Lines We Don't Cross

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Summary: Carl finds a plastic bag with pills in Jasper's jacket, and Jesus fucking Christ, there'll be hell to pay. Except…

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Carl was seething. What the fuck, Jasper?!

He twirled the small plastic zip bag with the fingers of his right hand, the three white pills inside mocking him. He'd found them when Jasper's jacket had fallen off the coat rack earlier as Carl had hung his own. And Carl couldn't believe it, didn't *want* to believe it.

Of course now Jasper wasn't here. Out… doing whatever teenagers were doing these days. Doing drugs, apparently. Fucking hell!

Jasper eventually got home two hours later, ambling into the kitchen. "Hey," he greeted Carl who was folding laundry in the living room. He fucking hated folding laundry, but someone had to do it.

He balled his fist, scrunching up the sleeve of the hoodie he was holding, trying not to explode right away. "Jasper, can we have a meeting?"

Jasper turned to face him. "What, now?"

"Yes," Carl snarled. "Now."

"Did something happen?"

"For fuck's sake," Carl swore under his breath. More loudly, he said, "Sit."

Jasper seemed disconcerted but obeyed, plonking himself on the couch. He looked up at Carl. "Did I do something?"

Carl fished the plastic bag out of his jeans pocket and walked up to Jasper, held it up for him to see. "What the fuck is this?"

Jasper averted his eyes and said, "Carl…"

"Jesus fucking Christ, Jasper!"

"It's not what you think," he defended himself.

"Oh no? Then what is it? This isn't just ibuprofen now, is it?"

“No,” Jasper tried to interject, but Carl was already in a rage.

“Then what?! What are they? Coke? Ecstasy? Benzos?”

“I dunno! Amphetamines. Maybe.”

“Crystal meth? Fucking hell, Jasper. Do you even…” Carl threw his hands up in the air. “Do you know how dangerous these are?”

“Yes!” Jasper yelled at him. “This is why I have them.”

That took Carl by surprise. “You— What? This some kind of fucked up dare? Let’s see what all the rage is or if Carl notices if I come home high? Is that it?!”

“No, it’s not like that!”

Now Carl yelled too. “Then tell me, what the fuck it is?!”

“I just…” Jasper gazed down into his lap, then back up to look him straight in the eyes. “I figured if I had them, then no one else would take them.”

That stunned Carl into silence. That was *not* what he had expected. Something in him instantly deflated. He let the hand with the plastic bag sink down to hang by his side. “Shit,” he muttered.

Jasper stayed quiet but held Carl’s gaze, waited patiently for the aftermath.

Carl didn’t know what to do with it. With any of it. He raised the bag again to let Jasper see it. “Where did you get these?”

Jasper shrugged. “This guy we sometimes hang out with.”

“He a friend of Gemma’s?”

“What? No. Gemma has nothing to do with this.”

“Then what? Who is this guy?”

“He’s, I dunno, this rich kid. I don’t really like him. He was passing these out one night. I pretended I was interested. I didn’t take any.” He met Carl’s eyes again. “I don’t do that kind of stuff.”

“*That* kind of stuff? So you do other drugs?” Carl snapped at him.

“No!” Jasper shot back, then added, “A bit of weed sometimes.”

Carl shook his head incredulously. “A bit of weed. Great. That’s just great.”

“Come on, it’s not like you’ve never done it.”

And while that was true, it wasn't quite what Jasper might be thinking. Carl had tried it once. A peer pressure thing. A blunt being passed around. He hated how it tasted and he hated how it made him feel. He'd never tried it again.

"Look," Jasper said defiantly. "I'm careful, alright? You never talk about your work, but I know that shite can really mess you up. And it's not like you haven't lectured me about this before. I know you think I never listen to you, but I do."

Carl's initial rage now subsiding, he fumbled with the bag in his hand. "Okay, here's what I'm gonna do. I'm gonna take this into work tomorrow and have them analyse it, see if it's laced with something. And you will never touch that shit ever again, are we clear?"

"Are you gonna tell them you got it from me?"

"Fuck no," Carl said immediately. "Jasper, I need you to promise that you'll never touch this shit again."

"I promise," Jasper said in a low voice.

"I didn't quite catch that."

"I promise," he repeated, this time louder.

Carl let out a weary breath, then pocketed the plastic bag. "Okay."

Jasper gave him a wary look. "Are you mad?"

Mad? No, Carl wasn't mad. Not anymore. He was... shaken. Out of his depth. "I'm..." he started, unsure how to finish. "I'm not mad. And you're right, this shit can really fucking mess you up. If I ever catch you doing any hard drugs, I swear to God, there will be fucking hell to pay like you've never seen."

Jasper's mouth curved into a crooked smile and Carl asked, "What?"

"You try so hard to make it seem like you fucking hate me, but you don't, do you?"

Carl sighed, then sat down at the other end of the couch. "No, I don't fucking hate you."

"But you fought Mum when she wanted you to have custody."

Carl rubbed his eye with one hand. "Yeah. As you're well aware, I'm not exactly great stepfather material."

Jasper pressed his mouth together for a second, then said, "It could be worse."

That made Carl chuckle. "Why, thank you for the glowing endorsement."

"No, I mean, seriously. If I had to live with Nan, I'd be going out of my fucking mind."

"Yeah, well, I don't blame you. That woman is a fucking menace."

Carl reached for the remote control. "Come on, let's watch something."

Jasper looked at his phone, then made a face. “Actually, I’m hanging out with friends tonight.”

“Didn’t you just come home?”

“No, I mean, online. We’ve got this mission going.”

“Mission?”

“Yeah, Call of Duty.”

Ah. One of his video games. “Alright. Go and knock yourself out. Just… turn down the sound, yeah?”

Jasper got up from the couch. “I’ll use the headphones.”

Carl’s gaze traced Jasper as he left the room, rubbing a finger against his upper lip. Maybe he hadn’t been doing this stepfather thing totally wrong, after all.