



Episode Thirty-Nine

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Boxer Falls Episode 39

by Damon Suede

By the time the sun had risen in the sky, Adam had settled in for a day-long marathon of *Dance Moms* and *Teen Wolf*...even masturbating half-heartedly to WWF wrestling for a few minutes until they all started looking like his shitty best friend.

Door locked. Sweatpants. Lite beer.

It had taken him two hours to finish an entire jar of Marshmallow Fluff with a salad fork. Normally, he wouldn't admit to craving anything this repulsive, but there were moments in a young fag's life when he needed-yes, *needed*- food faker than Sarah Palin's caps. Even with empty cabinets, he just couldn't face the farmer's market or Caddison's.

He'd sucked the last sticky forkful clean when the doorbell gave a muted ping-ding.

At first he didn't acknowledge it. His lights were off and the TV wasn't loud enough to hear. Maybe they'd go away.

Puh-ling-ding-ping.

And like that, he knew Zach was jabbing on the bell, in a rush to get somewhere. How many fucking times had he jumped up at that fucking sound.

Then banging on the door and Zach's voice, muffled. "You're home, Adam. C'mon."

Adam turned off the bare-chested idiots and tucked the Fluff under the couch, irrationally ashamed at being caught doing what he wanted in his own house by the motherfucker who had proposed marriage and then spat on him.

Ding-ping . Zach got quieter out there. "Open up, babe. Your car's right there."

When Adam tugged open the door, Zach stood on the mat outside his little apartment.

"Hey-"

Adam slapped him: hard and right across the face and slapped again before pointing at the street's oyster shell concrete. "You can fuck right off."

"Ow." Zach shook his head. "I'm not here to fight."

Adam raised his hand again and scowled. "Well boo hoo. Because we're fighting, dipshit." Adam jabbed a finger at him. "You know commitment is a big deal to me. I just needed some time. A month even to work some shit out-"

Zach shook his head and raised his hands like a white flag. "Adam, I'm not here-"

"Stop! I'm not forgiving and forgetting you acting like a total dick. Again." Adam was already pushing the door closed against Zach's hands and blocking the gap with his body. "You don't get to script me. You can't script what you want me to say and get annoyed that I haven't learned my lines. "

"Adam, my dad isn't dead. Phil is alive." Zach lowered his hands.

Adam lowered his hand. "What are you talking about! They had him laid out at the goddamned morgue... Zach." Head shake. "I get that this a lot to handle, but the last thing you need to be doing is some kind of crazy denial-trip."

"Phil got poisoned or drugged or some fucking thing. I dunno." Zach ran his palm over his lined face. *Why did he have to look so appealing, even now?*

"This has nothing to do with...before? Proposing to me." Adam couldn't keep the sneer out of his voice. "This has got to be the sorriest excuse I've ever heard." Snort. "For real. This beats pissing on me at the prom."

"He's been moved but I am pretty sure he needs help if he's gonna *stay* alive."

"And you know this how?"

Zach glanced at someone outside. "My mom saw it. My bio-mom. I can't explain. Adam, we don't have time. Jesus." His green eyes were wild and he yanked on his tangled hair. "You're the only one who knows where they've got him. Please Adam."

"The fuck I do..." But he could feel himself weakening at the sound of Zach's naked need; he could feel the urge for a heroic rescue welling up in him. *Deep breath.* Adam wrapped his arms around himself, painfully aware of how frail he probably looked.

"It sounds crazy. But Vreeland, Ben Vreeland, did something to my dad and he's been stashed on a boat headed for New York. Restaurant supplies." Zach dug his hands into his pockets. "He's in a shipping container. Ben was gonna let him starve, leave him to go crazy inside a fucking can. In the middle of nowhere. Retribution."

"You're a lunatic! Are you listening to yourself?"

"It's my father, Adam. Phil is in deep shit." He was rocking from foot to foot now.

"Unbelievable." Adam shook his head in disbelief. "You spat at me. You fucking loogied me because I wouldn't jump through a hoop. I'm supposed to drop everything for some goosechase with a headcase-"

"No. We have an address. A shipping yard in Salem. You know Vreeland's operation. He offered you a job."

"Like a hundred years ago." Something moved outside and Adam realized a woman stood watching them from the curb below. She looked at her watch and the sky where the sun looked like a dirty bottle cap floating in a puddle.

Zach shrugged. "You're cleared in their security system, right? You told me that you had a standing offer to go work for that prick."

"Salem? Your car won't even make the drive. You're expecting me to drive your ass to the Atlantic Ocean after...everything."

Zach lifted his hand, as if about to pet Adam's chest...the same way he'd touched it a thousand times...a million... But then the fingers stopped short and closed into a limp fist. "Please, man."

Adam weighed their long history against the past few weeks. He stood with his hand on the doorknob, letting the door glide back and forth a few inches on its hinges. He could either step through or step back.

"Look: you don't have to forgive me. You don't have to even like me." Head shake. "But please help me."

Adam looked down at his rusty car, at the weird woman in art-teacher jewelry, the grubby sky... and then slowly back at his crazy, stupid, stubborn, exhausted, gorgeous man. A pitiful smile rode his lips. "Okay."

* * *

Sam had been back and forth to Boston twice a week for the past two months. The negotiations had taken seven lawyers, fifteen grand and an ocean of grease, but at long last the pieces had started to come together. He figured he was either a genius or an idiot. Teaming up with Whitlock had been a masterstroke.

If I can pull this bitch off...

Climbing the steps to his front porch, he dug for his keys. But as he leaned against the door to pull them free, the door swung open on silent hinges. The interior of the house was . Dim blue-green glow thrown from a clock and his entertainment system. He could just make out his own reflection in the mirror over the hall table. A muffled thump overhead made him look at the ceiling.

Someone had broken in and they were still in the house.

Sam couldn't imagine who'd take the risk. He had a reputation, and it wasn't like anything they took couldn't be replaced, except for the-

Muffled laughter from upstairs, his bedroom probably. Several voices. Silently, he scooped up a Maglite from the cabinet. The cold weight of it felt reassuring. With the new deal, he'd assumed that all this kinda shit was behind him. Taking the treads slowly, he inched upstairs on silent feet, mindful of the loose boards.

Laughter again. Definitely the bedroom, and it sounded like a group of guys...young guys. At the top of the stairs, Sam could see the bluish flicker of a television from his bedroom. Someone had turned on the flat screen.

Local toughs probably, they'd gotten drunk and done this for kicks. Hell, maybe one of them was hot.

Slowing his tread down to a crawl, he crept to his open doorway. Now he could hear voices and realized they were recorded. Oz's voice it sounded like and that redheaded kid from the pub. They were goofing around.

Someone had found his tapes.

As he stepped into his bedroom, he raised the Maglite like a truncheon and flicked on the overheads.*Click*. His room snapped into view around him.

Rider .

But Rider didn't turn around. The youngest Cotten was sitting cross-legged in a rumpled suit at the foot of the bed. Sure enough the video on the screen showed his

brother Oz, goofing around with the redhead at the Lake, hands all over each other and both of them freeballing.

"Everyone, huh?" Rider stared at his brother groping the sunburned bartender with a frown on his face. "You got us all here."

Several hundred DVDs lay scattered across the floor like silver scales. Each one was labeled in black Sharpie: date, name, location: "COTTEN TRIO. wharf DINNER. 10 July" or "SHERIFF NEALE. REST STOP. 17 MARCH." Sam knew what they said. He'd labeled them.

"I'm in here too." Rider stared at the DVDs. "In forty or fifty of them so far. Fighting with my father. Drinking at the lodge. Fucking some guy in a changing room. Me doing all kinds of shit." His voice sounded dead and came from far away.

On the big plasma screen, Oz tackled the redheaded bartender and pulled him laughing underwater.

Rider shrugged. "I came here to surprise you. How pathetic is that? Sexy joke." He wiped his nose.

"It's not what you think." Sam went to the bed and sat beside him. "This isn't what-"

"Oh! Oh, okay. Great. Whew. I was *worried*." Rider's sarcasm felt like acid. "So I'm imagining all that footage? Wow. That's a relief, huh?" He snorted and shook his head. "Because, stupid *me*, I started to worry that you had thousands of hours of video spying on everybody in town." He uncrossed his legs. "I thought that I found hundreds and hundreds and *hundreds* of DVDs of uncut footage from cameras you've got all over town. All of us, Sam. You taped all of us."

"Chill out." Sam put his hand on Rider's leg and Rider flinched. "I wasn't doing it to hurt anybody. You gotta believe me. It's a whole other deal. This could be huge."

"Funny thing?" Rider took a ragged breath. "I don't wanna know. I don't wanna hear. Some other goddamn scheme. Some fucking scam where you put one over on the next guy and shit runs downhill. This is exactly why I hadta get my head on straight. Y'see?"

"I didn't want to get your hopes up, y'know? Cause it could be such a big deal if it goes, but I been waiting on the final say-so." Sam shrugged. "I wanted you to be proud of me. To have something going on that had a future. C'mon, Ride."

"I'm such an asshole." Rider pulled away putting space between them on the unmade bed. "No wonder my father treats me like a fucking retard."

Sam spoke softly, and turned his eyes on Rider like sweet artillery. "Rider, I'm doing this for us. For you. This is totally on the up and up. Seriously. I only kept it from you because I had no choice. This could put me on the map."

Rider speared him with a glance. "I spent all that time trying to undo the past. I mean I went to rehab to make the past couple years go away. Come to find out, you spent all that time documenting every fucking moment of it." He stood up unsteadily. The DVDs skittered underfoot.

"Sam?" A voice from downstairs. "*Little pig, little pig, let me come in...*"

Shit .

"Wait a sec." Rider shook his head and stared at the door. He squinted. "That's..."

"Let me get him up here." Sam shook his. "He can help me explain."

The smooth voice from downstairs again. "*There's lots to discuss over dinny-din-din...*"

"I know that voice." Rider stared at him. "That's Trip. You're, quote, *working* with Trip Whitlock. I can't believe I trusted you."

"I didn't know you had company." Trip's voice made the words a snide joke. Footsteps on the stairs. "Fucking dark, man."

"You should trust me." Sam dropped to his knees and tried to shuffle the disks into piles. He could organize them later once his boy had calmed down.

Rider goggled at him and kicked a DVD from underfoot. It ricocheted off the wall and slithered over its silvery brothers. It read, "GRADY & CONRAD. CABIN. 22 APRIL"

Sam reached to rescue it. "I took your advice, and I'm using all my contacts. Like you said, Ride. I got all these guys in show business that could gimme a leg up if I had a leg to stand on."

Trip raised his voice in the hall, sounding like an *opera buffo* ogre. "*And I'll huff... and I'll puff... while I'm sticking it in.*" And like that, Trip stalked through the doorway, looking tan and rested in a two thousand dollar blazer.

"Am I interrupting a tit-a-tit?" Trip winked and pinched his own nipple. "Oh! The littlest Cotten." He pretended to smile. "*Wee Willie Weiner... who lives to suck peener.*"

"Trip, not now." Sam's hands scrabbled to pull the scattered DVDs into gleaming piles. "He'll come up and we can show you what we got so far."

"Isn't it romantic?" Trip sat on the bed, as if he'd used it before.

Rider didn't look his way. He watched Sam crawling on all fours on the archived footage. "I know what you got. I don't want to see any more."

"No that's all bullshit." Sam put his hand on Rider's shoulder, trying to will him into calmness. "Trip has the real deal. We got the papers and everything, so it's official. Right?"

"I do." Trip shrugged.

"I'll leave you to it." Rider looked at him as if Sam had proposed a gangbang in a leper colony.

"Whatsamatter Cotten? You're going to be a star!" Trip pretended to look maniacally thrilled.

Rider took a step towards the door and the stairs and the night outside, slipping on the DVDs. Sam caught him, but he wrenched free.

"Remember, Cotten: the important thing is sincerity," Trip nodded like a sage and tilted his head at Rider. "If you can fake that you got it made."

"Trip." Sam went to the door to explain, to promise, to convince Rider that everything was okay. But it wasn't. "It isn't what you think."

Rider shook his head. "Nothing is." And he left Sam to Trip, both of them standing frozen on a pile of silvery disks scattered over the bedroom floor.

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- * What secret deal have Trip and Sam been putting together?*
- * Will Rider tell anyone about Sam's surreptitious footage? Will he relapse under pressure?*
- * Can Adam and Zach find Phil in time with Cathy's extrasensory assistance?*
- * Will Adam and Zach find a way to reconcile or wreck their relationship?*

TUNE IN NEXT WEEK!

Boxer Falls: The bigger they are...

AUTHOR BIO:

Damon Suede grew up out-n-proud deep in the anus of right-wing America, and escaped as soon as it was legal. Though new to M/M, Damon has been writing for print, stage, and screen for two decades. He's won some awards, but counts his blessings more often: his amazing friends, his demented family, his beautiful husband, his loyal fans, and his silly, stern, seductive Muse who keeps whispering in his ear, year after year. You can get in touch with him at:

■ DamonSuede.com

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