

she tells me worship (in the bedroom)

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Summary

Jamie's never been much for religion, never been prone to belief or worship--save for where Dani is concerned.

There are days, as the years burn away like so much kindling, where everything is the best it possibly could be. Days where Dani's beast in the jungle is silent--maybe no longer there at all--and her demeanor is smooth and easy. She matches Jamie's smile on these days, warm and light and happy, and Jamie can't get enough. Could never ask for more than Dani in her best mood, Dani's laugh the clearest bell in the room.

Those days are wonderful--but they are, of course, not the only sort. Natural enough, Jamie knows, for anyone, though maybe somewhat more of a concern for Dani. The days where Dani's tensions run high are doubly-loaded, one part the natural discomfort of a bad day, one part Dani's mounting fear of losing herself.

You're here, she tells Dani on days like this. *You're right here, with me, and you're not going anywhere.*

Dani grits her teeth, furrows her brow, nods. Jamie pulls her close, still murmuring the words like an endless prayer. She's not much for religion, Jamie; never much saw the point of asking for miracles from ghosts and gods. Bad days with Dani, though, are their own kind of religion. They form their own kind of belief, stretched between them, one that says Dani is *here*, Dani is *strong*, Dani is in control whether or not she feels it.

There are good days, and there are bad days, and there are days like this whole week has been: middling days. Days where Dani is not fumbling away from her with breath whistling high and fast, but neither is she laughing. Days where Dani wakes with a grimace already on her lips, her temper short, her body clenched as she moves about the apartment. Jamie has learned to read these moods, has learned Dani doesn't need her to ask questions or work to soothe her nerves. Dani in a mood like this is independence, so used to fighting the battle of her own bad day alone, she sometimes only feels worse if Jamie tries to take her hand.

Jamie has learned, instead, to stand back a few steps. To keep her eyes on Dani's expression, to keep her ears perked for a sign Dani is shifting toward something genuinely dark, something that will genuinely require Jamie to step in and catch her. Some days, it goes this way--a middling day turning without warning into bleak horror. Some days, she needs this of Jamie.

Other days, she needs something else entirely. Something to turn a highly-strung afternoon into a pleasurable evening. Something to remind her, though she does not always have control over her mood, there are other things to grab hold of and use to her own ends.

Jamie doesn't mind in the least.

She knows it will reach a breaking point eventually. There's just a scent on the air when Dani is like this, no matter what image she's projecting to the rest of the world--sooner or later, the smile will slip, the polite laugh will dry away, and there will be only Dani Clayton in all her magnificent frustration left.

It's really just a matter of waiting it out.

In the meantime, there's plenty to do. The shop is thriving; Jamie, who had spent most of that first year wanting to pull her hair out over numbers, is still not entirely convinced she can trust the implication that they are doing *well*. The odds of moving to America on a whim to start a flower shop that actually survives its first few years were slim; the fact that they are rapidly becoming a fixture of their small Vermont town, taking in larger swaths of customers every month, is baffling.

It pleases Dani, too, she knows--most of the time. When Dani isn't dealing with a customer like this one, a shrewd-eyed woman who calls into question Dani's comprehension of her job at every other turn.

"Anything I can help with?" Jamie asks, leaning around Dani with a surreptitious hand brushing her back. Dani shoots her a sharp look, a *not now* look, and she nods.

"Right. Be in the back if you need me."

Some days, *if you need me* is a call sign, an olive branch Dani grabs with greedy hands. Some days, after a customer like this one, Jamie finds herself propped against the back room table with Dani tearing at her zipper before she even realizes.

Not today. Today, when she pokes her head back out to ensure Dani hasn't actually murdered the old bat, she finds Dani already chatting with someone else. Politely. Smiling, even, though Jamie knows better than anyone what Dani's barely-hanging-on smile looks like.

"All good?" she murmurs as the new customer saunters away, careful not to so much as graze Dani. Mismatched eyes snag her gaze, Dani huffing out a breath.

"Sometimes I wonder why we picked a job with so many people."

"Be a lot more fun with just us," Jamie agrees. "Though how we'd fit all those lovely pillows into a cardboard box, I couldn't say."

Dani grants her a small laugh, barely enough for Jamie to coast on. It's almost nothing, but it's what Dani can manage today, and that's fine enough. Jamie considers saying something else--telling Dani with words that she is here, that she can handle all the worst customers the day has to offer, that she doesn't mind if Dani begs out early. Not that words matter most, with Dani. Words have never been the thing, where Jamie is concerned, for Dani.

"I'm all right," Dani says, a bit stiffly. Jamie shuts her mouth, nods.

"Sure. 'Course you are. If you, ah, need me..."

It's becoming a prayer of its own, she thinks sometimes, a plea to the part of Dani that desperately requires both hands on the wheel. *If you need me*. Which, no matter how it shows, Dani always does. Even on days like this, where Dani can't quite fit right into her own skin, where Dani is trapped between normal human irritation and the mounting anger she carries for someone else. Dani always does need her.

It's just that that need doesn't always look the same.

"What say we order in tonight?" Jamie asks as they're closing up. "Throw on a movie?"

Dani shrugs. "Fine. Need to hit the grocery store first, though, we're out of...a lot of things."

"I can do it," Jamie offers. Dani slides her a grateful smile that doesn't quite reach her eyes.

"I'm fine, Jamie. I promise."

"No, I know," Jamie says, a bit too hurriedly to be believed. "Only--look, I know it's been a hard week. I just..."

"Want to help," Dani fills in when her voice trails awkwardly away. Jamie scrubs a hand down her face.

"Yeah. But if I'm hovering, I don't--"

Dani doesn't quite touch her. Dani seems some days unable to touch her, or be touched, like she's afraid basic physical contact will release the thing lurking inside. It's the anger, she says, her voice strained with worry. *It's that rage.*

Won't hurt me, Jamie says, with a confidence she has never been more sure of than while looking into Dani's eyes. *Wouldn't ever.*

It'll pass, she knows--in an hour, in a day, in a week. It'll pass, and Dani will be back to her usual self once more, laughing, telling stories Jamie hasn't yet had time to memorize, trailing her fingers across Jamie's face. Back in the driver's seat, as it were. The only thing in charge of her own choices.

She allows Jamie a brief kiss, the single negotiation made with her demons--there is never a time, no matter how she feels, or what petty argument they've had, where Dani does not kiss her goodbye.

The apartment isn't filthy, by any stretch, but certain things have fallen by the wayside over the course of a busy week. Jamie sets to work alone, humming her way through laundry collection--the pair of underwear beneath the couch offers a particularly pleasant memory: Dani stretched back against the arm, sighing as Jamie undressed her and settled in to explore--and stacking dishes in their proper places. Little things, she reminds herself. Little ways to make it easier on Dani until Dani can breathe easier all on her own. Jamie doesn't mind doing the dishes, sweeping up, ensuring the plants are watered and the bathroom tissue is restocked. Dani does the same for her, when the roles are reversed.

Dani does more for her than she seems to realize. Even down to holding herself apart this way, too afraid of crossing a line she can't take back. Jamie wishes there were words to explain how much that means--how much Dani's self-imposed protective qualities make Jamie feel as though no one has ever been more important. It means the world, and it makes her crazy all the same, because there is nothing she'd like more than to hold Dani close when she gets this way.

I'm not sick of you, she thinks fiercely, stacking plates into the cupboard. *Not now, not ever, Poppins, so when are you going to stop pushing me--*

The key in the lock. She turns her head, watching Dani shove the door open, jerking her key back and forth to unstick it. "Hey, you're back. Good. Was just tryin' to decide what kind of pizza--"

She pulls up short, leaning back against the counter with a frown. There's a look on Dani's face, a strange tight look that instantly makes her wonder if things are worse than Dani has been letting on of late.

"You all right? You look..."

Dani shakes her head, tosses her purse so hard, it bounces back off the couch. She doesn't seem to notice, preoccupied with the tight clench of her fists, the stilted stride that carries her across to the kitchen to deposit paper bags across the counter in a careless mess.

"Dani, what happened?" There's keeping her distance, and there's keeping things *from* Jamie. The look on her face now, the sharp cut of her mouth, the taut clutch of her jaw, is just this side of worrying. "I need you to talk--"

Dani has her shirt in one hand, bunched in her fist, dragging her close. Jamie stares, her stomach giving an agreeable little lurch.

"Did I do something?" she asks. Unlikely, sure, but always a possibility. Always possible there's something she didn't notice to make up for.

Dani, though, shakes her head once. Her hand tightens, pulling Jamie forward, past the kitchen threshold to the living room rug. She stops, swaying slightly as though not entirely certain where she is.

Jamie--growing less concerned, more intrigued by the second--hesitates. There are only so many outcomes, from this sort of greeting. Only so many outcomes from the way Dani is looking at her now, a sort of helpless tension held in every curve of her face.

"Can...can I help now?" Jamie asks, half-expecting Dani to release her, to crumple, to open the door to whatever she's been holding Jamie away from all week. It's like this, sometimes. Dani, surrendering to her after days of miserably tending her own mental demons. Dani, falling into her with exhaustion. Sometimes.

Not always.

Dani is pushing her, she realizes, her hand dragging up Jamie's front to grip her shoulder. The pressure she applies is surprisingly gentle, but too firm for Jamie to deny for anything but the best reason. She allows herself to sink, allows Dani to shove her down until her knees strike rug, until she's staring with her head tipped back and her skin growing hot.

There's something about this view, she thinks, that will never grow old. Particularly with Dani looking at her this way, eyes stormy, brow creased with some combination of frustration

and--

“Let me help,” Jamie says, half a suggestion, half a plea. She reaches a hand to Dani, giving her ample time to step back, to change her mind. Dani, instead, reaches to the hem of her own skirt, yanks it to her waist.

“Please.”

One word, and Jamie’s whole body shudders. Dani’s hand slips up, skimming her cheek, delving into her hair. She’s staring at Jamie like a challenge, like a dare: *love me now*, her eyes seem to say. *Love me like this*.

More than that, Jamie promises silently, pressing forward into her. There’s loving Dani, certainly--she’s happy to do it, privileged to do it, doesn’t even think about it anymore. There’s an instinct to loving Dani she gave into long ago, with no desire or intention of turning back.

This, though. This is more than loving. This is the closest thing to religion she’s capable of, the closest thing to belief she can wrap her head around. Forced to her knees by Dani’s hand, moving to kiss Dani from this spot of supplication, is the truest kind of worship she’s ever known how to give.

Dani exhales above her, the breath leaving her in a rush as Jamie slides her hands up the backs of her thighs. Her skin still holds a chill from the early winter air, and Jamie lets her palms rest for a moment, giving Dani her own warmth as a gift of greeting. She peers up at Dani, watching her sway with anticipation, watching her gaze down that same scorching challenge: *Love me like this. Even today. Even when I can’t love myself*.

She presses a kiss, small and sweet and barely anything at all, to the crest of Dani’s underwear. Dani makes a low noise in her throat, something shaky, palming the back of her head in an effort to push her closer. Fast, she recognizes--Dani wants her fast, rough, to demolish the day’s shadows in no time at all.

Dani wants it that way--but it isn’t what she needs. Jamie tilts her head, brushes against Dani with her nose, moves to kiss the inside of one thigh instead. She feels Dani’s hand loosen, allowing her the freedom, and she takes it with glee. Each kiss is small, gentle, a bare approximation of what Dani is asking of her, but with each press and release of her lips on Dani’s skin, she feels some of the tension go out of Dani’s grip. Dani, who has spent all day strung tighter than Jamie could possibly know, and who could demand more of Jamie now, sighs.

She doesn’t beg. Doesn’t even speak. Only splays her fingers across the back of Jamie’s skull, her palm resting at the crown of Jamie’s head, letting her go where she will. Trusting that Jamie, taking her time with every kiss, smoothing her hands down to cup behind Dani’s knees, dragging her nails lightly down Dani’s calves, knows how to read her.

Control, thinks Jamie, as she so often does in moments like this. Given freely, it’s an intoxicant all its own.

There's something about the way Dani trembles when she opens her mouth against smooth skin, when she runs her tongue in a slow, gentle arc up toward the juncture of Dani's pelvis. Something about the tightening of Dani's hand in her hair that makes her feel more alive than she ever does walking the world.

She's giving the same treatment to Dani's other leg, tracing one hand lightly around her kneecap, digging her nails gently in, when Dani utters her first low moan. Jamie smiles into her skin.

"Yes?"

"Didn't ask you to talk," Dani says, though Jamie can hear her smile. She slides a hand higher, gripping the underside of one thigh, digging her thumb in.

"Didn't ask for much, from what I recall. Bit demanding, Poppins."

"If you're complaining," Dani says, "I can just take care of it myself."

"Not like I can," Jamie points out, and Dani grips harder, yanking her head back. She gives a hiss of pleasure. "Oh, you're not denying it."

"You," Dani points out with an arch of her brow, "are denying me."

"Let me back to it, then." She's playing with fire. She's playing with fire, and Dani could turn the tables at any moment, could push her away and decide she isn't in the mood after all.

Dani, to the contrary, gives her a smile that makes her glad she's already on her knees. Her hand flexes in Jamie's hair, wrenching her forward without warning, and Jamie groans against her, biting gently through the fabric of underwear that, already, is considerably wetter than it had been. This, she thinks, should have been their entire day. Their entire week. Dani gripping her skirt in one hand, Jamie's hair in the other, already revolving her hips gently to meet the slow press of Jamie's tongue.

"Tease," Dani sighs, as she circles, wraps her mouth around already-straining nerves, sucks lightly through sticky cotton. *"Fuck."*

Jamie smiles against her, pleased; Dani already swearing is a sign she's been looking for this longer than she maybe even realized. Her hand presses Jamie in, her legs spreading slightly to give Jamie more space, and Jamie takes what she's granted willingly. She's kissing Dani with slow, heady abandon, eyes closed, aware with every small jolt of Dani's hips that this is exactly where she ought to be. It's easy to lose herself here, in the rock of Dani meeting her every stroke, in the taste of Dani soaking through thin fabric onto her tongue. She takes the edge of Dani's underwear between her fingers, pulls it aside, uttering a low sound of pride at what she's already accomplished.

"Enough?" she asks politely, and Dani makes a breathless sound of aggravation above her. She bows back in, stretching the fabric away from where it belongs, letting her fingers graze slickly along Dani only once. Dani jerks.

She could stay here, she thinks. Stay here on her knees, holding Dani in helpless limbo, forever. Stay here, feeling Dani's gaze on her, feeling Dani's desperation to push her closer coming up hard against her desire to let Jamie choose how this plays out. She's never sure what will win, with Dani in a mood like this.

"Jamie." Not pleading, not yet, but slightly choked all the same. Her hand smooths down the back of Jamie's head, urging her closer, and Jamie presses back into her palm for a beat. Just a few seconds of fighting the push, her fingers grazing back and forth--stroking once across skin, back across fabric, feeling Dani throb against her fingertips.

"*Jamie.*" *That* was pleading. She slides her hands up, pulls the underwear down, supporting Dani as she steps out and all but crashes into Jamie's mouth once more.

That was pleading, and this is worship: sinking into Dani in every way that matters. She traces Dani with the tip of her tongue, curling when Dani sighs, stroking when Dani whimpers. The taste of her is overwhelming, drawing aside her own restraint a little at a time, and Jamie reminds herself exultation should not be rushed, benediction cannot be forced. True worship, true belief, is a slow, deliberate thing, inching ever nearer to something huge and glorious and well-earned.

Dani's nails dig hard into her scalp, scraping under her hair until she parts her lips around swollen nerves in a sharp sigh of pleasurable pain. Dani is making sounds of her own, muffled sounds against the clench of her teeth even as she's grinding harder to meet every swipe of Jamie's tongue. She sucks more forcefully, adds a gentle scrape of teeth that makes Dani twitch violently beneath her. A pounding heat between her own thighs gives a particularly sharp pulse, and Jamie welcomes it, welcomes it as she explores the familiar map of Dani soaking into her lips.

She's here, she tells herself, validated by every sound from Dani's lips. *She's here, all of her.* She imagines what she must look like now, her head bobbing between Dani's legs as she twists and angles to offer every last inch of pleasure. What she must look like to Dani, with her eyes lidded and her body bucking, Dani who drives a hand against her head, pulling her hair hard to show Jamie exactly where she's most needed. What must this look like: Jamie's own hips rocking hopelessly against nothing, her hands occupied with holding Dani upright as the strength slides from her knees. She is the only thing keeping Dani here, keeping Dani in place, keeping Dani from collapsing to the floor in a heap.

Dani is making breathless, almost keening sounds, pumping her hips hard to match the flick and roll of Jamie's tongue. Jamie opens her eyes, leans back, letting the contact go just long enough to take Dani in: head thrown back, the cords of her neck standing out, trying with everything in her to keep her volume down.

Let them hear you, Jamie thinks, delving in again with rough, reckless strokes. *Let them fucking know.* She's moaning herself, unable to stop, unable to control her own voice as Dani grips her tight, thrusting to match her with frantic, nearly-there energy.

Her fingers tremble, the desire to slide into Dani almost too strong to ward off. She resists. This is what they both need, instead, this urging of Dani over the edge with nothing more than what Jamie has already promised. Just the art of taking Dani into her mouth, drawing her

tight, feeling her wind higher and higher as her hands glide through Jamie's hair, catching, yanking. Nearly there, she knows, from Dani half-groaning her name. Nearly there, and it's a shame to let it end, a shame to know this is not a permanent fixture of life, being on her knees in front of Dani Clayton.

Dani is shuddering, crying, "There--there--*fuck*." Jamie presses her tongue flat, gives a final broad stroke that sends Dani tumbling, each pulse against Jamie's mouth feeling a little more like triumph. She keeps going even as Dani is slowing, even as Dani's rough grip in her hair is loosening to something soft, something tender.

"Jamie, I--I--"

Jamie is one long open kiss, warm and wet and needy in her own right, working a hand up the inner slope of her thigh, and now she is teasing with her fingers, now she is offering Dani this added gift, and Dani is making a high, surprised, wanting sound above her.

"Jamie--"

Tell me, Jamie commands silently, and Dani is so open, Dani is so wet, Dani is beyond ready even as she's begging. She slides inside, eyes rolling back in her head when Dani clutches immediately around her, legs nearly buckling as Jamie curls fingers and tongue in the same action.

She drops her skirt at last, closing both hands around Jamie's head to ride this second climax to its height. Jamie, eyes closed, is not sure she needs anything but this to feel at home. Nothing but Dani shuddering around her, Dani arching to take her deeper. Nothing but Dani, letting her in.

She leans her head against Dani's hip, breathing hard, letting the skirt fall back into place. Dani, still trembling, wraps her arms around Jamie as best she can, leaning her head back and sighing.

"I'm--"

"Good," Jamie says, not much interested in an apology or an embarrassed explanation. She licks her lips, runs the back of her hand across her mouth, tilts her head to look up into Dani's still-dazed face. "You're good, Dani. All good."

She stands, takes Dani's face in her hands, runs her fingers along Dani's parted lips. Dani smiles, tongue darting out to curl around one finger and Jamie makes a softly wanting sound against her own will.

"You're all right now?" she asks, her voice husky. Dani closes her eyes, nods, kisses her way along Jamie's fingers until they're clean. Then she's kissing Jamie with all the quiet fever of a week spent staring into the shadows of her own head, pulling Jamie backward toward the couch, sinking down as the last of the strength finally goes out of her legs.

She won't talk about it--not now, not yet, not with her hand urgent against Jamie's zipper. She won't talk about it as she palms Jamie through her jeans, rubbing in hard strokes while Jamie

sinks back against the couch and groans. She won't talk about it, bending over Jamie to kiss her hard, slipping her hand into Jamie's underwear and stroking, pinching, driving her toward a dazzling conclusion of her own.

Later, maybe. Another night, maybe. This night, the push and pull of it, the teasing angle of her bent over Jamie with her hair curtaining them both and her smile welcoming Jamie to kiss her to completion all over again, was not made for that. This night is for Jamie to remind her of what is most important: that even on her worst day, even fed up with the world or the beast in the jungle, there is no enough for Jamie. There is no end, no exit, no edging away.

She holds her close, arm around her waist as she pushes desperately up into Dani's hand, understanding in some distant way that there is no such thing as too much where Dani is concerned. There is no darkness in Dani that can scare her off, no lack of control in Dani that doesn't make her want to lead Dani back to a place of authority over her own life. There is nothing except Dani, striding into the room and forcing her to her knees; Dani, losing herself in the slide of her lips; Dani, needing and being needed.

Let me in, she thinks with sleepy hope, as Dani kisses her and nestles against her side. *Let me in, let me help you. I can give it back when she takes it away.*

She'll say it, someday. Maybe tomorrow. Maybe next year. She'll say it, and Dani might even believe.

In the meantime, she doesn't mind this, the devoted worship of one who has never loved like she loves this woman. She doesn't mind Dani being unable to ask. She doesn't mind Dani's fierce need coming to call.

It's mutual, she thinks as she dozes with Dani in her arms. It's everything.

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