The Desperate Type

by chchchchcherrybomb

Summary

After falling from the tree didn't do the trick, Evan begins to seek out another solution. A partner. Peer pressure to get the job done. He spends several weeks trolling a website with a section called Suicide Partners after breaking his arm. He finds a potential match in someone else who is looking to make sure they actually pull the trigger this time (metaphorically speaking).

Three guesses whose message Evan responds to.

It's Connor's, of course.

Inspired by My Heart and Other Black Holes

Notes

A few things: First of all this is going to be a bit dark. It's about people who look for other people to help them commit suicide. Suicide ideation, anxiety, and depression are basically main characters. So, proceed with caution.
Second, the premise is entirely ripped off from the YA novel My Heart and Other Black Holes. Except that book is very hetero.

Third, the name of the website (CatchingTheTrain.com) is from Law & Order: SVU. It's a dumb name, but Smooth Passages from MHaOBH sounds like a laxative to me, so I didn't use that.

Finally, the title is from a Fall Out Boy song, 7 Minutes in Heaven (Atavan Halen). Because I am very old.

**This is going to get gay, but it's a slow burn. Like very slow.**
I Keep Telling Myself I'm Not the Desperate Type

The website was probably designed to look nondescript. The homepage looked sort of like a Tumblr dashboard, only it was a different blue and the web address was CatchingTheTrain.com. To an uninformed looker on, it probably looked totally innocent.

Evan knew it wasn’t.

He was on it enough. Too much. So he had to clear his browser history every time he logged off of it. In case his mom decided to look at it. Which made Evan’s hands sweaty just to think about his mom opening his laptop, even if she didn’t see the website, even if she didn’t understand she would definitely ask about it and then he would have to come up with a lie because he hadn’t been able to bring himself to actually come up with a lie despite the fact that he spent all of his time worrying about how he could lie to her about the website if she found it.

CatchingTheTrain.com was a site about suicide. Ways to do it. Ways to deal with wanting to do it. It had message boards, different sections, tips and tricks, and even a messaging system if you had questions for other users. And the place where Evan’s hand was most drawn to, the place he’d been clicking on every single day since he had… since he had broken his arm. Partners. Suicide partners.

“Evan, sweetie?”

Evan slammed his laptop shut the moment he heard his mother outside of his bedroom door, feeling his heart rate tick faster almost immediately.

“It feels like every time I come in here lately you’re closing your computer…” His mother was in her scrubs with a hoodie over the top, frowning.

“Oh. S-sorry. I… I was just…” Iwasjustlookingatawebsiteaboutsuicidenobigdeal. “A letter! It’s… I was working on one of the letters that-that Dr. Sherman…”

His mother smiled then.

“Oh. That’s good. I’m glad you’re working on those, honey. I think it’ll really help.”

“Y-yeah. M-me too.”

Once his mother left him alone again, Evan pulled his laptop onto his lap again, pulling open Catching The Train again, his mouse hovering over the section on partners again.

It was stupid, Evan knew, but he had tried and just… failed. It hadn’t worked. And it was so embarrassing that no one had even realized, even noticed, everyone just swallowed the story about falling while he was climbing.

Partners… which was maybe the stupidest idea Evan had ever entertained, because, who would even be his suicide partner when he couldn’t even get anyone to sign his fucking cast.

Evan clicked on it anyway. Just because.

He sorted by location until he saw a new posting for his town.

It was a post by someone called Murphys_law.

From thirty minutes ago.
From someone who lived in his town.

Evan felt his heart speed up, suddenly, but not panicked, exactly. Almost… excited.

*This whole thing is probably idiotic… but last time I got caught in an attempt, so I’m changing tactics. I keep telling myself I’m not the desperate type, but nonetheless here we are.*

*I only have a few requirements: One, I don’t want to do it with anyone who has kids. I can’t handle that shit. Two, you can’t live far away from me. My parents would catch on fast if I suddenly have a friend who lives two states over who wants me to leave the house for a change. Three, it would be best if you look like you could feasibly be a highschool student. I’m trying to be inconspicuous.*

-Murphys_Law

Evan’s breathing hitched.

He… met those parameters. He was in high school, he lived in town… no kids. Which. It was perhaps the first time he had ever seen something that he was quite literally perfect for.

Evan swallowed hard.

And with shaking fingers…

Began to type out a response.

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He felt like he was playing detective.

The kid, Murphys_Law, they had to go to his school. Based on location alone, it wouldn’t really make sense for it to be someone from anywhere else.

For a brief, paralyzing moment as he was walking past the band room the next day, Evan thought that Murphys_Law could be Zoe Murphy. She played guitar in jazz band. The girl who drew stars on the cuffs of her jeans in study hall. The pretty girl he had spent a little too much time daydreaming about.

But there was no way it was Zoe Murphy. She just… she wasn’t like him. She looked happy, seemed happy, smiled all of the time. She had even briefly talked to him at the start of the year, apologizing for her brother when he shoved Evan.

Girls like Zoe Murphy didn’t want to kill themselves.

And Evan knew, even if by some crazy random happenstance that she was the person from the message, Evan knew he couldn’t take her up on it. People like Zoe Murphy needed to exist in the world.

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“Stopping by the pharmacy on my way home tonight. You okay on refills?”
“Yes. Thanks.”

“Dude, could you quit checking your phone?” Jared said, nudging his shoulder. “You’re acting like you’re sweating a Tinder match.”

“What?” Evan said, his voice jumping high. “No-no, I-I wasn’t. I don’t. I don’t even have Tinder. It was m-my mom, I was texting my mom.”

Jared looked at him like he was perhaps the most pathetic thing on this Earth. Evan would have to agree with him. “Dude. Maybe don’t tell people you’re texting your mom.”

“Yeah. Thanks. I’ll… do. That.”

As their English class started, Evan did check his phone as stealthily as he could manage. He was waiting for a notification. A sign.

His heart nearly leapt out of his chest when his phone buzzed, one new notification in his email inbox, a reply from Murphys_Law and ruined the whole thing suicide partners thing because if his heart flew out of his body right then and there then he wouldn’t need a partner at all, he would just need to make sure nobody called 911 for like thirty seconds which shouldn’t be hard because nobody had come running when he dropped forty feet out of that oak tree.

*OutOfUrTree,*

*If you are serious about this, we should meet up to discuss plans ASAP. I have helicopter parents, so getting around them might be a bit of thing. I want to make sure you’re serious. The last thing I need is for someone to flake out.*

*If you can, meet me at the coffee place around the corner from Central High tomorrow at 4:00pm. I’ll wear a red scarf.*

There wasn’t a signature.

But it was there.

Evan responded quickly, saying that he would be there at 4:00pm the next day, and then deleted the emails from his inbox regarding the notification and cleared his browser history on his off brand smart phone.

Time flies when you’re having heart palpitations because you’re about to meet a potential suicide partner.

Or something.

Frankly, it was some variety of a godsend that he managed to struggle through the whole day without a complete meltdown, even though Thursdays were the day that they closed the library during his lunch hour for some teachers meeting, which meant that Evan had to eat either in the
cafeteria or find a teacher who would let him sit quietly in their classroom while he eat.

He ended up in the back of Mr. Reeves’s botany elective, which Evan had already taken. It wasn’t too bad and nobody looked at him weird really. There was Connor Murphy, Zoe Murphy’s brother, who was apparently in for a lunch detention, though Evan didn’t know what it could be for. Jared had said something about Connor getting pissed off and lobbing an onion plant at another student in the hall, but so far Evan hadn’t noticed an onion plant out of place in the greenhouse.

The day eventually came to a halt, and then it was like time was racing forward without Evan. He opened his textbook to look at his math homework and then suddenly it was 3:50 and he was going to be late to meet Murphys_Law.

Hitching his backpack over both shoulders and gripping the straps tight, Evan headed off in the direction of the coffee just off campus, internally debating if he ought to order something. People might think it was weird if he just sat there in the cafe not ordering anything, but then again he was going there to literally plan out how he was going to die, so who cares if people think he’s weird for not buying a coffee he doesn’t even really like coffee and besides it’s way over priced.

Evan stopped just outside of the building to take a deep breath while his thoughts wound themselves up, troubling over whether it was appropriate to shake the hand of someone who you just met when you were there to make a date to die together.

Finally psyching himself up, and only about a minute late, Evan pulled the door to the coffee shop open. His eyes scanned the people milling around for a red scarf. It took him a few minutes, because it was nearly October now and people were already pulling out their fall clothes even though it was still too warm when he stopped because he had spotted the only red scarf in the place.

It wasn’t. It couldn’t…

There was no way it was Connor Murphy.

This was a trick, a joke, something that… Jared had done to fuck with him, some sick idea of funny that was probably going to get his reaction filmed and put online only to go viral because he knew he was an ugly cryer; he got all red and sweaty and snotty and sometimes he cried so hard he couldn’t catch his breath which made him throw up.

He was bumped forward by someone trying to squeeze around him and then Evan stood in front of Connor Murphy. Zoe Murphy’s psychopath older brother. The kid who threw a printer in second grade.
I Don't Do Too Well On My Own

Chapter Summary

In which a plan is hatched, a cast is signed, and Zoe is understandably suspicious.

Chapter Notes

I was very pleasantly surprised by the reaction I've gotten so far about this. Thanks!

Connor Murphy was staring miserably down into a cup of coffee and wearing a red scarf. Evan was pretty sure he could turn back, turn around, leave the coffee shop (and the state) and Connor Murphy would never even know Evan was the one who blew him off.

“Uh,” Evan said instead, unintelligently. “Uh. I uhm… I think I’m meeting you here.”

Connor looked up for barely a second. “Doubt it.”

“No, but, really—”

“Didn’t we have Spanish together?” Connor asked, looking up again, his eyes narrowing.

“Yeah, uh, last year, yeah.”

"Everyone in that class spent the week Señora Hendrick was out looking up ways to call me a freak in Spanish."

"Oh," Evan said, face flushing, because he remembered that. "I'm... I'm sorry. I didn't. I swear I didn't."

Connor sighed. "What's your name again? Emmet?"


“Connor Murphy.”

“I know… I mean. Uh. I meant. Shit, I uh… I meant that I knowyournamebecause of-of c-class, not anything weird like about your reputation or anything.”

Connor didn’t really react to that.

“I'm… I'm um… I'm OutOfUrTree.”

Connor Murphy blinked, looking perhaps a little surprised. “Oh.”

“You… You’re. The scarf?”

Connor nodded, jaw set tightly. “Right.”
“Sorry if I’m… not what you expected,” Evan muttered, gripping the strap of his backpack like it had morphed into a jet pack that would launch him into the sun any second.

“Do you want a coffee or something?”

“What?”


“No, I mean, no thank you, I just… I don’t. Have…. ” Evan twisted the hem of his polo shirt tightly in his hands, wringing it, because he didn’t know how to explain that he didn’t really have the money for a five dollar coffee drink.

“I’ll buy.”

“Oh. N-no, it’s alright.”

Connor didn’t seem embarrassed to be seen with Evan stuttering all over himself, which was maybe nice, Evan didn’t know. “Dude. It’s fine. Let me buy you something. I owe you… since I shoved you the other day.”

“Oh.”

“Yeah. I can be kind of an asshole.” Connor shrugged, but didn’t apologize. “What do you want?”

Evan squeaked out an order, specifying that dairy milk was fine because he didn’t like soy milk and almond trees used for almond milk production were actually having a somewhat negative impact in the bee populations that were required to grow them.

Again, Connor didn’t seem embarrassed. Maybe he was more depressed than even Evan was. He headed off to the bar, and Evan sank miserably into the other seat at the table, wondering if now his brilliant partner plan was going to backfire after all and he would just keep on living like thing until he was in his middle fifties and his anxiety actually gave him a heart attack.

“I got it to go. I hope that’s fine.”

Evan usually didn’t order coffee at all, but especially not to go, because cardboard was wasteful, but then again this place claimed its cups were all made of recycled materials so he figured it would be fine just this once. “Thanks.”

“Can we get out of here? I don’t really want to do this in here, in front of everyone.”

“Uh. Yeah. Sure.”

Connor dropped his undrunk coffee into the bin near the garbage and led the way out of the coffee shop. He headed toward the mostly abandoned yard outside of the school, lighting a cigarette and then Evan stupidly opened his stupid mouth, saying, “You smoke?!” but it was more like “You smoke?!” ” and Connor gave him a look, shrugging.

“Oh. That’s cool or whatever. I didn’t know.”

“Right,” Connor said, and they grabbed a picnic table in a sort of secluded area of the quad which was in the shade of a big maple tree. “So.”

“So….”
Connor took a long drag on the cigarette. “So, we’re probably going to need to take some time to plan this out, unfortunately. I tried to off myself the first week of school but my parents found me out before I got the job done and now they’re watching me like a hawk and literally won’t let me go anywhere without them.”

“Right.”

“We’re going to need to make it look like we’re friends so that they’ll let me go somewhere with you.”

“Okay.” Evan didn’t know how to do that.

“Uh. I guess we should probably talk details.”

“Sure.”

“You’re serious about this, right?”

“Y-yeah.”

“Because if you’re just going to flake out then I’d rather do it myself.”

“No, I’m serious.”

Connor looked at him, eyes sort of narrowed, and Evan felt very much like he was being X-rayed.

“This had better not be a joke.”

“It’s… it’s not!”

“If this is Jared Kleinman trying to fuck with me again, I will freak out and kill him.”

“No, J-Jared? No! He. I didn’t say anything about this to Jared. I swear Ididn’tevenknowyouwereyou.”

Connor stared at him for another minute, then nodded, like Evan had won over his approval. “Do you have any specific plans in mind?”

Evan could literally hear his blood rushing through his body and he stuttered out, his brain almost short circuiting, because suddenly his brain was full of the stories of those kids from Columbine High School and how the one was just suicidal but became friends with a sociopath and then they tried to bomb the school, which most people don’t know is that they meant to bomb the school, but they still shot and killed like a dozen people, and Evan didn’t want to hurt other people but he was suicidal and what if you just could kill people if you wanted to die anyway and then his mother would have to live with being the mother of a school shooter and his dad would be on CNN even though he hated CNN. “You’re not like planning to shoot up the school right?” but it came out more like “you’renotplanningtoshootuptheschoolorightareyou?” and Connor…

Laughed.

“Oh-what did I say?”

“I get it. School shooter chic, yeah?”

Evan started to sputter something, but Connor kept laughing. Hollow laugh. It wasn’t like it was really funny.
“No I get it. I deserved that one. It’s fine,” Connor said.

Evan tried to take a deep breath. And then tried to take a swallow of his coffee, only to choke on it and then cough a few times before his airway was clear again. “So. You’re not…?”

“No. I don’t even know where I could get a gun right now, considering that my dad has locked up all of the pencils for being too sharp.”

Evan stilled for a brief second. “Really?”

Connor gave him a look. “Yeah. I wouldn’t lie. My parents are a fucking disaster.”

“Sorry.”

“So are you open to methods or something? I’m not really interested in making this a murder-suicide thing.”

“No, no,” Evan said, yelped, whatever. “No. I’m just… Thinking. I don’t know. I guess the how isn’t important to me. Just. That it happens.”

“Same. We’ll have to figure something out soon then.”

“Okay.”

“So…” Connor said, dropping his cigarette on the ground and stubbing it out. “What happened to your arm?”

“Oh I uh… fell out of a tree, actually.”

Connor raised an eyebrow. “Fell?”

“Yeah.”

“Was that like… on purpose?”

Evan mumbled something that even he didn’t quite understand.

“No one’s signed your cast.”

“No… I know.”

“Well I’ll sign it.”

Evan looked at the white cast, still blank. “You don’t have to.”

Connor looked a little irritated. “Come on. We can pretend like we’re friends.”

“Oh. Yeah. I guess.”

“Do you have a sharpie?”

Evan pulled one from his khakis, and Connor uncapped it before writing CONNOR in massive capital letters across nearly his entire cast. “Oh. Great. Thanks…”

Connor was standing up now, looking at his phone, muttering, “Damn, it’s 4:30. My sister’s going to be leaving band practice and she’ll go ballistic if she can’t find me after.”
“Why?”

Connor rolled his eyes. “She’s pretty much babysitting me while we’re at school. We have to share a car.”

“Oh. That… that sucks.”

Connor blinked a few times. “Actually, this is perfect. Come with me? We’ll tell her I bought you coffee to make nice and she’ll tell my parents.”

“Great,” Evan said lamely. He didn’t know why but the whole thing was making him feel a bit deflated. Something about tricking people felt awful. He followed Connor back inside the school, toward the band room, and it only really connected for him that he was about to encounter Zoe Murphy a moment before he actually encountered her.

“Connor, what the hell?” She practically shouted, which made Evan flinch. “I was about to call mom to say you took off. You said you were going to do homework in the band room.” She got closer then wrinkled her nose. “Where did you get cigarettes? Since when do you smoke cigarettes? I’m going to have to tell mom and dad.”

“It’s kind of loud in the band room,” Connor drawled, like he was bored. “So I went to get coffee.”

“Coffee?” Zoe repeated, like he had said something more sinister like “I went to go murder small animals and then snort a bunch of drugs.”

“Yeah. Coffee,” Connor said, and then he pointed to Evan’s coffee cup and then Zoe Murphy looked at him for the first time and it was like he was going to throw up an internal organ like his spleen or something because she smiled at Evan briefly before returning her gaze to Connor. “I got coffee with Evan.”

Zoe narrowed her eyes. “Did he do something awful to make you get coffee with him?” She asked Evan, and he had this hilarious image in his head of being forced into a Starbucks at gunpoint and then he tittered a little which made both Connor and Zoe look at him like he was actually an insane person, which he was, so then Evan cleared his throat a few times to try to explain.

“No, no, s-sorry,” Evan said, “Sorry. It’s just a. He. Er. Connor he took me to get coffee to uh, s-say sorry for shoving me the other day. Sorry. It’s just… We just got coffee.”

“Oh,” Zoe said, smiling again. At Evan. Evan caught Connor giving him a thumbs up behind her back, but not like a “yeah nice job” thumbs up but more like a “smooth move there, asshole,” thumbs up. Whatever. “That was… nice.” She eyed Connor suspiciously. “Why are you being nice to Evan, Connor?”

Connor rolled his eyes. “Fuck you Zoe.”

“I…” She looked sympathetically back at Evan, then said, “Connor, you aren’t nice to anyone. It’s kind of your signature thing. What’s going on?”

Connor just crossed his arms over his chest.

Zoe looked imploringly at Evan. “Is something going on?”

Evan shook his head, too hard too much it definitely looked super weird, so he said, “No, he just said he wanted to apologize for the other day and that, uh, hey, we could get coffee?”
Zoe still didn’t look satisfied, but she didn’t push. “We should get home, Connor.”

“Yeah, sure,” He said, sounding disinterested. “Evan. We should hang out soon.”

“Definitely, yeah, that would be… cool.”

“Maybe you can come over or something.”

“Sounds good, yeah.”

Zoe still looked lost, but then she said goodbye to Evan and followed Connor out to the student parking lot.

That night, Evan opened facebook to see that he had a friend request from Connor Murphy. He accepted it without hesitation. It was probably a good way to pretend to be friends.

Evan looked at his facebook feed. Even though he hardly spoke to anyone at school, he had nearly fifty facebook friends.

He wondered how many facebook friends Connor Murphy had.

A moment later, he got a facebook message.

From Connor.

“Do you think you could come over after school tomorrow?”

“I’ll ask my mom.”

“Thanks.”

Evan closed his laptop, walking into the living room where he found his mother eating leftover Chinese food with a large book on her lap.

“Hey Mom.”

“Hi honey. I didn’t know you were still awake.”

“Just h-heading up now. I just wanted to let you know that I’m going to go over to my friend Connor’s house tomorrow after school.”

“Oh?” His mom put her chopsticks into the carton, smiling at him. “Connor?”

“Yeah, uh, Connor Murphy… he um… he’s in my grade.”

His mom smiled. “He signed your cast!”

“Yeah. Anyway, he asked if I wanted to hang out after school tomorrow so if that’s okay I will just go upstairs and text him to let him know that I am going to come over.”

“Sure thing honey. Get a good night’s sleep.”

Evan didn’t like how easily he had lied to his mother.

Was he a liar now?
Wasn’t he always lying? Didn’t it count as lying when he told his mom he was really trying to write those letters to himself but all they ever turned out to be were laundry lists of the ways he hated himself.

And then there was lying to Dr. Sherman. He was always pretending to be better for Dr. Sherman, only to go home be too anxious to even order a pizza online.

And then there was the big one. Was simply existing, business as usual a lie? Was he lying about wanting to be alive by not telling anyone he wanted to just… stop?

Regardless, he had practically broken out in hives during his lunch in the library, thinking about how much Connor’s parents were definitely going to hate him. Hate him when they realized he was lying. Hate him when they met him, because here he was, trying to lie about being normal and chill and not a mess at all, and if they hated him then they wouldn’t let Connor be around him which would literally ruin their plans and then Evan would just…

Keep lying.

Ad nauseum, into infinity.
Evan found Connor, mercifully alone, at his locker at the end of the school day.

“I’m sorry, I don’t know if I can do this,” Evan said in a rush. “Sorry.”


“No, I, it’s just…” Evan was scrambling to try to explain. “I don’t know if I can go to your house. What if I meet your parents and they absolutely hate me and then they tell you that you can’t have me over anymore and it just ruins the whole thing?”

Connor rolled his eyes. “I know it’s probably a moot point, but have you ever tried to calm the fuck down?”

Evan twisted the hem of his shirt without saying anything, stalled out, stopped.

“Shit. Sorry.” Connor tucked his long hair behind an ear. “Look, my parents will probably fucking love you just for existing.”

“S-sorry?”

Connor seemed to be trying very hard not to yell, which Evan actually really appreciated. “I don’t think I’ve had a friend over to my house since like… sixth grade. Maybe before that. Okay? So just. You come over and exist and we’ll be in business.”

“You’re sure?”

He nodded. “Oh, I should warn you…”

Evan tried to brace himself.

“My mom’s on this weird organic, sustainable farming kick so unless you’re into that, don’t eat anything she tries to give you. It all tastes like shit.”

“Oh. Oh. Okay.”
“Also my bedroom doesn’t have a door.”

“Oh, sorry, wh-why?”

Connor rolled his eyes like the reality was tedious. “They had to break it down when I tried last month, and now my parents won’t replace it because they seem to think a closed door would be too tempting or something.”

Evan nodded. “Sorry.”

“You say that a lot,” Connor said.

“Sorry.”

Connor shot him a look. And then he almost smiled.

Which made Evan’s face twitch nervously into what was almost certainly a grimace.

“Jesus, Christ, Zoe, is there a chance you could drive less like a grandmother?”

“I have the insurance plugin, asshole, if I speed my rates go up.”

“I’m sure mom and dad would survive the hit if your rates went up a whopping twenty dollars,” Connor said from the passenger seat. He had mentioned quickly that his parents had taken away his driving privileges, which he clearly thought was stupid. Evan tried not to think hard about how hard Connor’s parents seemed to be trying to keep him alive.

Connor pulled a pack of cigarettes from his jacket pocket, and lit up before rolling down the window.

“Connor what the fuck?!” Zoe shouted. “You can’t smoke in my car.”

“Sorry, there’s no ‘no smoking’ sign,” Connor said easily, taking a drag. “How was I supposed to know?”

“Connor I’m serious, fucking put that out.”

“Or you’ll tell mom and dad?”

“Yeah I will, actually,” Zoe said, making a sudden grab for the pack of cigarettes, but Connor was faster. “What the hell, Connor, you know you’re not supposed to have a lighter.”

“Ohh, okay,” Connor said, “Well since I’m not supposed to …” He took another drag, apparently unbothered.

And then the car was swerving and Zoe had lunged over the passenger seat, grabbing the pack of cigarettes and then, righting the car, Zoe chucked the hard pack of cigarettes out the window.

“What the hell Zoe?”

“Give me the lighter.”

“No! What the fuck?”
“That’s… that’s actually really bad for the environment,” Evan mumbled. He was doing his very best not to hyperventilate.

Connor looked back at him in, like disbelief, “Dude. Not helping.”

“I just mean that animals can eat the cigarettes but they can’t digest them and-and they are very flammable, o-obviously.”

“See, you ought to listen to Evan,” Zoe said, obviously reaching.

Connor said nothing.

“Just give me the lighter and I won’t tell mom and dad.”

“Fuck you.”

“Connor, come on. You know if they found you they’d send you packing.”

Connor scoffed, but nonetheless passed a white plastic lighter over the center console into Zoe’s outstretched hand.

Evan felt himself let out a breath he didn’t know he was holding.

This was exactly why he knew he needed someone to help him end things. Make him end things. Evan knew his anxiety was so paralyzing he would over think himself into living. Maybe if Connor could… Maybe Connor could help override that intense self preservation tendency.

“Look, I’m already sorry about the gluten free lasagna. I told her that nobody has a gluten allergy, but she’s on a kick where gluten is going to kill us all somehow,” Connor said as they walked in.

“She texted Zoe earlier to let her know that was for dinner, but Zoe didn’t actually, like, tell me until we already had you in the car.”

“It’s fine.”

“Don’t,” Connor said. “There’s no point sugar coating it. It’s going to suck.”

"Oh, I-

“Connor, is that you?”

He rolled his eyes at Evan. “Nope. I’m the other kid you have who complains about your cooking.”

His mother swatted Connor upside the head gently. “Don’t be rude, Connor. You have a guest.”

“Sorry, I guess I don’t know what that’s like,” Connor said in a faux-innocent voice. “Evan, this is my mom. Mom, this is Evan.”

“N-nice to meet you, Mrs. Murphy.”

“It’s lovely to meet you Evan.” She started to ask if they wanted anything to drink, but Connor was already pulling Evan by his (good) arm up the steps, calling after his mother that they had some homework to do.
“Great, you pass,” Connor said, dropping Evan’s arm outside of a bedroom that, as Connor had said, did not have a door. "We're friends now. Tada."

Evan loitered in the doorway while Connor threw himself into a desk chair, frowning. “You coming?”

“S-sorry.”

There was nowhere to sit but the bed or the floor and both felt wrong.

“Dude, sit down,” Connor said.

Evan stepped uncertainly into the room.

“Dude, just sit on the bed. Don't look at me like that, it's fine. I swear. I'm not like going to molest you if you sit there.”

Evan sat quickly, nearly tripping over a rug in his rush. “S-sorry.”

Connor stared blankly at him. “Stop saying that.”

“Sorry.” Evan felt his face heat up. “Shit, sorry.”

Connor nearly smiled.

“So… you like…” Evan looked around the room.

“I don’t,” Connor said. “Everything I liked about my room has been removed for my 'safety.'”

Evan nodded. He didn’t say “sorry,” but he really wanted to so instead he twisted the hem of his t-shirt, trying to take deep breath because it was a Friday night and here he was, trying to get things on track to get things off the track completely but Connor was… Connor. It wasn’t like he was just going to be magically nice now, Evan realized stupidly. And it wasn’t like Evan even wanted Connor to suddenly be nice to him because then he might get ideas in his head about how Connor liked him and if he got that sort of idea in his head then he might change his mind about wanting to die but that in and of itself would be a disaster because he knew eventually he would want to die again and it would be so much worse if he had had his hopes raised.

“Where’d you go?”

“Oh, uh, sorry.” Damn it.

“I uh… I do that. Sometimes.”

“And what was that?” Connor asked. “A trance? Spontaneous meditation?”

“No, not exactly, more like… a. I was. I was just thinking.” Sure. Thinking. Definitely thinking and not at all spinning into a spiral of ceaseless anxiety.

Connor nodded like he didn’t need to hear more. Thankfully.

“Should we actually do homework?”

Connor shrugged. “Not like it matters.”

Evan’s eyes darted nervously toward the open door.

“I’ll have to get my computer out of lock up,” Connor said, sighing and pulling himself from the
desk chair and headed down the stairs, calling for his mother.

Evan pulled his phone out, but immediately regretted it because all that was there was a text from his mother.

“Is he blackmailling you or something?”

Evan jumped. Zoe was standing in the doorway. “Using something to get you to do his homework?”

Evan shook his head. “No. Not at all.”

“I’ve never seen the two of you talk before this week.”

Evan shrugged. “I don’t know, he just…”

“And before that, I saw him push you in the hall.”

“He, uh, he apologized for that already.”

Zoe didn’t look convinced. Evan didn’t feel convincing.

Dinner wasn’t so bad. Evan had been expecting a stony silence from the Murphys. Or constant prying questions. Or that the food would actually inedible.

It wasn’t bad. The Murphys were… nice.

They asked how Evan and Connor knew each other.

“School,” Connor said, pushing food around his plate without really touching it. Evan understood what he was doing. He did it all the time. Most nights his mom just assumed he didn’t order food because he was too anxious to talk to a delivery person. And that was true, at least some of the time. But there were other times when he just didn’t have an appetite. He’d take two bites of something and lose interest, his stomach feeling like it had shrunken to the size of a pea, and then he’d start obsessively trying to hide the fact that he hadn’t eaten.

And then there were times like now where eating was about the only thing he could think of doing. He could have probably eaten the entire pan of gluten free lasagna, plus dessert, and still kept going until he actually made himself sick. Evan had done that a few times too. Made himself sick because he ate so much so fast that the only thing his body seemed to be able to think would solve the stomach pain was and emergency reversal.

“And Evan, are you getting excited about college next year?”

Evan swallowed and nearly choked and then took a sip of water and then practiced lying through his teeth. “Oh yeah. I am. I’m hoping to, uh, to get a scholarship since my mom and I, you know, we’re not like… we don’t have like…” He stopped because now everyone was looking at him and face started to go red. “We’re not like. Uh. Rich. So I’ve been doing these, uh, scholarship essay contests? Because I like to write, sorta, and my mom heard a story on NPR about them?”

Mrs. Murphy was smiling encouragingly at him and Evan felt his stomach flip flop. It was almost worse than when his mom looked at him this way, because, like, she had to she was his mom, but then Mrs. Murphy was smiling and trying to be encouraging and it was a good thing that the Murphys had apparently locked up anything sharper than a fork because it might have been too
fucking tempting to just stab himself out of the conversation.

It would be more troubling to Evan that his brain automatically filled in suicide as the default problem solving method if he wasn’t literally about to kill himself.

As dinner was finished, Evan caught himself offering to help clean up the dishes. Connor rolled his eyes and sighed, because, well obviously it would look weird if Evan helped but Connor didn’t. They stacked dishes and Connor showed Evan the dishwasher and they rinsed and loaded in a sort of awkward silence.

Then, “You’re laying it on kind of thick. I already told you they’d like you.”

“Sorry,” Evan said.

“Stop saying that.”

Evan bit his lip to resist saying it again.

As they finished loading up the dishwasher, Evan could suddenly hear voices arguing in another room. Connor sighed, muttering, “Ignore them,” and the pair of them headed back up the steps. Evan caught Connor’s name a few times in the raised voices.

Once in the (relative) privacy of Connor’s room, Connor turned around in the desk chair and said, “So the college shit… That’s not why you want to do this, right?”

Evan was surprised. “No.”

Connor seemed to relax almost instantly. “Good.”

“Why does it matter?”

Connor’s face hardened. “Because I don’t want it to be some stupid reason.”

“And college would be a stupid reason?”

“Yeah it would. It’s not like you’re the first kid who can’t afford college.”

Evan felt his face heat up. “Well, you’re not the first rich kid with nice parents to be miserable either, but you don’t see me questioning your motives.”

Connor didn’t react for a moment. Then he almost smiled. “Damn.”

“What?” Evan demanded, heart thudding too loudly in his chest.

“I just mean. You’re more serious than I thought.”

“I don’t want to half ass this,” Evan said, almost desperately.

“Me either. Sorry.”

“It’s fine.”

“Boys?”

Connor’s posture changed immediately, he sat up a little straighter, but his eyes got a little duller too. Mrs. Murphy stood in the doorway, with red eyes and a watery smile. “Connor, I spoke to your
father, and if it’s alright with Evan’s parents he can stay over.”

Evan tried his best not to look frantically over at Connor like *what the hell?*

“Cool,” Connor said.

“Thanks Mrs. Murphy,” Evan said, trying to muster something like enthusiasm and not nervous breakdown into his voice. “I’ll call my mom at work.”

“Good,” Mrs. Murphy said. “You can have the TV in the living room if you like.”

Connor’s smile slipped a little then. “Am I still not allowed in the basement then?”

Mrs. Murphy’s smile wobbled too, and her eyes traveled to Evan and then back to Connor quickly. “It’s a compromise, Connor. We’re trying to meet you halfway.”

“My *Xbox* is down there…” He muttered, shrugging. “Living room is fine. Right Evan?”

“S-sure.”

Mrs. Murphy smiled uncertainly at them, then said something about making them popcorn if they wanted it later and headed back down the steps.

Evan meanwhile was shooting Connor an accusatory look. “Staying over?”

Connor frowned. “I know, it’s fucking lame. But she came up with it and was so excited I said I’d ask you.”

“You didn’t actually do that, you know,” Evan said hotly. Of fucking course Connor didn’t think to ask because nobody even bothered to ask what he wanted, nobody checked in on him it was always just assumptions that he’d do what he was told because he always, stupidly, did what he was told.

Connor shrugged. “We’re supposed to be pretending to be friends. Did you have better plans for tonight?”

Evan obviously didn’t, but that didn’t stop him from feeling… angry. Pissed off and irritable. “Look I said I’d pretend to be your friend, but that doesn’t mean that you get to just decide stuff for me, okay?”

Connor held his hands up as if in surrender, the same stubbornly bored expression on his face. “Noted.”

“Good,” Evan said, pulling his phone out. He texted, rather than called, his mom because she wasn’t allowed to be on her phone at work saying that he was staying at his new friend Connor’s house :) and that he’d be home in the morning.

Not that she’d be there.

"Why can’t you go in the basement?"

Connor shook his head, rolling his eyes. "They found a bong I'd stashed down there."

"Sorry."

"Dude, *stop.*"
His last sleepover had been at Jared’s. Freshman year.

He’d forgotten all of the rules and kept half expecting one of Connor’s parents to burst in on them watching a movie that neither of them were particularly interested in and announce, “AHA! We knew you were here because you’re in a weird suicide pact with my son! Begone from this place, elst we shall alert the authorities!”

….Evan was starting to get seriously weird in the head.

But he was doing his best to do normal sleepover things. Which felt off, considering that he was seventeen and he was pretty sure that Connor was eighteen already and did guys even have sleepovers at this age anymore? Was even agreeing to do this making him so very obviously socially inept to the Murphys? But seriously he didn’t even know if boys, if guys, still had sleepovers let alone at his age.

And then there was the popcorn thing.

Evan hated popcorn, but he couldn’t just say that he hated popcorn because that was rude, so he was eating it whenever Mrs. Murphy looked in on them, which meant that pieces of kernels kept getting stuck in his teeth. So he was sitting there, sucking his teeth to try to dislodge the pieces, not paying any attention to the movie they were watching, and meanwhile the whole time he had really had to pee but nobody had showed him where the bathroom was so he just kept eating popcorn and crossing and recrossing his legs, planning to just hold it until the Murphys went to sleep.

“Oh, Evan, I left a toothbrush out for you in the bathroom upstairs. And there is floss if you need it after the popcorn.”

“Thanks Mrs. Murphy.”

Connor rolled his eyes. “She’s probably going to stay up all night checking in on us. Sorry.”

“It’s fine.”

“What’s going on with you?” Connor said, looking at him. “You’re bouncing your leg so hard it’s shaking the couch. Don’t tell me that The Blair Witch Project is scary to you.”

“I uh…” Evan knew his face was a tomato, a red apple, a red balloon, a volcano about to blow. “I have to pee.”

Connor blinked a few times. “Bathroom’s right there.” He pointed out a room just off of the living room. Evan stared at it, surprised it had been there the whole time, face flushing, because how had he not noticed it? “Well go.”

Evan nodded, not even taking a second to apologize. Once in the bathroom he checked his phone, no new messages, and then peed and washed his hands thoroughly. In first grade he had gotten made fun of for not washing his hands properly at a birthday party his friend threw at a McDonald’s play place and then nobody would play in the ball pit with him so now he made sure to wash them twice so nobody had any reason to think he hadn’t washed his hands.

Evan walked as quietly as he could back into the living room. Connor hadn’t even paused the movie, which was fine by him since he wasn’t really invested in it. He kept losing the thread of the plot, all those kids lost in the woods because they didn’t have any wilderness survival skills, so it was nice to
just let it go and space out in front of the television.

Connor didn’t seem invested in the movie either. He was just kind of staring at his hands, and after a while he started to pick off little bits of black nail polish. Evan might have thought it was rude to left little flakes of nail polish all over the couch, but then again this was Connor’s house so he probably shouldn’t think too hard about it.

Which was definitely something Evan was good at.

Totally.
The slumber party part 2, cast removal, panic attacks, and picking a spot.

“Boys don’t stay up too late,” Mrs. Murphy said around midnight, turning out the light in the kitchen. “I’m going to head to bed.”

Evan bit his lip. As a little kid he would have expected to chime in on a chorus of half hearted “We won’t”s. But he said nothing. And neither did Connor.

“Connor?”

“Yeah mom. Got it. Night.”

She smiled and headed into a bedroom off of the living room.

A few minutes later. “Do you want to watch anything else?”

Evan shrugged.

Connor turned off the TV. “Let’s go upstairs.”

Evan’s heart jumped into his throat, because he realized that they were alone. Actually alone. Unsupervised. Was this it? Was this finally it? Evan wished he had been more prepared, thought ahead, maybe planned to wear a different outfit. He didn’t really love the idea that the Murphys would find him, that Zoe might be there, and then he started wondering if it was really true that you wet yourself when you died and would that still happen if he peed right before he did it. Plus the underwear he had were old and like, someone would see the underwear, if he had known it would be today he would have made sure to have done laundry the night before so he could be wearing a nicer pair which was stupid because who worried about the underwear he was wearing when his dead body was found it wasn’t like Zoe Murphy would see his underwear, even if Zoe Murphy found them, oh god then Zoe Murphy found them and he’d wet himself when he died, and he was wearing shitty underwear and then even in death Evan would be the laughing stock of his hometown.

“Is your sister home?”

Connor shrugged.

“Do you guys like, ever, talk?”


“J-just curious.”

“If you have a thing for my sister-”

“I don’t!”
“-Knock it off, because I don’t need to deal with that, so you can just-”

“I don’t! I don’t! I mean, I don’t, now, but I used to and I just... I’m sorry.”

Connor clenched his fists for about twenty seconds and then let go. “Whatever.”

“I’m sorry.”

“Don’t start on that,” Connor said. “Just don’t like, say creepy shit about my sister in front of me.”

“Okay. Sorry.”

Evan couldn’t sleep.

He was just staring up at the ceiling in Connor Murphy’s room. Just staring. In the corner there was a lone glow in the dark star, like there had been a lot stars in Connor’s room when he was a kid but someone had ripped them down. Or they had all fallen but one.

He tried to stay perfectly still, because the Murphys had set up an air mattress for him to sleep on. He was afraid if he moved it would squeak and creak and it would sound like he was like just laying there, letting out farts, which was literally his nightmare being blamed for that, which would wake Connor up and then he would think that Evan was super gross and then he’d probably tell everyone about how gross Evan was and then Evan would have to steal a car and drive as far away as possible and then probably drive it off a cliff but only if he didn’t give his mom’s car insurance because then she would have to pay for a funeral and to replace a car and then her rates would skyrocket and she’d have to drop out of school and then she’d lose the house and then she’d probably kill herself too.

He hadn’t really thought about how his mom would pay for a funeral. Maybe he ought to nudge her into taking out a life insurance policy on him.

Then again his dad probably already had one because it seemed just like his dad to cash in on Evan’s dying but never actually pay his child support on time.

Evan didn’t think Connor was sleeping either. But he didn’t think they were really in a place where he could just ask. Evan didn’t think he had ever been in that kind of place. Or that he would ever be.

The Murphy’s house smelled like expensive candles and freshly vacuumed carpets, which was nice in general but also made Evan feel too out of place to sleep. In his efforts not to move, he had clenched his jaw really tightly and it had been at least a few hours so now his whole face was starting to ache.

There was some squeaking above him, and Evan snapped his eyes shut immediately, and listened as Connor swung his long legs over the bed and then step carefully around the air mattress and then out of the bedroom. About a minute later, Evan heard a toilet flush and water running. Another minute, and the footsteps were back and held very still.

“You suck at pretending to be asleep.”

Evan jumped like a foot, and the air mattress squeaked under his weight, and he could barely catch his breath and then Connor flipped on the light by his bed.
“Sorry,” Connor muttered. Evan realized his had pulled his hair up into a knot at the back of his head which couldn’t be comfortable for sleeping so he probably really wasn’t sleeping either.

“H-how come you’re awake?”

Connor shrugged. “My parents are definitely asleep. I checked.”

“Oh okay…”

“So did you give any thought as to how you want to do it?”

Evan scooted off of the air mattress until he was sitting on the floor, legs a pretzel, in a pair of borrowed sweats. “I uh. I jumped before, but I don’t think I was high up enough.”

“So, jumping?”

Evan shrugged. “It doesn’t have to be, I dunno.” He fidgeted with his t-shirt, then looked up at Connor again. “How’d you try it before?”

“I tried to hang myself,” Connor said, pointing to the exposed brick wall and the exposed support beams that lined the ceiling. “They heard me kick the chair out from under me.”

Evan nodded. Swallowed. Tried not to be sad about these things. These failures. “So what were you thinking?”

Connor frowned. “Well a gun’s out, obviously. And pills too, unless you could get them?” He looked hopefully toward Evan, who shook his head.

“I’m…. they’ve given me Xanax a few time, but I go through it… My mom would notice if I asked for a refill too soon.”

“We could always try acetaminophen?”

Evan shook his head again. “Too risky. We could just end up with like… kidney p-problems.”

Connor nodded like, yeah, good point.

“Plus I don’t, uh, I don’t really want my mom to find us?”

“Fair enough.”

Mostly Evan just didn’t want to die choking on his own vomit. He had a thing about vomit, and he read up on suicide by overdose, and usually you pass out and then you throw up but you’re laying on your back so you just choke on the puke and drown in it.

“Wish we lived in California,” Connor muttered, “We could toss ourselves off the Golden Gate Bridge.”

“Suicide with a view,” Evan joked, and Connor actually almost smiled.

“You know,” Connor said, looking thoughtful. “There is that water tower just outside of town…. The one you see right after you cross the bridge to get to the apple orchard?”

Evan blinked at him, confused.

“The Autumn Smile apple orchard…?” Connor said. “Like, everyone’s parents made them go as a
“Well, you go over the bridge when you go to the mall…”

Evan knew that. He nodded. “Yeah I know the bridge.”

“I’ve just never noticed it before, sorry, I just haven’t been…”

“Anyway... The water tower. It’s at least a hundred feet up. Maybe higher.”

“Yeah,” Evan said, thinking about it. “Yeah I think you’re right.”

“Great. That’s settled then.” He almost-smiled at Evan.

Evan smiled back at him. “Yeah.”

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Connor had therapy on Saturdays. Or so he told Evan over breakfast in the Murphy’s sun soaked kitchen. He looked like shit; Evan had dropped off somewhere around three in the morning, exhaustion taking over in the end, but he didn’t think Connor had managed to sleep.

One positive side effect of taking a daily SSRI: drowsiness.

One negative side effect of skipping your daily SSRI to have an impromptu slumber party with your brand new suicide partner/pretend friend? Massive headache about an hour after waking up.

So Mrs. Murphy’s chirpy tones that seemed sort of nice, and charming the day before made Evan kind of want to throw things. Or throw up. He had barely touched the food in front of him.

Connor made better progress looking human. He managed to eat the French Toast put in front of him and even managed to answer his mother’s questions non-monosyllabically.

After breakfast, Mrs. Murphy herded Connor and Evan into the family SUV like a cheerful red haired sheepdog with a yoga mat strapped to her back.

“Evan, let me have your address to put into the GPS?”

Evan gave it to her, keeping his eyes trained on his sneakers.

“Will your parents be home?”

“My uh, my mom might be? She sometimes works on Saturday afternoons.”

“Well I’d love to meet her.”

“Yeah, great, if uh if she’s home I’ll um…” He swallowed. “Yeah. I’m sure she’d like to meet you too.”

About ten, mostly silent, minutes passed before they finally reached the outskirts of Evan’s neighborhood. As the GPS directed Mrs. Murphy to turn into his driveway, Connor looked back over the passenger seat like, really, this is your house?
It was small. There were only two bedrooms. Evan was glad they weren’t going inside; he knew that the counters were covered in old take out cartons and pizza boxes. They had branched out and gotten Indian food last week, but now the kitchen still had a lingering smell of turmeric and masala because Evan had forgotten to take the trash out on his way to school Friday morning and he knew his mom probably hadn’t realized it yet.

Thankfully when they pulled up, Evan saw his mom loitering nervously in the front window, and she waved and then walked out through the front door. Evan got out of the back seat fairly quickly, and was alarmed to see Mrs. Murphy was putting the car in park and getting out herself. He looked frantically at Connor who rolled his eyes, saying, “Mom could you maybe not be super weird about this? You’re embarrassing me.”

Unfortunately, teen angst was apparently no match for Connor’s mother’s optimism, and before Evan’s mother had even finished saying, “Hi honey, how was your night?” Mrs. Murphy was out of the car, smiling.

“You must be Mrs. Hansen.”

“Heidi, nice to meet you… uh…”

“Cynthia.”

They shook hands. Evan wished the gravel driveway would suddenly open up a sinkhole for him to disappear into.

“We were so pleased to meet your Evan.”

“Well I was so happy to hear that Evan was getting along so well with your Connor.”

Yep, Evan would really appreciate a lightning bolt to the face right now. He heard the door open, and Connor as he walked by, muttered, “Are we in fucking kindergarten?” before walking over to Evan’s mom and introducing himself.

After which Connor and Evan just standing there, awkwardly, waiting for the adults to stop talking.

On Saturday afternoon, Evan got his cast off. He wasn’t sad super sad to see Connor’s massive name gone from his arm.

Sunday morning, and Evan had already had had a panic attack over a scholarship essay contest that he wouldn’t even be alive to see the results of.

And then he’d locked himself in his bedroom, his mother outside, trying to be gentle, saying, “Honey, please come out, I promise it’s gonna be okay, it was just an idea.”

Essay topic: talk about a personal adversity that you have overcome.

His mom’s suggestion: write about his anxiety.

His body’s immediate reaction: nope, breathing normally? Out of the question.

Absolutely fucking not.
He had already dry swallowed a pill which would take effect soon, and he kept trying to slow his breathing. But. Evan. Hated. Thinking. About. Breathing.

Every doctor out there was always telling people with anxiety to take deep breaths, slow breaths, focus on your breathing on the rise and fall of your chest try guided meditation deep calming breaths.

Evan fucking hated that.

When he focused on his breathing he just got anxious about it. If it was too loud. To slow or fast. Did his breath smell? Did the room smell weird or was it just the way he was breathing? What if he didn’t focus on breathing and then he just stopped breathing, just all of a sudden, stopped breathing only he did it in front of his mom and then she totally freaked out and took him to the hospital which would cost thousands and then they’d throw him right into the psych ward, just toss him right in there, which would be another five thousand dollars, which only made him hyperventilate more and more and he was starting to get worried he would black out and his hands were trembling so hard he had dropped his phone when it chimed earlier.

His mom had stopped knocking so he knew he only had five minutes to get it together and show his face before she called 911.

He put his head between his knees, taking a few slow, shaky breaths.

He picked up his phone again, thinking he’d mindlessly scroll through twitter because sometimes that was mind numbing enough to calm him down, but when he unlocked the phone he saw that there was a facebook message from Connor.

“My mom is creaming her pants thinking about you coming over again.”

Thirty seconds later, a second: “I think if we lay low and just let our parents buy the friends thing, we should be in business.”

Then another, about three minutes later, “You are still planning to come over again, right?”

And finally, one from a minute ago, “We still need to pick a date.”

Evan took a few slow breaths. Then, slowly, he tapped out a reply. “Tomorrow after school?”

Less than a minute later, “Sure.”

Evan was fidgeting in the coffee shop around the corner from school, a pair of lattes in front of him. He had scoured his bedroom and found an old birthday card from his grandma with ten dollars stuffed inside, which he immediately blew on coffee for his suicide partner.

You know. Real casual.

“Hey,” Connor said, hands in his coat pocket. “I can’t stay long.”

“Oh-oh okay.”

Connor sighed, sinking into a seat. “It’s Zoe, she ratted me out about the cigarettes.”

“S-sorry, uh, that sucks, I’m sorry.”
“Yeah, so I’m grounded.”

“Sorry.”

Connor gave him a look. “It’s my fucking dad. He’s got it in his mind that my mom is too soft on me.”

“So how long?”

“Just a couple of days because mom took pity on me.”

Evan nodded, quickly, too many times because he was feeling weirdly pissed off that he didn’t actually have plans like he thought.

“So… a date?”

Evan shrugged, muttering, “Whatever, just, as soon as possible.”

Connor almost smiled. “Well, how long do you think you’d need to get your… stuff in order?”

Evan shrugged. “Maybe uh, I dunno, s-six weeks or maybe, maybe a month? I j-just… there’s a few things I want to do first.”

Connor nodded. “Yeah, yeah, good, that works.”

Evan looked up at Connor and Connor was almost smiling again. Evan noticed that Connor had massive bags under his eyes. And that Connor’s ears were both pierced, which he hadn’t noticed before. And that Connor’s long hair was lank and kind of greasy. Like he hadn’t washed it or showered at all in a while.

He didn’t look good.

He looked about as bad as Evan felt.

“Oh hey. You got your cast off,” Connor said suddenly.

Evan reflexively pulled back his bad arm, which still looked pale and shriveled next to his other arm. “Oh, uh. Yeah. Saturday.”

Connor nodded. “Cool.”

“Yeah, cool, thanks.”
At lunch on Wednesday, Connor very conspicuously dropped himself into a seat across from Evan in the library.

His nails were painted black again.

“Hey.”

“…Hi?”

“Do you eat lunch in here every day?”

“Yeah. Except Thursdays.”

Connor nodded. “So, do they like… let you take the books with you?”

Evan blinked. “It’s… it’s a library?”

“Cool cool cool,” Connor said, fidgeting with a loose string on his sleeve. “Do you have a bucket list?”

“Uh, um,” Evan said, his face flushing, “Could you maybe… maybe not talk so loudly?”

“Shit, am I being loud?” Connor said, even louder, which made Evan’s neck heat up too and he knew he was probably starting to sweat. He wiped his hands self consciously on his jeans.

“P-please…. Could you just, please, be quiet?”

Connor was looking at him way longer than was comfortable for Evan, and he was immediately self conscious about the clothes he was wearing from the blue t-shirt to the navy hoodie to the khakis. And then, with his heart pounding too loudly in his ears, Evan looked at Connor.

Whose eyes were so bloodshot they looked almost pink.

“Wait, Connor… you’re not. Are you? I mean, uh, I mean… are you high right now?”

Connor smiled then. Evan wasn’t sure he had ever seen him smile. Not really. “Bingo.”
Evan wanted to dissolve right then and there. “Connor, what happened to laying low and letting the pretend friends thing work on your parents?”

“I got bored in French,” Connor said with a shrug.

“Connor, come on,” Evan said, frustrated, grabbing his bag roughly. “Let’s go.”

Connor rolled his eyes, mumbling something like “yes mom,” and followed Evan out of the library, out the back doors of the school and into the empty quad. It was gray and rainy and sort of cold, so nobody else was out there.

Connor was pulling a joint from inside a pack of cigarettes.

“What the hell?!”

Connor shrugged. “What? We’re outside.”

“There’s like… cameras…”

He shrugged again. “Who gives a shit?” He flicked his lighter, but didn’t actually light it. “Want some?”

“No! No I do not want to smoke any of your drugs thank you,” Evan said, only it came out more like “nonoldon’twanttosmokeyourdrugsthankyouverymuchsorry.”

Connor was laughing at him.

And it was really fucking pissing Evan off.

“Knock it off.”


“I’m not… I’m…” Evan said, his mouth dry, his hands balled up into fists at his sides, really properly angry now. “I’m not the one sabotaging our entire plan because I can’t stop smoking weed.”

Connor blinked lazily. “You’re right,” he said, trying his best to keep a straight face. “I’m sorry, you’re right. My bad. Won’t do it again.”

“Thank you,” Evan said, mostly to his sneakers.

“So,” Connor said after a moment, flicking his lighter a few times. “Do you have a bucket list?”

Evan shrugged. “Not really. I’ve… It’s just that I’ve never really done anything so it feels sort of stupid to start now.”

Connor nodded lazily. “You’re right,” he said, trying his best to keep a straight face. “I’m sorry, you’re right. My bad. Won’t do it again.”

“Thank you,” Evan said, mostly to his sneakers.

“So,” Connor said after a moment, flicking his lighter a few times. “Do you have a bucket list?”

Evan shrugged. “Not really. I’ve… It’s just that I’ve never really done anything so it feels sort of stupid to start now.”

“What do you mean?”

“Well, I…” Evan cleared his throat, twisting the hem of his shirt. “It’s just. I’ve never done anything, like, I dunno, exciting or cool or whatever.” He ran his sweaty palm down the front of his shirt. “Never drank underage, never cut class, never stayed out all night, never kissed anyone, never I-I dunno, smoked pot.”

Connor nodded. “That’s… that’s kind of the saddest fucking thing I’ve ever heard.”

“Yeah well it’s my life so,” Evan snapped and then immediately regretted it, like he could see the
words flying out of his mouth and he tried, stupidly, to catch them and grab them back.

Connor was still playing with his lighter, not really making eye contact.

“Oh just… just smoke it, I don’t care.”

Connor almost smiled at him again. Took the joint back out, put it to his lips… and then looked at Evan. Not just looked at him, Looked At Him, like in capitals, like he was seeing something important which Evan knew was idiotic because there was nothing important about him.

“So you’ve never done… anything?”

“I just!” Evan yelped loudly, then cleared his voice, lowered it, tried again, “I just said I hadn’t.”

“So what’s stopping you from taking a hit off of this joint right now?”

Evan could think of at least eight thousand things stopping him. His mom’s face, the fact that he would absolutely look stupid doing it, all of those D.A.R.E. classes in junior high school.

“Fine.”

Connor blinked in surprise. “Wait, really?”

“Yeah. Yeah, really, I mean… Screw it. Sure.” He was just so keyed up, so angry, so lost and yeah, just, fuck it. Screw it. What did he have to lose?

Connor looked at him for a long second. “You’ve never smoked anything before.”

Evan shook his head.

“Okay, it can be sort of harsh… do you have, like, a water bottle?”

Evan pulled one from his backpack.

“Okay. So just. Don’t be over ambitious. Just inhale a little bit, but make sure you like actually inhale, not like… just pulling smoke into your mouth.”

“Sure, yeah,” Evan said, like yeah, he totally learned how to smoke drugs all the time, this was normal.

“Just like a tiny breath though, okay? And then blow it out. You’re definitely going to cough, which is why you need the water. Okay?”

“Sure.”

Connor passed the joint. “You’ll have to light it. Can you light it?”

“Yeah.”

“Okay, you’ll light it for a few seconds and then inhale. It’s not like a cigarette.”

Evan knew how to use a little bic lighter because his mom left them around the house for lighting candles. It took him a couple of tries before he manage to light it though. Light, hold, inhale.

It took him a few tries with shaking fingers, and then Connor, seeing how he was struggling said, “Look I’ll get it started and we can just pass it.”
Evan watched, eyes anxiously trained on the school half of the time, as Connor lit the joint, rotating it under the flame and after a few seconds look a short pull from it. Held it. Coughed a little. Exhaled. It smelled awful, like skunk spray. Connor took another puff, holding it and exhaling, and passed it over to Evan.

“Don’t inhale too much.”

“Okay.”

Evan put the joint to his lips, surprised that it wasn’t like coated in Connor’s drool. He blew out a nervous breath then inhaled.

And the need to cough was so instantaneous that he almost wasn’t positive he had inhaled at all.

“Tried to warn you,” Connor muttered, taking the joint back and handing Evan the bottle of water.

“I… fuck, I know.” He was bent double, still catching his breath, still coughing.

“Normally the rules say to let you hit it again. Like, puff puff pass, or whatever” Connor said, “But since we don’t have any other friends, I say fuck ‘em.” He took a hit. He held it out to Evan again. “If you want to?”

Perhaps embracing an idiotic defiant streak, Evan took it back. And tried again. A short inhale, almost like a gasp. And then an exhale, coughing again, but not as hard or as much.

Connor decided that that was probably enough, and Evan kept sort of waiting to see what would happen. He hadn’t thought to ask before what being high felt like. It couldn’t be terrible considering so many people did it.

But then.

Then.

Thenethenthethen his mouth felt wrong. Wrong. Like it wasn’t attached to his body. Like it was made out of steel wool.

“Is… is my mouth supposed to…?” Evan managed over a thick tongue.

“Yeah, sorry, cottonmouth. Drink some water.”

But the water didn’t help, it just made his mouth cold and still scorched dry.

Well if being high was just having an extra dry mouth, Evan thought it wasn’t worth the trouble.

He heard a bell ring.

“We should go inside.”

Connor nodded.

They didn’t move.

Which made Evan worry. Worry. Worrwrrrrrrrrr.

He scratched the back of his neck and his arms still worked so why couldn’t they move back into the school?
He tried to move his legs but they were just kind of there.

None of this was really happening. “I really need to go inside.”

“Okay, we’re going.”

Evan Hansen would not be the type of person who smoked pot on school grounds. It just wasn’t really happening. He’d fallen asleep in the library or something.

And why wasn’t he moving? Why were his legs just useless and not getting him where he needed to go.

It was a dream.

Evan nodded to himself. Nodded nodded nodded nodded nodded. A dream. A fever dream, a lucid dream, but there was definitely not really happening.

“Evan?”

“This isn’t happening,” he told Connor cheerfully, but then things suddenly seemed to shift and Connor was awfully close and Evan couldn’t feel his tongue and it was hard to breathe and he was really preoccupied with which direction was North so he started spinning around to try to figure out which way was North but he couldn’t tell because he hadn’t brought his compass he should have had his compass on him who leaves the house without a compass in a dream that wasn’t a dream.

“Connor,” he said, suddenly, his voice surprising himself. “This was fun but let’s stop now.”


“Let’s stop now. Let’s stop this. I don’t want to do this anymore.”

“Do what Evan? Being high?”

He was shaking his head now, grabbing at his shirt, “Don’t want to be in this dream anymore want to wake up I want to wake up I want it to stop.”

“Shit.”

He had wrapped his arms around himself and he wanted it to stop but Connor was looking at him funny, Connor was laughing at him and he wouldn’t turn it off he wouldn’t make it stop. “Stop laughing at me.”

“I’m sorry,” Connor said, “I’m just… I’m sorry. Are you okay?”

“No I’m not fucking okay I don’t know what way North is right now!”

“Come on,” Connor muttered, and he sort of pushed Evan through a dreamland forest of lots of rectangular trees or maybe they were lockers? But his mouth felt numb, like the dentist kind of numb, and he was really concerned about how his lips looked. Where they wetter than normal? Bigger? What if he was drooling but he couldn’t tell like that time he had had a filling done? Did people look at him and wonder about his massive mouth like he could fit a fist into his mouth but not when it was made of rubber like it was right now.

“Connor, what the hell?”

And now Zoe Murphy was there which was fucking perfect because nothing was better than being
spotting in the middle of a crisis about the size of your mouth.
“Zoe, fuck,” Connor tittered for a second, suddenly grabbing Evan by the back of the shirt when he tried to walk away, then tried again, “Shit. Okay. I got Evan high.”

“You did what?! ”

“Zoe, focus,” Connor said, “Let’s lecture later. He’s really freaking out.”

Rude. Evan thought. He’d like to see Connor remain calm when his face melted off and his lips were dentised and his tongue had definitely been replaced but he didn’t know how that had happened and he was pretty sure all of his blood was going to escape out of his body and what if he ran out of saliva and his mouth was dry for forever should he stop swallowing his spit because of the forthcoming mouth drought and he knew. He knew. He was high, he knew that, but, “I want it to stop.”

“I know.”

They were walking down the hall now and Evan had totally lost the thread of whatever it was they had been talking about and Zoe was saying something about needing to just let it pass and they were in a dark room now.

“Connor, make it stop.”

“I can’t, sorry.” Connor said, and then he was draping a blanket over Evan and wrapping him tight like a burrito in it, tight tight. “I’m sorry. This was a bad idea.”

Evan shrugged his shoulders, like eh, like no it’s cool man, but really he just wanted this to stop and he was waiting patiently for Connor to stop it.

“The high should wear off soon,” Connor mumbled, and then he handed Evan a bottle of water and lollipop. “That might help with the cotton mouth.”

“You’re not leaving?”

“No, I’m not leaving.”

“I just want it to stop.”

“I know. I’m sorry. Bad idea. I fucked up.”

“Was Zoe here?”

Connor nodded. “She stashed us in the auditorium while she figures out how we can get you home.”

“Oh.”

“It’s gonna be fine. It’ll wear off.”

“Okay.”

“So that’s two things,” Connor said.

“Sorry?”

“Two things off your list. Cutting class and smoking pot.”

Evan laughed. A little too loudly and too manic and then he wasn’t sure why he was laughing.
“I feel like a burrito.”

“Jealous. I’ve always wanted to be a burrito.”

“Why do you do this?” Evan wanted to know.

Connor shrugged. “It calms me down. I guess I didn’t realize it would somehow make you more high strung.”

Evan snorted. “My mouth feels like a dentist appointment.”

Connor laughed then.

“Do you have a bucket list?”

Connor shrugged. “I’ll tell you when you’re older.”

“I’m older now!”

Connor cracked up which cracked Evan right up and they were still laughing when Zoe came to get them and take them both home.
Chapter Summary

Heidi's nervous, Evan likes it when Connor mopes, and Connor had a Grey's Anatomy phase.

He ended up going to the Murphys’ house after school because Zoe determined he was still too high to be seen by his mother. She also insisted on spraying both Evan and Connor with a travel size Febreeze before letting them into her car.

Which made Connor surly.

Which only made Evan more anxious. They were absolutely going to get caught by the Murphys. There wasn’t the faintest chance they were getting away with this, and the Murphys would like, blame Evan, and then they’d call the cops on him and Evan would go to prison where he’d have to be put in solitary for his own protection because he was so skinny and defenseless that he would get beat up on the very first day he was in prison and then his mom would have to take time off of work or school to visit him on jail and then she would get a flat tire on her way to the prison two hours away and get picked up by a serial killer who would torture and murder her but then he would get caught and sent to the same prison as Evan and even though Evan was in solitary he would find him and torture him only nobody would hear him screaming because the corrections officer on that day was hard of hearing so Evan’s body would be bloated and gross before anyone even noticed he was gone.

“Dude, are you okay?”

Evan shook his head, then shrugged, and Connor….

Squeezed his shoulder.

Evan sort of stilled, blinking, waiting for Connor to move his hand away.

It took him a moment.

“Sorry again,” Connor mumbled, looking away.

“You’ve been at Connor’s a lot this week,” Evan’s mom said as he got home on Thursday night. He had eaten dinner at the Murphys again.

“Oh, uh, yeah.”

“You know Connor could come over here too,” His mom said, giving him an encouraging smile.

“I uh… his parents. He got into some trouble earlier this year and I, uh, I don’t know if he could come over since, you know, you’re not usually here.”

His mom’s smile sort of wilted. Damn it. “Well, what if I bagged my shift tomorrow night we we do tacos or something?”
Evan nodded, smiling, trying to not be such a disappointment. “Okay, yeah, I’ll… I’ll ask him.”

He headed up to his bedroom, frowning, and once inside pulled open his laptop and sent Connor a facebook message. “My mom is being weird because you haven’t come over.”

A second later, “Damn it.”

Evan responded, “Is there any chance your parents would let you?”

Connor’s icon was displaying the three dots meaning he was typing for a long second. Then it disappeared. Then it came back again. Then: “I’ll ask.”

“Thanks.”

Ten minutes passed.

Twenty.

Evan realized distantly that he didn’t even have Connor’s phone number.

Half an hour. His mom had left for class already, a twenty on the counter for dinner. He was trying to decide if he needed to eat. He’d had a granola bar at lunch, and eating it had been such a process, all of that chewing….

He walked away from his computer, going to check out the kitchen. There was a freezer burnt bag of pizza rolls in the back of the freezer. The fridge was worse; just a bad of salad mix that had already started to go brown. He’d have to order something if he wanted to eat. Which meant getting change from the delivery guy.

Nightmare.

But suddenly he was so damn starving it was all he could focus on. He rushed back to his room, selecting the pizza place from his favorites and ordering a large pizza before he could even worry himself into a tizzy over waiting for the delivery guy to make change.

He checked facebook again. Still nothing from Connor.

So he did some homework.

The pizza guy arrived, and he paid him. He just sort of chatted awkwardly about the weather while the guy made change and then Evan gave him a big tip because the guy hadn’t looked at him weird at all.

He walked into the living room and switched on the television while he ate, pretending he was normal. Maybe that he was some college kid, already twenty, who had an apartment and who liked to eat by themself because it was their only free time because they were so involved. Like Alana levels of involved in things. Who had tons and tons of friends which also sucked up free time. And getting a night a lone, eating a pizza, was a luxury.

Connor never messaged him back.
Friday at school.

No Connor. He just hadn’t shown up.

Evan had texted his mom saying Connor was out sick and that maybe they should plan for another night for tacos. Evan chewed his nails in class, shook his foot, anxious and worried and angry because what if Connor had done it without him?

What if after the pot thing he just decide Evan wasn’t worth it and just did it without him? What if he just abandoned Evan to do this alone?

Someone would have told him if Connor was dead by now, right?

Right?

Like he would know, Zoe or someone would tell him, it would be on twitter right? Someone would have told him by now. He was certain. He was positive.

He wished he had Connor’s fucking number.

It was a long day.

Really fucking long.

And then right before fifth hour, while Evan was putting a few books back into his locker, a voice. That made him jump about fifteen feet and crack his head on the ceiling.

“S-sorry, what?”

It was Zoe Murphy, biting her lip. “Hey Evan.”

“Hi Zoe.”

She sighed. “I can’t believe I’m doing this… but.” She put a hand through her hair while Evan felt like his heart was going to beat right out of his chest, just out onto the floor where it would hippity hop across the linoleum. “Connor asked me to give this to you before I left this morning…” She handed him a folded up piece of paper.

“Doesn’t he have a phone?”

Zoe rolled her eyes. “No, my dad’s decided that the only way to control him is to take away all of his stuff.”

Evan nodded. “No phone, no car.”

“No door to his bedroom,” Zoe added, shaking her head. “Plus dad took his laptop now too after he skipped a therapy session.”

“Oh.”

“Yeah. It’s pretty stupid.”

“Was he sick today?”
Zoe smiled. “Doubt it, but he’s always been able to worm his way out of school when he didn’t want to go.”

“W-wish I had that power.”

Zoe chuckled, nodding.

Evan stared down at his shoes.

“Evan are you okay?”

“Yeah!” He practically shouted at her, so he cleared his throat and tried again, “Yeah I’m fine why do you ask?” (“Yeah I’m FINE why do you ask?”)

“Well I just,” She shrugged. “I’m surprised to see you hanging around Connor. And then the thing the other day.”

Where Evan had gotten high and made an absolute fool of himself.

“Yeah, heh, I, um… I don’t usually do that.”

“Good. Maybe try to peer pressure Connor then, not the other way around.”

“Great idea, uh, I’ll um. I’ll try that.”

Zoe smiled. “My parents are glad to see you coming over, so I didn’t tell them about that.”

“Thanks.”

“Well,” She said, looking past him down the hall. “I should get going.”

“Uh, yeah, me too.”

Zoe waved and Evan waved back and for about thirteen seconds he let himself imagine an alternate universe where he and Zoe Murphy dated, liked each other, kissed.

Not fucking likely.

“What did Zoe Murphy just give you?” Jared Kleinman asked, appearing almost out of thin air.

“What?” Evan said, shaking his head. “She didn’t give me anything, why do you think she gave me something?”

“I saw her hand you a piece of paper, man.”

“Oh. Right.” Evan was going to give himself a brain bleed with how hard he was hoping to just evaporate on the spot. “It was just something from Connor…”

“Oh how could I forget? You only have eyes for Connor Murphy these days.”

Evan glared at Jared. “Shut up.”

“Come on, was it a love note?”

Evan shook his head. “I don’t… What? No!”

“Dude, I was kidding. Chill.”
“Whatever Jared, I’ve got to get to class…”

“Alright man, say hi to your new boyfriend for me.”

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Evan,

Sorry, needed a personal day. Please apologize to your mom for me. Another time?

(Aren’t I getting so good at sounding functional?)

If you’re free, let’s hang out on Sunday. Just come over whenever since I’m being forced into Amishness.

Connor

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On Sunday, Evan’s mother had asked again about when Connor was planning to come over for dinner which just rattled him on his way out the door.

Why were they waiting again?

It seemed that Connor could do whatever he wanted as long as he wasn’t at home. They should just cut class and do it. Get it over with.

He said as much once he got up into Connor’s room.

Connor sighed. “I have a couple of things to do first.”

“Like what?” Evan mumbled. “Get a tattoo? Smoke more weed? What is it?”

“Actually a tattoo’s not a bad idea, my dad would absolutely lose his head,” Connor said, sounding a little amused.

“Stop fucking joking around about this.”

“Keep it down,” Connor warned.

“Zoe’s the only one home,” Evan said, feeling himself flushing.

“Yeah, but that’s because she’s my babysitter. So she’s probably sitting in her room eavesdropping. ISN’T THAT RIGHT, ZO?”

From Zoe’s room: “BLOW ME, CONNOR.”

Evan looked at him strangely. “Siblings are weird.”

“Don’t you have any?”

Evan shrugged. “I guess, technically, but like I don’t really know them. My dad has kids with his new wife, so I guess that makes them like my half siblings or whatever but I don’t really know them and they’re a lot younger than me.”
“Hmm.”

Evan sighed. “Look, if you want to wait then you’re going to have to… you’ll have to come over and have dinner with my mom. I’ve held up my part, I’ve made it look like we hang out all the time for your parents, but my mom is like… hovering which is really frustrating so if you could just if you could please just help me out and come to dinner?”

Connor nodded. “Yeah.”

Evan let out a breath, a little relieved.

“That’s it.”

Evan’s head snapped to attention. He’d been sitting on the floor, fiddling with his phone in Connor’s room, while Connor flipped through a book on his bed. He looked up too.

Zoe was standing in the door, wearing a pair of ripped jeans with a bunch of stars scribbled on the cuffs and a white t-shirt. “You guys are bummering me out.”

Connor raise an eyebrow at her. “Oh, I’m sorry. Didn’t realize we were meant to entertain.”

Evan just fiddled with a string on his sock.

“Well I’m stuck babysitting you, so it would be nice if you did something other than mope around when you have a friend over.”

“Evan likes it when I mope. Don’t you?”

“I, uh, I…”

“Nobody likes it when you mope,” Zoe said, shaking her head. “We’re gonna dance it out.”

Evan looked at Connor, panicked, because if that meant what he thought he needed to leave so fast he was absolutely not dancing and definitely not in front of Connor and Zoe he might be willing to die in front of Connor but dancing was absolutely out of the question no chance. Connor groaned. “Zoe, knock it off.”

“No. We’re doing it.”

“Absolutely not.”

“Please?”

“This isn’t my Grey’s Anatomy phase anymore, Zoe, we’re not dancing it out.”

Evan was still trying to puzzle through Connor Murphy having a Grey’s Anatomy phase but then Zoe was pulling him to his feet saying, “Come on Evan, help me out.”

“Oh, n-no, I don’t, I c-can’t…”

“Yes, you can, come on, we’re doing it.” She was pulling her phone from her pocket, and then pulled it into the stereo in the corner of Connor’s room and Evan kept trying to develop the ability to
blend into the wall.

Connor rolled his eyes, raking a hand through his long hair. “Fucking hell, Zoe, knock it off.”

She didn’t react, just turned up the volume on that old Kesha song “Die Young.”

Which sort of made Evan’s lips twitch at the irony. If only she knew.

“See, Evan’s into Ke$ha!” Zoe said, and then she sort of bounced over to him and started mostly just, he didn’t know, jumping and then she grabbed him, moving his shoulders with hers, and he was so uncomfortable that he started laughing because it was laugh or cry and he was not going to fucking cry in front of Connor no matter how pathetic he got, and then Connor rolled his eyes and got out of bed. Stood up.

Zoe whooped in victory.

He mostly just nodded his head, rolling his eyes, like obviously he was way too cool for this, but then Zoe started to badly rap along to some of the words and Connor almost smiled and Evan was laughing and by the time it got to the last chorus they were all jumping and clapping and laughing while they sang along, acting so fucking crazy, like batshit out of their minds crazy, acting like children, but Evan didn’t have time to feel self conscious because Zoe and Connor were both acting crazy too and that was way more interesting to watch.

The song switched and then Evan did feel his face flame, because, of course it was S&M by Rihanna and now he was dancing with Zoe and Connor while they were both sort of mumbling the words and then Zoe said something about how red he was getting and Evan just got ready, because he was going to have a panic attack. He was absolutely without a doubt going to have a panic attack.

But.

Then.

He didn’t.

And Connor was sort of spinning his sister in a sloppy ballroom turn and then he spun Evan too, and Evan just started cracking up because not even when he was high could he have concocted a situation where he was dancing with Connor Murphy while singing along to a song about rough sex. The whole thing made Evan want to blush, but he couldn’t focus because Connor was jumping like a crazy person and like headbanging like it was a metal song and Zoe was strutting around but not like sexy like she was making fun of people who thought they were sexy and then the song flipped again and they had completely lost track of time and they were in the middle of an impromptu routine to “Bang Bang,” which involved a lot of jumping and arm waving and Connor was sort of rapping the Nicki Minaj bit, and then Mr. Murphy, Mr. Please-call-me-Larry-Murphy was standing in the doorway.

And they all stopped immediately, breathless but suddenly sober. Zoe switched off the music. Evan’s heart thudded so loudly in his chest he was certain that everyone could hear it.

“Dance party?” Mr. Murphy asked.

“Yeah,” Zoe said.

“See you painted your nails again,” Mr. Murphy said to Connor.

“Yup,” Connor said, but his face was already so guarded, “Problem?”
“No.” His father looked around the room uncertainly. “I’m... glad you were having a good time.”

Connor crossed his arms over his chest, still breathing heavily, and Evan started to focus in a little too much on the rise and fall of Connor’s chest because it was like just then hitting him that there would soon come a day when that chest was totally still, when his own chest was totally still, and it would Evan’s fault.

He wasn’t saying that he thought this made him a murderer.

But looking at Connor’s flushed face and moving chest and twitching fingers made him feel strangely responsible. Like they were too nice not to exist, even once Evan didn’t exist.

Evan then felt his face flush, because, oh my god, was he now just sitting there thinking gay things about Connor Murphy in front of Connor Murphy? He was like a class A freak, he was a disaster, and he needed to get out of there.

“Oh, um, s-sorry, I have to head out...” He said, suddenly, too loud, and he stooped to pick up his phone from the floor.

“You’re not staying for dinner?” Mr. Murphy asked.

“N-no, not tonight, s-sorry.”

Connor was looking at him strangely, then. “I’ll walk you out.”

“Connor,” His father said.

“I said I’d walk him out, not that I’d walk him home, Jesus.”

“N-no, it’s fine Connor, I just, it’s just that I have plans to um, I’ve just got to talk to my mom about a thing, um, a scholarship thing, so um. An-anyway, I’ll just be going...”

He zipped around Mr. Murphy and down the stairs, hearing as he did Connor saying, “Why the fuck did you have to make it all weird? Now he’s leaving!”

Evan was struggling to pull on his shoes, wishing he could block his ears, hearing, “Connor, I’m glad you’ve made a friend but I’m not sure this is the most appropriate behavior. You were meant to be studying when Evan came over not screwing around with choreography..”

He was struggling with his shoe laces, hoping to escape before someone tried to talk to him again, and Zoe was involved now, shouting, “Dad, it was my idea. We were just messing around for like ten minutes! You don’t need to freak out.”

Evan heard Mr. Murphy start to say something, but he was already out the door.
Chapter Summary

Evan gave Connor a quick twitchy smile. “Do you believe in Hell?”

Connor’s smirk vanished. “I do.”

“Oh.”

“I’m pretty sure this is it.”

Lowkey-soft Connor is a little less lowkey. Jared is there. Evan drives a car.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

A few minutes after he left, walking quickly, Evan heard hard, heavy footsteps behind him. He wanted to bolt, wanted to run, wanted to disappear…

It was Connor. Of course.

“Hey.”

“Hey.”

“Why’d you bolt?”

Evan shrugged. “Your dad… seemed upset.”

Connor rolled his eyes. “Yeah, well, he’s just like that around me. Don’t take it personally.”

Evan nodded. “Isn’t he going to get super pissed that you’re out here unsupervised?”

Connor shrugged. “Screw him.”

“But what about laying low and… and…”

Connor smiled. “Sorry, maybe I should have explained. For me, this is laying low.”

“Oh.”

“Can we go to your house?”

Evan shrugged. “I mean, we don’t have to. We probably have about five minutes before your parents catch up… we could…” He sort of nodded his head vaguely west, where the water tower was.

Connor shrugged. “That’s a helluva walk.”

“I guess.”
“Plus I’ve got a few things I still need to do.”

Evan bit his lip. “Are you ever going to tell me any of those things?”

Connor shrugged. “It’s sort of… Private.”

Evan scratched at the side of his face. “I told you some of mine…”

“You did.”

“So….”

“So?”

“Come on, give me at least one.”

Connor rolled his eyes. “Let’s go to your house.”

“I mean, it’s not… it’s not as big as yours.”

“So?”

“And my mom has a night class so-so nobody’s home.”

“That’s fine.”

Evan looked at his shoes. “We don’t have cable.”

Connor shrugged. “I don’t really watch TV.”

“Why do you want to go to my house so badly?”

“Why don’t you want me to come over so badly?”

“I-I-I don’t know, I just!” Evan shouted, then cleared his throat, then muttered, “I don’t know I just… nobody’s ever come over other than Jared and only when his parents have guilted him into or-or threatened to stop paying his car insurance.”

Connor blinked. “That’s fucked up.”

Evan shrugged.

“I’m not going to like… con you into throwing a kegger, Hansen. We both know that you’re the social one of this duo.”

“Why do you keep talking like that?” Evan shouted.

“Like what?”

“Like we’re… like we’ve… We’re not friends Connor.” He pinched the hem of his t-shirt tightly between his fingers. “We’re just… pretending. Trust me, I know, because literally nobody would want to be friends with me, so could you just knock it off. We don’t need to hang out. We’re not friends.”

Connor swallowed. “I know that.”

“Then…”
“Well maybe I don’t want to spend my last few weeks feeling like shit about not having friends or whatever? Maybe it’s just nice for me to pretend a little, okay? Would it kill you to go along with it?”

Evan found himself speechless and uncertain. “I… Sorry, okay. I’m sorry.”

“I don’t have friends either, okay? So maybe I just wanted to… Maybe this is as close as I’ll get.”

“Sorry.”

Connor looked pretty awkward standing in Evan’s kitchen.

Like he was too tall for it.

There was a note on the fridge already, “Money for dinner. Please make sure you eat tonight honey. XOXO Mom” with a $20 stuck to it with a magnet.

Evan wrinkled his nose at it, thinking that maybe he wouldn’t have to worry so much about paying for college if his mom didn’t tell him to get take out every night.

Not that he was bitter or anything.

“Any chance your mom’s hiding liquor anywhere?”

Evan shrugged. “I doubt it.”

Connor frowned. “Well, we’ll have to find you some liquor before next month.”

Evan was frowning. “Why?”

“Well you didn’t give me an official bucket list, but, I think it was on the impromptu one you listed off the other day.”

Evan recalled. Vividly. He had to lie to his mom to get him to email his teachers, claiming she forgot to call him out for a doctor’s appointment. She thought he had just had a panic attack.

Evan needed to be careful about that lie, because it made it sound like he was having more than he actually was, which would just worry his mom more.

“So where’s your room?”

Evan led them out of the kitchen and into his room with the single bed.

Connor looked around like he was interested which Evan thought was sort of weird. He wondered if Connor would judge him for his tree prints and the calendar of national parks. He wondered if there was anything he could do that would cause Connor to unpick him for their suicide mission.


“Yeah.”

“Feels almost like it’s going to take forever.”

“Hmm.”
Evan took a seat on his bed, legs crossed. Connor kept looking around.

“Should I let your mom or someone know where you are?”

Connor looked at him funny. “You’re awfully responsible for someone who’s suicidal.”

Evan frowned. “I just…” He twisted his fingers together. “I just don’t want to mess this up and I know that your parents are just really worried about you and so, so is Zoe she’d never say it but she’s worried too.”

Connor squinted at him. “Are you Catholic?”

Evan shook his head.

“Jewish?”

“Not to my knowledge. I wasn’t really raised religious. Why?”

Connor smirked. “Just trying to figure out why you always sound so guilty.”

Evan smiled nervously, twitchy smile. “Wh-what about you?”

“Hm?”

“Do you ever feel guilty?”

Connor turned to look at him. “I don’t really feel much of anything anymore.”

“Really?” Evan bit his lip, wondering what that was like. He felt too much. All the time.

Connor shrugged. “I dunno. Before… before I was like this I was like always wracked with guilt. You should have heard my confession to a priest in the second grade.” He rolled his eyes, putting on a high, childish voice, “‘Forgive me Father for I have sinned, I threw a printer at my teacher, am I going to Hell?’”

Evan gave him a quick twitchy smile. “Do you believe in Hell?”

Connor’s smirk vanished. “I do.”

“Oh.”

“I’m pretty sure this is it.”

Because Connor apparently didn’t feel things besides the second grade variety of guilt, Evan made him responsible for giving the pizza delivery driver the cash while he went to wash his hands.

He didn’t expect to find Connor to be standing stock still, fists balled over a crumpled twenty dollar bill, back against the door breathing unevenly.

“What’s up?” Evan asked because “Are you okay?” seemed wildly inappropriate.

Connor’s unfurled his hands and Evan saw that they were shaking. “You sent me out there to mess with me, right?”

Evan shook his head. “N-no…”

Connor was shaking his head “That wasn’t a pizza guy.”
Evan shook his head because, well, who else could it have possibly been?

“You invited Jared Fucking Kleinman over. When I was here. You did it to make fun of me right? And now he saw me here, at your fucking house, which means you wanted him to! You told me to go outside so you and your buddy could laugh at me…” Connor had his hands in fists again. “This is a joke to you, right? This-this whole thing is a fucking joke to you and… and you’re probably telling him all about it behind my back? Huh? Is that what you’re doing? How fucking funny it would be to hang out with someone until he killed himself, right? Right?”

“No!” Evan shouted, trying to peer out the window, “No. Connor. I swear. I wouldn’t. I d-didn’t know Jared was coming over I…”

The doorbell rang again.

And Jared’s voice followed, “Not to make it weird, but you kinda locked me out here with the pizza guy.”

Evan froze. There was Connor, looking like he was about to throw Evan through a window. There was Jared, who didn’t seem to realize he was ruining everything. There was a pizza that he couldn’t get to.

Evan took a steadying breath. “Connor,” he said, firmly. “I didn’t know Jared was coming over.”

“Sure, right.”

“No, no, really…” He pulled his phone from the pocket of his jeans. “I swear. Here, look, I’ll show you my messages.” His texts from that day went Mom at 12:45pm, Mom at 3:00pm, Mom at 4:15 (“On my break! Please make sure you eat something tonight honey!”). The last text from Jared was over a week old, asking about a Spanish assignment. “I promise. I’m not messing with you. I don’t know why Jared is here. Please.”

Connor, still frowning, shoved the twenty dollar bill into Evan’s chest and took a seat on the sofa.

Evan shook out his hands, took a deep breath then pulled the door open. “Hi, sorry,” He mumbled to the pizza guy, handing over the cash and accepting the pizza box. “Keep the change.”

Evan looked over at Jared who looked incredibly amused. “So, you’re actually banging Connor Murphy?”

“I’m, what? No!”

“Dude he like went into a jealous rage just now when I showed up.”

“That’s not what happened –”

“Tell me, Dylan Klebold, are you and Eric Harris planning to party at school on 4/20? Should I take off that day, because you I’ve gotten into a few colleges and it would be nice to actually go to-”

“JARED SHUT UP.” Evan shouted it so loudly that it seemed to echo. Jared took a step back.

“Chill out, bro. I was just kidding.”

“It’s not… it’s not funny, al-alright?” Evan said. “You’ve been making fun of Connor for like te-ten years now and you know what-what I think? I think it’s because he’s one of the two kids less popular than you in our grade. And, and, you don’t have to be nice to him so that your parents pay
your car insurance.”

“Dude, calm down, it was just a joke…” Jared looked thoroughly befuddled. “Does this mean I can’t have your AP Psych notes then?”

Evan shook his head. “Why didn’t you just facebook message me?”

“I did!” Jared said, shaking his head. “Like five times, but you never responded. Besides, you literally always answer right away, and you’re literally always home. I wanted to check to make sure you weren’t, like, dead or something… considering who you’re hanging around with.”

“Fuck you, Jared.”

“Jesus Evan, come on!”

“I’ll email you the notes later okay?” Evan said, turning back into the house, gripping the pizza box too tightly.

Connor was still on the couch. He had taken his boots off. And wrapped his arms around his knees. He was so lanky that he practically just folded in half.

Evan sat the pizza down on the coffee table.

He let out a sigh.

Connor didn’t move.

So Evan switched on the television and they watched the weather report. Eventually he decided that he was hungry, so he kept the news on and ate a slice of pizza.

“Do you want some pizza?”

It was the only thing he could think of to say to Connor.

“You just defended me to Jared Kleinman.”

“Yeah.”

“I thought he was your friend?”

Evan shrugged. “Family friend. Or so he likes to remind me. I dunno.”

“You didn’t have to do that.”

“I know.”

“I get the, uh, the, uh… jokes a lot too. About like, um, shooting up the school or whatever.”

“That’s… that’s fucked up.”

“I’m used to it.”

No you’re not, Evan wanted to insist. If you were you wouldn’t have freaked out.

“Sorry.”

“It’s fine.”
“Do you want to eat any of this?” He nodded to the pizza.

“No.”

“I’m sorry about the jokes. That's not funny. It’s… it’s really f-fucked up.”

Connor’s lips twitched. “You don’t really swear a lot, do you?”

“No, I...why?”

Connor looked over at him like maybe Evan was missing something important. “You always stutter a little when you do. Like you’re not sure you should say it.”

“Funny,” Evan said, sighing. “I’m never really sure I should say anything.”

The weather rolled into a local story which rolled into sports, but Evan didn’t switch off the television. The sun sank in the sky and the only light was from the TV.

“I want to fix things with my sister,” Connor said abruptly. Evan almost jumped, but he was starting to get used to being around Connor.

“Sorry?”

“That’s on my bucket list.”

“Oh.” Evan was surprised.

“She hates me.” Connor sighed. “I don’t blame her.”

Evan thought of her throwing an impromptu dance party with them earlier. He wasn’t sure that looked like hating someone. “Okay…?”

“I want us to have, like… One good day. You know? Like if we can have a good day then maybe it won’t be so…”

“Yeah.”

Evan woke up with a jolt as the lights flicked on.

“Honey, did you… oh.”

Evan looked from his mother to where her gaze was focused and it was on Connor, asleep, head bent forward on the other end of the couch.

“S-sorry,” Evan said, “Uh. Um. Connor came over for a bit… he uh… didn’t know you were at work or, uh, but I guess we fell asleep?”

“What?” Connor jerked awake then. He looked around wildly, like he didn’t know where he was, which made Evan realize that these were pretty unfamiliar surroundings for him.

“We fell asleep,” Evan said to Connor, perhaps a little pointedly.

Connor blinked. Then looked up at Evan’s mom. Then tried to smile but it came out all wrinkled and weird. “Hi Mrs. Hansen.”

“Heidi, please,” She said, and Evan realized his mom was smiling. “You ordered pizza?”
“Yeah.”

“And you were just… watching TV?”

“Yeah, uh, I guess. And um…” He was looking for something else to give his mom, something to make her keep smiling. “Jared came over to get some notes from me too.”

That worked like a charm. His mom’s face split with happiness. She just looked so pleased, Evan felt a sinking in his stomach when he realized how much he was going to disappoint her so soon.

“Well, it’s ten o’clock…I imagine Connor’s parents want him home soon. School night.”

“Oh uh. Yeah.”

“Do you want me to drive…” She asked, fiddling with her keys.

“No, no, I can do it.”

Heidi gave him a surprised look. “You sure honey?”

“Yeah, I’m sure.”

He took the keys from his mom and very specifically did NOT look back at Connor. He unlocked his mom’s car and got in and adjusted the driver’s seat because his legs were a lot longer than his mom’s.

Connor got into the passenger seat. “Do you not like drive normally?”

Evan turned the key in the ignition and turned down the talk show his mom had been listening too. “No, I… I passed the driver’s test but I uh. Started having panic attacks driving, for a while, so I uh. Don’t drive that much.”

“Right.”

Evan put his seatbelt on. Flipped on the headlights. “Seat belt,” Evan muttered.

Connor sighed. “It’s only delaying the inevitable if we get into an accident.”

“I know, but, my mom…”

“Fine, fine,” Connor said, pulling the seatbelt across his chest.

But Evan was trying very hard not to think about Connor’s chest after his weird brain confusion earlier.

Connor’s head was sort of down, Evan noticed when checking the passenger side mirror when he was pulling out of the driveway slowly. He wondered what was going on in his head. It probably wasn’t pretty, but it didn’t stop Evan’s curiosity.

“Thanks for uh… telling me more about your bucket list.”

“Oh, uh, sure. Yeah.”

More silence. They turned off Evan’s street.

“I can’t believe we fell asleep,” Evan said, shaking his head.
“That is not going to help the gay rumors.”

“There are gay rumors?” Evan asked, surprised, because normally he was so concerned about how he came across that he was always eavesdropping on gossip.

“Yeah,” Connor said.

“Well… I guess there are worse things for people to say about you.”

Another silence.

“Sorry I freaked out before…” Connor said in this voice that was so soft Evan might not have thought it belonged to Connor if he weren’t sitting beside him.

“Don’t worry about it. Besides, now we’re even.”

“Even?”

“You dealt with my uh… pot freakout.”

Connor snorted. “Pot freakout?”

“My… weed meltdown? My, uh, reefer madness?”

Connor laughed again. “Dude, you are such a dork.”

“I know.”

But then Connor laughed and Evan laughed and it was almost like having a friend.

Chapter End Notes

So I'm really sorry that Jared comes across sort of like a dick? I just? I feel like, based on "Good For You" he'd probably be pretty jealous if Evan started hanging out with someone else? Forgive him; he doesn't have the whole picture.
On Monday morning, Connor found Evan in the parking lot.

In a car Evan had never seen before. It was nondescript and quiet and blue and not at all what he imagined Connor would drive. Connor parked then hopped out. He was wearing sunglasses. Evan was so confused.

“You have your own car?”
Connor nodded. “Yeah. My parents had been making Zoe and I share, but then they got her a car for her seventeenth birthday, and then they took my car away because I was a danger to myself, but I got it back.”

“How?”

Connor gave him this sort of wolfish smirk. “My mom finally won the fight with my dad. Car, phone, and laptop have all been returned to me.”

“And the door to your room?”

“It’s a work in progress,” Connor said.

“What do you have to do to keep it?” Evan asked, hoping, wondering, that it was something simple because if it was simple then they would be set. They would have car that wasn’t borrowed to take off in. A way out. A real way out.

Evan felt the tight ball of anxiety that was curled up just under his diaphragm relax just a little, just enough, and he could breathe. Easily.

Connor smirked. “I can’t cut class or skip therapy for a whole week.”

“Can you manage?”

“I’ll do my best.”

They laughed. They were doing that a lot, Evan realized. He sort of liked that.

“So what’s your phone number?”

Evan looked at him in surprise. “We see each other like every day at school.”

“Yeah… but what’s your phone number?”
Evan told him; Connor typed it into his iPhone.

“Okay I just texted you,” Connor said to Evan.

Evan pulled out his phone, and it vibrated a second later. Then there it was: a text from an unknown number that said “what up bitch” with about fifteen emojis after it, two of which were squirt guns and three were pizza.

“What the hell?” Evan said, laughing at the text.

“I’m shit at texting.”

“Me too, but all of those emojis?”

Connor laughed so Evan laughed and then the bell rang and Evan had to go sit through AP Psych with Jared. And… And...

“What class do you have now?”

“Shop,” Connor said.

“Shop?” Evan repeated, brow furrowed because that did not make one iota of sense. Connor Murphy with his long hair and painted finger nails did not belong in a shop class.

“My dad,” Connor said, looking away, adjusting his messenger bag.

“How are you doing in that class?” Evan asked, lips twitching up.

“Haven’t sawed my hand off yet,” Connor returned easily.

“Not for lack of trying I hope.”

Connor laughed.

Evan laughed.

Second bell.

Evan looked at his feet. “I am a terrible influence.”

“Why?”

Still staring at his feet, Evan shyly looked up toward Connor. “Well now you’ve got a car, I’m half tempted to convince you to cut class.”

A sort of nervous half smile twitched onto Connor’s face for a half a second. “Well I’m free after school?”

“Yeah?”

“Yeah, I… We could go somewhere. Or something. If you wanted.”

Evan wanted.

He wanted that.

He didn’t particularly know why.
He didn’t care.

“Hey Evan?”

“Hm?”

Connor was looking at him weird.

Evan realized distantly that maybe that was just how Connor looked at people. Or even just at him. He didn’t know.

“Do me a favor and don’t…” He stopped, like maybe he’d thought better of what he was about to say.

“Don’t what?”

“Just… don’t do anything stupid, okay?”

“What do you mean?”

“Like…” Connor ran a hand through his hair. “Like giving away your shit or telling people you wanna die or going off your meds.”

“How’d you know I was on meds?”

“You mentioned it,” Connor said, a little dismissive. “Just. We can’t be obvious, alright?”

“Yeah. Yeah. Of course.”

What the fuck?

What the actual fuck?

Something was going on, something weird, something that Evan didn’t understand but like honest to fucking god what did Connor mean when he said he shouldn’t go off his meds?

Like, why would he go off of his meds? Like, and like why would it matter if he went off of them anyways? Like, was Connor afraid that the meds were the only thing letting him think clearly about this whole suicide thing and if he went off of them he would immediately be too depressed to even kill himself? Or maybe it was the opposite, maybe Connor was still so scared that he’d flake but he knew that young people on SSRIs were more of a suicide risk so he was counting on Evan staying on the meds to make sure that he still wanted to kill himself?

Which then made him question, was Connor Murphy like trying to kill him? Maybe all of the people with the school shooter jokes were onto something, maybe he was just a very specific type of serial killer and this was how he took his victims, maybe this wasn’t the first time Connor had posted a message on CatchingTheTrain, maybe he had hundreds of username and maybe the real reason that Mr. Murphy seems suspicious of Evan was because Evan had VICTIM written all over his face and that was why he was always trying to reign Connor in because he knew Connor liked to kill for fun.

Was murder really murder if the victim wanted to die? Even if Connor was a psychopath murderer, did it matter? Did Evan care as long as it wasn’t a long tortured process?

“Today we will be going over mood disorders,” The AP Psych teacher said to the class, smiling, “We’ll start with depression.”
Evan found Conner by his car at the end of the day. He had sunglasses on again, and he waved at Evan when he saw him.

Which.

...Okay.

“Hey,” he said, hanging onto the straps of his backpack.

“Let’s go somewhere,” Connor said, and Evan agreed, didn’t ask where they were going, just got in the car and surrendered to potentially getting murdered.

Jared had been sort of cold to him all day. Which. Evan supposed was maybe expected but not super fair.

Zoe had said hi to him in the hall earlier, after fourth hour, and Evan was surprised that his stomach didn’t summersault like it usually did.

He noticed that his hands were sort of sweaty then.

He wiped them on his jeans.

Connor looked pretty cool, wearing shades and smoking while he drove.

Or maybe you think he just looks pretty.

Evan decided to ignore that voice in his head.

Which meant an immediate onslaught of thoughts in that vein followed.

Was he gay? Was now really the time to turn out to be gay? Hadn’t he done all of the normal little boy stuff as a kid, like playing with trucks and trying to do sports before he realized he was terrible at sports and would start crying when he got the ball because he was so scared of letting his team down? Was it because his dad left, was that a thing, a lack of a male role model? Maybe it was his mom, being so careful with him, maybe it was that or it was that he had always been kind of soft and sad and a little pathetic so wouldn’t it just make absolutely perfect sense that he would be gay because nothing else in his life had ever gone the way he wanted and now he was probably gay for a murderer and everyone would find out somehow and then it would turn out that everyone at her work was super homophobic and they’d whisper about her behind her back like, hey look it’s Heidi who turned her son gay and then he and his gay boyfriend killed themselves (gaily) and she’d have to quit her job and move back in with Evan’s grandma who would be definitely homophobic so then his mom couldn’t even miss Evan in front of his grandma on account of how gay he was which would mean that –

“Hey.”

Connor’s hand.

On his arm.

“W-what?”

“You’re going to gnaw through your lip doing that.”
“S-sorry.”

“Dude, it’s your mouth. I’m trying to save you stitches.” A beat. “Just. What’s up?”

“Nothing.”

“Liar.”

“No, no, really.”

“Come on, Hansen. Spill.”

“No, it’s really, it’s fine, it’s nothing.”

“Evan,” Connor was looking at him now, stopped at a stop sign, flipping up his sunglasses to give Evan a pointed glare.

“Just… you’re not a murderer, right? I know it should, like, objectively bother me if you’re a murderer but like… you’re not. Right?”


“Just, you said. The thing about the meds? I… It just seemed weird.”

“Oh,” Connor said, turning back to look at the road. “I just meant that your mom might catch on. If you stopped taking them”

“Right.” He took a breath. “Where are we going?”

“I was thinking we could go to the water tower. Scope it out, make sure it would work for us.”

“Great idea.”

Up close, it was clear the water tower was abandoned. A fossil.

A tomb.

“Should we go up there?”

Evan frankly only wanted to make that climb once, but he wiped his hands on his jeans again and nodded. Connor went first and Evan waited until he was about fifteen feet up and followed.

Dangerous, his brain told him.

Very unsafe.

Turn back.

Thirty feet up.

Fifty.

His heart was thudding in his chest too hard, his throat was tight, he didn’t want to be climbing up there but Connor wasn’t slowing down so he pushed forward but his hands were starting to sweat
again and he tried to blow out his anxiety just deep breath and blow it all away but it wasn’t working and he was pretty sure he had sweated through his t-shirt and hoodie which was so fucking gross but he didn’t know if he was sweating because he was climbing or because he was scared.

Why was he up there?

He had to be batshit out of his mind.

Connor had clamored over to the platform at the top of the ladder. Evan took a shaky breath, pulling himself up, higher and higher and past the tops of the nearby trees and then the whole sun seemed to pour down on him.

And his hand slipped.

Just a little.

Just enough for the jerk around his kidneys, for the adrenaline, for his heart to stop and sputter and he couldn’t move.

He could let go.

What if he let go?

He was going to let go, just not today.

He was going to die.

What if he died?

“Hey.”

He couldn’t open his eyes he was frozen he was stuck he was just going to be there until he let go and when he let go he would fall to his death and that would be it.

“Hey.”

He was shaking his head, his mouth moving without him knowing what he was saying, some excuse, he didn’t know he couldn’t be there couldn’t be there couldn’t be there couldn’t be there couldn’t be there. He was trapped. Trapped. Trapped.

A hand on his.

It felt disconnected from his body.

“Hey. You’re fine, come on.”

So Evan listened, moved his arms and legs until he was on top of the water tower, on top of the world, the sky, but he was shaking so hard and his lungs didn’t work and.

“What can I do?”

Shaking his head, nonononononononononononononononononononono.

“Evan.”

Nonononononononononononono.
“Okay, well now I’m just fucking googling how to deal with a panic attack so don’t hate me if I get it wrong, okay?”

No.

Breathing.

No.

No.

“Okay, do you have any meds you normally take?”

He couldn’t move but they were in his bag he was stuck there frozen trapped nononononono.

“Okay I’m going to go in your bag to look, okay?”

“NO.”

“Can you take the bag off of your back?”

He was sweating so much and he was wheezing now, hyperventilating, he could hear it it was all he could hear it was swallowing up all of the other sounds, burying him in gasps his chest was on fire it hurt hearattackhearthattack.

He heard something distantly behind him but he wasn’t there he was buried and numb and definitely dying.

“Here, okay, I’m... “

There was a pill in his hand and Evan’s body worked on muscle memory. Dry swallow the pill. Hands around his knees, head down, slow breaths.

“Can...?”

He didn’t know. He didn’t know his brain was broken it was fucking broken he was fucking broken and....

Then he flinched because Connor had pulled him in, tightly, hugging him tightly and...

Well.

“I fucking hope this is okay because you’re not talking but just like punch me or something if it’s not.”

It wasn’t bad.

It was sort of restrictive but like that almost helped?

He knew in about twenty minutes he would a little zoned out with his meds.

And right now he was a little too zoned in.

But.

Well.
He tried to focus on breathing, on the softness of Connor’s t-shirt against his cheek, on the smell of cigarettes and fabric softener on Connor’s clothes, he tried to force his body to just stop with the shaking and the gasping and…

“You’re okay.”

It sounded so certain.

And as suddenly as it came on, it began to fade.

And he could breathe.

And look out over the sky and the sun and the tree tops and the distant river and the road as it faded to nothing more than a line leading to the horizon.

“F-fuck.”

Connor hadn’t let go.

Evan sniffed.

And realized his face was slick with tears.

And put his hand on his face, embarrassed, ashamed, pulling away from Connor, wiping his nose and his eyes.

“Shit, s-sorry,” Evan stuttered, wiping his face again. “Fuck, I’m so s-sorry, I’m a fucking m-mess.”

He chanced a look at Connor.

Who was scary pale.

Whose t-shirt was wet with tears and snot and it just made Evan want to curl into himself because this was it. This was the end of the weird collaboration of Evan and Connor. They were done, no more, over. Connor could see his disaster, his mess, Connor could see what he was desperately trying to hide, the worst of him…

Evan ought to just throw himself off the water tower now.

There was no point in waiting.

“Just,” Connor was saying, and Evan didn’t know how long he’d been talking, like, at all, “Can you maybe just come back from the edge a little?”

Evan blinked.

He was standing there, at the edge, at the knee high guard rail, and if he tipped forward even an inch he would fall. Connor had taken his hand. He was standing a little bit further back. He was squeezing Evan's fingers tightly.

“How do we know this will kill us?” Evan asked.

Connor sighed. “I figured we could test it?”

Evan stepped back then, looking at Connor, befuddled. He was calm now, but it was sort of like being iced over, like if you hit him hard enough the frozen layer would shatter and all of his
frustrationangeranxietyworryguilt would flood him, drown him, drown everyone around him. “How?”

“It’s obviously not perfect,” Connor said, letting go of Evan. He produced an apple from the pocket of his hoodie. “But I think if it splatters we know we’re okay.”

Okay to die.

Perfect.

“Drop it.”

“You sure?”

“Do it.”

Connor joined Evan, a foot from the edge, and held out his arm.

“Get closer. We’ll probably jump forward a bit.”

“Good point.” Connor shuffled forward, until his boots hung over the edge and his shins touched the safety rail. He tossed the apple lightly into the air. It fell, arching out then down… down… until they couldn’t see it anymore.

Evan looked at Connor, a steely calm having overtaken him.

Connor looked at him, a bit uncertainly. “You’re sure about this? I don’t…” He cleared his throat but whatever internal hardass he was trying to summon didn’t appear. He shoved his hands into his pockets. “I mean. You had a panic attack, I just…”

“I’m not going to flake,” Evan said. Not in a rush. Smooth. No bumps.

“Okay.” He was looking over the edge and then back at Evan, biting his lip, obviously unsure. If he were a cartoon, Evan imagined he would gulp audibly.

“Don’t worry,” Evan said to him, almost smiling. “It’ll be quick.”

Connor did swallow audibly then. “Y-yeah.”

When they got to the bottom, it took them a while to find the apple. When they did eventually find it, it wasn’t much more than a wet spot on the rocks.

Chapter End Notes

So I wasn't going to post this yet, but I went out tonight in closet Connor Murphy drag (black nails, black skinny jeans, black boots) and won $20 so surprise I stayed up late to finish. Huzzah.
Evan woke up around 10:00 o’clock Saturday morning to a text from Connor: “Come over. 911.”

So.

So he got up and showered and brushed his teeth and rode his fucking bike to the Murphys’ at top speed, his brain mushy and not quite awake, and he rang the doorbell with hands that shook and there was a lot of shrieking and laughter and Zoe pulled open the door. She had tin foil in her hair, and there was a distinctly chemical smell to the air. She was also wearing pajamas.

“Evan! You’re here!”

“Yeah, uh, Connor texted?”

“Yeah, yeah, come in.”

Evan followed her uncertainly inside, up the steps, and instead of turning toward the bedrooms she took a sharp turn toward the bathroom. Connor was sitting on the counter, long legs dangling, reading what appeared to be a box of hair dye; he was wearing pajamas too. “So the bleach has to process for like half an hour,” He was saying, “And then you’ll put the dye on for about half an hour too.”

“Great.”

Evan was so fucking lost.

How the hell was Zoe bleaching and dyeing some hair 911? He hadn’t eaten, he had homework he could be doing, he hadn’t told his mom where he was going.

And then.

Oh.

“911, Connor?” Evan asked, sort of annoyed, and Connor shrugged like it was some big joke to him.

“I was being assaulted with a comb.”

“Still.”

“I told him to invite you,” Zoe said. “We’re having a Treat Yo’self Day.”

“A what?”
Zoe and Connor exchanged a sort of frustrated look. “Like from Parks and Rec?”

“I’ve never seen that show.”

“Oh my God,” Zoe said, laughing. “Well, we’ll fix that as soon as we finish this. It’s the best day of the year.” She sort of sang the last bit. Evan was so totally lost, but Zoe and Connor were smiling so he stuck around.

Evan sort of watched, amused, as Zoe complained loudly about the state of Connor’s hair, pulling most of it up in a sloppy knot, save for one piece behind his ear, about an inch wide.

“Stop fidgeting.”

“Stop pulling my hair.”

“I’m not pulling it, it’s just so damn knotty! Have you heard of conditioner?”

“Is that the one that stops athlete’s foot?”

“Shut up, idiot.”

Zoe combed out the bit of hair. Then she put on some plastic gloves and a little black brush and painted the bleach onto Connor’s hair.

Then she popped some tin foil on the streak that was being bleached, and the three of them crammed into Zoe’s room, where she pulled up an episode of Parks and Recreation. She explained the premise of the show and the episode to Evan – pausing at one point to treat him to a long explanation of Leslie and Ben’s relationship – and then he watched as Donna and Tom, with Ben in tow, embarked on a day long shopping trip.

It was funny. Evan liked it.

What he liked more was how Zoe would quote a line, or mouth the words, and Connor would laugh or sort of smile or recite the next line back to her.

“So. Uh… Why exactly am I here?” Evan asked about thirty minutes later, after Zoe and Connor had both finished putting teal dye on their newly bleached hair. They were playing rock paper scissors to determine who would get stuck washing their hair in the guest bathroom downstairs.

Some people’s problems…

“We’re going to the mall after this,” Zoe said. “I’ve got a solo in the jazz band concert tonight, so we decided to blow some of our parents’ money on stuff that makes us happy.”

Evan looked over at Connor, alarmed.

“We want you to go shopping with us,” Connor elaborated.

“Why?”

Zoe laughed. “Evan, you need to relax. We want you to come because you’re cool and it’s not like our parents will be mad if we blow money on you.”

“Oh, you don’t have to-”

“Nonsense,” Zoe said firmly. “Mom spent eight hundred dollars on a pasta maker three years ago.
She used it once, then banned gluten from the house.”

“Oh.” Evan was calculating how many credit hours at the community college that would pay for. What his mom wouldn’t do for a spare eight hundred dollars on any giving Tuesday.

“Come to the mall with us,” Zoe said. “Please?”

Evan looked uncertainly over at Connor, who nodded encouragingly, so, of course, he agreed.

Evan supposed he didn’t realize that one good day with Zoe meant he was supposed to witness it. But. Well.

“Okay. Sure. I’ll go.”

Zoe smiled. “Great.” She lost the game of rock, paper, scissors and had to go wash out her hair in the guest bathroom.

The moment they were alone, Evan rounded on Conner. “What is going on?”

Connor’s smile from literally ten seconds ago had faded. “Oh, I… Well.” He cleared his throat. “Zoe?”

“Your sister doesn’t like me.”

Connor shrugged. “She’s always pretty glad when you’re here.”

“I don’t…” Evan rubbed his hands down the front of his t-shirt. “I don’t think this is a good idea.”

“Come on. Like you wouldn’t have killed to spend an afternoon with my sister a few weeks ago.”

“I…” Evan frowned. “What if she catches on that something’s up? Huh? What if-”

“She’s not going to catch on! She’s barely paying attention to us. Trust me.”

“I don’t like watching you be around your family,” Evan said suddenly and it was out of his mouth before he could stop it and Connor looked taken aback, almost hurt.

“What?”

“I’m sorry, I…” Evan stopped, clenched his fists a few times, tried again. “Sorry. It. It just. It’s confusing for me. To be around them. To be around you, around them.”

“Why?”

“Because!” Evan said, trying not to raise his voice, trying not to attract attention. “Because they are the exact things that I wanted in my life but didn’t get, and you… you hate it. You hate them. You resent that this is where you came from and I would kill to be in that position instead of… like. Instead of how I am. What I am. Where I’m from.”

Connor blinked.

“They seem like they care so much, it makes me… It’s confusing to me.”

Connor nodded. “I didn’t know, I…”

“It’s… it’s fine.” He smoothed the wrinkles out of his shirt. “I’ll go. I’m ha-happy to go with you.
It’s just. I’m just. It gets confusing.”

“I’m sorry.”

Evan quirked a smile. “You know, you apologize a lot too.”

Connor laughed.

Evan did not have any idea what the point of Forever 21 was. It was insane asylum white, the music was a remix of a folk song, and everything seemed to be somehow equally overpriced and poorly made. He might have been wearing clothes that came from Walmart but at least he didn’t spend thirteen dollars on a pair of jeans that were covered in bleach spots and holes.

“What do you think of this top?” Zoe asked, holding a t-shirt with pizzas in the shape of hearts on it.

“It’s nice,” Evan mumbled. He kept staring at her new hair; she had dyed streaks of teal into it and then curled it and it looked like the sort of mermaids that Evan imagined when he was a little kid.

“Yeah, mom’ll love it,” Connor said, shaking his head. “At least now that she’s not Buddhist anymore.”

“God, do you remember when she was really into *The Secret*?” Zoe asked Connor.

“A nightmare for customer service reps across the country,” Connor said. He nudged Evan. “She would just be like, grossly nice to them all, because ‘like attracts like’ or some bullshit.”

“Yikes.”

“Let’s go look at sunglasses,” Zoe said, grabbing the shirt from the rack.

Connor followed her, about ten feet behind.

“Is it going well?” Evan asked him in a low voice.

“Hm?” Connor asked. Evan couldn’t quit staring at the teal in his hair too. His hair was darker than Zoe’s, so the single streak of teal shone brightly against the rest of his hair.

“Well, this is your… this is your good day with Zoe, right?”

Connor frowned. “I guess.”

“Well, how’s it going?”

He shrugged. “Not badly.”

“Good.”

“Great.”

“Awesome.”

“Cool.”

“What the hell are you two doing?” Zoe said, coming out from behind a rack of sunglasses. “You’re
“always whispering.”

“Chill, Zo, we were just talking about what to get for lunch.”

“Alright,” She said uncertainly, and Evan felt his stomach drop because she was absolutely on to them they were so caught they were definitely both getting shipped off to a nuthouse, no, separate nuthouses, and then Evan’s dad would probably sue his mom because he was probably the type of person who would want a reimbursement for child support he paid on someone who his mom had clearly fucked up and then they’d fight over who had to pay for the nuthouse and obviously his dad would win because he was a dick like that.

“I like these ones,” Evan said, too loudly, trying to talk over the voices in his head telling him that somehow mumbling to Connor equalled his parents in court trying to pass off the Evan burden. He grabbed a pair of circular sunglasses at random. “Zoe try these.”

She smiled, and put them on, the tag hanging down in the middle of her face, and then Connor said, “Good look on you,” and she playfully smacked his arm, and then it sort of became a game of finding the weirdest accessories and making the others try them on. Evan in big aviator sunglasses; Connor in a floral baseball cap; Zoe making ducklips in a big floppy hat. Zoe insisted on a selfie once Connor had this gray beanie on and she had the floral cap turned backward and Evan was in a pair of fake-hipster glasses, and she insisted on taking the photo even though she was the shortest, so Evan and Connor had to crouch and crowd around her shoulders.

They kept it up, finding silly things, like Zoe with this purse that looked like a disco ball, which Connor snapped a picture of her holding under her face, of the picture with Evan and Connor, failing to keep straight faces, both wearing plastic flower crowns, or Connor putting a gaudy fake ring on his pinky and making the blankest expression Evan had ever seen which made Zoe crack up.

There would be tons of pictures.

Of Evan.

On Zoe Murphy’s Instagram.

With Connor, doing stupid shit, playing around in a Forever 21, and he didn’t really care even though he knew any moment now that his phone would buzz with a text from Jared saying, “Dude, Zoe Murphy?!!”

Zoe insisted that Evan get this t-shirt she picked out. It was plain and light blue and he liked it.

“That’s a good color on you,” Connor said.

“Gay!” Zoe giggled.

“Shut up,” Connor mumbled, and Evan noticed he was blushing a little.

They did the same thing at H&M. This time Connor got a button down, and Zoe a pair of sparkly earrings, and Evan got a pair of shoes that weren’t lame sneakers for a change. More shopping at the next store, some chain next door to the Pottery Barn. Zoe convinced him to try on a pair of expensive Levi’s a the next store, which upon learning that they fit, Zoe insisted that they buy for him.

“Really, d-don’t spend this money on me.”

“Rich parents,” Connor said.
“It’s literally the best way we could spend it.”

They were grabbing lunch at a diner.

Zoe was in the bathroom.

Connor was picking off his nail polish across the table.

“Can you come to the jazz band concert tonight?”

Evan nodded, uneasy. He had this strange, tight knot in his stomach; a sense of trepidation, of impending doom. Which he always had. But today it was more acute, more real. He was certain something awful was on the horizon and he didn’t have even the foggiest idea why.

“How come you dyed your hair?” Evan asked, rather than talking about it to Connor because who the hell talked about their feelings right?

Connor shrugged. “I dunno. I thought it looked cool when she had the purple and blue in her hair before, and she was all antsy about doing it while our parents were out of the house so that they’d be surprised… I dunno.”

Evan knew exactly why Connor had dyed his hair. It was the same reason Evan went to see Dr. Sherman when his mom wrote it on the calendar, the same reason he was struggling through an email chain with his mom about scholarship essay contests. He cared. He wanted her to know he cared. Even if he didn’t want to be alive, he cared.

“Where are your parents all the time?” Evan wondered.

Connor shrugged, not looking at him. “Yoga, business trip, pilates, golf… anywhere far away from me.”

“That’s not fair.”

“To me or them?”

Evan swallowed his response. He didn’t know.

“Sucks more for Zoe,” Connor said. “They leave her to like, watch me. So they avoid her too. They shouldn’t.”

“Why not?”

Connor shrugged. “If I had a kid like her I wouldn’t leave them alone with a kid like me.”

Evan had no fucking idea what that meant.

“I just.” Connor stopped. Looked up to make sure Zoe wasn’t coming back. “We were close. When we were little. But. I.” He raked a hand through his hair, which only showed off the teal stripe more. “I’ve just been like this for forever, and when it started I. I just.” He fiddled with his straw. “I took it out on her. Still do sometimes. I just. It’s like my brain switches off when I get angry. Like I don’t even…” He looked up again. “Whatever.”

“Hey, did you order yet?”
“Nope,” Evan said, because Connor seemed to be searching for meaning in the depths of his glass of Coke.

“I have to pee,” Connor muttered, sliding out of the booth before Zoe sat down.

“What if the waitress comes back? What do you want?”

Connor shrugged and walked away without answering. Zoe crossed her arms, looking frustrated, and slid into the seat Connor had been occupying.

Evan didn’t know what to do with Zoe Murphy across the table from him, so he just stared at the menu, hands at his sides, pinching the seam of his jeans between two fingers.

“So, like…” Zoe was fiddling with a piece of her hair. “Why did you and Connor start hanging out? I don’t think I ever asked.”

Evan blinked. He didn’t have an answer, a good answer, for Zoe because the answer he could give her was an answer she didn’t want to hear even if she really did hate her brother, which Evan doubted, she wouldn’t want to hear about a suicide pact. A sane person would be concerned about that, a sane person would call the police, a sane person would tell a grown up and not bat an eye because it was the right thing to do, even if it was hard.

Evan didn’t know how to do the right thing. Or the hard thing. Unless the hard thing was living. And he barely knew how to do that.

Plus then there was the whole weird potentially gay thoughts thing happening in Evan’s head and basically he was paralyzed. He didn’t have answer. His brain was scream ABORT MISSION and his hands started sweating and he kept clearing his throat and twitching a smile but it wasn’t enough it wasn’t an answer he didn’t have an answer for her.

“Evan?”

“S-sorry?”

“How’d you and Connor start hanging out?”

“Oh, uh, sorry, it’s just, uh, sorry, we had er. We had a Spanish project together?” It came out like a question.

“Connor takes French now. Did you have it last year?”

Right. Damn it.

“Right sorry, that’s… that’s…”

“Zoe, don’t interrogate him,” Connor said, returning.

And sitting beside Evan, rather than his sister, which was a choice.

“I just wondered how you got to know each other.”

“Study hall,” Connor answered easily. “We’re both always in the computer lab.”

Zoe smiled, like yep, all settled.

And Evan couldn’t stop focusing on the way that sometimes Connor’s knee would bump his.
“She’s good,” Connor muttered to Evan, nodding toward the stage where Zoe was playing a guitar solo. She had that smile that Evan had first noticed last year when he waited after the jazz band concert to introduce himself. And didn’t.

“Didn’t you know?” Evan asked, uncertain.

Connor shrugged.

“Shouldn’t we be sitting with your parents?”

Connor rolled his eyes. “Not a chance. My dad tapes these.”

“Oh.”

After the concert ended, Evan waited around with Connor and the Murphys in the atrium outside of the auditorium. Mrs. and Mr. Murphy looked a little surprised when Evan and Connor appeared beside them; Mr. Murphy muttered to Mrs. Murphy that he had assumed Connor was still in his bedroom.

“Zoe was wonderful, wasn’t she?”

“Yeah,” Evan said enthusiastically. “She was really great.”

Connor nodded, hands shoved into his pockets.

“Hey guys,” Zoe said, smiling, appearing, smiling, and Mr. and Mrs. Murphy both hugged her and congratulated her on her solo.

“You were magnificent, honey,” Mrs. Murphy said, smiling and touching her daughter’s face.

“Yeah,” Connor muttered, and he produced an envelope from his pocket, shoving it into her hand, and she looked at him, taken aback.

“Connor, what the hell?”

“Zoe,” Their mother admonished and Evan was trying to subtly distance himself from the Murphys, just inch away, because this was not something meant for him, he didn’t want to watch this.

She pulled open the card, and it was like a card with a silly cartoon duck that said congrats and out of it fell a dainty silver chain with a silver four leaf clover pendant.

Mrs. Murphy gasped and Evan was like, cool, I’ll just look at the fucking floor, what interesting linoleum.

“Connor, what the fuck?” Zoe said.

“Zoe!” Mr. Murphy said.

“Don’t make it weird,” he muttered, not meeting her eyes.
“Connor and Zoe used to look for four leaf clovers whenever we’d picnic at the orchard,” Mrs. Murphy explained to Evan who was trying to teach himself how to Apparate like in Harry Potter because this was exactly. What. He. Told. Connor. Bothered. Him.

How was he supposed to want to die with someone whose family was like this?

“Thanks, asshole,” Zoe said, punching his arm lightly.

“Whatever.”

“Hey, um,” Zoe said, looking at her parents. “So Brenna from band is having a few people over to celebrate? Can I go?”

“Sure, honey,” Mr. Murphy said.

“Zoe, why don’t you invite your brother and Evan to go with you?”

“Oh, I,” Evan started, while Connor shook his head saying, “That’s alright, don’t worry about it.”

“You guys should come,” Zoe said, smiling.

“I, uh, I don’t know…” Evan said, looking nervously at Connor.

And Connor gave them a half smile. “Evan. Come on. Bucket list.”

Evan’s heart leapt out of his throat and launched itself out of the building and into orbit.

The Murphys were staring, Zoe was staring.

Cover blown.

Abort mission.

Fuck.

“High school bucket list?” Connor said, like it was obvious, like they were all being morons. “We’re seniors, remember?”

“Oh. Uh. Yeah. I uh, I’ve never been to…” He cleared his throat. “I’ve never gone out after a jazz band concert before.”

Chapter End Notes

Lowkey-soft? What low-key soft?

Also did I mention I am on tumblr? I’m on tumblr. In addition to being DEH trash, I am also Harry Potter trash.

https://www.tumblr.com/blog/ch-ch-ch-ch-cherrybomb
Chapter Summary

Drunk sad boys make great and terrible decisions.

Content warning: teen drinking, more suicidal thoughts than average, self harm.

Chapter Notes

Hey look it's everything you didn't want to happen.

Guys, I don't even know. I'm sorry. Please don't murder me. Just do me a favor and read to the end before you rage quit okay?

“You guys know we’re going to a kegger, right?”

That was the first thing that Zoe said as she led Connor and Evan from the school auditorium.

“Oh? Is that it? I assumed it just be Scrabble,” Connor said sarcastically, and he lit a cigarette once they got outside.

“Not in my car, please,” Zoe said and Evan was surprised at how fast they resumed their typical patterns after the strange moment with the necklace. Which Zoe was wearing already.

Evan had roughly eight thousand questions about that but his brain was tired from all of this. It happened sometimes. He was worn out from too many people. Too much interaction with others, not enough time scrolling endlessly through twitter and tumblr, complaining to his mom about having no friends.

There was also the small fact that Connor was like, trying to get them caught.

“Hey Evan don’t make it obvious,” He said, before immediately doing some really obvious shit. Oh yeah, let’s hang out with my estranged sister all day and then I’ll give her a super sentimental gift, that’s not out of character or obviously suicidal. “Hey Evan stay on your meds,” he said, while cracking jokes about bucket lists in front of his parents.

Evan half wondered if this was Connor flaking. Could Connor flake? Evan had assumed, if it was anyone, it would be him. He’d be the one backing out. He’d be the one resigning himself to life and having to spill his guts to his mom and the Murphys about what he and Connor had really been up to all that time.

He hadn’t considered.

Evan dismissed it.

Maybe Connor was having some cold feet. Cold feet about Evan as a partner, about whether he had
patched things up with Zoe… but not about dying.

They were definitely going to die together.

Evan was certain.

While Zoe and Connor bickered and fought, Evan finally thought to check his phone. He had a number of Instagram notifications: Zoe Murphy (@GuitarHeroine1999) had followed him and tagged him in a photo. And another. And another. And another. Evan pulled up the picture of him and Connor and Zoe all smiling and crammed into a selfie from the mall. The caption read: “Treat yo’self.” They were all smiles.

It looked weird to see how happiness looked on his own face.

There were like five pictures. Like Zoe wasn’t afraid to spam the people who followed her with pictures of the two least popular boys in the school.

The caption on the picture of Connor and Evan in the flower crowns read: “Follow me for more soft grunge.”

He checked his texts.

Two from his mom: “Hi sweetie, I know you said you might go over to Connor’s but I haven’t heard from you please give me a call love you.” And: “Evan, honey, please just shoot me a text. I’m stuck at work late, so go ahead and eat without me if you’re home.”

He shot off a quick reply to her, something vague about the concert and hanging out and might stay at Connor’s.

Three texts from Jared. One:“Dude, did I just see Zoe Murphy tag you and her brother at the mall together? That is either the hottest or the gayest thing ever.” Two: “Alana said she saw you sitting with Connor at the back of the auditorium. If you’re gonna blow the place up, fire a warning shot first so I can locate an exit.” Three: “Please tell me you’re not coming to Brenna Cohen’s party with Connor Murphy. Please. For the sake of my reputation as your family friend.”

Evan took a breath, sighing. He typed back, “Zoe invited him, don’t be so jealous.”

And put his phone away.

Life was too short. That was the saying, right? The thing adults were always saying around the time they decided to do something pointless and wasteful.

Evan’s life was too short.

He only had a few weeks left.

Might as well take the time to say what he felt. Via text where he couldn’t see the smoke billowing from Jared’s nostrils.

Still.

Progress.

“We aren’t drinking and driving,” Zoe said. “Because just. No. I can usually get someone from band to pretend to have had a sleepover with, but you two are on your own.”
“We’ll just say we stayed at Evan’s to mom and dad and Evan’ll say he was at ours to his mom. It’ll be fine.”

Evan couldn’t think of anything less fine.

But again he was not fine with whatever plan Connor had cooked up and left him out of.

Whatever.

“Evan, you okay?” Zoe asked from the driver’s seat. “You’ve been awfully quiet.”

“No-no, I’m fine. Sorry.”

“Don’t be sorry.”

“Sorry.”

“He does that,” Connor said. Almost fondly.

Fuck Connor feeling fond. Fond Connor could…

He supposed telling someone to go fuck themselves wasn’t just of an insult.

And he couldn’t kill himself because Evan needed him for that.

So.

Zoe broke apart from Evan and Connor once they arrived at Brenna Cohen’s house. They looked at each other, both a little lost because, Evan realized, it wasn’t like Connor went to parties either.

He was here purely for Evan and Zoe.

That made something in Evan’s chest tighten uncomfortably.

“Should we go… find something to drink?”

Evan looked at him sharply. “Drink?”

“Come on. Bucket list, remember?”

“Stop.”

“So you’ve cut class and smoked weed,” Connor said, like he was thinking hard. “I think that leaves drinking underage, staying out all night… and…”

Evan’s heart slowed to a stop. His stomach fell out of his body, just vanished, his eyes went wide.

The last thing on the list was kiss someone.

Connor couldn’t.

He didn’t mean.

He obviously didn’t…
Evan Hansen did not like beer. He drank about three sips before he casually dumped it right down the sink. Nope. If that was drinking then nope. Cross it off, like smoking. Not for him.

But he did like whatever was in the giant garbage can that was being dispersed in red plastic cups. He thought he heard someone call it “wop,” whatever that meant, but it was sweet and it didn’t hurt his throat on the way down and there was some fruit in there so it obviously couldn’t been too terribly alcoholic.

“How many of those have you had?” Connor had to shout over the music at Evan.

Who rolled his eyes back. “Not enough, obviously, I can still hear you nagging me.”

Evan pretend he didn’t see the way Connor’s face shifted after that. “That has Everclear in it, idiot. Slow down before you get sick.”

“I feel like suicide partner etiquette means that you shouldn’t criticize my self destructive tendencies.”

“Whatever. I’m going out for a smoke,” Connor said, and that suited Evan just fine since apparently they were in a fight now and he knew nothing about fighting with your suicide partner.

He wandered out of the kitchen and into the living room where he found Zoe, and drunk and weirdly feeling bold, Evan said hello.

“Evan!” She said, smiling so wide and happy, and she threw her arms around him and it almost caused them both to spill their drinks and tip over. “You’re here! I’m glad you’re here.”

“Zoe, you drove me.”

“Yeah but you’re still here.” She swayed a little. And grabbed his hand.

Which Evan didn’t think was sweaty at all.

If this suicide thing didn’t work out, he could always become a drunk. It was the obvious answer to the crippling anxiety.

Zoe swayed a little. “I’m so glad I met you.”

“Met me? Why?”

“Yeah, you. You’re the sweetest. I’m always glad to see you.”

“You are?”

“Obviously.” She nodded, taking a sip of her drink. “And you’re cute. Plus you’re so great with my
brother…”

“Huh?”

“Like I mean. You’re nice to him. Nobody’s nice to him, I’m not even nice to him…” She shook her head, the teal curls flying. “I don’t know why you decided to be friends with my brother, Evan Hansen, but I think you saved his life.”

His insides vanished, replaced by a sudden ache. “No. Don’t say… No.”

“I mean, I didn’t really believe Brenna at first when she said you were kind of mentoring him? Like, that sounded so… weird. But it makes total sense now.”

“What?”

“She said your friend Jared told her that? That you were mentoring him or something. That you were doing community service because like you’re seeing a therapist and they said it might help you feel more comfortable talking to people,” She was slurring. She was definitely drunk and he was definitely drunk and none of what she was saying was making any sense and it took Evan a moment to get his lies straight in his head.

“No,” Evan shook his head. “No I… I just. We’re just friends, Connor and I.”

Zoe smiled, swaying, and she still had his hand in hers.

Her hand was a little sweaty.

Evan thought that was sort of funny.

“I think you’re a sweet guy.”

“Th-thanks, I um. You don’t have to say that, I-”

He never expected it to happen like this.

He never expected it to happen at all. Zoe Murphy kissing him at a party where they were both drunk and holding hands and in his dreams it wasn’t anything like this.

He pulled way. Like almost immediately.

And locked eyes with Connor, having just walked in the door and seen the whole thing.

Shit.

“Zoe… Oh my god, Zoe, I am so so s-sorry, but I… I’m sorry.”

“Evan, I’m sorry… Are you okay?”

And he walked away as fast as he could because.

Fuck.

“Evan!”

Alana Beck did not belong at a kegger, but apparently that did not mean she was not at a kegger. She was in the backyard, sipping a bottle of water, chatting with a few of the girls from jazz band that
Evan knew from around. And Jared. They were all standing around a bonfire.

“Hey Alana.”

“How’s your semester going?”

“It’s-”

“Mine’s going great. I was made president of the honor society. And I’m first chair in orchestra now.”

“That’s-”

“Did I see that you came here with Zoe Murphy? She’s so nice. I really enjoyed when we had Drama class together last year. She was very good in the monologue from the end of Our Town. It made a few kids cry.”

“Are you friends with Zoe?” Evan asked, in a rush.

“Acquaintances.”

He nodded.

“Hey Evan,” Jared said, finally acknowledging him even though he was standing right there. “Haven’t seen you in a while. How’s your new pet project?”

“What?”

“Jared mentioned that you’re mentoring Connor Murphy as a community service project. That’s a great idea,” Alana said, smiling. “I hadn’t thought of trying to get involved in peer-to-peer mentorship. I’ll have to talk with my guidance counselor.”

“Oh… oh I’m not-”

“I think it’s really noble of you to do that, considering how difficult school has always been for Connor. Remember in the second grade when he-”

“Threw a printer, yeah,” Evan said, sighing. “Everyone remembers that I guess. Alana, I’m…. I’m not mentoring Connor. We’re… we’re just. We’re friends.”

“But Jared said…?”

Evan looked at Jared then. “I don’t know what he’s talking about.”

Jared gave him one of those twisted, far-too-amused smiles he had and Evan kind of wanted to punch it off of his face. “Sorry, man, I was just trying to save you some face considering you’re committing social suicide.”

Not just social.

Evan frowned. “That wasn’t cool Jared.”

“It was a joke! I just thought, you know, you must have screwed something up pretty bad if you’re hanging out with Connor Murphy. So you were like court ordered? Get it?”

“Oh, I get it,” Evan said, and his voice wasn’t his voice, it was an echo of Connor’s on that first day
of school. *Yeah, no it was funny. I’m laughing, can’t you tell?* “You ought to be a comedian Jared. Hilarious.”

“Come on, man. I just… it’s weird that you’re hanging out with him suddenly.”

“Well… well who else am I supposed to hang out with, Jared? It’s not like you want to. And it’s not like I have other friends.”

Jared frowned, like he was hurt.

And Evan smiled like he didn’t give a fuck because he was drunk. Because he felt nothing. Like he had taken his meds but without the anxiety attack.

“Evan,” Alana was saying, like she was trying to diffuse the situation, “I think you could probably still put mentorship on your college applications.”

“Oh my God!” Evan laughed, shaking his head. “You two… Just.”

He had no words for them, but he knew he didn’t want to talk to them anymore, and then Jared was tugging on his arm, and he was frowning, muttering, “Hey look, I’m sorry bro. I just… you’ve been MIA for like two weeks now, and… I dunno. I’m. Like where have you been?”

Evan blinked. “You’re mad because you think I’m blowing you off?”

“Well aren’t you?”

“I didn’t think there was anything to blow off,” Evan said, honestly, surprised. “You always say how you don’t want to hang around me…”

“Well I… I mean. It’s that or admit that nobody else will hang around me.”

“What about your camp friends?”

Jared rolled his eyes. “I mean most of them live hours away… and there’s only so many jokes about how lame your Jewish parents are before it gets old.”

“Well… what do you want from me?”

Jared shrugged. “I dunno. You haven’t even talked to me in AP Psych lately?”

Evan was laughing. “God, sure, Jared, I’ll fucking talk to you in AP Psych!”

Jared laughed then. “Dude, you’re super drunk.”

“No, no, no I’m not. I only have like three of the weird garbage juice.”

Jared was laughing again, wheezing, saying, “Dude that is like 95% alcohol!”

Evan shook his head. “No, no, it wasn’t…” He laughed. “I’m drunk!”

“Evan Hansen, drunk at a party. Will the wonders never cease?”

Evan tittered and Jared laughed and then, “Where is Connor anyway? Maybe I should make nice with him.”

“Oh,” Evan said, and he felt his face heat up immediately. “Well I just… He saw me. I kissed Zoe
and he saw and now he’s probably going to kick my ass.”

Jared shoved him playfully. “Shut up. You kissed Zoe Murphy? In front of her crazy brother?”

“Jared come on with the crazy thing.”

“Dude, he is going to completely flip out on you.”

“No, no, I mean…” Evan shook his head like he was trying to get water out of his ears. “I don’t think anyway.”

In the end it was Connor who found Evan.

He didn’t kick Evan’s ass right away, so that was a win for Evan goodjobgoteam. Jared thought that was funny. Funnyfunnyfunny.

“Hey.”

“What’s up Connor?!” Jared yelled. “Sorry I’ve been such an ass to you, I’m like that.”

“Cool,” Connor said, not smiling. “Have either of you seen my sister?”

Evan shook his head and Jared disintegrated into giggles. “Evan clearly has,” Jared said, waggling his eyebrows.

“Stop,” Evan said, hitting him because Connor sort of looked like he wanted to punch something when Jared said that.

“I haven’t seen here in a while,” Evan said, earnest. “Want me to help you look?”

Connor shrugged.

Evan interpreted that as a yes. Jared apparently interpreted it as an invitation to tag along. They headed into the house, weaving their way through the kitchen. No Zoe. Into the living room. No Zoe.

Connor made Evan check the bedrooms on the off chance that she was… in a bedroom with someone.

She wasn’t.

Finally, Connor knocked on the bathroom door and Alana poked her head out. “Oh. Hi Connor.”

“Hi?” He said as if he had no idea who she was.

“Alana. We did a project on Huck Finn together?”

“Sure…” He awkwardly pushed a hand through his hair. “Have you seen my sister?”

“Oh yes,” Alana said. “She’s in here.”

“Okay…?”

“She’s throwing up,” Alana explained. Her head disappeared back into the bathroom for a moment.
“Well now it seems she’s stopped, but she was throwing up.”

“Excuse me,” Connor muttered, and he pushed Alana and into the bathroom. Zoe was sitting in front of the toilet. “Zo, you okay?”

She nodded, smiling a little. “Yeah I’m alright. I think I wanna go dance.”

Connor shook his head. “It’s almost four in the morning, kid.”

“That’s the perfect time for dancing!” She said, standing up. Perky. Happy. Not the moaning, groaning, throwing up drunks that Evan had seen on too many ABC family shows.

“You can dance when you wake up tomorrow,” Connor said, and Zoe nodded, like, yeah good point, and then she headed out of the bathroom, fairly steady on her feet.

Alana lived not far from Evan’s house, and she was very gracious and offered to drive Connor, Evan, and Zoe to Evan’s house because she was responsible and hadn’t been drinking. There was no way Zoe could go home. She was still drunk, and still loud, and a few times she threw up.

So Zoe couldn’t go home. She said so herself, “I can’t go home.”

“Why not?” Evan asked. She was holding onto his hand like it was a lifeline.

“Because my dad will make it out that it was Connor’s fault that I’m drunk my mom will just be all quietly disappointed and then I’d still have to live with them for two years.”

“Fair.”

Evan led Zoe and Connor inside. “My mom is home, please be quiet.”

“Quiet. Got it,” Zoe mumbled, nodding to herself.

“Let’s put her in my room,” Evan said to Connor. “We can take the couch. It pulls out.”

“Great idea.”

While Connor got Zoe’s shoes off and set her up on Evan’s twin bed, Evan grabbed his small garbage can to put over the side in case she got sick again.

“Connor why are you being nice?” Zoe asked.

“Go to sleep, Zoe.”

“Why are you being nice to me? You’re never nice.”

“I know. Go to sleep.”

“I like the necklace.”

“Good. Night Zo.”

Evan was just sober enough that the exchange made his stomach turn.
Once alone in the dark living room, Evan suddenly wished he had just asked Alana to take the Murphys home.

He didn’t want to be alone with Connor after he just kissed Connor’s sister.

In fact, Evan wasn’t positive he wanted to be alone with Connor ever again.

His stomach flipped again and he kept worrying that he would throw up like Zoe had.

“The couch pulls out,” Evan repeated, and Connor just sort of looked at him like that didn’t quite make sense to him.

The couch was a cheap Ikea thing, and Evan stepped forward and pulled the underframe out and the last piece pulled back and up, turning the sectional with the chaise into a long rectangular bed.

Which he’d apparently be sharing with Connor Murphy.

Who had sometimes had gay thoughts about.

Whose sister he had just made out with.

Who he was supposed to kill himself within a few weeks.

“Blankets,” Evan said suddenly, and he took off down the hall to grab a blanket from the hall closet, loitering, his hands definitely cold and clammy and sweaty and his heart beating uncomfortably, defiantly.

Fuck.

Damn.

He walked back into the room with the blankets, and Connor was sitting sort of awkwardly perched at the edge of the couch.

“Um,” Evan said.

“Sun’s nearly up,” Connor muttered. “That’s your last three things, right? You got drunk, you stayed out all night, you kissed someone.”

“Yeah,” Evan said, swallowing hard.

“Cool,” Connor said. Hollowly. “Good. That… that makes it easier, right?”

“Um,” Evan said. “I guess.”

“Great.” Connor stripped off his hoodie and climbed onto the sofa bed.

“Cool,” Evan said. He toed off his shoes, pulled off the zip hoodie he was wearing, and climbed onto the other side of the bed from Connor. As far apart as he could manage.

Connor turned his back almost immediately.

Evan did the same.

But he wasn’t tired.
He rolled back onto his back.

“Connor?”

“What?”

“I’m sorry.”

“What for?”

“I just am,” Evan said, his heart in his throat. “For… the thing with Zoe, earlier.”

“It’s whatever.”

“No, it’s not.” No response. “Connor.” Nothing. “Hey.” Evan reached out, arching his arm so that he grabbed Connor’s arm above the elbow. Immediately, Evan recoiled. The arm felt like a scarred tree trunk; it was lined with scabs and indents and Evan’s breath caught. “Connor.”

“Don’t. It’s fine.”

“Are you… You’re doing that to yourself.”

No response.

“Why?”

Connor rolled over, facing Evan in the gray watery morning light, taking his arm out from under the blanket to reveal cuts and scars and scabs from the edge of his t-shirt to his elbow. Ugly, angry, violent lines. All straight. Intentional. Evan could see that they went down his whole arm, the inside of his wrist.

It was like a punch in the gut.

“I thought suicide partner etiquette means that you shouldn’t criticize my self destructive tendencies.”

“How long has that been happening?” Evan asked, ignoring Connor.

“A bit.”

“Are you still doing it?”

“Evan.”

“Well are you?”

“Yeah. Sometimes.”

Evan realized he didn’t think he had ever seen Connor wear anything other than long sleeves.

“Doesn’t that hurt?”

Connor gave him a bitter sort of smile. “That’s the point.”

Evan didn’t know if it was fair to be sad for someone he wanted to die next to, but he was. His chest hurt. His brain hurt. How could he doing that? How could he be hurting himself? How could he be in so much pain that physical pain was the only workable option?
It wasn’t fair that Evan felt like this. He knew it wasn’t fair, he knew it was hypocritical. He knew.
It wasn’t fair to mourn Connor’s pain, to feel for him, to hurt because he was hurting. Evan had no
right. He had no right at all.
But he did.
Evan took a breath.
Reached his hand back out. Touching Connor’s arm. Mutilated and scarred. But warm to the touch.
“Don’t,” Connor said, and Evan could only focus on his own breathing speeding, his own heart
pounding too loudly. So loudly. Connor could hear it.
“I’m sorry.”
“I don’t care if you’re fucking my sister, Hansen, just as long as you’re still planning to die with me.”
“I wasn’t talking about Zoe.”
Connor let out this small, strangled noise. Just for a second. Like a gasp or a release of breath or
something, but he did and Evan could see just a flash across his face of just pain.
“I’m so sorry.”
“Please don’t…”
“I'm so so sorry.”
"Don't."
They were too close to each other now. Too too close.
“The sun’s coming up.” Barely three inches between them. Evan's eyes were watering; he didn't
know if it was exhaustion or if he was crying and he was too far gone to care which or that Connor
could see.
“I’m so tired.” Connor had taken Evan’s hand, their fingers laced together.
“We should sleep…” Their knees were touching.
“We should.”
Evan, his heart hammering, his palms sweating, his fingers shaking…


I'm a Nervous Wreck

Chapter Summary

Heidi is a good mother. Evan writes an essay. Connor brushes his teeth. Zoe makes a clarification.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Evan was the one who closed the distance between them.

He thought.

He wasn’t positive he stayed awake for long after. It all felt like a dream.

“Oh my God!”

Evan jumped, thrown back into wakefulness, eyes open out of nowhere.

His mom.

Fuck.

His head was pounding and his mouth felt like he had spent all night licking carpeting.

“Mom?” He said, getting up from the sofa, not even sure what time it was, just that the sun was out and it was too bright.

She was staring into his bedroom, staring, arms crossed. “Honey, did you have people over last night? Why is there a girl in your room?” Her words were sincere and understanding, but her voice didn’t sound soothing and calm it sounded disappointed and rough and pissed and his head really really hurt.

“Oh, uh, s-sorry, mom, that’s… That’s uh Zoe. We hung out last night, a-after the jazz band concert, and uh. It was a party, okay, we went to a party and she got drunk so I left her in my room to sleep it off…”

“Why didn’t you call me? I could have driven her home.” She looked back at him again, worry marking her face and Evan knew immediately that he was going to get interrogated and he was utterly unprepared. “How did you get home? Were you drinking?”

“My friend Alana drove us. She lives two blocks from here. I had one drink, but I had gotten a ride _”

“You were drinking?” His mother said, disbelieving. “Do you know how dangerous that could have been with the medication you’re on? Side effects, worsening symptoms…”
“Mom, it was one drink.”

“And you’re never at home, and you haven’t touched the scholarship essays I mentioned. Are you skipping therapy? Skipping classes?”

“Mom, come on,” Evan said. “You… Y-you sent me to Dr. Sherman to build up my confidence, to be able to talk to people! And I’m doing it, I’m talking and making friends and socializing and you’re… angry.”

His mom looked crestfallen. “Honey, I want you to have friends. I do. I’m so glad you’ve made friends… but. This isn’t like you. You don’t forget to text me all night. You don’t bring home girls!”

“It’s one girl, mom!”

His mom frowned. “Please don’t lie to me, Evan. I saw the other girl on the couch with you.”

Evan felt his face heat up, the whole of last night rushing back to him, the party, Zoe’s lips on his, Connor, the scars, his lips on Connor’s. “Mom,” he muttered. “That’s Connor. Sorry, mom, uh… Zoe is his sister. He didn’t want to get her into trouble with their parents.”

“Oh!” She said, and she looked immediately relieved. “Oh honey, I am so sorry… I just. I had this moment where I saw myself as a grandmother by this time next year and I think my brain disappeared.”

Evan gave her an attempt at smiling. His head really did hurt. “Sorry. I should have texted. We just didn’t want to wake you since I knew you had work and class today.”

“That was thoughtful, honey,” She said, patting his cheek. “I don’t… Look, I don’t want you drinking. At least… you could get sick or into trouble…”

“I know, mom. Sorry. I’m really sorry.”

“It’s alright.” She sighed, checking her phone. Evan saw it flash 7:02 am. “I have to be to work in half an hour… where do the Murphys live? Maybe I could drop Connor and Zoe off?”

“Oh.”

And leave Connor and Zoe alone with his mom? Not a chance.

“No, uh, Zoe has to go pick up her car so… So they should be fine.”

She nodded. “ Alright.” His mom smoothed out her hair. “What are your plans for today? I could try to sneak home between work and class? Work on a few of those essay contests?”

“Oh.” He sighed. “Well I a-actually have a lot of homework I need to do, but I was thinking, maybe, maybe I could try to work on uh…” Evan thought fast. “I might work on the one about… uh. Overcoming adversity?”

“Really?” His mother said, smiling, looking surprised.

“Yeah, I, uh. I mentioned your idea to Dr. Sherman last week and… I guess Dr. Sherman thought it might help, so. I think. I’m going to try to do it.” That was actually true; Evan had mentioned the essay to Dr. Sherman, who had told him to consider writing the essay even if he never sent it. As an exercise in talking about himself. Like a letter to himself, but one that didn’t flinch away from the anxiety and depression and the gory bits and pieces.
“Oh, sweetie, that’s wonderful!” His mom said, and then she was hugging him tightly, and when had he gotten so much taller than her? She was hugging so much it hurt. Not just the squeezing around his middle, but Evan’s heart hurt. He was going to hurt her. He was going to break her. She wouldn’t recover.

Could he live with that?

Oh, more importantly, could he die knowing that?

He debated crawling back onto the sofa bed, beside Connor, just pretending he had never been awake in the first place, but his head hurt too badly and something about that felt skeevy and weird to him. So instead, Evan grabbed his laptop from his bedroom (quietly, Zoe was still out cold, snoring ever so slightly) and headed into the kitchen where he Googled hangover cures and finished the pot of coffee his mom had made.

Caffeine made certain people more on edge, but Evan was there by default. Nothing that could be changed by a little caffeine.

Connor didn’t snore, Evan noticed, but he did sometimes make odd little noises. Sighs and “hmms” and teeth clacking. Evan tried not to watch him sleep; for one he wasn’t a stalker or a vampire so it was definitely creepy to watch someone sleep. But could catch glimpses of Connor adjusting his head or snatches of a little sight when he walked through the room to get his power cord, to brush his teeth…

It was only eight in the morning, and Evan was exhausted. The moment Connor and Zoe got up he was crawling into bed to sleep for the rest of the day. He was just wiped out.

In the meantime.

He pulled open a fresh word document.

And started typing.

… Words fail to capture precisely how humiliating it is to struggle with mundane tasks, tasks others accomplish without even acknowledging them. The choking sensation that accompanies each new failure, the ache of hunger because you just can’t foresee how to cope with watching a delivery driver count out change, the sweat slick palms with each new person you could make a connection with if only your hands could stop sweating long enough for you come up with words to say, the haunting feeling that nothing you say matters; all these agonizing truths of my life that struggle to express are just some of the things I…

“Aren’t you hungover?”

Evan jumped, startled. Connor was standing in the door for the kitchen, his hair a tangled halo around his head, the teal piece loose and obvious.
“Sorry,” Connor mumbled. “I tried to make noise when I got up so I wouldn’t startle you.”

Because Connor knew Evan was jumpy.

Jesus Fucking Christ.

“It’s okay,” Evan said.

“Zoe still out?”

“Wha-? Oh, yeah, she’s still asleep. She’s breathing, I checked, because she hadn’t moved in a while when I went in to grab a change of clothes before I showered but she was definitely breathing so she’s just sleeping in.”

“Hm.”

A silence fell over the kitchen. Evan stopped typing entirely, instead picking at the hem of his t-shirt, not really looking at Connor.

“Last night…” Connor said, eyes on the floor.

“I’m so sorry,” Evan blurted. “I can’t believe that I did that, I didn’t even… I’m not even… I’m sorry.”

Connor shook his head. “No, no. It’s fine. It was…” He smiled faintly for just a second, then pulled the sleeves of his hoodie over his hands. “It can’t change anything.”

Evan blinked. “Okay…?”

“I mean,” Connor said, eyes on his toes. “We’re still… at the end of the month?”

“Oh,” Evan said, understanding. “Yeah.”

“Good.”

More silence.

“What are you working on?”

“Scholarship essay contest. My mom is obsessed. And the deadline on this one is today.”

“Oh,” Connor said, frowning.

“It’s just… she’s getting sort of suspicious. She kind of freaked out on me this morning for being out so late and bringing you guys back.”

“Oh. That sucks.”

“Well she thought you were a girl so…”

Connor laughed, but it wasn’t the harsh laugh he was usually giving. It sounded nervous. Awkward. “Fuck, man, that’s a real hit to my masculinity,” He said, mumbling, like he’d thought too hard about the words and was just trying to be funny and Evan laughed anyways.

It was cute that Connor was nervous.

It was….
What the hell was Evan even thinking?

What was wrong with him, smiling nervously at a boy he had just kissed the night before? First of all, since when did he kiss people? He’d wanted to kiss people, mostly girls, mostly Zoe, and then he finally kissed Zoe, and then he kissed Connor Murphy? Was he actually insane?

Was this some kind of end-of-life madness? Was it because, now that he knew he would die, his brain was misfiring left and right, just trying to make sure that he lived enough life before he stepped off the edge?

“Is there any chance you have a spare toothbrush?” Connor said, eyes on the floor. “I kind of feel like there’s moss growing on my teeth.”

“Gross.”

“I-I know right?” Connor said.

“I think we have a spare,” Evan said, standing up, walking toward the linen closet outside of the bathroom. There was a pack of toothbrushes hidden behind a pack of toilet paper and a small stack of hand towels. He grabbed one, twiddling it in his fingers, and brought it back into the kitchen.

Connor had taken over his seat, folded up awkwardly so he hadn’t needed to scoot out the chair to fit his legs. Evan wondered what pharmaceuticals Connor hadn’t taken because of their impromptu slumber party; he seemed like himself but amped up. More nervous and awkward and it was sort of freaky because it was like looking in a mirror.

A funhouse mirror, Evan thought, looking at Connor’s long limbs and long hair.

“Found a tooth brush,” Evan said.

And then he realized that Connor hadn’t looked up because Connor was reading his essay.

“Don’t read that!” Evan practically shouted.

Connor looked up.

“It’s… don’t, okay? It’s stupid and it’s just to get my mom off my back, okay, it’s all… It’s all made up. Pretend. Bullshit. Okay? Just don’t… don’t read it.”

Connor bit his lip for a second. “I was just going to say that you’re a good writer.”

“Oh,” Evan said, relieved. “You think?”

“Yeah.” Connor fiddled with a strand of his hair for a second. “Then again, I thought that when I read your paper on Daisy Buchanan last year.”

“But I…” Evan stopped. “I never finished that presentation.” He was looking at spot on the floor, feeling like his throat was closing up. “I actually… I had to go to the hospital after that.”

“Oh.”

“You read it?”

Connor looked like he might be blushing. “You left your copy at the front of the classroom. I kept
meaning to return it but…” He shrugged. "Like what kind of psycho holds onto someone else’s English paper. I didn’t even like, rip it off.” He shook his head. "I read it though. It was good.”

“I didn’t even know you were in my class,” Evan admitted.

Connor shrugged. “It’s not like I showed up a lot.”

Evan sort of smiled.

A beat.

“ Toothbrush?”

“Oh, great, thanks.”

Connor headed off to the bathroom, toothbrush in hand. Evan sat briefly at the table again, looking at his, now finished, essay.

He sighed. Saved it.

And emailed it to his mom, with a note that said, “What do you think? I might submit it today.”

He sighed, deciding that it was done.

One more thing finished.

Connor came back into the kitchen a moment later, his hair pulled back in a knot, and Evan saw that some of the hair in front was wet and glued to his forehead, like he had washed his face in the bathroom.

“Hey.”

“Hey.”

Connor got closer. Like a foot away from him. Evan was leaning, pretend casually, against the counter in the kitchen.

“So… last night?” Connor said, his voice a little shaky.

“Yeah?” Evan said, a little breathless because he was so close.

"Were you still drunk or...?"

"No. I don't think so..."

“Can we… try that again?”

Evan’s internal organs vanished, leaving behind a acute ache. “Oh. Yeah.”

“Okay.”

Connor put his hands on either side of Evan’s head and sort of, cautiously, came closer… pulled away, blew out a nervous breath with a soft whoosh, smiling nervously, and then. Kissed Evan. Evan hadn’t realized that Connor was that much taller than he was until he was standing on his toes to meet Connor’s lips. His back pressed into the edge of the counter, his hands not sure where to go so he used them to pull Connor closer, until they were chest to chest. He was struggling to breathe,
but in a good way, in a great way, because he was kissing someone and when did you breathe when that was happening? Connor’s mouth tasted like Evan’s toothpaste and Evan wondered if he had planned to do this when he asked for a toothbrush. Connor had one hand on the back of Evan’s neck, one coming around him to rest on the small of Evan’s back and then they broke apart, breathless.

Evan let out a nervous laugh, not knowing what to do.

“Guys?”

Zoe’s voice.

Connor backed away fast, one fluid motion, basically stepping back across the whole kitchen in one step.

Zoe walked into the kitchen, her hair a mess, curls having fallen out since the night before. She had smudges of leftover makeup around her eyes.

“Hey. Thanks for letting us crash here, Evan.”

“Don’t mention it,” Evan said, eyes on his socks.

“Connor, we should get going before mom and dad get worried,” She said.

“Yeah,” Connor said, heading out of the kitchen. “I’ll get my shoes.”

“Evan, can I talk to you?” Zoe asked, smiling at him but looking like she would rather not be smiling but maybe flinching or running away.

“Sure.”

“In private?”

“Oh. S-sure… We can go to my room.” Zoe followed him to his bedroom, and closed the door behind them.

“I wanted to apologize.”

Evan was surprised. “Sorry?”

“I’m sorry about last night. When I kissed you. That was… I was drunk, and it was weird, and I’m sorry.”

“Oh. You’re…. Sorry, okay.”

She looked pained. “Oh god, I didn’t mean it like. Like that. It’s not that I don’t like you. I think you’re… wonderful. You’re so nice and… it’s just that I shouldn’t have kissed you like that. I didn’t even ask if you liked me and I’m so sorry.”

“It’s alright.”

“Is it…?” She sighed, still trying to smile but it just wasn’t working. “I was hoping we could still be friends.”

Zoe smiled genuinely then. “I’m glad.”

“M-me too.”

Zoe gave him a hug, and then they left his bedroom where they found Connor, arms crossed over his chest, looking pointedly away from the made up sofa bed like he hadn’t been the one who put it away. Like the dog who looks away when he makes mess meme, but in reverse.

“Connor, come on.”

“Bye,” He said quickly to Evan, not looking at him.

“See you later!”

Evan got an email back from his mom a couple of hours later. She thought his essay was, “perfect, honey!” She caught a couple of typos he had made, and Evan submitted the essay to the scholarship’s website before he could think better of it.

He didn’t know why.

Maybe since he had poured out all of the details about his mess, his disaster, the worst of him…. Maybe he just wanted to know that someone out there would see it. Even if it was all garbage, all bullshit, all things he wished he could believe…

Someone other than his mom should read it.

....In conclusion, I have worked very hard to overcome this adversity I face. However, overcome is a verb, and for me it will always be in the present tense. I am actively working to overcome, every day. Some day are harder than others. Some days are impossible.

Then there are days where everything seems possible, where all you can see before you is the horizon stretched out, reminding you of how much you still have yet to see, and do, and think, and feel. So you persevere. You push through. You do the hard thing. You step out into the sun.

Chapter End Notes

Oh my god thank you to all of my beautiful readers! If you haven't seen it yet, please check out the amazing and adorable fanart by larryismyweakness (@secretconnormurphy on tumblr) of Evan, Connor, and Zoe's Forever 21 selfie. :}
Broken and Callow, Cautious and Safe

Chapter Summary

Larry Murphy makes questionable parenting decisions.

Chapter Notes

So long, soft! Connor.

***Content warning: There's some discussion of antidepressants and some shaming of folks who take them. And a liiiittle bit of homophobia.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Evan felt like he had had a stomachache for three days.

No not a stomachache.

A stomach hollowing. Like someone had installed fifteen gigs of empty space in the spot below his ribs.

He kept waiting for some kind of explanation from Connor about why the fuck they had kissed because he was certain that Connor had to have one since Evan sure as hell didn’t. He was nervous all of the time. Not necessarily more than usual, but now it wasn’t an all over feeling. It was concentrated. It was weighing him down. He hadn’t taken a normal breath in three days. He was starting to feel lightheaded. He wasn’t able to focus, to muddle through his classes like normal, he couldn’t eat couldn’t really sleep.

Evan was so freaked out he was starting to actually think about telling his mom about the kiss. Just to tell someone.

No chance he’d talk to Jared about it though. That was like begging to die by torture and embarrassment.

It was so all consuming, this sudden confusion, that Evan when realized that he hadn’t wanted to die for three whole days, he looked around, suspiciously, like someone had pulled a very strange joke.

He...

Evan felt his head spinning.

He hadn’t wanted to die for three whole days.

Was it because all of that was sorted out now? Was it because it was just sort of a casual coast to the end there?

Was he so needy and broken that the moment he finally kissed someone his emotional barometer...
leveled out? Was he already dead and this was Hell, but like a sneaky version of Hell where you didn’t know you were there immediately?

The fact was that not wanting to die didn’t even feel better. It felt just… empty. Too wide open, too unfurnished. Like, what now? So his broken brain wasn’t operating on Threat Level: Kill Yourself for a few days…. What did that even mean? Flake out? Get help? Just chug along chug alone chug along until you have two-point-five kids, a white picket fence, a divorce under your belt, and a drinking problem?

It would come back, Evan told himself.

It would come back, he reassured himself.

“Do you want to go somewhere?” Connor asked him during the passing period between seventh and eighth hour. “After school?”

Connor did not look good that day. He hadn’t looked good for three days, in fact. Evan wondered if he looked the same. If they were both losing sleep.

Though Evan at least managed to shower. He was a terrible depressive; he was a functional depressive. The anxiety was overwhelming and it utterly derailed him every time. But depression? He could probably live with just that. He’d be bored out of his mind, but he’d live. He’d just sleep too much or too little, eat too much or too little, and think about death a lot. Not a big deal. He could function. He could shower. He could show up to school on time every day.

The fact that Evan doubted anyone could see the depression.

The anxiety was so obvious. His forehead practically read, “Ask me why I’m so sweaty in everyday situations!” But if someone did, he would probably just throw up. Or pass out.

But the depression. He wasn’t a classic case. He wasn’t the sort you saw in commercials. He could get out of bed; he just didn’t want to, ever.

Connor might have been the commercial brand, though. Yesterday morning Zoe had texted him saying Connor was refusing to go to school. He did end up showing sometime before lunch, high and apparently pissed off because he snapped at Evan once or twice (and then apologized hollowly, and then did it again, and then apologized hollowly, lather, rinse, repeat).

Evan shrugged, then nodded. “Sure.”

Connor was driving a little too fast.

Evan was only sort of clawing the side of the seat for dear life.

Dear life.

_Jesus fucking Christ._

“Where are we going?” Evan asked after they got on the interstate.
“I have something I need to check off of my bucket list,” Connor muttered.

Evan’s heart dropped. It seemed unlikely Connor’s bucket list was going to be something sort of silly like getting drunk. He seemed edgy to Evan, his hands gripping the steering wheel so tightly his knuckles were white.

“Did something happen? You seem off…”

Connor scoffed. “Nothing ever happens to me,” he muttered.

Which. Okay. Liar.

Evan had mostly stopped himself from being afraid of Connor. He had. Connor wasn’t scary; he was just messed up like Evan.

Or at least Evan kept telling himself that.

It was rapidly starting to look a lot less like that.

Evan’s mind raced, trying to think of something that might get Connor to drop the look in his eye like he was about to make Evan drive a getaway car from a bank robbery.

“What’s your favorite color?”

“The fuck?” Connor said, obviously disarmed.

“Your favorite color. You h-haven’t told me, and I, uhm, I realized that I didn’t know and you see the thing is that I… I know it’s stupid, I know, it’s really dumb and I’m s-sorry I asked, it’s just… I just want to know what your favorite color is because you know, we’re… we’re doing this, whatever this is, we’re suicide partners and and I just, it’s just that I want to know what your favorite color is sorry.”

Connor glanced at him quickly. Like he had sprouted tentacles.

“Sorry, that’s so weird I’m sorry.”

“Knock it off with the sorry shit.”

“S-”

“DON’T!”

Silence fell over the car.

Connor kept speeding.

Evan stared at his lap, fingers winding in the hem of his shirt, biting hard on his lip. Fuck. Fucking fuck.

They kept sitting there in tense silence. For one minute. Two. Five. Eight. Evan’s mouth tasted like iron suddenly. His lip was bleeding. Fucking hell.

“It’s green.”

He looked at Connor, surprised. “Green?” He had never seen him wear green, his bedroom wasn’t green. He was surprised. Maybe it was a pot thing?
“Yeah. Green.”

He turned the radio on, too loud to talk over. He didn’t ask Evan’s favorite color, and Evan was almost thankful because it was a stupid question anyway.

Connor parked his car in a huge parking garage downtown. He didn’t seem uncertain at all about where he was going, but Evan didn’t have any idea what there were there for and why he was there and where they even were.

But he didn’t dare ask.

“Come on,” Connor said, leading them out of the parking structure, across a skywalk, and into an office building. It was white and cool and there was soft music playing.

Connor walked right up to the receptionist, and smiled, and it was unnerving because it wasn’t a real smile it wasn’t genuine at all, and she said, “Connor! Sweetie, I haven’t seen you in two years, how are you?”

“I’m alright.”

She hugged him.

What.

The.

Hell.

“You’ve gotten so tall!” She said, smiling. “How’s senior year? You thinking about colleges yet?”

“Sent off a few applications, yeah,” He said, smiling easily. He listed off a few schools, all very far away from there.

“Well, good luck. I’m sure you won’t need it. You’ve always been so studious. I remember that summer you were thirteen, always hanging around your dad’s office, reading everything you could get your hands on.”

“Yeah.” Connor pushed his hands into his coat pocket. “This is Evan, by the way.”

The receptionist smiled brightly. “Nice to meet you. I’m Darla. I’ve worked for Mr. Murphy since Connor and Zoe were in diapers.”

“Nice to meet you,” Evan mumbled.

“Is it alright if we go up?” Connor asked, and it was so light and pleasant.

“Go on ahead, I’ll buzz you.”

“Thanks Darla.”

She buzzed them out of the lobby and into a bright hallway. Connor dropped the smile immediately, and, yeah cool, Evan thought, you’ve been hanging out with a sociopath.
“We’re at your dad’s office?”

“Yep.” Connor punched the elevator button so hard it had to hurt.

Evan shrank away because he didn’t even want to ask.

They rode the elevator up to the eighth floor. Evan let Connor take the lead, heading down one hallway and then another.

“What’s going on?” Evan asked under his breath.

“Shut up.”

Connor knocked on a closed office door that read “Lawrence Murphy” with a lot of letters following his name.

“Come in!”

Connor opened the door and strode inside. Evan followed, tentatively.

“Connor! Evan! What are you two doing here?”

“We were in the area.” Connor said, lying. He shut the door. He was digging for something in his messenger bag and Evan’s brain immediately went GUN!

It was a piece of paper.

Mr. Murphy was looking at it quizzically.

“Got my progress report today,” Connor said, conversationally.

“And how does it look?” Mr. Murphy asked. Stern. Not smiling. Evan realized his hands were shaking.

“Well there’s a note from the school psychologist,” Connor said, casually. “Dear Mr. and Mrs. Murphy…”

“Son, can we do this at home? I’m buried under a pile of work.”

“It’ll just take a second,” Connor said sharply.

Evan had a bad feeling about this.

“After talking with Connor a few times, I would really appreciate if I could have a meeting with both of you. I know last we spoke, Mr. Murphy was very resistant to the idea of medication, and I would like very much to revisit the issue. Connor’s grades have improved this semester, but his attendance is still very sporadic and in our conversations it seems apparent to me that, in my professional opinion, assessment from a psychiatrist is necessary. Connor would benefit greatly from medication in addition to therapy since he is displaying symptoms of clinical depression-”

“Enough!” Mr. Murphy snapped. “I’m not doing this now, Connor, we’ve talked about this.”

Connor eyes were unreadable. “You don’t want me medicated? That’s the reason?”

A really bad feeling.
Mr. Murphy fell speechless.

“You told me that the doctors thought it wouldn’t make a difference.”

“I—”

“You…. you lied to me. You told me that I just wasn’t trying hard enough, that I was just lazy and doing… doing everything for attention.”

Mr. Murphy was on his feet. “Connor, I’ve read the literature about antidepressants-”

“I’m eighteen!” Connor yelled. “She— the-the shrink only told me because I’m eighteen… She said you talked about this when I was a freshman.”

Mr. Murphy put his hand on Connor’s shoulder. “And, at the time, your mother and I-”

“Bullshit!” He violently pushed his father off of him. “Mom’s been begging you for years to try something else. I begged, Zoe’s begged—”

“I don’t want to talk about this, now, Connor-”

“You sent me to rehab, you let her send me to fucking yoga retreat, but you won’t pay ten dollars a month to keep me from killing myself-”

“Now you’re just being dramatic-

“Dramatic?! Why don’t you just call me a fag like you want to, dad—”

“I don’t see how you thought this would be productive, and I don’t know why you would have dragged Evan along to see your temper tantrum.”


“Connor-”

“I don’t need your permission to be on medication!” Connor shouted.

“If you want to live under my roof, be on my insurance-”

“Fuck you,” Connor said, but his voice was so much lower and Evan literally thought he felt the room spin. “Come on Evan.”

Evan followed, looking back at Mr. Murphy quickly. He had collapsed back into his chair, hands over his face.

As they crossed the floor to the elevator, everyone in every cubicle was staring at them.

Connor didn’t seem to notice.

Evan rushed him into the elevator, punching the floor for the lobby, and the moment the doors closed Connor slammed his fist into the wall, leaving behind a fist imprint in the drywall.

Evan didn’t say anything.

His mouth wouldn’t, couldn’t open.
Connor wasn’t on medication.
Connor wasn’t getting help like he needed.

They rushed past Darla the receptionist, out of the office, fast, across the skywalk, and into the parking garage.

“Connor-”

It was like he wasn’t even there. He was walking, steady, purposefully across the parking garage, past his car, and Evan’s first thought was that Connor was going to throw himself over the side and his second thought was, without me.

Instead, Connor stopped in front of a black Lexus, and it all happened so fast, he had a pocket knife and he slammed it into one of the tires. Slashed it, and all of the air rushed out with a soft whoosh and Evan was shouting, “Connor what the hell?”

He didn’t say anything.
He slashed another tire.

“Connor.”

“What do you want, Hansen? I’m busy-“

He was making to move around the other side of the car and Evan didn’t know what came over him but he tackled Connor Murphy to the ground. He’d never been an athlete. He had never tackled anyone in his life and the moment they landed, hard, painfully on the concrete Evan realized he probably ought to have given more thought about the fact that Connor had a knife in his hand.

“Get off of me!” Connor shouted, and he was shoving and hitting and Evan just shoved and hit back until Connor rolled them over, rolled off of him, got to his feet, spitting.

His lip was bleeding.

Evan’s elbow and knees throbbed. He hoped he hadn’t injured his arm again, he’d just gotten the damn cast off.

Connor started toward the front of his dad’s car, and Evan started to go for him again and “Evan, I swear to god if you come near me I will break your other arm.”

And Evan, stupidly, bravely, desperately said, “So do it.”

Connor didn’t react.

“You want someone to hurt as badly as you, I’m here. I can’t run fast and we both know you’d kick my ass. So. Go for it. Break my arm, bash my head in. I don’t give a shit.”

“Stop.”

“Come on! You’re clearly itching to break something-”

“Evan shut up.”
So Evan did.

And Connor just sat there, breathing heavily for a moment, then headed toward his car.

And Evan followed.

And they got in and Connor drove the speed limit but Evan didn’t know where they were even heading.

But after half an hour, Evan swallowed hard and said, “Sometimes the meds don’t even work. Look at me.”

No response.

“Are you going to go on them?” he chanced, knowing it was stupid to ask. “It’s just that, you said it, you’re eighteen…”

“I think it’s probably too late for that.”

“It doesn’t have to be.”

Connor looked at him quickly. “For me it does.”

The scariest thing to Evan was that throughout the whole exchange, Connor hadn’t cried. Hadn't gotten choked up. Not once.

They just kept driving, and Evan was completely lost.

“If you weren’t going to die in three weeks, what would you want to do with your life?”

Evan started, surprised that Connor was speaking. They hadn’t spoken in an hour. At least. The sun was starting to go down.

“Uh,” Evan said, blinking. “I don’t know. I’m going to die in three weeks so…”

“But if you weren’t.”

Evan sighed, thinking. He didn’t know. Was there a job where he could just be around trees and not people? “I’d probably want to go to college. Study environmental science or something.”

“Why?”

“I. I uh, I really like… nature.” He said. It was so lame. He was so embarrassed.

“Yeah?”

“Yeah… I was an apprentice park ranger this summer. At Ellison Park.”

“Cool.”

“You don’t have to lie just to be nice to me.”
“I’m not being nice to you,” Connor muttered. “That’s kind of cool. Objectively.”

“Sure.”

“So… why nature?”

“I don’t know. I like tree.”

“Trees?”

How had they made out and never talked about the tree thing.

“Yeah. Trees.”

“Cool.”

At some point they had turned around. Evan wasn’t paying attention to time; he knew it was about three of Connor’s cigarettes ago.

“What about you?”

“What?” Connor said.

“If you weren’t dying in three weeks, what would you want to do?”

Connor sighed. “Go on fucking meds.”

“Anything else?”

“I dunno. I haven’t… I’d probably just fuck up anything I tried.”

“But if you didn’t?”

Connor sighed again, louder, frustrated. “I don’t… I don’t know. I might go to college. I guess.”

“What for?”

“English, I guess. I… I like to read.”

“Would you want to write?”

Connor shrugged. “Assuming this is a universe where I don’t fucking suck at stuff? Sure.”

“Cool.”

“Whatever Hansen.”

“Don’t Hansen me, Murphy.”

Connor laughed. So Evan laughed.

“Do you think there’s an alternate universe where we’re happy?” Evan asked then, suddenly desperate to know.
“I don’t want to think about that.”

“Why not?”

“Because I… I just don’t.”

“Why not?”

Connor groaned dramatically. “I guess. I, I don’t want to think that there’s anything else. That after I’m dead, I’m dead. No more.”

More silence.

More driving.

“Do you think I can stay at your house tonight? I don’t want to go home.”

“I’ll text my mom.”

More silence.

More driving.

Evan checked his phone. It was nine o’clock. They’d been driving for hours.

Evan took a deep breath. “Connor?”

“Yeah.”

“The thing you said to your dad…. After he called you were dramatic?” He took a shuddering breath, Connor was not speaking. “You said-”

“I’m gay. Probably.” He slowed to a stop at a light. “If you hadn’t figured that out already.”

“Okay.”

“What about you?”

Evan sighed. “I have no idea. I’ve never…”

“Alright.”

“Okay.”

“Cool.”

“Great.”

Chapter End Notes

Oh my goodness you guys! I love you each so dearly.

Sorry about Larry. Sorta. I kind of drew on the bit of dialogue before "Words Fail" for that. And also recalled my own experience with my own parents who were like “nah
Tess, you're not depressed don't go on medication just stay busy." Obviously medication is not the only or best way to treat depression in every person, but outright refusal to consider them can put kids, like Connor, into dangerous mental spaces because they can't get the help they need.

Thank you and special shoutout to flowersforflorence (@flowers-for-florence on tumblr), who drew a beautiful piece of fanart for the scene at the end of chapter ten with Connor and Evan holding hands as the sun comes up. It's amazing! You all are the best possible fans, and I love you all dearly. You make my life.
Get Bummed Out

Chapter Summary

Heidi is really trying, Connor is really a mess, Evan is really confused.

Chapter Notes

Have you listened to "Get Bummed Out" by Sports? Do it. I posted it on my tumblr (@ch-ch-ch-ch-cherrybomb). It is very Evan and Connor this chapter.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Evan unlocked the front door to the house, already nervous because his mom was definitely home already and he’d have to explain why Connor needed to stay over because it wasn’t like he could sneak Connor into his bedroom (because he had already tried to think out that scenario and in every iteration it ended with Connor breaking some bones (sometimes his own) (sometimes Evan’s)).

“Honey!”

His mom sounded worried. And Evan’s veins flooded with guilt. She was worried, she was worrying about him again, like always, like she had to because she was stuck with him.

“Hi mom!” Evan tried to shoot a please-be-cool look back at Connor, but he looked like he was on another planet. Just completely absent. Lights on, nobody home.

“Honey, please tell me you have Connor with you.”

“Yeah mom.” He tried to catch Connor’s eyes, but he was just standing there, eyes on his boots, not moving from the entry. “Let me go talk to her.”

Connor didn’t respond.

Evan wondered if this was, like, a catatonic state.

He’d have to ask his mom.

He walked back through the house, finding his mom sitting perched on her bed, in pajamas already, her phone clutched to her chest. She beckoned him to come into her room, so he did, closing the door quietly.

“Mrs. Murphy just called me in tears.”

“Oh.”

“She said that Connor had a fight with his dad?”

“Uh. Yeah.”
His mom was frowning. “Did he really slash his dad’s tires?”

Evan flinched. “I tried to… I stopped him once I realized what was happening.”

His mom pinched the bridge of her nose, standing up. “Can I ask what happened?”

Evan shrugged. “I guess… I guess Connor’s been kind of, erm, he’s been depressed? For a while? And he f-ound out that his dad… his dad doesn’t, like, believe him. Won’t let him think about going on meds.”

His mom’s frown only deepened.

Evan didn’t know what to say. He didn’t even know why he was saying this to his mom. Might as well let the cat out of the bag about everything at this point, just confess, let it out, stop the guilt.

“I guess they… His dad is saying he doesn’t want Connor in the house right now.”

Oh.

Fuck.

“H-he doesn’t?”

His mom bit her lip. “Well. I told Mrs Murphy he can stay here tonight.”

“Oh.”

“He won’t have anything to wear tomorrow,” She said uncertainly. “I don’t think his parents are willing to drop things off for him tonight.”

“I’ll lend him something.”

His mom gave him a twisted smile, and Evan understood. Yeah right. Like Connor would be caught dead in Evan’s dorky clothes.

“Mom, what do I even say to him?”

His mom looked like she might cry for a split second and.

Just.

If his mom cried, then he would cry, and if he started crying all of it would just come out of him, just an unstoppable force, a broken dam, and if he told her she would hate him so much.

“I don’t know honey. I think you just… need to be a good friend. Listen to him. Let him talk.”

“Oh.”

“It’s late already,” She said, a little pointedly. “Do you want to set up the sofa for him…? Or see if he wants to stay with you? I think we still have that old air mattress in the hall closet.”

“I’ll ask him.”

His mom put a hand on his shoulder. “Sweetie, you know that you can tell me anything, right? That if you’re ever… if you’re ever feeling like Connor’s feeling now, you can tell me. I’ll be there, I swear. It doesn’t matter how bad you think it is. I’ll listen.”
“Oh I… I know. Thanks mom.”

“Love you.”

“Love you too.”

Evan was worried that Connor hadn’t moved when he turned back out of his mom’s room.

“Did he call then?” Connor asked.

Evan didn’t want to tell him the truth. But he figured lying would make it worse. “Your mom did.”

“Did he kick me out again?” Connor asked.

Evan wrinkled his brow, his brain stuck on again. “Do you want to go to my room?” He said instead.

Connor shrugged.

Evan tried to smile encouragingly, but he knew it didn’t come out right on his face. He nodded his head toward his bedroom, and started in that direction. He heard Connor carefully remove his boots, placing them carefully next to Evan and his mom’s line of shoes. Like he was trying not to make waves.

The moment they were in his bedroom, Evan closed the door. Connor sat on one end of his bed, Evan on the other. “What do you mean again?” His dad had thrown him out before? And then there was that comment about rehab, was that? The Murphys had seemed so nice, seemed like they were trying so hard, and maybe they were but what. What the hell.

“Oh,” Connor said, like he’d just realized that Evan was there and Evan had asked him a polite question about the weather. “Yeah, they shipped me off to stay with my grandma for a while when I was sixteen.”

“Why?”

Connor shrugged. “There was… I dunno. I got into a fight with Zoe.”

Evan waited for more details.

“It was stupid, but I think it was the last straw for my dad.”

“What was the fight about?”

Connor smiled bitterly. “Honestly? I don’t remember. I do remember her making fun of me, something stupid about how my dad caught me wearing nail polish again, and then I…” He looked down at his hands for a second. “I wish I could say I snapped, that like I didn’t mean to do it... I threw a chair at her, like from the kitchen? It missed. Which is good, I guess.” He paused, eyes not moving from his hands. “After I nearly broke her door down, saying I was going to kill her, my parents sent me to my grandma’s for the rest of the summer.”


He just felt sad.
“Stop…” Connor said, like he had come back to himself, like he was angry. “Don’t feel bad for me.”

“Why not?”

“Because I…” He stopped. Took a breath. “It’s not like anything ever happened to me to make me this way. Nothing bad ever happened. I’m just… I’m just fucking like this. I try not to be but… Look, Evan, I’m not a victim. Nobody made me this way.” He shook his head. “Don’t fucking feel bad for me. I don’t deserve it.”

Evan thought of Connor in the diner that day, after they went shopping with Zoe, when he said that if he was a parent, he wouldn’t leave a kid like himself alone with Zoe. He supposed that made sense. “How long was that? That you were kicked out for?”

“Two months,” Connor said. He pulled a hand through his hair. “Probably not the best idea though, in retrospect. I guess they didn’t think to tell her to put a lock on the medicine cabinet.”

Evan blinked. “Sorry?”

Connor shrugged. “My grandma… She had all of these pain meds. Leftover from surgery.” He sighed. “On an unrelated note, probably don’t give me any oxy unless the intention is to kill me. I’m a real asshole when I’m high.”

Well.

Noted.

Evan swallowed.

Looked at Connor’s hands again. Trying to see if they looked different now that he knew that Connor… He was violent sometimes. Angry. He’d thrown a chair at his sister. He’d slashed his dad’s tires.

He’d made all of those horrible cuts on his arms.

Evan kept waiting to see those hands as something that belonged to a monster.

Instead he noticed that knuckles on Connor’s right hand were swollen and bruised. “Shit. Your hand.”

Connor looked confused for a second, then looked at his knuckles on his right hand. He straightened them slowly, frowning. “Oh. Right.”

“Uh… I let me go get you some ice.”

“It’s fine.”

“It’s… obviously it’s not.”

Connor shrugged.

Evan left. Down to the kitchen. In a shocking turn of events, there was a bag of frozen peas in the back of the freezer, hidden behind the pizza rolls he had found last week. He plucked them out, and then paused, looking at the countertop.

For a second he could feel it against his back again, Connor’s hands arms around him, Evan’s pulling Connor closer.
Evan shook his head, blinking rapidly.

Not the fucking time.

He headed back to his bedroom to find Connor sitting near the top of Evan’s bed, staring at this stupid, small picture of Evan and his dad from the last time he had gone out to Colorado to visit.

It had been after he finished middle school. On the way there he had a panic attack about flying alone (his mom couldn’t afford a ticket to go with him, his dad didn’t care enough to come to pick him up). He’d spend the whole flight gripping the seat of the plane, not daring to read the book he had brought along because he was convinced if he lost his concentration for even a moment the plane would go down, crash into the mountains, slam into the ground in a fiery explosion. He was convinced this was going to happen, and if it wasn’t, it was terrorists. The plane was definitely getting hijacked and crashed into a building. Evan hadn’t slept the whole night before his flight watching clips of the 9/11 terrorist attacks on youtube, because he was certain that the only way it wouldn’t happen was if he forced himself to watch the planes hit the buildings and over and over again until it was the only thing he could see when he closed his eyes.

When he got to Colorado, his dad was busy a lot of the time. He spent a lot of his time hanging around his stepmom, who was relatively nice but very preoccupied with the little kids.

He didn’t really think of them as his siblings.

He hadn’t seen them since that last visit.

The picture was of Evan and his dad at a baseball game. Evan didn’t especially care for baseball, especially at fourteen, but his dad was taking him, so he smiled brightly for the picture and when he got home he made sure to print the photo out and frame it. Like if he did that, it would mean he’d see more of his dad. He also dug out his old baseball glove from a short lived stint in little league and conned Jared into playing catch exactly once before Jared declared it lame and made them go inside and play Final Fantasy.

He didn’t mean it literally, of course, when he’d thought he wanted to see his dad. He wanted to actually see his dad more often.

But the picture meant he saw more of him. Technically.

“Who’s the guy in this picture?”

“My dad.” He handed Connor the bag of peas.

“Thanks,” Connor said, putting the bag on his hand. “He’s not around?”

“Not since I was seven.”

“I’m sorry.” Connor looked it too. Sorry.

“It’s fine.”

Connor kept looking at the picture. “Baseball?”

“I’m not really into it, but I flew out to Colorado to visit and… that’s what he thought we should do.” Evan sighed. “I tried to like get back into it afterward for a while. But it’s sort of lame to try to play if you’re too scared to actually talk to the other kids on the field.”
Connor frowned. “My dad’s really into baseball too. He has, like, all of these baseball cards in the garage.”

“Yeah?”

He nodded, giving this awkward smile that was all wrinkled and wrong. “Yeah. He tried to get me into it for ages. He even got me a brand new glove like, I dunno, three years ago for my birthday?”

“Oh?”

“Spoiler: I am not into baseball.”

Evan nodded. “What did you ask for?”

Connor looked confused. “What?”

“What did you want for your birthday that year?”

Connor blinked. “Oh. I don’t know. Probably a book or something.” He sighed.

“How’s your hand?”

Connor shrugged. “Probably not broken.”

“Do you think-?”

“I don’t want to talk about my dad anymore Evan.”

He nodded. “Okay.”

Connor checked looked at his phone. Then he turned it off.

“Has anyone texted you?”

He nodded. “My mom… Zoe.”

“Do they….?”

“I don’t want to talk about them either.”

“Okay.” Evan looked over at his alarm clock. It was after ten. He was exhausted. “Are you tired?”

Connor shrugged.

“Let me find some pajamas for you, at least.”

“I can just sleep in my clothes.”

Evan rolled his eyes. “Don’t make it weird.”

Evan dug through his drawers, trying to find the least worn and old pair of pajama pants to give to Connor. He thought they’d probably be too big in the waist; the borrowed pair Evan had worn the last time he had stayed at the Murphys’ was a little bit too tight.

He pulled out a pair of soft flannel pants. They were navy and maroon. Evan looked back at Connor then. “Do you want a shirt?”
“No, I can just wear this one.”

Evan grabbed clothes for himself; an old t-shirt and a pair of gray and black flannel pants.

And then.

Well, he couldn’t change in there, obviously.

“I’m just… bathroom?”

“Yeah.”

Evan walked out of the room, to the bathroom. He took a strangled breath, because. He just. Connor was changing his pants in Evan’s room right now. Probably.

That was.

That was a lot for his brain right now.

Evan shook his head, trying to focus. He peed, washed his hands, and brushed his teeth. He changed into his pajamas - realizing that the shirt he had grabbed had been from an eighth grade field day. The shirt had been massive on him at the time; he had been so nervous about turning in the size form that Evan never did it, and they had to give his tiny eighth grade self a men’s large t-shirt in the end. The shirt had a bunch of faded eighth grader signatures on the back; Evan had been vaguely friendly with a girl called Georgia who had moved away before the start of high school at the time, and she sort of peer pressured a few people into signing his t-shirt with a sharpie.

He thought he might have still been facebook friends with Georgia.

Evan hadn’t thought about that in a while.

He shook his head, trying to remove the thought from his brain. Not the time.

He washed his face.

Took a deep breath and walked back into his bedroom.

Connor was sitting on Evan’s bed, his legs folded up like a pretzel. “Nice shirt.”

Evan smiled nervously. “Thanks.”

“Weren’t you in my class in eighth grade?”

Evan frowned, turning to close the door to his bedroom. “I’m so-sorry, I don’t remember.”

“Must have been,” Connor said softly.

“Sorry?” Evan sat down on the other end of the twin bed.

“I signed your shirt.”

“What?” Evan said.

Connor reached out, poking the back of his shoulder. Evan pulled the collar so that the shirt twisted, and there it was. In big, block letters, faded by nearly four years: Connor.

“Oh.”
“You hung around with Georgia Stern, right?”

“Yeah, sometimes. I don’t know. We were neighbors for a while.” Evan bit his lip. “I’m sorry, I don’t really… I don’t really remember you in the eighth grade.”

Connor shrugged. “I didn’t really talk to anyone.”

“Yeah, but…” Evan bit his lip. “You clearly talked to me. At least once.”

“Doesn’t matter.”

“But…”

“Do you want to watch something?”

“Sure.”

It was pretty late.

Evan didn’t feel like sleeping.

They had watched a few episodes of *Parks and Recreation*, because Evan knew Connor liked it.

The thing was that you couldn’t really sit comfortably on a twin bed side by side.

Evan kept nearly losing his balance.

But he didn’t want to move close to Connor because that seemed like it might result in their shoulders touching, and if their shoulders touched then Evan might want to hold Connor’s hand if he held Connor’s hand it would be the one he had used to punch a wall, so then he would yelp, and Evan would apologize and they would fall into awkward silence and not be able to talk anymore.

Connor was sitting back against the headboard a little. His hair was thrown up in a sloppy knot. He kept looking at Evan when he thought Evan couldn’t see him, then looking away quickly.

So Connor was gay, probably.

And Evan was…

Evan was going to die in three weeks. So. Debating whether or not he was gay was just so fucking beside the point, wasn’t it?

Wasn’t it?

He nearly lost his balance again, and Connor made a frustrated noise and said, “Jesus will you just come here?” Acting like he had asked three times and gotten ignored or something. Evan sort of squeaked (*jesusfuckingchrist*) because he didn’t really realize what was happening at first, until then it clicked and he sort of was resting his head back against Connor’s chest. “Is that okay?”

“Yeah…” Evan said but it was NOT okay because he was going to DIE because sitting like that meant that Connor’s arms were around him and that Connor’s really long legs were on either side of him wearing Evan’s stupid pajama pants and if Evan shifted at all he would… erm.
Evan was certain his face was so red it was bordering on purple by now. He was so thankful he didn’t have a mirror in his room where he might accidentally see himself and then pass out of embarrassment.

Admittedly not feeling like he was going to fall every three seconds was nice.

And Connor weirdly smelled nice.

They just kept watching things. Sometimes Connor would laugh and Evan could feel the vibration all the way down his spine, feel the breath on his neck. Forget kissing. This was fucking intimate.

He was definitely going to break out into hives or something.

After a while, Evan started to get sort of cold. Probably because he was fucking exhausted. He tried to shiver in the least obvious way possible.

“Cold?”

“Uh, yeah, I’m just going to get a hoodie-”

“Just take mine.”

“W-what?” Evan said, turning so he could actually sort of look at Connor.

“Don’t get up. Just take mine.” He was unzipping the black hoodie he was wearing already, pulling it off, and Evan realized the t-shirt he was wearing said “Nirvana,” which was a band that Evan knew his mom had liked as a kid. “Here.”

“Thanks.” Evan pulled the hoodie on. It was so warm. It smelled like Connor.

They settled back again, Evan’s back against Connor’s chest, the back of Evan’s head against the front of Connor’s shoulder, Connor’s right leg propped up a little, his arm resting loosely on it, his other arm next to but not touching Evan’s.

Maybe half an hour later, Connor murmured, “You’re falling asleep.”

“Sorry.”

“No, I should let you go to sleep.” He was starting to climb around Evan, like he was going to leave, go sleep downstairs or something and Evan, half asleep and warm and out of his mind and wearing Connor’s black zip hoodie said “No stay.”

Connor was standing already. “Hansen, you sleep in a twin bed. We won’t fit.”

“Stay.”

“Your mom…” Connor said uncertainly.

“Stay. I’ll set an alarm.”

Apparently he didn’t have great self control either. He smiled a little nervously. “Okay.”

There was a little bit of fumbling as they figured out how the hell they were actually, physically, going to be in a twin bed together, and eventually it ended with Evan on the right, Connor on the left, with Evan draping an arm over Connor’s waist and he knew he was overly tired because he wasn’t even that concerned about being that close, that physically close to Connor, dismissing his
own worries about sleep boners and just pulling Connor in closer.

This was a mess, Evan thought.

A big fucking mess because he had a big gay fucking crush on his suicide partner.

He swallowed the lump in his throat.

That was a tomorrow problem.

“I…” Connor started. “I’m sorry about today. I won’t fuck up tomorrow, I swear.”

“Don’t be an idiot,” Evan mumbled, his eyelids so heavy. “Didn’t fuck up anything.”

“You sure?”

“Well you fucked up that car pretty bad… but yeah.”

Connor rolled over to face him, their noses practically touching their chests definitely touching and he kissed Evan. Evan kissed him back, like he had been waiting for this, hoping for it, aching for it all day. They were both all hands, gripping at clothes and hair and sneaking finger tips just briefly across skin, when their shirts rode up.

Evan was relieved to discover Connor’s chest and back free of scars.

Well.

Tomorrow problem.

Chapter End Notes

Thought after last time you could use some fluffy bits at the end.
At five thirty in the morning, Evan’s alarm went off. He didn’t need to be up for school for at least an hour, but he needed to make it look like he and Connor didn’t spend the night squeezed into his twin sized bed because then his mom would ask him all kinds of questions that he was just not ready to answer yet.

So.

At five thirty his alarm went off, and Evan switched it off immediately and there was Connor, still curled up beside him, his hair having mostly fallen out of the rubber band he had used to hold it up, his body warm and pressed against Evan’s and he was...

Yeah he needed to get up.

Just.

For.

Dignity.

If he even had that.

He carefully untangled his limbs from Connor’s, and Connor’s eyes opened slowly as Evan was easing the blankets off of himself, looking confused, saying, “What’s happening?”

“Go back to sleep,” Evan said, his voice a little hoarse.

“No,” Connor said, indignantly, but then he adjusted his head on the pillow and was out again.

Evan took a deep breath. He walked quietly into the living room, grabbing the afghan from the back of the couch. He threw himself down on the couch, not bothering to pull it out, and threw his arm over his eyes, hoping to get back to sleep.

When that didn’t happen after about ten minutes, he sighed and pulled his phone from the table in the living room, unlocking it.
He had fifteen texts.

Fifteen.

Evan’s head swam, who had texted him, why were there so many did someone tell people at school about yesterday did people already know what was happening.

He clicked his phone locked again, holding it screen side down onto his chest.

He couldn’t look.

But his heart was hammering so hard that he couldn’t not look either, so he unlocked the phone again.

Evan took a deep breath. Nearly choked. Tried again.

He could do this.

He was going to jump off of a water tower in a little less than three weeks. He could read some fucking texts.

The first one was from Jared, and all it said was, “Stay sexy and don’t get murdered!” Jared had gotten really into some true crime podcast and he had made Evan listen to an episode during gym class when they were both pretending to be playing outfield in softball.

Okay. One down.

Fourteen to go.

He scrolled to the next one. From Zoe.

There were six from Zoe.

Evan self consciously looked around, like the moment he opened the text from Zoe, Connor would appear out of nowhere and just… look like he had in his dad’s office. Just crushed.

He opened them.

“Have you seen my brother? My mom said she got a note from the school shrink and wanted to talk to him.”

And, “Even if you don’t know where he is, can you just let me know?”

And then, “Evan, I know you’re with him. He slashed my dad’s tires? What happened? Is he okay? Mom and I are freaking out.”

“I just tried to call Connor and it went straight to voicemail. My mom called yours and you’re not there either. Are you guys okay?”

“I’m starting to get a little pissed off. Please text me back ASAP.”

“My mom said Connor’s staying at your house tonight. Can you tell him to text me in the morning? It’s urgent.”

He texted Zoe back immediately, figuring that she would rather a text woke her than not hearing from him. “Sorry, things were sort of stressful yesterday, and I wasn’t checking my phone. Connor is
here. He is… okay I think. Sorry again. I’ll tell him to text you.”

Evan looked back at his messages.

One from his mom from last night, and he just opened and closed it quickly before he opened the pandora’s box of guilt and confusion.

One poorly timed text from his dad, asking how senior year was going. Evan ignored that one too.

The rest were from Connor.

Which surprised Evan because he didn’t know when he could have missed them.

3:15pm: “I’m in the senior parking lot.”

The next was from 3:16 in the morning. “You talk in your sleep. Not like embarrassing or anything weird, so don’t get freaked out. But you mumbled something about bee populations and it was cute.”

And then, 3:17am, “I realize it is super weird that I just texted you that since we’re in the same room and you’re unconscious.”

Another at 3:24am, “What fabric softener do you use? Your whole bed smells like like a cupcake but I kind of like it?”

Then at 3:45: “Omg, I’m sorry, I should stop being a creep that texts you while you’re asleep, but you just smacked my phone out of my hand saying ‘no smoking’ and I almost fell out of the bed.”

And, at 4:00am, “I like you. Is that stupid?”

4:01am: “I don’t really care if it is. I just wanted to tell you.”

Evan thought he felt his heart stop for a second after the last two.

But then he sort of smiled.

And didn’t wake up again until his mom shook him at 6:30.

“Honey, it’s time to wake up.”

Evan opened his eyes groggily.

“Go on and hop in the shower. I’ll go wake Connor…” then she paused, looking at her watch. “Unless you think he should shower first? He does have all of that hair…. Evan are you falling back asleep?”

He had been. Evan blinked rapidly. “No. I’ll shower and I’ll wake Connor. He’s got hair. Totally awake.”

His mom gave him a smile, and he dashed off for his bedroom, flicking on the lights. He grabbed clothes quickly, and figured he could let Connor sleep until he was done.

Evan twisted the taps to cold when he got into the shower because now was not the time to be a hormonal teenage boy. It didn’t really help.

Dressed and showered, Evan hurried back to his bedroom. His mom was saying how she had put
coffee on and that she was going to call Mrs. Murphy on her lunch. “Okay, thanks mom,” Evan said, irritably. He walked over to the bed and shook Connor’s shoulder. “Hey. We’ve got to get up.”

Connor pulled the covers over his head.

“We’ve got school.”

“No.”

“Also your sister texted me like six times worried about you so you have to deal with that.”

Connor pulled the covers back down again. “You’re grumpy in the morning.”

Evan wasn’t grumpy. “You’ve got to get up. The shower’s open.”

“Okay okay okay I’ll go,” He said, getting up, pausing for a second with his back to Evan and knew immediately what was happening so Evan was pretending to be super interested in the paint on his ceiling.

“There’s a towel in the bathroom,” Evan said to the ceiling fan.

“Great,” Connor said to the carpet.

Just totally normal conversations they were having where they both definitely didn’t have boners.

Fuck.

It just got worse after that.

It was like everywhere he turned there was an opportunity to think about Connor naked and Evan was trying super hard (jesus) not to think about that.

And then his mom was downstairs, thankfully, when Connor came out of the bathroom, in his same jeans with his wet hair hanging down to his shoulders and.

He.

Didn’t.

Have.

A.

Shirt.

On.

Evan nearly fainted. Because. Well.

He’d never seen Connor without a shirt and after the night before it seemed somehow… private.

Plus if his mom walked in she would either 1) catch on immediately about Evan’s big gay crush or 2) catch sight of Connor’s arms and freak out completely.

“Can I borrow a shirt?” Connor said, a nervous edge in his voice, shoulders collapsed inward, arms crossed awkwardly over his chest like he knew Evan was looking. “I… I don’t want to hear about
wearing the same clothes two days in a row.”

“Yeah,” Evan said, tearing his eyes away. “You can take literally anything from my closet.”

Connor turned to face the closet, flicking through Evan’s shirts, yawning. After a few minutes, he had pulled out a blue t-shirt with a cartoon bookworm on it. The back said “HANSEN” in big letters.

“What’s this?”

Evan sighed. “Oh my god, I forgot about that. I was on battle of the books in seventh grade.”

Connor raised an eyebrow. "Battle of the books?"

“It’s like… It’s so lame, but you read a bunch of books and then answer questions about them.”

“And you still have this shirt from seventh grade?”

Evan nodded, swallowing hard. “Yeah. It’s old, but it still fits…”

“That’s kind of cute.”

Evan blushed.

“Can I borrow it?”

“If you want.”

Connor pulled it over his head.

It was a little tighter in the chest on him than it was on Evan. And a little bit shorter too.

“Um,” Connor said, awkwardly, recrossing his arms. “My hoodie?”

“Oh, right, I hung it up,” Evan said, grabbing it from the back of his bedroom door. He handed it to Connor, who put it on right away. And looked. Relieved.

“Hey guys,” Evan’s mom said, appearing in the doorway. “Good you’re both up. I’m running late, Connor would you mind driving to school?”

“I can do that.”

“Great,” She looked at her watch. “Shit. Evan, honey, I totally forgot I told Erica I would stay late tonight since she has another ultrasound today. Are you okay to get to your appointment with Dr. Sherman on your own?”

“Yeah.”

“I can drive him,” Connor volunteered.

And Evan’s mom stopped, surprised, and then smiled at him. “Okay, great. Thank you. Connor.”

“What time are you going to be home?” Evan asked.

“I’ll be home by six, so I’ll bring home Chinese if that’s okay? Connor, I’m going to call your mom on my lunch to see if you’re staying over tonight too, okay? I’ll text Evan to let him know. If you talk to your mom before then, tell her to still give me a call, yeah?”

“Sure Mrs. Hansen.”
“You can call me Heidi, sweetie.” She gave him a smile and then sighed. “Damn, okay boys. Eat something before school, alright? I’ll talk to you later.”

“Alright mom.”

She stood on her toes to kiss Evan’s cheek, saying "Love you," then to Evan and Connor’s apparent surprise, walked over to Connor and did the same thing. Kissed his cheek. “Have a good day at school, guys.”

And then she was gone, hurrying out the door and driving away.

Evan was trying to think of a way to apologize for his mom being so weird, but Connor kind of smiled at him awkwardly. “Your mom’s really nice.”

Evan shrugged. “I guess. When she’s here.”

"At least she cares."

On the way to school, Evan didn’t say anything about the texts Connor had sent him.

The school day really dragged.

His mom texted him at lunch saying, “Connor’s going to stay over again tonight.”

At the end of the day Evan went to find Connor at his locker.

He saw that Zoe was there already and hung back.

“What is going on with you?”

“Nothing,” Connor said.

“Mom and dad had a massive fight last night,” She said. “After mom picked dad up.”

Connor didn’t react.

“Dad… He started throwing around divorce again.”

“Good,” Connor mumbled. “Maybe they should break up. They aren’t happy.”

Zoe blinked a few times. Then she hauled off and slapped Connor across the face. “How can you say that?” She yelled, pushing him back against his locker. “Maybe you don’t give a shit -” She shoved him again, hard, and then Evan was moving faster than his brain would let him process, getting in between them.

“Hey, Zoe, stop!”

“Please get out of my way Evan,” She said, and her voice was shaking.

“I don’t think that’s a good idea.” People were looking, people had stopped to watch them, eyes wide, and Evan thought he even saw a few people go for their phones.

“No, let her finish what she started,” Connor said from behind Evan.

Zoe stepped back. She took one look at them and then burst into tears. “Fuck…”

Evan stepped out of the way.

“Zo, I’m sorry.”

“Just, can you just try to be normal for like one week, Connor? I just want to get through one week where I don’t…”

“I’m sorry.”

She took a long look at Connor, then stormed off, muttering, “I have band.”

Evan turned back to look at Connor, and his face was blank. As usual. “Connor…” He started. The crowd had dissipated a little.

“Come on, I told your mom I’d drive you to therapy.”

“Are you okay?”

Connor rolled his eyes as they walked up to his car. “No.”

“Zoe… she hit you.”

“Yep.”

“She’s… “ Evan didn’t know how to articulate this. She was angry, obviously. But it wasn’t just that. She seemed scared. He thought of all of the texts from her this morning. The same sick discomfort that he’d carried around all day when they went shopping together came back; Evan didn’t want to see Connor’s family worry about him. When he saw that, it made him feel sick. Guilty. Made him feel like a murderer in waiting.

Evan didn’t know what to say.

Connor had dropped him off, saying he would hang out in a coffee shop a few minutes’ walk away. “Text me when you’re done.”

“Okay.”

Evan’s brain had been so preoccupied that he hadn’t even had time to dread his session with Dr. Sherman.

“Evan?”

Dr. Sherman appeared in the waiting area, smiling, like usual.

Evan smiled self consciously, and followed him back to his office. He hated the walk to the office. He hated that they had to walk past all of the other closed doors with white noise machines outside, he hated trying to chat about the weather with Dr. Sherman, he hated the way his palms started sweating.

They stepped into the office.
Evan took his usual seat.

Dr. Sherman took his usual seat, crossing his legs at the knee, which Evan noticed most guys didn’t usually do. He had his clipboard out, and he was smiling. “So, Evan. How have you been?”

Evan took a breath. “Um. Fine.” Damn it no, Dr. Sherman would call him on that. “Good. I guess.”

“School’s going well?”

He nodded. “Yep. Good so far.”

“Did you end up writing that scholarship essay we talked about last time?”

Evan nodded. “Yeah. I um. I brought a copy?”

“That’s great, Evan.”

Evan went into his backpack, pulling out a folder and the stapled copy of the paper. Dr. Sherman took it from his hands. “So how do you feel about it?”

“The essay?”

“Yes. You said that you were thinking of writing about your struggles with anxiety. How was writing about that?”

Evan blew out a breath. “It was… difficult.”

“Say more about that.”

“I…” Evan frowned. “Getting started was the hardest part, you know? I didn’t even know where to… to start.”

“So, how did you get started?”

Evan bit his lip. “I started talking about the things that are hard for me to do. Stuff that… most people can just do.”

“Like what?”

“Talking to people. Strangers. Stuff like… ordering coffee and paying the pizza guy.”

“Good.”

“And then it just kind of… It was easier to talk about once I got started.”

“How so?”

“I wasn’t. Erm. I wasn’t embarrassed, I guess? At least not as much. It’s not like I’m going to, you know, bump into one of the judges on the street? It’s not like they were going to email me back saying, well, that’s not a real problem.”

“Good.”

They talked about the essay for a while. Evan was thankful, watching the clock. If he was lucky, he would get out of there without talking about much of anything else.

“So, last time you mentioned Connor?”
“Oh. Uh. Did I?”

“You did. How is that going? Are the two of you still hanging out?”

Dr. Sherman was definitely too old to be saying “hanging out” without putting air quotes around it.

“We are. He. He actually gave me a ride here today.”

“So he knows you’re in therapy?”

Evan nodded. “He does.”

“And how was telling him about that?”

Evan hadn’t, not really. Not intentionally. They just… it had come up naturally. While they talked about how they were going to kill themselves. “It was fine.”

“Fine?”

Goddamnit. “He didn’t like, freak out or anything. Or make fun of me.” He cleared his throat. “He uh. He’s actually in therapy too.”

Dr. Sherman smiled. “Is that so?”

“Yeah. He.. uh. He’s depressed, I guess.”

“Did he tell you that?”

“Yeah.”

“And how did you feel about that?”

“Bad, I guess. For him. Sad for him. It sounds… harder for him. His dad isn’t… his dad doesn’t really think depression is, like, real. He thinks Connor’s just being lazy.”

“I see.”

They only had ten more minutes left. Evan could make it, he told himself, another successful session of lying to his therapist.

“So. Have you been writing the letters to yourself like we talked about?”

Fuck.

Fuckfuckfuckfuckfuck.

Evan had completely forgotten. He had just completely blown that assignment off.

“I… um.” He sighed. “Not really.”

Dr. Sherman frowned. “Is it okay if I ask why you stopped? You’d been doing very well with them.”

“I guess… it’s just. It’s so lame,” He said, then slapped a hand over his mouth. “No, I mean. It’s. I just… I don’t… Sorry. I. I’m.” He shifted his jaw. “It’s just that I’m already such a loser at school
that I really don’t need any other reasons to look like a freak.”

“Why do you think that makes you a freak?”

“I mean…” Evan clenched his hands into fists. “I'm. They are letters to myself. My friend, er. My family friend Jared found out about them and thought they were like… creepy sex letters. And, and I… I just. It’s not helping. I don’t feel pumped up after, I don’t feel better. I feel stupid because who is so pathetic that they have to write letters to themself? I mean, it’s not going to stop me being… being like this. There’s no point.”

“No point in getting better?”

“I mean, how much better can I even expect to be?” Evan said, angry. “It’s not like I’ll wake up tomorrow in a different brain. One that’s not broken. I don’t see what the point in lying to myself is. Today’s not going to be a good day, tomorrow’s not, it’s… it’s. There’s no point. It’s not going to get better.”

“Evan,” Dr. Sherman said, and he sounded concerned. “I need to ask you something. Please understand that it is not a criticism, I just need to know going forward.”

“Sure.”

“Have you ever thought of hurting yourself? Of suicide?”

Oh fuckfuckfuckfuckfuck nononononono.

He’d given it up, he’d made it obvious, he’d blown it ruined it fuckfuck.

“No,” he answered too quickly.

“Evan, I promise this is not a judgement on you as a person. But as your therapist, I have a responsibility to check in with you about your safety. Now, I know over the summer, you broke your arm… How did that happen?”

“I fell out of a tree.”

Fuck. He knew, he knew. Evan was fucked. They were fucked. No. Nonono.

“I just ask because you don’t seem especially prone to accidents like that and…”

Dr. Sherman kept talking but it faded to a dull whine in Evan’s ears. He had ruined. He ruined it for both of them.

“Evan?”

“Sorry?”

“I’m going to ask you a few questions… it’s a safety assessment. As you know everything we saw here is confidential, but if you have plans to harm yourself or others I have an ethical obligation to…”

Evan swallowed. Trying to keep from panicking. He had started to cry because he was so fucking overwhelmed. He had messed it up, he had ruined it and now Connor would hate him and his mom would hate him and Jared would find out and make fun of him and call him a pussy and fuck how he walked into that, how had he screwed it up so badly. *Fuck, fuck.* He kept wiping his face but it wouldn’t stop. He couldn’t stop. His shrink knew, his mom would know, they’d all know and then
“Have you had any thoughts or actions, now or in the past, to do anything to hurt yourself?”

“No,” Evan lied, wiping his face again. “I… No. I wouldn’t. I couldn’t.”

“Do you have a plan on what you would actually do to hurt yourself?”

“I don’t want to hurt myself,” Evan said helplessly. “I don’t have a plan or anything.”

“Oh, okay,” Dr. Sherman said, voice calm. “It’s okay, Evan. I just need to check in with you.” He started to talk about what to do if Evan ever felt that way, how to get an emergency session, how he could go to the hospital or call a hotline.

Evan felt like complete garbage. Utter shit. He took the list of resources from Dr. Sherman with shaking hands.

“Well, that looks like our time is up,” Dr. Sherman said. “Do you need a moment?”

Evan shook his head, wiping his face again, clearing his throat and getting to his feet.

He didn’t say anything as Dr. Sherman walked him out, except, “See you next week.”

It took twenty minutes to calm down enough to even text Connor. He was so freaked out and nervous and scared that he actually had to ask Connor to pull over on the side of the road so he could throw up. He barely made it out of the car.

“Dude, are you okay?”

Evan shook his head. “I got…” He stopped, because he had to catch his breath. “I fucked up in therapy. I’m so sorry, I really fucked up.” He took a breath. “I got safety checked.”

“Oh fuck,” Connor said. His face looked white. “What did you say?”

"Something about how I didn't expect to ever really get better and... damn it."

"Okay," Connor said anxiously. "What did you say when he asked if you were going to do it?"

“‘That I didn’t have a plan, obviously,’” Evan said, shaking his head. “I. *Fuck*. They’re going to throw us both in the psych ward.”

“The psych ward isn’t the worst place, but it does leave you pretty zonked out for a couple of days. I was sedated for most of it.”

Oh.

Right.

Connor had gotten caught trying to kill himself.

Right.

“Okay. Shit,” He said, digging in his pockets and pulling out a cigarette and lighting it and smoking it. “Shit. Well... well. They let you leave right?”
Evan nodded like, duh.

“And they didn’t say anything about telling your mom?”

He shook his head.

“Okay. Okay,” Connor said taking a deep breath. “Okay. We should be fine then?”

“You’re sure?”

“I read up on it on CatchingTheTrain before my last appointment. In case I fucked up. We’re probably fine as long as we don’t act like we’re going to kill ourselves. Since you’re a minor I’m pretty sure they’d have to tell your mom. So if they didn’t...”

“Yeah?”

“Yeah.”

“Okay.”

They went back to Evan’s house.

It was still light out.

Evan called his mom once he was home; she said she had talked to the Murphys and Mrs. Murphy said Connor should stay the weekend.

She’d drop off some clothes for him later.

Evan told this to Connor.

“Brilliant,” He said, looking at his phone. He sighed and put it down.

“Is your face okay?”

Connor looked at him like he didn’t know what Evan was talking about. “From where Zoe...?”

“Oh. Yeah. Fine.”

A few hours later, Evan’s mom got home with Chinese. The three of them crowded around their coffee table, and it was actually kind of nice. They left some episode of a terrible Friday night sitcom on, and Evan’s mom made some comment about how terrible it was, which got Connor started, and the pair of them went back and forth trading insults about the characters until the doorbell rang.

“That’s probably your mom,” Evan’s mom said, standing up. She wiped her hands on her jeans, and Evan looked at Connor as he watched her go to the door.

He looked, for just a second, like a little kid. The kind that still got excited to see their mom after a slumber party.

It was gone in a flash.

Connor got up while his mom was still saying hi to Evan’s.
“Come in,” Evan’s mom said. “Can I get you anything?”

Mrs. Murphy shook her head. “I can’t stay… I.” She frowned. “I wish I could, I just… Larry’s business partners are all in town for their annual meeting and I’ve had plans to host a dinner for months.”

“Sure,” Evan’s mom said, and Evan caught the tension in her voice even though he didn’t think Mrs. Murphy picked up on it.

Connor was getting to his feet, walking over to take the backpack his mom was carrying. “Your glasses are in there as well. I know you’ve been sleeping in your contacts, but you’re really not supposed to—”

“Thanks mom,” He said, quickly, cheeks suddenly a little pink.

“Glasses?” Evan mouthed at Connor, smiling stupidly, and Connor rolled his eyes.

“Connor, can I speak with you for a moment? Outside?”

He looked at Evan like, dude kill me now.

And Evan looked back like, I mean we’re literally doing that soon.

“Sure.”

“Excuse us,” Mrs. Murphy said, and they stepped out of Evan’s front door.

Evan’s mother was frowning. “Mom?”

“It’s nothing,” She said, still frowning. “Just. How can she be throwing a party right now?”

Evan shrugged. It was probably better than when his mom hovered around him.

His mom shook her head, blonde hair shaking around her. When he was a kid, Evan thought his mom’s hair looked like princess hair. He even tried to learn to braid it once.

Then he got bored and started playing with his trucks, leaving his mother with knotted hair.

“It’s just…” His mom was saying, and she started cleaning up the remains of their dinner. “Can’t she see that her kid is struggling?” She paused, glancing out the window. Then she heaved a defeated sigh. “I’m glad you are Connor are friends, honey. I really am. I’m just sorry he’s having such a hard time.”

“Yeah.”

“If you ever want to talk about it…”

“I don’t.”

His mom looked a little taken aback.

“I mean,” Evan tried again, immediately feeling guilty. “I mean. Just. Not right now, not while he’s staying over, you know? I-I don’t want him to feel like we’re talking about him behind his back.”

His mom gave him a smile. “You’re so smart. How’d I get so lucky to have you?”
Evan resisted listing off ways she had gotten so unlucky: a witch’s curse, breaking a mirror, crossing the path of a black cat. He just smiled instead.

Chapter End Notes

Okay, so Heidi. She's being a bit affectionate toward Connor but I genuinely believe that it's because she's like "oh this poor kid is my kid's best friend and he's obviously not getting what he needs, so I'm going to just treat him like he's mine because what else can I do?"

So. That's Heidi.

Also the author does not promote lying to your therapist. Please don't lie to them, they are just trying to help you.
Chapter Summary

Heidi and Connor like Nirvana, Evan likes Connor's glasses, the insanely cool Jared Kleinman is there, and things get physical.

Chapter Notes

Please note that this chapter contains... *adult themes.*

Ahem.

Another night, crowded together on Evan’s bed. Evan’s head on Connor’s shoulder, this time their fingers laced together.

“What did your mom say to you?”

Connor shrugged. “Just that my dad is pissed. Which. I know I’m shocked.”

“Right.”

Connor’s nail polish was starting to chip a little, Evan noticed. With Connor’s hand in his. “You have long fingers.”

“...Okay?”

“My Nana would say that you should play piano with them.”

“I do. Or I did.”

“Really?”

“Yeah I took lessons for a long time. Until high school.”

“Why’d you stop?”

“Because I’m too punk rock, obviously,” Connor said sarcastically.

“No but really.”

He sighed. “I don’t know. I just didn’t want to anymore.”

A little while later: “I want to see your glasses.”
Connor laughed. “Fuck no.”

“Come on. Please?”

“No.”

“I’ve added a new thing to my bucket list,” Evan said a few minutes later.

“Oh.”

“Yeah. It’s seeing you in glasses.”

“Oh, fuck you Hansen.”

“You’re going to deny me my dying wish?” Evan teased, and Connor was laughing. Connor untangled himself from Evan, and went to his backpack.

“Fine. But I have to take my contacts out first.”

Evan was nearly giddy with the idea of this and he had no idea why.

Just.

Connor Murphy was a nerd who played piano and wore glasses. But. In secret.

Connor came back from the bathroom a few minutes later. In glasses. Dark, horn rimmed glasses.

“Those are adorable.”

“Shut up.”

“No. I like them.”

“....Thanks.”

At five thirty in the morning, Evan got up and moved to the couch again.

Connor had just stayed in his bed again.

Which.

Whatever.

Evan had ended taking his hoodie again, and realized distantly that wearing it on the couch might give them away.

He didn’t care.

Evan opened his eyes to the sound of conversation in the kitchen.

“-Surprised you’re up so early. Evan hardly gets up before noon on the weekends.”
Oh damn, his mom was talking to Connor.

Fuck, was Connor out there just in Evan’s t-shirt? That would get some questions asked. Damn. Damn damn.

His mom laughed. “Oh, is that Evan’s old battle of the books t-shirt? I thought he had donated it.”

“Guess not.”

“Well now it’s… vintage I guess.”

“Sure.”

His mom cleared her throat. “Did I see you in a Nirvana t-shirt the other day?”

Connor must have nodded, because Evan’s mom continued. “They were my first concert, like, ever. I was obsessed when I was in high school. Do you listen to them?”

“My mom lent me her old tapes and CDs like four years ago.”

“Your mom was into Nirvana?”

Connor laughed. “Apparently for a bit when she was getting her master’s. I didn’t believe it either.”

“She has a master’s degree?”

“Yeah. In education. Not that she uses it.”

Evan’s mom changed tactics, “Naturally, I have to ask if you think Courtney Love did it.”

“Oh, absolutely. That note was nonsense. She absolutely put a hit on him.”

Evan’s mom laughed. Evan had no idea what they were talking about. Wasn’t Nirvana a band? Hits? “Thank goodness, I was afraid I’d have to pull out my powerpoint presentation on why it obviously wasn’t a suicide.” She stopped suddenly. “Honey, I’m sorry, that wasn’t very sensitive of me. Your mom mentioned… at the beginning of the year.”

“It’s fine. Don’t worry about.”

There was a short lull in the conversation.

“What are you reading?” Connor asked. Evan heard a chair being pulled out. Connor had sat down?

“Oh I’m studying up on how to write a contract. I’m taking classes be a paralegal.”

“That’s… that’s cool, Mrs. Hansen.”

“Please, sweetie, you can call me Heidi.”

“Okay…”

“I’m just, you know… I’ve got a year left before I have my degree. So then maybe I won’t have to work so much just to pay the bills.”

“How come you want to be a paralegal?”

“The hours, mostly. Since Evan’s dad left… Well my schedule hasn’t been consistent for a long
time. And I want to set a good example. That you can always go back and improve, even when you’re old like me.”

Connor sort of laughed.

“Thank you again for driving Evan yesterday. Saved me having to worry about him on the bus.”

“No problem.” A pause. “Thank you for letting me stay here.”

“Oh honey, of course.”

Another pause. Or maybe they were just talking more quietly then. Evan wanted to burst in and end the conversation, but he didn’t know how to do in a way that wasn’t totally obvious.

“...so glad that the two of you are hanging out now.”

“Me too.”

“You know, I... I was surprised when someone had signed his cast. I know I told him to ask the other kids to do it, but. Well. He’s always had trouble making friends.”

“Me too.”

Evan was going to rush in there and murder them both, he was certain. What the hell, mom? Did she need to explain to Connor that even she thought he was a loser?

“I’m probably going to be gone most of the day...” His mom was saying. “Just because I like having you here doesn’t mean you can throw a kegger, alright?”

“Yes ma’am.”

Evan heard his mom laugh. “Mostly kidding.”

“Same here.”

Then his mom laughed again. “Make sure you give your mom a call later, alright? I promised her that you would.”

“Of course Mrs., er, Heidi.”

It was about ten when Evan’s mom left, and he and Connor just sort of lazed around in pajamas. Evan weirdly really, really liked that Connor was wearing his clothes. The shirt he’d borrowed, the pajamas Evan had lent him, and a red hoodie that had been hanging on the back of Evan’s door.

And Evan really really liked that.

He was probably creepy and possessive. Which was why it was good that he’d never have girlfriend.

Or boyfriend?

Or whatever.

He was probably just some possessive bisexual disaster who would stalk people if allowed to live.
But then Connor said, “You keep stealing my hoodie and sleeping in it.”

“Yeah, sorry, I-.”

“It’s fucking cute.”

And Evan just.

It was like his entire body had been reduced to a pile of glitter confetti. Which was a fucking weird thing to say.

Connor got up at one point to get a glass of water, and Evan tried to just look at him objectively. Like if he stared at him, he could piece together why he just had this intense need to look at Connor and touch Connor and kiss Connor.

He was skinny. Which wasn’t really a good or bad thing.

His hair was dark and more importantly it was always a mess. And tied up again. Evan liked it up. But he also liked it down. It was always a mess though. It must grow like that, Evan thought, because he had seen Connor get ready the morning before and he hadn’t done anything special to make it look the way that it did.

Connor was also wearing his glasses. The glasses? So cute. They made Connor look like some kind of, freaking, hipster librarian. All he needed to complete the look was a sleeve of tattoos.

Damn it. Evan knew he was blushing because he was just sitting there trying to decide what kind of tattoos Connor would get even that that was idiotic because it wasn’t like you could get an entire sleeve done in two weeks.

Then there was the… Connor’s hands and feet. They were… big. They were above average size and all he could think about was Jared always saying he could tell their gym teacher had a small dick because he only wore a size six shoe.

God Evan was probably some kind of psycho pervert.

“You okay?”

Evan had been staring. And caught staring.

“Yeah. Great.”

Connor shook his head, and reached up to grab a glass from a cabinet over his head, and the tiniest bit of his stomach was revealed because Evan’s t-shirt was a little too short for him.

Evan was on his feet before he properly knew why, crossing the room, pushing Connor back against the counter, kissing him hard.

“Evan, what the hell?” Connor asked, pulling away.

“I just..” He looked down at their feet. Touched the hem of the shirt Connor wore. “You just really cute right now, I’m sorr-”

Connor kissed him back.

Evan was not an expert in what people liked kissing-wise, seeing as he had only really started kissing people like this month, but considering that Connor grabbed onto him incredibly tightly and they
wound up on the floor next to the counter making out he was going to count that as Connor liking it. There was also a moment when Connor pulled away and kissed Evan’s neck that nearly caused him to lose consciousness, and then of course they were both always pulling the other on top of them. Evan liked having Connor on top of him, he thought. At first he was so aware of all of the parts of them they were touching that way, chests and stomachs and hips and legs and toes, and he had to shake his head and take a second because that was a lot. But he liked having Connor on top of him. He didn’t worry that he was crushing Connor for one. Plus the weight was just kind of warm and nice and…

He just really liked it.

They finally managed to get themselves off of the kitchen floor when Evan heard his phone go off from the other room.

He caught a look at himself in the window as he walked into the living room to pick it up. His hair was sticking up in all directions. His mouth looked especially red.

Evan picked up his phone and saw a text from Jared. “We still hanging out today or are you ditching me for your boyfriend?”

A second text followed, “By boyfriend I mean Connor Murphy. In case that wasn’t obvious.”

Evan looked uncertainly at Connor. He couldn’t just leave him here. Plus he didn’t really feel compelled to go play five hours of Call of Duty with Jared.

A third text from Jared, “Look I know he’s staying at your house so just fucking bring him with you.”

Evan turned to Connor who seemed to be examining a red mark on his neck in the reflection of his phone. “I think you gave me a hickey,” Connor said, frowning. “Is that what a hickey looks like?”


“Us?”

“Yeah. He uh. He knows you’re staying here.”

Connor shook his head. “Cool, so everyone knows now. Spectacular.”

“What?”

Connor shrugged. “I stupidly mentioned it to Alana Beck during Physics yesterday. She was leaving early for some kind of volunteering thing so she came into my class and got paired with me on lab assignment.”

“Why’d you tell her?”

“She recognised your t-shirt.”

“Oh.”

“She just started going on about how she wanted to start a Gay-Straight Alliance and shit so I just said I spent the night at your house before she outed me to the whole school.”
Evan frowned. “Oh.”

“I just don’t need that getting around and affecting Zoe right now.”

Evan looked away. “You’d think she’d do the same for you.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?”

“Just…” Evan sighed. “She got into with you in front of everyone yesterday. At school. She’s not… she’s clearly not concerned about your social life.”

Connor shrugged. “I don’t really care.”

“Bull,” Evan said.

Connor sighed. “Maybe a little. But it doesn’t matter anyway. I’ll be dead soon, so it doesn’t matter if she embarrasses me.”

Evan blinked.

He’d forgotten that… just for a second he’d forgotten about their plan.

Jared’s first words were, “Ho-ly shit, Connor, do you have a hickey? Where the fuck did you get a hickey?”

“Your mom gave it to me,” Connor returned immediately. “Also I’m your dad now. You’re grounded.”

And Jared, mercifully, just laughed and led the way to his bedroom.

“Die motherfucker!” Jared yelled, frantically clicking buttons. Evan had stopped playing, but Connor had largely held his own, even though apparently he had never played this game before.

“Fuck,” Connor muttered. “Your controller sucks, man, do you jerk off on this or what?”

“Nah, I let your mom jerk me off.”

Evan waited for Connor to freak out.

“Oh tell her hey from me, it’s been a couple of days.”

Evan thought maybe he just didn’t understand other guys.

As Jared started campaigning to play Mario Kart, Evan got up to use the bathroom.

It weirded him out that Jared was just, like, fine with Connor now. And that Connor was just, like, fine with Jared. If Evan were a different person, he would assume they were doing it just to be nice to him. But Evan was Evan so he doubted that was the case.

He headed back from the bathroom and caught Jared saying his name. Because he was exactly the sort of person who always feared what people said without him around, Evan paused, listening.
Again. He was such a creep today. Eavesdropping, launching himself on Connor like an animal.

“Look, I’m not being funny. If you’re messing with him, if you planning to fuck around, I’ll… I’ll do my best to kick your ass.”

“I’m not messing with him.”

“Don’t bullshit me, Murphy. If you hurt him I’ll run you down in my car.”

“I’m not - I won’t.”

“Good.”

Evan thought he might be sick. So Jared… Jared was being protective? And Connor was promising not to hurt Evan when getting him killed was literally the whole reason they were doing this.

Fuck.

They left around Jared’s at like six because Jared’s parents were forcing him to go to Temple because he apparently hadn’t been in weeks.

“I can’t believe we played video games all day,” Connor said, kind of laughing. “This is why we’re going to die virgins.”

Evan felt his stomach drop. “Uh.”

And then Connor seemed to realize what he had said, and his face turned bright pink and he said, in a rush. “It was a joke. Sorry. Bad joke. Just… Fuck. Fuck, Evan, I'm sorry. I-I was kidding.”

But Evan was laughing.

And Connor laughed, awkwardly, still blushing, like he didn't know what was happening.

And then Evan, kind of. Thought. His brain might have short circuited. Because the next thing he said was, “Well. What if we didn’t?”

"Didn’t?"

"Die virgins?"

Connor seemed frozen, his keys in the ignition but unable to move.

“Connor?”

“You. Don’t. I. Um.”

“I don’t… er. Have anything at my house though, so we’d need to go to the drug store or something.”

Connor was just sort of staring out the windshield.

“Connor?”

“I uh. Yeah. If you’re sure.”
“So…” They were at a CVS, standing in the aisle with condoms and lube and stuff and Evan sort of regretted this just for the sheer fact that they looked so fucking obvious.

“Uh. Yeah,” Connor said.

“What do we, erm. Need?”

Connor was still sort of blushing. “Hang on.” He was on his phone.

“Who the hell are you texting?” Evan almost shouted.

“I didn’t - I’m not -” He took a breath. “I’m googling it. I don't want to forget anything.”

Which made Evan laugh again.

In the end, Connor was the one whose face was the least red, so he was the one stuck with actually buying everything. Evan distantly recognized their cashier as someone from school, but she seemed very disengaged and barely even looked up through the whole transaction.

His mom wouldn’t be home for hours, but they still went upstairs to Evan’s room and locked the door.

Evan thought that, weirdly, Connor might be more nervous than he was. He didn’t even know how that was possible. He was all shaking fingers, shallow breaths and bitten lips. But Connor was worst.

Evan had never taken his clothes off in front of anyone before. It was a little surreal.

Evan kept waiting to panic. To realize this was a terrible idea and bail.

He didn’t.

Was playing rock, paper, scissors the most adult way to figure out who would top? Probably not.

It worked anyway. Connor didn’t seem to mind the idea of bottoming.

“Is this like a terrible idea?” Connor asked. “Because I… if you don’t want to we can just… forget this ever happened. And maybe just blow our brains out now?”

“No. No. I want to.”

Connor looked away, shyly. “You’re sure?”

“Yeah.”
Turned out Connor was ticklish. Who knew?

The whole thing didn’t take quite as long as either of them probably would have wanted, but still. It was.

A lot.

It was.

Wow.

It was.

Just.

Well.

It was great.

Afterward Connor’s hands still kind of shook. So Evan held them.

“Okay, don’t laugh…”

“I won’t laugh.”

“I haven’t even said it yet, asshole,” Connor was sort of half on top of him, his head on Evan’s chest. “Jesus.”

“I just won’t laugh. No matter what. Promise.”

“Okay…” Connor sighed, and it was warm against Evan’s skin. “This was kind of on my bucket list.”

“Sex?”

“Well, yeah, but… I mean. This.” He squeezed Evan’s hand.

“Why?”

“Because I… I just like you.”

“Don’t.”

“Why not?”

“Just… that sounds like a bad idea.”

“Well. I’m very good at bad ideas.”

“Connor?”
“Hm?”

“I like you too.”

Chapter End Notes

:3

So Heidi likes Nirvana because the first YA book I wrote takes place in 1994. So I have a lot of feelings about grunge music.

Jared is trying to be more cool about Evan and Connor, bless him.

As for the ending? Well. Now you know Connor's bucket list.
Connor went home on Sunday night. His mom called saying that his father was willing to negotiate punishment for the slashed tires.

He kept trying to delay going home, but by five o’clock it was just weird that he hadn’t gone home yet.

Connor hugged Evan’s mom before he left. And thanked her for letting him stay.

Evan wondered if Connor would be back to normal at school. With him. With everything

Evan missed him when he went to sleep that night.

Evan Hansen had two weeks left to live when he realized he might be in love with Connor Murphy.

Evan woke up Monday morning feeling heavy as lead.

He slept through both of his alarms, and only woke up to his mom say shaking his shoulder. “Honey come on. School today.”

“I don’t feel good,” Evan said. Lied. Whatever.

His mom frowned, feeling his forehead. “You’re not warm…”

“Too tired.”

“Honey, come on. You’ve got to go to school.”

“Please don’t make me? I feel awful.”

His mom sat down on the foot of his bed. “Evan, tell me what’s going on.”
“Nothing’s going on, I just don’t feel good.”

“Do I need to call Dr. Sherman to set up another appointment?”

“No.” He sat up then, but he felt weighed down, his movements wooden.

“Evan, honey, you’re scaring me. Why don’t you want to go to school today?”

Because. If he saw Connor, he might.

Cry.

Throw up.

Freak out.

Tell his mom everything.

Because he wasn’t sure he could do it. Because he was starting to feel like this whole thing had turned into a really big, really scary game of chicken and that they were both going to do it because they were afraid to disappoint the other and his head was a mess and he was too tired and he just needed time to think.

So instead he told his mom some half truth, “I don’t think I’m straight.”

“Honey slow down.”

“I might… I don’t… I think I’m not straight.”

His mom blinked. Like she’d been gearing up for something worse. “Oh, honey. Okay. Well. That’s nothing to be worried about…” She smiled at him. “Thank you for telling me. I’m proud of you.”

“Mom,” Evan said. (“Maaaaaaahm.”)

“What? You told me something very personal, and I know that can be hard for you so. I’m proud of you. And I love you. Okay?”

“Thanks.”

She smoothed out his hair. “Are you and Connor…?”

“MOM .”


“Thanks mom,” Evan mumbled because he was so fucking embarrassed.

“You still have to go to school today,” She said, smiling. “I don’t care what gender or genders you like, you can’t skip school just because you’re not straight.”

Evan flopped dramatically back onto his mattress.

His pillow still smelled like Connor.

Fuck.
Evan got to school on time. Jared picked him up. Which was nice of him to offer.

Connor had left his black zip hoodie at Evan’s house. So he wore it. He figured it was innocuous enough to wear a black zip hoodie.

But the moment he got into the car with Jared, Jared was just holding up his hand.

“Wh-what are you doing?”

“Trying to give you a high five.”

“Why?”

“Because you obviously got laid this weekend. Good job.”

“No I-I… No!”

Jared rolled his eyes. “Right. *Riiiiiight.* So you’re just wearing Connor Murphy’s emo ass clothes just because?”

“It wasn’t like that, Jared.”

“Sure, bro. I completely believe you.” He shook his head, like this was crazy to him. “I thought you liked Zoe anyway? What happened with that?”

“Oh,” Evan said, and he was pretty sure his face was so hot it was about to launch itself out of the atmosphere like a space shuttle. “We actually made out at Brenna Cohen’s party.”

“You did WHAT?!?”

“Yeah,” Evan said. “But we’re just… friends.”

Jared blinked a few times. “So are you sleeping with Connor or what?”

Evan’s face was giving him away, he knew, so he mumbled, “P-please don’t tell anyone.”

Jared whooped in celebration. Evan clung tightly to the passenger seat handle. “I fucking knew it! I knew it!” He was cackling. “I can’t believe you’re fucking the school weirdo.”

“Jesus, Jared, st-stop it.”

“What’s he look like naked? Does he look like the claymation from the Corpse Bride?”

“Jared.”

“Was it good? Who topped? Did he wanna do weird shit with handcuffs?”

“JARED.”

Jared heaved a sigh. “Fine, fine, I won’t harass you. But I want details man.”

“You know, I think asking for details of your bro’s sex life is gayer than anything I did this weekend.”

“Damn, Hansen,” Jared said, laughing. “Have you always been this savage?”
Connor didn’t show at school.

Evan texted him a few times.

“Personal day?” After first hour.

“Did you end up talking to your dad?” After fifth hour.

“Am I allowed to worry about you? I don’t care. I am. Text me back please.”

He never heard back.

Tuesday was the same.

Nothing from Connor.

There was this recurring nervous pain that would strike Evan, right in his middle, right in the hollow space that he didn’t seem to be able to get rid of.

Damn it.

At the end of the day, Evan took a massive breath, clutched his backpack, and went to go and find Zoe. Demand answers.

She was hanging around the band room, talking to Alana of all people and the moment she saw Evan, Zoe rushed over and hugged him.

No.

No no *nonono*.

The sky was falling, he wasn’t ready, Evan couldn’t-

“Zoe what’s—”

“It’s really bad Evan...”

“What... what happened?”

She frowned. “My dad... completely lost it on Connor this morning, even though he genuinely was running a fever.... Dad should have known he was sick right away since Connor’s always trying to get out of school and he was up and dressed on time.”

He was. Connor was. Sick?

“What happened?”

Zoe frowned. “He started going on about, like, military school and... Sending him away again. Connor got up from the table, like, he didn't need to hear it and...” She stopped, her hand over her mouth. “My dad grabbed his arm. And then there was blood... His arm, it’s j-just covered in-”
Evan knew.

Oh god.

Zoe took a second. “I had no idea it was this bad.”

“Where is he now?” Evan imagined the psych ward, a rehab, a padded room.

Zoe sighed. “At home, but I guess mom’s been dragging him around to specialists all morning.”

Evan nodded, like, yeah, of course, that was the right call. Totally.

“Did you know?” Zoe asked, and Evan was terrified she was going to start crying again. He felt a hard lump in his throat, and so he just sort of nodded.

“Don’t tell him I said any of this,” Zoe said suddenly.

“Okay.”

“But… can you come over later? I just… I’m worried about him, and our parents are hovering which usually means he’ll do something stupid…” Zoe pulled a hand through her hair. The teal was still vibrant against her hand. “I just want him to get through high school in one piece, Evan. I don’t know what to do…”

“I’ll come over.”

“Thanks.”

Evan had never met anyone who looked quite as brittle as Mrs. Murphy when she opened the front door to let him inside.

“Evan, I’m so glad you’re here,” She said, sounding like she would be crying inside a minute. She hugged him. Evan let her. “Connor’s in his room.”

“Can I go upstairs?”

She nodded.

Connor was on his back, on his bed.

He was wearing a gray t-shirt. No hoodie.

Evan thought it would be a wildly inappropriate time to make a “sun’s out, guns out” joke. But his lip twitched for a moment and he had to take a few deep breathes before he turned to the door. Fuck.

Evan knocked.

Connor turned his head just a little. “Who told you?”

“Zoe.”

“Damn.”
“Can I come in?”

Connor nodded, sitting up. He looked so miserable. And his eyes were red.

Evan wondered if he’d been crying. He hadn’t see Connor cry before.

He might never see him cry.

It sort of made him want to cry.

“Can I ask what happened?”

Connor shrugged.

Evan sat next to him on the bed. He took Connor’s hand, not caring who could see. He just took it.

The nails were all chewed up and bloody, nail polish chipped down to the cuticle.

“It was just my dad, being an asshole as usual.”

“I’m sorry.” A pause. “I heard that you’re sick?”

“Oh yeah,” Connor said, like it was an afterthought. “I have the flu. I spent most of the day sleeping between doctor’s appointments.”

“Sucks.” Evan brought their intertwined hands up, kissing the back of Connor’s hand quickly.

“Careful, I’ll infect you.”

Evan laughed, just once, softly. “We’re probably past that point.” He ran a finger over Connor’s knuckles. “I’m sorry. About the bad day.”

“Thanks.” He leaned his head against Evan’s shoulder. “Can you stay for a little while? I need a break from them and I’m on house arrest until further notice.”

“Yeah. I’ll stay.”

A little while later:

“My mom is so freaked out.”

“I know. I saw her when I walked in. She didn’t look good.”

“I fucked up.”

“No, hey, it’s fine.” He shifted until his arm was around Connor’s shoulder. Then around his waist. “We’ll figure it out.” Maybe they’d postpone a few weeks, maybe they’d have to just have to go one day after school, maybe they’d just find a way to make their original plan work. It was fine. They’d be fine.

Evan thought that maybe he heard Connor sniffle.

But he didn’t say anything.

He didn’t know what to say.
When Connor came back to school on Wednesday, he didn't look right.

“Hey.”

Connor blinked slowly. It took him a second to look at Evan. “Oh. Hi.”

“You… you good?”

Connor shook his head. “Shouldn’t have complained. Now they won’t leave me alone.”

Evan waited.

“They’ll never let me out of the house now,” Connor muttered. He stalked off to class a minute later. Evan felt like he was going to be sick.

How was he doing this, what was he doing, could they really go through with this? Was it ethical? Could he trust Connor’s judgment like this?

“Dude, what’s going on with your boyfriend? He looks like he’s been microwaved.”

Evan turned to look at Jared. “I don’t know. He’s… something’s wrong.”

Jared’s smirk slid off. “Seriously?”

Evan gripped the straps of his backpack. “Seriously.”

“Is there anything I can do?” Jared asked. Sincerely. Like he cared.

Evan felt like he had swallowed ten live snakes. “I’ll let you know if I think of something.”

At home that night, Evan’s mom sat next to him on the couch when she got home that night. “I talked to Mrs. Murphy today.”

Evan took a nervous breath. “Yeah?”

“God, honey, I… I’m sorry he’s going through that.”

“Me too.”

“You’re alright?” She said, looking anxiously at Evan. “You’re… doing okay?”

“I guess,” he said, picking at a loose thread on his jeans. “I don’t know.” He took a breath, and suddenly it was all there. “I’m so scared, mom…”

His mom hugged him. “I know honey. I know.”

And then he was just crying into his mom’s shoulder, because he was, he was fucking scared, he was terrified that Connor wasn’t okay, that Connor would tell about their plan, that Connor would try without him, that Connor would die.

Evan let out this choking sound because.
Oh god.

He didn’t want Connor to die.

He didn’t even know if he wanted to die anymore.

He was just so fucking scared.

It was like when he was high - Evan wanted it to stop, he wanted it all to stop, he didn’t want to lie anymore don’t wanna lie anymore it was a disaster but he couldn’t take it, couldn’t handle it, it was too much way too much.

His mom let him skip school on Thursday. He said he was too tired, and she said it was fine, and he spent the day in bed, his mind racing. He felt sick to his stomach.

His pillow didn’t smell like Connor anymore.

So he got up and washed all of the sheets.

He kept pulling out his phone and then putting it away before he did anything with it.

Evan felt just. Sick. Sick with himself, sick with everyone.

Around noon, Evan was sitting in front of some daytime talk show. And he.

He got up and started digging through his mom’s old crafting supplies, the ones she hadn’t used for ages, since going back to school. She used to DIY a lot of t-shirts and stuff for herself and friends.

And when Evan’s hand closed on the X-Acto knife, there was a shock of adrenaline. A squeeze around his kidneys. He just… he had to know. He needed to know what it felt like.

He was too nervous at first to draw blood.

It took a few tries, and when it happened it… It just fucking hurt. Nothing euphoric. He wasn’t glad to feel something. His wrist just hurt.

So Evan put the knife back.

And he went to the bathroom, found the first aid kit his mom kept, and cleaned out his one inch cut. Covered it in a small bandage. It looked like just an awkwardly placed paper cut.

After, Evan looked up the number for the national suicide hotline. He sat there, phone in his hand, starting at the 1-800 number until his screen went black.

Friday morning, Evan was shocked to see Connor waiting at his locker. Anxiously. Twisting the sleeve of his hoodie in his other hand.

Connor’s hair was up. At school. Evan hadn’t ever seen him do that before.

And he wore his glasses. Which Evan knew he was self conscious about, that he didn’t like wearing.

Evan was struck by the hipster librarian thought again.

When Connor saw Evan he rushed over and hugged him, muttering, “You fucking scared me,”
before hurrying toward his class.

Evan didn’t know what the hell to think about that.

The hollowness inside of him spread.

Damn.

“Evan!”

He was sitting in his third hour computer science course on Friday. His teacher was out sick, so everyone was just playing around online. Evan just sort of sat on wikipedia, not motivated enough to do anything else.

Alana Beck had slid into the seat beside him. “How is your semester going? I feel like I haven’t seen you in weeks.”

“It’s… no, it’s good. Fine. H-how’s yours?”

“Great. I’m volunteering at the animal shelter and tutoring at the middle school, and I’ve been accepted early into a few schools.”

“That’s—that’s great, Alana,” Evan said, smiling nervously. “Congratulations.”

“Thank you,” She said, smiling a little. She pushed her glasses up. “I wanted to talk to you about an idea I had.”

“S-sure.”

“It was… it was actually inspired by Connor and you. I was talking to Zoe, about how the two of you are really helping each other…” She sighed. Stopped. Started again, “Okay. Sorry. Let me start again. I… I get it. I’m… I understand what the both of you are going through. And I want to start a student group of other kids like…. Like us. Like me, and you, and Connor. Kids with… mental health issues.”

Evan stared. “Like… like a support group?”

Alana smiled. “Yeah, something like that. I’ve already talked to my guidance counselor and Mrs. Q, the school psychologist? They both think it is a good idea and are on board to be our faculty advisors and be on hand for help.”

“Why are you telling me?” Evan asked.

“I wanted to see if you wanted to… help me run it?” Alana said. “I’m already so busy, that I thought. Maybe…. You obviously don’t have to, I just thought-”

“Sure. I’ll help,” Evan said. Surprising himself. “What are you thinking of calling it?”

“I’m not sure yet,” She admitted. “But maybe we could get together next week and brainstorm?”

“Sure. Sounds like a good idea.”
“My mom says I’m allowed to come over today. If that’s okay with you,” Connor said to Evan at lunch.

“Oh. Yeah. If you want to.” Evan stopped eating for a second. “I’m surprised she said you could go out. I thought you were on house arrest?”

“Me too,” Connor admitted. “But it sounds like she has officially won the mom versus dad boss battle. He didn’t say anything when she told me that at breakfast.”

“Okay.”

Evan’s phone rang when he and Connor walked into his house.

It was his dad.

“Sorry,” He muttered to Connor. “It’s my dad.”

“Take it.”

So Evan did, stepping out into the kitchen, leaning back against the kitchen counter. “Hello?”

“Hey champ! I’ve been trying to get a hold of you for a couple of weeks. How’ve you been?”

Evan glanced into the living room where Connor was sitting on the couch, practically folded in half, head resting on top of his knees. “Good,” Evan said.

“Senior year’s going well?”

“So far yeah.”

“Any girls catch your eye?”


His dad’s side of the line was silent for a minute. “Well. That’s. That’s great kiddo.”

Evan frowned at that response, but didn’t push. “Sorry, just, what did you call for?”

“Just trying to catch up. It’s been awhile since we chatted.”

“Yeah. Well. It’s probably because you don’t call. Or maybe because you haven’t even seen me in almost five years.”

“Evan, hey-”

“Look, I’m really busy dad. I’ll have to give you a call later.”

“Oh, alright bud-”

Evan hung up.

And walked into the living room.

“My mom won’t be home for at least an hour.”
“Yeah?” Connor said, looking up at him.

And smiling.

“Let’s go to my room.”

“You sure?” Connor said, blushing. “I kind of assumed that was a one time thing.”

“Let’s go to my room.”

Evan tried to kiss as many of Connor’s scars as Connor would let him. But then Connor started laughing, so Evan pulled his hair. To very positive results.

Evan Hansen had two weeks left to live when his mom shouted to him, a delighted sound, shouting, “Honey!” Thankfully when they heard the front door open, he and Connor had already put their clothes back on.

Evan leaned over, kissed Connor quickly, saying he would be right back.

“What’s up?” Evan asked, hurrying down the steps, straightening his clothes and wiping his mouth, pretending that he hadn’t definitely been having sex with Connor upstairs.

Again.

He didn’t have any idea what was happening there.

But he really didn’t want it to stop.

Connor was standing at the top of the steps, eyebrow raised, waiting.

“Mom?”

His mother was holding a massive envelope out to him. On the back, in big bold type, the envelope said “Congratulations!” Evan turned it over. The front had the address of the state school he had applied at. He had applied at the end of the summer because he’d had nothing else to do. It was the state school about an hour away.

“I got in?” Evan said, voice surprised, hoarse.

“That’s not all,” his mom said, smiling so brightly. “This came too.”

She handed him an envelope.

From the scholarship contest he had entered.

Evan ripped it open, his fingers suddenly shaking. The words in front of his face swam, but he did manage to catch “Congratulations, we are pleased to inform you that you have been selected to receive…” and “$10,000.”

“Mom,” he said faintly, and that was of course when Connor reappeared too, looking to see what the
commotion was about. “I won.”

“You won!”? She cried, hurrying over and squeezing him tightly.

“I won the essay contest?”

“Oh my god, you won! Congratulations! I’m so proud of you, sweetheart. I can’t believe it!”

“What did you win?” Connor asked, confused.

“You’re a college man, now,” Evan’s mom said, giving him a tight hug.

“Oh… uh,” Evan said. “That scholarship essay contest?” He handed the paper over to Connor.

Evan caught the way that Connor’s face fell before he corrected it back to a smile. “Congrats, man. Cool.”

“Thanks.”

“Well, I should get going,” Connor said quickly, “My parents are expecting me…”

“You’re not staying for dinner?” Evan’s mom asked him.

“Oh, I’m sorry, I can’t,” Connor said, and it wasn’t up to his usual standards of pretend politeness. “I left my bag in your room,” He said, and he turned to grab it before Evan could say anything.

“We should celebrate!” His mom was saying. “What do you want for dinner? We’ll have anything you like!”

“Actually, could we just… eat at home? Together?”

“That’s a great idea, honey.”

Connor reappeared at the foot of the stairs, waving Evan off, calling, “Bye.”

Evan felt the sudden balloon of hope inside of himself pop.

Oh.

Right.

He was supposed to be dying. With Connor. In two weeks.

And there he was, making future plans. Getting excited about college. Getting excited about anything.

What the hell was he doing?

Chapter End Notes

The title I saved this under on my computer was "Evan and Connor and the Great Wafflefest of 2016." Also, what year are we supposed to assume the musical takes place? Just generally "present?"
Anyway.

Special shout out to AnAwfulPerson for trying to murder me with headcanons in front of my mom last night. I tossed in an easter egg for you. :))) <3 you nerd.

Thanks to all of my lovely commenters and readers. You make my life. :)

Chapter Summary

Evan and Connor take a short trip.

Evan makes up his mind.

So does Connor.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Evan went back up to his bedroom that night. And collapsed right into bed. Which smelled like Connor. Which almost made him want to text Connor but after the way Connor left he was afraid to.

Evan knew that Connor could see how flaky he was from a mile away.

And he was scared. Scared of losing Connor, scared of ruining everything that had materialized in less than a month.

He felt sick.

Just so sick.

Evan woke up to the sound of his phone going off.

“Hello?”

“Oh good, I was afraid I’d have to throw rocks at your windows.”

“Connor it’s…” Evan looked at the clock. “It’s five am.”

“Leave your mom a note and meet me outside. I want to go somewhere.”

“It’s the middle of the night.”

“No it is very early in the morning.”

Evan groaned.

“I have coffee and one last thing on my bucket list. Please?”

“Alright.”

“It’s kind of cold. Wear a hat.”

Evan yawned. He rolled out of bed. He threw on a thick hoodie and some worn, but warm jeans.
Then he pulled on his jacket and, listening to Connor, grabbed a hat.
Before long he was out the door and in the passenger seat of Connor’s car. It was cold. Connor had on the red scarf he had worn when they met. And a hat. And fingerless gloves.

Connor was smoking when Evan got into the car. Evan kissed him anyway.

“Where are we going?”

“Please, I’m not spoiling the surprise.”

Evan’s eyes widened.

"I swear it is a chill surprise. No other people, nothing that jumps out and scares you. Just something I think you'll like."

"Okay..."

They drove for a while. “Do you have a favorite song?” Connor asked Evan.

Evan shrugged. “I don’t know. Nobody’s ever asked.”

“Well, if you had to name one.”

Evan sighed. “Uh. My mom listened to almost exclusively the Beatles after my dad left. Which you’d think would make me hate them… But I don’t. But I can’t pick one favorite. Maybe one of two…”

“So what are they?”

“Here Comes the Sun, Eight Days a Week, You’ve Got to Hide Your Love Away.”

“That last one is supposedly about their manager being gay.”

“Really?”

“Yeah.”

“And what about you? What’s your favorite song?”

“Lithium , by Nirvana. Or Found Out About You by the Gin Blossoms. Or Anna Begins by the Counting Crows, but I’ll deny that I’ve ever listened to it. Or there’s this, like, one song that Zoe used to play all the time when we were kids. I think it’s called Northern Downpour. It has this line… I dunno. I like it. It goes like… uh, hang on…” He hummed under his breath for a second. “It goes, ‘I know the world’s a broken bone / but melt your headaches, call it home.’”

“I like that,” Evan said.

“I never looked it up until I was in rehab…” Connor said, then shook his head. “Sorry you don’t want to hear about that.”

“Yeah. I do. I really do.”

Connor smiled sort of nervously. “Okay…” He cleared his throat. “I never listened to like… the band that played it until this summer, in rehab. And I just kept listening to it. Because for like a few
seconds it felt like I could get through… stuff.”

“Do you have it? Can we listen to it?”

“Yeah, I think I have it on my phone…”

Evan took it from the dash. He found the song and hit play.

They played it on repeat.

Evan liked it too.

“You are at the top of my lungs…. Drawn to the ones who never yawn.”

The sky had turned a watery gray when they pulled up to the place Connor had taken them. A watercolor painting in black and white.

“Where are we?”

“I want you to see this,” Connor said. He had gone into the back of the car and grabbed a blanket.

“Come on.”

Evan followed, clutching the thermos of coffee.

Connor led them to a low chain link fence. He tossed the blanket over, then hopped the fence.

“Are we trespassing?”

“Only technically. Here, hand me the coffee. I'll help you over.”

Evan handed the coffee over, muttering, “I can get over it myself.”

But he took Connor’s offered hand anyway.

Connor led them around in the dark, holding tight to Evan’s hand. Evan nervously said, “This is giving me serious Blair Witch vibes.”

“God, you’re such a dork. I love you.”

Evan stopped.

But Connor kept going, apparently unaware of what he had said.

So Evan tried to shake off the sudden flash of pain in his middle.

Good pain.

Growing pain.

“Okay, here we are.”

They were standing in a clearing, in the half light of morning.

An open field, framed with trees.
“I think we should watch the sun come up,” Connor said.

“Where are we?” Evan asked as they laid out the blanket. His fingers were cold. In the early morning light, he could see his breath.

“Uh, it’s the old apple orchard? I think it closed a few years ago. My... my family used to come here for picnics when I was a kid. Zoe and I would hunt for four leaf clovers, and we had this… this stupid toy plane. Which we were fighting over once, and then my dad took the controller and crashed the thing.”

“Oh. I’m sorry.”

“I tried to run away. I decided I was going to live here, in the apple orchard. Like Johnny Appleseed.”

“Johnny Appleseed?”

“Yeah. Did you know that the real guy actually roamed around, trying to convert indigenous people to Christianity? It was fucked up. But when I was little, I thought it just meant eating a lot of apples and living in the woods.”

“How long did you run away for?”

“Like... maybe an hour. My mom absolutely lost it when she found me.”

“Hmmm.”

Evan was leaning back into Connor, sapping up all of his warmth. Evan kept taking Connor’s hands and rubbing them between his, trying to keep the tips of his fingers warm. They passed the coffee back and forth, drowsily.

The sun peeked out over the horizon, illuminating the rows and rows and rows of overgrown apple trees. Their leaves turn to flame as they hit the sunlight; yellow and gold, orange and amber, red and and copper.

“Wow,” Evan said, taking in the view. “This is amazing. How have I never been here before?”

“I don’t know,” Connor said. “But I’m glad you got to see it.”

“Me too.”

They stayed like that, in the secluded orchard, until the water color sky transitioned from pink and yellow and orange and purple to a gorgeous blue.

Squinting in the bright light, Evan turned to Connor. “Why did you bring me here?”

Connor shrugged. “It’s... You said you liked trees.”

Evan kissed him. And Connor kissed him back.

“We probably shouldn’t stay long. I thought I read that it might rain.”

“Yeah. Okay. Sure.”

“Good.”
“Great.”

“Awesome.”

Evan and Connor, sitting in a tree.

Talking about trees. Not even bothering with K-I-S-S-I-N-G.

It was like Connor had read Evan’s eighth grade diary to figure out what he thought his ideal date would be. He bitched a little about the tree climbing, especially after he managed to get a splinter which Evan had to pull out for him. “I’m not a fucking boy scout.”

“You weren’t?”

Connor sighed, “Well I was until second grade. The whole Mrs. G. incident sort of made cub scouts less fun.”

“I’m an Eagle Scout,” Evan said. “I got my Eagle Award freshman year and immediately quit.”

“Why?”

“Because camping normally requires you to be around other people, and that’s really all it is after a while. Camping.”

“Fair enough.”

They sat apart in the tree. Evan was sort of smiling. He wished he could take a picture of this, of Connor Murphy sitting in an apple tree, looking so out of place but still so real and there and alive. He wished he could document that. He wished other people would see that.

“It looks like it might rain,” Evan said, pointing to the clouds which had obscured the sun.

“So…” Connor said, taking a seat in a branch about seven feet off the ground. “Tell me about apple trees.”

“Oh. Um.” Evan sort of adjusted the way he was sitting. “Well. They are technically part of the rose family.”

“Really?”

Evan nodded. “They are.” He plucked a leaf out of his hair. “And the seeds are poisonous. But only if you eat a lot of them.”

“Really?”

“Yeah. They’ve got cyanide in them.”

“ Weird.” Connor looked uncertainly at Evan. “So. When you broke your arm…”

Evan looked away.

“You said you’d jumped when you tried before.” Connor was looking at him so intently that Evan could practically feel his eyes on him. “And then you said you fell out of a tree. So. Did you fall or…”
did you let go?”
Evan shrugged, pitifully.
“You can tell me.”
“I let go…” He sighed. “It was stupid… I obviously wasn’t high up enough.”
“I’m sorry.”
“Why?”
“Because… I just am. I’m sorry you’ve felt that way. Sorry you feel that way.”
But Evan had caught it.
The use of past tense.
Connor was…
A flake.
A class A flake.
He wasn’t planning to kill himself anymore.
And Evan felt… at least a little… relieved.
What.
Did.
What did that mean?
“Damn, I think it’s starting to rain.”
“Yeah,” Evan said.
They managed to climb down from the tree just as it began to downpour, thick sheets of rain so dense that Evan could hardly see in front of him. He had started off at a jog, back in the direction of the car, but he’d dropped Connor’s hand and skidded to a stop to look and see what he had been doing.
Connor had just totally stopped, head tilted up at the sky, getting utterly drenched.
“What are you doing?”
Connor shrugged.
There was a flash of lightning that lit the entire sky.
And then a crash of thunder that shook all of the trees around them.
“Come on,” Evan said, laughing. “You just had the flu, you can’t be dancing in the rain.”
They took off running toward the car. Connor carried the soaked blanket; Evan the empty thermos. As Evan went to load the blanket in the trunk, Connor started the car. But Evan was surprised to find
him standing outside of the passenger side door when he circled the car.

“Have you ever seen one of those cheesy movies where the romantic leads have some big disgusting kiss in the rain?”

“Yeah.”

“Well…”

Evan’s stomach lurched.

He wondered if it always would when Connor went to kiss him.

It was a good kiss.

It made Evan’s knees a little weak.

They were soaked. It was freezing.

He kissed Connor until his teeth chattered.

And then they climbed into the car, still smiling idiotically, drenched through. Evan’s hair was plastered to his head. So was Connor’s.

“Let’s go back to my house,” Evan said. “We can stay in bed all day.”

“I probably shouldn’t…” Connor said, frowning. “My parents are still fighting.”

“I’m sorry.”

He shrugged. Then stared at the clock. It was hardly even eight. “Actually… screw them. I want to come with you.”

“You’re sure.”

“It’s not like it could possibly get any worse.”

His mom was scheduled all weekend.

So they had the house to themselves.

Evan tossed all of their clothes into the dryer, and he and Connor huddled together in his bed in their underwear.

They didn’t have sex.

They just stayed under the covers, half dressed, in a twin bed. They just talked.

It was the strangest thing Evan had ever experienced.

But it made him contented in ways he had never even imagined before.

“You look exhausted. Have you slept, Connor?”

“Not in a few days.”
"You should sleep."

"Don't want to."

“What did you mean the other day? At school, when you said I… that I scared you?”

“Oh.” Connor was sort of tracing lazy circles on Evan’s arms with his finger. “I just… I hadn’t heard from you at all, and then you didn’t show up at school…. I got scared that you. Did it without me.”

“Why would that scare you?”

“I just does, okay?”

“Why?”

“Because… because. I don’t know why. But it freaks me out. So please don’t… don’t do it… without me.”

“Okay. I won’t.”

Evan woke up to an empty bed with a blue post-it note in his open palm.

“Sorry, my parents sent a few frantic texts, so I had to go. Didn’t want to wake you (even though you drooled on my shoulder).

I’ll probably text you in three minutes.

Thanks for coming with me this morning.

-Connor”

Evan rolled over, taking a deep breath, breathing Connor's scent in. Like a creep or a dog of a weirdo in a romance novel.

He wished Connor had been able to stay. He wished a million things.

Evan sighed and pulled out his phone.

As promised, there were several texts from Connor.

12:00pm: “I told my dad that apple trees are deciduous over lunch. He thought I was high and sent me to my room.”

12:03pm: “To be fair I got stoned in the car on my way back from your house. So he wasn't wrong. #yolo”

12:04pm: “Obviously I am still baked. Please don't judge the hashtag. I don't know how to people.”

12:05pm: “I’m bored already. Come over.”

12:34pm: “Actually don’t, I have a ton of homework to do and if you were here I’d just try to find a sneaky way to make out with you.”
Evan did go over.

He made Connor do some homework. He said it was for the sake of appearances.

Mrs. Murphy seemed genuinely relieved to see him. She congratulated him on his acceptance into the local state school and on winning the scholarship over dinner.

Connor just moved his food around his plate.

They did manage to sneak away and make out a few times.

Connor texted Evan in the middle of the night. “How come you left anyway?”

“Headache.”

“Liar.”

“That makes two of us.” Evan deleted it. Instead he sent back, “Sorry.”

“My mom?” Evan went down to the living room where his mother was studying on Sunday morning.

“Yeah honey.”

“Is it… Can I…?” He stopped. Took a deep breath. Tried again. “Is it okay if I make another appointment with Dr. Sherman this week?”

His mom looked up, surprised. “Sure thing. Is everything okay?”

Evan tried to nod. “It’s just. I’m. Stressed out by the college thing. I just to want to… I want to check in.”

“That’s really smart, honey. I’ll leave them a message to see if you can get in in a few days.”

“Thanks mom.”

His mom left for the day around 2:00pm on Sunday.

Evan had been pacing the house all morning.

He continued pacing after she left.

The house felt massive. And Evan miniscule.

He had messed up. This was messed up.

How did he convince Connor to back out?

Was he positive that he wanted to back out?
Was not dying a choice he was ready to make? What if they just postponed? What if they couldn’t 
back down easily? What if he wasn’t ready to not die what if he did die what if he he kept living but 
Connor died what if Evan died and Connor backed down? What would happen to them, to their 
moms, would they find out? What would they do if they found out? Would they cry? They would 
cry.

Evan’s mom would hate him. Knowing what he tried to do. What he might still be trying to do.

He was just pacing the kitchen, pacing, pacing, and then he was just hyperfocused on the counter.

And Evan couldn’t breathe.

His thoughts had gotten away from him.

Fuck.

Evan tried to slow down to climb the steps to his bedroom but he was tripping and falling and 
eventually he managed to get upstairs, get to the box where he kept his pills, and he tried to breathe 
as he opened the box.

His SSRI was there.

The bottle of Xanax was gone. There was just one pill sitting there.

In place of the bottle was a note. On a post it. Like the note from yesterday.

“I’m so sorry. I can’t let you do this with me. Please don’t hate me.”

Evan’s heart hurt, hurt so badly, because Connor had been there yesterday.

Yesterday.

He’d left the note yesterday.

He hadn’t texted Evan since three in the morning.

Evan swallowed the single Xanax and just.

Tried to calm down.

Connor had swiped his pills, Connor had swiped his pills, he had taken them.

Evan knew he was hyperventilating, he knew he was panicking.

He took out his phone.

On shaking fingers. “Mom I need help I did something bad please call me asap.”

Evan gave himself a few minutes, and then he called Connor.

Called him.

Evan hated talking on the phone. Hadn’t willfully called anyone in the whole time he had had this 
phone.

He called Connor.
Connor didn’t answer.

Evan tried again.

No answer.

He was laying on the floor of his bedroom. He couldn’t move. But he texted Connor. “What does that note mean?”

“Connor?”

“What does that mean?”

Chapter End Notes


Happy Zombie Jesus day to those who celebrate. :) I’ll be with my family all day so replies might not be prompt.

We’re getting close to wrapping this all up, folks. Thanks for sticking with me. Thanks for saying such lovely things. I love you all.
Gonna Get Me a Little Oblivion

Chapter Summary

If a boy kills himself in the forest and nobody cares about him, does he actually die?

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

After thirty minutes, when Evan hadn’t heard from his mom, and he was feeling a little mellowed out, he got up off of his floor.

His message still hadn’t been read.

Evan got on his bike and peddled as fast as he could to the Murphys’. He was going to die, just from effort. He was going to die, of exhaustion.

He was going to die because if he let Connor Murphy kill himself he wouldn’t survive it.

Evan went to the front door, dropping his bicycle at the edge of the sidewalk, and ringing the doorbell frantically.

Zoe came to the door. She looked exhausted. “Evan?” she said, surprised.

“Zoe, have you seen Connor? Is he here?”

Zoe blinked, surprised. “Mom and dad aren’t home… he said he was going to your house.”

“He took his car?”

Zoe nodded.

“Damn it, damn it.”

“Why? What’s going on, Evan? You’re scaring me.”

“I’m scared… I’m scared Connor’s going to try to kill himself.”

Zoe was white as a sheet. “What? Why would you say that?”

“Because… because,” Evan said, breathing heavily. “Because I was going to do it too. That’s… that’s how we met, we met online. We’re… we’re supposed to be… suicide partners.”

Zoe looked ill. Like she genuinely might throw up. “What? But… but…” She was definitely crying. “He… he…”

“We need to find him. He’s not answering his phone.”

Zoe raced to the garage first, making sure Connor’s car wasn’t in there.

“Okay,” She said, like she was trying to make a plan. “We should split up and look. He only left like
twenty minutes ago. He… there’s no way he… in twenty minutes.”

“Okay.”

“Here,” She was shoving a set of keys into his hand. “Take my keys. I’ll take my mom’s car; she left with dad. I’ll call them. You keep trying Connor, okay?”

“Sure.”

They divided up places to go. Evan took the Mr. Murphy’s office, the orchard, and the water tower. Zoe sped off toward school, because there were some childhood places that Evan hadn’t even known about.

Evan had never driven so recklessly in his life. Speeding. Taking corners too fast. Texting and making phone calls.

Jared would have been proud.

__________________________________________________________________

Evan got to the law office where Mr. Murphy worked, his heart racing. He scoured the parking lot, the structure for any sign that Connor had been there.

His heart nearly stopped when he found the pocket knife that Connor had used sitting against the concrete half wall in front of the parking space marked “LARRY MURPHY.”

Evan picked the knife up. And looked desperately over the side, fearing the worst, imagining Connor’s body prone on the pavement, blood splattered.

Nothing.

Evan looked at the knife. Closed the blade.

It had Connor’s initials engraved on the side.

Who had given this kid a knife as a gift? Who would have been so oblivious?

Evan crossed to the skywalk. The lights were all off. The doors locked.

Connor couldn’t have gotten in, could he?

Evan turned, prepared to run back to Zoe’s car… and spotted a janitor, standing in the parking structure, smoking a cigarette.

“Sir!” Evan said, his voice too loud. He didn’t care. “Sir, have you seen anyone around here today? A kid my age? Brown hair to his shoulders, probably wearing black?”

The janitor shook his head. “Nobody comes in on Sundays, son.”

“Thanks.”

Evan called Connor and left him a long voicemail, which included a lot of swearing, and a lot of “call me back”s and “answer your fucking phone Connor please please pleasepleasepleaseplease.”
The drive to the orchard too too long.

Evan was running out of time.

He was just running.

Running full tilt so fast that when he jumped the privacy fence, it probably looked like an audition to be a hurdler.

Evan rushed to the clearing.

There was no sign of Connor anywhere. Nothing to indicate he had ever been there, he had ever existed.

If a boy kills himself in the forest and nobody cares about him, does he actually die?

Evan didn’t know. He wished he did. He wished he had known two months ago.

His hands shook and he took off back toward Zoe’s car so fast that he ended up doubled over, retching, until everything he had managed to eat that morning was splattered on the yellowing fall grass.

Fuck.

Fuck.

It had been more than an hour since Zoe said that Connor had left. It didn’t take more than an hour to kill yourself.

Connor was definitely dead.

He was absolutely dead.

Evan knew. He felt it. In his heart, breaking. In his bones, aching. He knew it in the hollow place below his ribs where he had come to keep Connor.

Connor was gone.

Evan was searching for a body.

He put the keys into the ignition of Zoe’s car.

Evan took a deep breath.

Maybe Connor knew Evan would find him. Knew he wanted to be found that way.

He could do it. He could do that for Connor. He owed Connor his life. He could see the end of Connor’s.

Evan wiped his face.

He stole a piece of gum from Zoe’s center console. Worried about what the inevitable police would say about the vomit on his breath.

Connor had probably choked on his own vomit, swallowing Evan’s pills.
He turned out of the orchard, defeated.
And turned toward the water tower.

Connor’s car was parked on the side of the road, near the water tower. Evan had never noticed the perfect shade of blue of it before.

Keys still in the ignition.

Phone sitting on the passenger seat. Lit up from missed calls and texts.

Fuck.

Evan looked up.

Evan could see immediately that someone was on the water tower.

It was obviously a body. Connor had decided to overdose up there. Obviously.

Evan had to see him up close. To confirm. To make the call.

He wouldn’t be able to get Connor’s body down on his own. And the Murphys would want a body.

Evan just climbed, up and up and up, fast and quiet, not looking down, so focused. His hands were sweaty.

He reached the top.

Connor was there. Sitting back against the railing, head in his hands.

Breathing.

Alive.

Evan almost wept with relief.

“Hey.” Evan clamoured up onto the platform. “You’re two weeks early.”

Connor looked up at Evan. “No,” he said. “What are you doing here?”

“You left me a note,” Evan said. His hands were shaking terribly. “You… that. That wasn’t okay.”

“Please, Evan. Just go back down. Please. I don’t want you to see this.”

Evan shook his head. “I’m not going anywhere.” His phone in his hand, Evan texted Zoe as fast as he could, positive it was littered with typos, not taking his eyes off of Connor.

“Please. Please just go back down.”

“Connor…”

Connor was shaking his head. He was paler than Evan had ever seen him. “Fuck. Fuck, Evan, please…. Just down back down.”
“No,” Evan said, his voice far steadier than he felt. “Because I have to tell you something…”

Connor shook his head. And Evan sat down beside him. Taking his hand.

“Fuck.”

“Why’d you leave that note for me?”

“Because,” Connor said, his voice shaking. “I can’t… I can’t let you. Because… God Evan. You’re a good person. You… Please don’t, okay? Please.”

“I won’t if you won’t.”

“Evan.” He sounded almost insulted.

“I’m… I’m beginning to think we might… we might have made this decision a little too fast.”

Connor laughed.

Or maybe he was crying.

Could be both.

“Please,” Evan said. “Please don’t do this. Not today. Please. We can figure something else out, okay. I’ll talk to your parents with you. I’ll tackle you every time you feel like slashing a tire. Please. Connor. Please.”

Connor sort of laughed to himself. “That’s a cute idea.”

“Connor.”

“You know I don’t even like you?” Connor said, bitterly. “I just… I just don’t think you’re fucked up enough to die. It’s not even about you. I mean. You think you’ve got problems? Please. You don’t even know what problems feel like.”

That hurt.

That fucking hurt.

“You’re just… you’re pathetic and nervous and you were so easy to manipulate. God, I even tricked you into sleeping with me... This was just because I needed a way out of the house. I can't believe I even let it get this far. But you’ve done your job. Go home to your mommy.”

“Connor,” Evan tried, his voice faltering.

It was exactly everything Evan had told himself. Everything he had feared. Self conscious in his own desire to kill himself.

It made him half tempted to look away.

Climb down.

Go live a normal life.

Let Connor Murphy kill himself.

Fuck that.
“Connor, no, listen, I have to tell you—”

“God if I’d known you were going to be like this I would have put an end to this ages ago. Before you got so clingy and so pathetic. I mean. You had a panic attack because of weed. That’s a fucking plant. It’s not even a real drug. You are such a lo—”


Connor did look at him then, and immediately the hard, numb, callous face fractured. Broke. Crumbled.

“I’m sorry… “ Connor said, mumbled. “Fuck… I’m sorry. I don’t think any of that… I just. You can’t stay up here with me. And I’m not coming down alive. I can’t… I can’t keep doing this, Evan. I can’t. I hurt everyone around me. This! This is the shit I do. I say. I can’t even… I can’t stop it. I’ve tried. I’ve tried and tried and I fail. I fail every single fucking time, and fuck it all up. I can’t… I can’t stand it. I hate it. I hate the way people look at me. I hate that I’ve made them look at me this way. I feel like shit… constantly. All of the time. It never goes away. Even when I’m at my happiest, even when I’m looking at you, I’m just waiting for someone to pull the rug out from under me.”

“I know. I know.”

Connor wiped his face. “I can’t do this. I’m so tired of fighting. I just want it to stop.”


“Why the fuck do you think that?” Connor said. It sounded like pure pain.

“Because I know you,” Evan said. “And for me, everything’s better with you in the picture. Even the bad stuff. Even the inside of my head.”

“Come on, Evan.”

“When we met,” Evan said. “I was just so scared of everything all of the time. And that was paralyzing.”

“Please don’t try to bullshit me into thinking everything’s not still scary for you.”

“NO,” Evan said, frustrated. “That’s the thing. It’s all so scary. All of the time. Still. Fuck, sometimes even you’re scary to me.” Connor flinched. “But I’m not frozen anymore. At least not all of the time. You’ve helped me feel like some things are worth the risk.”

Connor shook his head. “I… “

“I love you,” Evan said, his voice steadier than he felt.

Connor looked away. “I get it. I get what you’re doing. Please don’t… don’t just… I understand what you’re saying, and I appreciate how much you don’t want to feel responsible for me... but you don’t have to lie to me.”

“Connor. I’m not lying.”

Connor didn’t respond. He just kept looking away.
“Connor.” Evan gently touched Connor’s face, turning it toward him. Connor was definitely crying. He looked so utterly broken. “I’m not. I’m not lying. I love you. I love you.”

Connor looked away again, covering his face in his other hand. He was shaking. “That’s… that doesn’t fix this. It doesn’t fix me. I’m still… I’m still this thing I am. Angry and mean and fucked up and-and horrible.”

“I know, I know it doesn’t fix it,” Evan said. “It doesn’t. It doesn’t make it better. I know.”

Connor was breathing heavily now, in short stops and starts, and Evan was so scared. So scared. Because it would only take a second if Connor decided to jump. And Evan was so scared. Scared he couldn’t get Connor off of this water tower alive. Scared of who he would be if he couldn’t.

“I just… Connor, I think it can get better. I really do. I don’t know why. It’s probably the stupidest thing I’ve ever thought. But I do. I think it can get better. For both of us.”

“Why? Why do you think that now?”

Evan shrugged. “Because in July of this year I had no friends and no life. And now… I have friends. I’ve been to a party, I’ve been drunk, I’ve been high, and I’m definitely not going to die a virgin like I thought. And… And I have you… And I never expected that. So maybe that isn’t a fluke. Maybe it’s real. Maybe you can… you can have it too.”

And then Connor sighed and said, “Okay.”

And Evan kissed him because he was so relieved.

And within a few minutes they were on the ground, and Evan was holding on to Connor as tightly as he could, just. Crying.

He was okay.

Connor was alive. He was there. He was real.

Connor was crying too. He wasn’t even really quiet about it or trying to hide it. He was wrecked. He looked utterly wrecked.

They were a fucking mess.

And Evan was still depressed. Still anxious. Still seriously questioning whether or not he ought to find some way to end everything.

But he was also in love.

So that was something. A light in the dark.

“You scared me,” Evan said.

“I’m so sorry. About everything. I’m so sorry.”

Evan nodded.

“Did you mean it?” Connor asked. “Or did you just say to get me down here?”

“I meant it.”
“Please don’t lie to me.”

“I meant it.”

“Please, Evan, just…” He took a shaky breath. “I won’t be mad or freak out if you did say it to get me down. Okay? Just tell me.”

“I love you.” He took Connor’s hand. “You’re a mess. And sometimes you’re an asshole. In fact, not just sometimes. A lot. And you genuinely have a drug problem and a problem with rage, which terrifies me, because I am shrimpy and-and I don’t know anything about drugs. At all. And you are so wonderful. And so… You care so much, even though you do you best to pretend you aren’t. And I love you.”

“I don’t deserve it,” Connor said, softly. “I don’t…. I.”

“Nobody does. At least, not by the standard you’ve set up,” Evan said. “But I love you. “

“Okay.” He pulled Evan to him then, and the empty space inside Evan exploded and he gripped Connor so tightly he was certain that Connor would have bruises. “You know I… I uh.” He stopped.

“I know. You don’t have to say it.”

Connor shook his head, laughing and crying. “I almost just killed myself without saying it, Evan, fuck. Let me get out.” He took a deep breath. Like he had before their first proper kiss, in Evan’s kitchen. He ran a hand through his hair. Wiped his face. “I love you. Oh my god, I’m so in love with you that I… Fuck. I love you. I don’t… have a big speech or anything prepared. I’m terrible with words and worse with thinking so… I just love you.”

Evan shyly touched the sleeve of Connor’s hoodie. “Connor?”

“Yeah?”

“Were you planning to jump?”

Connor nodded.

“The pills you took from me… that’s your backup plan? You were going to overdose if you couldn't jump, right?” He looked into Connor’s face, hard. ”You didn't take them, right?”

“No,” Connor sighed. Wiped his face again.

Reached into his hoodie.

Handed over the Xanax bottle with the name EVAN HANSEN printed on it.

“It was my insurance policy. Since. Well. Since I wanted to make sure you didn't… I wanted to make sure that you stayed alive. And since you don't have a car, I figured you'd think of this next.”

And Evan smiled. Stupidly.

Burst out laughing. But still crying. “You are the worst. You are the biggest idiot that I know and, even though I’m not saying it now, I am so mad at you.”

“You can be mad at me.”

“Good, because I am!”
“Good.”

Evan wiped his eyes. “Fuck… I-I told your sister! I told Zoe how we met. We’re… we’re in such
deep shit when we get back!”


“I… uh. Yeah. I wasn’t sure how else to explain how I knew what you’d be doing.”

And Connor cracked up. “Our parents are going to freak out so bad.”

“We probably won’t be allowed to hang out anymore.”

“Do I have to be Juliet?”

“You do,” Evan said, laughing.

“It's the hair?”

“Absolutely the hair.”

“Evan?”

“Hm?”

“Thank you.”

“You really want to thank me right now?”

Connor shook his head. “No. But in case I don’t say it later.”

“We’re definitely going to miss some school,” Evan said as they walked back toward the cars.

“Want to be my date to the psych ward?” Connor asked, nudging Evan’s shoulder. He still had tear
tracks on his face.

And scars on his arms.

And a brain that was broken. Maybe a heart too.

He looked beautiful.

And then Evan nodded. “Wouldn’t miss it for the world.”

Evan followed Connor back to the Murphys’ in Zoe’s car.

When they arrived, the driveway was already crowded. Mr. and Mrs. Murphy. Evan’s mom. Zoe.

Evan got out of Zoe’s car first.

And Connor followed.

Taking Evan’s hand.

Their parents were all standing anxiously near the mouth of the garage.
Nobody spoke at first.

Evan squeezed Connor’s hand. And Connor looked at him, before walking over to his parents. His mom was crying. His dad had his arms crossed over his chest.

“I’m… I’m so sorry,” Connor said to them, his head down. “I messed up. I’m messed up. Really, really messed up. Please… I’m so sorry…”

Evan thought it was progress that Mr. Murphy was the one who pulled his son in for a hug first.

Chapter End Notes

The summary was a dick move. My bad.

The chapter title is taken from "Perfect Blue Buildings" from Counting Crows because my roommate suggested it and then I almost cried so. Anyways here’s the bit:

"Asleep in perfect blue buildings
Beside the green apple sea
Gonna get me a little oblivion, baby
And try to keep myself away from me"

So, also, I very nearly called this chapter "All Was Golden in the Sky" because so many people were telling me how perfect the Panic! song "When the Day Met the Night" is as a tree bros song...

But I couldn't give myself away. :)

I love you. I love you all. So many loves.

Also: fear not! For this is not the end. At least not officially. I have a few final chapters planned out (think of them as like, related and attached one shots or like a very long, extended epilogue). I’ll try to get them written this week.

Thank you all for being the loveliest.
I Want to be More Than You're Thinking Of

*It’s the most wonderful time of the year.*

And Evan can’t get that damn song out of his head. It had been playing on a loop since two weeks before Thanksgiving in every store and on every radio station. It was starting to make Evan feel insane. He was experiencing rage for like the first time ever, and it was all directed at this one fucking Christmas song.

Dr. Sherman had warned him that this might happen. In his sessions, Evan was starting to talk about how to not take all of his anger inward, like he had been doing for so long. It was a slow going process. It was easier to keep things in a lot of the time.

Only now sometimes things exploded inside of him, and he couldn’t swallow the explosions anymore.

Like two days ago when Connor had rolled his eyes and pantomimed shooting himself over calculus homework and Evan went OFF.

“It’s not fucking funny!”

“Sorry,” Connor had said, arms up, defensive, brows knit together. “Sorry. I didn’t… I’m sorry.”

“You don’t get to kid around about this right now.”

“I’m sorry. I was… you’re right, I’m sorry. Okay. Hey, look at me, I’m really sorry Evan, I’m not trying to downplay this, alright? I’m sorry.”

“This isn’t a joke! I’m not laughing! Stop it!” Then he just kept it up. Kept yelling, shouting, carrying on about how it wasn’t fucking funny, none of this was fucking funny anymore.

Because Connor was back in the hospital.
Because the cocktail of drugs they had tried on him made him straight up, serious as could be, suicidal. Worse than before. When he had called Evan that day, which thank god he had called Evan, he was home alone. With a plan. And means. And every intention of actually going through with it. And he had sounded almost giddy on the phone, saying how he’d definitely gotten it right this time.

Evan didn’t know how he had managed to get Connor to hang up and call 911. He honestly had no idea.

But he had. And Connor did call 911.

And then he went back to the hospital for the third time this semester. And this time they asked him to stick around for a while they tried to get his medication stabilized. Because the medication they had tried back in October clearly were not working.

So Connor had been in there for over a week.

And Evan had yelled at him for a bad joke over calculus.

Evan and his mom had gone to Jared’s house for Thanksgiving, and Jared spent the whole of dinner shooting looks of obvious concern Evan’s way. Not subtle. Not even close to subtle. Performing a tap routine “IS YOUR BOYFRIEND OKAY BECAUSE I HEARD HE WAS IN THE HOSPITAL” accompanied by a chorus of vuvuzelas would have been more subtle.

But Connor was in the hospital.

And Evan and Connor were in a fight.

Evan’s mom tried to reassure him, saying that all couples fight.

Evan retorted that most didn’t fight because one of them was pissed off to be alive.

But the anger immediately faded and Evan broke down crying. Scared it would always be that way, scared that it wouldn’t get better.

So after Thanksgiving dinner, in Jared’s bedroom, feeling a little buzzed after the (large) glass of wine Evan had been allowed at dinner, Jared immediately shoved Evan into a beanbag chair and said, “The fuck, Hansen! I’ve been texting your boyfriend all week. We’re on a history project together, and all that Mrs. Carlisle will tell is that he’ll be out for a few days. What’s going on?”

Evan sighed. “He’s in the hospital again.”

Jared’s face fell. “Shit.” He pulled up his computer chair to sit closer to Evan. “What happened?”

Evan shrugged. “The meds they had him on weren’t working.” If this were anyone other than Jared, Evan would have made something up. Appendicitis or stomach cancer or Connor’s arm had fallen off and it was stumpng doctors. But Jared had been there from the jump… or rather from the decision not to jump. During Evan’s (brief) stay in the psych ward, Jared had shown up every day. Brought homework. Chatted with Evan like this was super totally normal, which Evan didn’t even know how to express gratitude for. Jared just showed up. And kept showing up once Evan and Connor came back to school. He didn’t even tease them about fucking so much they wound up hospitalized, which Evan had been anticipating from the moment he first saw Jared in the waiting room. He even pulled Alana aside and asked her to quit peppering Connor with questions, because she was a little too invested in how Connor was doing. Evan thought it was because Alana and Connor were actually friends – but if you asked either of them they would correct it to
“acquaintances” quickly, avoid eye contact, and move on.

Jared sighed. He put a hand on Evan’s shoulder. “That blows man.”

“Yeah.”

“How come you’re not there then? Is Papa Murphy still giving you grief?”

Evan shook his head. “No. It’s not that…” He sighed. “We’re in a fight.”

“You and Connor?” Jared looked skeptical. “I’ve never seen you two fight. Ever. I don’t even think I’ve seen you two disagree on anything. He just usually does whatever you say. Are you sure you’re in a fight?”

Evan nodded. “Yeah. Yeah. We absolutely are because… because he would have emailed or texted or called by now. Like he has the last few days.”

“Why?”

“I’m… it’s because I’m mad at him.”

“For being sick or…?”

Evan shrugged. “I guess. I don’t know exactly. I’m just. I’m so angry.”

Jared frowned. “Should I sneak into the liquor cabinet before dessert?”

Evan smiled ruefully. “No. My mom’s here. And. Uh. Technically speaking I’m not supposed to drink.”

“Technically speaking,” Jared said, “Fuck that.”

He let Jared make him a drink, just because Jared seemed to need something to do.

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Evan Hansen drove himself to the hospital on Black Friday because he had the day off of school. To visit Connor.

Was Connor his boyfriend?

Probably. They weren’t like facebook official and neither of them had called the other their boyfriend but then again they had been a little bit busy trying not to die in the two months that they had been sort of together.

But they hadn’t officially said that they were boyfriends.

Not that it made Evan any less secure in what they had, twisted and dark as the beginning had been.

He just didn’t know how to bring it up now that Christmas was coming and Evan’s grandmother would be in town for a few days. She was pretty homophobic, at least on her facebook page, so knowing for sure if he should avoid the word “boyfriend” when talking about Connor would be good to know for Christmas.

But.
Evan had driven to the hospital. To visit Connor. Who might be his boyfriend.

Eventually, Evan realized, the shock of driving wore off. It had bothered him nearly as much since the day in October. When Connor…

He drove fairly regularly now.

Though his mom had offered to come with to visit Connor. She had the day off.

Evan’s mom loved Connor. So much so that sometimes Evan himself felt a little jealous. Connor was the sort of kid that Heidi Hansen should have been parenting. Tough, hard, and into the right music. Not Evan. Not someone who only very recently realized that polo shirts weren’t actually that cool and he had been wearing them under a false sense of their dressiness but now that he was gay (he wasn’t, but that was the way that Jared kept phrasing it) he really needed to quit wearing polos.

When Jared said the thing about polo shirts to Evan during the first week of November, Connor had worn exclusively polo shirts for ten days. Evan didn’t even lend him any. He suspected they had been buried in the back of Connor’s closet (“like Evan was, eyyyy!” cried the part of Evan’s brain that seemed to have been rented out by Jared). Or that they might have been Connor’s dad’s.

But. Anyway.

Evan’s mom loved Connor. She liked having him at the house, she liked having him to talk music with, she liked the fact that they genuinely once studied together before Evan got up one Saturday morning because Connor had a big test in French and Evan’s mom had a big test as well and the pair of them traded flashcards and quizzed each other until Evan got out of bed. And then he joined them.

So Heidi loved Connor.

And sometimes that made Evan a little jealous.

Because of course his mom loved Connor when it felt like sometimes she only just tolerated Evan.

Not most of the time.

Just sometimes.

Like when she got frustrated over Evan’s anxiety, like the time in the middle of the month when she realized he had lied and said he’d eaten at the Murphys when he had not, he was just too overwhelmed to order any food.

But. Again. Not most of the time.

Evan arrived at the front desk of the psychiatric wing in the hospital. He was allowed to go back; Connor would be in his room.

Evan hated seeing him in here.

Last time wasn’t so bad because the first day Evan was sort of too overwhelmed to consider the tragedy of the situation, and the second day Connor had cracked a bunch of jokes about the county issued pajamas they were wearing. The third day, Evan got to go home. Connor got to leave two days later.

Last time wasn’t as bad.
This time was worse because it had already been a week, and Evan still didn’t know when Connor would be home.

Evan walked toward Connor’s room. Because he knew where it was. Because he had been here every day, barring Thanksgiving.

Every day.

And he got to go home afterward every night.

It wasn’t fair.

Evan knocked.

Connor had headphones on so he obviously didn’t hear.

So Evan loitered in the doorway until Connor looked up.

Even after nearly two months, Evan still didn’t feel like he could barge into Connor’s space without asking. Like a vampire needing an invitation.

Evan bit his lip. Who still thought about vampires this much at seventeen? He was like one of those weird moms who got into *Twilight* and graduated up to *Fifty Shades of Grey* and seemed perpetually unhappy unless they were talking about one or the other.

Fuck.

Evan knocked again. Anything to avoid looking like he was standing in the door thinking about *Fifty Shades of Grey*.

If that was a thing. Was that a thing?

It was probably a thing.

Connor was still not paying attention, sort of nodding his head to whatever he was listening to.

“Connor. Hey .”

Connor looked up then.

He looked a little better. His eyes looked right again. Not overly bright or far too dull.

He was wearing his glasses, which always made Evan happy because he looked so damn cute in them.

Connor smiled at Evan and pulled the headphones off. “How long were you standing there?”

“Long enough that I started thinking about *Fifty Shades of Grey.* ”

“So, what, fifteen seconds?” Connor quipped. He turned off his music, setting his iPod and the book he was reading on the side table. There wasn’t a lot of space in the room – most people moved to the visitors area just to have more space. But Connor folded his legs up into a pretzel, and Evan had a
seat at the end of the bed. Hanging his feet over, like he was riding a horse sidesaddle.

He smiled nervously at Connor.

Who smiled nervously back.

“Can we talk?” Evan said.

And Connor’s nervous smile vanished. “Oh. Okay. Sure.” He looked away. “It’s just… I understand if you’re breaking up with me. I swear, I’m not going to freak out. Plus everything in this room is bolted to the floor anyways... Just. If you are, can you just say it? I know you get anxious about saying big stuff like that but it would really help me out if you could just if you could just do it now before I-”

“Hey. Hey!” Evan said. “I’m not breaking up with you. I’m sorry, that was… bad phrasing.”

“Oh. Okay.” Connor sort of almost smiled. “What’s… what did you want to talk about then?”

“I wanted to apologize,” Evan said.

“You wanted to… I’m sorry, what?” Connor said weakly. Some of the color returned to his face.

“I wanted to apologize for getting so angry the other day. It wasn’t cool. I’m sorry.”

Connor’s eyebrows knit together. “I mean… Um. That was angry?”

Evan blinked. “Yeah. I mean I… I yelled at you and stuff.”

It was Connor’s turn to blink. “You… yelled? That’s. Angry? For you? Just yelling.”

Evan nodded. “I was really really mad, but I shouldn’t have yelled at you like that.”

Connor smiled. “Well. I. Uh.” He raked a hand through his hair; in the short sleeves he wore, Evan could see maybe three scabs. New since two weeks ago. Since the last time he had looked. The wristband Connor wore obscured some of Evan’s view though, and he worried there were more. “Well. I appreciate the apology, then. It’s fine.”

“Really?”

Connor nodded. “I knew you were upset with me, but I didn’t… I thought you might be. I dunno. Sad?”

“Sad?”

“Yeah.”

“Do you yell when you’re sad, Connor?” Evan asked.

“Sometimes. Yeah.” He shrugged. “I. I don’t want to. Fuck.” He pushed his glasses up. “I’m not saying I like… didn’t realize you were upset with me. That’s not what I’m saying. I knew you were upset. I guess I just didn’t realize you were mad.”

“Why not?”

Connor shrugged. “I don’t know… that wasn’t freaking out to me. That was like… Tuesday for me. Probably because the way you process anger is so much healthier than me?”
Evan smiled then.

“I’m sorry too,” Connor said, looking down at the bedsheet. “I… it was a stupid joke to make. Especially in here. I just.” He shrugged. “I’m embarrassed. I’m here again for the second time in two months. I don’t… I don’t know how to deal with it.”

“I know. I’m sorry.” Evan took his hand then. So they’d had a fight. And they were dealing with it. And the sky wasn’t falling. “You’re going to be okay, you know?”

“And you? How are you?”

Evan shrugged. He reported back some of stuff he had practiced with Dr. Sherman that week… included the stuff about being angry about Connor’s… backslide? Relapse? He wasn’t sure on the words.

And Connor listened. And nodded. And said that he was also feeling pretty pissed off about the backslide/relapse.

And Evan felt a little better.

Connor mentioned that he would be back in school by Monday. “I’m out of here tomorrow, and then I’m supposed to check in with my therapist like… daily. But, yeah, I’m back at school on Monday.”

And Evan felt a little better.

And Connor said, “You know. I want to get better. I really… I do.”

“I know.”

Evan felt a little bit better.

I Wanna Scream I Love You At the Top of My Lungs

“I don’t want to go.”

“Your parents will absolutely freak out if you don’t go.”

Connor flopped dramatically onto Evan’s sofa. “But I hate skiing. And I hate the Harrises. Their kids are assholes. Last time we went on vacation together, Brian kept snapping Zoe’s bra and then I was the bad guy because I shoved his head into a toilet.” Connor rolled his eyes. “Can’t I just stay here?”

“Yeah. And hang out with my Nana? Sure. Great idea.”

“Is this the homophobic one?”

“The one and only.”

Connor frowned. “Maybe I should convince my parents to let you come with me.”

Evan frowned back. “You’d think we could have played the suicide card to get out of Christmas this year.”
Connor shook his head. “I wish though. Christmas on the psych ward sounds much for festive.”

Evan rolled his eyes, muttering, “Until you find out that all ornaments count as sharps and you’re stuck with only garland on the tree.”

“Do you think candy canes can be sharps? If you suck them down to a point?”

“I think you’re thinking of shanks.”

“Oh right. I always get those mixed up.”

“You’re so weird,” Evan said, smiling. Then he kissed Connor.

They pulled apart after a while, switching on a Christmas movie playing on the local public access channel. The semester had ended for them already so there was no homework to be done for almost two full weeks.

Connor was really sweating his grades; he was hoping to get into the school where Evan was planning to go. They had a good program in English that he liked. But missing a lot of school was not helping his G.P.A., and he and Evan had spent much of the last two weeks huddled over textbooks and crammed into coffee shops reviewing everything. So this was nice, having a break.

“I know we said no gifts,” Connor said after a while.

And Evan’s heart squeezed. They had agreed not to exchange gifts, because gift giving filled Evan with so much dread that he basically had a panic attack the first time they even heard Christmas music together.

Which Connor, nicely, said meant that gifts were out. “No gifts. Don’t get me anything.”

“I can’t do that! I can’t not get you anything! That’s not fair!”

“Fine, then I won’t get you anything either.”

“Oh…” Evan had thought about it. “If you’re sure.”

Evan snapped back into the present. Connor was still holding his hand, looking expectantly at him. “Sorry, what?”

“What would you say if we went out somewhere?”

“Like a date?”

“Yeah.”

“Okay,” Evan said, smiling. “But no gifts.”

“No gifts, promise.”

“Hey, so…”

Evan looked up at Connor. They were walking through a park downtown, where the city had set up a ton of Christmas lights on the trees. It had snowed the day before. It looked like a Christmas card.
Evan liked it. “Hey so what?”

Connor had taken their intertwined hands and put them into the pocket of his jacket. Which was great because Evan’s fingers were freezing. Even in his gloves. The weather had taken a frigid dip since the day before, and with every word their said little clouds would escape their mouths.

Evan had never properly imagined Connor Murphy in winter wear. But he really enjoyed it. The black knit cap, the black pea coat, the thick socks that stuck out over his boots a little. The flushed cheeks. The fact that he was always reapplying mint-flavored chapstick because his lips were really dry, which made his mouth taste awesome. The red scarf that made Evan’s heart jump a little the first time he saw it, until he realized that… well. It was just a scarf.

Connor looked good in winter.

Then again, Evan thought Connor looked good just about anywhere. Everywhere.

“I wanted to ask you something,” Connor said.

Evan nodded. A little uncertain. But he took a deep breath and thought it seemed stupid to drive all the way out here just for Connor to dump him. So he pushed the thought from his mind.

“Am I your boyfriend?” Connor asked. “It’s just… it’s been like three months. And. Um. I just… well am I?”

Evan stared at him. “You don’t know either?”

Connor blinked. “What?”

“I just mean, I’ve been… I’ve been waiting for you to tell me if we were, like, I dunno, dating officially or whatever. And you don’t know either.”

Connor smiled, looking a little relieved. “Oh man, we are a fucking joke.”

“We absolutely are.”

“We belong in a freak show.”

“We should go on tours,” Evan said, smiling. “And just let people laugh at our incompetence at this…”

“This being?” Connor said, teasing, smiling.

“Dating. I think.”

Connor let go of his hand.

And used his now free hand to scoop up a handful of snow, throwing it at Evan. Hitting him square in the chest.

Evan rolled his eyes. “Worst boyfriend ever,” he said, laughing. And Connor kissed him, in the fucking snow, in the middle of all of these Christmas lights. It was cheesy as hell.

Like Jared would have thrown up if he had seen it.

Evan wanted to keep the moment in a snow globe. So he could shake it and relive it when things got
“How do you feel about ice skating?” Evan asked Connor after a while. They had walked past a rink a little while before.

He shrugged. “I’ve only been a few times. Most of them where I just fell on my ass a lot. Like, picture a baby giraffe… and then put it in ice skates. That’s me.”

“Please, you look nothing like a giraffe. Your neck is way too short.”

Connor laughed.

They went skating. It was clumsy and awkward and Evan would be leaving with a few bruises (one from the time he straight up crashed into Connor, not realizing that Connor had stopped, resulting in them landing in a pile on the ice laughing hysterically, and one from the place where Connor had grabbed his arm so hard to keep from falling that he nearly brought them both down). But they had a good time.

“How do you feel about hot chocolate?” Connor asked after, his face pink from cold and smiling.

“Generally positive.”

So Connor bought them each a hot chocolate.

And they just wandered the park and walked and talked until Evan realized he couldn’t properly feel his toes.

So they walked back to Connor’s car.

Hand in hand.

Freezing.

But happy.

At least for now.

“I can’t believe we’re video chatting. I’ve never video chatted before.”

“Evan, it’s just because I’m in the middle of the fucking mountains and my phone only works on wifi.”

“Okay. I just. What do I do with my face?”

Connor smiled. “Just… just whatever you’d normally do when we talk.”

“Well it’s hard to drool over you over the internet.”

“Haha,” Connor said dryly.

“Is that Evan?” It was Zoe’s voice in the background.

“Yes,” Connor said, rolling his eyes. “Zoe wants to say hi.”

“Hi Evan. Merry Christmas!”

“Thank you. You too.”

Zoe was clearly hurrying across the room with Connor’s phone (he could hear Connor griping in the background), “So what did you get for Christmas?”

“Oh. Some books. A few things for college? Wh-what about you?”

“I got a brand new Fender. I am stoked! It’s going to make my solo in the spring concert sound so bad ass—”

“Zoe—”

“It’s bright blue too, which is even better—”

“Zoe, can I please have the phone back?”

She rolled her eyes. “Fine. But Evan, Alana is throwing a New Year’s Eve party, and if you don’t come I will kidnap you.”

“Okay. Alright. I’ll talk to my mom.”

Zoe handed the phone back to Connor. He shook his head. “Hey. Sorry. Did you want to go to Alana’s party? She facebook messaged me yesterday asking about it.”

“Oh. Yeah. I mean… I’ll go.”

“Oh, I doubt it’ll be a really big party… but then again Alana has all of those acquaintances so who knows.”

“She does have a lot of those.”

“Hmm.”

“But you’ll be back then, right? You guys fly home the day before?”

Connor nodded.

“How are you doing?” Evan asked.

Alright,” Connor said, shrugging. “You?”

“My Nana is gone already. So better.”

“That’s good.” He ran a hand through his hair. “Did you tell her that you’re super into dudes now?”

“Yeah, I showed her my porn collection too,” Evan said, rolling his eyes.

Connor laughed. “So. Speaking of…” His eyes darted toward where Evan imagined the hotel room door was located. “I called you my boyfriend in front of my mom today.”

“Oh?”

“She was fine with it. I’m sure she already knew.”
“So, that’s two down,” Evan said, smiling encouragingly.

“Yeah, but that leaves my dad.”

“Yeah.”

“Fucking Larry.”

“I don’t think he’s going to react badly,” Evan said. “I really don’t.” Connor and his dad had been getting along better since October. Not perfectly. Not even well some days. But better.

“Yeah well I’m not holding my breath.”

“I think it’ll be fine,” Evan said. Positive outlook.

“Sure.”

Evan hung up later feeling a little deflated. Connor was getting better, everyday. He was. But it was very slow going. And on days like today, where all Evan could do was call, it was frustrating.

I Want To Know Your Plans

It turned out that Alana Beck’s parents were cool as hell.

“We expect you all to stay the night,” Mrs. Beck said, smiling when Evan, Connor, and Zoe arrived. “But as long as you don’t trash the place, feel free to have a good time. We’ll be back in the morning.”

Evan was a little gobsmacked. Alana, who did three internships and ninety hours of community service over the summer, was throwing a kegger.

She was smiling brightly in the living room, wearing a sparkly dress. She hugged Evan and Connor and Zoe each in turn, welcoming them to the party which was already fairly populated with kids from school. Evan recognized a handful from his honors classes, and a decent amount from the student group Alana had started. The support group. It was actually pretty popular, considering it was a group for kids who were mentally ill. Alana and Evan had eventually decided to call it “Sincerely, Me” because of the online service they had helped to set up - where kids could submit anonymous letters about their personal struggles, seeking support and advice.

Evan did three letter shifts a week on good weeks. Less on bad weeks.

He thought Alana probably answered the most letters.

But Connor was pretty involved, to pretty much everyone’s surprise. When asked, he just shrugged and mumbled about college applications. But Evan thought it was probably because he liked it. And he was good at it. While Evan relied heavily on templates and resource lists, Connor always found ways to personalize his responses. Like when he wrote back to someone else who had been struggling with self-harm, Connor had added that he wore a rubber band or hair tie around his wrist so when he was struggling with the urge to hurt himself, he snapped a hair band or rubber band and it helped.

Basically Connor was the best at answering the letters. But sometimes he just laid on the floor of the
empty classroom where the club met, not helping, not sleeping, not doing anything at all.

It was a work in progress.

“Hey,” Evan said, frowning. He found Connor standing beside Alana, holding a red plastic cup. The pair were chatting about some English project they were paired together to do. “You’re not supposed to be drinking,” Evan said to Connor, eyebrows raised.

He really wasn’t supposed to be drinking. His therapist said that since Connor was still thinking of suicide so often that lowering his inhibitions by drinking or smoking pot was a bad idea for the time being.

Connor rolled his eyes. “Are you really meant to be drinking, Xanax?”

Evan flushed. “Connor.”

“Sorry. That wasn’t necessary.” He nodded to Alana. “I’ve been chatting with Alana and nursing this one drink all night. I won’t get drunk. Promise.”

“Fine.”

Evan was pretty drunk by midnight.

He knew this because he was dancing around with Jared, also drunk, singing a warbled version of “Auld Lang Syne,” and blowing into noise makers.

Which was not a thing Evan Hansen did. Dancing. Singing. Being loud on purpose.

“Hey,” Connor had appeared in the circle of people around Jared and Evan’s impromptu kick line.

“Hi!” Evan said, enthusiastically, and he practically ran over to Connor, surprising him with a kiss.

“Happy New Year!”

“You too,” Connor said, smiling.

“Hey, don’t leave me out of this love fest,” Jared complained, loudly, pulling both Connor and Evan into a strange, impromptu group hug.

“Jared is so gay for us,” Connor stage whispered to Evan.

“Don’t I know it!” Jared agreed happily.

“Hey, check it out,” Evan muttered quietly. He pointed a finger across the room where Zoe Murphy and Alana Beck were making out.


“GET IT, ZOLANA!” Jared shouted across the room, and the girls broke apart suddenly, both blushing. But still holding hands.
They joined Jared, Connor, and Evan in the corner. “Hey losers,” Zoe said, smiling. “Happy New Year.”

“You too,” Evan said back, smiling. Alana was beaming. Zoe was smiling so hard Evan was certain it hurt her face.

“I want a picture!” Alana announced. “I’m making a scrapbook of my senior year, and I want to document this moment with all of my acquaintances.”

“Hey give that a rest,” Connor said, rolling his eyes. “We’re obviously your friends.”

Alana looked at him, bewildered. “Friends?”

“Yeah. We’re fucking friends, Beck. Come on.”

The group all squeezed in tightly for a few selfies (courtesy of the selfie stick that Jared had pulled out of his backpack with a self-deprecating joke about how lame it was). Silly ones where everyone pulled faces (except Connor, who muttered that he did not make silly faces because he had standards, which cracked Evan and Jared right up), ones where everyone smiled, ones where Evan slapped Connor’s hand down when he tried to give Zoe bunny ears.

Evan ended up snapping a few photos of just Connor and Alana together; one where Connor wasn’t ready yet and it just looked like Alana was clinging to him awkwardly, and another with his arm around her shoulders, really emphasizing their height difference.

“This is going online,” Alana said, giggling as she took the phone out of Evan’s hands. She was definitely a little drunk.

“Great idea,” Evan said, raising his eyebrows at Connor, who rolled his eyes.

Evan posted the photo with the caption “#besties,” which made Alana get choked up.

They kept the energy going all night long, staying up as everyone else dropped off to sleep, slowing their alcohol consumption until most of them were sober and drinking water. Alana and Zoe cuddled together on the couch until they fell asleep. Jared, his head leaned back against the couch, out cold at six am.

Evan and Connor went out to the Becks’ deck. Connor smoked a cigarette. They watched the sun come up over the snowy backyard. “We made it another year.”

“We did,” Connor said, exhaling smoke. “I can’t really believe it.”

“Me either.”

“You alright?” Connor asked Evan.

Evan nodded. “I think so.”

“Good.”

“Zoe and Alana? Did you see that one coming?” Evan asked.

Connor shook his head. “I thought Zoe was going out with some kid from jazz band. Shows how much I know.”

“So,” Evan said after a while. “Any big plans for this year?”
And Connor smiled at him. “I think I’ll stay alive this year.”

“Yeah?”

“And maybe I’ll go to college or something. I dunno.”

“Sounds like a good plan,” Evan said, smiling. “Any others?”

Connor was looking at him pretty intensely then. “I might have some for later today.”

“Oh?”

Connor raised his eyebrows. “They involve my boyfriend.”

“Is that so?”

“Yeah.”

“Are you flirting with me?” Evan teased.

“Trying to.”

I Wanna Get Better

Evan’s mom was trying so hard to be helpful, but Evan just felt worse each time she checked in on him.

“Honey…”

“Mom. It’s okay. Really.”

“Do you want me to call off work tonight? I’m really worried about you. You’ve just been sitting here on your computer all night.”

Evan shrugged. “It’s fine mom. Go to work. It’s alright.”

His mom sat down beside him. “I can call Dr. Sherman? See if you can get into see him this week?”

Evan nodded. “Yeah. That-that would be good.”

His mom kissed the top of Evan’s head. “He’ll be okay.”

Evan nodded. “Sure.”

“Honey, this happens sometimes. It’s hard for him…”

Evan picked at a loose thread on his pants. “I know. I know it’s so hard for him.”

“Evan.”

He didn’t look at her, just picked at the string, picked picked picked.

“Honey, I understand it’s gotta be hard for you too,” His mom said. “I know. I’m so sorry that you’re
going through this right now.” His mom put her arm around him. “You know what? I can take a night off. I deserve one.” She stood up, giving him an encouraging smile, and grabbing her phone. Evan let her call off for the night. He let her order them a pizza with extra toppings, and he even let her pick out a cheesy romantic comedy on Netflix for them to watch.

He didn’t say that part of the reason he was so upset was because it was Valentine’s Day.

His first Valentine’s Day with his boyfriend.

But his boyfriend was in the hospital.

Evan went to school like always did the next day.

He sat with Alana and Jared and Zoe at lunch, all of them quiet. Nobody mentioning Connor’s empty seat.

Which was really pissing Evan off.

“This is so stupid,” He said after a while. “We literally run a support group and we can’t say anything about this?”

Zoe looked up at him, and then nodded. “Yeah. That’s a good point.” She ran a hand through her hair. The teal had long since washed now; now she had pink in it (Connor had a stripe of pink as well). “I’m pretty pissed off at him right now.”

“Me too,” Alana said. “I know it’s not fair, since he’s clearly struggling. But he could have called me. He could have talked to me. He never said anything.”

“He said something to me,” Jared volunteered suddenly. “But I… which I realize is idiotic, because I, like, know… but he made a joke about not surviving the semester and I. I should have said something.”

“Evan?” Alana said to him.

Evan had suddenly crushed the empty La Croix can from his lunch. He was tempted to just keep going, just keep taking things and breaking them until everything looked as bad as he felt. “I…” he started, but his voice died. He swallowed. Tried again. “I… I know how he feels. But it is hard. Because he sucks me right back there too.”

They all nodded.

Connor got out after the mandated seventy two hour psych hold.

Evan hadn’t visited this time. He was too tired. He was too scared.

So he wasn’t expecting to see Connor sitting outside of Evan’s door when he got home from school.

“How are you here?” Evan asked. “Your parents said they wanted you to stay at home for a couple of weeks, at least.”
Connor shrugged. “I guess they decided your place was safe.”

“What do you want?”

Connor flinched. “To apologize. For this whole week.”

Evan nodded. “Thanks.”

“No,” Connor said. “Don’t just… Look. I feel like shit. I’m sorry. I…” He looked at Evan, his eyes tired. He dropped his gaze to the sidewalk. “I’m really trying. I’m trying it’s just… I want this to be better. I want to be better for you.”

Evan gave Connor a dirty look. “Don’t get better for me. That’s… that’s the stupidest thing you’ve ever said to me. Get better because you want to get better. Get better for yourself. Jesus.”

Connor nodded. “You’re right. I’m sorry.”

Evan crossed his arms over his chest.

“Zoe said you were pretty pissed at me. Which makes sense… I just… I need to know. Did I ruin it?”

“It?” Evan asked.

“This. Us. Our.. whatever. Did I ruin it?”

Evan shook his head, surprised. “No. Of course not.”

“I’m really sorry.”

“I know.”

Evan took Connor’s hand. He kissed his cheek.

“Evan?”

“Hmm?”

“I love you.”

“I love you too.”

Chapter End Notes

So this is just part one of four of the epilogue. So I know this chapter was sort of a bummer, but I can promise (without spoilers) that it will get better and happier. :)

The parts are titled after the following songs:

I Wanna Be Free - Panic at the Disco
The (Shipped) Gold Standard - Fall Out Boy
I Want to Know Your Plans - Say Anything
I Wanna Get Better - Bleachers
Epilogue Part 2: Spring

Chapter Summary

Epilogue Part 2: Spring

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

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I'm Not Fine But I'll Be Okay

Evan checked his backpack for the tenth time in the security line.


Evan nodded. He fidgeted a little with the rubber band around Connor’s wrist.

“I just… I don’t…”


Evan nodded.

“Plus, Dr. Sherman told you that it was fine to take something before we take off to keep you from getting overwhelmed. You’re going to be fine.”

Evan nodded again, this time mostly to reassure himself. He resisted the urge to check his bag again, going over the list he had made for himself in his head.

“Thank you again for coming with me.”

Connor threw an arm around Evan’s shoulders. “You’ve got to stop thanking me or I’m going to start thinking you’re dragging me somewhere awful.”

“I might be. I haven’t been since I was a kid.”

“I’m sure it’s fine.”

“You’re sure you want to be spending your Spring Break with me? It might be really boring.”

“Evan, yes. I want to be here.” He smiled. Evan thought he looked tired. “Though the airport is not the best time to be asking.”

Evan sighed, rolling his eyes.

“Besides, you wouldn’t let me get you anything for your birthday! I had to come with you.”

“Please don’t remind me that it’s my birthday.”
“Happy birthday dear Evan,” Connor sang, teasing him. “We should have stopped on the way to the airport so you could buy cigarettes and lottery tickets.”

“Shut up. I don’t want to talk about my birthday. I don’t know why I agreed to this.”

“Because he’s your dad, and you wanted to see him?”

“No, that can’t be right,” Evan said, shaking his head.

“You wanted to join the mile high club?”

Evan blushed, turning his head away. “Are you kidding me? Are you trying to give me a panic attack?”

Connor shook his head. “Sorry.”

The line moved forward. Connor let Evan walk in front of him, but they still held hands. They were getting a few looks. It made Evan a little embarrassed, and he debated dropping Connor’s hand, but the thought of his own hand, empty, made him even more nervous.

They reached the point of the line where they were required to place all of their personal items into big plastic boxes. Evan did let go then, because he had to untie his shoes.

Watching Connor remove his boots and the chain around his neck and his belt sort of made Evan think about the last time Connor had gotten undressed in front of Evan, and that also made Evan’s face get warm.

It had been a while for them.

First there were a couple of issues with Connor’s new meds in the… in that department.

Then the weeks before Spring Break had been so jam packed with homework that they had literally no time alone. Because Evan was unshakeable in his resolve to never do it where they could get caught. The idea of someone walking in on them made Evan’s head just sort of float off of his shoulders and up into a thunderstorm in the stratosphere.

Evan blinked rapidly. And thunked his backpack into the plastic box, then got back into the line in his socks. He bit his lip, giggling nervously, because the last time he had flown, he had reached this point of security and all he could think about was that he couldn’t talk about bombs. Which sounded fine, because when did Evan ever really talk about bombs? Except not being able to talk about them really made it difficult to not talk about them, and now he was stepping into the full body scan machine over his head, almost crying from repressed laughter, thinking about how he couldn’t talk about bombs because they were in an airport and thank goodness the body scan couldn’t see into his brain because he was just thinking about bombs the whole time.

They got through security, put their shoes back on, and headed off in search of their gate.

Connor poked Evan, showing him a text from Jared that read, “You’re going to Colorado? 420 blaze it, eyyyy.”

Evan chuckled. Jared was such a dork.

Plus Connor was trying to stop smoking so much, since the interaction of his new meds and weed mostly just made him edgy. “Of all times to be going to Colorado.”
“Sorry,” Evan said.

Connor bumped his hip against Evan’s. “Don’t apologize.”

Evan bit his tongue to stop himself from saying “sorry” again. Connor kissed him quick. Evan wondered if Connor was consciously rewarding him everytime he didn’t double apologize for something that wasn’t his fault or if was just a time that Connor thought was good to kiss him.

Kissing in public. Holding hands in public.

So long, Evan Hansen of two months ago.

He was so comfortable around Connor that sometimes he just genuinely forgot to be uncomfortable.

Progress.

They made it to their gate. After they checked in for the flight, Connor stepped away to get coffee. Evan didn’t think he had slept well the night before (he had tossed and turned for a while before Evan dropped off) and their flight left early so they’d been up really early.

Evan was sort of hoping Connor would sleep on the plane. Though he figured that he wouldn’t, since Evan wouldn’t.

“Hey.”

“Hey.”

“You good?”

Evan nodded. Smiled nervously.

“So,” Connor said, nudging Evan. “What is your dad going to think of me?”

Evan grinned. “Probably that you’re far too cool for me.”

Connor rolled his eyes. “See I usually get like, neerdowell or hoodlum.”

“Yeah, but you haven’t seen pictures of him and my mom from when they met. You look super straight laced next to them.”

Connor smiled. “That’s almost disappointing.”

The intercom starting calling seats in the section before theirs. “Hey, take your pill yeah? No need to stress yourself out over the flight.”

Evan nodded. He went into his bag, grabbed a pill from the bottle, and swallowed it with a sip of Connor’s coffee. Connor led them toward the boarding line.

“Boarding pass?”

“Right here,” Connor said, waving them.

“Okay,” Evan said, mostly to himself.

“We talked about this,” Connor said, touching Evan’s shoulder. “You’re going to be okay. You’re going to turn on the playlist you made as soon as we start moving, and we’ll be back on the ground
by the time it’s over.”

Evan nodded. His stomach was in knots. He felt a little sick. He didn’t know what had compelled him to do this, other than a strange sense of guilt that he had almost killed himself six months ago without visiting his dad in Colorado so he had agreed to this stupid trip over Spring Break, this stupid trip on his his birthday, and then Connor was with him for the visit (his parents were happy to pay for him to take a trip somewhere other than the hospital) and Evan was going to make a complete fool of himself. This was a disaster. He was going to freak out on the plane, and even if he managed not to freak out on the plane he would freak out when he saw his dad or his dad would hate Connor and it would be a whole thing and he’d end up crying and…

Connor kissed his cheek. “Hey. I’m right here. Tell me what you’re thinking about.”

“It’s stupid.”

“Tell me anyway.”

So Evan blew out a breath, and explained. His nervousness about seeing his father, the guilt about almost not doing it at all, how grateful he was not to be alone but that it also meant a lot of pressure on them and their relationship. And Connor didn’t laugh or recoil. He just said, “I get it,” and nodded while he listened.

And that. Was. Better.

In the end, the flight wasn’t so bad. He still got a little choked up when they took off and a little nervous when they landed, but most of the time they were in the air it was fine. Though Evan wasn’t certain if that was his medication doing its job or the fact that Connor held his hand the whole time.

Evan noticed that Connor seemed to be focused on Evan’s dad. Probably not noticeable to anyone else, but Evan watched him lose the thread of the conversation once and knew instantly that Connor’s brain was miles away.

To be clear, Connor was perfectly polite to Evan’s dad and stepmom and siblings. Almost unnervingly polite, though Evan had gotten a little more accustomed to Connor’s ability to switch on the charm when it would simplify a situation. It actually surprised Evan more that he didn’t use it so much at school - it seemed he could have avoided years of bullying and being shoved into lockers if he could have just pretended to be interested in what the bigger, meaner kids had to say.

But Connor was polite all through dinner. All through the birthday cake that Evan allowed his siblings and stepmom to sing over despite the fact that back home, in his real life, his friends and family all knew that singing at him in any setting was likely to reduce him to tears.

He made it through the cake, but had to take a few minutes in the bathroom to calm down before he would consent to opening presents. They weren’t great - there was a framed picture of his siblings for his future dorm room, a CD, like a physical CD, for a band Evan hadn’t heard of before. A graphic t-shirt that he’d never wear.

But he smiled all through it, and thanked everyone, because he knew they were trying. Just because they hadn’t succeeded didn’t mean that they didn’t care about him or hate him or something. They just didn’t know each other well.

And that could always change.
Connor had raised his eyebrows at the picture of his siblings though. Not judgey. More like surprised.

But Connor’s focus seemed split all evening, so it didn’t really surprise Evan when he mentioned he was going to head to sleep early that night.

Evan was a little irritated that they had set up the spare room for Evan but the basement for Connor. Like they were going to have sex at his dad’s house. Honestly. But he said nothing, because it wasn’t much different than the rules Mrs. Murphy had set up for them (Evan could sleep in Connor’s room, but only if he slept on the blow up mattress with the door open). Evan’s mom didn’t really care where they slept, just as long as they slept. She even said maybe she should have gotten Evan a bigger bed for his birthday since the pair of them were always cramming into Evan’s twin.

So. Connor went to sleep. And Evan was alone with his dad.

“So, I forget,” his dad said. “How’d you meet Connor again?”

“School,” Evan replied. Because that was as close to the truth as he was willing to get. “We’ve been in the same school for years, but we only started talking this year.”

“And how long have you been dating?”

Evan shrugged. “October? We don’t have like… an official date.”

“Hmm.” His dad said.

Evan waited.

They were alone, him and his dad. So this was it. The moment. The time to talk it out, the leaving, all of it.

His dad said, “Glad you could visit.”

“Me too,” Evan said, but what he meant was that he didn’t want to visit at all. He wished that he never had to get on a plane to see his dad. He wished his dad wasn’t far away, he wished that his dad was a dad. Not a guy who two little kids that supplied pieces of Evan’s genes.

That night Evan dreamt of the water tower.

It was a nightmare he had been having off and on for months now.

Him and Connor at the platform of the water tower.

In some dreams, Connor jumped. Others, Evan jumped. Once, during exams last semester, Evan dreamt that they both jumped but survived. He woke up and got sick pretty much immediately because in the dream there had been blood everywhere. Just everywhere.

Evan hated the dreams.

Two days into break it happened.
“Shit,” Evan’s stepmom muttered under her breath, hanging up the phone. Evan looked at her questioningly. “Your dad has a flat tire. He’s supposed to leave work early to watch the kids while I go to the doctor, but now he’s stuck waiting for AAA.”

Evan bit his lip. He didn’t know what the rules here were. Did he offer to watch his siblings for a while? He’d never babysat in his life and would probably freak out.

Connor, who was only just barely awake and had been staring groggily into his cup of coffee blinked a few times when Evan looked at him, then kind of shrugged.

“We could watch them?” Evan offered tentatively.

His stepmom eyed them both warily, then, seeming to realize that she had no other options smiled. “Okay. Great. It’ll only be for a few hours… Just until your dad gets home.”

Evan nodded. Connor nodded too, but Evan didn’t know if he was awake enough to process the conversation.

Watching children sounded like a nightmare. Especially since they were both on break from school.

Two little kids. Aged seven and five.

Damn it.

“How come your hair is so long?”

That was Jessie, Evan’s seven year old half-sister. She was eyeing Connor skeptically from the other side of the living room. She had only been two when Evan had last seen her.

“I just like it that way,” Connor responded.

“Are you a girl?”

That was Max, Evan’s five year old half-brother. He had been a newborn last Evan had seen him.

“Nope,” Connor responded.

“Are you sure?” Jessie asked. “You have painted fingernails too.”

“I do.”

“Why?”

“Because I like them. Why do you paint yours?”

Jessie had bright pink nails. “Because I’m a girl.”

“You don’t have to be a girl to paint your nails.”

Jessie and Max did not seem convinced. Evan was hoping to just get through the next two hours without blowing up the house.

Connor looked kind of tired.
“Can I play with your hair?” Jessie asked him after a minute of staring.

And Connor.

Smiled a little.

And said sure.

Which was how Evan wound up sitting next to Jessie on the sofa while she practiced her braids in Connor’s hair, narrating her process to Evan about an hour later. Which honestly surprised Evan a little. Connor could be a little bit averse to touch, depending on the day. Evan hadn’t imagined that he would be interested in a little kid pulling on his hair for this long.

Meanwhile, Max and Evan had been playing with trucks for a while on the floor (though Evan was incredibly self conscious about it, because he was eighteen and he didn’t really remember the fun of playing with toy trucks because it just seemed weird but he tried hard when Max instructed him how to make “truck noises” and when it was time to crash the toys together), but now Max was watching some cartoon, utterly transfixed.

“SO!” Jessie said loudly, grabbing Evan’s attention back. “Then you put a bow here. If you have one. Do you have one?” She asked Connor, tugging on the sloppy braid she had done.

“Sorry, I don’t.”

She sighed. “Why do you even have long hair if you don’t put bows in it?” Jessie asked this sounding so exasperated that Connor and Evan cracked up.

“That’s a really good point,” Connor said eventually. “I’ll have to buy some bows.”

Jessie undid the braid she had done, brushing through Connor’s hair a little violently. “Okay, Evan, you do it.”

Evan blinked at his sister. “Sorry?”

“You do the braids now. So I can see what a good teacher I am.”

“Um…” To be totally honest, Evan hadn’t been paying attention to the tutorial.

“Oh, fine, watch again,” Jessie said, rolling her eyes. “You start with three pieces…”

It took Evan a few tries before he got it right, but eventually he had managed to do one French braided pigtail on the back of Connor’s head. And then Jessie did the other side.

“Hair tie please,” Jessie said, to Connor.

He handed one backward to her. And she took it, but then gasped. “What happened to your arm?” She said, pulling down the sleeve of his hoodie a little to reveal Connor’s wrist.

“Oh.” Evan couldn’t see Connor’s face, but the back of his neck got a little red. “I hurt it a little while ago.”

“How?”

Connor sighed. “I was sick.”

“Oh,” She said. Jessie tied the hair up, and then insisted that they take pictures for her mom and
The last one, a selfie with Jessie and Connor-in-pigtails was so cute that Evan put it online.

“You’re good with kids,” Evan said to Connor later.

Connor’s cheeks turned a little pink. “I...um. Thanks.”

“Do you think you’d ever want them?”

Connor shrugged. “I mean. That’s a long way out.”

“Yeah, but. Hypothetically.”

“Yeah. Sure. Hypothetically.”

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Evan’s dad was the one to drop them off at the airport again. The trip had been fine. Evan and Connor spent most of the time with the kids. Evan and his dad had taken a somewhat awkward trip to the hardware store together on Saturday morning.

Evan didn’t know what he was expecting. He just kept waiting for his dad to say… well.

Something. Something important, something that helped to explain the holes Evan had because he had grown up with a dad halfway across the country. Something to explain why he came home every night and talked and played with Jessie and Max but only called Evan once a month, at best.

But he didn’t. And Evan didn’t confront him because, well. What was the point? He was eighteen now. If Evan wanted, he never had to see his dad again. There was no point in getting deeper into it.

It made more sense just to let it go.

Once they were past security, Connor looked at Evan. “Did you get what you wanted out of this trip?”

And Evan nodded. “Yeah.”

“Good.”

Evan’s mom was the one to pick them up again. And Evan hugged her extra hard when he saw her. And thanked her for doing what she did for him, for taking care of him, for caring about him no matter what. Because well. His mom was a good mom. A busy mom. One who didn’t make the job look easy, but one who was there and not going anywhere.

Which was really all Evan wanted or needed.

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And I’d Rather Be Sad With You Than Anywhere Away From You
Evan was not having a good day.

Connor was out for the second day in a row. He genuinely sick, again. Connor claimed it was food poisoning from some food that Jared’s mom had fed him when he had gone to the Kleinman’s to work with Jared on some math homework (Jared was good at calculus, Connor was not).

He also wouldn’t let Evan come over to keep him company after school. “Please, I’m not having you over to watch me throw up. Not sexy.”

“Don’t care about sexy,” Evan had texted back. “Care about you.”

“Don’t be such a goober, Hansen. I’ll survive.”

Evan wasn’t having a good day. He’d bitten his fingernails bloody during lunch because Alana and Jared were both complaining about the prom theme and Evan just didn’t have enough space in his head to worry about the fucking prom.

Besides. Connor wouldn’t want to go to prom. At least not with Evan, who would get all sweaty and gross on the dance floor and generally just embarrass everyone who knew him.

And there was the letter that he got via Sincerely, Me that morning that he had no idea how to respond to.

The kid who had written in had written about all of these anxieties that they had. How they had no friends. How they were thinking about just killing themself because they were a burden to their parents.

When the group got messages like that, they sent them to the school psychologist, who had access to the original, non-anonymous email, for follow up.

But it was following Evan around like a dark cloud.

Like a bad dream.

Like fucking six months ago because that was exactly who he had been six months ago.

He was just spiraling, because maybe he was really still that person, maybe feeling and getting better was all just an elaborate trip he had played on himself, maybe he was just as broken as ever only he didn’t notice because he had thrown himself into so many other things that he couldn’t keep track anymore.

“Penny for your thoughts?” Zoe asked him on the walk from the cafeteria to his next class.

“They aren’t worth that much.”

“You seem down today. Is everything alright?”

Evan nodded, probably too quickly. “Really. Just. Not the best day.”

Zoe sighed. “I’m sorry.”

“It’s fine,” Evan said, desperate to change topics. “Are, uh. Are you going to ask Alana to the prom?”
She sort of grimaced. “I want to, but technically it’s her prom, you know? I feel weird asking her to go to something I need an invitation for.”

Evan nodded.

“Plus there’s the whole thing where Connor and I are playing chicken about coming out to Fucking Larry.”

Evan didn’t know when Zoe had picked up Connor’s nickname for his dad, but it made him smile tentatively. “I didn’t realize it had gotten so high stakes.”

Zoe shook her head. “I’m just afraid he’s going to ask me why I haven’t joined a softball league.”

Evan grinned. “Well, why haven’t you?”

Zoe laughed, “Do bi people do that? Or is it lesbians only?”

“No idea what bi people do,” Evan admitted. “Other than finger guns. I read that on tumblr.”

Zoe laughed again. “See you later,” She said, shooting finger guns at him as she turned to go to class. Evan did finger guns back.

Maybe the day wasn’t so bad.

---

Evan and Connor were alone at the Hansen household. They both had therapy on Tuesdays, and since their appointments were in the same building, Connor had taken to driving Evan when his mom had to work. And then he’d normally come over afterward, and they would do homework.

Connor was not in a great mood.

Evan actually was in a fairly good mood, so rather than letting Connor’s black cloud overtake it, he just… asked about it.

“What’s going on?”

Connor frowned. “My therapist is a dick.”

Evan had heard this from Connor before. Connor’s therapist apparently didn’t let things drop when she got them in her head. And it turned out that her latest pet project, with Connor, was tackling why it was that Connor didn’t like himself.

Which apparently frustrated Connor to no end.

“She wants me to write a list of ten things I like about myself.”

Evan smiled. “At least it’s not letters to yourself,” he said, nodding in commiseration. “Dear Evan Hansen, today’s going to be a good day and here’s why…”

Connor frowned. “Yeah I don’t think I could do that.”

Evan shrugged. “It’s not so bad now. This summer though? Absolute nightmare.”

Connor crossed his arms over his chest.
Evan smiled. “Come on. It’s just ten things. You can do that in like, five minutes.”

Connor frowned, not moving.

Evan looked at him suspiciously. “You can’t tell me that you can’t name ten things you like about yourself.”

Connor sighed, not looking at him.

“But it’s…” Evan said, helplessly. “It’s… it’s just ten things.”

Connor looked like he was trying to permanently fix his arms in a knot.

Evan sighed.

That was…

“Well, okay, I’ll help. We’ll just see as far as we can get, yeah, and then we can j-just do something else, okay? Let’s just see where we get.”

“This is the stupidest thing I’ve ever had to do,” Connor said, rolling his eyes.

“I know, but…” Evan started. Stopped. What the hell was his move here? How did he get Connor to say something nice about himself when the task just seemed impossible to Connor. “Why do you think it’s stupid?” Evan asked, perhaps asking for trouble.

“Because I—” Connor snapped, but then closed his mouth immediately, cutting himself off. His face was little bit pink.

Because, Evan thought, Connor probably couldn’t name one thing he liked about himself.

Which made Evan feel like someone had punched him in the gut.

Evan was tempted just to blurt all of the things that he liked about Connor. Just to make him smile. Just so he’d have something to write down. Just so he’d stop making the defeated face he was making.

“I just don’t like the whole… concept. I think it’s really fucking damaging to tell people that they can’t love other people until they love themselves,” Connor ground out.

Evan nodded. “I agree. That’s not a good message to send people.” He bit his lip. “But I don’t think there’s anything wrong with liking yourself either.”

Connor pulled a pillow over his head, groaning, “You too? God.”

“Hey, what’d I say?”

Connor pulled the pillow away from his face. “You’re honestly telling me you that you like yourself?”


Connor stared at him.
“I like myself a lot better now that I don’t feel like dying all of the time.”

“I didn’t mean that you shouldn’t like yourself, Evan,” Connor said quietly. “I’m sorry.”

Evan smiled back. “I know what you meant.”

Connor made a frustrated sound, flopped back on the couch, and pulled the pillow back over his face. “I can’t do this.”

“I bet you can,” Evan said.

Connor just let out a garbled noise from under the pillow.

What a drama queen.

“Come on. You’ve got to have something. Just give me one, and I’ll leave you alone.”

“No.” Connor said. Muffled voice.

“Please?”

“Still no.”

“Connor.”

No response.

“Connor, come on. There’s got to be one thing. Just one. It doesn’t even have to be good. Just give me something you don’t hate, okay?”

“Mrmp.”

“Without the pillow over your head? Maybe?”

“Uggeggh,” Connor said. Groaned. Pulling the pillow over his face tighter.

“Connor.”

“I don’t want to talk about this anymore.”

“Connor.”

“Please don’t make me talk about this anymore.”

“Connor.”


In the past, Evan might have flinched away.

Now he wanted to jump on him. Jump forward. Jump past this.

Instead, he touched Connor’s leg. “Hey. It’s okay.”

“It’s not…” Connor said, sitting up. He leaned his head against Evan’s shoulder. “I don’t… I don’t think I can do this.”
“You can.”
Connor buried his face in Evan’s neck.
Evan sighed and kissed the top of Connor’s head. “Are you hungry?” Evan asked.
“No.”
Evan frowned. “Could you eat if I put food in front of you?”
“Yeah,” Connor said, untangling himself from Evan, head leaned back against the couch.
“I’ll see what we have in the fridge. I think my mom went to Trader Joe’s last week…” Evan got up. Walked into the kitchen. Poked his head into the freezer, which was remarkably well stocked considering how rarely he and his mom went to the store. “Okay, looks like there is some… Indian food? Pizza?” He closed the freezer and went to the fridge. There were some leftovers from the last time they had gotten Thai food, leftovers from when they got Chinese, leftovers from when his mom had made pasta the night before. “Pasta? Thai? Chinese? What do you think?”
Connor had followed him into the kitchen. He was leaning back against the counter. “Whatever you want. I’m not hungry.”
Evan frowned. “Can you like… eliminate anything?”
“Nothing spicy,” Connor mumbled, looking down at his socks.
“Sure,” Evan said.
He reached for the leftover pasta. Walked it across the kitchen to the microwave. Punched in some numbers.
“Are you mad at me?” Connor asked.
Evan turned back around. “Oh my God, no, why?” (“Ohmygodnowhy?”)
Connor shrugged. “Because I’m…” he made a fist and knocked it gently back against the counter. “Bad at therapy?”
Evan shrugged. “I’m not great at therapy either.”
Connor shrugged. “Better than I am.”
Evan frowned. “I thought we were trying to avoid comparing progress…”
“Yeah, me too,” Connor muttered.
“Hey,” Evan said, walking over to him. Pulling him in for a hug. “Don’t beat yourself up. Please.”
“But I’m so good at it,” Connor said, laughing.
“You’re good at a lot of things,” Evan said, smiling as brightly as he could manage.
Connor glared back at him. “Like what?”
“Well you always understand books way better than I do.”
Connor looked away.
“And you’re the best at responding to the letters for Sincerely, Me.”

“Yeah, when I do them.”

The microwave beeped. And Evan stepped away. “Don’t… try not to do that, please?”

Connor crossed his arms over his chest.

Evan stirred the food and put it back into the microwave. “Come on. You can do this. Give me one thing you like about yourself, and I will drop it forever.”

“And if I can’t?”

“Then I’ll bug you about it everyday.”

Connor rolled his eyes.

“Fine. If you do it, you get a reward.”

“Like what?” Connor asked, raising an eyebrow.

Evan tried to smile coyly, but he doubted he could pull off coy.


Evan laughed. “No that definitely doesn’t count.”

“Damn it.”

“Come on. Just one thing.”

Connor sighed again. Crossed his arms again. He looked like he was guarding himself from an attack. “I like that I can, um, that I…” He stopped. Cleared his throat. “I like that I… That I’m good with kids.”

Evan smiled brilliantly. “You like being good with kids?”

Connor shrugged. “I dunno. I just. It’s weird. It makes me sound creepy, forget I said-”

Evan crossed the kitchen in three steps and pushed Connor back against the countertop, kissing him forcefully, his one hand tugging gently at Connor’s hair, his other snaking its way up the back of Connor’s t-shirt because he knew that Connor liked it when Evan dragged his nails down Connor’s back.

And then, as quickly as he approached, Evan backed away. All the way across the room. Smiling.

Connor stared after him, looking a little overwhelmed. “What the…? That was…. Um.”

“I’m sorry,” Evan said, smiling. “I can’t go back over there until you say something else you like about yourself.”


“Well I don’t make the rules…” Evan teased.

“You literally make the rules!” Connor said, laughing. “Come on. I gave you one.”
“Well then you can give me one more.”

Connor groaned. “Fine.” He pulled a hand through his hair. “I like that I’m… erm. That I’m… that I. That I read a lot. I like being able to say I’ve read things. That I’m… well read, I guess.”

“You are,” Evan said after he untangled his fingers from Connor’s hair. “Well read that is.”

Connor almost whined when Evan backed away. “Not fair.”

“I know you can think of more. This is just an incentive.”

Connor sighed, rubbing a hand over his face. “I like that I’m getting along better with Zoe. Now. We haven’t fought in weeks.”

That time Evan kissed Connor’s neck. Connor made really fun sounds when he did that, so Evan didn’t stop for a few minutes. Just.

For.

Reasons.

But then he did pull away. And before he managed to back across the room, Connor was talking again already, saying, “I like that I make people laugh sometimes. It’s… it’s stupid, but when I was a kid I was always telling these, like, idiotic why did the chicken cross the road jokes?”

“Really?” Evan said. He kissed Connor’s neck again. Grabbed onto his hair. Pulled Connor closer.

“Yeah.”

“That’s adorable.”

“Shut up.” Connor went to kiss him again, but Evan pulled away.

“Come on, you’re on a roll now.”

“You’re the worst. Very mean. Horrible boyfriend.”

“Come on, tell me what else you like about yourself.”

Somewhere around “I like that I’m good at painting my nails” Connor lost his shirt. Evan’s came off a little bit after, “I like that I can kind of draw?”

And when Connor mumbled, “I like that I’m alive right now,” there was really no point in wearing pants anymore. They were just in the way.

Evan ended up having to reheat the pasta.

Twice.

Nostalgic for Disaster
Every time Evan went to the Murphys’ after school, the refrain had been the same. “Any mail?” Connor would ask, looking anxiously.

And his mom would either hand him some envelopes or not.

He had gotten into a few schools, but they were both very far out West, places he had applied just to stop his parents from getting suspicious about his plan to kill himself.

Evan knew Connor was hoping to get into the school in state that Evan had decided to go to next year. He had sent off his deposit for his dorm the week before.

He and Connor had established some ground rules, assuming that Connor was accepted: they couldn’t request to be roommates (too much too soon) and they had to try not to take the same classes, since they might be tempted to never speak with anyone else.

Evan was starting to get a little bit excited.

And nervous.

It was the middle of March.

Most kids knew where they were going to school already. Alana had been placed in an honors dorm already, so she had been assigned her roommate at her new school already. They chatted daily about how they intended to decorate. Zoe had even met the girl via skype, and they giggled about the potential of getting a futon for Zoe to stay over (as if Zoe wouldn’t just just sleep in Alana’s bed).

So Evan went back to the Murphy’s and Connor asked, “Any mail?” and his mom handed him an envelope with a frown.

Evan knew the seal on the envelope.

He also knew that his envelope had said “Congratulations!” in big bold type.

His heart sank.

Connor ripped the (small) envelope open.

Evan knew it wasn’t a letter offering him a spot.

Connor read it over quickly. Frowned. Read it again.

“Well?” Mrs. Murphy asked.

Connor sighed. “I um…” He cleared his throat. “I didn’t uh. I didn’t get in.”

Evan’s heart sank faster.

“Oh, I’m so sorry,” Mrs. Murphy said.

Evan was speechless. He had really thought… he had really hoped…

Connor frowned for a second. “Well I’ll…” He cleared his throat again. “I guess I’ll just need to reapply or… transfer or something.”
“Honey,” Connor’s mom started.

“Is it okay if we go up to my room?”

“Yeah sweetie.”

Connor folded the letter back up. And left it on the table.

And headed for the stairs.


Connor collapsed onto his bed. Evan took a seat in the desk chair.

“I’m so sorry,” He managed to say after a while.

“You’re sorry?” Connor said, sitting up. His face was a little bit red and blotchy, and his mouth kept twitching. “I’m sorry. I… I. I messed this up.”

“No,” Evan said, shaking his head. “It’s been… this year and last were… it’s not your fault.”

Connor shook his head. “I should have… tried harder or, or… I dunno. Joined a fucking sport or something.”

Evan moved quickly to sit next to him. “Hey. Don’t… it’s okay. It’s not your fault. It’s… they obviously. Suck.”

Connor took a shaky breath, and Evan put an arm around him.

“Damn it.”

“I’m sorry.”

“I tried… I tried really hard.”

“I know you did.”

Connor wiped his face. “Well. Um.” He laughed awkwardly. “I’m sorry I can’t be a part of your big collegiate experience next year.”

“We’ll figure it out.”

“Yeah because long distance is super easy, I hear.”

“We’ll figure it out.”

“Look, why don’t you just… just dump me now so I don’t have to spend all of the fall worried about when you’ll—”

“Do you want to go to prom?” Evan interrupted.

“What.” Connor’s eyes appeared to be in danger of popping out of his head.

“Do you want to go to prom with me?”

“Oh,” Connor said quietly. “Uh.”
“I mean obviously if you think prom is stupid then we shouldn’t go I just didn’t know if you thought it was stupid but I figured I’d ask, like, in case you did want to go.”

Connor kissed his cheek. “Yeah. Let’s go to the fucking prom.”

“Really?” Evan asked, smiling.

“Yeah. Really.”

“I’m really sorry about school, Connor,” Evan said.

“Thanks.”

“Connor?”

“Hm?”

“If I’m taking you to prom, you probably ought to tell your dad about us.”

Connor sighed, falling back onto his back on the bed. “But I don’t want to. Can I space my rejections out?”

Evan fell down beside him. “I guess.”

“What if you meet some hot guy who’s really into trees and wants to be an arborist and looks like Chris Hemsworth away at school?”

“Then I’ll say, ‘Hey Chris, have you met my boyfriend Connor? He’s really weirdly worried I’d leave him for you.’”

Connor laughed.

And leaned over to kiss Evan.

And in the middle, there was a knock at the door.

They sat up fast.

It was Connor’s dad.

Nobody spoke or moved for a beat.

Then, “Um. Hey guys. Dinner’s ready.” And then Mr. Murphy hurried away.

Connor blinked. “ Fucking Larry.”

“I guess that’s one way to tell him,” Evan said, tittering with nervous laughter.

“Yeah. I guess so.” Connor laughed too.

Jared’s parents had rented them a limo for prom.

Which meant that Evan had to go in the limo to pick up Connor.
Which.

So fucking teen movie. He wanted to dissolve into the floor.

His suit wasn’t bad. He didn’t feel super comfortable in it. He had let Jared talk him into picking the way, way, way flashier dark red suit and he must have been like, manic or something, because now he was full of regret because he should have just gotten the black one but he had gone with his mom and Jared and they both agreed that he looked really really nice in the red suit except now he had to wear the red suit and he probably looked like some kind of demented Santa Claus and he’d spend the whole dance hiding in the bathroom.

“Dude.”

Evan looked up. Jared’s date, Rachel, some girl he knew from camp who looked really pretty in her pale blue dress were looking at him expectantly. “We’re here.”

“Oh. Right. Good.”

Evan’s mom had been so bummed out that she couldn’t get Erica to swap shifts tonight so Mrs. and Mr. Murphy had been commanded to take extra pictures of them before the dance.

Evan got out of the limo.

And wished he had sunglasses.

Fuck.

This whole thing was an idiotic idea.

They ought to ditch out on the whole thing.

Did he ring the doorbell? Evan never rang the doorbell here anymore, he just walked right in, though he was usually was accompanied by Zoe or Connor and he had this fucking box with a goddamn flower in it and he looked like a complete idiot just a total moron.

He was loitering outside of the door when he felt his phone vibrate. Evan answered it fast. “Hello?”

“Hey. I’m creepily staring at you from my window,” Connor’s voice said from the phone.

“That’s weird,” Evan laughed, squinting into the sun to look up toward Connor’s room.

“It is. You look really good, by the way.”

“I do?”

“You do.”

“Thanks.”

Connor cleared his throat on the other side of the line, “Okay so you can’t laugh at my outfit.”

“Why would I laugh?”

“Because I’m in full drag,” Connor said, and Evan thought he was probably being sarcastic, but he still looked up quickly toward the window.
“Really?”
“No not really,” Connor said laughing. “I didn’t have that kind of time on my hands. But I uh… I don’t think I’ve ever worn a suit in public before.”

“Me either,” Evan said.
“So… no laughing.”
“No laughing.”
“Okay. Then I’ll let you ring the doorbell.”
“Okay.”

So Evan went to the door. And Connor was already waiting at the bottom of the stairs, despite Mrs. Murphy’s apparent hope to get a picture of him coming down the stairs, which made Connor blush and mutter, “Mom, Jesus, I’m not actually a girl.”

He looked good, Evan thought. Really good.

He had a black suit on. Obviously. He looked good in black. The suit fit him well. His hair was loose but a little less messy than it normally was. Evan was glad to see he still had his fingernails painted black.

“Hey.”
“Hi.”
“Nice suit.”
“You too.”

“Pictures!” Mrs. Murphy said. “Let’s get pictures of you two before Zoe comes down.”

So they took pictures standing side by side. And a picture where Evan pretended to pin a flower to Connor’s lapel (which Mrs. Murphy thankfully fixed), and then another where Connor actually pin a flower to Evan’s lapel (though he complained that he managed to stab his finger in the process).

In all of the pictures, they hardly look like themselves because they were smiling so hard.

And then the doorbell rang, and it was Alana’s parents dropping her off. She looked amazing, Evan thought. Her dress was the color of champagne, and it sparkled in the light. Alana had ditched her glasses for the night, and it looked like she had spent a long time on her makeup.

Zoe did wait at the top of the stairs, and Evan thought she looked kind of like an angel in a movie. A baby pink dress, gauzy and floaty and long, and her hair was ever so slightly curled.

Alana literally gasped when she saw Zoe.

Which made Connor grab Evan’s hand and grip it tightly, like he couldn’t deal with how adorable it was.

Alana and Zoe had gotten each other corsages, and they took a bunch of pictures of the exchange of them. Then a group shot of the boys and the girls, then one with Evan and Zoe and one with Connor and Alana, and then they went out to the limo and dragged out Jared and his date Rachel and took a bunch of group shots on the lawn in front of a pair of massive pines that the Murphys had in the front
of their house.

Including a few hilarious shots where Connor jumped into Evan’s arms, and Evan caught him, bridal-style, and the pair of them laughing hysterically. It only got worse when Jared got involved, and the resulting picture, of Evan and Connor both holding Jared up, was one that Evan vowed would never see the internet.

It got twenty Instagram likes in the first hour it was online.

The night was long. And fun.

And they had a good time.

Such a good time that Evan’s feet were starting to hurt a little from his dress shoes because they had all danced so much. It was like all of them had caught a case of who-gives-a-shit, because four of the were graduating soon and what did they really have to lose?

Both Evan and Connor had ditched their jackets back at the table.

And then, even though they had ditched every other slow song, they did dance to the last one. It was very much like every John Hughes movie Evan had watched. Twinkly lights and bad music but still. He was with Connor. And that was fucking great.

“This is probably the gayest thing we’ve ever done,” Connor said.

“Yeah, pretty much.”

“Did you have a good time?”

“Yeah,” Evan said, honestly. Because he had. He genuinely had.

“Definitely did not imagine this when I first met you… or well. Met you again.”

Evan smiled shyly. “Me either.”

“Do you think this is better?”

“Yeah.”

“Me too.”

“Good.”

“Great.”

“Awesome.”

“Love you,” Connor said.

“Love you too.”
Hi so I named Evan's dad and stepmom and half-siblings:
Half siblings are Jessie and Max, Dad is Dan, and stepmom is Sarah.

Songs from:
The Prettrots - Suicide Hotline
Bleachers - Wake Me
Fall Out Boy - Hum Hallelujah
Chapter Summary

Epilogue Part 3: Summer

Chapter Notes

You guys! I love you all so much! I've gotten some lovely art since the last bit of the epilogue, so please check it out:

bad-l-ands did two beautiful pictures! One of Connor in his red scarf, and one of Connor and Evan at the prom:  
https://bad-l-ands.tumblr.com/post/159825454607/there-he-goes  
https://bad-l-ands.tumblr.com/post/159810392797/so-i-read-this-fanfic-called-the-desperate-type

niconicodoesart did some gorgeous illustrations of Evan and Connor in their flower crowns at Forever 21: http://niconicodoesart.tumblr.com/post/159795217967/a-cute-fanart-for-my-favorite-dear-evan-hansen

And ilastaroth-tayre did some fantastic sketches of various scenes from the story (including the counter make out!) here:  

Thank you all for sharing your beautiful talents! I love every piece of art that I've gotten and I'm just going to cry for 75 years about how gorgeous they all are. As always, if you want to do any art if this fic, please feel free! Just shoot me a link over on my tumblr (http://ch-ch-ch-ch-cherrybomb.tumblr.com) so I can like, reblog, and cry over it! :D

See the end of the chapter for more notes

And How Do You Know When to Let Go?

“Evan? Are you ready?”

Nope. He definitely was not.

Graduation was on a Sunday.

He kept straightening his tie.
He had been up for five hours already.

Plus how was he meant to wear the stupid cap without it messing up his hair and leaving a big red line over his forehead?

“Honey, come on. We said we’d meet the Kleinmans and the Murphys for pictures beforehand.”

Evan pulled open his door. “I don’t know how to wear the cap without it looking stupid. And-and I keep forgetting what side the tassel goes on? What if I have it backwards and everyone notices? What if-?”

“Evan. Honey. Take a breath.”

So.

He did.

He did feel a little bit better after.

“Okay. Let’s not worry about the cap until we get to the school, okay?”

“Okay.”

“Are you excited? Graduation day? Huge accomplishment?”

Evan shrugged. “I guess.”

“Honey…” His mom started. “Is something wrong? What’s going on? You wouldn’t stop talking about this two weeks ago and suddenly you’re… You seem really bummed out. Is it because your dad’s not coming?”

“No.”

“Then what’s going on?”

Evan shrugged again. “Just nervous. Everything’s gonna change…”

“Not everything.” His mom said gently. “You’ve still got me. You’ve still got the whole summer ahead of you.”

Evan nodded. Swallowed hard.

Who would have thought he would ever be here, feeling choked up and sad and scared about something as silly as high school graduation?

When he was a freshman he used to count the days until this moment, like Charlie in the movie version of *The Perks of Being A Wallflower*.

Now he had been dreading this end date for weeks. Months even.

It didn’t seem fair, Evan thought. When he wanted to die, he didn’t care much about graduating. It just seemed like something to suffer through.

And now that he was doing better?

Well it was still something to suffer through. But this time he’d have to really feel it.
He didn’t want to feel it.

Or anything.

He sort of wished he could pull back on the protective layer of existential dread and ride out the whole ceremony on mute.

Pretty fucked up, huh?

They arrived first at the Murphys’, where Mr. Murphy was directing what seemed like a semi-professional photo shoot.

“Should we be doing this?” Connor complained. “I don’t even have my diploma yet.”

“And you better be getting it or we’re taking away the car.”

Connor rolled his eyes, and Evan thought he heard him mutter to Zoe, “straight fucking As all damn semester for this shit.”

Evan got out of the car.

“Let’s get a picture with Zoe, Evan, and Connor, Larry!” Mrs. Murphy said, smiling.

“I just have to put this… uh,” Evan said, looking into the side mirror on his mom’s car to pull the stupid cap on. He definitely looked stupid.

He joined Zoe and Connor in the yard where they had taken their prom photos, giving a nervous smile to the camera.

“You okay?” Connor asked him between photos.

“Yeah. Great.”

They did a lot more photos. Evan and his mom. Evan, Connor, and Evan’s mom. His mom almost started crying with laughter when they took one where both Evan and Connor kissed her cheek.

The whole Murphy clan, one with Evan in the photo as well, one of Connor and his mom where his mom just looked like a dwarf beside Connor, one of Connor and Larry.

They were doing better.

Not great.

But better.

Jared and his family appeared about twenty minutes later, and they all got photos together (though Evan and Connor refused to recreate the prom photo where they held Jared up).

“Well boys, time to get going,” Mrs. Murphy said, looking at her watch.

So Evan, Connor, and Jared all piled into Jared’s car, Connor in back, Evan riding shotgun. They had to be at the school more than an hour before the ceremony actually started.

“Kleinman, if you get weepy, I will deck you,” Connor said as Jared carried on, waxing poetic about
their senior year.

“Please, you know you want me weeping on your shoulder.”

Evan looked back at Connor, who was pulling a face. “Ew. No.”

“I’m so jealous you two are sitting together,” Evan said, sighing. “I’m stuck next to Joshua Goodman. During practice on Friday he walked into me twice as we did the diploma run through.”

“Want me to kick his ass?” Connor offered.

“Please, and keep you from getting your diploma now? No thanks.”

Connor laughed.

Evan tried to focus on how happy that made him. Connor’s laugh.

“Good afternoon students and faculty, family and friends. For those of you who don’t know me, I am Alana Beck, president of the honor society, first chair violin in orchestra, co-president of Sincerely, Me, a student run support group…”

Evan thought he might have dozed off during Alana’s list of her accomplishments.

“...and senior vice chair of our tutoring program with Weatherby Middle School.”

A few people tittered with laughter.

“I’m also the Valedictorian. And…” She took a deep breath. “And I have depression.”

A deafening silence overtook the crowd. Evan looked back at Jared and Connor, who looked as surprised as Evan felt.

“I wanted to give a speech about the importance of finding yourself in high school and how that would lead us all to bright futures. But when I sat down to write it, I realized I was telling a lie. I didn’t find myself in high school. I didn’t make great memories or great friends or great connections during my four years here. I only barely managed it this past year. And I wanted to talk about why.”

Evan thought he was going to throw up. What was she doing? Why was she doing this? Would she mention Evan, Connor? What was she doing?

“When I started this year, I was really depressed. Worse than usual. I had spent my summer throwing myself into internships and community service, trying to ignore the fact that I didn’t feel anything anymore. My grandma broke her hip and died, and I got worse. Because I didn’t want to think about losing her, didn’t want to admit that I was a seventeen year old girl whose best friend was her grandmother.

“The fact was that I thought nobody would notice if I disappeared… so I started to think about ways to do just that. To disappear. What was the point of my padded resume and 5.0 GPA if nobody could even see me? I made a plan, I typed out a note, and I got excused from my late afternoon Physics class… but because my teacher seemed to suspect something, she asked me to come in and make up the lab exercise during my study hall that day.

“I got paired with someone… and I won’t mention his name because I know he’d get embarrassed if
I did… but I got paired with someone who I now consider to be one of my closest acquaintances… er. Closest friends.

Evan’s heart slowed to a stop.

This sounded familiar.

Alana took a pause. “I think we talked about the t-shirt he was wearing. It was a stupid conversation, really. But he asked me how I was doing. And when I told him, it all sort of came out. About my grandma, about how lonely and empty I felt… and he didn’t stare at me like I was a freak. He didn’t laugh at me, and despite what people might have thought of him, he just listened. He told me he understood. That he felt the same way, sometimes.” Alana stopped, wiped her eyes. “So instead of taking my own life that afternoon, I went home and told my parents what I was feeling. And I saw a few doctors. And I started feeling better.

“And because I realized how close I had come to never feeling better, I found some people to start this project Sincerely, Me. And knowing other people felt the same ways I had helped. And helping them helped me. And the friends who I worked with on the project helped, by being there every day, reminding me of how not alone I am.”

She took a breath. “I guess what I am saying is that nobody knows what lies ahead. I sure can’t. If you had asked me six months ago to imagine that I’d be standing up here today, I wouldn’t have been able to do it. I couldn’t have pictured my friends, my girlfriend, any of it. But I’m here. And I’m hoping to continue being here, to help, to breathe, to laugh, to fall in love, to… to just be. I can’t promise a big bright future. I can’t promise success. I know personally that the world can be harsh and difficult and cruel. But I have hope. And I think all of us can do that. Have hope. It might sound hokey or cliche, I know, but I genuinely believe that everyone in this room has such potential to go forward. I didn’t want to talk about how bright our futures will be, because I don’t know. But I know we all deserve futures. We deserve a chance to live. And to do good. And to be good. But most importantly, to just be. Thank you.”

Evan’s hands shook a little as he clapped.

He wasn’t terribly surprised to hear Zoe whooping from the bleachers.

He just sort of wanted to hug Alana. And thank her. He’d had no idea. But he was so grateful that she was in his life.

The moment the ceremony ended and the caps were tossed, Evan went to find Connor and Jared.

He found Connor, hugging Alana tightly, saying, “You asshole! Why didn’t you tell me? I started to fucking crying! My reputation as scary is ruined!”

“Started?” Jared said, crossing his arms. “That was some straight up weeping, dude, hate to break it to you.”

“Shut up Kleinman, Alana and I are having a moment.”

“I hope you’re not mad -” Alana said.

“Why the fuck would I be mad?”
“-That I called you my friend.”

Connor pulled away from her, frowning. “Beck. Come on.”

But she was grinning. And Connor laughed, and Evan pretended not to see him wipe his eyes.

“Evan!” Alana shouted. “We did it!” She ran over to hug him.

“We did!” He said, trying to return her enthusiasm. “Your speech… it was. That was really good. Brave. Thank you.”

She smiled and nodded back. “Oh, there’s Zoe. I’ll be right back.” Alana kissed Evan’s cheek and dashed off toward her girlfriend.

Connor made his way over to Evan.

And Evan did his best to smile.

And Connor dropped his smile immediately. “What’s wrong?”

“Nothing, I-”

“Evan. What’s going on?”

“Did you know? About Alana?”

Connor shrugged. “I mean I knew the bit about her grandma, yeah…” He took Evan’s hand. “Are you okay?”

Evan shook his head, words utterly failing him, because he didn’t know Alana was one of his friends and he had had no idea and now school was over it was done and then what if this happened again and he didn’t know and there wasn’t anyone that Alana felt comfortable talking to around? What if it happened to him again, what if it happened to Connor, what if he left his phone in his dorm room and Connor called him and then the next call was from Mrs. Murphy because Evan had been gone during a critical twenty minute period?

All he could see was the water tower, that terrible day, his pulse out of control, the world slipping off of its axis.

“Evan…?”

He blinked.

And Connor’s face swam in front of him.

“I don’t…I don’t care what happens between us. I don’t care if someday we break up and h-hate each other, if you ever… if it ever gets that bad again, you have to call me, okay?”

“Evan, hey, come-”

“Promise that you’ll call me. Until I pick up.”

Connor pulled him in tightly. “Yeah, sure. Whatever you want.”

“Hey, lovebirds, your parents are looking for you!”
Evan and Connor broke apart.

And some of the fear Evan had been carried around, coiled up inside him for weeks, seemed to loosen, just a little.

Evan took Connor’s hand. Smiled at him.

And led them back toward the small huddle of people where their parents were.

They were at Jared’s party immediately following the graduation ceremony. His parents didn’t seem to care or notice that everyone around them was drinking.

Which suited Evan just fine.

He had dipped out of a conversation to run to the bathroom, stopping to grab another drink and coming back as Jared said, “So, Con-Man, have you finalized your plans for next year yet?”

Connor nodded. “Yeah. I’m going to stick around here. Probably get a job. Take classes at the community college, and reapply in a few months.”

“Solid.”

Jared touched his bottle to Connor’s.

“So, you and Hansen? Going to try the long distance thing or…?”

“Yeah,” Connor said. “Though I’m not sure being an hour away really counts as long distance.”

“I think it does when the pair of you can’t even walk down a hallway together without holding hands.”

“Don’t be jealous, Jared, it’s a bad color on you.”

Jared laughed. “Has Evan talked to his new roommate yet?”

“Yeah. He seems… fine. I don’t know.”

“Is he hotter than you?” Jared teased.

“Hotter than you for sure.”

“Hey,” Evan said, rejoining the group.

“So, Evan, is your new roommate hot?” Jared asked.

Evan shrugged. He had exchanged a few emails with Tom, his new roommate, and looked at his facebook. He seemed nice enough. Not weird, not overly jock-ish. Reasonably attractive. “Hotter than you,” Evan responded, and Connor cracked up.

“Best. Boyfriend. Ever,” He said, throwing a hand around Evan’s shoulders and kissing his cheek. “I fucking love you.”

“You’re drunk,” Evan said, laughing.
Connor nodded. “Just a little.”

“Just beer?” Evan asked, eyebrows raised.

“Swear. Scout’s honor.”

Jared rolled his eyes. “Didn’t you drop out of scouts after you chucked a printer at Mrs. G?”

Connor shot him a glare. “Fuck off, Kleinman or I’ll throw one at you.”

“Blow me Murphy.”

“Alright,” Connor said, face blank. “You like teeth, right?”

Jared backed away, hands up defensively.

Evan cracked up.

“Don’t be so mean to him,” Evan said to Connor.

“He likes it when I’m mean to him,” Connor said giggling.

“I actually kind of do,” Jared said.

“It’s how we express our love.”

“You guys are so weird.”

As the sun sank, the Kleinmans lit a bonfire in their backyard. It was just the five of them left then: Evan, Connor, Zoe, Alana, and Jared. All a little tired, a little cold, and all a little bit buzzed.

“I feel like I should have brought my guitar,” Zoe said, smiling. “We could have had a singalong.”

“That feels a little bible camp to me,” Alana said, laughing.

“Do I look like I know songs about Jesus?” Zoe asked.

“I have an old acoustic guitar in my room?” Jared said. “I got it in middle school but never learned how to play.”

Zoe jumped up happily. “Let’s go.”

Jared hurried off with Zoe into the house.

“This is a bad idea,” Alana said, smiling. “If it’s not Jesus songs, then she’s just going to torture us all with a bunch of Nickelback songs.”

Evan giggled. “How does she know Nickelback songs?”

“She learned them to annoy me in middle school,” Connor said. “She’d just stand outside my door playing the same three chords and shouting ‘LOOK AT THIS PHOTOGRAPH!’”

Evan was leaning back against Connor, and he giggled at the vibrations that’s Connor’s own laugh caused.

Zoe and Jared returned, a guitar in hand, and Zoe sat back down, tuning the guitar by ear and chatting jovially with Jared about her upcoming summer job at Lush.
“Steal me a bath bomb.”

“Don’t,” Connor said. “He’ll just, like, try to eat it.”

“Any requests?” Zoe asked, strumming the guitar.

Alana asked for Skinny Love. Which took a few minutes because then Zoe dropped the guitar to make out with Alana for a bit. Jared grumbled about all of his friends being couples.

Jared, laughing into his beer, asked her to do Wonderwall.

So Zoe winked at him and said, “Anyway…”

Evan was just tipsy enough that when everyone joined in on the chorus, he did too. Not that he was a singer… but he doubted anyone could hear him over the rest. “Maybe… you’re gonna be the one that saves me…”

Evan looked affectionately up at Connor.

And thought, stupidly, drunkenly, that he sort of liked that they had saved each other. Saved themselves together.

“Oh, Connor, do you remember this one? It’s been forever since I played it, hang on…” Zoe started strumming, smiling, and Evan thought he recognized the song when Zoe started to sing, “If all our life is but a dream….”

Evan’s ears perked up. He knew that song.

It was one of Connor’s favorites.

When Zoe got to the chorus, Evan jumped when Connor jumped in, singing the harmony line.

And Evan.

Leaning back, smiling, Evan realized that he always suspected that Connor could probably sing. It was just sort of funny to only have that suspicion confirmed now.

Connor drove Evan back to his house the Monday after graduation. Early.

The pair of them curled up together on the sofa in a patch of sunlight.

“Do you want to sleep?” Connor asked Evan.

“Yeah.” He laid down, resting his head on Connor’s chest. “You should too.”

“I’ll try.”

“Have you been sleeping okay? When I’m not around?”

Connor nodded. “Sort of. Better than normal. I’m trying melatonin out, but I woke up in the middle of the night last week after taking it feeling like I was going to hurl.”

“I take that sometimes,” Evan said. “I always have weird dreams.”
“Like what?”

“I had a very vivid one last week that you and I were both like… ten years old? And we went to a water park.”

“A water park?”

“Yeah. There was this massive water slide…And your mom was a lifeguard…”

“Evan? You’re falling asleep.”

“Sorry,” He slurred.

“No, no, go to sleep,” Connor said, kissing the top of his head. “Just didn’t want you to feel like you had to keep talking.”

“‘Kay.”

“Evan?”

“Hmn?”

“We’re going to be okay, right? You and I?”

Evan peeled his eyes open again. Connor looked a little bit uncertain as he said it. “Yeah. We are.” In any other situation, he might had said, “probably” or “I think so.” But, of one thing, Evan Hansen was very certain: he and Connor were going to be okay. Somehow, somehow.

I Want Everything to Change and Stay The Same

(Oh, Time Doesn't Care About Anyone or Anything)

A few weeks later, Evan started back at Ellison Park.

And it was actually going fairly well, considering how poorly it went last summer.

There were a few uncomfortable jokes from the other apprentice park rangers about Evan falling out of another oak tree, but Evan just let them pass without comment.

He had already prepped for that with Dr. Sherman.

Who thought it was a good thing that Evan wasn’t letting his anxiety keep him from returning to a summer job he liked.

And he did like it. A lot, in fact.

This summer Evan got to interact more with campers.

Which.

Yay.
But ultimately it wasn’t so bad. He actually enjoyed talking to a few of them.

He didn’t always have the best reception at the park, just because of the lack of cell towers, but when Evan did manage it he always checked his phone, because Connor’s snapchats were especially quality since he had started his part time job at Starbucks. His main complaint was that apparently, Starbucks corporate policy stated that employees couldn’t wear nail polish. He swore most of the girls at work got away with it, but he wasn’t allowed which sucked.

Evan agreed that it sucked. He sort of missed Connor’s black nail polish now that he hadn’t seen it in a few weeks.

But Connor was always sending him hilarious snaps because he often worked very early mornings when the store was dead other than the morning rush just before eight.

The snaps varied in content but they were always super funny. Pictures where Connor drew flames all over the shop because he had another customer come to the counter and complain about Starbucks at Starbucks to a Starbucks employee. And then try to order a drink that they didn’t make.

Or the ones where Connor would sing made up words along to the radio on his breaks. Some of these involved his coworker, Nicki, a single mom who went to the community college where Connor would start in the fall. She had trained him and they had sort of become friendly. Nicki would always tease Connor in videos about his “emo punk ass,” adding things like “2005 called any they want their music back,” which seemed to crack Connor right up.

Today’s snap was a selfie Connor with his eyes half closed, saying he had already drank three espressos and still felt like he needed a nap.

Evan sent back a picture of himself frowning dramatically.

Then he sent a picture of this maple tree he really liked.

Connor responded that the tree was pretty.

And Evan liked that he was certain that Connor was being sincere.

A lot, but obviously not all, of Connor’s sarcasm had retreated since they had started going out. Evan didn’t know if it was because Connor was comfortable or if it had more to do with therapy. But it was sort of… nice.

Evan saw that he also had a text from Connor.

“Hey, what time are you off today?”

And Evan replied, “Not until 3.”

“Can I meet you at the park?”

“Sure. You know the south side entrance?”

“Yep. Want me to bring you coffee?”

“Maybe an iced tea?”

“Sure thing.”
“Nice outfit,” Connor said. Teased. Evan smiled. He didn’t mind the uniform.

He still had a long sleeved shirt on, but Evan suspected it had more to do with having just come from work. His hair was pulled back. He had sunglasses on, an iced coffee in one hand, and handed Evan a bright pink drink with the other.

“What is this?”

“Very low in caffeine.”

“Perfect,” Evan said, smiling. “So how come you wanted to meet here?”

“Because I want to see some damn trees.”

“I mean… it’s pretty warm. Are you sure?” Evan eyed Connor’s long sleeves.

“I have a t-shirt under this,” Connor said, dismissively. “Come on. Show me all the good trees.”

So Evan did. He led the way around all of the places he liked that weren’t too terribly far from the park’s entrance.

“Okay but which one is your favorite?”

Evan led them deeper into the cool, shadowed woods until he found the tree he thought was probably his favorite. It was the only he had stared at from the oak before he had fallen last summer.

It was a massive white pine, well over fifty feet tall. It stretched out, blocking out the sun, casting a cool dark shadow, it’s big heavy branches laden with needles and cones, drooping toward the ground.

But what Evan liked best about it was that it had been struck by lightning and survived. It had a massive, bright white streak that scarred the trunk. There were a few gaps in the branches and a spots that had yellowed. But it had kept living. Breathing. Taking up space unapologetically.

“This one?”

“Yeah,” Evan said, looking to Connor. His face was sort of tilted up, catching one of the few rays of sunlight that had filtered down to the ground.

“It’s gorgeous,” Connor said, smiling.

“It’s scarred too,” Evan said, shyly, pointing out the white streak down the tree. “It was struck by lightning.”

“I know the feeling,” Connor said, smiling at Evan.

Who smiled back. Shyly. “Can I show you one more?”

“Yeah, just one second,” Connor said, pulling out his phone. He took a few photos of the white pine. Evan smiled. Took his hand. And led him to the nearby oak tree.

Connor looked at him sharply. “Is this where… where you broke your arm?”

Evan nodded.
Connor took their clasped hands and dropped a kiss on Evan’s.

“How high up did you get?”

“Maybe thirty feet…” Evan answered. “I know now that I obviously… That I obviously would have needed to be higher up.”

“When’s your anniversary?” Connor asked him.

And Evan sighed. “It’s... it’s actually this week. I didn’t want to say anything but…”

And Connor kissed the top of his head. “At least you only have the one to keep track of?”

“I guess.” Connor had four. Four attempts, four anniversaries, four days he could have taken himself out of the world. And didn’t.

“Evan?”

“Hmm?”

“I love you.”

“Love you too.”

“I’m really fucking glad you didn’t die last summer.”

“Thanks,” Evan said, laughing awkwardly.

“Do you have plans tonight?”

Evan shook his head. “Why?”

“Because I kind of want to blow my first paycheck.”

And Evan laughed, agreeing to go wherever.

Connor said he had something to do first, and asked if Evan could meet him at an address downtown. Evan agreed, not sure where the place was or even what it was.

But Connor hadn’t ever taken Evan anywhere that Evan didn’t want to go.

So he agreed.

The address that Connor had texted him was...

A tattoo parlor.

Evan blinked in surprise.

Then figured that maybe Connor was going to get something else pierced? He already had his ears and kept saying he wanted to do his cartilage someday.

So maybe he wanted Evan to come with him?
He didn’t know.

He had a text on his phone from Connor. “I’m inside.”

So Evan pushed the door open, still not sure what he was doing there.

He found Connor sitting in a chair, chatting with a guy, covered in tattoos, who kept pointing at a sketch pad, with Connor nodding and pointing too.

“Connor?”

“Evan!” He got up. Smiling. “This is Dave.”

“Hello,” Evan said nervously.

“Oh so this is Evan, huh?”

Evan looked at Connor, surprised.

“Dave and I met in rehab,” Connor explained, shrugging.

“Yes, we were fucking terrible at rehab,” Dave said laughing. “Is that when I did your ears?”

Connor nodded. “Yeah. We were super stoned and you did them with a safety pin. So health code appropriate,” He said. Connor looked at Evan, ”We thought our group leader was going to lay an egg when she saw.”

Evan smiled nervously. So. Connor had a friend from rehab. Okay.

“So, what do you think?” Dave said, holding up a drawing of a pine tree. A white pine. With a streak of white that scarred the pieces of trunk that were still visible.

Connor nodded. “Yeah. Evan?”

“Um,” Evan said, looking between the drawing and Connor. “I mean. I like it… but what am I looking at?”

And Connor smiled, saying, fake casually, “Oh I’m getting a tattoo.”

Evan blinked. “Of… of that?”

“Unless you hate it.”

“No I… no I like it, I love it, it’s…” Evan swallowed hard. “I… are you sure you want that on your body forever? My-my…?”

“Favorite tree? Yeah. I definitely want that.”

“But what if-?”

“Evan. I love you. And you very literally saved my life. So. I’m pretty sure I want this.”

“I just mean… it’s like… you might as well get EVAN in all caps on your arm!”

“Why, would you rather I do that?” Connor teased.

“Oh my god, no!”
Connor cracked up. “Can I please get this tattoo? Please?”

“Okay,” Evan said, taking a shaky couple of breaths.

“Shall we?” Dave said.

“Yep.” Connor kissed Evan’s cheek. “Do you want to leave? I can’t remember how you feel about needles.”

“No I… No I’ll stay.”

“Want to hold my hand?” Connor asked, teasing.

And Evan laughed. “Yeah. I can do that.”

He was a little bit surprised that Connor had opted to have the tattoo done on the inside of his right forearm. Just because Evan knew he typically didn’t like people to see the collection of scars that he kept there.

But Evan thought he looked pretty calm as he unzipped his hoodie, displaying his arm to Dave who whistled, saying, “Gnarly, dude,” before applying the stencil.

“Connor?”

“Hm?”

“You… uh,” Evan knew he was blushing. “I can’t er-”

And Connor laughed. “I’m not expecting you to get a tattoo, don’t worry.”

Evan breathed a sigh of relief. “Okay.”

The whole thing took maybe a little over an hour. Connor didn’t really seem to notice the needle skating over his arm, he just chatted idly with Evan and Dave over the buzz of the equipment.

“Can’t believe you work at Starbucks, man. That is so lame.”

“I know, but it was that or work at my dad’s office this summer.”

“Oh, insult rescinded. You make your coffee.”

Connor laughed.

Evan smiled.

“So….”

“So.”

“You got a tattoo today,” Evan said.

And Connor smiled.

“Are your parents going to lose it?”

Connor smiled. “Not mom. I told her. She wanted to come with me, which was just way too
embarrassing.”

Evan smiled. “I… I really like it.”

“This isn’t because of your weird hipster librarian fetish, is it?” Connor teased.

“That’s only a small part of it.”

And they grinned at each other, stupidly.

And kissed.

Evan thought it was a pretty good day, overall.

Evan was sitting on Jared’s bean bag chair.

Technically speaking they were meant to be packing. But the thought of actually taking things off of
the walls seemed to contort Jared’s face much the same way as it tied Evan’s stomach in knots, and
the two of them were just playing video games instead.

“Talked to you new roommate?”

“Yeah,” Jared said. “He’s got like this really intense gaming system.”

“Cool.”

“You’ll have to come visit,” Jared said. Almost timidly.

“Yeah… Yeah of course.”

“Good. You can be my wingman when we go to parties.”

Evan laughed. “Why do I have to do it?”

“Because you’re the bait, and I’m the switch. The girls come to talk to you because you look all
sensitive and nice, and then surprise! They’ve got my dick in their mouths.”

Evan glared at Jared.

“….obviously after they consent to having my dick in their mouths. Jesus, Evan, I’m not that much of
a douche.”

“You did go to an a capella concert when you were at your orientation.”

“Well excuse me for having hopes of meeting a hot DJ like in Pitch Perfect .”

Evan shrugged. “I don’t really care for that movie.”

“You just don’t like that everyone thinks you look like Benji.”

Evan frowned.

He and Jared kept playing until they heard Jared’s mom get home, then they both jumped up quickly,
making a big show of debating whether Jared ought to bring his poster from the newest Star Wars
movie off to college.

“You boys doing alright?”

“Yep,” They chorused.

“Evan, I chatted with your mom on my way home. She says you had better not surprise her with a big tattoo like Connor did or you’re grounded.”

Evan laughed. “Okay. Thanks.”

“We’re doing Chinese for dinner if you want to stay?”

“I probably shouldn’t,” Evan admitted. “I’m neglecting my own packing.”

Once Mrs. Kleinman headed back toward the living room, Jared shook his head. “I can’t believe Connor got a tattoo of a fucking tree.”

Evan just smiled.

“That’s just… that’s a whole new level of gay for him.”

“Really? That’s the level?” Evan asked. “I’d have thought it was the sex.”

Jared balked. “Oh my god.”

“What?”

“I need to write this down, hang on can I get a picture? Evan Hansen, 18, finally admits that he has sex with his boyfriend like every other red blooded American.”

“Jesus, shut up Jared.”

I’m Still the Optimist, Though It is Hard

He was meeting with Dr. Sherman.

For the last time.

He would be transitioning to a new therapist, one closer to campus.

“So, how are you feeling about this ending?” Dr. Sherman asked.

“A little sad,” Evan admitted. “I feel like… you’ve helped me a lot.”

“I feel the same way,” Dr. Sherman said, smiling. “But I’m excited to see you moving on to college. I have a feeling it will be very good for you.”

Evan smiled slightly.

“So, you’ve set up your first appointment with Dr. Williams?”

“Yes, and I spoke with her on the phone last week.”
“The phone?” Dr. Sherman said, smiling. “I’m impressed.”

Evan smiled. “Thanks.”

“Well Evan. I’m really proud of the progress that we’ve made here.”

“Thank you,” Evan responded, biting his lip. “Me too.”

“How would you like this final session to end?” Dr. Sherman asked. “Some of my clients want a… handshake, a high five, a hug? What do you think?” He was getting to his feet.

“I think a hug. We’re there,” Evan said, grinning.

“I agree.”

They hugged, tightly, and briefly. And Dr. Sherman walked Evan out of his office and back out to the lobby. “Best of luck, Evan.”

“Thank you.”

Evan turned out into the lobby. Smiling. Feeling cautiously optimistic about everything.

He found Connor, standing outside of the office building smoking a cigarette. “Smoking again?” He asked. Connor had been quitting off and on all summer.

“Rough day. You?” He asked Evan. “How was your last hurrah with Dr. Sherman?”

“Good. Really good.”

“Great.”

“Connor?”

“Hm?”

“You alright?”

He smiled sadly. “Yeah. I’m… I’ll be fine. Just. I just had a moment.”

“You know that’s okay, right?”

Connor smiled half heartedly. “I know. I just…” He sighed. Pulled his free hand through his hair. Evan got a glimpse of his tattoo. It was an incredibly endearing sight. “I don’t want to ruin this for you. You deserve to be deliriously happy about going away to school…”

“And I am,” Evan said, gently. “That doesn’t mean I’m not also sad that you’re not coming with me.”

Connor took a drag on his cigarette. “I’m such a fucking asshole.”

“No, no, why do you think that?”

“Because I kind of don’t want you to go.”

Evan heaved a sigh. “I know. That doesn’t make you an asshole.”

“Makes me feel like one, then.”
“It’s a year,” Evan tried.

And Connor stared at him, his eyes utterly unreadable. “I almost didn’t make it through the last one. Forgive me for not feeling like I can bet on myself here.”

“Connor, come on…” Evan said helplessly. “I thought we had talked about this!”

“Yeah, well, that was months ago!” He said, sounding angry. “I’m kind of freaking out. You’re leaving. And I’ll just be here, living with my parents, like… like nothing ever happened.”

“Is that really what you think?” Evan asked.

“I don’t know, I-” Connor started. Realized he was yelling, and stopped. Clenching his fists. Evan watched him take a deep breath. Imagined that he was probably counting. “I don’t know. I just… I’m freaked out. Everything is changing for you, getting better for you, and I’m just going to be… here. Alone.”

Evan bit back the things he wanted to say: But you’re not alone, you’re talking to Zoe again, and you have friends at work, and I’ll only be an hour away, and you’re doing so much better can’t you see that?

“I’ll be home so much you’ll probably get sick of me,” Evan tried, knowing it wasn’t enough.

“That’s the thing. I don’t think I can get sick of you.” He sighed, tossing his cigarette to the ground. “But I’m worried that once you meet other people that you’ll… that you’ll get sick of me. You’ll… you’ll meet who are more together, who aren’t just giant fucking disasters, and you’ll see how much of a mess I am and…”

“And I’ll love you then like I do now,” Evan said stubbornly.

“And if you don’t? We’re eighteen. These things… they fall apart. They’re basically designed that way.”

“I will,” Evan said, arms crossed over his chest. “I’ll love you.”

“Stop saying that if you don’t mean it.”

“I mean it. I’ll love you. And I’ll still want you. I’m certain of that.”

Connor laughed, hollowly. “When did you become an optimist?”

“About twenty minutes ago,” Evan said, smirking. “It’s going very well, as you can see.”

“Fuck you,” Connor said, laughing again.

“Love you.”

———

“Evan? Are you ready?”

He was sitting on his bed, picking at a loose thread on the blanket. His real blankets were already packed away, so the bed in his room had one of the spares on the bed.

He had barely slept.
His walls were looking especially vacant and uninviting this morning. Most of his photos and prints had been packed up already.

Evan kept feeling like he couldn’t quite swallow the lump in his throat. He looked up at his mom, smiling. “Yeah. I guess.”

“Well. Larry is going to be here with the truck in about twenty minutes. Do you have anything last minute to pack up?”

Evan shook his head.

Mr. Murphy had a truck apparently, with an extended cab, so he was helping Evan and his mom move Evan into his new dorm room.

Which was great because Evan and his mom had been puzzling over how to get all of his things into her small four-door for weeks.

Plus the Murphy’s just happened to have a futon from a family friend.

Which Evan didn’t buy for a moment.

But his mom said he was allowed to take it. So that went into the truck too.

“Mom?”

“Yeah honey?”

“I love you.”

His mom smiled. “Love you too honey. You alright?”

“I just… thank you for everything. Especially this last year.”

His mom gave him a watery smile, then she moved to sit next to him, wrapping her arms around him tightly. “I love you so much, honey.”

“You too, mom.”

She pulled away, cupping her hands around his face. Her eyes were glassy. “I can’t believe you’re going away to college. When did I get so old?”

Evan shook his head, like, he didn’t know either.

She pulled him close again, kissing his head. “I remember when you came home from the hospital, as a baby? I thought about this day.”

“And how does it compare?”

And his mom smiled. “Well I didn’t count on your tattooed boyfriend’s dad helping, but otherwise it’s about the same.”

Evan laughed. “I can’t believe you’re so mad about the tattoo.”

“Well he might as well have gotten ‘property of Evan Hansen’ written across his arm!”

Evan laughed. “That’s what I said!”
His mom took his hand. “I’m so proud of you honey.”

“Thanks mom.” He smiled. “Now I’m expecting you not to work too hard now that I’m not home. And you can’t eat takeout every night.”

His mom laughed. “Alright, alright. I won’t.” She smoothed out his hair, just sort of looking at him, and Evan thought that it was an expression he probably wouldn’t ever be able to process. At least not until he was a parent.

The doorbell rang.

“Well… we better get this show on the road,” His mom said.

Evan nodded. “Okay. I’m ready.”

Evan’s hands felt too cold the whole ride up, sitting in the big backseat with Connor. They held hands, but Evan sort of felt like they were just doing it to do it.

They hit some traffic on the interstate, and Mr. Murphy -er- Larry grumbled about.

Evan’s mom just kept looking back asking if they wanted any snacks.

Evan checked his phone. His new roommate Tom had said he would be arriving in a few hours and that Evan was free to start setting up the room how they had discussed, playing around with the school’s room arranging tool online a couple of weeks back.

It took about an hour and a half to finally arrive at Evan’s new dorm. It was a big building, ten floors. Evan’s room was on the eighth floor.

“Eight is my favorite number,” Connor had said when Evan told him.

So Evan thought it was a good omen.

First, he and his mom went to find the front desk where he signed in and got his keys. They told him where to get a massive red moving cart.

Evan’s mom stopped, insisting that she get a picture of him holding up his new keys.

Back at the truck, Connor and his dad had started to unload things. They gratefully accepted the big cart, loading it with big plastic storage containers and boxes. Evan grabbed a storage bin, and so did his mom, while Connor steered the cart and Mr. Murphy pulled up the rear carrying a lamp and a box of books.

They took the elevator up to the eighth floor, and then Evan led the way down to 805. His new room.

The door was already decorated with a big construction paper sign saying, “WELCOME HOME!” Then there was a paper plate, colored to look like a sunflower, that said EVAN HANSEN and another that said TOM REED.

Evan walked in first, setting down the container on top of the first bed.

The beds were bare. The walls cinder blocks painted white. The window overlooked the courtyard
outside of the building.

“Alright, let’s get this unloaded,” Mr. Murphy said, clapping his hands. “Evan, did you and your roommate talk about how to arrange the room?”

Evan directed how it was meant to look, and while Evan and his mom made another trip to the truck to get the suitcase full of clothes and Evan’s backpack, Connor and his dad bunked the beds up.

Evan’s mom started to put the storage containers away, under the beds, one in the closet, pulling out essentials like his toothbrush, flip flops, and shower stuff and putting them where Evan could see them.

“What’s left in the truck?” Connor asked.

“Just a couple of boxes with dishes and stuff, I think.”

“Dad? Want to go down?”

So Connor and Mr. Murphy swept out of the room, and Evan’s mom traipsed off to the bathroom.

There was a knock at the door.

Evan recognized Tom from his facebook profile. “Hey! Evan, right?”

“Yes,” Evan said, smiling, reaching out and shaking Tom’s hand. “Tom?”

“Yeah. My whole brood is on their way.” He looked around. “Sweet, you already lofted the beds. My dad’s got a bad back so I was imagining a nightmare if he got involved.”

Evan nodded, laughing. “Do you care about top or bottom bunk?”

Tom smiled. “I hate heights of any kind. You mind taking top?”

Evan shook his head. And climbed up to dump his sheets and blankets on the top bunk.

“Who were the guys who just left?”

“Hm?” Evan asked.

“The guy with the man bun and the tattoos? Is he your brother?”

Evan smiled. “No he’s my boyfriend. Him and his dad are helping my mom move me in.”

And Tom smiled. “Oh thank fuck, man, I was scared you might be secretly homophobic. There’s like no chill way to ask about that.” He laughed nervously. “I’ve got a boyfriend too. His name’s Oscar. He’s going to the Catholic school upstate?”

Evan nodded, smiling. Of course his new roommate was gay. Jared would die when he found out.

“My boyfriend’s Connor. He’s hoping to go here next year, but he’s taking some time off to get his grades up.”

“Cool, man. Hope he does.”

“Me too.”

“So anyway if you want to come with me this LGBT Campus Center social this week…?” Tom
asked. “I’m a little too…” he waved his arms as if to communicate something that Evan understood to be anxiety, “to go by myself.”

“Yeah. That would be cool.”

Tom smiled. “You’re such a good roommate already, man.”

“Thanks.”

After they finished moving all of Evan’s things into the room, Mr. Murphy insisted on treating them all to pizza at a place across the street from campus.

Connor wasn’t really eating. Or talking. And the last time he went to the bathroom, Evan noticed he had come back with red eyes.

But he didn’t smell like weed.

“Is it okay if Connor and I take a quick walk down to the CVS?” Evan asked as they finished their lunch. “I just realized I totally forgot to bring any…” he was trying to think fast. “Tylenol. I should probably have some just in case.”

His mom seemed to pick up on his meaning. “Good thinking, Evan. Larry, why don’t you and I go grab a coffee down the street?”

“But I-”

“Please, it’s the least I can do since you were such a big help today.”

Evan and Connor started off in the direction of the CVS. “You want a cigarette,” Evan said.

“Oh thank god,” Connor said, his hands already pulling a pack out of his pocket.

Evan smiled.

They walked and Connor smoked and they held hands.

They didn’t talk.

“I’m going to miss you,” Connor said after they actually went into CVS to buy the Tylenol.

“I’m going to miss you too.”

“Fuck, I’m such a mess.” Connor wiped his eyes, like he was trying to be nonchalant about it.

“I like that you’re a mess. Because I’m a mess too.”

“When do you come home?” Connor asked.

“Your birthday. Three weeks.”

Connor rolled his eyes. “I thought we cancelled that…”

“No. We’re all coming home for it. Alana is baking you a cake.”
“Fine.”

“And you’ll visit. Soon.”

Connor nodded. “Fuck.”

“Tell me about the classes you’re taking,” Evan said.

Connor shrugged, listing off a few genetic general education classes. “Oh. And a Junior level American Literature class.”

Evan smiled broadly. “Sorry, what did you get on your AP Lit exam again, sir?”

Connor blushed. “A five. I can’t believe I let you talk me into taking it.”

“You worked really hard for it! You deserved it!”

Connor smiled. “Speak for yourself, AP Bio and AP Psych.”

“I maintain that I only got a five on the AP Psych exam because I am literally a case study.”

Connor laughed.

They were closing in on Evan’s dorm. Evan could see his mom and Connor’s dad waiting by the truck in the parking lot.

“Okay. What’s the plan?”

Connor sighed. “We’re going to… We’re going to hug. And say ‘see you later,’ and then I’m going to leave and neither of us will kill ourselves.”

“Great plan.”

They reached the truck.

Evan dropped Connor’s hand.

He hugged Mr. Murphy, thanking him for his help.

He hugged his mom, and they both got a little weepy, and then he hugged her again. Saying he would be home in three weeks. She kissed his cheek. They said their “I love you’s.”

And then he turned to Connor.

And gave him a hug.

And said, “See you later.”

And Connor nodded, saying, “See you later.”

They pulled apart.

And Evan watched them drive away.

He barely made it to the bathroom before he started just, sobbing. Tears pouring, nose running, the whole nine yards.
His phone buzzed. “Oh my god your mom had to give me a paper bag, I am such a mess.” There
were like three crying emojis.

“Same,” Evan responded.

“Three weeks?”

“Three weeks.”

“How many days is that?”

“Twenty one.”

“Twenty more sleeps then,” Connor responded.

“Okay. Twenty sleeps.”

“Miss you already. We’re not even out of the city yet.”

“I know. Miss you too. I’m hiding in the bathroom.”

“Evan?”

“Yeah?”

“You know you’ve got this, right?”

Evan smiled at the text. “I do.”

“Good.”

“Great.”

“Perfect.”

“Awesome.”

Chapter End Notes

Yes! I gave Connor a TATTOO of a TREE because I am TRASH for tree bros. :)

One last chapter to go, kids. I’m starting to get all feelsy about it. You all are the greatest
readers I could have ever imagined. :) Thanks for sticking with me.

Songs this chapter:
Where Does the Good Go? - Tegan and Sara
(Coffee’s for Closers) - Fall Out Boy
Woe - Say Anything
Epilogue Part 4: All Was Golden In the Sky

Nobody said relationships were easy.

Chapter Notes

Alright kiddos, it's the last chapter of The Desperate Type. Please take a moment. Take a breath. And remember to read to the end before you comment yelling at me.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Now We're Stuck in the Storm
We Were Born to Ignore

Jared’s parents let him host their small party for Connor at their house. Alana had, in fact, made a cake.

It was weird being home, Evan realized. It was all so safe and familiar and normal, but it also felt strange. Like not having to lock his bedroom door whenever he left the room was weird. And for the first time he noticed the way his mom’s house smelled - like sunlight and apple scented air freshener and open windows.

Plus Connor was there.

Which was great.

But… a little bit weird.

Three weeks was not an objectively long time, but it was long enough that Evan couldn’t rely on autopilot for certain things anymore. What way did they usually hold hands? Was it Evan’s in the front, Connor’s in the back, or vice versa? What side of the bed did Connor like to sleep on, did he always tuck his hair behind his ears like that, and did he usually bite his fingernails or was that new? Had Connor always seemed so intentionally gentle with everyone and everything like he thought existing too hard would cause pain or was Evan imagining that?

“Evan? You with us?” Zoe asked him as they chatted around a pizza at the Kleinmans’ kitchen table.

“Yeah, sorry, just… thinking.”
He knew this was all utterly irrational, but it had been weeks. And Connor seemed especially careful with him too, not kissing him when they first saw each other this afternoon, not talking much on the drive back to town just letting Evan ramble.

Not to mention that Evan had been home for six hours and they hadn’t even discussed the possibility of sneaking away to have sex.

Not that when Evan was still living at home they were having sex all the time.

Just that.

Well he had sort of imagined that their first reunion would have managed to squeeze that in.

Not that he was upset.

He wasn’t.

Just.

It felt… weird.

“Okay, so, per Connor’s request, even though we all came all the way home from school for this,” Jared said, smirking, “We are keeping things very lowkey. So. We’re all going to pile into a car and go see a movie and pretend to be all wholesome and shit? That cool with everyone?”

“Literally everyone knows this already,” Zoe said, crossing her arms over her chest. “Don’t be a dick, Jared.”

“You heard her,” Alana said, kissing her girlfriend’s cheek.

Evan thought about asking Alana if she was also feeling weird about seeing Zoe for the first time. But then what if he mentioned the sex thing and then Alana started talking about HAVING SEX with ZOE MURPHY and then Evan’s head would explode off of his shoulders and he would die.

“Evan? You with us?” Jared asked as they all piled into Jared’s ugly but huge car.

“Yeah.”

The movie was fine.

Evan sat next to Connor and they didn’t say anything and Connor didn’t take Evan’s hand and so Evan didn’t take Connor’s either.

After the movie they went back to Alana’s. Had cake, without singing, again per Connor’s request.

And then it was midnight and everyone was heading their separate ways and Connor said he would drive Evan home and Evan had this intense fear that he wouldn’t stay.

“Are we okay?”

Evan blurted it out the moment Connor had pulled out of Jared’s driveway.

“Because… because I’ve been home for hours and we… It’s been weird.”

“I’m sorry.” Connor sighed. “I didn’t want to say anything.”

“How about…”

Connor’s hands tightened on the steering wheel, then he said. “My phone… it’s the first email.”

So Evan picked up the phone (he knew the passcode; everyone knew the passcode, Connor literally asked everyone who rode with him to check his phone for him when he was driving). He opened the inbox.

The first email was a response from CatchingTheTrain.com.

To Connor’s initial post.

About a year old.

Evan felt sick; the email contained a copy of Connor’s original post. He could recall, vividly, how it felt seeing that message originally; the almost excitement, the fear of being rejected by someone and left to literally die alone.

_I keep telling myself I’m not the desperate type, but nonetheless here we are._

Evan’s eyes kept sticking to that line. And then the date. One year, two days ago.

He blinked, and read the response:

_Hey._

_I have no idea if this message was left up here because you never ended up finding someone or you’re already dead but._

_If you’re still looking, I’m available. More than available. I’m fucking ready._

_Please, please still be available. You’re the only person from my area that I’ve ever seen on this site._

Evan swallowed. “When did you get this?”

“This morning,” Connor said, quietly. “Happy birthday to me.”

“What… what did you do?” Evan’s brain was racing. Connor’s account was still online? Connor had never taken the message down?

Connor sighed. “I got Jared to help me trace the IP address and called the cops, obviously.”

“Oh.” Thank God. “Why didn’t you tell me?”

“I didn’t… want to wreck your first time being home.”

“That’s so…” Evan sighed. “Is the kid okay?”

“I don’t know. It’s not like the cops could tell me. All I know is that they are a minor who is probably in Zoe’s grade…”

“Are you okay?”
Connor sighed. “I. I dunno. I got that this morning and managed to do a phone session with my shrink before I came to pick you up earlier. She said she wasn’t concerned about my safety but I…” He trailed off. Gripped the steering wheel harder. “It’s hard to look at that. I didn’t… It feels like that was a different person somehow. Like, I know that was me. I know. But I don’t recognize myself.”

“Pull over.”

“Evan, I’m fine, we’re nearly at your house-”

“Pull over.”

So Connor did, putting on his hazards and slowing down on the shoulder of the road. “Okay…?”

“Are you okay? Really?”

Connor shrugged. “I guess…”

Evan pulled his seatbelt off and hugged Connor as tightly as he could with most of his body leaning over the center console. “I love you so much.”

“Love you too.”

“You probably saved that kid’s life today. You know that.” Connor shrugged again, which was a weird thing to feel when you hugged someone. Evan pulled away. “You know that,” Evan repeated.

“I know,” Connor said. It was hard to see his face in the dark. “It’s just… It’s so messed up that we both… that we both thought…”

“I know.”

“I could have gotten you killed,” Connor said, his voice strained.

“I was a willing participant,” Evan said, sadly. “I… it wasn’t just you, remember? It was me too. I was just as committed until the very end there.”

Connor bit his lip. “Do you remember that Thursday that you missed school? Right before…?”

“Yeah,” Evan said. He could recall. Vividly.

“I was so cut up, because I was convinced that you had gone through with it – even though I had spent the last like two weeks trying to convince you not to – and you cut school, which you never did, and I just. I was a mess. I was convinced I had failed you, made you do it, that I was some kind of murderer-by-proxy… And I just kept thinking that someone would tell me, right? Someone would have let me know if you were dead…. I felt sick. All day. And when I saw you the next day, I couldn’t even… I had been so scared that you were gone…”

“I remember that,” Evan said. “You hugged me. I knew that something was up right away.”

“I’ve never been the most subtle,” Connor said, half smiling.

Evan took Connor’s hand. Squeezed it. Traced the branches of Connor’s tree tattoo. “You posted last year…?”

“I… Yeah. I posted it right before my birthday. I don’t really like my birthday.”

“Why not?”
Connor sighed. “An entire day where everyone is meant to pay attention to me? No thanks.”

“I guess I understand that.”

“Yeah.”

“So…” Evan said, thinking. “Does that mean we met on your birthday last year?”

Connor sighed. “Uh. Yeah.”

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Evan’s mom was still awake when they got back.

“Hi!” She said, pulling her son in for a tight hug. “I’m so sorry I wasn’t home when you go back earlier. How was the drive? How are you?”

“I’m good, the drive was fine, how are you?”

His mom let go of him, holding him out at an arm’s length, as if she was assessing whether or not he was lying. She smiled broadly. “I’m good. So glad you’re home.”

“Thanks.”

She hugged him quickly, and then moved toward Connor. “Evan tells me it’s your birthday.”

“It is,” Connor said.

“Well then I’m definitely hugging you,” She said, and Connor laughed and let her pull him in for a hug. “Happy birthday! How old are you now? Forty five?”

“Forty six, actually,” Connor said smiling.

“Well happy birthday,” Evan’s mom said. “I do have something for you, don’t you protest! I will be right back.”

Connor looked at Evan, his eyes pleading. Evan was also surprised to discover that his mom had gotten Connor a gift, since she hadn’t mentioned it when they had talked on the phone this week.

She emerged from her bedroom with a battered looking old shoebox. “Now you’ll have to forgive me as this is a bit of a vintage present, and it’s not wrapped but…” She handed the box to Connor. “I have a feeling you will like it.”

Connor took a seat on the edge of the couch, carefully pulling the top off of the box. Inside, Evan would see, sat an old yellow cassette player and many many clear plastic cassette cases. Connor was smiling as hard as Evan had seen him smile. “Oh my god, I… thank you so much!”

“I figured since I keep most of my music on my iPod now, that you would… appreciate it more than I do.”

“Are some of these mix tapes?” Connor asked, pulling out a couple of tapes to inspect them.

“Yeah, a few from friends, a few I made… I think there might even be one from Evan’s dad from when we first met in there, so be careful.”
Connor smiled, carefully replacing the tapes in the box and hugging Evan’s mom again. “Thank you so much. I love it.”

“I’m glad.” She said, patting Connor’s cheek affectionately. She stayed up with them chatting for about half an hour, before she looked at the clock and sighed. “I should get to bed. I’ve been up since five thirty.”

Evan smiled. “Mom, we're fine, go to bed.”

“Allright,” She said, smiling. “I’ve got the whole day off tomorrow. And we’re going shopping because I have a feeling that you haven’t been going to the grocery store when you run out of things.”

Evan smiled. It was true. “Alright.”

“Night boys.”

“Night.”

“So, I have a present for you too,” Evan said.


“Too bad, you still get a present.”

“I didn’t get one for you,” Connor muttered.

“Yeah, but I asked you not to because I hate opening presents at all, ever. Do you hate opening all presents?”

“No,” Connor mumbled.

“Great. The present’s in my room.”

“Please just tell me it’s just your dick-”

Evan shoved Connor’s shoulder playfully. “Stop, my mom’s right in the other room.”

Connor laughed, and Evan opened the door to his room. “Okay,” he said, going into his backpack. “So… I am pretty sure you don’t have this. I had Zoe check your room, don’t get mad,” Evan said, looking at Connor significantly. “But in the eighth grade yearbook thing we did? You made a list of your ten favorite books, and this was on it, and it doesn’t look like you have it so…” He handed the small wrapped package to Connor.

Who was eyeing him, confused. “You found that?”

“Well, yeah, I... yeah.”

Connor nodded. He carefully unwrapped the wrapping paper from the book, revealing the lime green cover. He smiled brightly. “Oh my god. I haven’t read this in years.”

Evan smiled back. “You like it?”

Connor nodded, smiling. “How I got away with reading this in the eighth grade is beyond me,” He said conversationally, “Like... this is pretty dark. And there are a lot of drugs.”
“I’ve never read it,” Evan admitted.

“You’ve never read it?”

“I saw the movie,” Evan said. “That was a little… difficult to watch at parts.”

“Yeah,” Connor said, frowning. “Unless you mean Emma Watson’s accent. Then you’re grounded.”

“Hey, I thought her accent was pretty good,” Evan said, smiling. “Though most of her scenes were with Ezra Miller, so maybe I was distracted.”

Connor smiled. “I can’t believe you never read this. It’s so short.”

Evan shrugged. “I mean.. I’ll read it. Soon.”

Later, a lot later, after the sex and cuddling and more sex and more cuddling when it was too late for them to still be awake, Evan was leaning back against Connor, and Connor grabbed the book from Evan’s nightstand. Though it was late and they were both tired, and Connor’s voice was a little gravely from a day full of talking, he started to read.

“August 25, 1991…Dear Friend, I am writing to you because she said you listen and understand and didn’t try to sleep with that person at that party even though you could have…”

“Okay…. Shit I am so bad at talking on the phone.”

“You’re not,” Evan said. His hands were a little bit sweaty as he sat in his room, on the top bunk, talking on the phone with Connor. It had been almost a month since Evan had left for college. It was… alright so far. Tom was nice. He was actually at the library, which meant Evan had the room to himself for practically the first time since moving in. Which was nice because then he could call Connor without having to sit in the hallway or the stairwell like he did when he talked to his mom. “You said you had news so I called you.”

“That’s way too healthy, are you sure you’re my boyfriend?”

“Connor! What is the news?”

Connor sighed on the other line. “Okay, but first are you sitting down?”

“Yes?”

“How’s your heart? Have you gotten that checked recently, because I don’t want to be responsible-”

“CONNOR!”

“Okay. Fine. But you cannot freak out.”

“Um, okay, but if you’re about to tell me you’re pregnant then I’m breaking up with you, because that wasn’t funny last time-”

“I got a job at the library.”

Evan went speechless. He was smiling so hard he was certain he pulled a muscle in his face. “You… did what?”
“I went to the library and they needed someone and I applied and now I work at the library.”

“What about Starbucks?”

“Eh, the library has better hours -”

“Oh my god, oh my god! You have to send me a picture when you’re there. And wear your glasses. And your hair up! And that button down that you got when we all went to the mall this spring, the one with the polka dots?”

Connor was laughing on the other side of the line. “I already knew this was going to happen but you’re exceeding my expectations.”

“You’re literally going to be working at the library!”

“I am.”

“That’s really hot.”

“Evan, you’ve got to overcome this librarian fetish-”

“No! Pictures!”

“Evan-”

“PICTURES!”

“I can’t take a picture at the library right now, I’m in my bedroom!”

“How’s having a door back?”

“Nice. To be honest I sort of got used to sleeping with it open.”

“And how’s everything at home?”

“Fine. Alright. I don’t know…” Connor sighed. “I hung out with Zoe and a few of her jazz band people this week. Which was okay, but like. A little weird. Like, cool now I’m the loser still hanging around the high school kids.”

“Connor, you literally went there four months ago.”

“Four months is a long time. Now it’s creepy.”

“It’s not creepy.” Evan was sort of laughing. “What about classes? Are those going okay? I feel like I haven’t talked to you in forever.”

“We saw each other last week,” Connor said, and Evan imagined him rolling his eyes. “But classes are okay. I got my first paper back in my English class.”

“And?”

“Yeah, I dunno... it was good…”

“What does that mean?”

Connor sighed again. “I got an A on it.”
“That’s fantastic!” Evan said, smiling.

“I mean… it’s just. Community college, I don’t know, I wouldn’t get too excited.”

“Connor, come on. You know there’s nothing wrong with going to community college.”

“Easy for you to say,” He said sourly. Then sighed again. He was sighing a lot. “Sorry. I just. I’m just nervous about my application. I submitted it the other day.”

“I know. But your grades went up, like, so much at the end of last year. And your grades now are great, plus you took those online classes this summer and… and when you retook the ACT you got a 32. With a perfect score on the English section. That’s, like, insane. You’re absolutely going to get in.”

“I barely passed the first three years of high school, I’m not so sure…”

That was true. Evan had looked at Connor’s transcripts once; his grades had been mostly Cs, with a handful of Bs and a few Ds before senior year. Apparently deciding to live was quite the GPA booster.

He always got As in English though.

“I don’t want to talk about this anymore.”

“Okay,” Evan said. He didn’t really know what else to talk about so he said, “What are you wearing?”

And Connor laughed.

Which.

That was Evan’s favorite sound. He wasn’t hearing it as much and he missed it. “Hansen, are you seriously trying to initiate phone sex?”

“I…” Evan wasn’t sure. “Maybe.”

Connor laughed again. “Jesus, warn me next time. I almost fell off my bed.”

Evan laughed then. “So… what are you wearing?”

“Just… clothes? I’m sorry I’ve never actually done this.”

“Me either, obviously,” Evan said.

“Oh so you mean you didn’t moonlight as a phone sex operator in high school?”

“Not that I recall.”

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**I Just Want Back In Your Head**

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Fighting with your boyfriend wasn’t fun.
Especially not when you were stuck doing it over text between classes because they lived more than an hour's drive away.

Especially when it was cold and rainy you had an exam coming up and a paper due and your roommate had just gotten over a cold and you were just trying to will yourself not to get sick too.

And the fight was because your boyfriend’s sister called you to say that they suspected your boyfriend was skipping his therapy sessions. Which he only did when he was feeling suicidal.

And then it turned out that he just rescheduled one session, and he got all pissed off at you and his sister.

“It makes me really uncomfortable that she texted you instead of just saying something to me,” One message from Connor read. “And it makes me feel really shitty that you believe her over me.”

“I’m just concerned.”

“Well, I appreciate that, but it sort of feels like you’re checking up on me because you don’t trust me.”

“No, I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to do that,” Evan texted back, feeling frustrated, but then his class started to he had to text “pause” and try to focus on a lecture on cell structures.

Pause was their rule. Developed because sometimes they couldn’t manage to argue or fight or debate or whatever without one of them breaking down and they… they could pause and pick the conversation back up once the moment had passed.

Pause was invented for down days and anxiety attacks, but Evan supposed they could probably use it for college too.

He didn’t check his phone all through class. Will power.

Evan pulled it out of his backpack the moment the professor dismissed the lecture, and was irritated to discover he had three more texts.

And not a single one of them was Connor saying, “Okay, are you alright?”

Instead, there was one saying, “I don’t think pause is meant to be used just because you’re in class. I know your schedule.”

Then, five minutes later, “Look, I’m sorry. That was unnecessary. I’m just really pissed off, okay? You talked to Zoe behind my back and then tried to make me feel bad for something I didn’t even do. That… hurt my fucking feelings, okay?”

And then, “Look, now I have class. Don’t text me, okay? I’ll call you tonight.”

Which.

Okay.

Rude.

Not cool.

Evan only said something because he was worried. He had been worried about Connor. Skipping therapy was a bad sign, normally.
Evan bit his lip.

God, what a fucking terrible day.

Connor never called.

Evan was actually a little bit relieved.

It was a bad day the next day too.

The last week of October. Gray and rainy and cold.

It had been a bad day since the moment Evan had peeled his eyes open this morning to discover that he had slept through both of his alarms and had less than twenty minutes to make it to his morning class where he had a test.

He managed it but it was close and he didn’t get to sit in the seat where he normally sat because exam day was the only day when people actually showed up to class and some of them didn’t know where people usually sat.

Then the test.

Might as well have been in French for all Evan understood.

He had been up late studying, but then none of the things in his review sessions or that he had gone over last night were the focus of the test. He had to muddle through fifty multiple choice questions on topics he barely remembered from lectures.

Then after the test he had an appointment at the student writing center where some bubble gum popping junior in a crop top ripped his thesis statement to shreds and then told him he had a “really good start.”

As if that wasn’t bad enough, the card machines in the cafeteria were down so every single student on the meal plan had to have their student ID number written down by hand so that their account could be charged.

And once Evan finally sat down to eat, he realized his phone had died. Probably because he had stupidly left his location services turned on again. And he was checking it half the night hoping to get a text from Connor, where he apologized for being a dick.

No such text.

But all of that would have probably been okay. He could have muddled through all of that.

But then he went for his appointment with Dr. Williams. He had been looking forward to sort of bragging to her about how well he handled this terrible day, no more anxiety than typical, no panic attacks, he had been fine. He wanted the pat on the head, the reassurance that he was, in fact, doing much better.

And then the receptionist sighed looking at him, saying, “Evan, I’m so sorry. We called and left you a voicemail. Dr. Williams had a family emergency and she had to cancel her appointments for the rest of the day.”
“Oh. Sorry, my phone died during my last class… I didn’t get the message.”

“I’m so sorry.” The receptionist said, and she sounded sorry. “She did ask that you give a call to reschedule later this week.”

“Alright. Thank you. I have to look at my schedule but I will call to reschedule…” He rushed out because he was like ninety percent certain he was going to cry or break something or just fucking die right there on the spot because this was a bad day.

He had to wait thirty minutes for another bus that would take him back to campus.

And when Evan got back to his dorm, he didn’t have any energy for anything. Even though it was barely five o’clock, Evan climbed up to his bed and pulled the covers over his head and went right to sleep.

He woke up at nine thirty to find Tom poking his arm. “Dude.”

“Hm?”

“You remember how last time Connor visited we all traded numbers before we went eighteen-plus night at that gay bar?”

“Yeah.”

“Well, you didn’t text him all day and now he’s texting me because he seems like half convinced you are dead.”

“Shit,” Evan said, sitting up. “My phone died. I never charged it.”

Tom smiled. “No worries, dude, plug yours in and use mine to call him back, yeah?”

“You sure?”

“Yeah, for sure.”

So Evan scrambled down from the top bunk. Plugged in his phone.

Accepted Tom’s phone and called Connor back. “Hey! I’m sorry! I had a bad day and my phone died…”

“Evan?”

“Yeah. Tom lent me his phone,” Evan said. “I just… Bad day. I-I went straight to sleep when I got back.”

“Oh. Okay. I’m glad you’re alright.” His voice didn’t sound right, and it wasn’t just the strange phone.

“Are you…” Evan asked. “You sound. Weird.”

“Well that is because I completely overreacted and I’m basically outside your dorm like a total creep… but since I know you’re fine I will just go home…”

“No!” Evan said. “One second.” He pulled the phone away from his ear, looking at Tom. “Is it okay
if Connor stays over? He drove all the way up here to check on me.”

“Shut. Up.” Tom said, smirking. “Need to get me a man like that. I asked my last ex before Oscar if we could be exclusive and he told me he was banging my cousin.”

“Seriously?” Evan said.

“Oh yeah. They’re engaged now. Wedding’s next year.”

“Damn.”

“But anyways, yes your boy can stay.”

“Thank you,” Evan said, putting the phone to his ear again. “Go park, Connor. I’ll meet you outside in five minutes.”

“If you’re sure…? I didn’t mean to freak out, it’s just that we.. had that fight yesterday…I just got worried that something had happened.”

“It’s fine. Really. I’ll be right down.”

“Oh.”

“Love you, bye.”

“Love you, bye.”

Evan ended the call and handed the phone back Tom. “Thank you so much.”

Tom rolled his eyes. “You act like it’s some big inconvenience when he comes up here. He always leaves his leftovers here for me. I am never going to be mad that he’s feeding me.”

Evan smiled.

“I’m actually supposed to pull an all-nighter with my media studies group since we all slacked off on our group project and now we have to have some preliminary slides finished by class tomorrow.”

“Oh. Alright. Should I not put the chain on?”

“I probably won’t be back before nine, and you have an early class tomorrow don’t you?”

Evan nodded. “Yeah I have my biology lab at nine fifty.”

“Perfect.”

Tom and Evan walked out of their room together, and rode the elevator down together. “Can I say hi to your man first?”

“Sure.”

They rounded to the visitor parking lot, where Connor was texting while leaning back against his car.

“Hey,” Evan said, smiling at him.

“Hey,” Connor said, his hands shoved into his pockets.
“Hi Connor. Sorry I can’t party with you tonight, duty calls,” Tom said, nodding his head toward the library that was blocks away. “But you’ll have the room to yourself.”

“Thanks man.”

“Later boys.” Tom headed off.

Evan looked at Connor, frowning. “I am so sorry. I just didn’t even think about charging my phone when I got home.”

“Evan.”

“I didn’t mean to worry you it’s just that I had a really terrible day and I’m so sorry-“

“Evan. It’s fine. It’s just… today’s date. I. I got scared.”

“Today’s date?” Evan said, confused.

Connor pulled out his phone.

And Evan’s heart nearly stopped.

Because it had been a year.

One year since… the day at the water tower, the day they both were hospitalized, the day Connor nearly killed himself.

“Oh, fuck, I am so sorry,” Evan said, grabbing Connor’s hand tightly. “I didn’t even realize… You probably wanted to talk today and I was just dicking around because I woke up late…”

“Evan. It’s fine. I just… I got scared when I didn’t hear back from you all day. I even sent a fucking picture of me at work because I was hoping to get a reaction.”

“Oh god,” Evan said, giggling. “I am definitely going to save that as my phone background.”

“Shut up. Are you okay? You said… you said you had a bad day?”

“I… yeah. Woke up late, one of my exams was harder than I expected, my phone died, and my therapist cancelled on me.”

“That sucks.”

“I’m so sorry I scared you.”

“It’s fine, I overreacted, I just-”

Evan pulled Connor in for a hug, holding on tightly. “It’s fine. Stop apologizing. Really.”

“Okay.”

“Are you okay?” Evan asked. “With today being… today?”

Connor shrugged. “I guess…. I guess probably not since I fucking drove here like a lunatic.”

Evan almost laughed. “Will you be okay?”

Connor nodded. “I think so. Yeah. I’ll… I’ll be okay.”
“Want to go up to my room?”

Connor smiled. “Sure.”

They were huddled under blankets, sitting on Evan’s futon. Connor was wearing some of Evan’s pajamas; he had come straight from work, so nothing he had on would have been comfortable to sleep in. They were sitting side by side, Evan’s fingers absently tracing the tree tattoo on Connor’s forearm.

It had been a bad day for Connor too.

Because he had woken up and his mom had cried over breakfast because the year before Connor had tried to kill himself, and Zoe had gotten pissed off because she just wanted to get out the door to go to school, and Connor was just sort of watching all of this happen and nobody was listening to a word he was saying and then Fucking Larry started yelling at Connor’s mom so then Connor was yelling at Fucking Larry and they all had a massive fight all before Connor’s first class of the day.

Add that with not hearing from Evan for nearly a full twenty four hours, which never happened, and Connor was in a complete panic by the time he got off of work.

“Feeling any better?”

“Yeah. You?”

“Yeah.”

“You’re not slacking off on any important homework, right?”

“No,” Connor said, dropping his head to Evan’s shoulder. “I did homework at work tonight.”

“Okay.”

“Evan?”

“Hm?”

“Did I… Did I ever thank you? For last year? For getting me down?”

“You did,” Evan said. “Don’t you remember?”

“I don’t really remember much of that day, to be totally honest,” Connor said. “I don’t really know why. I’ve tried to talk it out like fifty times in therapy but… I just. I don’t really remember. I don’t remember that morning, I don’t know what I was wearing, I don’t… I know what happened, but the details are fuzzy.”

“It was scary,” Evan said. He leaned his head against Connor’s. “I don’t think I’d ever seen you cry before. It was kind of unnerving.”

Connor laughed. “Because I am an ugly crier.”

“No you’re not.”

Connor pulled his head away, shaking it at Evan. “I am. I am definitely an ugly crier. Compared to
“You do not,” Evan said, exasperated.

“I do too!”

“You’re so weird, I love you.”

“Even though I ugly cry?”

“Yes, you complete goon.”

I Don't Want to Hear You Got a Boyfriend

Evan and Tom had signed up to work a shift at a big campus wide mixer for the LGBT Campus Center. They were in charge of staffing a table that was littered with cool merch - “swag” as Tom kept calling it. They were meant to encourage people to sign up for the email list. Buttons and stickers and a few coffee cups that said things like, “Pronouns matter” and “I’m bisexual, you’re confused,” and others with various pride flag prints. Evan was wearing a bi pride pin next to his name tag which read: “Evan, first year, he/him/his.”

“I thought you were gay,” Tom said, eyeing the pin as he stuck his “Tom, not Thomas, he/him/his” name tag to his shirt.


“I wish I was bi,” Tom said, sighing. “It just seems like so much more fun.”

“Assuming people believe you and not stereotypes,” Evan said, smiling.

“Oh, so like ‘you’re very confused and here to steal everyone’s partner’?”

“Yeah.”

They had a good time.

Evan laughed a lot. Interacted with a lot of strangers. Only worried sometimes if his hands were sweaty.

Dr. Williams had been shocked and pleased when she found out he was going to do this.

As Tom and Evan’s hour to staff the table drew to a close, a pretty girl with hair the color of pink cotton candy walked up to the table.

“Are we allowed to just… take this stuff?”

Evan nodded. “You can also sign up for the email list. Find out about events and stuff.”
“Cool.”
Evan spotted her name tag. It read “Jo, she/her/hers.”
“I’m Evan by the way.”
She smiled and laughed. “I get it. Bi the way. Clever.”
Evan felt his cheeks get warm.
Especially when Jo picked up a “I’m bisexual, you’re confused” pin and stuck it on her messenger bag.
“Do you go to a lot of these events?” She asked.
And Evan, blushing, nodded. “I. Uh. Yeah. I do.”
“Maybe I’ll see you around.”
“Yeah. Maybe.” He said.
Jo waved as she walked away.
“Fuck, you really are bi. Hope Connor’s not the jealous type.”
“Maybe not. But she was. Damn,” Tom said, smirking. “I wish I was bi. That girl was hot.”

Evan went home the weekend before Halloween. Tom was having some friends in town for a big party, but Evan didn’t really feel up to partying. So he made plans to go home, spend some time with his mom, pass out candy to the trick-or-treaters... maybe convince Connor to watch a scary movie and make out during most of it.

His mom picked him up Thursday night because his Friday class was cancelled, and Evan was looking forward to relaxing for a couple of days.

He knew Connor worked Thursday nights, so he wasn’t expecting to see him before ten at the earliest.

But then it was ten thirty and his mom looked over at him, frowning, saying, “No Connor tonight?”
And Evan frowned. “I thought he said he was going to stop by...” He pulled his phone out and texted Connor.
“You still coming over?”
The reply was almost instant. “Fuck. You’re home?”
“Yeah,” Evan texted back. “I thought you said you were going to come over after your shift?”
“Shit. I’m sorry. I wrote that down for next weekend.”
“It’s alright,” Evan texted back. “Do you just want to come over now?”
Evan watched the three dots flashing. Then stop. Then start again. Then stop and vanish. Then, finally, “I’m actually at a work friend’s party, and I’ve been drinking so I can’t drive. Sorry. I got the dates wrong.”

Evan frowned. “It’s fine. I could come pick you up?”

Three dots. Disappear. Three dots. “Sure. I left my car at work. I’ll text you the address.”

“Mom, can I borrow your car?”

His mom looked at him, a little surprised. “Yeah, sweetie. What for?”

“Connor needs a ride.”

“Is his car okay?”

“Yeah. He just ended up at a party…”

His mom nodded. “I remember college. I’m glad he’s not driving. Keys are on the hook.”

“Thanks.”

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**Am I More Than You Bargained For Yet?**

This was not some college party, Evan realized.

He had expected a lot of kids, beer pong.

A lot of these people were in their twenties.

Evan felt uneasy.

He was sitting in his mom’s car, texting Connor.

Waiting.

No reply.

Five minutes, then ten.

Evan took a deep breath. Got out of the car. And walked inside. The door was wide open.

The house was smoky, and it reeked of weed and cigarettes. Evan bit his lip and started to walk through the house, looking for Connor. Very few lights were switched on. Some unfamiliar rock music was playing. He walked through the living room, then the kitchen, then finally, after checking the bathroom, walked out into the backyard.

“Connor?”

He found him taking a rip off a bong, sitting at a picnic table. “Oh, shit,” Connor said, putting the bong down. “Evan? You’re here?”

“You said I could come pick you up.”

“Oh… right.” Connor looked a little confused at the person next to him.
“Who’s the little guy?” Asked a guy sitting beside Connor.

“That’s… uh. He’s my boyfriend.”

“Dude, you’re gay?”

“Shut up.”

“Connor?” Evan tried again.

“Oh. Right. I gotta go, sorry,” He said to the guy he was sitting with. “Come on Evan.”

The guy at the picnic table parroted Connor’s voice back, but higher pitched. “Come on Evan.”

Evan hurried away from the party, Connor trailing behind him.

Connor was smoking weed again.

Connor was drunk.

*Connor forgot he was coming home.*

The moment they were in Evan’s car, Evan knew he had two options.

Say nothing and hope it got better.

Spit it out and risk making it worse.

“Connor?”

“Yeah?”

“What the hell?”

Admittedly he probably could have phrased that better.

“Sorry?” Connor said.

“You’re… you’re high, which you said you were trying to not do anymore, you’ve clearly been drinking, which you also said you were trying not to do so much, and you kind of blew me off… so I’m not like exactly super happy right now.”

“Jesus I don’t get one night off?”

“What does that mean?”

“It means that you get to go out and have fun away at school and the one time I go out with some people from my school, it’s a thing with you.”

“Because you told me you were going to try to stop smoking so often!”

“I haven’t smoked in like *over* a month.”

“We were supposed to hang out. You said that you would come over after you got off of work.”

“I’m sorry! I wrote down the wrong weekend. Contrary to what you might think, Evan, I don’t actually just sit at home weeping over a photo of us at the prom until you grace us all with your
Now Evan was getting pissed. “You told me that it was fine that I was going away to school! You said that I should go and that I would be good. You told me that we were—”

“No! No, you told me we were fine. You told me that every. Fucking. Day. Until you up and left and now I’m just what? I’m supposed to do nothing ever because you’re not around?”

“You’re not supposed to be hanging out with people like that—”

“Like what, Evan? Like what?”

Evan bit his lip.

But Connor wasn’t dropping it. “What kind of people am I hanging out with Evan?”

“Please stop, I’m sorry, I went too far—”

“What kind of people?”

“Stoners, losers, lowlives, dropouts! Fucking idiots who go to community college at twenty five after barely scraping by in high school. Is that what you want me to say?”

“Yeah, if that’s what you really think of me, then yeah—”

“I don’t think that about you.”

“Just everyone like me, is that it? People who were barely scraping by in high school? Because we’re all just idiots to you.”

“Jesus, have you taken anything else?”

“What?”

“Are you on anything else? I just want to make sure.”

“Are you fucking kidding me?” Connor said. “I had like three beers and and one fucking bong hit, maybe let’s chill out.”

“Just tell me if you’re on anything else—”

“I’m not, Jesus, Evan—”

“I just need to know—”

“I’M NOT ON ANYTHING FUCKING ELSE.”

Evan had heard Connor raise his voice before. A lot, in fact.

But never at him. At least, never first. He’d yelled back a few times. This was different.

It was a little unnerving.

Evan pulled over, just immediately, on a side road near the bridge (near the water tower) in the middle of the night, no street lights, and he knew instinctively that Connor was going to get out of the car the moment it stopped but he stopped the car anyway because he couldn’t drive like this.

“What the hell, Connor?”
“Fuck!”

“Where are you going?” Evan shouted, getting out too, following him.

“I’m going to fucking walk home since you’ve done nothing but lecture me since the second that I got in the car and I don’t want to be around you right now.”

“Connor, get back here. That’s at least ten miles and it’s freezing. Come on.”

“No. Also, fuck you.”

Evan knew he probably should have stopped pushing ages ago, but everything Connor said just got him more angry and now he was a person walking down the side of a rural highway, screaming at his boyfriend to get back in the car.

He was that guy now.

“Connor, come on!”

“Fuck off.”

“I’m sorry!” Evan yelled. “I’m sorry, okay? Just please come back.”

Connor slowed.

Evan realized that Connor was letting him catch up.

“Is that it?” Connor said, voice hollow.

“Is what it?”

“Are you done with me?”

Evan shook his head, dread welling up inside of him. “No. No I… No!”

“Is this it for us? Because if it is I just need to know so I-”

“Connor…”

“You’ve seemed pissed off at me all night and we’re fighting literally all of the time so if that’s what you want just do it now so I can-”

“Connor, we’ve been together for over a year, do you think just once you could stop assuming that I’m breaking up with you if we fight?”

A beat. “You’re not breaking up with me?”

“No!”

“Are you sure?”

“What?”

“You literally never yell and you were yelling…”

“I’m freaked out, you’re not acting like yourself. You’ve been doing bett-”
“Or I’m acting exactly like myself and you’ve just decided that I’m different.”

“Connor.”

“What if it’s not me?” He said, the far off headlights washing out his face. “What if the person you love isn’t real? Isn’t me? What if it’s just something that comes out of being heavily medicated? What if I’m actually as messy, as harsh and awful as I was before I went on them because that’s just who I am? What if they stop working, what if it comes back?”

“Connor,” Evan tried to say gently.

“I’ve… it’s getting bad again, okay? Not yet, not now, but I know something’s wrong and I… I don’t know what it is but something isn’t right and nobody is listening to me.” He stopped. Hand through his hair. “I’m fucking ruining this. This whole thing… because I can’t keep it together.”

“So tell me about it…” Evan said. Pleading. “Please. Just tell me. I’m here. Right here.”

“For how long? How much more of this can you take? This isn’t what you signed up for.”

“What?”

“I know… It’s what you’re thinking, it’s what I’m fucking thinking. I’m supposed to be fine by now. And I’m just fucking not. I’m not fine.”

“Connor, come on.”

“It’s… nothing’s fucking different. Not for me. I’m just as fucked up and just as stuck here and you look at me like you’re looking at me right now and it just…”

“You think things are easier for me?” Evan said, his voice harder than he meant it to be.

“Well aren’t they? You’re sleeping at night, your grades are fantastic, you’re off at school, you have friends, like, plural… You haven’t had a panic attack in weeks. You’re doing better. And I’ve… stalled out. I’m not getting better.”

“Connor.”

“You’re fine. And I’m supposed to be but I just can’t get there…”

Evan’s anger just flared and he just… lost it. Fists balled tightly, blood pounding too loudly in his ears, and he let out some kind of garbled, angry, foreign noise.

And then Evan said the sort of thing you can’t take back. “Well why the fuck aren’t you then? Why aren’t you fine or better or whatever? What aren’t you doing? Because… because. It should be getting better by now, right? If you’re doing what you’re supposed to, it should be… It’s been over a year. And it’s fucking exhausting watching you struggle. It’s… I don’t know what I’m not doing to help, I just… I hate that I could wake up one morning to find out you’re just fucking gone. Still. After all of this time.”

Evan didn’t think he’d ever seen Connor’s eyes so wide. “You… you don’t think I’m trying?”

“I think you were… I think you’ve stopped trying as hard since I left.”

“You think I’m not trying…” Connor’s face was so so so wrong. He looked like he had just broken, then and there. “I’m just so fucking tired of trying so hard… And everyone is telling me that I’m not… And I’m just so tired, so done with this.”
Oh fuck.

Fuck.

Here there were again. A-fucking-gain.

“Connor.”

“No, wait... I… Evan, that came out wrong.”

“Connor…”

“I swear that’s not what I meant I just, it just, it came out wrong please, you have to listen to me, Evan…” He was just babbling then. Evan didn’t think he had ever seen him look quite so scared. So scrambled and freaked out.

“You swear?”


Evan understood the implicit in that statement, because last time Connor had been hospitalized he hadn’t been so restrained in his begging: Please don’t make me go back there please please please I’ll get better just don’t send me back there please please!

Evan got it. He wouldn’t give the psych ward a great Yelp review either.


Connor shook his head. “Not doing great, no.”

“What do you need me to do? Call your parents? Take you to the hospital?”

Connor shook his head. “I just need to sleep. See how I feel then.”

“Okay.”

“Evan?”

“Hm?”

“I’m so, so sorry… about tonight. About everything…”

Evan closed the distance between them, taking Connor’s hand. “It’s alright.”

“It’s not.”

“Yeah but... you apologized. And I forgive you. So.”

“Okay.”

“Good.”

“Great.”

“Awesome.”

“Cool.”
And they walked back to the car. Connor said. “I’m trying. I really am.”

“I know.”

When Evan woke up, Connor was awake. Sitting in the chair across the room. He looked like shit. Evan felt like shit.

He knew. He knew he knew heknewheknew.

“We need to talk.”

“I know,” Evan said. He picked at the blanket on his bed. He didn’t even know if he wanted to cry or just go back to sleep and pretend it was all a bad dream.

“We can’t…We can’t keep doing this.”

“I know.”

“It’s not working.”

“I know.”

“...This fucking sucks.”

“It does.”

“I’m starting to… to resent you. It’s not healthy. I don’t want...”

“I know.”

“Maybe we just… call it.”

“Okay.” Now Evan was crying. “So… this is it?”

“I don’t…” Connor sighed. His nose was red and his chin was sort of wobbling. He kept shifting his jaw. “I guess.”

“I don’t know how this works,” Evan said. Wiped his face. “How do we end this?”

Connor shrugged. He looked just… Gone. He looked so far removed from the situation.

And Evan knew it wasn’t his job to pull Connor back anymore. Maybe it never was his job. It broke his heart. “I think we already have.”

“Ohkay.”

“Ohkay.”

Evan waited. Waited for them to continue, their little joke, the little routine, carry on with vague platitudes.

“Perfect.”

“Awesome.”
“Great.”

They didn’t.

“Can I… can we still talk or…?” Evan said, suddenly desperate for something. Anything. Grabbing on tight to whatever was left. “It’s just… it’s just that I… you’re my best friend and I-”

“Jared’s your best friend,” Connor said.

“No, no, that’s… no. You are.”

“No. I’m not. We weren’t ever really friends, Evan.”

“Don’t… you don’t get to rewrite this, Connor. We were. You are.”

“We were suicide partners. Then boyfriends. We… we weren’t friends.”

“Connor, please, come on…”

“I have to go.”

“Connor-”

“I have a class, and I’ve got to get my car still.”

“I can… I’ll drive you, I’ll…”

“Evan.”

He stopped. That hollowness in his chest just overwhelmed him. He gasped, audibly gasped, he was positive that he was dying.

Was this really happening? This wasn’t what Evan wanted. He didn’t want this. He knew he knew he knew he fucked it up.

“I’ll… We’ll figure out when I can give you your stuff back.”

“Keep it,” Evan said, hollowly. “I don’t. I don’t want any of it.”

“Evan. Jesus. I’ll drop it off or something.” Connor was on his feet now. Connor was leaving. This was it. It was over.

It couldn’t be it. It couldn’t be over.

“Please… can we talk about this?”

Connor shook his head. “I’m really tired of talking.”

“Connor…”

“Look I’m going to be late. I have to get going. I’ll… I’ll see you around or something..”

And then he was gone.

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**Bitter Tears and Broken Hearts**
Evan went back to bed.

When he woke up again, around noon, Evan only got out of bed because he was starving. He headed for the kitchen, intending to eat the leftover pizza from the night before and heading straight back to bed.

He nearly had a heart attack when he saw Zoe Murphy sitting on his sofa, flipping through channels. Her hair had purple in it now. Evan didn’t know when she had changed it; the streak in Connor’s hair had been touched up in weeks.

“Zoe?”

“Oh hey, you’re up.”

“Don’t you have school?”

“Yeah I called out. I decided it was a good day to fake period cramps.”

“Why are you here?” Translation: do you know?

“Because I obviously can’t go home or Mama Murphy will have my head.”

“How’d you get in?”

“You guys have a hide-a-key in a potted plant. Come on.”

“...Have you talked to Connor?”

“Yeah. I’m sorry, dude. It sucks.”

Evan stared. “So... you’re still talking to me? Even though Connor and I broke up?”

Zoe looked at him like he was particularly stupid. “Yeah? We’re friends.”

“Oh.”

“Do you want to do sad break up stuff?”

Evan came and sat next to Zoe. “What even is break up stuff?”

“Eat ice cream, watch romcoms and cry, burn everything that reminds you of Connor?”

Evan shook his head. “I think most of that is girl stuff.”

“Well. Still.”

“No. I don’t want to do any of that.”

“Do you want to go spend a bunch of my parents’ money?”

“Not really.”

“Just want to watch crappy daytime TV?”

“Yeah. That’d be great.”

“Okay.”
When Evan’s mom found out, she looked really surprised.

They stayed in for most of the weekend, him and his mom. They ordered a lot of takeout and Evan let her buy him ice cream even though he didn’t really feel much like ice cream.

Evan felt a little bit better.

But not great or good or even fine.

School dragged when he got back.

Evan tried to just… keep his head up.

He got inundated with texts. From Jared, from Alana. Jared was not sympathetic at first. He spammed Evan’s inbox with questions: “What the fuck? You two broke up? You’re my OTP, what the fuck? Who dumped who?”

“It was a mutual thing.”

“That’s what people who got dumped say.”

“Fuck off Jared. Can you not do that? Please.”

“Jesus, sorry. I just didn’t realize that you literally had no heart anymore.”

“Jared what the hell?”

“I just mean he’s clearly fucked up and you fight with him for getting high, like, once?”

“Is that what he said?”

“It’s what Zoe said.”

“Look the fight wasn’t just about that, okay? And he was the one who called it off so maybe lay off.”

Alana was worried. About both of them. “You’re keeping up with therapy?”

“Of course.”

“And you’re talking about it?”

“Yeah. It’s not exactly fun. But yeah. I am.”

“I’m glad you’re working through it. I’m so sorry things didn’t work out with you two.”

“Thanks Alana.”

“I just talked Connor yesterday. Do you want to know how he’s doing?”

“No, thank you though.”

“Okay.”
Evan went out with his roommate Tom and sometimes his boyfriend Oscar too. Tried to keep busy. A lot of the time he and Tom just hung out and watched old episodes of Law & Order: SVU. Or went to the library. Evan got a lot of studying done now that he didn’t have a boyfriend anymore.

Slight upside. He supposed.

Thanksgiving at the Kleinmans’. Another year.

Jared seemed to have mostly forgiven Evan for getting dumped. Which was nice of him, Evan thought grumpily.

“So how’s your semester going?” Evan asked him.

“Frankly I’m so stressed out I’m tempted to ask you to sell me some Xanax, and I literally don’t have time to be home for a full weekend.”

“I’m sorry.”

“ Seriously, can I buy a Xanax off of you?”

“Um. No. I actually need those?”

Jared rolled his eyes. “Buzzkill.”

“Whatever.”

“How’s your semester going?” Jared asked him.


“You hitting that?”

“No, he has a boyfriend…”

“Sorry I haven’t made it up to visit yet.”

“No worries. Busy time. Maybe next semester?”

“Oh absolutely. I hear your school has this massive block party the weekend before finals.”

“That… doesn’t really make sense,” Evan said, laughing. “Shouldn’t that be when you’re studying?”

“Exactly, which is why you are absolutely taking me this year. We’ll get shit faced. Make a day of it.”

“Jared, do you actually do any work at school?”

“Sometimes.”

Evan rolled his eyes.
The whole group of them, Alana, Zoe, Jared, Evan, and Connor, were supposed to go Black Friday shopping together. It had been on the books for months, since summer.

Evan was nervous about it. He hadn’t seen Connor, hadn’t talked to him in nearly a month. It tore him up, not knowing how Connor was doing, what he was up to, was he going to therapy, was he still taking his meds, did he miss Evan like Evan missed him?

Evan wondered, distantly, what his promises from summer meant now that they had broken up? Did he still love Connor? Obviously. But what did you do with that when they didn’t want you anymore?

“Is he actually coming?” Evan texted Alana anxiously around nine. They were slated to meet at Jared’s at ten.

“He said so. Is that going to be an issue? I’d say we ought to drive separately but parking at the mall is going to be difficult.”

Evan, who didn’t like crowds, wondered why he had agreed to do this again. This was a nightmare. “Just wanted to mentally prepare. Thanks.”

Alana borrowed her parents’ minivan for the occasion.

Evan supposed it made sense for her to have stashed Connor in the front seat when she picked up the Murphys. Evan sat in back, next to Zoe, with Jared taking the very back seat, threatening to unbutton his pants, complaining about being full.

“Kleinman if you flash your junk at my sister-’’ Connor started from the passenger seat.

“Connor, come on, I’m the girlfriend, let me make the threats,’’ Alana said. “Jared, if you even think about unbuttoning your pants in this car, I will personally ensure that you have to eat every meal for the rest of your days through a straw.”

“Damn,’’ Jared said.

“She’s pre-med. She means it,’’ Connor said.

“I fucking love her,’’ Zoe stage-whispered to Evan. He laughed.

After they had hit a few stores open all night at the mall, Connor approached Evan. Tapped his shoulder.

“Can I talk to you for a minute?’’

Zoe looked at Connor, an eyebrow raised.

“Alone.’’ He said, raising both of his eyebrows at his sister.

She looked at Evan, who shrugged, and then headed off to find Alana in the crowded H&M. Evan turned to Connor.
“Come with me quick? I just don’t want to get trapped in the line.”

Evan nodded and followed Connor out of the store, out the exit door, and outside into the cold, dark night. He recalled how maybe even a year ago he would have taken this as a sign that Connor was absolutely going to murder him.

“What’s up?” Evan asked.

“Um,” Connor said, and he pulled a folded up piece of paper from his jacket pocket. “I got in. To… your school. Early acceptance.”


“Uh… thanks,” Connor said. “Look, do you mind if I smoke? I’ve been trying the stupid nicotine gum but it tastes like a used condom.”

Evan shrugged. What did he care anymore?

So Connor lit a cigarette. And blew out a nervous breath. “So. I wanted to ask you if it was… still okay if I went.”

Evan blinked. Oh.

“That’s not really my call, Connor.”

“I know. But. I’m asking… if it’s okay with you if I still go?”

“Yeah. Sure. It’s what you wanted to do…”

Connor gave him a small smile. “Thank you…”

They fell silent.

“Evan?”

“Yeah?”

“I’m so sorry.”

Evan nodded. Swallowed hard. “I am too. I’m so sorry.”

“Could we… maybe talk? Obviously not right now, but maybe when you’re on break next month? I just… I.”

“Yeah,” Evan said, trying to smile. “That sounds like a good idea.”

“Okay.”

“Okay,” Evan repeated.

“Great,” Connor said. Smiling knowingly.

“Awesome.”
You Know the More I Try, the Less I Want to Let You Go

It wasn’t that Evan just assumed that he and Connor would get back together.

But.

Well, what if they did?

Did he want that?

Yes. So much. He missed Connor like you miss a vital organ. Or like you’d miss your front two teeth. Or like you’d miss a limb.

Was it a good idea to get back together?

That Evan didn’t know.

So, back at school the next week, he asked Dr. Williams. “I know he didn’t actually say that’s what he wants,” Evan said. “But… I want to figure out what I want.”

“That’s very mature of you, Evan,” Dr. Williams said. “But here’s the question I want to know: What will you do if you want to resume your relationship and Connor does not?”

Evan frowned. “I guess… I’d be sad. For sure. But. I guess. I just want us both to be happy. And you can’t really be with someone if they don’t want to be in it with you. And if we did get back together… well I know it wouldn’t always be easy. We both put a lot of pressure on ourselves before. So. Even if I want it, and he doesn’t… I guess. That would be okay. Painful, but okay. I would still be glad to have had what we did. He’s a huge part of my life.”

Dr. Williams smiled. “Well, it sounds like you have a good idea of how to move forward.”

Evan had finished all of his finals.

Tom had left already for the holidays. Oscar picked him up. They looked really happy.

Evan was trying to be excited about the holidays.

He was a bit nervous about talking to Connor. He hadn’t, not since Thanksgiving. They hadn’t picked a date yet.

Evan sat there, on his top bunk that Connor had helped set up.

And he thought.

About Connor. About them together.

About how much of a disaster the beginning was. The nights last winter, sleepless, where they just texted each other constantly, trying to just stay alive. Together.

How their first “I love you”s came on fast and sudden and how they waited weeks before either of
them dared to say it again, both of them confessing later that they were scared of what that meant.

He thought about that time they got high on school grounds and evaded being caught by some insane level of luck. How Connor tried his best to comfort Evan when he started to get paranoid and anxious.

Evan thought about Connor’s laugh. And what made him laugh. Like Jared’s tasteless jokes. And dark humor. And spamming Evan’s phone with emojis when he thought Evan was concentrating on something too hard.

He thought about all of their firsts. Evan’s first time high, first time drunk, Connor was even in the room when Zoe gave Evan his first kiss. First time having sex, first time having good sex.

Connor on the plane to Colorado with him.

Connor on Evan’s front step after Valentine’s Day, apologizing for going to the hospital, as if Evan was actually angry and not scared out of his mind. Asking Evan if he ruined it. Evan telling him that he literally never could so long as he was alive (not in so many words, of course).

Connor in his glasses. Connor humoring Evan’s weird thing about librarians.

Connor asking, “Am I your boyfriend?” even though it was obvious that he was. Obvious that Evan was so completely his.

Getting Connor to tell Evan what he liked about himself.

Slow dancing at prom, holding hands after graduation.

Connor’s silly Starbucks snaps. Connor and Zoe singing around the campfire at the Kleinmans’. Connor hugging Alana, wiping his eyes, embarrassed and touched after her speech at graduation.

Connor getting Evan’s favorite tree tattooed on his arm. Connor who was a little shy about his feelings, wearing them literally on his sleeve for forever. For everyone to see.

Connor was in all of his good memories.

Connor saying he couldn’t bet on himself to make it through another year at the end of the summer. Connor, in the hospital… Not once or twice but three times. The scars on Connor’s arms. Connor texting him that Evan’s mom had to give him a paper bag to breath into after they dropped Evan at school. Connor telling Evan in his room back home that they should call it.

Connor was in a lot of the bad memories too.

But the good outweighed the bad.

He thought.

No.

He knew.

So, before he could think too hard on it, Evan pulled his laptop onto his lap.

And with shaking fingers, began to type.

*Dear Connor Murphy,*
Kind of weird that I’m starting with your full name…

What’s your middle name? I never asked. Selfish that way. I’m sorry about that.

Anyway.

I know we haven’t decided when we’re talking.

And I know you have every single right to ignore this and never speak to me again. And I keep telling myself that I can wait until I hear from you. I keep telling myself that I’m not the desperate type.

But the thing is: I love you.

And I meant what I said at the end of the summer. I love you. And I will love you. And I have loved you. And we’ve been through hell, both of us. And frankly, it’s a lot better to go through it with you by my side. I’d rather be sad with you than anywhere away from you.

So. If you think we’re still worth something… if you think we’re worth another shot.

Well.

So do I.

So let me know.

I love you. I just wanted to say it again. Even if you don’t. I just wanted to tell you. Again. I love you. And I’ve missed you. I love you.

(Again and again and again. Ad nauseam. Into infinity.)

Love (literally all of it),

Evan

Evan sent it as a facebook message.

And then closed his laptop.

It was probably too early for dinner at five o’clock, but he was starving and it was already dark. So he climbed off of his bed. Put on his shoes, coat, hat, and gloves.

Tucked his phone into his pocket.

Evan stopped. Realizing that now that his classes were all finished, he could read for fun again.

What a nerd.

He looked at his bookshelf.

Smiled, sadly, realizing he still had the copy of The Perks of Being a Wallflower he had given Connor for his birthday on the shelf. He had never returned it. Connor had insisted that Evan take it back to school to finish after they read the first half in the early hours of the day after Connor’s birthday.
Evan picked up the book.  
And set out for the dining hall. 

His phone rang about an hour and a half later, just as Evan was returning to his dorm. Evan didn’t recognize the number, but it had already called once and hadn’t left a voicemail. “Hello?”

“Is this Evan Hansen?”

“Yes.”

“I’m at Mercy Hospital. I’m calling about Connor Murphy? You’re listed in his phone as an emergency contact.”

Evan’s heart stopped.

What.

Also.

He knew that hospital.

It was less than a mile from campus.

“What? What’s going on? Is Connor okay?”

“Are you a relative? We’ve contacted the other emergency contacts but didn’t get an answer.”

“Yeah, I’m his… stepbrother,” Evan said, inventing wildly. “What happened? Is he okay?”

“Mr. Murphy was struck by a moving vehicle in a pedestrian walkway. He is stable and conscious but it looks like he may have broken his arm.”

Evan’s heart was still too tight in his chest.

“But he’s okay?”

“As I said, he may have fractured his arm-”

“And you’re at Mercy?” He checked that this was the hospital he was thinking of. It was.

“I’m on my way,” Evan said.

He hung up.

Evan didn’t remember the trip to the hospital. He just knew that when he stepped outside he realized the sidewalks were slick with ice and he just.

Hailed a cab.

The ride took at least ten minutes because of the conditions.

The walk to the emergency room took longer.
“I’m here to see Connor Murphy…” He lied again saying that he was Connor’s stepbrother because he couldn’t just leave him alone in the emergency room.

There was a doctor in baby blue scrubs frowning at Connor when Evan got there. He couldn’t see Connor without stepping behind a screen, so he waited.

“I would really recommend something for the pain. Your arm is broken. I can see that without an X-Ray.”

“I understand that,” Connor said through gritted teeth. “But I used to pop pills for fun, and I think it would probably be a bad idea to give me morphine.”

“Well if-”

“Can you just give me some Ibuprofen or something? The other doctor said it was going be a while since the X-Ray is backed up…”

The doctor in baby blue scrubs marched off, looking irritated.

Evan stepped behind the curtain.

Connor didn’t look good. There was a bloody gash above his eyebrow, blood in his hair, and his left arm looked… broken.

Evan’s own arm tingled uncomfortably at the sight.

“Evan? Wh-what are you doing here?”

“I’m an emergency contact in your phone.”

Connor cast his eyes toward the floor. “Oh. Right. I never changed that.”

“Are you okay? The person on the phone said you got hit by a car? What are you even doing here?”

“Oh, you know, I’m fine…” Connor smiled, but it didn’t look quite right. Probably because he had been hit by a car. “I. Uh. Got your message. I was coming to talk to you.”

“Oh.” Evan couldn’t help but be embarrassed about the way his heart sped up.

“It started pouring right as I parked in the visitor lot, and I was crossing the street, thinking, idiotically, that I’d just march right up to your door and… anyway, the car hit a patch of ice, I think? They were trying to stop.”

“Oh my god.” He didn’t ask what Connor was coming up to say. That wasn’t what was important; he was alive, and relatively unharmed.

“Don’t you want to know what I was coming up to say?”

Evan shook his head. “Maybe once you’re patched up.”

“I’ve got a broken arm and nothing but time to kill,” Connor said, smiling, sort of.

“I just…” Evan sighed. He wasn’t sure he was ready for whatever the verdict was. “Okay.”

“I…” He paused. Eyes screwed up in concentration. “Fuck I should have known I would have ended up in the hospital. Being hospitalized is totally my move now…” Connor cleared his throat. “I
think… Of course I think we’re worth another shot. Of course I do. I was an idiot to ever throw away our first one.”

Evan couldn’t help it; his eyes swam instantly. “You’re sure?”

“Yes.”

“And what about the distance? What if you… meet people who are less of a mess than I am?”

“Well. I’ll love you.”

Evan grinned far too much for someone staring at the person they loved in a hospital bed. “I’ll love you too.”

“So… Are we back together then?”

Evan nodded. “I want to hug you so badly but… You’re kind of a mess right now.”

“I know,” Connor said, wincing. “Just want to hold my hand then?”

So Evan did. His right hand, of course. He just kept talking, letting Connor squeeze tightly when the pain got bad, tracing the outline of Connor’s tattoo while they waited. First for X-Rays, then through a few stitches in his forehead, then to get Connor’s left arm set, then to see if he was okay to go home.

Connor was cleared. He’d cut his head on broken glass in the road. No concussion.

And Evan called first his mom, and then Zoe to explain what happened. That Connor was hurt but fine. That he was staying in Evan’s room for the night since the roads were too slick to drive. Even though, technically speaking, there was a rule against overnight guests during finals.

“Can I get you anything?” Evan asked once Connor was settled on the futon.

“Something else to wear? I’m covered in blood…”

“God, I didn’t even notice since all of your clothes are black.”

Connor grinned.

Evan found some pajamas. And helped Connor get changed, since he was still struggling to get used to the cast.

He had a few big bruises on his hip and knee.

“Admittedly, I didn’t think this would be the first way you’d get me naked…” Connor mumbled.

“You need to sleep,” Evan said softly, kissing Connor’s cheek once he helped to pull Connor’s broken arm through the sleeve of a t-shirt.

“Stay with me?”

Evan agreed.

He curled himself around Connor on the futon, thankful that it was comfortable.

“I’m sorry you got hit by a car.”
“Me too. I would not suggest it.”

Evan laughed softly. Then said, “Wait!”

“Hmm…?”

“I need to sign your cast.”

Connor gave him a look. “I guess.”

Evan crossed to his desk. He came back with a sharpie.

In massive letters, Evan spelled out his name.

Which made Connor laugh.

But Evan wasn’t quite finished.

In smaller letters, above he wrote “Property of:” and then “Hansen” below. “Just so you don’t get any ideas about backing out now.”

Connor cracked up laughing.

It was Evan’s favorite sound in the entire world.

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We'll Make Them So Jealous

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Another New Year had dawned.

This year, the festivities at Alana’s were a little more subdued. Just the five of them. Ringing in the new year with a bottle (or three) of champagne and the television.

Evan wouldn’t have had it any other way.

Connor’s cast had been signed by the rest of them. Once they finished laughing at the way Evan had signed it.

Jared nearly wet himself. He had rushed to the bathroom pretty frantically.

Connor wasn’t letting him live that down.

Everyone seemed happy to see that they were back together.

Nobody happier than Evan and Connor, of course.

As the dawn approached, Evan found himself on the Beck’s deck. Connor at his side. They watched the sun come up, holding hands.

“Any big plans for this year?” Connor asked Evan.

“I think I’ll stay alive,” Evan said. Smiled.
“Good plan.” Connor kissed him.

And his heart swelled.

They turned, breaking apart, when they heard Jared knocking on the sliding door. “Get it! Let love win! OTP!”

“He is so jealous,” Connor said, rolling his eyes.

“Yeah. He is.”

“So… another year? Think we’ve got it in us?” Connor asked, pulling Evan in close.

“Yeah, I do,” Evan said.

“Good.”

“Great.”

“Perfect.”

“Awesome.”

Chapter End Notes

Songs:
- When the Day Met the Night - Panic! at the Disco
- Don’t Take the Money - Bleachers
- Back in Your Head - Tegan and Sara
- Girls/Girls/Boys - Panic! at the Disco
- Sugar, We’re Goin’ Down - Fall Out Boy
- Teenagers - Hayley Williams
- Back to Me - Allison Weiss
- It’s Not a Side Effect of the Cocaine I Am Thinking It Must Be Love - Fall Out Boy

Well... That's all for now. I swear this won't be the last I write for this fandom. Thank you all for the kindness. For sticking with this roller coaster. For sending your thoughts to me. I love you.

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!