to hold himself up anymore. “He’s not had anything to eat or drink in a while, you think?”

Her perfectly glossed pink lips thin into a straight line. She shakes her head. “No, honey. I don’t think this dog has seen any love or food other than scraps in weeks. He was drinking rain water from the only puddle in reach. He was so caught up in his chain that he could barely move, which is why he has so many hotspots on his hindquarters.”

Just as I pull out my phone to let Nick know I might need transportation, his brother-in-law Jake pulls up in his truck. Baby P and I look at each other and nod.

Jake pulls up close to us and rolls down his window. "Are y'all alright? What the hell is wrong with that dog?"

Baby P leans in. "Oh honey, I couldn't leave this baby tied up and neglected, so I paroled him. But I can't keep him, so we need to get him to the shelter."

Jake looks down at the poor animal and shakes his head. "Nah, he needs to go to the vet first. It's a no-kill shelter, but I wouldn't trust them to have the resources to help him get better."

I look at the pitiable creature and shake my head. "No way we're letting the big guy die today."

Jake juts his chin, gesturing to the bed of his truck. "Well, let's get going, then. I don't think you can fit him in the cab, but you can put him in the back. Evie and Scout's vet isn't too far from here, and they take emergencies."

We all work together and gently place the poor beast into the back of Jake's truck. He looks at me with his large, baleful eyes, and I decide to stay in the back with him.

Baby Paris turns to Jake, introducing herself. "Hello, darling. My name is Baby Paris, and who, pray tell, are you?"

He smiles, something he's been doing more of lately, and answers, "I'm Jake. It's nice to meet you, Baby Paris—I've heard Elijah talk about you."

She cackles as she shuts the tailgate with brute force. "All good things, I hope?"

Jake's smile reappears. "Only the best."

"You still seeing that big lump of a man, sweetie?"

Jake... blushes, which is adorable as fuck. "Yes ma'am."

"All right then, I'll keep the flirting to a minimum."

As they settle in to the cab of the truck, I arrange myself, sitting against the back of the cab so that I can put this very large animal's head on my lap. I lean my head against the back window and catch snippets of Jake and Baby P's easy conversation as Jake takes off towards the vet, driving slowly so that we aren't jostled around.

It's odd, having something rely on me like this. I was so alone for such a long time that it's strange to know that I can be responsible for this animal's life. It's a nice moment, and a reminder that I've come so far in the few months that I've worked at Wrecked. While we're on the road I call the vet's office and explain to them that we're coming in with a critical case.

They were waiting for us when we pull up, and because I told him that he was so big, they came prepared with a gurney. Their eyes widen at the sight of Baby Paris; no one expects a six-foot-three drag queen on a Saturday morning. To their credit, they remain professional, which is good because I am in no mood to deal with people's bullshit right now.

Working in unison, we transfer the enormous pup to the gurney. As they roll him through the doors, he looks to me and I realize that I might be in a spot of trouble.

Nick

I walk into my apartment above the gym and know immediately that something is off. Elijah's lived with me for a couple of months now, and... frankly, it's been better than I could've even imagined. We moved

quickly, but I wasn't ever going to let him sleep on the streets again. Sure, with his new position he could probably easily afford something, but I find that I don't want him to leave. We haven't really officially talked about our live-in arrangement, but he definitely isn't staying in the guestroom.

It can be difficult, melding two personalities into one living space, and I'll admit to a certain rigidity when it comes to cleanliness and order. Thankfully, Elijah is ex-Army and rarely has a thing out of place. And that's what's off. I walk into the living room and there are bags and bags of things piled on the table and couches.

And something that looks suspiciously like a very large dog bed is taking up the whole corner of the living room.

"Elijah? What's going on?"

I am greeted with a bark. Very low, deep bark.

More of a growl, really.

"Why is there a dog in our apartment?"

Elijah's voice is somewhat muffled, but he answers back "Well, he's more like a small horse, but Baby P nicked him from his asshole owner, and we had to rush him to the vet earlier today."

Ugh.

I don't like dogs.

I know you're not supposed to say that, but... I really don't like dogs. They are the opposite of neat and orderly.

"And why am I just now hearing about this?" I ask, unable to keep the frustration from my voice.

"Well, I'd made plans with Jake to take him to the shelter after we went to the vet's office, but the vet suggested that that he might need a calm place to settle down for a few days before going into the shelter."

As he's talking, I'm making my way to the hall bathroom, entirely unprepared for the scene I am greeted with. "That's not a dog—that's a horse."

"That's what I just said! He's enormous."

He'll be very beautiful dog once he's well cared for. This is normally exactly the kind of thing that would annoy the hell out of me, but watching Elijah gently scrub the dirt off of the dog makes me smile.

Even though the dog is whining, he is being a good boy, sitting still for Elijah's ministrations. Satisfied that he's as clean as possible, Elijah takes the showerhead and is so gentle in rinsing him off that I kinda melt for him all over again.

Using an old towel, he starts drying the brute. The poor thing just looks awful. I grab another old towel and get the other half of the dog.

"What happened to him?"

"Apparently his owner just left him chained in the front yard with no food or water."

The set of Elijah's jaw makes me think he'd like to go over to that owner's house and tell him a thing or two, but I know him better than that. He'd rather focus on the dog at front of us. He's got a very large tube of ointment on the back of the toilet, and I grab it, holding it up. "Is this what we're supposed be putting on him?"

Elijah juts his chin over to the counter. "He also needs antibiotics and heavy dose of Benadryl."

Given the amount of skin to be covered, we work in tandem, covering the large patches of sensitive and damaged skin.

I can't help but be surprised at how chill this dog is. He's just sitting there, looking forward, patiently letting us work on him. Once we're finished Elijah pulls back to take a good look at him, and the dog leans over and licks his face.

Don't tell anyone, but that was the cutest thing, ever. Just as I'm laughing at him, the huge animal turns to me and gives me a wet, sloppy kiss on my cheek. Elijah and I crack up, laughing way too hard as I hastily wipe the dog slobber off of my cheek.

Mind you, Elijah hasn't said a single word about keeping the dog, but with the way he it's looking at this creature, there's no way in the world he wants to take him to the shelter.

He looks up at me with the saddest sky-blue eyes, the splash of freckles across his nose and cheeks adorable as ever.

Yeah, pretty sure we're dog owners now.

I smile, knowing that this makes the conversation I've been wanting to have with him go so much easier. I love Elijah with everything I have, and he deserves more than a converted apartment above a gym. I want us to have a home together, and a life together.

I already know that I want to give him a ring one day, if he'll have me. But for now, I can start with a backyard, a ridiculously huge dog, and my entire heart.