HOMECOMING

EPISODE 39

“OLD SKIN”

Oh, God... Alan...


Promise me we'll never lose this, moments like this, even if everything else goes to hell again.
But it won't, babe. That's over. You said—
Please. Promise me.
I'm not losing you again, no matter what. I promise.

Mmm. Fuck yes, that feels so good.



God, I want to cover this.

Hm?

The tattoo. I'm tired of caking Dermablend on it every time we leave the house.

I kind of like it. It's... badass. You're badass.

It isn't mine. Not really. He... I got it when I was nineteen. I thought it made me look dangerous. Manly. God, that's pathetic. It belongs to somebody else's life. I'm sick of wearing an old skin.

So what goes there instead?

I don't know yet. Something I choose.

Maybe a mermaid.

I have to tell you something. I was going to wait, but I can't.

What's up?

I booked the consult, Dr. Ortiz at Northwestern, the one I told you about. Thursday at ten.

The... The bottom surgery. She's… she's supposed to be the best.

Say something.

I'm just... wow. Thursday.

Are you okay with it? Really? And don't give me the 'good boyfriend' answer. Give me the real one.

The real one is I don't care what's between your legs, Kris. I never did, not in that room and not here.

I care that you look in the mirror and like what you see. If that means surgery, then it means surgery. If it means nothing changes, nothing changes. I just want you happy in your body. Whatever that looks like.

That sounds a lot like the 'good boyfriend' answer.

It's both.

Really really?

Really really.

You know what I keep thinking about? The first time after. When I'm healed and it's all mine and you're the first one who gets to... God... It's making me so...

I can tell. Want a preview?

Fuck yes. Right now.

Harder. Fuck.... Faster!

I don't understand how she's doing this. Alters can't just... eat memories. That's not how any of this works. Dissociation walls things off, it doesn't rewrite them, but that's exactly what she's doing. Somehow, I'm being replaced in my own memories.

I guess it doesn't matter *how* she's doing it, really. I need to find a way to stop her, get control back. That's the only way to save Benji—

...booked the consult, Dr. Ortiz at Northwestern, the one I told you about. Thursday at ten.

The... The bottom surgery. She's... she's supposed to be the best...

What? Oh my God, I... I think I heard something from the outside.

Wait, *bottom surgery!?*

No, no, no. There has to be a door that leads out, something she can't lock, something she missed. She's not perfect. She's not God. Hell, she's not even real! Come on, come on, *come on*—

Oh, good. Room service. But, please, tell the chef that if it's a strawberry milkshake again, I'm sending it back. I'm watching my figure.

You haven't eaten solid food in almost two weeks, Ben. Your kidneys need more than water.

My kidneys are fine. My patience, on the other hand... C'mon, are we really doing this song and dance *again?*

I know you don't believe me - can't believe me - but one day, you'll thank me for what I'm doing. Right now, all that stubborn macho bullshit is screaming at you to starve yourself and play the hero. Your precious Christopher did the exact same thing. Spent weeks crying on the floor over his missing balls. And look at Kristine now. Couldn't pay that little slut to put a pair of pants back on.

Go to hell, Cami.

I'm serious! The second Bella let her off the leash, did she run to a doctor to get fixed? Did she come crying to you? No! She bought a push-up bra, spread her legs for one of her former johns, and started playing soccer mom in Edgewater. Even traded you in like a used car just so she could keep getting railed by her boyfriend. And she wasn't even *half* the material you are, Ben. She was just a spineless med student who learned how to work a cock. You? Once we burn the cop out of you, you're going to be fucking transcendent.

I'd love to let you reach that epiphany at your own pace. Really, I would. Unfortunately, your girlfriend just put us on a clock.

Recognize the blonde? Your little lawyer marched into the 18th District two hours ago in her power suit. Demanded a detective outside and started throwing Christopher Bowman's name around in connection with your disappearance.

Always hated that bitch. All that righteous Ivy League attitude, like her shit doesn't stink. And now she's sniffing around my house. So here's the deal, Ben. You pick up that cup, you chug every drop of the pink stuff while I watch, and you start growing your tits like a good girl. Or I drive over to Lincoln Park tonight, wait for Counselor Turner to unlock her front door, and redecorate the foyer with the back of her skull.



Oh, no! Not Kayla! Please, Mr. Kidnapper, anything but my unoffical ex-girlfriend!

Holy shit, Cami. Really? *That's* the masterstroke? Chris already told me this whole chapter! Bella's Post-it note with Kayla's name and zip code. You two are running this big-time shadow empire and you're recycling the exact same hostage? That's just lazy writing.

Laugh again and I'll film myself cutting her tongue out so you have something to watch while you eat.

Sure you will. Let's do the cop math, partner. I'm a missing detective. Kayla Turner is an officer of the court who just walked into our precinct and went on the official record about me. If she turns up dead tomorrow... Hmmm... one plus two equals - oh, I know! The F.B. fucking I.

And forget the Feds. What do you think that "little slut" in Edgewater does if you touch Kayla? The only reason Kris left me in your van was your promise that Kayla was off-limits. You kill her, you void the contract. And we both just watched Kris walk into a fortress in a little dress and heels and walk out with a mobster in her trunk. Well, *his* trunk, actually. You really want Bella's star graduate hunting you while you're dodging federal agents?

Keep talking, smartass. See where it gets you.

Aw, what happened to 'Good Kidnapper?' You can't touch Kayla. Which brings us to the actual question. Why the fuck are you still trying to get me to drink this shit? Chris told me what happened when he mouthed off on day one. You pumped knockout gas through the ceiling, and he woke up without his balls. It's been weeks, and the vent is right there over my head. Why haven't you gassed me, strapped me to a table, and forced the estrogen into my veins?

Because Bella gave you to *me*. And I'm giving you the chance to be smart and choose it yourself instead of being dragged kicking and screaming like the rest of these pathetic—

Yeah, yeah, so you said. But *why* is that so important? And why the rush? I'd bet my pension it's because Bella is getting impatient. I think you're fighting her off, doing everything you can to keep her scalpel away from me. You want me to choose this because... because if you turn on that gas and mutilate me while I'm unconscious, I'm not your partner. I'm not your equal. I'm just another broken victim.

And then you can't pretend this is love anymore. Can you, Cami?

Arrogant, psychoanalyzing motherfucker... God, but that's why he's worth it! I don't *want* this to be easy. If he folded over a cheap bluff, he'd just be another spineless john. When a man like that finally gives in - when he looks me in the eye and swallows that pink shit with his own hand - it's going to be so fucking sweet I might come on the spot.

Still... he's right. Can't touch the lawyer without bringing the Feds down on the precinct. Can't touch Kristine without setting off a war - not to mention my sister would lose her fucking mind if I damaged her favorite little prodigy. God knows why she has such a hard-on for that girl...

No. If I want to break a Boy Scout, I need someone expandable. Someone nobody gives a shit about. Someone who'll make Ben drown in his own hero-complex guilt...

...because *he* is the only reason she's in my crosshairs, because he pushed too hard, and because the dumb bitch couldn't even keep "Butterfly Beach" straight to save her own pathetic life.

Yeah. I think it's time for a haircut.

Cindy, baby? Somebody is here to see you.



What the hell? Are you kidding me? A literal stop sign? For someone who thinks she's a criminal mastermind, Kris really doesn't have much imagination

The lights stop, too... Okay, this is good. For the first time since that door unlocked, I found a boundary. And you don't put up barricades in an empty hallway unless there's something on the other side you're terrified of losing.

If the exit to my body is back there in the dark - right where you don't want me looking - then that's exactly where I'm going.

Okay, the temperature drop and the chains is a little dramatic, even for her. If she thinks turning down the thermostat is going to scare me off after three years in a literal dungeon, she really doesn't know me at all. Let's see what you're hiding back here, Kristine...

Alright, I need to try to get inside one of these... Come on. This is *my* head. My brain! Open. I'm ordering you to open!

What the...!

Quit stalling and open that pretty mouth...

What—?! No! Why am I on the floor?! Get off me—don't touch me! I can smell him—God, his sweat, the cigarettes on his breath—I can't move my hands, she's moving my hands, she's reaching for him—STOP! LET ME OUT OF HERE!

So, my mom already called dibs on hosting the Fourth of July barbecue, which means you're officially going to be subjected to my Uncle Stan's burnt ribs. Unless you want to fake a stomach flu now and we just take Dustin to the Navy Pier fireworks—

I think I can survive Uncle Stan's ribs if it means—

AAAH!

Kris! Hey, hey, what happened? What's wrong?!

I... I'm okay. I'm fine, I just... God.

You're shaking. Was it a migraine?

No, it... for a second I was back in that room. With one of the men. I could taste it, I could feel his hand in my hair like it was happening right now. That's... that's never happened to me before. Not like that.

Fuck... That... That wasn't the exit. That wasn't even one of my memories! That was hers! One of the sessions from the second year - one of the hundred times I blacked out and left her out there to take it so I... so wouldn't have to feel his hands on me...

Oh, God. She didn't put these chains on the doors. I did! I buried that memory back here in the dark so I wouldn't go insane...

...and she had to live through every single second of it alone.

Wait. Just now, right before I pulled back... when the pain hit...

I saw a bedroom. I saw... I saw Alan looking right at me! I wasn't in control, I couldn't speak, but for half a second... I was looking straight through her eyes!

Oh, God.

No.

No, no, no! Tell me that's not the rule. Tell me the only way back to the surface isn't through what I made her endure...