It was their room.

Two desks, two chairs, two lamps, two laptop bags, two gaming laptops – Toby’s recommendation for the bag, Charles’s for the laptops – everything in twos except two things: the single bed, split in two with the long pillow Charles brought, and the lockpick in Charles’s bag. Force of habit, since he never knew when he’d be locked out.

Charles knocked on the door to the hotel bathroom. “Hey, uh, Toby, you go–”

“Go away, I’m... I’m okay. Just filthy. Go to your room or something.”

Filthy? Charles scratched at himself, the relief of his nails turning to a claw as he went over old wounds that reminded him of Toby.

“Toby, are you scratching too?” Silence. Regret crept into him. “We don’t have different rooms. When we planned this, we said we wanted to share a hotel room, that we were eighteen and old enough. That we wanted to show some independence.”

His dad usually forgot about Charles, as it was today. He was downstairs with Toby’s mom now at the buffet, both trying to charm the other, as always, ever since Charles and Toby met and their parents hit it off. He would’ve joined them for the buffet, eaten himself satisfied and asleep with mouthfuls of fried oysters and hundred-dollar steaks like his dad.

But there was business to finish here.

With a sigh, Charles turned around and slumped against the door, staring at the mirror in front of him, at the scratches on his cheeks. He could hear the water running inside, but something kept his heart low. Something bad. “You’ve been in there for like twenty minutes.”

“Filthy.”

He gnawed at his right finger, savoring the punishment of his teeth grinding against his flesh, wishing he could eat the whole guilty hand.
Filthy – the word fluttered on the hazy memory of a whiskey’s pink buzz.

What a fun night that was. Charles saw his father with Toby’s mother, Charles’s mother came home, saw them, left immediately for her family, and the whole ramshackle house fell apart and Charles stole and sold his dad’s ring, because he wouldn’t need it anymore. Bought a whiskey, dropped the rest of the cash at his dad’s study, drank because that was what his dad did: pleasure himself like the world was a game.

Toby had been next to him during that night.

Toby had been afraid when Charles got close, when Charles’s hand wandered low, when Toby had to slap him back to his senses—but that didn’t change what it meant.

“I know you’re still there.” Toby said. Charles rose and pressed himself against the door again, listening to Toby’s whisper-chant. “Filthy, filthy, filthy.”

“I, uh, said I was sorry.”

“Sorry? You know how people used me like a toy, before I finally got adopted two years ago.” He scoffed. “Past this door, you sound just like everyone else.”

Charles slapped the door. “I know you don’t want to be hurt like that again, but I was tipsy—I don’t know, it was stupid and I’m sorry and I’m not even gay, but I guess it was...” Silence. He slid down, then curled up next to the door. His finger moved towards his canine, the sharpness concentrating into a piercing justice. “Toby, I just want to be friends again.”

“You’re just like your father, Charles. Do you remember what my mot—”

“Shut up!” Sweet, iron taste of blood trickled to his tongue as his teeth punished him, as he rose. “I’m not, I'm not, I'm not, I'm not!”

He slammed his hand against the door, and he heard Toby yelp. There came a skittering of water, then of flesh striking tile.
Charles stared at the door.

“Toby?”

Guilty silence.

“Toby!”

Charles hurried to his laptop bag, taking out a lockpick. Before he shoved it into the bathroom door, he stopped, the metal edges of the lockpick whispering for his blood. Then, the lockpick fumbled its way in, only for Charles to drop it.

He stared down at his hand, at the red indents the lockpick carved into his skin.

What if he was like his father, who saw the world as his plaything?

He looked back at the hotel phone desk.

There was no time.

In the lockpick went. If the last thing his hands did for Toby was help him, that’d be okay, they didn’t need to be friends anymore, maybe this would be their last time together, thoughts like that raced through Charles’s mind as he fumbled with the lock.

The door flung open.

Shallow scratches ran all across Toby’s limp body. Streams of blood ran down the scratches, down the shower stall, while a red river flowed from his friend’s head.

Filthy. Charles’s left hand scratched a cheek scar open. Had to clean, clean, scratch, slash, claw, let it out, let it out, let it out– they were words, self-hatreds that they shared.

A shame that they shared.

Staring at him, that pink buzz crept into Charles’s mind, his body. He could hear his father’s laughter, the same boisterous laughter before he told Charles to take a sip, then a chug, not caring if his son vomited or fainted or fell asleep.
Charles’s hand wandered to his mouth. That thought deserved punishment, but...
He had to be better for Toby, and he’d just have to hope that Toby would see it.
He dashed to the towels, grabbing three thick ones, then hurried to his friend. Towels
wrung round and round Toby, each and every wound and scratch. He’d call the help desk soon,
but this would hide their shame.

As the last towel wrapped around Toby’s head, as a drop of Charles’s own blood fell into
the water, Toby’s eyes fluttered open.

Charles looked at him as the towel tightened. “I’m sorry,” he said.

Toby looked away, the blood soaking through his towel, the water still running, muddy
with blood.

Filthy.