Paper Walls: Morning

“I still don’t know what the hell you were thinking.” Piper said dabbing the cut above his eye.

“I wasn’t thinking, that was the point.” Harry replied.

As he did so, he winced at the feeling of the disinfectant on his exposed skin. Pipes had taken his arrival much better than he’d could have hoped for. In truth he didn’t know what to expect when he’d turned up at her house at 4am with his face bruised, battered and bloodied and his right arm potentially broken.

He’d half-thought that she might scream in his face and kick him out after he jumped in through her bedroom window, or worse: beat him up herself – something Piper was fully capable of doing if someone made her angry enough. Granted she had very nearly bashed his face with a hockey stick before she realized who he was. It said something about how far their friendship had come (and the where the rest of Harry’s circle was) that Piper Ashton – a woman he had once dubbed ‘The Ghost’- was the only person he could go to in the middle of night for help.

“This is not a game, Harrison. You could be seriously hurt. Or worse.”

“Worse than that needle you’re going to use on me?” he said, gesturing towards the open first aid kit sitting on the sink to his left. Once she’d gotten a good look at his face and its current state, Piper had grabbed her first aid kit, dragged him into the bathroom and shut the door. She sat him down and ordered him to tell her the whole sad-stupid-but-true story while she put her gloves on and got to work cleaning his injuries.

“Is everything a fucking joke to you? You could’ve been arrested.” She replied. As difficult as it was to believe while he sat in her house at 04:11 am on Monday morning with her literally wiping blood off of his face and disinfecting the wounds he’d suffered earlier in the night, Piper and Harrison had once been mortal enemies locked in a never-ending war with one another. Harry remembered a point in time back at Seacrest Academy when the pair of them were at each other’s throats on a daily basis. The worst part of it was that for as vicious and merciless as he could be, Piper could be much worse when she wanted to be - her response to ‘The Cereal Prank’ had, at the time, left him with a begrudging respect for her ruthlessness.

But that was not the Piper that was literally on knees in the bathroom, still wearing her pajama pants and a faded Crimson Spark t-shirt. No, this Piper had on a set latex gloves and was helping him out for the umpteenth time. Harry didn’t remember why they used to fight back at school but he was glad, at least for own sake, that they weren’t at odds anymore.

“You’d bail me out. “ Harry said

“I’ve done that enough times, thanks. It’s Keith turn.” She responded

“At least Keith doesn’t lecture.”

“No, but he does make you pay him back.”

“Oh yeah. I’d forgotten about that. Can I borrow 200 bucks from you?”

At that Piper stopped working on his injuries, brought her hands down and glared him. Her brown eyes dug into his soul while her face settled into a trademark scowl. Now Harrison had been on the receiving end of plenty of death-glares in the past, mostly coming from his elders, but Piper had a way of looking at him as if she was going cut his tongue out every time he said something out of place.

Harry was relieved when she decided to drop her gaze and begin the process of stitching his face back together.

“Just do me a favor: be more responsible” she began after a moment’s silence

“You sound like my disapproving girlfriend. Or my mother.”

“Your mother doesn’t patch you up after fights.”

“Girlfriend it is then.”

Once again Piper stopped what she was doing. This time she set the needle down, took off her gloves and punch him on his left shoulder.

“Damnit Piper! What happened to ‘Do no harm?’ ”

Harry should’ve anticipated that. He knew he was pushing her buttons but he hadn’t counted on her attacking him. Piper knew where his injuries were so she’d picked a clean spot to punch and thereby make her point: stop it or I will hurt you.

She inspected his bad arm briefly before disinfecting another needle, replacing her gloves and getting back to working on his face.

“I can’t believe Rick beat you this badly.” She stated out of the blue.

“Do we have to talk about that jerk-off?” he replied.

“Do you rather wanna talk about the time that Madison kid fucked you up?”

“I deserved that one.” Harry said. He had to concede on that point. He was legitimately surprised that Greg Madison hadn’t broken both his legs after the stunt that he pulled.

“And this time?” she said, looking him in the eye.

“Pipes, all I did was ask a question.”

“You went up to The Cheerleader at her own party and asked her whether she was jealous that her boyfriend has bigger breasts than her. You shouldn’t be surprised about, you know, this.” She said pointing at his injuries.

Well that wasn’t the entire story exactly. The girl’s boyfriend had caught him staring at her chest and it was all downhill from there. Were it Amy herself who’d caught him, he’d simply compliment the logo on her t-shirt and move on but it wasn’t her who’d found him out. Though in Harry’s defence, he had offered to stare at the boyfriend’s cleavage instead of at Amy’s but he doubted that the guy had appreciated the sentiment.

“The girl has a name, Pipes.”

“I don’t acknowledge blonde bimbos.”

In an uncommon display of restraint Harry fought back the urge to point out to Piper that she was a natural blonde. The last thing he wanted was another attack on his good arm.

“I don’t think Amy is a natural bl-” he began

Before he could finish Piper closed her eyes and pinched the air between them. She clutched all five of her fingers together, producing the universal sign for ‘shut-the-fuck-up’.

“That is completely beside the point.” She said, her eyes still closed.

“What IS the point?” he asked

“That you, my friend, are an asshole.”

“A loveable asshole?”

“No, just the regular kind.” Piper replied

“I still think it was a legitimate question.”

“And I still think it was stupid.”

“See this? This is why people don’t like you.” Harry said, crossing his arms. Once upon a time he had thought that but now he knew that it wasn’t true. Regardless, he still wanted to see her reaction.

“Then people can go fuck themselves.” Piper replied, not even lifting her eyes from the cut above his eyebrow.

“Including me?”

“No. Because you enjoy fucking yourself.” She added. This time she looked him in the eye as she said it.

“You do care about me.”

“Not in the mood, Harrison.”

“Well I like you too.”

Piper made a show of rolling her eyes and shaking her head but Harry saw through the act. While she normally had a flawless poker-face, tonight he could see her lips curling in an ever so slight lopsided smile. For a change, she wasn’t scowling.

“There. Your wounds are clean and you’re all sewn up. I don’t think your arm is broken or fractured but get to a doctor anyways.”

“Thanks doc.”

“Just remember: You don’t block punches with your face.”

“She makes jokes.” He observed

“Only once her work is done.”

Piper packed her kit away and they shared a cup of coffee before Harry, declining her offer to walk him home, eventually readied himself to leave. At the doorway he leaned in and threw his arms around her, pressing their bodies together.

“Do we really have to – ”

“Too late, Pipes.” He said, cutting her off

“Okay fine.” She said, dropping her shoulders and exhaling theatrically. She slipped one hand around his waist and patted him on the back with the other.

Piper hated hugging (and being touched in general) but Harry was feeling sentimental and he really was grateful to her. Even though he’d never admit it to her face – he was grateful for her. Of course if he knew Piper at all, she’d probably be counting down the seconds until he let go. Harry let the hug last for five seconds and then decided to have some fun.

Seven seconds.

“Harry?”

Ten seconds.

“Harrison.”

Thirteen seconds.

“Enough! Enough hugging goddamn it.”

At that he released her. He was surprised he’d managed to get away with that much without her threatening to bite his ear off or something. Piper was more patient than she let on. He filed that in the back of his mind for later.

“Now get out so I can start my day properly.” She added

“Thanks for patching me up. You’re the best.” He said walking through the front door this time.

“I know.” She replied, shooting him a bright smile for the first time that morning.

**Paul Cupido**