**(Subjective) Rights**

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# (Subjective) Rights

by theotherwolfinsideyou

Summary

"What's with the collar?" Murray asks.

Alexei shrugs. "Why? You want to bite?"

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Murray and Alexei talk about government-mandated collars while Joyce and Hopper bicker in the front seat.

Hopper and Joyce had been bickering non-stop since they knocked on Murray's door, and that fact rang true for their long car ride back to Hawkins, much to Murray's chagrin. He'd been able to tune them out while Alexei was explaining the layout of the base to him, but now it was nails on chalkboard. Not understanding the argument didn't make the situation any less annoying to the Russian omega, clearly, if the slight bitterness to his scent was any indication. Murray could pick it up easily with his better beta nose, but Hopper and Joyce stayed oblivious, as always. He was surprised he could pick up Alexei's scent at all with how badly the two were stinking up the car.

He and Alexei shared a glance. The omega tilted his head. "Why do you not calm them down?"

Murray side-eyed him. "I'd love some peace and quiet as much as you surely would, but why the hell would that be my responsibility?"

"You are their beta, no?" Alexei lifted an eyebrow.

Murray laughed at that. *"God* no!"

"No?" Alexei looked confused. "Why no?"

"Because then I'd have to take orders from *Hopper* of all people?" Murray laughed again. "I'd rather put my balls in a blender."

"Such colourful imagery, you Americans," Alexei shook his head. "Who is your pack, then? They must worry, with you gone so long."

Murray shrugged. "I don't have one."

Alexei looked at him for a long moment then, sporting the blank-yet-judgmental expression that most Russians had perfected. That wasn't anything new. Murray had faced opposition before, on his choice to stay packless. It made people uncomfortable to see a beta lead their own path in life. They were supposed to be the supporters, keeping pack cohesion with their calm hormones and (generally) adept social skills, all while dutifully following their pack alpha's lead. That life had never appealed to Murray. He couldn't see how it appealed to *anyone*.

The odd comments and judgmental looks never bothered him much. Most people dropped it soon enough. It was hard to know Murray for long and think he'd *help* pack cohesion.

"That is not allowed in Russia," Alexei finally said. "Betas cannot be packless after they are eighteen. Is a waste, otherwise. Leads to violence."

"Yeah, well, this is America," Murray said. "The government has to let us believe we have rights here."

Alexei pursed his lips. "You *do* have rights in America."

“That’s subjective,” Murray said.

“You do not have pack. This is okay,” Alexei said. “That is right.”

Murray had to admit, belatedly, that Alexei won that point. He graciously admitted defeat by switching the topic. “What’s with the collar?”

Alexei had a thick leather collar around his neck, attached at the back with a small padlock. It was one of the first things Murray had noticed about the omega when Hopper dragged him out of the lab. Collars were long out of style in America. Some people still considered it immodest for omegas to show off their necks, but they were taken about as seriously as those who thought omegan ankles should never be shown. You couldn’t walk down the street nowadays without seeing necklines, bitten or unbitten. Alexei stuck out like a sore thumb.

Alexei shrugged. "Why? You want to bite?"

Murray stared at him. Alexei broke out into a grin, the same one he’d sported while he was drinking his slurpee. Murray was a self-appointed excellent judge of character, but he hadn’t expected *cheekiness* from the omega. It was a welcome surprise.

“Is that what it’s for?” Murray asked. “To stop unwanted chompers?”

“No. Russia is civilized, you know,” Alexei said. “It is to keep me from choosing to mate. I am too valuable to government right now. Am not allowed to take alpha until my work is done.”

“Your government *collared* you?” Murray asked.

“You know enough about us to learn Russian, and this surprises you?” Alexei asked.

“Russia doesn’t exactly tell Americans about how they treat the scientists they have working on top secret missions,” Murray said. “Before I met you I assumed there were no Russian omega scientists.”

“Not many,” Alexei sighed. “The others are also collared.”

“It doesn’t bother you?” Murray asked. Alexei didn’t seem too bothered by the whole situation.

“No. There is reason for it. Being wife would slow me down, not let me work as much. I could never have left Russia,” Alexei shrugged again. “Someday I would like it off, have an alpha and pups. I am omega, after all. Some things are same in Russia and America.”

“We can cut it off for you,” Murray found himself saying, ignoring the way hearing “I want an alpha” from Alexei’s mouth stung. “Russia’s not going to do it for you, now. I’m sure you can find an alpha here who’d give you everything you’d ever want.”

“What makes you sure?” Alexei asked.

“Because you…” Murray trailed off. *Because you look like that,* his brain unhelpfully supplied. The collar may have not been the first thing he’d noticed about Alexei. That may have been his deep brown eyes, and then the perfect sweetness of his cherry blossom scent, and then *maybe* the way his glasses accentuated his softer features. The fourth thing he’d noticed was the collar. Which was still pretty high up there, in his defense.

“Because I…?” Alexei prompted. “I have not seen you lose your words before. From the way other two talk to you, you have too many.”

“Can it,” Murray waved his hand. “I’m sure because alphas are simple. Finding one is easier than finding vodka in Russia. It’s not complicated, for you alphas and omegas.”

“Right,” Alexei nodded, smugly.

“We’ll cut it off soon,” Murray said, desperate for another topic change. “You shouldn’t have to wear that.”

“Yes,” Alexei nodded again. “Is one of my not subjective rights. I would like it off.”

“Tell you what, first thing we’ll do after this shitshow is over is get a pair of boltcutters and go right to work,” Murray promised. “It can be our celebration.”

"You are very invested in my collar, beta,” Alexei tilted his head. “Do you really want to bite?"

For the second time that car ride, Alexei had thrown Murray for a loop. He was pretty sure that was another dose of cheekiness, but Alexei’s eyes were bright, the way the Byers boy’s were whenever he looked at the Wheeler alpha.

*Fuck me,* Murray thought. Things would’ve been so much easier for him if he’d only been attracted to other betas. If people didn’t like a beta on their own, they sure as hell didn’t like a beta who’d “stolen” someone else’s mate. But Murray had long ago decided to make his own path.

He grinned. "At least let me buy you a corndog first."

“Okay,” Alexei smiled, scent growing sweeter. “It does not have to be an alpha, by the way. Another right, yes?”

“No, that one *is* subjective,” Murray said. “Unarguably. Things aren’t terrible here, though.” He never would’ve stayed in Indiana if they were.

Alexei opened his mouth to reply, but was cut off by Joyce loudly proclaiming that she’d rather be anywhere but here with Hopper. Murray’d been filtering their bickering out for the whole conversation, but he’d been slowly dropping straws while doing so and that? That was the last damn one.

Murray gave Alexei a look that he hoped communicated *we're coming back to this* before leaning forward and grasping both of the front seats. "CHILDREN!"

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