Refractory

by Nesswrites

Summary

Refractory
adj. (rih-frack-tuh-ree) 1. Stubborn or unmanageable. 2. Resistant to a process or stimulus.

Kravitz, a young orthopedic surgeon, is thrust into what feels like a different reality when he meets psychiatric patient, Taako. In a strange flurry of events, he finds himself being drawn toward this man, spending more and more time in a department that he used to hate and becoming invested in a patient who isn’t one of his own.

Taako, an in-denial anorexia patient, is forced into a long-term hospital stay by friends and family who worry about his waning health. When he meets an attractive doctor from another wing, he begins to wonder if maybe this was the star-crossed love that he was always destined for. At least, that’s what hundreds of episodes of Grey’s Anatomy taught him.

In other words, the hospital drama nobody wanted but everyone got. Now complete!

Notes
Hello! Here I go again with another intricate AU idea. This is going to a pretty angst heavy hospital AU, so anyone who is unsettled by hospital settings or themes, I'd recommend skipping this one. I've been working on making this a fully thought out plot before I jumped into posting and I hope all of this hard work pays off! I've never really written for The Adventure Zone before but I've seen some people headcanoning Kravitz in a medical profession of some sorts and as someone who has lived with an eating disorder for the past several years, this is something that is kind of near and dear to me.

Shoutout to friends Jared and Nat for helping with plot and suggesting as well as my sister! I'll do my best to keep the tags updated and to update (hopefully) twice a week, on Wednesdays and Saturdays, at least over the summer! Find me at ness-writes.tumblr.com for questions and conversations! Thank you so much for reading, and I hope you enjoy!
Chapter 1: Kravitz

Kravitz’s least favorite wing of the hospital has always been the psych ward. It isn’t often that he finds himself in that area, since orthopedics tended to deal in an entirely different manor, and he certainly wasn’t bothered by his infrequent visits.

Pushing the sleeves of his lab coat up, Kravitz sighed tiredly and focused on the ground. The psych ward just seemed so much… sadder, than the others. He wasn’t trying to discredit the plight of any hospital patients, whether there were there for extended stays or not, but the idea of being betrayed by your own mind was one that tended to get to him every time he thought about it. So, yeah, maybe he avoided the place, but sometimes his work drew him there and he simply couldn’t find a way around it.

Today, he had the patient file of a young woman who had a broken foot. It hadn’t been an exciting story, she’d tripped on the stairs while out walking, but Kravitz was nervous nonetheless. Thankfully the woman seemed in good spirits aside from the whole break situation, and she thanked him endlessly when he set her break and fit her for a boot.

The hospital was always a busy place, with constant motion and ever changing patients. The quiet moments were few and far between and more often than not doctors and nurses were being called from station to station, people were assisting in sections that weren’t their own, and there was always a patient crashing that needed resuscitation. Kravitz was always thankful for moments like this, when there was an easy fix and a thankful person. Far too often were people short and snapping, and while Kravitz knew that he was working with people on what was usually a very stressful day in their lives, he always appreciated, thoroughly, when the patients were kind.

The hospital was one of the nicer ones in the middle of the city. Appliances were new, the rooms were clean, and it was one full of widely renowned specialists. Kravitz had been on the staff for just over a year, having been hired on straight out of his residency from a teaching hospital nearby. He was thankful, of course, especially since this place only accepted the best and the brightest, and while his orthopedic prowess had been wonderful, his apparent composure and professionalism had been what sealed the deal.

The psychiatric wing was on the left half of the second floor, far away from Kravitz’s office and the orthopedic section on the third floor. There weren’t even any operating rooms, and while Kravitz spent some of his time setting breaks and studying x-rays, his days were mostly spent in the OR. That’s the way he liked it, though, because talking to patients and families was his least favorite part of the deal and at least for that, the patient was unconscious.

Tucking his folder under his arm and bidding the woman and the doctor farewell, Kravitz exited the room and left the ward feeling a little less heavy. He had an operation in two hours and it was about time for him to take his lunch break.

He’s contemplating whether he wants to leave the hospital to go to the Thai place across the street or if he just wants to eat in the cafeteria when he heard a commotion coming from one of the rooms to his left. He’d yet to exit the psych ward, so he knew it was probably just a patient having a bad day, but then Hurley, a nurse that was kind and small but fierce, poked her head out of the door. “Oh, Kravitz! Thank god, can you come here?”

Kravitz wished more than anything that he could sink into the ground and disappear. He’d been so close to freedom, so close to escaping without any issues, but there was Hurley, looking overwhelmed and desperate, and he changed directions and headed toward the room without too
much visible hesitation.

“There’s a patient here who is refusing medical treatment, we need help, maybe you can, uh, intimidate him a little?” She asked, smiling sheepishly up at him.

“Intimidate?” Kravitz chuckled. “I’m not so sure about that, but I suppose I could try to assist.”

Handing her the file he’d been holding, she flashed him the biggest, most relieved smile he’d ever seen her wear.

Now, Hurley was an incredibly competent nurse, so when she’d asked for help handling someone Kravitz was expecting someone much, well, bigger, than the man who was in the room. He was of average height, maybe on the taller side, but he was sick. He was almost skeletal, the clothes that he wore hanging off of him, his long, sandy hair pulled into a braid that was frizzing at the ends. Sloane was there, too, trying to reason with him, but every time she tried to get close, he scrambled in the other direction, looking absolutely venomous. Kravitz couldn’t get a good look at him, since his back was to him, but he was almost certain this was a patient suffering from a rather severe eating disorder.

“Dr. Sloane,” Kravitz said, as he stepped fully into the room. The man whipped his head around to glare in his direction, his posture stiffening.

“Good afternoon, Kravitz.” She said, though she didn’t smile at him.

Kravitz finally got a good look at the man standing in front of her, and he was actually taken aback for a moment. Yes, he looked sickly and far too thin and pale, but he was easily the most beautiful person Kravitz had ever seen. His messy hair was endearing, and his eyes were accentuated with a sparkly eyeshadow. Kravitz was sure he was wearing more makeup, but it looked almost natural, his skin perfectly smooth and freckled along his cheeks. It appeared as if he certainly hadn’t been planning on a trip to the hospital, dressed in maroon leggings and a dark sweater that practically swallowed him.

He was snapped out of his admiration when the man suddenly crossed his arms and glared at him. “Take a picture, dude, it’ll last longer.” He snipped.

Kravitz felt his cheeks heat up, glad that blushes had never shown well through his skin. “My apologies.” He said, blinking out of his revere.

“We were just having a hard time cooperating with the doctors.” Sloane said, taking a step forward. “Taako, please. We’re here to help, and you took a pretty bad fall while you were out shopping. We need to do a neurological exam.”

“Oh hell no.” The man, Taako, said. “Absolutely fucking not, don’t touch me.” He said, stumbling backwards and away from her. “I don’t need to be here! Don’t think I didn’t hear those paramedics, my dude, I’m not going to be admitted. I’m fine.”

“The tests they did in the ambulance showed that your blood sugar levels were far too low and that you were severely dehydrated.” She said, frowning. “And if you continue without some sort of treatment, you won’t get very far before you experience more fainting spells. All that aside, at the very least you need an MRI to ensure that you aren’t concussed. Nobody has spoken about admittance yet.”

Despite the level tone to Sloane’s voice, Taako seemed to sink further into the corner, and while his anger held strong, Kravitz doubted anything about this situation seemed okay to him.
“No. I want to go home.” Taako said, shaking his head firmly. “I don’t need to be here, I’m perfectly fine. I have places to be—“

Finally, Kravitz took a step forward, clearing his throat. “Taako, if you don’t mind me calling you that,” He began, holding a hand up. “We can’t let you go when your blood levels are so unstable. If you’d allow us to just take a blood sample and get you on an EKG, we can figure out what caused the fainting and send you on your way. Would you like to call your family, or someone who can come and wait with you?”

Taako looked at him for a long moment, wide eyed and calculating, and just as quickly as he’d been there, he was dashing for the exit. Kravitz stepped in front of the door, looking a little desperate. The last thing he wanted to do was to have to restrain a patient—he didn’t love interacting face to face in the first place. The man stopped in front of him, and for the first time, Kravitz realized how shaken he truly looked.

And then, Sloane was plunging something into the guys arm, and he shrieked, turning to her with absolute murder in his eyes before wavering slightly. He glanced around the room, looking completely thrown off, and breathing a quiet “fuck you,” before his knees were buckling and Kravitz was lunging to catch him in his arms.

“Was that really necessary?” Kravitz asked, unable to keep the bite out of his voice.

“Absolutely.” Sloan said, her shoulders slumping forward. “He was being unreasonable, you must be more dense than I imagined not to see how—how sick he is.”

“Of course I know how sick he is.” Kravitz said, sighing at the figure slumped in his arms, unconscious. “And I know he wouldn’t have been able to fight much longer and that we could have eventually convinced him to at least allow an EKG—“

“There’s no way he’d reason with us, Krav.” Hurley said shyly, from her spot in the doorway. “He needs to be admitted, this is the worst case of an eating disorder that I’ve ever seen. He needs help.”

“I know that.” Kravitz sighed, finally stooping a bit to lift Taako up, hating how limp he was in his arms and how he could feel every joint and bone through his clothes. “But now he’s going to hate this place and the likelihood of him trusting you all after that is pretty low.”

Once he’d gotten Taako positioned in the bed and Hurley began working to hook up the EKG, he started to step back, glancing to Sloane, who handed him the file he’d forgotten about earlier.

“You do know, Kravitz, that we have his best interests at heart, right? He fainted in a mall and someone called an ambulance when they couldn’t resuscitate him. He was unconscious the entire ride to the hospital; he weighs practically nothing for his height. I’m rather sure if he went out there again, he wouldn’t last very long. He needs professional help.”

Kravitz sighed. “Yes, I’m aware. I would highly recommend finding friends and family before he comes to, because he’ll probably tear that IV out and make a break for it.”

Sloane rolled her eyes, patting Kravitz on the shoulder. “Oh of course. Thank you for your sage advice on how to do my job. We’ll handle this. Go get back to breaking bones and such.”

Hurley smiled from Taako’s bedside and waved, and Kravitz waved back, turning toward the hallway and casting one last look at the man in on the cot.

Even the pillows and blankets seemed to envelop him. For just a moment, he allowed himself to think, to hope that he would be able to find the help that he needed here, that he could start to heal.
And with that thought, Kravitz turned around and headed out of the room, his shoes clicking in the empty hall as he went to get ready for his next surgery, his lunch break long forgotten.
Chapter 1: Taako

Chapter Summary

Taako's two favorite people show up shortly after he's admitted and give their input on whether or not he should stay in the hospital.

Taako is against it. Lup is persuasive. Magnus cries.

Chapter Notes

Hey guys! I'm here with chapter two of my angsty hospital AU! General warning again for hospital themes and talk of eating disorders, though that will likely be present in every chapter in the near future. Also, this story will shift from Kravitz's perspective to Taako's, probably alternating chapters usually! (So since this is a Taako chapter, next update will be Kravitz.)

Hit me up at ness-writes.tumblr.com for any questions or just to chat! Also, like Hurley and Sloane, there will probably be lots of character cameos in the hospital! The IPRE group is going to be a little different, but if anybody has any suggestions for characters to pop in, let me know! I hope you guys enjoy this chapter, and the next one will go up this Saturday!

The first thing that Taako noticed when he woke up was the unfamiliar ceiling. It wasn’t his own bedroom, which had a fan directly overhead, or Lup’s, which was covered in pictures of their friends, or even the ceiling in their living room that was splattered with paint from the day they’d decided the walls needed a new coat of paint and hadn’t done any of the proper preparation. No, this ceiling was boring and plain and outfitted with uniform tiles and flickering overhead lights.

The next thing he noticed was that, when he moved, he felt like he was pushing through tar. It took what seemed like a tremendous amount of energy just to force his eyes open, and far more to force himself into a sitting position. His thoughts were as sluggish as his movements, and he had to blink several times to get a hold of his surroundings.

Oh, yeah. He was in the hospital.

“Morning, sleeping beauty.”

Taako flinched visibly at the sudden noise, turning quickly enough to make his head spin. It was only Magnus, though, not one of the irritating hospital staff members from earlier. “Oh,” He said, hoping the relief wasn’t too evident on his face. “Hey, Mags. What’s up?”

Magnus turned the chair so it was facing the bed, raising an eyebrow. “What’s up? Oh, just chilling, watching the shitty hospital TV.” He said, rolling his eyes. “I got a call from the hospital in the middle of my shift saying that you had collapsed and the paramedics couldn’t wake you up. You scared the shit out of me.”
Taako shrugged, picking at a loose thread on the hospital gown he was now wearing. He was still wearing his leggings, (thank god,) but someone must have wrangled him out of his sweater while he was asleep. Gross.

“I just got dizzy while I was out shopping.” Taako said, waving a hand dismissively. “Let me tell you, my dude, this whole experience has been a trip. A doctor sedated me. Like, what’s up with that?” He asked incredulously.

“Taako,” Magnus started. He was looking at his hands, dressed in what Taako assumed were his work clothes. He’d probably rushed over in the middle of his shift or something equally as heroic sounding. “Look, I know you don’t want to… to talk about it, whatever, but—“ He paused, sighing, “This is serious, okay? This, this isn’t just some kind of joke. You’re in the hospital.”

Taako laughed, unable to keep the slightly nervous edge from seeping through. “Well, I’m at the hospital now, and they’ll do what they’ve got to do and I’ll be good again. Don’t get all sappy after I’m already stabilized, buddy.” As hard as he tried to make his voice sound confident, he spoke rushed and clunky, wanting more than anything to change the topic.

“They want to admit you, Taako.” Magnus said, wringing his hands.

“Bad news for them, I’m not sticking around.” Taako said simply, patting Magnus’ arm. “I know, it’s a big spook to see your bestie in the hospital and all, but it was just a fluke. I’m good as new, now, they—“He glanced down at his form, “They gave me this dope ass gown and put some stickers on my chest. I’m practically glowing.”

For the first time, Magnus looked up at him, his expression grim. “Taako, this isn’t a joke. You’re— they said you were malnourished, that you’re at risk for some, some refeeding syndrome? I don’t even know what that means but I googled it and it definitely isn’t good. I knew you weren’t—we all knew that you didn’t eat much, I saw that you were losing weight, but I didn’t realize that it was…” He had to stop, finally breaking eye contact. “I had no idea it was this bad, and I never said anything.”

Taako held up both hands, shaking his head quickly. “Woah, there, big guy. I’m doing fine, it’s not like I have some sort of problem. I passed out in the fuckin’ Earthbound because the incense got to me, it’s not some big thing.” He assured, though he dropped his hand and his fingers curled into the hem of the gown. “Look, Mango, I know this is stressing you out and all but I’m just ready to roll out. Let’s sign the papers and talk about this at home.”

“We’re not going home, Taako, we have to stay here. You’re—you’re malnourished, and underweight. You can’t just laugh about this and pretend it isn’t happening. They said that if you weren’t admitted, that if you keep going on like this, you’ll…”

Shit. Taako’s blood ran cold. Magnus was crying.

“Hey, hey.” Taako said, awkwardly scooting toward the edge of the bed and ignoring the way the room tilted around him. “Look, homie, I’m gonna need you to cut that shit out. I’m so not about to be the reason Magnus Burnsides cried, okay?” Magnus dropped his head into his hands, his shoulders trembling slightly as he drew in a breath.

“They said you could die, Taako, and it was stupid of me not to speak up when I knew something was wrong, but I’m not going to let it happen again. You need help, Taako.” He said, finally. “I’m not going to sign the discharge papers, not until we hear what the doctors have to say.”

Taako sighed, placing a hand on his shoulder and patting halfheartedly. “Didn’t they already tell
“They wanted to wait until you were up and Lup got here to discuss their treatment plan.” Magnus said, rubbing his eyes and dropping his hands. “She left work a little while ago, she should be here soon.”

“Fuck, okay.” Taako muttered, awkwardly dragging the pillows up behind him and leaning into them. Just sitting up and talking was beginning to drain his energy, and he wondered if he’d be able to get away with his usual dinner plan—pick at what seemed semi appetizing and ignore the rest. He doubted it. He would fight tooth and nail not to be stuck here for more than a few more hours, but he was beginning to worry that they wouldn’t let him leave.

They lapsed into quiet after that, Magnus chipping at the paint on his nails, (seriously? Taako had just given them a fresh coat of polish yesterday,) while Taako turned on the dingy television and found a cartoon station. Despite the heaviness in the room, the silence wasn’t terribly uncomfortable. Magnus was Taako’s closest friend, (though he’d never say it out loud,) and just having him nearby made him feel a little safer.

That was, until the door to the room slammed open and his sister barged in.

“Oh, hey, Taako, what the fuck is going on?” She asked, dropping her bag at the end of the bed and climbing on top, giving Taako only a second to shift over and make room for her. Making a face at all the equipment, she slowed, taking a gentler route to ensure she didn’t unplug anything.

Taako braced himself for impact, though it certainly wasn’t unpleasant. As soon as she was close enough, Lup was enveloping him into a tight hug, squeezing gentle but firm. “Start talking, now.”

She muttered into his hair, drawing back before he could even hug back and fixing him with a firm glare.

Taako opened his mouth to respond, but Lup cut in before he could begin. “Do you have any idea, Taako, how unsettling it is to get off work and to have missed calls from the hospital? How fucked up it is to listen to the messages the paramedics left you about your brothers ‘accident’? You scared the shit out of me, asshole!”

Taako sighed, rubbing tiredly at the bridge of his nose. “Look, Lup, it wasn’t—it isn’t a big deal. I was at the mall, in the Earthbound—you remember Earthbound, right?—Well, they have all of those fancy smelling things, and I got a little overwhelmed and must have collapsed.”

“Taako.” Lup said, turning toward him with the most serious expression he’d seen her wear in a long time. “I need you to listen to me, okay? I need you to take this seriously. The doctors are about to come in here, and I know that this is—this is hard for you, believe me, I do. But you can’t just keep pretending like it’s a joke. Please, for me, just listen to what they have to say.”

Taako felt like he’d just been punched in the stomach. These moments of sincerity were few and far between. They’d always bonded through other means, avoiding heart to hearts in favor of holding hands on bad days or bing ing a TV show that lightened the mood. The seriousness in Lup’s voice, the sincerity—it wasn’t something he took lightly.
“Okay.” Taako said finally, refusing to meet her eyes. “Only if you promise never to look at me like that again, okay?” Despite the fact that he wasn’t looking at her, he knew she was smiling.

“No promises, bro, but we’ll see how it goes.”

It was 5 minutes later that the doctor and nurse from earlier came inside, standing at the edge of Taako’s bed and going over, in excruciating details, their treatment plan.

There had been no technical diagnosis, yet, but they had plans for his first week and what it would entail. There’d be a full psychiatric evaluation, followed by a personalized plan for therapies, both individual and in groups, and workshops that would help build both Taako’s confidence and comfortability. From the tests they must have run while he’d been asleep, he’d been branded as severely underweight, and was put on bed rest so as not to burn calories that he needed to recover. He had a weak immune system, his body was all out of whack, and they’d be keeping him on IV fluids until they were able to build his strength back up.

They went over meal plans and options, things that they’d do to help Taako gain weight. He could listen to them talk about therapy, about bedrest, whatever, all day long, but when they began to explain their plan to feed him thousands of calories a day so he could get back to a healthy weight, he began to panic. The words made him feel nauseous, his heart rate racing in his ears. He felt as though he couldn’t breathe, wanting so badly to tell them to shut up, to apologize to Lup and to stop listening, but he’d made a promise, and he wasn’t about to be that big of a dick, not to his sister. He hadn’t realized how badly he was shaking until Lup grabbed his hand under the covers, lacing their fingers and giving a firm squeeze. It grounded him, a little, and the doctors, sensing his anxiety, smiled reassuringly and promised that it would all be gradual. They’d do everything they could to make sure that Taako was comfortable with the decisions being made.

By the time they finally retreated to give them some time to process, Magnus had cried twice. Lup had remained stone faced the entire time, though, her fingers holding tight onto Taako’s and staying that way even after they left.

“You know I can’t do this.” Taako said, finally, rubbing the bridge of his nose. “Lup, Mags—I’m not like this. It was—it was a stupid mistake, to be so forgetful, but I’m not sick. I don’t belong here.”

He hated how shaky his voice was, how desperate he sounded.

Lup was quiet for a long time, squeezing onto Taako’s hand and trying to find the words to say. “I’m sorry, Taako.” She said, finally. “I know that you hate this, and I swear to you, the moment you improve, the second they say that you’ll be okay at home, I will get you the hell out of here. But I can’t—I can’t sit here and watch you hurt yourself like this. You have to do this, Taako.”

Taako opened his mouth to speak, but Magnus beat him to it. “We love you, Taako, and I know that this is scary, but me and Lup… We can’t give you what you need. These people are equipped to help you.”

Taako shook his head, feeling his breath catch in his throat. “Well, it’s a good thing it isn’t your decision, then. Because I’m not staying here. I’ll—I’ll come do the therapy and stuff, whatever, but I’m not going to live here.”

Lup turned to look at him, her eyes shining with unshed tears. It’d been years since he saw her cry. “You have to stay, Taako, at least for a few days. At least until they get you stabilized. Even they said it may not be long, not if you respond well to treatment.” She said. “There are a lot of things that I will settle on, Taako, but you are not one of them.”

Taako groaned, scrubbing at his face. “Okay, fine, whatever, I’ll give it a try.” He said, knowing that
he was fighting a losing battle. “A few days, only because your crying face is so pitiful that I cannot even fathom having to look at it for another second.”

It seemed for a moment like she might get onto him for not taking it seriously enough, but she cracked the tiniest of smiles and nudged his shoulders. “You are the worst. Have I ever told you that? Like, the worst.”

Magnus rolled his eyes, standing up and patting Lup’s shoulder before giving Taako a hug that he unwillingly accepted. He said he was going to go and get a drink in the cafeteria, promising to be back soon. Taako knew he was just doing it so he and Lup would have a minute alone, but he was over worrying about it. It was way easier to deal with all of this when he pretended like it wasn’t happening. Besides, surely they’d realize he wasn’t as sick as they thought and let him go home.

Utterly exhausted and worn out, Taako nudged Lup with his hip before slowly sinking further into the bed. She followed suit, shimmying down until they were settled into the covers together, the way they’d always slept when they were younger.

“You know,” Lup said suddenly, a grin creeping onto her face, “this is a real hospital, Taako. Maybe this is it. Maybe this is what years of Grey’s Anatomy have been leading to.”

Taako rolled his eyes, though he found himself smiling back. “Oh, yeah, totally. I’m fucking sure there are plenty of smoking hot, eligible young doctors here for me to swoop in and woo.”

She nodded seriously, her smile huge. “I knew it. I knew it’d happen eventually. Of course it’d be you, though, I had to be boring and meet Barry in college.” She said, sticking her tongue out.

“You’re gonna get the fucking teen romance novel shit. Besides, I think this place needs someone to… liven it up, a bit.”

Taako laughed, pushing her shoulder. “Listen, bubbeleh. I’m pretty sure there isn’t a doctor here worthy of all this.” He said, motioning to himself.

Lup sighed, still smiling, though unable to shake the lingering dread that had settled into her stomach. “You never know.”
Chapter 2: Kravitz

Chapter Summary

Kravitz is called into the psychiatric ward to 'assist,' and finds himself becoming even more curious about the man he'd met a few days prior.

Hurley gives up. Taako is difficult. Kravitz tries to subdue.

Chapter Notes

Hello all! I'll preface this again by saying THANK YOU SO MUCH for the kind comments and all of the reads and kudos and such. I'm honestly overwhelmed with the positive feedback I've gotten for this fic and I'm so excited to continue on with it. We're back to Kravitz's POV this time, and again, same warning for hospital themes and talk of eating disorders, as it will be for most of this fic.

Also, just a little update! Between the usual Wednesday/Saturday updates that I've got going, sometime this coming week I'll be posting a bonus chapter that has some information on the relationships, ie, Lup and Taako and their upbringing, and how they came to be a part of the group of friends they are now. The next Taako chapter explores his visitors and I wanted everyone to know how their friendships and such came to be for some background, so keep an eye out for it!

Again, thank you all so much, and I appreciate every comment that I get!!! I hope you guys enjoy this chapter!

Three days go by without a call to the Psychiatric ward. Kravitz isn’t surprised by this, or bothered, and more than anything he just enjoyed his time working in the operating room. The image of the man Sloane had sedated had faded into a memory, pushed back by his thoughts of coming operations and physical therapy sessions.

In just a couple of days, he’d be doing a six-hour surgery on a young woman whose back had been deformed due to scoliosis. He’d never done a procedure like it before, and while part of him was nervous to take the reins on something so serious, (failure could mean paralysis, or even death,) he was itching to be able to make new advances and to add to his repertoire of surgical skills.

It isn’t until just moments after sitting down with his lunch that his pager goes off with a message from Hurley. It’s a rather nice day out so he’d decided to spend his break outside, commandeering one of the empty tables in the garden to the rear of the hospital, kept up for patients who are forced to stay for long periods of time. There’s a gentle breeze and the sun is warm but not unbearably so, leaving the perfect middle ground for a few minutes of outdoors.

Trying not to appear too exasperated as his pager went off for a second time, Kravitz set his sandwich aside and pulled the device off his belt, shielding the screen from the sun as he read the messages.
From Hurley: Krav, I need assistance in room 213.

From Hurley: Please! It's an emergency! I'll use the coms if I have to.

Rubbing at the bridge of his nose, Kravitz stuffed his sandwich back into his paper bag and folded it neatly at the top. He didn’t really need this today, not when he had so much to do, but Hurley was a friend and the last thing he needed was for her to come over the intercoms to scold him. Quickly, he typed a reply.

To Hurley: I'll be there in 5.

It didn’t occur to him that the room he was headed to was in the psychiatric ward until he was on the second floor and he realized that the room he was looking for didn’t branch off to the right, in pediatrics. Another sigh escaped him, (honestly, he just wanted to eat his sandwich and go over his surgical notes before he had to present them to the family in just a couple of hours,) unable to help his soured mood. Surely Hurley hadn’t called him to ‘intimidate’ someone else, right? AS if it’d gone so well the last time.

The idea that she may have called him for the same patient hadn’t even occurred to him, not until he was standing in the doorway of room 213 and he was faced with the same beautiful person he’d seen a few days ago. There were differences, certainly. Instead of his prior, rather glamorous outfit, he was dressed in a hospital gown. It was pink and patterned with flowers, and while the oddness of it didn’t quite compute in his mind instantly, Kravitz took a few moments to realize that it must have been one sized for children. Even this hung off of him, slipping down one shoulder to reveal a chest full of sticky electrodes. The wires lead to an EKG, which was positioned right next to the bed.

Of course, Taako, as Kravitz remembered his name, was still beautiful, but he looked as though he’d been fairing pretty poorly in his new environment. Whatever makeup had been on when Kravitz had first see him had been removed, and his hair was drawn into a messy bun atop his head instead of an intricate braid. It was a different look, certainly, one that wasn’t anything less than when he’d been dolled up, but he looked so terribly tired. There were bags under his eyes and exhaustion written all over, a sunken look to his face that there hadn’t been before.

It shocked Kravitz just how well he remembered what he looked like in the first place. Up until a minute or so ago, this entire ordeal may as well have been forgotten.

Once again, Taako caught him staring, but the look he gave him this time was significantly less hostile. He looked more curious.

"I give up,” Hurley said suddenly, grabbing Kravitz’s arm. He hadn’t even seen her before, his focus drawn to the man on the bed. “I am 100% out. Sloane will be here in half an hour but I can’t do this anymore. Just—just stay with him until she gets here, okay? Can you do that for me?” She asked, her grip tightening just a bit.

Kravitz opened his mouth to reply, but she looked so desperate that he couldn’t help but give in. “You owe me, Hurley.” He said simply, his shoulders slumping with his newfound responsibility.

“I love you.” Hurley replied, squeezing his arm before glancing toward her patient. Taako smiled and waved, wiggling his fingers in what seemed like an awfully antagonizing fashion.

“Bye, Hurley, see you!” He called, watching her as she went. Kravitz simply raised an eyebrow, unable to keep his gaze from wandering to the door, then back to the man in the bed.

“So? Come have a seat, Dr. Handsome, I don’t bite.” Taako hummed.
It was hard to believe someone who looked so worn out could have so much… energy.

“It’s Kravitz.” He corrected awkwardly, stepping forward and sitting down in the chair that sat next to Taako’s bed. “It was Taako, correct?”

“Taako indeed.” The man hummed, picking at the cuticles of his nails. “What’s a guy gotta do to get some privacy around here, huh? I can’t even pee without someone breathing down my neck, why do I have to be on 24 hour lock down? I know I might not look like the most responsible party but how much harm could I do?”

Kravitz rolled his eyes. “I don’t know that it’s quite so invasive.” He said, glancing toward the clock and his lunch bag that he’d left on the counter. While skipping lunch wouldn’t be a terrible future, he certainly needed to go over his notes.

“Says you, I bet you’ve never even been a patient here.” Taako retorted, raising his eyes to look at him.

“I supposed that is true.” Kravitz said. It was hard not to let his eyes wander, the room already decked out in a way that Kravitz was sure that this was a long term stay. There was a bouquet of flowers on the dresser next to Taako, as well as a coloring book with a box of crayons, (it was still propped open and it seemed as though they were well loved,) and a small wooden…. Duck, probably? It looked hand carved, though, clearly not something that had been picked up in the overpriced gift shop downstairs. The windows were opened, the curtains tied back with red ribbon, and finally there was a suitcase at the end of the bed containing several colorful outfits that overflowed from the top.

“Admiring the swag, huh?” Taako piped up, glancing toward the still expanding pile on the dresser. “Pretty cool, right? End up in the hospital and it’s like your second birthday.”

Kravitz chuckled. “I suppose that was your plan all along, hm?”

“Oh, absolutely.” Taako said, grinning. His teeth were white and well kept, aside from the gap smack dab in the middle. “Best way to get some quality R&R.” He said, waving a hand. His left wrist sported three bands, two with his information and one bright orange that read FALL RISK in bolded black letters.

Kravitz wasn’t entirely sure what to say after that—he knew next to nothing about this man aside from his medical condition and he didn’t need to bring up his disorder in conversation. He may not be the best with words, but he was smart enough to know that topic was taboo. For one reason or another, he seemed to have checked in of his own free will, and it seemed as though he’d be here for a while.

“So,” Kravitz said, after what felt like an eternity of silence, “What did you do to make Hurley so upset? She’s usually a rather level headed nurse.” He mused, turning the chair so he was facing toward the bed.

“Just wasn’t in the mood to eat, I guess.” Taako said, picking at his cuticles and not making eye contact.

“You ought to at least eat something.” Kravitz said, his eyes falling on the tray on the counter that had gone previously unnoticed to him.

“Look, my dude. I’m not hungry, okay? I’m not going to eat something when I don’t feel like it.” He retorted, leaning over to the bedside table and pulling open the drawer. There were several bottles of
nail polish inside, as well a small manicure kit. He took out one of the tools and started to file at his nails.

Kravitz shrugged. “If that’s your prerogative I’m not going to try to convince you, but would you prefer to go into cardiac arrest?”

Taako shrugged back. “Well when you put it that way—“

“Then the machines probably ought to stay.” Kravitz said, glancing at the EKG as it spouted off the constant information from Taako’s heart rate. “I hate to break it to you, though, but if you continue to refuse to eat, you’ll be getting another machine in the form of a feeding tube.”

Taako’s expression soured. “I already told them I’m not doing that. I’ll stay here because it’s what my friends think is best but I’m not going on a feeding tube.” Clearly, this was a touchy subject. Kravitz felt a little bad for bringing it up in the first place. The stress of this entire situation must have been insane. He couldn’t imagine how taxing it must be to be forced into such a new environment.

“If you’ve already signed the papers, you’ve already sealed the deal.” Kravitz said, though not unkindly. “Besides, as a patient in the psychiatric ward, your next of kin gets to make decisions when you’re not ‘mentally sound’.” He supplied.

“Are you implying that I’m not?” Taako asked, wrinkling his nose.

“No, no. But the doctors will do what they need to to keep you safe.”

“Oh, really? Like plunging a needle into my arm against my will?” Taako asked, the irritation evident in his voice. “Look, I get that you guys are just doing your job and you’re defending your friends and whatnot, but you’re really not good at this whole… conversation thing.”

Kravitz felt his face go hot. “I’m not usually the one to give this sort of advice, I just—“ He sighed, rubbing the bridge of his nose. “I know this is probably all very overwhelming and I figured I would be honest. It just seems to me as though you’d want to be at least in somewhat control over what you’re consuming. The last thing you probably want is a feeding tube, and the best way to avoid that would be to be a little more… compliant. I’m not insinuating that you have to jump in all at once, but if they see you’re making an effort to… to heal, they’ll do everything in their power to make sure that you’re able to do it on your own terms.”

Taako took a moment to process this, giving his own sigh. “Well, Dr. Handsome, I can’t deny that logic.” He grumbled, crossing his arms and seemingly thinking about what he’d just said.

It was a couple of minutes of silence before Taako piped in again, a grin on his face. “You know what? I think I want you to be my doctor.”

Kravitz blinked, taken aback. “Me?”

“Yeah, you.” Taako said, raising an eyebrow. “Those guys, they just keep bullshitting me with all kinds of made up mumbo jumbo. You’re the first person whose talked to me like a normal human being and you’re way cuter than them, too—“

Kravitz laughed, outright. “The looks of your doctors is that important to you?”

Taako looked a bit offended. “Um, obviously? The only way Lup convinced me to stay here is because she said it’d be like I was in Grey’s Anatomy. And let me tell you, friend, this is nothing like Grey’s Anatomy. I thought I was going to fall in love with someone and have some steamy television romance, and that’s certainly not happening with those two.”
“Grey’s Anatomy is fictitious, Taako.” Kravitz said, shaking his head but still smiling. “Besides, I’m an orthopedic surgeon. This isn’t really my area of expertise. I can’t offer much help in that department. I’d be happy to try to help, but I’d feel quite a bit better if you had something to eat.”

Taako huffed indignantly, rolling his eyes. “Well, I’ll make you a deal, then.”

Kravitz raised an eyebrow, curious. “Oh? Do tell.”

Taako leaned in a little, smiling mischievously. “I’ll do what you said and eat something, no promises on how much, if you promise that you’ll come back so I’m not surrounded by Hurley and Sloane all the time.”

Kravitz was certainly intrigued by this, trying to tell himself that he was interested because it meant a patient making some sort of effort, (regardless of how ridiculous it sounded,) and not because he was somehow drawn to this person, curious to learn more. After only a moment’s hesitation, Kravitz nodded. “Alright, then. It’s a deal.”

When Sloane came in a half hour later, Kravitz was sitting at Taako’s bedside reading and rereading his notes for his upcoming surgery, and Taako was, as he’d assured, nibbling very slowly on a handful of baby carrots.

“Doctor, may I have a word with you in the hallway?” Sloane asked, trying not to sound too incredulous.

Kravitz nodded, and Taako mumbled, “Ooooh, somebody’s in trouble.”

As soon as he’d stepped into the hallway, Sloane gave him a look. “What did you do?”

“What do you mean?” Kravitz asked curiously, raising an eyebrow.

“What did you do to get him to eat?” She asked, glancing back at the door of the room. “The only time he’s even touched food was when his sister was here, and—“

“We just had a conversation, and he, ah. He offered, sort of.” He explained, his hands shoved into the pockets of his lab coat.

“He offered?” Sloane said. “What do you mean he offered?”

“He said that if I, ah, promised to come back so he could have a break from you and Hurley, that he’d eat something. So I agreed.”

Sloane laughed, running a hand through her dark hair and shaking her head. “I cannot believe this! Do you know how hard he is to deal with?”

Kravitz wrinkled his nose, shrugging. “Well,” he began, “Actually no.”

Turning back to the room, Taako flashed him a halfhearted smile and blew him a kiss. Kravitz rolled his eyes. “See you later, Doctor!” He called, grinning.

Kravitz offered a small smile in return, earning an incredulous look from Sloane and a delighted laugh from the patient across the room. Nodding to his colleague, Kravitz turned to head off down the hallway, feeling oddly accomplished and ready to meet with his surgical patient.
Bonus Chapter-Backstories

Chapter Summary

Taako and Lup have lived an interesting life, to say in the least.
A little background on how they found their family.

Chapter Notes

Hey guys!
First off, don't worry, this is a bonus chapter that I'm posting today and there will still be a regular update tomorrow! Pretty much, this chapter just gives some background on Taako and Lup's relationship with their 'found' family. It's definitely formatted a little differently than the others with a lot of exposition and doesn't necessarily HAVE to be read to understand future chapters, I just wanted to establish a solid backstory so anyone who was curious could refer to that!! (Plus I thought a really long time about how to make their family dynamic worked and wanted to share!)

The chapter that will go up tomorrow has a lot of Taako's visitors and I wanted to establish relationships with his friends without just throwing a bunch of memory montages into the story, so I decided to write an extra little chapter! This wasn't beta'd at all, though, be patient! I'll talk to you guys tomorrow with the real chapter and we'll merge back into the flow of the story!

Warnings for hospital settings and mentions of illnesses!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Lulu.” Taako said, fidgeting with the hem of his sweater. “I think we need to call someone.”

Despite being bundled up in three layers and every crappy blanket their dingy apartment housed, Lup was trembling. Still, she held out a shaky thumbs up and flashed him a bleary smile. “Chill out, loser, I’m f-fine.” She insisted turning on her side. “Just get in the dumb bed and warm me up before I freeze.”

Taako glanced at the half empty bottle of NyQuil on the ground by the mattress and the cheap thermometer. “I’m chill as hell. You need to chill out. Seriously, you’re fucking burning up, jesus.” He grumbled, peeling back the covers and slipping down beside her.

A couple of months ago, this had seemed like a good idea.
Taako and Lup, the twins who refused to be separated, had been passed from place to place a lot throughout their childhood. First, it’d been family, then foster homes and adoption centers. They’d come close to a real family once or twice, (their aunt, the elderly woman who’d passed away when they were 12, etc.) but it seemed like they’d never really had a place to call home.

On their sixteenth birthday, they’d left the cramped house they were being kept in, got jobs at a dingy diner that thought they were funny, and found a cheap and dirty one bedroom apartment that was falling apart but had functioning kitchen and fit an air mattress. Despite the broken heater and the leak in the ceiling, it was a space that they could call their own, and Taako loved it more than anywhere they’d lived before.

Lup insisted they still go to school, that they graduate. Taako probably would have bailed if she weren’t so persistent, but they worked nights and weekends and spent their little free time buying things and thrift shops and pawning them off for double what they’d bought it for.

It wasn’t easy, in the least bit, but they were free, with nobody breathing down their necks and rent was just in their budget. They ate at the diner a lot, since the food was free, and they still got free lunches at school, so things certainly could have been worse. For once, Taako felt like maybe they were going to make it.

Then, of course, this shit happened.

It was the middle of December, and Lup was running a 103 degree fever.

Taako settled further into the blankets and let Lup settle against his side, coughing dryly, her throat grated from the past couple of days. “Lulu.” He started, glancing at the mostly empty cup of water next to their mattress. “The heater isn’t working, and it’s been two days.”

“I know that, goofus.” Lup grumbled, her voice muffled in the layers. “It’ll go away on it’s own, Taako, seriously. Just let me--” She sneezed into her arm. “Just let me sleep, okay?”

It didn’t go away. By the end of the next day, Lup was running closer to 104, throwing up everything Taako tried to feed her, and deliriously insisting that she didn’t need a hospital despite Taako’s rising panic.

“You’re dehydrated.” Taako insisted.
“We can’t afford a hospital, Koko, you know that.” She breathed, her eyes closed.

Taako shook his head. “I don’t care, I know we can’t, but I’m not about to let my fucking sister die in this shit apartment because I can’t do anything about it.”

In the end, he felt guilty for being relieved at how sick she was. It meant the fight on the way to their car had been pretty weak.

Taako carried his sister into the emergency room at the clinic that had been closest to where they lived. It was small but clean, and open 24 hours. The woman at the desk had signed them in immediately and lead Taako to a room, helping him get his sister onto the cot before disappearing to find a doctor.

The woman who came in was on the younger side. She was maybe in her mid to late twenties, with ebony skin and hair pulled into a ponytail that left her bangs hanging over her face.

“Look,” Taako muttered, his tone tired and curt. “I’m gonna give it to you straight. We ran away from our foster family. We don’t have insurance, and I probably can’t afford whatever the bill is, but I swear I will figure something out. I just need you to fix my sister.”

“Don’t worry about that.” She said, her voice calm and gentle. “I’ll help you figure something out. We’ll get her fixed up.” She gave him a gentle smile and he felt himself tear up almost instantly. He felt incredibly small in the tiny hospital chair.

Lup had a really fucked up version of the flu, which Taako thought was really fucking stupid. The doctor, who was way too nice and named Lucretia, did the routine and took a couple of vials of blood and gave Lup an IV that looked foreign against the underside of her arm.

She left to get prescriptions and let the two of them rest, and once they were alone, Taako climbed onto the hospital bed and squished himself up against his sister’s side, relishing in the warmth and the company. Taako watched her the entire night, unable to sleep himself and content to watch the discovery channel on mute. Lup woke up around seven looking worse for wear but sounding a lot more coherent, and the doctor gave them breakfast and let Taako drink coffee while she sat on the edge of the bed and scribbled out notes on a piece of scrap paper.

“You need to make sure you finish the entire bottle of medicine, even after you feel better, and you have to stay hydrated. If anything changes, you can come back, just ask for me and I’ll get you taken
care of.” She promised.

Lup flashed her a tired smile and a thumbs up. “You’ve got it, doc.”

The bill never came, and Lucretia visited their home a few days later with homemade chicken noodle soup, admitting to snatching their address from the paper work that Taako had filled out.

“I was worried that you wouldn’t come back if things got worse.” She’d explained, wringing her hands. “I wanted to make sure you were alright.”

He knew she had something to do with the lack of payment required by the emergency clinic, and they were both pretty thankful for it. Taako hadn’t known what he would have done to pay off an emergency room bill. Lucretia had insisted she had just come to make sure Lup was recovering properly and Taako was taking care of himself, but she seemed to have more on her mind. Taako had no idea why she was even there. It wasn’t as if there was anything in it for her.

Upset by the abysmal state of their apartment, Lucretia introduced them to a colleague who owned a small apartment complex. He’d been a doctor at the hospital Lucretia was trying to get hired at, and he rented them a much nicer two bedroom apartment for the same price as the shitty one they’d been staying in.

Soon, Lup and Taako were being visited almost on the daily as well as being invited to places. At first it’d just been Lucretia and Merle, the older but strangely interesting man who owned the apartment complex, but then it’d morphed into more, their next door neighbor Magnus, the couple Carey and Killian who lived downstairs. It was a pretty big change, and Taako was unsure of why or how they’d been showed all of this random kindness but he was thankful, nonetheless.

Five years later, Lup, Taako, and coincidentally Magnus, (he was older than them by a year but started college late after the death of his best friend and girlfriend, Julia,) graduated college, and Lup met the love of her life, Barry. They were all drowning in student loans but there’d been a huge party thrown by their friends, their family, and they were finally a part of something. It’d taken a long ass time, but it’d happened.

Then, there was Angus McDonald.

One day, Lucretia was living alone, and the next, she was ushering a very small and very sick boy into her apartment. After that, he never really left. Taako learned shortly after the initial move in that
the boy was 8 years old and had rode the bus to the hospital with his medical charts in hand and absolutely no supervision.

“You want me to what?” Taako asked, his phone propped up beneath his chin as he dragged the nail polish brush across his fingers.

“Hang out with Angus. Please, Taako, I have to meet with the foster system to talk about adopting him. He needs some supervision, and he could--” She paused, “He could use a positive role model, Taako.”

Taako laughed. “Lucy, a positive role model? Are you serious? *Me?*

“You really don’t give yourself enough credit.” Lucretia murmured into the phone. “He’s been through a lot, Taako, and you have to, it’ll be nice for the both of you.”

“I don’t think you know what you’re getting this kid into.”

Two hours later, Lucretia showed up at his apartment, a boy about half her size tucked against her side. He was dressed way too nice, in a tailored cardigan and a collared shirt, with a backpack on even though it was the middle of the summer. “Angus,” Lucretia started, smiling at him. “This is Taako. He’s a very close friend of mine. I’ll only be a couple of hours.” She said, handing Taako a twenty dollar bill. “Feel free to order a pizza or something. I really appreciate it.”

Taako rolled his eyes as she nudged the boy in, taking the cash and stuffing it in his pocket. “Yeah, yeah. You owe me one, but I’ll look after your boy for a few hours.”

She smiled briefly and gave Angus’ shoulder a squeeze before stepping out into the hall and walking off. Taako turned around without so much as an introduction and marched over to the couch, flopping down and kicking his feet up. The boy stood, frozen, his fingers clutching the straps of his bag.

“Well? Make yourself at home, Agnes, I don’t bite.” Taako said, not glancing up as he turned on the TV.

Finally, the boy took a step forward, slipping off his shoes and walking into the living room. Their apartment wasn’t exactly clean, but it wasn’t a disaster either, and he dropped his bag and sat down
on the edge of the couch, as far from Taako as possible. “Hello sir.” He said, turning to face him. “I’m Angus McDonald.”

“Sir?” Taako made a face. “Yeah, that’s not gonna fly, homie. Just Taako, thanks. I hope cheese pizza is okay, because we are a family of simple tastes.”

Angus nodded quickly, reaching into his bag and pulling his book out. “Okay, Taako.”

How things got any different, Taako wasn’t sure. Angus started coming over twice a week, at least, usually when it was just Taako there so he couldn’t force Lup to watch over him, (even though she totally loved him.) He wasn’t any good with kids so he usually watched TV while Angus read his stupid mystery novels.

But one day, they went from sitting in silence to chatting about fashion, to Taako painting Angus’ nails pretty pinks and blues, and then to them sitting together on the couch side by side watching movies. Angus slept over frequently, tucked into Taako’s side while he scrolled on his phone or read the shitty kid detective books he loved so much, and while he continued to firmly insist that the kid got on his nerves, he knew with a terrifying knot of anxiety in the pit of his stomach that Angus McDonald was growing on him.

All of them were growing on him.

Chapter End Notes

I’m very tempted to write another bonus chapter in the future of when Lucretia and Angus meet for the first time. Yes or no?
Chapter 2: Taako

Chapter Summary

Taako reflects on his first couple of days in the hospital and the visitors that pop up almost instantly.

Taako does his best, Lup supports, and Angus breaks down.

Chapter Notes

Hello, friends! Sorry for updating so late, I was in Austin this weekend visiting a dear friend and I'm preparing for a convention so writing patterns and times got totally thrown off, especially with the little extra chapter! Things should be a little more timely this coming update! I feel like I was a little off my game this time, but this should be the last of the introduction chapters and the real action will start up with this next Kravitz chapter! The timeline is a little off too, because I'd planned initially to catch up to when Taako and Kravitz had their conversation, but it get pretty long and I ended up deciding to keep it as is. As always, thank you SO MUCH for the kind words, I seriously check this all the time and I'm constantly blown away by the comments and kudos. Feel free to message me at Ness-writes.tumblr.com for any questions or just to chat with me! Same warnings as usual for hospitals and for eating disorders and such, so proceed carefully! I'll talk to you all on Saturday with the next chapter, thank you for being patient!!!

The hospital proved to be a pretty entertaining place to be, much to Taako’s surprise.

While Magnus left shortly after the doctors talked to them with a list of things from home Taako needed, Lup stayed planted at his side, and he had been grateful for the silent support. Especially so when he’d woken up around midnight after another nap and cried his brains out for a half hour. Lup didn’t say anything, didn’t offer those awkward empty phrases or assurances, just wrapped her arms around him and held him until it all died down. In the morning, they didn’t talk about it, and she let Taako pretend it didn’t happen while he managed to force his emotions into line again.

The first morning there was about what he expected. He had a curt, awkward evaluation that left him feeling exposed and nervous, though it’d been relatively short and he’d been pretty closed off. When he was being wheeled back into the room, (they wouldn’t let him walk on his own due to ‘hospital policy’ but he had a feeling it was because he was an asshole and they thought he might bolt,) Lup was there, freshly showered and sitting in Barry’s lap next to his bed.

“Morning, sunshine.” Lup grinned, getting up and moving out of the way as the nurse, who greeted her with a quick smile and started fixing Taako’s machines back up. “How was that whole shindig? Unlock the traumas of our dramatic past, yet?”

Taako laughed. “Oh hell no. That one is a solid 5 weeks of trust building, pumpkin, good luck.”
Barry greeted Taako with a quick and slightly awkward hug, clearly unsure of what to say as Lup climbed right back into Taako’s bed next to him and grabbed the remote, turning on the television.

The nurse frowned, grabbing the tray next to the bed that had a plate full of breakfast on it. “Ma’am, you’re really not supposed to be in the bed with all of that equipment.” She said.

Lup smiled. “Oh, I’m sure that’s true.” She said, though she made no move to get out of the bed. Instead, she grabbed a piece of bacon off of Taako’s plate and began to eat.

The nurse opened her mouth, but then shut it again, clearly afraid to challenge Lup’s confidence. “It’s just that, it’s not really allowed.”

“I know.” Lup said, smiling. “And I think that you know I’m not going to move anytime soon. Thanks, though.”

The nurse went pink, grabbing a notebook and setting it on the bedside table. “Taako, this is the notebook Doctor Sloane talked about, please make sure to record your breakfast.”

Taako shrugged, waving a hand. “Yeah, yeah. Will do. Lulu, turn on the animal planet, I think that meerkat show comes on about now.” He said, having already tuned the nurse out, who shuffled awkwardly out of the room.

Barry rolled his eyes, accepting an offered slice of toast from Lup’s hand. “Did you get to pick out your gown, Taako?” He asked, eyeing the floral print.

“Hm? I didn’t, but shit, my dude, I lucked out. I mean, everyone else is wearing this awful shade of green, fuck. I’m glad I got this one.”

Lup rolled her eyes. “Hate to break it to you, Taako, but I’m pretty sure that is for children.”

“So?” Taako asked, bumping her arm. “Don’t even try to convince me that this isn’t the best gown, Lulu.”

“Fair enough, dingus.” Lup shrugged, grabbing the other piece of bacon. “You need to eat something or you’re going to get in trouble.”

“Or, you could eat it for me and I’ll lie and say it was me.” Taako persuaded, picking a grape up and rolling it between his fingers.

“Sure, if you want to wither away and die in this hospital alone, I can do that.” She said, giving him an eerie smile. “Up to you, bro.”

Taako wilted under her gaze, glaring halfheartedly back and popping the grape into his mouth. “I hope they didn’t expect me to eat all of this.”

Lup shrugged. “Yeah, that’d be a little dense. Just… Grapes and toast, okay?” Taako sighed, but nodded anyways. He settled against Lup’s side, eating grapes slowly and watching as the tiny animals climbed in and out of their tunnel systems and explored.

After a while, Barry departed and Magnus returned, bearing tons of his belongings shoved into a suitcase, a duffle, and a makeup bag. Lup combed and braided his hair while Taako took out a bottle of nailpolish and grabbed Magnus’ hand, beginning to run the brush over his nails to fix the chipping he’d done the night before.

“They said they were going to give me a day to rest.” Taako said, rolling his eyes, “Before I start
therapy and all that. Fuck, like, real therapy. Isn’t that sad?”

Magnus shrugged. “I don’t think so.” He said simply, and Taako smacked his hand for moving too much, which in turn cause Lup to tug at his hair for moving too much. “I went to therapy too, after Jules died. It’s not something you need to be ashamed of.”

Lup laughed. “God knows we all need it.”

His first day consists of much of the same, Magnus and Lup keeping him company and watching intently as he forced down a half of a sandwich before it started making him feel actually sick and he had to stop. He scribbled halfheartedly in his journal, ‘half a sandwich, fuck this,’ and went on with his day. He hated being under the microscope, but they were at least making an effort not to make it seem like that.

Taako took a nap in the afternoon, while Magnus whittled a ‘get well soon’ present and Lup watched cartoons, and things at least seemed semi normal as he slept with his head against his sister’s side.

By the time dinner rolled around and he was forced to do much of the same, try more things and eat more food, Taako was ready to call it quits and shoved the tray toward Lup after only a couple of bites. “This is stupid. I’m not eating that.”

Lup sighed, rubbing the bridge of her nose. “I know it’s shitty, and hospital food isn’t the best, but the doctor said if you were making an effort they wouldn’t give you a feeding tube.”

Taako narrowed his eyes, crossing his arms. “I can’t, Lulu. I tried today, okay? That’s as good as it’s going to get.”

She seemed to be content with that answer, much to his relief, just pushing the apple slices toward him with a bat of her eyelashes but dropping the rest of it and setting the tray aside. “It’s a process.” She confirmed, nodding. “And I’m glad that you’re trying.”

Barry arrived half an hour later to take Lup home, and Magnus had to leave, too. They’d both taken a day off work and everything, to come and to be with him, which was both validating and kind of guilt inducing.

“I’ll be back after work tomorrow.” Lup said, hugging him tight and pulling away, grinning. “Don’t do anything I’d do. Unless it’s eating, which you should probably do. I’ll call you in the morning. Try not to fuck them up too badly.” She warned, giving him an exaggerated kiss on the cheek.

Taako rolled his eyes, shooting her a thumbs up. “Yeah, yeah. Gotcha, sis. Bye, Barold. Have fun doing adult shit, I’m gonna watch the animal planet and see where the night takes me.” He said, waving a hand. “All I need is a bottle of wine and some mood lighting and we’re halfway to a normal night.”

Lup grinned at him from the door, wrapping an arm around Barry’s waist and leaning over to dim the lights. “Maybe they’ll let us have wine night if you do super good. Or if we’re sneaky enough. Get some sleep, Koko. Love you!”

When, 20 minutes after they’d left, the loneliness got overwhelming, Taako did just that.

Thankfully, his moments alone were few and far between. The next morning when he woke up, Lucretia was sitting at his bedside with a book, smiling warmly at him when he pushed up on his elbows and blinked at his surroundings.
“Good morning, Taako, how are you feeling?” Her voice was gentle and smooth, a cup of coffee from his favorite cafe a few blocks away sitting untouched on the counter. “I brought you a drink, if you’d like it, Johann made it for you.”

Taako ran his fingers through his hair, giving her an exhausted smile and grabbing the coffee, taking a sip and relishing in the familiarity of it. “Aren’t you supposed to be busy? I mean I know you work here and all, but…”

“I took a late morning.” Lucretia hummed, dog earing the book she’d been studying and setting it aside. “It’s always a good excuse to see you. Lup called me, yesterday, I’m sorry I couldn’t visit earlier.”

Taako waved a hand, taking another sip of coffee and noticing with only a small twinge of annoyance that there had definitely been sugar and such added. “No biggie, Lucy. I’ll be out in no time.”

Lucretia’s look was awfully piteous. “Of course, if you listen to your doctors.”

Taako shrugged. “I listen enough.”

There was breakfast on the tray at the bedside, which he ignored until Lucretia nudged it toward him. “They suggested you try to eat half.” She said simply, turning to face him more. “Do you mind if I join you? They were out of scones.”

“Feel free, my guy, I’m not about to finish it.” Taako said, eyeing the meal with distaste and grabbing a strawberry. He knew it wasn’t enough–nothing would be enough, he was sure, but he hoped that maybe Lucretia wouldn’t call him out on it.

She scooted her chair closer to the bed and nibbled on toast while Taako poked at strawberries and apple slices. She didn’t pressure him, didn’t try to force him to have more, but handed over the journal when he pushed the tray aside.

“Angus wants to see you.” She said, breaking the silence as Taako scribbled his breakfast notes. ‘I’m not hungry this early in the morning, try again later,’

“Absolutely not.” Taako replied, without looking up. He dated the entry and set the journal aside. “I’ll be out soon, he can see me then. He doesn’t need to be here.”

Lucretia sighed. “He’s here all the time, Taako, please. He’s been crying. He cares about you. You know he’ll do better if he can see that you’re alright.”

Taako shook his head. “Look, I don’t want to do this. They have a schedule for me, I don’t have time for kids.”

“You have individual therapy at 3, so you have plenty of time to hang out with Angus. Magnus is on his way in with him.” She said. Her tone held some sort of finality, and Taako sat up straighter, frowning.

“Look, Lucretia, I know he’s your kid and he’s emotional, whatever, but I don’t need to be stressed out about it right now. I don’t care about how Angus is feeling. Isn’t this supposed to be about me?”

Lucretia sighed, standing up and moving to take a seat on the edge of the bed. “I understand that you’re under a lot of pressure right now, and while you have the right to be a little selfish, I’m sure you’re not blind. You’ve scared all of us quite a bit, Taako.” She said. “You know we’re all on your side, right? We love you, Taako, enough that we won’t let you do this to yourself anymore. And
don’t say that you don’t care about Angus, because that may be the biggest lie you’ve ever told.”

Taako opened his mouth to speak, but he was interrupted by a knock on the door, followed by two heads ducking into the room. Magnus was smiling, and a very hesitant Angus a few feet underneath him was chewing at his already bloodied lip.

Lucretia looked at Taako and took his hand, squeezing gently. “I’ll come by later today. Please call if you need anything.” She didn’t give Taako much of a chance to reply before getting up and stepping toward the door. She pressed a very quick kiss to Angus’ head and squeezed his hand before kissing Magnus’ cheek and disappearing down the hallway.

Angus stood frozen in the doorway, and the scene was way too reminiscent to the one when they’d first met. Magnus ushered him in, dropping the bag he’d been carrying. “I’m going to go and get something from downstairs, I’ll be back in a while.” He said, quickly backing out of the room as Taako sighed, feeling awfully tired.

“Come on in, bubbeleh.” Taako said, scooting carefully over to the side and patting the spot next to him. “I don’t bite.”

Angus stepped in slowly, dropping his things at the end of the bed and practically jogging the last few feet to the bed and clambering on. Before he’d even situated, Taako could hear the tiny snuffles, feel the quaking of his shoulders. Shushing him instantly, Taako pulled him slowly into his side and wrapped his arms around him, fingers drawing into his hair. “Okay, hey, hey, it’s all chill pumpkin, we’re all good.”

This was exactly what he’d been afraid of. Angus shuffled into the embrace and wrapped his little arms around him, pushing his face into Taako’s gown and holding onto him like he might disappear. He was bawling almost instantly, full body tremors shaking him as he lost it.

They stayed like that for several minutes, Taako muttering halfhearted assurances and trying to calm him down. When he finally, shakily, drew away and scrubbed at his eyes with his handkerchief, Taako sat up a little straighter and awkwardly pulled the damp gown away from his skin. The tears and snot had left him feeling sticky.

“I’m s-sorry.” Hiccuped Angus, blowing his nose.

“Don’t be.” Taako said, shrugging. “Can’t be helped, pumpkin, just try to breathe ‘n all. Can’t afford more than one hospital patient, y’know?”

Angus nodded briefly, and when he tried to pull away and give him more space, Taako tugged him gently closer. “I was just… really worried, Taako.”

“Yeah, yeah, Agnes, let’s not freak out. I’ll be out of here in a couple of days, it’ll be over, we’ll be able to go back to normal life.” He said, shrugging. “It’s just a thing, darling. I’m not dying.”

Angus nodded a little, watching with watery eyes as Taako nudged him over and helped him get the covers over the both of them. “It’s just that… that I knew something was wrong, but I never said anything…” He sniffled, scrubbing his eyes. “If I had said something earlier-”

Taako waved a hand. “Woah there, Ango, Magnus tried to play the blame game already, and I hate to break it to you, but that’s all on me, my dude. You guys didn’t have any idea. I’m all good, though, really, the hospital’s fixing me all up and then we can move on.”

Angus nodded slowly, seeming to finally settle in when he realized Taako’s arm wasn’t going to move. “Aunt Lup said you were really sick.” He muttered simply.
Taako shrugged. “She’s over exaggerating, pumpkin.”

“She said you weren’t being very nice to the doctors.” He said again.

“Well she’s not wrong.” Taako mused, grabbing the remote.

“I think you should probably listen to them.” Angus breathed, his voice small. “I think you know that you’re sick. And that’s okay because we’re here to help you, but you have to listen to them if you want to get better.”

Taako sighed. “You are way ahead of your years, Agnes. I’ll be okay, seriously. Ol’ Taako can handle this shit. Don’t worry.”

Angus looked up at him, His face puffy from all of the crying. “Did you eat breakfast?”

“Oh, i’m sorry, I didn’t realize you were my doctor.” Taako said, rolling his eyes.

Angus rolled his eyes back, a mirror action. “Whatever.” He said simply, grabbing the remote. “Can I turn on the history channel?”

Taako hummed an affirmative, fixing the pillows behind them and propping himself up. “What color, Ango? You need some polish.” He said, reaching over to rifle through the drawer to his left. Painting nails always tended to soothe the anxiety, if only a little bit.

“Blue sounds nice, Taako.”

An hour later, when Magnus came back looking somewhat hesitant to enter, Angus was sleeping and Taako was reading a magazine. It was quiet, but they were sitting side by side, and Taako still had an arm draped around Angus’ shoulders.

Smiling and waving, Magnus stepped in and took the chair next to the bed, the one that all of his guests had slowly filtered through. “How’s it going, Taako?”

“I can’t believe you abandoned me with a crying toddler.” Taako accused halfheartedly, his fingers stroking unconsciously at Angus’ curls.

“He needed some time alone with you.” Magnus said simply, smiling at him. “Did you eat breakfast?”

Taako groaned. “Yes, mom, and you’re the third person who’s asked, thank you very much.”

Magnus chuckled quietly, shaking his head. “I’m glad you two are good, though, because he was totally freaking out.” He murmured.

Taako rolled his eyes. “It’s annoying, how much all of you care.” He wasn’t smiling, but Magnus could hear it in his voice. It’d been two days and he’d seen most of his friends by now, excluding Merle, who was coming later that day with plants to ‘liven up the room.’

“We have to make it annoying,” Magnus said, smiling fondly. “You wouldn’t believe us if we didn’t.”
Chapter 3: Kravitz

Chapter Summary

Kravitz tries to make good on his promise and visit Taako more often.

Taako talks. Lup embarrasses. Kravitz blushes.

Chapter Notes

Happy Saturday! Hopefully, this chapter lives up to expectations as we focus on something a little happier, taking a break from the angst. I just wanted to say thank you again for all of the kind words and support! I seriously am shocked every day by the awesome feedback I'm getting, and I really hope that I can keep giving everyone a good story. Keep an eye out for another bonus chapter, (this time Lucretia and Ango,) between updates sometime this coming week and remember you can always reach me on tumblr, (ness-writes.tumblr.com) or even on twitter @nesselizabeth55 because I'm trying to do that now, too :) Also, I've been going back and editing some very minor details in other chapters in case anyone happens to notice a change.

I hope everyone's having an awesome weekend, next chapter is a Taako one on Wednesday! (Also, anybody else dying as we wait for the next part of the finale?? I'm so excited!!)

It isn’t until after Kravitz’s surgery that he was able to set aside time to visit Taako. He felt a little guilty about taking so long to make good on his promise, but he quite literally hadn’t taken a real break since their conversation a couple of days prior. Now, though, his patient was recovering nicely, and he was actually getting out of work at a decent time for once.

It was kind of awkward, making his way to the psychiatric ward at the end of his shift. He wouldn’t mention that he was off the clock unless it came up, which he hoped it wouldn’t. He’d been kind of hoping Hurley would call for help again, if only for an excuse to visit without having to necessarily make the decision himself. Of course, he wanted to see Taako. He just wasn’t sure it was for an entirely professional reason, and that was what made him nervous.

Taako was wholly fascinating. The sample he’d gotten when they’d spoken for those few minutes, it hadn’t given him enough, and he craved to know more. Not to mention he was lovely, charming, and humorous in a way Kravitz had never seen before. It was incredibly admiral, that he was so full of personality even when he was going through so much. Still, Kravitz wanted nothing more than to help Taako on his road to recovery, and if he kept good on his promise and ate when he visited, then it would be worth it.

Hesitating at the door as he finally approached Taako’s room, Kravitz tried to squash his nerves, tapping on the frame before peeking around the edge. “May I come in?”

The room was surprisingly empty, for someone whose file claimed ‘constant observation.’ Okay, maybe Kravitz had snooped a little bit, if only to assure that Taako wouldn’t be in therapy or
something when he tried to come by. He was a doctor; it’s not like he was doing it to sneak around.

Taako was alone, though, settled in bed with his phone in his hands. He was no longer hooked up to an EKG, but it’d been traded out with a feeding tube. Kravitz had kind of hoped it’d be avoidable, but he knew it was for the best. Even with Taako’s greatest efforts, the likelihood of him being able to eat as much as he needed to recover without being sick was unlikely. The man looked irritable, his eyebrows drawn in a scowl, but when he caught Kravitz’s gaze and realized it wasn’t one of his other doctors, his posture softened some.

“Doctor Handsome.” Taako greeted, cracking a smile. “It’s about time you came by,” he said, waving with his fingers, “I was beginning to think you weren’t going to keep your promise.”

Kravitz smiled sheepishly, stepping inside and making his way over to the chair at his bedside. It looked well used, in a different spot than it had been last time. He hoped that meant he’d had lots of visitors, lots of friends and family to support him. Kravitz couldn’t imagine a universe in which Taako wasn’t surrounded by admirers. “I know.” He said, setting his bag aside. “I wanted to stop by earlier but I had that surgery that was happening—“

“Oh, shit!” Taako said, sitting up a little straighter, immediately looking more animated. “I totally forgot about that! How’d that one go, was it bloody?”

Kravitz chuckled, rubbing the bridge of his nose. He’d been up since 2 in the morning, which was when he’d been woken up from his catnap in the on call room. “It went very well. The girl is recovering nicely and everything went according to plan. It’s a little gruesome, but yes, it was bloody.”

Taako grinned, crossing his legs and combing his hair with his fingers. “Did she almost crash on the table? Did you get to yell cool doctor shit?”

“You really have watched far too much Grey’s Anatomy.” Kravitz said, rolling his eyes playfully. “No, it was rather uneventful. Her blood pressure dropped pretty dramatically but it was to be expected. She was already speaking yesterday, and moving her toes. No apparent paralysis.”

Taako whistled. “Okay, even I have to admit that’s pretty fuckin’ cool, my dude. I bet she’s going to have a wicked scar.”

Kravitz nodded, sitting back against the chair and smiling sheepishly. He’d be lying if he said he didn’t appreciate his enthusiasm. “Yes, she will. Thank you, it was certainly hard work but always worth it. She has a chance at a normal life now, after recovery.”

Taako nodded, humming under his breath as he adjusted the blankets. “I wish I could see some of the action.” He sighed dramatically. “But no, I’m stuck in here watching shitty TV and going to therapy with a bunch of people I don’t like.”

Kravitz doubted that the statement was entirely true. He hadn’t had time to visit, no, but he’d certainly had time to pass by, and everytime he had it’d seemed like Taako was surrounded by people who cared about him. The door remained closed most of the time, but Kravitz could hear the voices, the laughter. Part of him felt guilty for wishing he could be a part of it all. “You’ve had lots of visitors.” Kravitz started. “I know it gets a little boring but once you build up some strength, I’m sure they’ll allow you to do more.”

Fiddling with the IV still taped to his arm, Taako groaned. “Yeah, yeah, I’ve heard it a thousand times, listen to the doctors, do what they say, and then you’ll get to do whatever you want.” He mumbled. “I get it. I just don’t understand why I’m still here.”
Kravitz sighed, sitting forward a bit to come closer to the bed. “Well, perhaps the therapy will help you understand. I hope that Hurley and Sloane have been taking it easy on you.”

Taako snorted. “ Barely, the two of them drive me nuts.” He said, rolling his eyes. “I just hate that everything is about fuckin’ food, yanno? I’m eating, whatever, way more than I used to, and they still gave me this stupid thing.” He said, gesturing at the feeding tube. “I feel like that’s hardly fair.” He muttered, scratching around his IV.

Kravitz frowned, taking his wrist and drawing his nails away from his skin without much thought. “I understand. But I imagine it’s for your best interest. I do believe that they have your best interests in mind, however.”

Taako rubbed his eyes, seeming to contemplate for a long moment before nodding. “Suppose so.” He popped the ‘p’, glancing at the TV. “You like animal planet, Krav?”

Kravitz felt his cheeks go warm at the nickname. “Ah, I’m impartial. Am I to believe you’re a fan?”

The change of pace had been sudden, the visible fight Taako had to give to change his demeanor enough to make Kravitz’s chest ache. Even so, Kravitz certainly wasn’t equipped to help Taako sort out his feelings, and if he wanted to change the subject, he wasn’t going to argue. He’d never been particularly good at giving advice.

“You bet. I’m about the animal planet, homie.” Taako said, grabbing the remote and turning the TV on. “It’s the only thing keeping me sane here.”

“I’m pretty sure you have more going on than you imply.” Kravitz chuckled, glancing at the bedside table, littered with similar knick knacks and things that other people had left. “Your ah, friends, they seem interesting.” He said simply.

Taako shrugged. “Interesting, yeah. It’s, ah. It’s nice, that they keep coming around, as lame as that fuckin’ sounds.”

Kravitz smiled. “No, this is an important time for family and friends.” He said. He was certainly curious, about these friends, whether Taako had a boyfriend or girlfriend or something, but that definitely wasn’t appropriate talk.

“I’m lucky, I guess.” Taako shrugged. “What’s your favorite animal?”

Another diversion. “I don’t know. I’m partial to ravens, and, um. Koalas?”

Taako laughed, turning toward him. “Koalas? Ravens, yeah, I get that, but fucking koalas? That’s hilarious.”

Kravitz felt his face go hot. “Well, what’s yours?”

“Mongoose.” Taako said, grinning.

Kravitz sighed. “That’s… oddly fitting.” Taako looked somewhat proud of this, and Kravitz was about to speak up again, when someone entered the room. He was tall and broad and he had bushy sideburns but kind eyes. He had a coffee cup in one hand and a bag on his other arms, trailed by a man wearing glasses and jeans.

“Hey, Taako! How’s it going?” The taller man said, his smile huge and genuine. Kravitz suddenly felt very out of place.

“It’s goin’, Mags, that’s for sure.” He said, accepting the coffee. “Barry, where’s Lulu?” He asked,
raising an eyebrow.

“She’s downstairs getting something to eat, she’ll be up in a second.” The bespectacled man said. He turned toward Kravitz, smiling a little. “Hey, I’m Barry, one of Taako’s friends. Are you one of his doctors?”

Magnus turned toward him too. “Oh, yeah, I don’t think we’ve met. I’m Magnus, Taako’s friend.”

Kravitz felt his cheeks go hotter, and Taako chuckled at his silence. “He’s not my doctor. Just a, ah. Friend. Right, Krav?” He said, turning and nudging his arm with a smile.

Kravitz nodded, then quickly stood up. “Um, y-yes, I work in orthopedics, I’m a friend of Hurley’s so we’ve crossed paths a couple of times.” He said. “My name is Kravitz.” He shook both of their hands, but then stooped to pick his bag up. “I really must be heading out, though, it was nice to meet you both. I’ll see you soon, Taako.” He said, smiling briefly at him before rushing out of the room, his heart hammering against his chest. He wasn’t sure why he’d panicked and ran off, but here he was now, and it was probably about time for him to head home.

After that, though, he started to see Taako a lot more often. The very next day, he stopped by on his lunch break and they ate together, (though Taako, very minimally,) and he ended up wheeling him to his art therapy room. The next day, he stopped by at the end of his shift, apparently just having missed ‘Lulu,’ again. He was pretty sure it was Taako’s sister, but he couldn’t be sure, and he didn’t feel like he had the right to ask.

As they spoke, he learned a lot about Taako. He was 25, he had grown up in a foster system, Lucretia, a pediatrician at the hospital, was a good friend of his, he loved bad reality TV. There were little things that were easy to pick up on, despite him not saying them out loud. Magnus and Lulu were his closest friends, but close to that were Merle, Barry, and Angus. He’d only met Magnus and Barry at this point, but he was certainly curious to see the others. Whenever someone else showed up, he tended to head out to go back to work or to go home, so he’d yet to really interact with any of them.

It wasn’t until a Friday evening when Kravitz had gotten off of work and was hanging out with Taako while he waited for Hurley to finish her paperwork that his visit overlapped with someone else’s. Taako was painting Kravitz’s nails, (it was embarrassing but incredibly endearing, his focused expression, his tongue poking out of the gap between his front teeth,) the color a dark purple that ‘complimented his skin.’

“Taako, if your doctor tells me one more time that you refuse to eat, I’m moving in.” The door was kicked open by a young woman, who had pretty much the same face as Taako. They looked almost scarily alike, as far as their features and hair color went, though this woman had pink dyed into her hair and it was cut much shorter. “Oh, hello!” She said, when she noticed Kravitz. “It’s about time I ran into you, Doctor Handsome, we need to discuss your intentions with my brother.”

Kravitz felt himself blush instantly, though he didn’t move, Taako squeezing his wrist. “Hold still, she doesn’t bite. I’m almost finished.” He said. “Lulu, give him a break, he’s sensitive.”

She rolled her eyes, sauntering over to the bed and sitting at Taako’s feet. “I’m Lup, Taako’s sister.” She said instead, smiling briefly. “Kravitz, right?”

Kravitz nodded, opening his mouth and then closing it, unsure of what to say. “Ah, yes. It’s nice to meet you, Lup. As far as my, um, intentions—“

She laughed, nudging his shoulder and shaking her head. “I was totally kidding, dude, I’m mostly
making fun of Taako, he talks about you all the time. He won’t let any of us come visit while you’re here, and—"

Taako shoved Lup, glaring. “Lulu, shut the fuck up before I ruin your jeans with this nail polish.”

Lup laughed wildly, and Kravitz figured out pretty quickly that the personality ran in the family. “I’m just teasing, Koko. I told you, though, Grey’s Anatomy. This one is certainly a looker.”

Kravitz probably would have rather died of embarrassment than hear her continue. “Um.”

“You’re freaking him out.” Taako said, capping the bottle of nailpolish and setting it aside.

“It’s fine, she’s, ah, she’s kidding. I can take a joke.” Kravitz said awkwardly, drawing his hands back and resting them awkwardly in his lap.

“Sorry, sorry.” Lup said, holding both hands up and smiling. “Really, I’m totally kidding. Don’t worry about it. I’m just messing with Taako. I’m glad he’s made a friend here for when someone can’t be here.” She said, patting Kravitz’s shoulder.

Kravitz nodded stiffly. “Y-yes, of course. It’s really my… my pleasure.” He said, relieved that blushes hadn’t ever shown well on him.

Taako rolled his eyes. “You visit because I bribed you to do it.” He said, shrugging.

Kravitz turned to him, frowning. “Don’t be ridiculous. I wouldn’t visit you just because of that. I… I enjoy it, um. Talking to you.” He said, unable to tear his gaze away from the expression on Taako’s face. “I visit for entirely personal reasons.”

Taako raised an eyebrow, clearly surprised by this. “Hm. Interesting.” He said instead, cracking a tiny smile. Lup crawled up onto the bed with him, watching as Kravitz moved to start gathering his things.

“You don’t have to leave.” Lup said, shaking her head. “I’m definitely curious, now.” She admitted.

“It’s fine.” Kravitz said, smiling politely. “I need to be getting home, anyways, but—"

“Have dinner with us tomorrow.” Lup said instead, grinning. “If you’re gonna bail now, I need to get to know my brother’s new doctor friend. I’m gonna get takeout from Taako’s favorite place, you can join us.”

Taako waved a hand, rolling his eyes. “You don’t have to do that, don’t listen to her.”

Kravitz shook his head, careful not to mess up the polish on his nails. “No, ah. That sounds nice.” He said, smiling just a bit and nodding. “Thank you for the invite. Can I bring anything?”

“Can you sneak a bottle of wine in?” Lup asked, grinning.

Kravitz laughed. “Um. I’ll see what I can do.” He said. “You two have a nice evening, I’ll see you tomorrow, then.”

“Be here at 7!” Lup called after him, watching as he quickly made his way to the exit of the room and stepped out of the door with a wave.

Taako turned to glare at her, and Kravitz could hear them from outside of the room.

“What? He’s cute, Taako, and he totally likes you.” She said. “Why else would he keep visiting?”
“Shut up, Lulu, and turn on the TV, I’m tired of listening to your voice.”

Feeling the weight on his shoulders lift, Kravitz took a deep breath and made his way toward the exit, feeling his smile grow as he mused over how the day would go tomorrow.
Chapter 3: Taako

Chapter Summary

Taako tries to adjust to the changes that are consistently happening in the hospital.

Ango builds a bear. Lup organizes a date. Taako finally loses it.

Chapter Notes

Like Griffin, I am tardy this update;;; Sorry guys, life got crazy and I'm going to a convention in a couple of weeks so stuff has been super busy!! (I just finished my Lup cosplay and I'm super excited!!) Anybody else absolutely LOSING it over this most recent episode, though???

Either way, this chapter definitely focuses more on Taako's feelings about the eating disorders and a lot more thought on it, so read with caution! It's also deeeefinitely a lengthy one, easily the longest so far. I hope you guys enjoy this chapter anyways, though! Hopefully the next one will be up a bit more timely! You can always find me at ness-writes.tumblr.com for questions and fic updates. Thank you all again for the kind words and the kudos and such, and I hope I don't disappoint. Things are really starting to pick up, and I'm super excited for the next couple of chapters.

Also, bonus Ango chapter will probably be up sometime over the next week. It's kind of taken a back burner to more important plot stuff, though. Enjoy!!

Taako felt completely exposed as he stood on the scale in Dr Sloane’s office, looking nervously at his clenched hands. He hasn’t really seen much of a difference as far as his appearance went, but he was almost certain he’d gained some weight. They had him on that stupid feeding tube and it’d been a week and a half at this point so it’d be stupid not to think otherwise.

“You don’t have to look.” Sloane said, her voice softer than usual. “It’s easier to know that you’re making progress rather than focusing on the number alone.” She assured, flashing him a brief smile.

He just nodded, keeping his eyes on his clasped hands as she recorded the number and urged him to step back off. Taking a long breath, Taako ran a hand through his hair and tried to ignore the way his hands trembled. “So?”

“You’re doing incredibly well, Taako.” She said, patting his shoulder and motioning him to sit down as she sat on the other side of her desk. “You’re still not eating enough on your own to be taken off
of the feeding tube, unfortunately, but you’ve made incredible progress in the week and a half you’ve been with us.” She sounded almost proud, which ignited a strange feeling in his chest that he wasn’t familiar with.

“Come on, Doc. You’ve gotta admit, I’m *easily* the worst you’ve ever had to deal with, right?” Taako asked, batting his eyelashes.

“You’d be surprised to hear that, while you may be the most *annoying,*” She teased, scribbling something on his file, “You’re certainly not the worst.”

Taako grinned. “Oh, yeah. Forgot about good ol’ Pringles from art therapy. That guy is *nutso.* All he talks about is some base on the moon and grand relics that are going to destroy the world.”

Sloane sighed. “Let’s not poke fun at the other patients, shall we?”

“You practically *asked* me to, darling, how could I resist?”

Smiling to herself, Sloane set his file aside. “You’re going down the right path, Taako, and it’s really admirable. I think that you’re benefitting more from the therapies than you may like to admit. For now, I’m going to switch you to temporary bedrest, so you’re welcome to go explore more frequently. We’re going to work on trying to increase your portion sizes a bit, but like I said, you’re making great progress.” She patted his shoulder, squeezing slightly. “Certainly a cause for celebration, so I suppose if your sister is *that* insistent on her wine night, I can probably pull a few strings.”

Taako grinned, bumping her fist instead when she went in for a handshake. “Dope. Uh, thanks for that, Lup’s gonna be fucking ecstatic.”

Sloane chuckled. “Yes, I figured. I can walk you back to your room, if you’d like, sans the wheelchair.” She offered.

Taako grinned. “That sounds fucking rad as hell. Finally stretch out a little, get some *air.*”

Sloane walked Taako back to his room in silence, where Lup was waiting crosslegged on his bed. The room was empty otherwise, though Taako suspected Angus would be around soon.
“Lulu—“He called, grinning as he peeked around the doorway. “Guess who’s off of 24/7 bedrest?”

Lup jumped up, a grin rivaling his own popping up almost instantly. “Oh fuck, yes!” She said, running over and throwing her arms around him. “Dude, you’re fucking killing this whole eating disorder thing. I love it!”

Sloane changed the information on the outside of the door and set his file back by the bed, waving to the two of them and heading off toward her next patient. Lup pulled back and patted Taako’s cheek, practically beaming. Taako felt himself wilt a little under the gaze.

“Seriously, Koko, that’s fucking badass. You’re doing so good. I’m proud of you.” She ruffled his hair for good measure, and Taako nudged her off with a roll of his eyes.

“Oh come on, goofus, don’t get sappy on me now.” Taako said, bumping shoulders. “Come braid my hair, I want to try to look at least a little nice before Ango shows up.”

Merle brought Angus up for a visit and delivered two new potted plants, (a cactus and some sort of purple flower Taako didn’t recognize,) to add to the growing garden across the windowsills. He left shortly after, with some sort of prior obligation used as an excuse, but said that Lucretia would be there to take Angus home after her shift.

Taako nibbled at lunch, just as well as he usually did. The fact that he was being forcefed calories through a tube didn’t really motivate him to try eating more. Really, it was more of an excuse not to mess with his food. He knew he was getting calories either way, and the physical act of consuming much of anything still felt foreign and wrong.

Angus was eager to share his lunch, accepting half of the sandwich with a toothy smile. It made him feel a little less pressured, so he tried his best to finish the rest.

“Hurley said you were doing really well, sir.” Angus said, taking a sip from the juice box Taako had insisted he didn’t want. “I think that’s pretty awesome! She also said you could start going on walks and leaving the room, and there’s this really cool fish tank downstairs that I wanted to show you.”

“Sure, sure, Agnes.” Taako said, pulling off a corner of the bread and chewing slowly. “I’ve never actually seen anything other than this room in this place. They got anything cool?”
Angus nodded, beaming up at him. “There are some little shops near the cafeteria downstairs! There’s even a Build-A-Bear for the kids in pediatrics! I know where pretty much everything is, since Ms. Lucretia works here.”

Taako gasped dramatically. “There’s a Build-A-Bear and nobody’s taken me yet? My dude, we have got to go. What are you doing, like, right now?”

And so, Taako put on some fluffy slippers that Lup had dropped off, grabbed his IV pole, and he and Angus set off toward the Build-A-Bear downstairs. It was rather small and filled with sick kids, but it wasn’t particularly busy. Angus raced ahead and picked out a plain looking brown bunny, while Taako grabbed the most ridiculous, sparkly pink bear that they had. They went through the motions together, filling them with stuffing and a heart and giving them names. When it came time for outfits Angus gave his bunny a fancy sweater and some round glasses while Taako outfitted his bear with sunglasses and a leather jacket.

Content with their creations, they walked to the cafeteria and met up with Lucretia, who bought Angus an ice cream cone and found a table in the corner. “You look well, Taako.” She said, smiling fondly at the pair. “Much less tired. Where did Lup wander off to?”

Angus took a lick from his cone and glanced to the door. “She said she had to get things ready for tonight, apparently Taako has a date.”

Taako narrowed his eyes, bumping Angus halfheartedly with his elbow and huffing as Lucretia gave him a look. “It isn’t a date, Lup invited Dr. Handsome to have dinner with us,” he said, shrugging. “And she really put him on the spot, too, it wasn’t like he could say no, I’ll be surprised if he even shows up.”

“Ah, yes, Kravitz.” Lucretia said, smiling knowingly. “I’m not surprised he’s so drawn to you. You’re quite an interesting individual, Taako.” She chuckled.

“Besides, Auntie Lup said he was really interested! And she doesn’t lie.” Angus defended. “I want to meet him, too, if he’s going to be your boyfriend.”

“Oh my god.” Taako said, hiding his face. “Shut up, both of you, I’m disowning you.”

“You can’t disown us.” Lucretia said, grinning. “I hate to break it to you, Taako, but I think you’re already committed.”
“Right!” Angus responded, taking one final bite of his cone and dusting his hands off on a napkin.

Taako groaned, running his hands through his bangs. “You guys are the worst. Did you know that? Next time, I’m leaving you in Build-A-Bear.”

“That’s okay, sir! I know where your room is already.”

Angus left with Lucretia a few hours later and Lup wasn’t going to return for another hour or two, so it left Taako with plenty of time to relax before his guests would arrive.

“You look well, Taako. Much less tired.”

He hadn’t exactly spent much time looking at his reflection since he’d been admitted. Despite everything up until now, he wasn’t exactly keen on seeing how all of this chaos was treating his complexion. Even now, standing alone in his room, he didn’t particularly want to take a look. It was hard to notice the weight gain when he only briefly saw glimpses of his body when he was changing from one gown to another, but he worried that when he really looked, he’d see it all at once, and that thought terrified him.

Even so, Kravitz was coming to have dinner and it seemed like an important night, and he hadn’t put any makeup on since he came to the hospital, so he was determined to put his products to use before Lup arrived.

Taking a deep breath and steeling himself to step into the bathroom, Taako glanced at the open door of his room and wondered how long it’d be until Hurley or Sloane realized he no longer had guests and was alone in his room and came to keep an eye on him.

Grabbing a towel and his bag of toiletries, he stepped into the bathroom. He avoided looking into the mirror as he undid the braid in his hair, slipped off his leggings and finally his gown. It wasn’t until he’d unpacked his razor and his floss, (he packed it up every night hoping the next day would be the day that he’d get to leave,) that he finally glanced up into the mirror.

At first, he didn’t notice much. His stomach was the same, flat and dipped in at his hips where the bones stuck out. He could still see his ribs, he still had a gap between his thighs, and his face looked almost the same. Nothing spectacular, average if anything. Then, though, he looked closer, and he
noticed something different. His skin was smooth—there weren’t any breakouts. His teeth seemed whiter, his hair full, and the bags under his eyes had decreased significantly. Even his freckles were more prominent, one of the few things he consistently liked on his face.

It was so slight that he hadn’t noticed it at all in the beginning, but he was starting to realize that perhaps he looked… a little healthier. Nothing major, of course, but there was less that he felt the need to cover up with foundation.

Taking a slow, deep breath and watching his lungs inflate with air, Taako turned away from his examination and started the water to the tub. He didn’t look strange, he couldn’t see the weight he’d put on, at least not yet, and he was beginning to wonder if maybe this place was doing him some good.

Taako showered and shaved his legs because he hated the way they looked when he didn’t, washing and conditioning his hair before wrapping a towel under his armpits and pulling his hair up into another.

Brushing his teeth while he waited for the steam to clear, he played some mindless soundtrack from his phone while he got ready. He couldn’t remember listening to music at all since he’d arrived, and something about the feeling was comforting. When the mirror finally cleared up, Taako began applying his makeup, going for simple and elegant rather than flashy and gaudy like he usually liked. There was something so normal about it all, like he was getting ready for a normal night out rather than pretending like he wasn’t about to have to hook himself back up to the wires from his IV and the feeding tubes. It was a nice sort of familiarity, either way. He was still an individual, still a person, and not just some patient in a hospital.

By the time he’d finished getting ready and slipped on something a little easier on the eyes than a pink hospital gown made for children, Lup had texted him to assure that she’d be there soon and to be ready because Kravitz wouldn’t be far after. Instead of being productive, Taako turned on the TV and towel dried his hair before carefully braiding it himself.

Lup came in with bags on both arms, smiling hugely at Taako as she set them on the counter. “Look at you, hot stuff, damn.” She laughed, already beginning to unpack boxes from the bags. It smelled great, surprisingly, the checkered bags somewhat nostalgic. “You got all dressed up. You look great, though, I’m sure Kravitz will love that look.” Lup hummed, crossing her arms. She was wearing a tank top and a black skirt, with heels that would make her three inches taller than Taako and the sparkly bangles Barry had gotten her for candlenights.

“Hey, sis, you look pretty bomb yourself!” He replied, capping the nail polish he’d just finished using and setting it aside. “I’m digging the look.”
“Thank you, thank you. I got pretty much everything off the breakfast menu so we’d have some variety, especially since I don’t know what Doctor Handsome likes—”

“I’m not picky, but I’m not a fan of the nickname, honestly.”

Taako glanced up from his hands toward the door, making eye contact with Kravitz, who flashed a very nervous smile. He had a bottle of wine under one arm, and a bouquet of roses in his free hand. Taako couldn’t help but grin.

“Oh, Krav, you delivered.” He whistled, sitting up straighter in the bed. Kravitz rolled his eyes, but Taako could tell he was just embarrassed. “Look at you, I’ve never seen you not in doctors clothes!”

“Ah, thank you, Taako.” Kravitz said, smiling a little. “You look, um, lovely, yourself.” He handed over the flowers to him then turned to hand Lup the bottle of wine. “Doctor Sloane said it was alright for me to bring this, since we’re celebrating, apparently.”

Lup grinned at him, taking the wine and giving him a hug. Taako actually laughed at how obscenely uncomfortable Kravitz looked in the embrace. “Thanks, doc! We’re having a picnic on Taako’s bed, if you want to get situated. We are a family of breakfast food lovers, so we have an array to choose from. What do you want, Koko?”

Taako waved a hand. “I want crepes, that’s for fucking sure. Surprise me, though. I’m ready to eat some real food.” He said. Kravitz sat down beside him on the bed, outfitted in black pants and a button up, with a red and black vest and a simple tie. “You clean up nice,” Taako said casually, accepting his plate from Lup and taking the plastic cup filled with wine.

“So do you,” Kravitz said, glancing toward Lup and getting up to make his own plate when she gestured to him. “Really, both of you look lovely. Thank you again for inviting me to join you.”

Lup grinned, sitting cross legged next to Taako so that Kravitz could sit comfortably on the other end of the bed. Once they were all seated, Lup held up her glass, motioning for the two of them to follow. “To my brother. Way to kick anorexia right in the ass.” She said, bumping Taako’s shoulder. “I love you, Koko, I’m proud of you.”

Taako rolled his eyes, trying to ignore the way his cheeks went warm. “Come on, Lu, you’re
embarrassing me in front of our guest.” He joked halfheartedly, taking her hand and squeezing tightly. “Love you too, though.”

Kravitz smiled warmly at the exchange, and Taako’s chest tightened at the fondness in his expression. “Yes, to Taako.” He agreed, raising his cup. They all bumped glasses, and Taako took another small sip from his, knowing they wouldn’t let him get away with more than one cup.

The chatter carried on from there, but Taako couldn’t help but get a little lost in his thoughts as he picked at his crepes. Everyone kept doting on him, talking like the few pounds he’d gained were such a big deal. Like his tiny, insignificant progress meant anything more than a tiny step forward. It was almost frustrating, realizing how little he’d actually improved. Sloane had said it’d take months to get back to a healthy weight, and while he hadn’t noticed it yet, he definitely couldn’t ignore it forever.

All of the sudden, he was regretting everything he’d eaten that day.

“Taako?”

Blinking, Taako glanced up at Kravitz, grinning sheepishly and trying to play it off. “Fuck, my bad, my dude, just zoned out for a second there.”

Lup nudged him gently. “You good, bro? You were out for a good minute there.”

“Yeah, yeah, I’m all good.” He said, forcing down another bite of crepe and flashing a halfhearted thumbs up.

“If you’re tired, I can go.” Kravitz offered, his voice gentle. “You had a busy day, with your Build-A-Bear escapade. It’s good that you’re getting out of the room but it’s likely that you’d be a bit tired.”

Taako waved a hand. “Chill, guys, I’m fucking fine. Can we not talk about this, for once, though? I’m honestly fucking tired of talking about it.”

Lup went quiet, for a moment, before nodding. “‘Course, Taako. What happened on Meerkat Manor, today?”
Taako did his best to recount the details from the day's episode, but the conversation quickly toggled back to Lup and Kravitz, who spoke to fill the silence and in hopes of making Taako comfortable again.

Taako wasn't even really listening, just thinking about how pointless this all was. Even if he gained weight because of the feeding tube, he knew he couldn't keep up with this stupid routine. He hated the therapy, he hated the meal plans, he hated the nurses breathing down his neck. He was tired of being a patient, and he didn't want to gain weight. He didn't want to be healthy. He preferred the way he was now. At least this way he could die looked semi decent.

Mumbling something about needing to pee, he slipped out of bed and made his way over to the bathroom attached to his room. He sunk to the floor almost immediately, ignoring the concerned words from Lup as he wrapped his arms around himself and pushed his head in between his knees, breathing shallowly and trying to calm down.

He couldn't stop. He couldn't see a way out of this. He was never going to get better.

Taako was only half aware as the door was pushed open a minute or so later, his heartbeat pounding in his ears. It wasn't the first panic attack he'd had, certainly not the last, but everything seemed so pointless in the moment, and the fact that he'd actually gained weight was completely terrifying to him. He didn't want to.

“Hey, Taako? Taako, breathe, it's okay, I've got you.” Lup's voice was right next to his ear, and he slowly began to realize that he could feel her arms around him. She was on the floor, holding him close to her chest and stroking his hair. “Try to breathe with me, you're going to be alright.”

Slumping into her side, Taako was crying before he could process what was even going on. He cried for what felt like forever, his fingers curling into Lup's shirt, his breaths coming in short pants. He cried until he couldn't feel anything, until his entire body felt empty.

It was like one minute he was on the bathroom floor, and the next, he was back in bed, his vision blurry and his head resting on Lup's shoulder. Lup was twirling a strand of his hair around her fingers, humming under her breath as Taako’s breathing finally began to even out.

Blinking slowly, Taako’s eyes wandered from the television to the counter, where Kravitz was standing and meticulously cleaning up container boxes. He was quiet, his shoulders tense, and Taako noted the worried expression on his face when he finally turned around.
“Sorry for ruining dinner.” Taako said simply, closing his eyes. “Panic attacks, y’know? What a mood killer.”

Kravitz frowned, sighing softly and stepping over toward the bed. “You don’t need to apologize for anything. I just hope that you’ll be feeling better soon. Can I get you anything before I head out?”

He looked so concerned that it made Taako’s stomach turn. “Glass of water would be dope, my dude.”

Kravitz smiled the slightest bit, getting a glass and filling it before handing it over to Lup. He paused, for a moment, looking like he was contemplating whether or not to say something, before he finally spoke up.

“Can I, ah,” he paused, clearing his throat. “Can I see you tomorrow?”

Taako felt his chest tighten. “I mean, you’re digging your own grave, my man, but I don’t mind.”

Kravitz smiled, nodding briefly. He almost looked relieved, as if Taako was going to shoot him down. “Alright, then. I’ll see you tomorrow, both of you have a good evening. Thank you again for inviting me.”

Lup waved and smiled at him, though she looked just as tired as Taako did. “See you around, Kravitz, thanks for stopping by.”

Taako waved too, all fingers. “Seeya later, Krav.”

Once the man had disappeared from the room, Lup sighed softly and squeezed Taako against her side. “I’m going to go and grab some makeup remover, I’ll be right back. Drink some of that water, dingus, you need to rehydrate.”

Taako did as he was told, wrinkling his nose when Lup came back and began to scrub his face clean with makeup wipes. He stuck out his tongue, but there was no real fight in it. He was fucking exhausted.
When she climbed back into bed, fixing the covers over them and flicking the lights off, Taako sunk back against her without a second thought. “You freaked me out, Koko.” She said simply, bumping him with her elbow. “I know we don’t usually have these deep talks, and stuff, but you can tell me when something’s wrong.” She murmured.

“I know, Lulu, I know.” Taako muttered back, yawning widely behind his arm. “Maybe deep talks tomorrow, though, because I’m fucking beat.” He said. “Thanks for all of that, though.”

“Yeah, bro, anytime.” She said, going quiet for a long while. Taako was just dozing off when Lup spoke up again. “I think he really likes you, Taako.”

Taako rolled his eyes and turned over on his side to face her. “Why, because he didn’t run off when I had a freak out?”

“Well, that, but… I dunno, Taako. I like him. I think he might be good.”

Taako sighed, scrubbing his eyes. “Yeah, Lulu. I do too.”
Kravitz wasn’t sure what to expect when he stopped by the next day. It was later in the afternoon, after his shift had ended, and Taako wasn’t even in his room, the place completely empty.

Kravitz ended up taking the seat next to Taako’s bed and pulling out his phone. He’d said he would visit, and he certainly wasn’t about to back out. Perhaps he was out on a walk or in one of his sessions. Kravitz was patient, and he didn’t have anywhere to be, so he didn’t mind waiting for a while. He had a bit of a hard time admitting that the visit was just as much for himself as it was for Taako.

It was about 10 minutes later when the door was pushed open and Kravitz glanced up quickly from the screen. Hurley raised an eyebrow at him when he sighed softly, setting down her stack of papers on the counter and chuckling. “Don’t look so disappointed.” She joked, rolling her eyes.
“Sorry.” Kravitz apologized, wringing his hands. “I was just waiting for Taako.”

Hurley shot him a knowing look before beginning to shuffle through the papers. Kravitz couldn’t help but feel a little patronized, her tiny smirk too much. She acted like she was in on some big secret of his. “Is everything alright?” He asked, eyebrows knitting. “Nothing happened, did it?”

Laughing, Hurley shook her head, turning back around to face him head on. “No, Kravitz, nothing happened. I think he’s in art therapy right now. They moved it back an hour. He’ll probably be back soon.” She assured. “You sure have been hanging around here a lot. You weren’t even working yesterday and I still saw you here.”

Kravitz shrugged, feeling his face heat up. “Yes, and? Taako’s sister, Lup, she invited me to have dinner with them. I felt like it was only right to accept the offer since, like you said, I apparently hang out around here a lot.”

Hurley held up both hands. “Hey, no judgement here. You’re not his doctor, so it’s not like you can’t be friends. It was just an observation. He likes you, anyways.” She went back to her papers and finally pulled out a flyer. “It’s good for me, anyways, because I needed to talk to you about something.”

Kravitz sat up a little straighter, accepting the paper when she held it out to him. It was almost obnoxiously colorful, with bolded letters and fancy script. After reading part of the description, Kravitz looked back up toward Hurley. “A cooking class?”

Hurley nodded, smiling. “Yeah, Sloane has been trying to find a way to get him off of the feeding tube. He’s been making progress, but he’ll never really get better if he doesn’t start to eat anything real. She was thinking that maybe if we were able to sit down and make a nutritional plan, we could get him to start eating more if he knows exactly what’s going into the food.”

Kravitz nodded thoughtfully. “He’s very self conscious about his appearance in the facet of gaining weight. I doubt he’ll be interested, though.” He sighed, rubbing the bridge of his nose. “He had a rather rough evening last night.”

Hurley nodded. “Yeah, I talked to his sister this morning about it.” She said. “And we were going to bring it up, but- ” she flashed him a smile, “Taako has taken such a liking to you, so we thought maybe you could talk to him.”
Kravitz shot her a look. “Hurley, I’m not going to bribe him into taking a cooking class.”

“No, no.” She said quickly, shaking her head. “Not bribe, just… Ask. Explain it. He thinks we’re all against him or something, but he trusts you. We’re having a hard time breaking through, but I have a really good feeling about this.”

Kravitz rubbed his temples. Taako was probably not in the best place, and Kravitz didn’t want to upset him suggesting something like this. Cooking didn’t really seem up Taako’s alley, either, but Hurley made a good point. Maybe if he knew exactly what went into making the food he was eating, he’d feel more in control. Control seemed to be a big part of this, for him, making his own decisions.

“I suppose I can talk to him.” Kravitz finally said, Hurley beaming at him almost instantly. “But you know that I’m not going to try to sway his decisions.”

Hurley waved a hand. “That’s good enough for me! I appreciate it, Kravitz, really, we just want to help him to get better.”

“I know that, I know.” He sighed, running his fingers up through his hair. “I understand, and I’ll see what he thinks.”

Hurley rounded the bed to give Kravitz a hug, only just slightly taller than him when he was seated. “I owe you one. Or like, 12, at this point, but you know what I mean. Thank you, Kravitz.”

Kravitz smiled a little, squeezing back. “Yes, that’s true. You’ll figure something out.”

Hurley waved at him as she exited the room, and Kravitz didn’t even have a chance to say goodbye.

The class seemed like a good idea in theory, but Kravitz wasn’t sure how Taako might react to it. He could see the progress in the little things that had changed, of course. Taako was less hesitant at meal times, though he still only ate the bare minimum. He went to therapy without fits, he didn’t constantly berate his doctors and nurses. Kravitz wished that he could get inside of Taako’s brain, to see what he was thinking, because it seemed near impossible just to guess.

Then, of course, last night he’d disappeared into the bathroom and Kravitz certainly hadn’t had any
idea what to do. He was glad that it hadn’t happened when he and Taako were alone, because he wouldn’t have known how to help him. Lup did. Kravitz sighed. Maybe he needed to do some more research, if only to learn how to help Taako better when he got nervous. He’d read more material on anorexia and eating disorders in the past weeks than he had of his novels. He’d spent hours online researching to better understand, to feel less useless.

Taako had fascinated him from the moment Kravitz met him, and he wanted to be around to learn more. The past couple of weeks had been interesting, to say in the least. Kravitz lead a pretty plain life, living in a small apartment shared only with his dog. He spent most of his time at the hospital, and when he wasn’t there, he rarely went out. Taako was a wild card, a new and amazing and wonderful thing bringing some actual excitement to Kravitz’s admittedly dull life. He wanted more than anything for it to stay that way.

And of course, Taako was beautiful. Not only in his features but in the way he held himself, how he moved. Even marred by the scars the eating disorder left, Taako was still beautiful. Maybe not in the way his skin stretched over his bones and his joints stuck up, but in the way he spoke, in his actions, in the sense of humor Kravitz still couldn’t understand but loved to be around. In the way he teased and glared and insulted with no real bite, in the tone of his voice when he talked about Angus despite insisting that he couldn’t stand him or about Magnus or Lup.

Kravitz knew that perhaps his interest spanned further than friendship or normal interest. He liked Taako. He wanted to know him and to be near him and to experience his light. Kravitz never wanted that to stop. And he was beginning to realize he’d do a lot to keep that light around. Whether it turned into something more or not, Kravitz longed to be near him.

It hadn’t been very long, but Kravitz knew that he was completely enthralled.

He was snapped out of his thoughts when the door to the room was kicked open.

“Woah, look who’s here!” Kravitz physically started at the voice, actually dropping his phone and barely catching it in his lap. “Whoops, didn’t mean to startle you, homie, my bad.”

Taako stood at the door, his hand curled around the IV pole he was dragging along at his side. Next to him stood a small boy with dark skin and curly hair, round glasses sitting on his nose. His eyes were scanning Kravitz curiously.

“No, no, I’m sorry. I was a little distracted.” Kravitz apologized, glancing at the child.
“Well, I’m on babysitting duty, Krav.” Taako said, ruffling the boys hair and making his way over to the bed. Kravitz couldn’t help but notice the way Taako shook a bit on his feet. He wondered how long he’d been up and about. “So we’ve got boy wonder here until Lucreatia gets off of work.”

The boy, dressed in an embroidered sweater and khaki dress pants, walked over and stood in front of Kravitz, holding a hand out. “It’s nice to meet you, sir! My name is Angus McDonald.”

Kravitz smiled at him, shaking his hand. “It’s nice to meet you too, Angus. I’m Kravitz, an orthopedic surgeon,” he said, glancing over at Taako as he slipped off his slippers and climbed into bed. “And Taako’s friend.”

Angus nodded, smiling back. “Yeah, I know.” He turned back toward Taako, climbing onto the bed up next to him once he was situated. Kravitz dragged the IV pole a bit closer so Taako didn’t have to worry about reach.

“So, how has your day been?” Kravitz asked, looking at the pair as Angus settled against Taako’s side. “Have you been feeling well?”

Taako shrugged, handing Angus a book from the bedside table and dropping an arm around his shoulders. “It’s been okay, I guess. Therapy, bleh, art, bleh, dinner with Ango, slightly less bleh. How’s about you? Got any cool hospital stories?”

Kravitz pondered for a moment. “Well, it’s a bit gruesome.” He said, glancing at Angus briefly, before looking back toward Taako.

“We love gruesome.” Taako grinned.

“Well, a patient came in today with a compound fracture earlier. The bone had broken through the skin. It was pretty intense. Lots of bleeding and bruising.”

Angus McDonald, an endlessly curious child, ended up setting his book aside in favor of asking questions about Kravitz’s profession and about what he did, wanting all of the stories he could muster. He admitted that he wanted to go into the medical field one day, maybe, if being a detective didn’t work out. He was kind of an adorable kid, and Kravitz found himself enjoying him instantly.

It was about an hour before Lucretia came to take Angus home, leaving Taako and Kravitz alone,
finally. It wasn’t so much that Kravitz had wanted Angus to leave, but he did want to get a chance to talk to Taako alone before he had to leave himself.

“He’s a pretty bright kid.” Kravitz said, breaking the silence they’d fallen into. “You seem to care about him a lot.”

Taako laughed, rolling his eyes. “Absolutely not. I can’t stand the kid.” He said simply, moving to bump Kravitz’s arm with his foot, the only thing that could reach him. “You’re sitting pretty far away, my dude, got an issue or something?” He joked.

Kravitz chuckled, scooting his chair closer. “No, no, of course not.”

“Did you have to wait around long for me to come back? I know you usually get off earlier than this.” Taako said, somewhat offhandedly.

Kravitz shrugged. “It’s been a little while, but nothing too bad. I wanted to see you, so it was, ah, worth the wait, I suppose.” He saw the ghost of a smile on Taako’s face before it was gone, followed by him sticking his tongue out.

“Oh, totally. Waiting around just to hang out during babysitting duty. Boring, right?”

“Not at all.” Kravitz smiled. He turned to face more toward the bed, crossing his legs. “Have you eaten much today? I could go and get something from the cafeteria for us.” He offered.

Taako shrugged. “I ate an apple with Agnes at dinner. Deffo no appetite today, though, I can tell you that much.” He muttered.

Kravitz nodded thoughtfully. “I understand. I could go and get you a snack or something small, so you’re at least a little closer to meeting your caloric criteria today.” He said, glancing toward the door. “The closer you get to the number, the sooner you can get rid of the feeding tube.”

Taako sighed, rolling his eyes. “Yeah, I know. I guess I could try to eat something else, if you’re gonna keep bugging me about it.” He said. “Give me like, 5 minutes to muster up the motivation.”

“Well.” Kravitz began, lacing his fingers in his lap. “I did want to talk to you about something. I was
talking to Hurley, earlier.” He began.

“Oh, spare me,” Taako groaned, dropping his head against the pillows.

“They’re going to be doing some sort of cooking class here, and it would probably be a good opportunity for you, if you wanted to try it.”

“I don’t cook, Krav.” Taako said, shaking his head.

“Well, I didn’t think so, but it could be fun. And if you wanted to we could start looking at some of the nutritional aspects of it. I thought that maybe it’d be easier for you to eat if you knew exactly what you were eating. It was just an offer, of course, but I can’t promise that if I don’t convince you that Hurley and Sloane won’t try.” Kravitz warned. “I’m not here to try to pressure you, but I wanted to make the pitch because I think you might really benefit from it.”

Taako seemed to mull this over, twirling a strand of hair around his finger. “You think I’d benefit from it, or they do?”

“I do,” Kravitz said. “I really do, Taako, and it could be fun.”

Taako sighed, sitting up a little straighter and toying with the IV port on his hand. “Can anybody do the class?”

“I think it’s mostly for the hospital patients but I’m sure I could ask and make arrangements. Did you want to see if one of your friends could join you?”

Taako nodded. “Yeah. You. I’ll do it if you do it, too.” He said, shrugging. “Final offer.”

Kravitz was a bit taken aback. It wasn’t as if Taako couldn’t just as easily invite his sister or one of his many friends to join him. “Me?”

Taako rolled his eyes. “Yes, you.”
Finally, Kravitz nodded. “Well, of course. I’ll talk to the coordinators and see what I can do.” He said.

Taako nodded but didn’t respond, signifying the end of the conversation. Kravitz could deal with that, he guessed.

“Would you still like something from the cafeteria? I can run and get it now.” Kravitz said, smiling briefly.

“Well, I don’t know what I’m really in the mood for, or what they’re serving.” Taako mused, tapping his lips.

“I could get you a menu, if you’d like.” Kravitz offered.

“Or we could just go.” Taako said, shrugging. “It’d be easier than waiting around and Sloane won’t shut up about exercising and getting out.”

Kravitz couldn’t help but smile. “Of course.”

They made their way downstairs together, riding the elevator while Taako chatted about his art therapy group from the day and picking a table in the corner where Taako sat and waited while Kravitz went to retrieve their food.

It was really kind of nice. Kravitz always enjoyed Taako’s company and he hadn’t been the one suggesting they extend their visit this time. Taako was animated and talkative, clearly in much better spirits than yesterday, and Kravitz adored it. It was calm, it was nice, it was something different than their usual gig of sitting around Taako’s hospital room.

They ended up walking out toward the fish tank that Angus had showed Taako a couple of days before, sitting on a bench across from it and watching the life bustle inside. Taako sighed quietly and, after a few moments of sitting straight, leaned against Kravitz’s side and rested his head against his shoulder. Kravitz felt his cheeks warm instantly.

“Fish tank’s pretty cool, huh?” Taako supplied, when Kravitz didn’t speak.
“Y-yes, it is. I’ve actually never really seen it, before.” Of course, Kravitz had seen it, but never really looked.

Taako pointed at a sleek, black fish. “That’s you.” He joked.

Kravitz rolled his eyes, searching for the most colorful, eccentric fish in the tank. There was a small pink and blue fish that swam across, with beautiful fins that moved gracefully though the water. “That’s you.” He said, chuckling. Taako rolled his eyes.

“Very original, dude. I commend you.” Taako sounded like he might continue, but he was interrupted by a huge yawn. “Yikes, sorry.”

“You’re tired.” Kravitz said, sitting up straighter. “I should probably get you back to your room.”

“Yeah.” Taako said, nodding slowly. “Just give me a sec. Kinda lightheaded, definitely don’t need to be swooning into anybody’s arms today.” He said.

Kravitz frowned. It kind of made sense that Taako would so openly lean on him if he wasn’t feeling steady. “That’s certainly not good. How long have you been lightheaded?” He asked.

Taako shrugged. “Mmmm… Most of today, I guess.” He said.

Kravitz sighed. “This is the sort of thing you need to tell your doctors, Taako. Let me get a wheelchair, stay here, okay?”

Taako frowned. “Oh, fuck no, i’m done with wheelchairs, I can walk, just give me a second.” He insisted.

“I don’t want to risk you fainting on the walk to the room, that would definitely end pretty badly.” Kravitz said.

“Can’t I just hold onto your arm? You’re big and strong.” He said, joking halfheartedly.
Kravitz sighed. “If you’re certain you’re not going to faint, I suppose you can, but if you start to feel uneasy, you need to sit down.” He insisted. “The last thing you need is a concussion, Taako, or to break something. I’m not your doctor and I’d prefer it if it stayed that way.”

Taako waved a hand. “Yeah, yeah. Let’s just go, I’ll be fine.” He assured, grabbing onto Kravitz’s arm and standing slowly. He remained suck to his side for the walk back to his room, and Kravitz wrapped an arm around his shoulders to steady him when he stumbled. They made it back in one piece, though Taako definitely looked relieved to be back in bed when Kravitz helped to get him situated.

“Expecting any other visitors tonight?” Kravitz asked curiously, filling a glass with water and hanging it over to him.

“I haven’t looked at my phone but I doubt it.” Taako said, accepting the glass, his hands shaking slightly. “Lulu is working late and Magnus has stuff going on.” He said.

Kravitz nodded. “Have you spoken to Hurley or Sloane about the lightheadedness?” He asked, sitting down next to the bed.

“I was kinda hoping it’d pass but if you’re that worried about it I’ll say something tomorrow morning.” Taako said, waving a hand.

Kravitz nodded. “I would certainly appreciate it. You may be burning too many calories when you’re up and about. It’s best to be careful about those sort of things. Like I said, I’d certainly prefer you be more careful.” He said, smiling. “I’ve taken quite a liking to you, really.”

Taako turned to grin at him, raising an eyebrow. “Likewise, pumpkin.” He said, winking.

Kravitz went warm, again. Taako turned on the animal planet, which seemed to be his favorite channel, and proceeded to sink into the pillows. They sat in companionable silence, watching the TV as some documentary on the mongoose flashed across the screen.

Taako fell asleep shortly after, though Kravitz had been expecting it. He’d looked fairly worn out since he’d returned with Angus earlier. He’d have to stop by the next day to assure he’d spoken to Sloane and Hurley about the lightheadedness.

Lingering for what Kravitz considered a healthy amount of time, he turned off the lamp at the bedside and slung his bag over his shoulder. Pausing next to Taako’s sleeping form, he watched his
expression in the light of the television. It cast blueish shadows over his cheekbones, accentuating how skinny he still was. Kravitz hoped for a day when he didn’t look so skeletal.

Taking a small breath, Kravitz drew the covers up closer to Taako’s chin and turned the television off. With one last glance at the sleeping form in the bed, Kravitz pocketed his phone and started his walk to the car, humming the theme song to the silly show they’d been watching under his breath as he went.
Chapter 4: Taako

Chapter Summary

Cooking classes come and go and Taako wonders exactly how far this little crush is going to extend.

Magic Brian charms. Taako reflects. Angus gets an unexpected spook.

Chapter Notes

Hey guys! I managed to not post things super late at night again! This chapter is a bit shorter than some of the others but it would have been super long had I put in another 'section' so I decided to leave it as is! I managed to work another NPC into this one, too! Some more wonderful people have done fanart for this fic! Heidydoodles on tumblr did this awesome drawing of Taako and Kravitz at the fishtank, and nejamin did this! Thank you again so so much for the awesome art and please, if anyone else does any, link it to me somewhere so I can share!!

Reminder that you can find me on tumblr at ness-writes.tumblr.com and on twitter @nesselizabeth55! Next update should be Saturday! I'm going to be at a convention the following weekend though, but I'll let you know ahead of time if I'm going to have a late update or if we'll miss one or something while I'm out! Thank you again so much for reading and commenting and such, I so appreciate it! Warnings as usual for hospital themes and such!

“Move over, stud, I can’t see the instructor.” Taako nudged Kravitz with his elbow, earning an embarrassed glance from his guest as he shuffled to the side.

Taako rested his elbows on the counter in front of him, a little workshop they’d set up in an empty therapy room. There were a handful of other patients there, with family or friends as well, but Taako could tell with ease that none of these people had his brand of issues.

They’d only just arrived, Taako’s IV pole sitting next to them, the port in his hand pulling every so often when he gestured too widely or forgot about needing to stay in relatively the same spot. He was pretty tired, truthfully, because any amount of time spent on his feet wore him out, but he’d be lying if he said he wasn’t at least a little excited for this excursion.

Well, excited and nervous. Also pretty nervous.
Kravitz smiled at him, and Taako rolled his eyes. “Quit giving me that look, Krav, I’m trying to focus up before the main event.” He said, though he was unable to completely resist the urge to smile himself.

Of course, Taako had dressed up for the occasion. Sure, it was technically just another therapy session, a different brand, but any excuse to do his makeup and trade out the gown for a hospital-approved outfit was to be capitalized on. He was wearing a baggy sweater and floral leggings, his hair pushed up into a messy bun and his eyelids accentuated with warm colors to make him look less lifeless. Kravitz had said he’d looked nice, when he showed up at his room earlier to ‘pick him up.’

_Were they flirting? Was Kravitz being overly polite or was he actually interested?_

Lup had stayed up with him the night before talking about it, or rambled about how frustrating it was. About Kravitz and their visits that became more and more frequent. It had been a week or so since they’d sat in front of that aquarium for the first time, and it seemed to him like Kravitz had been spending even more time in his room. Instead of a visit every couple of days, Kravitz almost always came around at lunchtime, inviting Taako out of the room and walking him somewhere ‘more relaxing.’ He was there in the afternoons when his shift ended, and had come once or twice on days that he wasn’t even scheduled for Taako’s strategically planned movie marathons or the trivia night Lup had organized with all of their friends.

(It was awesome. Angus creamed everyone and Lup and Magnus got into a fight and they all got kicked out of the hospital.)

Taako hated to admit that he was becoming enamored, too. Sure, at the very beginning it’d been looks, Kravitz was _something else_ in that department, but his stupid awkward charm and his too formal language, the way he never made Taako feel like a patient and the way he was always honest without being patronizing or unkind was sort of growing on him.

Emotions weren’t exactly Taako’s _thing_ , though, so they’d ended up dropping it, but he’d be lying if he said he wasn’t hoping for a _little_ more. He could only flirt and drop subtle hints so much without Kravitz noticing before he went absolutely bonkers.

“I can’t believe you picked a grey apron, how lame is that.” Taako said, resting his chin on his hand as he leaned further on the table. His own apron was looped around his waist twice and tied in a bow over his stomach,

Kravitz rolled his eyes. “Not all of us can pull off the multicolored ‘World’s Okayest Chef’ apron, Taako. Besides, if I got something extravagant, it’d take away the attention from you.”
“Oooh, fair point. I like the way you think, bone daddy.”

Kravitz covered his face. “Oh, my god. Please, Taako, I don’t like that one.”

Taako grinned, all teeth. “But it’s so good to watch you squirm. I love it.”

Kravitz shook his head, running a hand through his hair and glancing away from Taako as the door to the room was pushed open. A man with long, silvery hair walked in, a cookbook under one arm and a classic ‘kiss the cook’ apron tied around his waist. He smiled widely at everyone, waving with a flourish and setting his things down on the counter.

“Hello, hello.” He greeted brightly. “Welcome to my class! My name is Brian, though everyone I know calls me magic, because my cooking is like sorcery.” He grinned with total delight, but nobody laughed.

“Get a load of this loser.” Taako muttered under his breath, earning a tiny smile from Kravitz.

“Alight, well, introductions aside, I suppose we should go ahead and get started with the class! Today, we’ll be making chicken pesto pasta! We’ll start off by getting out our pots and boiling water. The portable stove tops may take some time, so be patient! I’m not used to teaching in these conditions.”

Kravitz stooped over to grab the pot from under their makeshift work station, moving toward the nearby sink and filling it with water. Taako knew he wouldn’t have been able to carry something that heavy, so he was kind of relieved that Kravitz had moved quicker than him, because he certainly wouldn’t have asked for help.

The instructor continued in his irritatingly cheerful voice, droning on with instructions. Taako got the gist of it, grabbing the pan from underneath and setting it on the makeshift stove top as Kravitz used the other half to boil water and add the pasta. He only half listened to the instructor, a recipe projected at the front of the room for reference. He didn’t know why they even needed an instructor when the recipe was right there, plain as day.

“So,” Kravitz began. “I heard that there’s been talk of removing the feeding tube. How are you feeling about that?” He asked. Taako didn’t glance up from where he was, very carefully slicing up a garlic clove. He was quiet as he sprinkled the garlic into the pan with a ‘splash’ of olive oil, as Brian
Finally, as the garlic began to cook, Taako wiped his hands down the front of his apron. “Ready to get this thing out of my nose, honestly. They don’t know for sure yet. I still don’t eat enough on my own.” He said, shrugging. “The sooner I get off of it, the better. ‘Cause that means I can leave sooner. I’m ready to sleep in my own bed again.”

Kravitz nodded, watching him earnestly as he explained. “I have to admit that I’ll miss our talks.” He chuckled. “Though, of course, I’m excited to see how far you’ve come. I’m proud of you, Taako. We all are. Hopefully the tube will be done with, soon.”

Taako hummed in response, taking out the chicken and wrinkling his nose at the slimy feeling on his fingers. “Yeah, yeah, quit making it all dramatic, Krav. Besides, nobody said our talks had to end.” He instantly regretted how straightforward he’d been, eyes casting down as he tried to think of something witty to say. “Because if they do, that meant you were totally just using me for amusement here. Not cool, dude, not cool at all.”

Kravitz chuckled. “You are rather amusing, Taako. Though I’d, ah. I’d like it if I could still… see you. If you wanted to, of course. I like to think we’ve become sort of, friends, you know?”

Taako rolled his eyes. “Friends, jesus, you’re so lame.” He joked, bumping Kravitz’s side. “Duh, though. It’s probably still gonna be a couple of weeks, so no use in worrying about it now. Still, maybe you come over, play some games and shit. And apparently we can make a dope pasta dish together.”

The smile that followed was warm and a little too genuine. That had to mean something, right?

They were quieter after that, listening to the instructor and following along as he prepared the dish with unnecessary flair. Their own creation wasn’t quite as put together, but Kravitz coerced him into tasting it, and it actually wasn’t too bad. More than anything, Taako was surprised that they’d made it on their own. He and Lup hadn’t ever really cooked, or eaten many home cooked meals, aside from the aunt that had fostered them for a couple of years. It was kind of entertaining, really. At the very least, Taako could cook for other people.

Kravitz ended up walking him back to his room, after Taako had tried to sneak away with the ‘World’s Okayest Cook’ apron in his hands and got caught. His stealth game was kind of off, anyways, and it was getting late, too. One hand placed on Taako’s shoulder, he could feel the warmth in Kravitz’s touch, a strange sort of reassurance as they made their way back to his room.
It was empty, which Taako was sort of relieved at. He was tired, for sure, and he didn’t have the energy to try to entertain anyone before passing out for the night. Kravitz fixed his IV pole and hooked the feeding tube back up, flashing Taako a gentle smile.

Taako rolled his eyes. “Well, that was… interesting.” He said, finally. Kravitz took a seat next to the bed, chuckling.

“It certainly was. He was quite… eccentric.”

“Magic Brian, the wizard chef or something. How garbage is that? The pasta was only okay. I bet I could do way fucking better.” Taako grumbled, crossing his arms.

Kravitz raised an eyebrow. “I bet you could. You did quite well, actually, I think maybe you have a knack for it.”

Taako laughed. “Yeah, right, can you imagine?” He didn’t want to admit that he’d kind of enjoyed the feeling of it, of taking one thing and creating another, of the simple monotony of cutting and slicing and boiling. Kind of ironic, considering how much he hated eating.

“I could.” Kravitz said, rolling his eyes. “You really don’t give yourself enough credit. I think it was fun, personally. Do you think you may want to do the next class?”

Taako undid the bun in his hair, letting it fall back and combing his fingers through it. His nails needed a new color, but he was worried he may fall asleep while they were still drying if he did them now. “I guess so. If you’ll go again. We’re partners in crime, now, and we have to overthrow Magic Brian.”

Kravitz laughed, outright, less contained than his usually measured chuckles. “I suppose so.” He said, shaking his head. “That sounds like it could be interesting.” He turned his head to muffle his own yawn, sighing softly.

Taako rolled his eyes. “You oughta head out. You work tomorrow?” He asked, raising an eyebrow.

“I’m coming in for a surgery but I won’t stay much later than that. I probably should go though, have to be here bright and early.” He said, smiling sheepishly. “I’ll see you tomorrow, then?”
“You better.” Taako said, shooting him a halfhearted thumbs up. “Lup has a date with Barry and I think Mags might bring Ango up for a while but you know how boring that is.”

Kravitz gave him a knowing smile. “Of course, of course. Have a nice night, Taako, I’ll see you tomorrow.”

Taako waved with his fingers, shooting a finger gun at him before he disappeared through the door. Groaning only to himself, Taako sunk beneath the covers, pulling them up over his head. He was in way too fucking deep.

“This is where you and Doctor Kravitz go for lunch, right sir?” Angus asked, far too chipper to be up so damn early. Taako groaned, swatting his hand.

“Yes, Agnes, it is. Taako needs time to wake up, so can it until I finish this coffee.” It was fully caffeinated, god bless Lucretia, because they would only give him decaf in the hospital. Maybe she knew he would have killed someone had she turned up without it.

Sure, it was only 9, but he was still fucking beat. Lucretia had shown up 15 minutes ago with Angus in tow, apologizing quickly because she’d been called in out of the blue and nobody was nearby to watch him. Taako hated that he was happy to see the brat. They’d made a trek down to the cafeteria to get Angus some breakfast but Taako had stopped him at the fishtank on the walk back when his vision started to blur around the edges and his head started to spin. This whole feeling lightheaded thing was getting pretty fucking old.

“Yes, sir! Sorry, Taako.” Angus smiled, holding his own cup of hot chocolate and a croissant in his hands. He was perched next to Taako on the bench, his feet not even reaching the ground from where he sat.

Blinking the blurriness out of his eyes, Taako slumped back into the bench and yawned widely. “Lucretia could have just tossed you into my room, she didn’t even have to wake me.” He grumbled halfheartedly, taking another swig from his cup. “You’re self sufficient.”

Angus shrugged, taking a bite of his croissant. “But I needed to eat breakfast.”

“You could have eaten mine.” Taako waved a hand. “We didn’t need to leave the room and stuff.”
“But you have to eat your breakfast, Taako, or you can never go home!” Angus complained.

“Maybe I never want to go home.” Taako stuck out his tongue and Angus made a face.

“That’s not funny, Taako.” He said, crossing his arms. “Everyone misses you at home.” Setting his coffee cup aside, Angus sighed softly, his shoulders slumping. Had he seriously fucked up again? The last thing he needed right now was a crying toddler. “It stinks when you’re not around, sir. Lup and Magnus are always alone in their apartments and nobody gets together like they used to. There used to always be a place I could go when I was bored or scared or lonely and it seems like… there isn’t, anymore.”

Taako frowned, rubbing at the bridge of his nose. “Jeez, kid, way to make a guy feel bad.”

Angus frowned, looking up at him. “No, no, I didn’t mean it like that. It’s just that… We all want you to come home. It feels like there isn’t any life there anymore.”

“You’re insinuating that I of all people in that building are the ‘life’ of it?” Taako asked, quirking an eyebrow.

“Well… Yeah, I guess so.” Angus looked worn down and tired, his expression more somber than an little kids should ever be.

“Hey, chin up, pumpkin. Taako’s getting better here, and I’ll be home in a jif. I was just kidding, of course I want to escape this hell hole.” He said, wrapping an arm around his shoulders and squeezing halfheartedly.

Angus shrugged a little. “I thought maybe you wanted to stick around since your boyfriend works here.”

Taako opened his mouth to respond, thumping Angus on the head when he saw his devious smile breaking through. “Oh, you little brat. Nice try, pumpkin, Taako’s still single.”

“Maybe not for long.” Angus teased, grinning. “Do you want to go back upstairs? I brought some movies to watch this time.”
Taako nodded, flashing him a quick smile before moving to get to his feet. Angus followed suit, hopping up and carrying his cup of cocoa along as they began the trek toward the room.

It was about halfway there that Taako began to get dizzy again, his head buzzing and heavy and tired. Angus was chatting at his side, but he realized he couldn’t really make out the words. In front of him, the hallway began to double, swaying in and out of focus as his fingers gripped tighter at his IV pole. He considered sitting down or something, but that would just freak Angus out, and they were already so close to his room.

Distantly, as his vision began to darken around the edges, Angus said his name, and Taako stumbled, the coffee cup falling out of his hand. He didn’t even hear it hit the ground, the world going black as his grip on the IV pole slackened. He was vaguely aware of the sensation of falling and chaos starting up around him before he faded into black, completely.
Chapter 5: Taako

Chapter Summary

Taako wakes up after fainting to a fair amount of chaos.

Angus is emotional. Taako is hurting. Magnus tries to comfort.

Chapter Notes

Happy Saturday! As you guys may notice, this chapter is breaking the pattern of shifting from Kravitz to Taako. At first I had planned on having this chapter be half from Taako's POV and half from Kravitz's, but Taako's part got lengthy and I decided just to break my usual pattern. Next chapter will definitely be a Kravitz one, though, so no worries! This chapter gets a little more detailed with some hospital procedures and things so read with caution!

In other news, more beautiful fanart from Heidydoodles on tumblr! This is seriously such a beautiful piece of art and I'm literally Heidi's number one fan so please please go follow as a solid to me. If anyone does fanart please remember to send it to me!

Anyways! Wednesday will be a usual update, but Saturday may end up being a shorter bonus chapter since I'm going to be at a convention that weekend! It all depends on how much I can write this coming week, though! Thanks so much again for reading and sticking with this fic, it's gotten sort of a following and that's just honestly insane to me? I appreciate it a whole bunch! Sorry for the cliff hanger at last chapter, by the way, some people seemed fairly upset from that one. Hopefully, I can make up for it! Have a great weekend everyone!

The room was sort of in chaos when Taako finally forced his eyes open.

The first thing he heard was crying, constant and inconsolable. Next was a quiet voice, firm and calm and collected, murmuring so softly that he couldn’t quite make out the words. Shifting slightly in what he assumed to be his usual bed, Taako’s eyebrows furled and he let out a long, shaky sigh.

“Good morning, sleeping beauty.” Sloane stood at his bedside, having just finished wrapping a bandage around his hand.

“Anybody want to tell me what the fuck is going on?” Taako croaked, his voice coming out shockingly hoarse.

“You fainted while you were out walking. You managed not only to break your wrist, but also tear your IV out. Someone from orthopedics will be here to check on it once we get x-rays done.” Sloan said. Taako tried to wiggle the fingers of the hand that hadn’t just been wrapped up and a sharp, aching pain shot all the way up to his elbow. He was sort of afraid to look.

“Yikes. Rough morning for ol’ Taako, I guess. What’s the verdict?” He asked, shimmying backwards slightly and blinking past the wave of vertigo brought on by the pain.
“Well, aside from the obvious suspects, I’m going to take a sample of blood while we get a new IV port set up to test for any obvious deficiencies. You’ve gotten a little better about eating but there’s not much of a reason you would be fainting from malnutrition alone with the tube. You also hit your head pretty hard, but it looks like it’s only a mild concussion at most. We’ll take you for a CT once we get this wrist situation sorted out.”

Now that he was aware of it, the pain from his hand was pretty difficult to ignore. Not to mention the pulsing headache and the fogginess that came from losing consciousness. He blinked a few times before nodding. “Yeah, okay. Deffo a rough morning there, my dude. Jesus. Do your worst I guess.”

As Sloane began to swab the crook of his elbow, Taako became a bit more aware of what was happening around him. His chest was littered with sticky electrodes, again, and there was a tiny device snapped on the tip of his pointer finger. His left hand was the one that had gotten fucked up, and upon glancing down at his side, he saw that his wrist was swollen to about twice it’s normal size. It made him feel a little sick to his stomach.

Turning his head as Sloane pricked his arm, Taako closed his eyes for a moment and breathed out through his nose, opening them to see Lucretia and Angus. Lucretia held Angus in her arms, and he was crying like it was the end of the world or something. Taako felt pretty guilty for not suggesting they sit down again on the walk back to the room.

“Hey, bubula.” Taako said, frowning a bit at his uneven tone. “Look at me, pumpkin.”

Angus lifted his head just slightly, his shoulders hiccupping with tiny gasps as he tried to calm himself down. “T-taako, I was, I didn’t—“

“Woah, woah.” Taako said, clearing his throat. “Come on, Ango, take a deep breath. Taako’s good, no worries.” He said, motioning with his ‘good’ hand, (though how good could it be when it was already wrapped up from the torn out IV and still tingling from the new one that’d been placed,) for him to come closer. Lucretia opened her arms and Angus climbed off her lap, stumbling his way over and climbing up onto the bed near Taako’s feet.

“Look, kiddo. I know this all looks rough and I probably scared the absolute shit out of you back there, but I’m gonna be fine, okay?” Taako said, patting his knee. “Listen, Ango, I’m really fucking sorry about that, okay? I didn’t think I was going to faint but I should have said something, been more responsible. I’m real fucking sorry.”

Angus sniffled and scrubbed at his puffy eyes, nodding slowly. “Y-you just…” His voice was thick with emotion and tears, his little hands shaking slightly as he spoke. “You just k-kind of fell and I knew w-what was happening but I d-didn’t know what to do about it and I c-couldn’t get you to wake up and it was j-just really, r-really uh, s-scary…”

“I know, bubula.” Taako said, lifting his hand and ruffling his hair. He was surprised at how hard it was to do even that. “It’s not gonna happen again, okay? That’s a fuckin’ promise, Ango.”

Angus nodded a little, wiping his eyes with his sleeves and accepting the handful of tissues that Sloane offered him with a sympathetic smile. Once he’d cleaned himself up a bit and didn’t look like he’d actively burst into tears, he scooted just a little closer and wrapped his arms around Taako, squeezing tight. “I l-love you, Taako.”

Taako rolled his eyes, trying not to be completely mortified that he was put on the spot like this. “Yeah yeah, Agnes, love you too.”
Angus climbed out of the bed after that, Lucretia letting him sit back on her lap. “How are you feeling, Taako?” She asked, stroking Angus’ hair slightly as he sniffled some more but remained, for the most part, controlled.

“Honestly? Pretty fuckin’ bad, Lucy, but what can ya’ do?” He sighed, closing his eyes and exhaling a measured breath. His arm was fucking aching and he was ready for them to drug him up and fix that shit up. “Hey, doc, do I at least get to pick the color of my cast?”

Sloane rolled her eyes as she recorded information from the EKG. God, he hated that thing. He hoped it wouldn’t stick around for too long. “I suppose so. Are you going to need us to get you some markers so your friends can sign it?” She joked.

“Abso-fucking-lutely. Can I still have my nails painted if my wrist is broken?”

“It depends on how badly broken it is, and how long the cast will be. I’m sure your fingers will be exposed just fine. You just won’t be able to paint them yourself.” She warned.

“That’s fine. Ango McDango over here’s getting pretty good at it.” He said, gesturing to Angus and grimacing as he accidentally shifted his other wrist as well. Jesus, that didn’t feel good.

“Alright. I’m going to take your blood sample down to the labs and Hurley will be in in a minute to take you to your scans. For the immediate future, no more walking. Just until we figure out what’s going on. The last thing we need is anymore fainting.” She said. Taako nodded, huffing in fake exasperation.

“Lame, but whatever.”

She flashed the briefest of smiles before disappearing out of the room and Taako closed his eyes, absolutely fucking worn out. He could honestly go for a quick nap, but the pain was bad enough that the prospect slipped away before he could entertain the idea. He did, however, remain like that, still and quiet, until Hurley came in with a wheelchair.

“Alright, Taako, we’re going to take you to get those scans. We can’t do anything to your wrist until we get a picture on the kind of break you have.” She said, giving him a quick smile. “We’re gonna try not to move your wrist at all while we get you onto the chair, though, so we’re gonna take it slow.”

“Gotcha.” Taako said, shifting very slowly into a sitting position and blinking away the stars in his vision.

Lucretia was standing next to the bed, her lips pressed into a small frown. Angus stood at her side, wringing his hands. “I’m going to take Angus home and he’ll stay with Merle for a while. Magnus is on his way over right now and I’ll be back in an hour or so.”

Taako nodded slowly, closing his eyes and inhaling through his teeth. He was dizzy, his entire arm aching from the slight movement. “Cool, cool. I’m all good here, no worries. Don’t freak out, Ango, you can come back later, okay? By then I’ll probably be all doped up and you guys can video it or something.”

Angus nodded quickly, clearly fighting the urge to cry. “O-okay, sir.” He said, sniffling wetly.

“We’ll take good care of him, sweetie,” Hurley promised, smiling at him.

Lucretia set a hand on Angus’ shoulder and led him out of the room, Angus waving before disappearing down the hall. Taako took another deep breath.
“Just take it slow.” Hurley said, patting his arm. “Pushing too fast will just make it worse.”

The process of actually getting onto his feet and sitting in the chair was a lot harder than it should have been. Taako blamed the concussion and the lingering shakiness from the fainting epidemic. After a solid minute of wondering if he was going to pass out or throw up, Taako finally slumped into the chair and propped his feet up on the little rests, effectively giving Hurley the okay to start moving.

The trip was slow going and arduous, especially when literally all he wanted to do was lie down. Taako got a few moments of bliss during the CT scan, where he could lie with his eyes closed and focus on breathing, but then he was being shuffled to another room, and his wrist was being manhandled into the proper position for an x-ray. He had to stop Hurley when he was back in the wheelchair because the room was turning into a tilt-a-whirl at a shitty carnival and he ended up actually puking over the arm of the chair.

When he was finally pushed back into the room, Taako was so fucking exhausted he could have cried and Magnus was there and ready at the door to help him back into his bed. (Maybe there were a few tears. The memory was a little fuzzy.)

“Rough morning, huh?” Magnus asked, watching as Hurley fixed the appropriate machinery and got Taako a cup of water.

“You wouldn’t fucking believe it.” Taako croaked, closing his eyes and giving his body a minute to sort it’s shit out before even trying to drink anything. Magnus hummed sympathetically.

“We should have your X-ray results back soon, so I’m going to go ahead and give you some mild painkillers and we’ll adjust when we figure out your course of treatment for it.” Hurley said, injecting something into his IV line. “It should take off the edge, at least. No sleep until we figure out the concussion, though. If you feel up to it, you need to try to eat something, too, but I don’t blame you if you need to wait for a little while.” She squeezed Taako’s shoulder and frowned. “Can I get you anything?”

Taako shrugged. “All good, Hurley, no use wasting your energy worrying about little ol’ me.” He said, sighing dramatically. “Mags can get me whatever, anyways.”

Hurley rolled her eyes. “I’m a nurse, it’s my job to worry. I’ll be back in to check on you soon. Take it easy, okay?”

Taako flashed her a thumbs up. He downed about half of the water before handing the cup off to Magnus, relieved just to be in a sedentary position for the time being.

“Your wrist looks pretty bad, dude.” Magnus said, eyeing the swollen and bruised section of Taako’s arm. “You had a really rough morning.”

“Damn right I did.” Taako grumbled, his posture relaxing slightly as the warmth from the IV spread across him and he started to feel the effects of the painkillers. “I probably fucking scarred Angus for life.”

Magnus rolled his eyes. “Probably not for life. He’s a tough kid, Taako, he’s just worried about you.”

“I know that.” Taako groaned. “God knows why that kid likes me so much.” He sighed, rubbing his eyes with his good hand.

“I feel like getting into this while you’re already emotionally fragile may not be the best idea.”
Magnus chuckled. Taako flipped him off.

“Didn’t they tell you? I’m always emotionally fragile, apparently. All that bottling up shit? That doesn’t fucking fly here.”

Magnus chipped at his nail polish. “I know.” He said simply, after being quiet for a long time. Taako could tell he was thinking really hard about what to say. “You know that’s okay, right?” He finally said, looking at him with a little more purpose. “It’s not a bad thing, Taako. You’ve got like… A lot going on right now. You have every right to be a little emotional.”

Taako scoffed, “Yeah, Mags, I know.”

“It doesn’t make you weak or anything. You deserve to be able to feel what you’re feeling without having to feel guilty about it.” Magnus continued, his voice earnest. “There’s nothing wrong with that.”

“Thanks, Maggie, but I don’t really want to get into this all right now. The painkillers are kicking in and I deffo don’t need to waste my energy crying or some shit.”

Magnus ruffled his hair affectionately. “Yeah, fair enough. Just remember you can always come to me if you need to.”

“I know.” Taako said, making eye contact for only a split second before looking away and holding his good hand out. “Can I have the remote? I’m gonna turn on some shitty reality TV while we wait on the results and shit.”

Magnus laughed, handing over the remote and prompting Taako to drink more of his water.

The half hour before Hurley and Sloane came back with results gave Taako plenty of time to get his shit back together. He’d even managed to nibble on some grapes from his breakfast, though it’d only been after Magnus had suggested it. Sloane dropped a file on the counter and took out an x-ray.

“Bad news, your wrist is definitely broken and we’re going to have to get someone from ortho to come reset it.” Sloane began, holding up the x-ray to the light to show the very clearly broken bones, “Good news is that the break is clean so once we get it reset and such, it should be an easy recovery. No surgery or anything like that.”

“Oh well thank god,” Taako said, rolling his eyes. “The last thing I need is fucking surgery, huh?”

“Agreed.” Hurley said, “Double good news, you have a very mild concussion and aside from having some headaches and dizziness for a couple of days, it’ll go away on its own relatively soon.”

“Dope.” Taako said. “Does that mean I can take a fucking nap, then? Because let me tell you, I’m pretty sure I’ve never been this fucking tired in my life.”

Sloane rolled her eyes. “You can sleep all day if you want, but you have to wait until after your wrist is fixed up.” She said, setting the x-ray image on the counter. “Someone is on their way to do that right now, and we’re going to give you some heavier painkillers for the process. They’ll use a local anesthetic on your wrist but it isn’t the most pleasant of procedures, so…”

Taako huffed out a sigh. “Seriously?”

Magnus rolled his eyes. “Don’t worry, you can hold my hand.”

“Yeah, right, Mango, I’m not a two-year-old.” Taako glared at him. “Lulu broke her arm when we
were kids and had to get it set and she did it like it was nothing.”

“Speaking of, I think Lucretia texted her. I’m not sure if she’s coming now or when she’ll be here, but I’ll call her after this is all over.” Magnus said.

Taako groaned. “Call her now and tell her not to come. She’s supposed to have a date today.”
Sloane injected something into his IV and he really felt that one. He actually had to close his eyes as the feeling pretty much numbed his entire being. “Woah.”

Hurley laughed, shaking her head. “Yeah, we’ve got you on the good stuff.”

The door was pushed open and a doctor Taako had never seen came inside. His hair was tied up into a bun and his lab coat sleeves were pushed up to his elbows. “Hey, my name is Avi, I’m a doctor in the orthopedic ward. I’m here to set your wrist.”

“Do your worst, Avi.” Taako said, flashing another exhausted thumbs up. It was kind of sloppy due to the stupid amount of narcotics coursing through him, though.

The actual act of the setting wasn’t totally horrible. Taako was given a local anesthetic that numbed the entirety of his arm, and the man put his fingers in some sort of weird Chinese finger cuffs that left his wrist hanging. He knew that it hurt, but he was either so out of it or so doped up that he didn’t respond. Magnus held his free hand despite the fact that Taako insisted he didn’t need it, and the only part that really got him was when he both felt and heard the shift of his bone popping back into place. Yikes.

After that, Taako was pretty much out for the count. He knew his eyes were still open and he could kind of hear what everyone was saying, but his mind was pretty much checked out. He closed his eyes and exhaled slowly, ready to do what Hurley had said and knock out for the rest of the day.

“Well, I’ll come in to check up on the break over the next couple of days until the swelling goes down and we can put a proper cast on it.” The doctor said, removing his gloves and tossing them into the trash. Magnus gave a thumbs up when Taako didn’t respond.

“Thanks, Avi.” Magnus said. Taako didn’t bother trying to express his own gratitude. If he was coming back later, he could just say it then.

“No problem, man. It was interesting to meet the illustrious Taako that Kravitz is always talking about down in ortho.” Avi said, and if Taako weren’t already on the cusp of sleep, he might have tried to get in on that one. Even so, Magnus was responding for him, and Taako didn’t have the energy to try to keep up with the words.
Chapter 5: Kravitz

Chapter Summary

Kravitz hears about the fainting episode and perhaps panics a little bit. Only a little. A healthy amount of panic.

Chapter Notes

Hey guys! Gonna try to keep this little author's note kinda short so I'll get straight to the good stuff. This chapter is pretty short, but I feel like it accomplished what I needed it to and I liked where it ended so I didn't continue it. I may or may not post this Saturday because I'll be at a convention and I've been in a pretty bad slump mentally so I haven't been able to motivate myself to do much writing because everything I've done just sounds bad to me lol I'm gonna try to get at least something out but I'll keep you guys updated on my tumblr ness-writes.tumblr.com !! I also wrote a little oneshot of Ango and Taako if you guys wanted to check that out, it's also posted on my AO3! Lastly, I just wanted to let you all know again how much I appreciate your comments and everything. I've been in a kinda rough spot recently and I worry that what I'm writing isn't worth any attention and the things you guys do or say with fanart or messages or comments is incredibly moving every time. Rereading some of the comments makes me really happy and talks me down from the ledge when I'm like 'this is garbage i should delete it all and start over' lol I love you guys, really, thank you so so much. Either way, enjoy this part, and GOOD LUCK WITH THE FINALE DROPPING TOMORROW. WE're in this together so if you need to scream at someone about it all hit me up! I'm gonna listen sometime tomorrow night :) (this wasn't short at all i'm so sorry)

“I think I might get why you like that Taako guy so much, now.” Kravitz glanced up from his paperwork as Avi brushed past his side, leaning against the counter of the nurse’s station and grinning. He’d just finished his surgery and he’d been planning to get all the paperwork finished before seeing if Taako had wanted to grab lunch at their usual spot. He’d just finished his surgery and he’d been planning to get all the paperwork finished before seeing if Taako had wanted to grab lunch at their usual spot.

Kravitz raised an eyebrow, clearing his throat. “I’m sorry, what?” He asked, setting his pen aside.

“Taako? That guy in psychiatrics that you keep talking about.” Avi said, nodding to himself. “He’s an interesting dude.”

Kravitz rolled his eyes. “I’m aware. What makes you say that now, of all times?” He asked, crossing his arms over his chest. Avi had been teasing him mercilessly about Taako since day one, and Kravitz certainly hadn’t expected the sudden change of heart. Not unless something had happened.

“I finally met him.” Avi mused, pushing his hands into the pocket of his lab coat. “I got called down there for a consultation.”

Kravitz sighed, rubbing the bridge of his nose. “Was the urge to invade my personal life that
“irresistible?” He asked, taking his pen and scrawling down his signature at the bottom of the page.

“I’m not that curious, Kravitz. It was his consultation.” Avi said, shrugging. “He broke his wrist.”

Kravitz blinked, taken aback. “He broke his wrist?”

“Yeah, he had a pretty good break. They called me in to set it, and I’ll be back in a few days to put on a cast once the swelling goes down.”

Kravitz frowned, turning to face him fully. “Did they tell you what happened?”

“I don’t know, they didn’t say. They had him drugged through the roof though. He passed out before I even finished bandaging his arm.” Avi said, shaking his head. “Look, I wouldn’t have said anything if I’d thought it would freak you out. It wasn’t a big deal, he probably just fell or something. He was sleeping when I left, his friend was there, everything was fine.”

Taking a moment to rub at his temples to push away the anxiety building up in his chest, Kravitz shook his head, grabbing the paperwork and pushing it into Avi’s hands. “Finish this for me, would you? Please?” Avi rolled his eyes but took the papers, snagging a pen out of the front pocket of Kravitz’s lab coat and sticking it in his own.

“Yeah, okay. Go wake him up with true love’s first kiss.” Avi teased halfheartedly, deflating when Kravitz only glared. “Come on, dude, just trying to lighten the mood. He’s gonna live.”

Kravitz thanked Avi quickly, skipping his usual stop at his locker and just leaving his lab coat at the nurses station and heading straight toward the psych ward. He trusted Avi, of course, someone he’d liked instantly when he’d gotten the job in the first place, but he knew he’d never be able to squash the nerves until he’d seen that Taako was alright for himself. Kravitz could only assume that Taako had fallen or fainted or something of the sort, and that insinuated a whole other set of problems.

A broken wrist was never a big deal, really, unless you were already malnourished and mentally exhausted. He couldn’t imagine it wouldn’t be hard on Taako.

Kravitz hadn’t even realized he’d made it there until he was stilling outside of the door, slightly breathless from his brisk walking pace. He took a moment to collect himself. The last thing he needed was to make a fool of himself by letting them know he’d practically run all the way from his ward.

Finally, taking in a deep breath, Kravitz tapped on the door frame, peeking into the room. Magnus was seated next to Taako’s bed, but he was the only guest. Taako was tucked precariously under the covers, his arm propped up on two fluffy pillows, the bed angled so he wasn’t lying completely flat. He was also snoring, loudly. Kravitz couldn’t help but crack the slightest smile. It was kind of hilarious and adorable at the same time.

Magnus chuckled to himself, shaking his head. “Yeah, they knocked him out pretty good.” He said, glancing toward his friend before looking back in his lap. “He’s been asleep for about an hour.”

“Hello?” Kravitz said, stepping inside and making his way over to the opposite side of Taako’s bed, grabbing one of the extra chairs that the doctors used and dragging it over so he could sit next to his bed. Taako looked pretty worse for wear. He had a nasty looking bruise forming on his forehead and the swelling in his wrist was borderline horrific because of how small he was otherwise. His expression was relaxed, though, peaceful, so Kravitz guessed he couldn’t have been in a lot of pain, which helped.

“What happened?” He finally asked, glancing up from the bed toward Magnus, who had been
watching him curiously as he eyed Taako.

Sighing hugely, Magnus slumped further into his chair, rubbing the bridge of his nose. “He fainted while he was out with Ango this morning. Dr. Sloane said that it wasn’t likely that it was the malnutrition alone, not since he’s been on the tube. They took a blood sample, she said they’d go over the results tonight.”

Kravitz worried at his lip. “Fainted. That’s certainly not good.” His gaze strayed back to Taako, watching the steady rise and fall of his chest, his hospital gown pulled open just slightly to reveal the electrodes. “Was the fracture bad? Avi said he had to set it.”

“They said it was a pretty clean break so the healing process shouldn’t take too long. He hit his head pretty hard too.” Magnus huffed. “Rough morning.”

Kravitz’s fingers twitched in his lap, the urge to tuck back some of Taako’s messy hair almost irresistible. “Is Lup coming?” He asked instead, crossing and uncrossing his fingers.

“She’ll be here sometime soon.” Magnus said, though Kravitz didn’t look up. “Probably would have been here sooner but I told her he was resting. She doesn’t like being away from him while he’s here.”

“Well, you all do a very good job of keeping him company.” Kravitz said, glancing at Taako’s hand, limp and twined with bandages. “I don’t think I’ve ever seen a patient with so many visitors.”

Magnus chuckled at that. “Yeah. He hates being alone. He doesn’t really talk about it, but… Yeah. We uh.” Magnus shook his head as Kravitz looked at him. “We have a google drive to make sure someone sees him every day. I mean, it’s not hard, especially because you’re here.”

“You have a google drive?” Kravitz couldn’t help but laugh, shaking his head. “That’s… Fantastic, really.”

“You probably oughta get in on it, honestly.” Magnus said, smiling. “We probably don’t even need it, since Lup is here at least for a little while almost every day, and Lucretia works here, but…” He shrugged a little. “It gets pretty lonely without him around.”

Kravitz hummed thoughtfully. “I can imagine it’s pretty dull.” He rested a hand on the bars on the edge of the cot, tapping his fingers. Magnus groaned.

“Quit staring and just hold his hand, dude, I know you want to.” Magnus said, his amusement masked by exasperation. “I’m not here to judge you, just.” He paused, shaking his head. “He’d like it, trust me.”

Kravitz felt his cheeks go impossibly warm, all the way up to his ears, but he couldn’t possibly not after Magnus had called him out so directly. After a moment’s hesitation, Kravitz slipped his hand through the bars, carefully slipping his hand into Taako’s and lacing their fingers. His skin was cool, probably from lack of circulation, but the touch sent his heart racing anyways.

Relax. Kravitz told himself. He isn’t even awake.

Magnus went quiet after that, and Kravitz simply looked at Taako’s sleeping form, watching his chest rise and fall and tracing circles over his palm with his thumb. Kravitz found it funny how beautiful Taako was even asleep, even ill and injured and hurting.

How much time had passed, Kravitz wasn’t sure, but sometime later, the door to the room was pushed open, gently, and Lup was stepping inside, sans makeup and clad in sweatpants. Magnus got
up from the chair he was sitting in before Kravitz could, watching curiously as Kravitz continued to hold Taako’s hand.

“How’s he doing?” Her voice sounded small, smaller than Kravitz imagined possible. Lup’s entire personality, from what he’d know, was loud. Not in a bad way, or an obnoxious way. She practically oozed confidence and excitement, always ready to have fun or to fight or something. She was bright and fiery, in both her movements and her voice. Now, though, now she just looked tired, worn out, worried. Kravitz couldn’t imagine the toll this was taking, watching and caring for her brother like this.

“He’s been asleep since the doctor left earlier. He’ll probably be out for a while, too, according to the doctors.” Magnus said, waiting as Lup took the seat next to Taako’s bed and sighed. She reached out, her nailpolished chipped, to tuck his hair back, smoothing it away from his face and tracing her fingers underneath the forming bruise.

“He looks tired.” She muttered, closing her eyes. “God, he looks so fucking tired.”

Magnus frowned, nodding a bit. “He’s been doing better, Lup, he’ll bounce back from this.” He assured, trying to sound comforting.

“I know that, I know.” Lup murmured, her hand lingering on his cheek. “But it’s so hard to watch, huh?”

Kravitz nodded in affirmation, and Lup shot him a tired smile. She gazed at Taako for a few more moments, seemingly assessing his current state before her shoulders slumped. “He’s putting me in an early grave let me tell you.”

“You and me both.” Magnus said, chuckling. Lup chuckled, too, and Kravitz wondered if it was strange that he felt so out of place.

“Hey, Kravitz.” Lup said, looking at him from across the bed. He straightened up, slightly, Taako’s fingers curling in his grip.

He cleared his throat. “Yes?”

“You like Taako, right?” She asked, glancing up to meet his eyes.

Kravitz felt the heat rise to his cheeks again. He resisted the urge to drop Taako’s hand. “Ah… Yes, that’s true.” He said, albeit somewhat awkwardly.

“I mean… You like him. I mean. It’s more of a statement than a question, really.” Lup said, waving a hand. “It’d take an idiot not to see it, but. You do, don’t you?”

Kravitz bit the inside of his cheek, unable to find his voice. He nodded, instead.

Lup glancing back toward the bed, looking thoughtful. “I think he likes you too. We all like you, Kravitz. And I trust you.” She said, meeting his eyes again. “I think that you’ll be good to him.”

Kravitz nodded again, fingers twitching in Taako’s grip, his mouth dry. “Of course.”

“He’s been through a lot. We both have. He deserves something good.” She said, looking at her brother. “I trust that you can give that to him.”

Kravitz cleared his throat again, his face unbearably hot. “Yes. I mean. Well. I’d like to. I want to
give that to him.” He said, voice too quick. “I do like him. I’m just—just drawn to him.”

Lup smiled, finally, nodding. “Good, good. Glad we’re on the same page, then. And, I’m sure you also know that if you do hurt him, there will be several people out for your blood, right?”

Kravtiz cracked a smile of his own. “Of course. I’d be disappointed if he didn’t have that sort of support system.”

Lup laughed. “Yeah, obviously.”

Things quieted down after that, but Kravitz didn’t feel pressured to leave. He chatted idly with Lup and Magnus, and with Lucretia when she stopped by to check in. By the time it was nearing dinner time and Kravitz realized he hadn’t eaten since breakfast, Taako was still sleeping soundly in bed with no signs of waking up. Lup had gone to get dinner and Magnus was outside talking on the phone to someone, (it sounded like he was trying to console a crying Angus, but Kravitz was trying not to listen in,) so Kravitz took a moment to stand up, giving Taako’s hand the barest of squeezes and, after a lot of contemplation, bending over to press a quick, chaste kiss to his forehead.
Bonus Chapter: Trivia Night

Chapter Summary

Kravitz visits Taako on the weekend for family trivia night. Things get a little out of hand.

Chapter Notes

Hey guys! This is just a chapter delving into family game night that I mentioned a couple of chapters back. This is mostly for funsies because I needed something cute after the finale and also to show some of the family dynamic from Kravitz's point of view.

This past weekend was super good to me and all of the comments you guys have left have been super uplifting and I'm feeling a lot better! I'll post some pictures on my tumblr to show everyone in a bit if you're interested. Catch me at Ness-writes.tumblr.com for questions or anything! Next real chapter will be on Wednesday, and sorry for being late with this one!

By the time Kravitz showed up to Taako’s self-proclaimed ‘party’ in his hospital room, it seemed as though the festivities had already started. He couldn’t remember a time where he’d seen a hospital room more packed, and while Kravitz recognized most of the faces there, he’d never seen them over all at once. There were the usual suspects, Lup, Magnus, and Angus, then Barry, Merle, Lucretia, and two women he’d yet to meet.

The counter was spread with snacks and baked goods, and there were people sitting in chairs, on blankets, and far more people than there should have been on one hospital cot. Taako was looking as radiant as he always did, his makeup flashy and noticeable. He grinned at Kravitz as he pulled a hand out of the pocket of the hoodie that pretty much swallowed him whole. “Hey, Krav, glad you made it!”

Kravitz ducked past Merle, the older gentleman who visited frequently to drop off plants and take care of the mini garden he’d set up in Taako’s window, who smiled and shot him a thumbs up. Everyone was holding plastic cups filled with some sort of punch, and the chatter was idle but busy enough to keep the room loud.

Angus McDonald sat in the bed next to Taako, a notebook in his lap as he scribbled down words in handwriting that was far too pretty for such a young kid to have, and Lup was sitting crosslegged at his feet. “I’m glad I was able to come. Thank you for the invite. How are you all doing this evening?”

“I’m doing well, sir!” Angus chirped, smiling up at him. “I’m just finishing my homework before game time starts! I don’t want to miss any of the action.”

“Nerd alert!” Lup sang, poking Angus’ side.
Taako groaned halfheartedly, snatching away Angus’ journal and pencil before he could react. “Come on, Agnes, live a little. It’s the weekend, I know this shit isn’t due tomorrow, put it away and have some fun already!” He proclaimed, holding the supplies in the air when Angus tried to snatch it from him. Lup snorted as she watched Angus struggle.

“Please, Taako, I have to finish so I can do my math tomorrow!” Angus complained, grabbing at Taako’s too big sleeve and tugging. “This isn’t a good goof, sir.”

Kravitz locked eyes with Angus and winked at him before quickly snagging the journal from Taako with ease, flashing him a smile as he got a murderous glare in return. He handed it over to Angus, who beamed up at him with practical stars in his eyes. “Homework is important, Taako.” He said simply, unable to help the grin on his face at the betrayed look he wore.

Taako stuck his tongue out and flipped him off when Angus looked away, though there was a fondness behind the gesture. “Way to ruin all the fun, Krav. You’re like. The Grim Reaper of fun. Sucking the fun right out of here.”

Lup laughed, smacking Taako’s arm lightly. “Oh please, the look on your face was so worth it.” She held out a hand, which Kravitz sheepishly high fived. It was strange, not to feel out of place. Taako had known these people for so long and Kravitz for so little, yet he still felt like he could be a part of this group, anyways.

“Abandon your brother, huh? Whose side are you on, Lulu?” Taako demanded, quirking an eyebrow.

Angus giggled. “I think she’s on Dr. Kravitz’s side, Taako.”

Taako groaned loudly, flopping back into the pillows, pulling one over his face. “My own family, abandoning me for an attractive surgeon. How unfortunate.”

Kravitz shook his head and took a seat near the bed, chuckling to himself. “I think perhaps that’s an overreaction.”

Lup laughed, patting Taako’s arm and getting up, going to grab Kravitz his own plastic cup and clapping her hands rather loudly. “Excuse me, everyone!” She called, clearing her throat as everyone quieted down. “As you all know, tonight is family game night.” She took out a handful of note cards, handing them over to Merle. “It’s trivia time, kids. Magnus and I are team captains, and I’m giving him first pick as a handicap because, lets face it, he’s going to fucking need it.”

It didn’t take long for teams to be selected. On one side, it was Lup, Barry, Lucretia, and Carey, who he learned lived in the same apartment complex as Taako with her girlfriend, Killian. On the other side, it was Magnus, Taako, Angus, and Kravitz, with Killian playing the mediator and referee. Why they needed a referee was only a slightly alarming thought to Kravitz. Certainly trivia couldn’t get that out of hand.

Merle was the one reading out questions, standing at the end of the bed as one person from each team stood on either side of him during their turn. Things started off pretty tame, as Angus and Lucretia went up. The questions weren’t particularly difficult, if not a little random. It felt a little more like ‘Are You Smarter Than a 5th Grader’ than trivia, but it was fun to watch nonetheless.

Angus, as it turned out and as Kravitz could have guessed, was incredibly bright. Every single question he went to answer was correct and almost instantaneous, and every time it came back to the team to correct an answer the others had failed, he was the first to volunteer.
Kravitz didn’t try keeping up with the game, more or less only answering when it was his turn, (thank goodness he was on a team with Angus and not against him, because he knew the child would have beaten him with ease,) and watching as Magnus guffawed and Lup got more heated. Taako was watching as Angus went up again, a fondness in his gaze that Kravitz hadn’t noticed before. Taako and Lup’s relationship was definitely more teasing, but it’d always been easy to see the love they had for each other, how much they both cared. With Angus, though, Taako never hesitated to talk about how much the child irritated him. He called him a burden, a stick in the mud, and he teased him constantly, but Kravitz had a very hard time seeing that in their relationship.

Right now, he was watching Angus the way proud parents did, grinning every time Angus answered correctly and high fiving him when he climbed back onto the bed. Their dynamic was strange, but Kravitz was beginning to find that Taako’s relationships with just about everyone were out of the norm. It was nice to watch, though, from his perspective, to see the love in their family and the support they all offered Taako in his time of need.

Kravitz didn’t realize he was staring until Taako caught his gaze and winked at him, sticking out his tongue. “Ango always kills at this shit. Board games and card games and stuff, that’s different, but Agnes over here is the best at trivia.” Angus was absolutely beaming, his smile huge as Taako ruffled his hair.

“I noticed. I’m certainly glad that we’re teammates and not enemies in this one, or we’d be in big trouble.” He teased. “Magnus and Lup seem to be getting rather heated, though.” He chuckled.

Lup was, rather loudly, arguing about foul play and cheating in the last round and Magnus was starting to raise his voice right back. Taako rolled his eyes, wrapping an arm around Angus’ shoulders and patting Kravitz’s arm as the scene unfolded before them. Everyone was going about their normal business as the pair argued, getting louder and louder until they were both practically shouting.

It wasn’t funny, really, but Kravitz couldn’t help but laugh. “Oh, my god. They’re going to get thrown out.”

“Lulu, it isn’t worth it!” Taako called, waving a hand. “We won fair and square, you should have picked Ango first, that was your downfall.”

Lup turned on him to glare, shooting him daggers. “Taako? Shut the fuck up.”

It was just then that Hurley came inside, glaring at the two at the end of the bed and shaking her head. “Okay, seriously? I can hear you from three doors down with the doors closed! You two, out. It’s late, people are trying to sleep, and you’re not helping. Goodbye.”

Lup and Magnus looked at each other, wide eyed, then to Hurley.

“I’m serious, go.” She said, crossing her arms. “You can come back tomorrow, but you’re out tonight.” Kravitz watched the blush spread across Lup’s face, and the ashamed look that Magnus gave her. She waited as they both grabbed their stuff, waving awkwardly at the group before shuffling out of the room. Hurley shot them all a look as Lup and Magnus disappeared, closing the door behind her.

Almost instantly, Taako burst into a deep, hysterical fit of laughter. Angus was quick to follow, giggling wildly as Taako hunched over his middle and wheezed, delighted peals of laughter leaving him breathless and teary eyed. Angus hung onto Taako’s arm and Kravitz chucked, too, his chest light in lieu of recent events.
“Oh my god.” Taako giggled, breathless. “I can’t believe Hurley just kicked them out. Someone, quick, go get a picture of their walk of shame, please.” Both Carey and Killian volunteered, going to bid Taako goodbye before jogging off to find them. Barry apologized sheepishly, giving Taako and Angus both quick hugs before going to follow, and Merle joined suit.

Taako was still wiping away tears of mirth as they all went, leaving Angus, Kravitz, Taako, and Lucretia alone in the room. “That was fucking hysterical, god, I hope they get a picture. Amazing, honestly, fucking amazing.”

Lucretia rolled her eyes, ruffling Angus’ hair and standing. “We should be heading home. Angus will be around tomorrow for a bit, I’m sure.” She assured Taako, bending down to kiss his cheek. "I hope they get those pictures, though. I’ll frame them for you.”

Taako rolled his eyes, barely reciprocating the hug from Angus despite having an arm around him almost the entire night. “Goodnight, sir, get some rest!” Angus said, smiling at them. “Goodbye, Dr. Kravitz.”

Kravitz watched as they went, waving at them and standing up to gather his own things when Taako hid a huge yawn in the crook of his arm. “That was a pretty interesting time.” He said.

Taako snorted, shaking his head. “You’ve got that right. Never a dull moment.” He said, slumping further into the cot and rubbing his eyes, his cheeks still flushed from the laughing. “I hope this was worth coming up here on your day off, for.”

Kravitz smiled, rolling his eyes. “Oh, absolutely.” He said. “Believe it or not, I enjoy spending time with you.”

“Oh shit, really? I thought this was all a convoluted ruse to aide my healing process through attractive doctors.” Taako said. “If I thought you were actually enjoying this I would’ve gone about it way differently. Damn.”

Kravitz shook his head, his expression fond. “I really do enjoy it, Taako.” He said, shouldering his bag and taking his keys out. “Perhaps we can continue once you leave.”

Taako quirked an eyebrow, smiling. “Perhaps we can.”

Setting a very awkward hand on Taako’s shoulder, Kravitz patted lightly and moved toward the door. “It was nice to get to see your family in action, though I hope Lup and Magnus didn’t get into too much trouble.”

Taako shrugged. “They’re always getting into trouble. They deserved that shit. I’ll make sure and show you the pictures tomorrow.” He grinned.

“Tomorrow, hm?” Kravitz asked, smiling.

Taako nodded. “Lunch?”

Kravitz bit the inside of his cheek, nodding. “Absolutely. I’ll see you then. Get some rest, Taako.”

Taako waved from his bed, all fingers, blowing him a kiss that Kravitz pretended didn’t make him blush all the way up to his ears. The heat didn’t fade until he got to his car, slipping in and burying his face in his hands as he wondered how he’d gotten roped into going into work on another one of his days off.
Chapter 6: Taako

Chapter Summary

Taako sleeps. The twins have a heart to heart. Kravitz brings flowers.

Chapter Notes

Finally updating after taking forever! This is a pretty important chapter in this story so I sincerely hope that it doesn't disappoint! I've been working really hard on it for a few days!!! A very special shoutout to my TAZ family for being supportive and especially to Caroline for reading through and telling me exactly what I needed to fix. I actually owe this little group of people a lot for giving me something to look forward to and pulling me out of this nasty slump I've been in for the past few weeks.

I don't have many updates aside from that! Updates should be regular again for the time being and the story is progressing really well! I'm still taking drabble requests on my tumblr, so feel free to send me some asks! Find me at Ness-writes.tumblr.com !! Again, if you do any fanart or anything of the like for this story make sure you send it to me so I can cry over it. I so appreciate everyone's continuous comments and for the constant support and kindness. I love and appreciate it so much! I don't wanna keep you from this chapter, but like I said, this is a BIG ONE, so I hope you all enjoy it! Let me know what you think in the comments. See you all on Saturday!

When Taako woke up, the sun had already set and the lights in the room were dimmed down. His head was heavy and felt like it was filled with cotton, his brain making slow work of pushing away the lingering sleepiness. Shifting toward the bedside table, Taako caught sight of Lup, who was curled up in an armchair next to the bed, asleep.

The alarm read 9 o'clock, meaning Taako had actually succeeded in sleeping through the entire day. He could feel it in the stiffness of his muscles and the lingering grogginess, still struggling to get his brain to move at a normal speed. His arm ached, but it was a lot duller than it'd been earlier, bandaged all the way up to his elbow probably to keep him from fucking it up.

Clearing his throat, Taako realized how unbearably parched he was. It took him a few moments to fight past the wave of dizziness that washed over him when he pushed into a half sitting position, his bed already propped a fraction up, sinking back against the pillows and taking a few deep breaths.

Lup slept right through it, clad in sweats and a crop top that hung off one shoulder, a blanket draped over her lap. She must have skipped her date.

Fuck. There you go again, fucking everything up.

Watching his sister sleep in the chair by his bed made Taako’s chest hurt. He hated that she had to keep doing this, and he knew she would, she always would, and so would he, but this all was taking a toll on her, too. Just seeing that made his heart sink, made him want to hurry up and get better,
better enough so he could at least start sleeping at home again.

“Lulu.” Taako said, clearing his throat again. “Hey, Lup—wake up, c’mon.” His voice was groggy and hoarse, but he did his best to raise it enough to wake her.

In the end, he had to stick his foot out from under the blankets to nudge her, too afraid to use his bad arm. She sat up rather quickly, drool stuck to the corner of her mouth, her hair sticking up on the side. She flashed him a groggy smile and wiped her mouth with her wrist, stretching her arms in the air and arching her back.

“Yikes, impromptu naptime for both of us, huh?” Lup said, sitting up further and smoothing down her hair. “You look like shit. How are you feeling?”

Taako shrugged, coughing into his shoulder and accepting the styrofoam cup from Lup and taking a few long sips from the straw. “Just fucking tired, honestly. I barely remember what happened earlier.”

Resting her chin in the palm of her hand, Lup nodded. “Yeah, you were out cold when I got here earlier.”

Taako sighed, handing the cup back over with his slightly shaky hand and pushing his tangled hair over his shoulder. “Shit. Gonna be hard to do, well. Anything, now. Wanna do me a solid and brush my hair?”

Lup smiled, nodding. “Yeah, sure.” Taako shifted to one side of the bed so Lup could get onto it, too, combing his hair and braiding it before looping it up into a bun.

“That’ll keep it out of the way for a while.” She said, patting his shoulder and sitting back into the cot, content on staying with Taako for a while. “You hungry? I’m honestly fucking starving and I bet if I ask, Hurley will bring us something and neither of us will have to pretend to be functioning adults.”

Taako nodded. “Yeah, I could eat. Have you been here all day?” He asked, sitting back at her side as she snatched the pager for a nurse.

“I came in an hour or so after they finished setting your arm. And don’t—don’t start with all that ‘you didn’t need to come’ garbage, because it was for me, not you. If you want me to stop worrying, you’ve gotta stop scaring the shit outta me.”

Taako groaned. “Hey, that one wasn’t on me, my body’s just fucked up or something.” He complained, bumping her arm. “You were supposed to have a date, Lulu.”

“Barry rescheduled. You know you’re more important than that shit.” Lup accused, grabbing the remote. “Make it up to me and let me choose TV.”

“You should go home and sleep.” Taako sighed, dropping his forehead into his good hand.

Lup turned to look at him, frowning. “Don’t do this, babe. This is not your pity party, Koko, don’t get all ‘woe is me.’ We don’t do that shit.” She said, voice firm. “I’m staying over tonight. No arguments.”

Taako took a deep breath, nodding. “Yeah. Okay.” He said, rubbing his eyes. “Sorry.”

“Don’t be.” Lup said. “I know you had a long day but don’t let this get in your head, got it? You’re doing fucking great. This isn’t going to be some step back.”
Taako huffed, rolling his eyes. “God, Lulu, I get it.” He grumbled, bumping her arm. “You’re embarrassing me, shut the fuck up.”

Lup laughed, bumping him back and turning on cartoons, just in time for Hurley to come in and take orders for dinner. “You should text Ango. He was worried, earlier.” She said, handing Taako his phone. “Magnus sent him a video of you snoring earlier to tide him over but I know he’s probably not gonna sleep until he hears from you.”

Taako rolled his eyes as he opened his phone. “I was snoring?”

“Like a freaking chainsaw, it was kind of hilarious.” Lup said, taking the phone from him to snap a quick selfie of them both to text to Angus. “It’s okay, though. Kravitz thought it was adorable.”

Taako took the phone back to type out a quick message, ‘Feeling way better, quit worrying and go to sleep like a normal kid. You better come for book times tomorrow or I’m gonna be pissed.’

“I’m sorry, what? Kravitz was here?” Taako asked, eyes glancing up from the screen at Lup, who was grinning.

Nodding enthusiastically, Lup bumped his arm. “Magnus said he like… ran over here, he was super worried about you. He was here for a long time, but eventually we figured you were just going to sleep through the rest of the day so he headed home. He just sat there and held your hand the whole time.”

Taako felt his cheeks go warm. “He seriously sat here that long? He was holding my hand?” He asked incredulously.

Lup laughed. “Yes, seriously, he held your hand and stared at you like some sad, Grey’s Anatomy dream!” She sounded delighted. “It was fucking awesome Koko.”

Staring at his phone as a message popped up, a reply from Angus reading ‘I’m glad you’re feeling okay. I’ll come by for book time, don’t worry! Thank you for texting me, I love you!’ Taako felt himself beginning to smile, biting down on his lip as he turned the device over in his hand. “What a fucking loser. I can’t believe he did that.”

Lup chuckled, nodding. “Honestly, neither can I. I bet he’s back first thing tomorrow morning.”

“I’d bet against you but you’re probably right.” Taako admitted, shaking his head as he sent a simply ‘LY 2’ back to Angus before setting his phone aside.

“I can’t believe you’ve got this fucking TV show romance going on.” Lup laughed. “It’s amazing. Seriously, I’m excited for you.” She said, taking Taako’s phone to set it on the bedside table with the remote. “I think he’s going to ask you out.”

Taako gave an exasperated sigh. “I don’t know, Lulu, I don’t think he’s gonna make the first move.”

Lup shook her head. “You didn’t have to see that sappy look on his face all goddamn day long. Seriously, Koko.”

Taako gave her a look, elbowing her in the side. “Yeah, we’ll see.”

“You’re gonna say yes, right?” She asked, raising an eyebrow.

Taako groaned, tilting his head back. “I don’t know. I want to.” He shrugged. “How am I supposed to know?”
“If you like him, you should say yes. I like him, too—I know he’s gonna treat you right.”

“Well, obviously, I’m not settling for anything less.” Taako grumbled. “We’ll see how he does it and go from there.”

Lup seemed content with his answer, sitting up a little taller when Hurley arrived with food and dragging the tray over so they could eat without making a mess. Taako only finished half of his sandwich, though he was pretty sure it was the fresh dose of painkillers and not his lack of appetite, his eyelids growing heavier as he felt the energy to keep his head up draining away. Lup pushed the tray away a few minutes later, settling back into the bed and fixing the blankets as Taako slumped into her side.

“You look like garbage.” Lup teased, squeezing his shoulders.

“At least I have an excuse to.” Taako muttered, yawning hugely. “You need to sleep too, loser, go to bed.”

Lup rolled her eyes, nodding. “Yeah, yeah. Night, dingus.”

“Night, goofus.”

“Love you,” Lup added, poking his side. Taako lifted his gaze, catching her tired smile.

Taako rolled his eyes. “Love you too, Lulu. Shut the fuck up, though, I’m trying to sleep.”

Taako didn’t have any trouble sleeping through the night, which surprised even him after sleeping literally the entire day. It was quite possibly whatever Hurley had given him after he’d eaten, but he guessed that it didn’t hurt him to be getting some rest. When he woke up the next morning, the sun was up in the sky and he was in bed alone. There was a note on the bedside table, scrawled out in quick handwriting.

*Kick ass today. I’ll be by after work. Love ya!*

It was sealed with her messy signature and a kiss, and Taako couldn’t help but roll his eyes. They’d always had a flair for the dramatics.

Sitting up slowly, Taako came to realize he didn’t feel quite as disoriented as he’d been the day before. He was still a little lightheaded and his arm had the same sort of ache it had before, but he felt significantly less fuzzy. A glance at his phone revealed a couple of texts from Angus about visiting later as well as one from Magnus asking if he needed anything.

Just as he was replying to Angus, (one handed, of course, it still hurt to move his fingers much,) he heard the door being pushed open, muttering a halfhearted greeting as he finished his messages.

Taako didn’t glance up until he heard a familiar but unexpected voice, nerves chipping away at his usual composure. Kravitz stood across the room, standing hesitantly at the door, a huge bouquet of red roses clutched in his hand. “Good morning.” He greeted, somewhat awkwardly, looking unsure of whether or not he should enter the room. He was clad in a dark suit with black lapels and a red pocket square. It looked like he was about to go to a fancy gala, not to visit someone in the hospital.

Taako raised an eyebrow at the ensemble, sitting up a little straighter. “Hey, stranger.” He said, quirking a smile. “You come here often?”

Kravitz huffed out a small laugh, hesitating for just a moment before stepping inside, closing the door behind him and walking over to the bed. “You look much better today.” Kravitz said, smiling a little
bit as he extended the roses. “I brought these, for you.”

Taako whistled, raising an eyebrow at the display. “These are some nice roses, damn. Can you set them over there? My hand’s out of commish.” He laughed, shaking his head. “Why’d you bring these?” He asked, watching as Kravitz’s cheeks flushed and he set the roses on the bedside table.

“Of course, I didn’t realize.” Kravitz said, looking sheepish. “I hate to admit how, ah… Worried, I was.” He chuckled, “I may have embarrassed myself in front of your family yesterday.”

Taako snorted, making not to get a vase for the flowers in the near future. “That’s hardly worth, what, two dozen roses?” Taako waved his good hand. “Not saying that I’m not worth two dozen, because let’s be real here, but.” He shrugged. “Seems a little extravagant.”

Kravitz shifted in his seat, wringing his hands in his lap. “Yesterday, when Avi told me you’d fainted, I completely… panicked. I don’t know why I got so upset. I knew, logically, you were alright, but all I could think about was being here with you so I could see it with my own eyes.”

Taako opened his mouth to reply but stopped himself, instead just watching Kravitz with a bemused expression. He was embarrassed, clearly, and with enough focus, Taako could see the color spreading across his face. He rested his cheek against his good hand, shooting Kravitz a somewhat reassuring smile and nodding him on.

“Seeing you asleep in here, after all of that happened, I just…” Kravitz shook his head. “I don’t know, it just scared me. How much I worry about you is… quite alarming.”

Taako snorted, moving his hand to cover his face, feeling his own face heat up.

“I mean—not like that!” Kravitz said quickly. “Not in a bad way, in a good way, if that makes sense?” Instead of continuing, Kravitz just smiled, laughing as he covered his own face. “I’m not very good at this, am I?”

Taako just shook his head, hiding his smile behind his hand. “I’d lie and say you were doing great but it’s like 9 am and there’s no turning back.”

Kravitz laughed again, hunching over and taking a deep breath. “I can’t put words to it, apparently, but—this isn’t just a friend thing, Taako. I’m crazy about you. I want to be with you all the time.”

Taako nodded, biting down on his lip in attempts to mask his own excitement. “Oh, really?”

“Yes, really. I brought you flowers as a get well soon present, but I did have some ulterior motives. I wanted to know if you’d like go out with me.”

“I mean, it’s a little early for a date, and I’m back on bedrest, but if you really wanted to do it now,” Taako joked, unable to help his grin.

Kravitz shot him a look, though it was full of affection and fondness. “Not right now, of course. I was thinking maybe once this whole situation had been sorted out and you were back in good health. You deserve a date as extravagant as you are. I would love to escort you to breakfast this morning, though.”

“Breakfast sound fuckin’ fantastic.” Taako said. “I mean, dates do too, but I’ve been sleeping forever and I’m kind of hungry.”

Kravitz smiled so wide it looked like it hurt, and Taako had to look away. It was kind of getting to be too much. “You aren’t supposed to be on your feet so a wheelchair is in order. Is that alright?”
Taako nodded, carefully pulling the covers back. “Yeah, yeah. I definitely don’t need to pass out in front of my hot date, huh? That being said, how do you look so alive in the mornings? I can’t believe you dressed so nice for this.” He scoffed, scooting slowly to the edge of the bed and giving his body time to adjust as Kravitz brought the chair over to his side.

Chuckling, Kravitz held onto his good arm as he slipped off of the bed and sat down in the wheelchair, propping his feet up after donning some fluffy slippers. “I had to look good in case you were on the fence. Had I worn a t-shirt it may have been less convincing. Let me brace your arm before we go so we don’t mess anything up.” Kravitz said. Retrieving a brace from the counter, Kravitz crouched down and carefully slipped it over the wrappings on Taako’s arm, tightening it gingerly and murmuring a quiet apology when Taako sucked in an uneasy breath.

After carefully resting his arm in his lap, Taako shrugged. “Depends on how tight the t-shirt would have been, homie. Let’s get this show on the road, Angles is coming sometime today and I’m pretty sure he’d have a heart attack if he showed up and I wasn’t in my room.”

Nodding, Kravitz pushed the chair out into the hallway, admiring Taako’s precariously put up bun as he began the trek to the cafeteria downstairs. Taako was content to hold their tray as Kravitz pushed him along the line, picking out various foods and watching as the cashier waved them through. They went straight past the tables and toward the fish tank down the hallway, mostly empty aside from the occasional doctor or nurse wandering through.

Kravitz simply put the break on the wheelchair to keep it in place and took a seat on the bench next to it, smiling at Taako with an expression so soft it made his stomach hurt.

“Quit look at me like that.” Taako said, rolling his eyes as he bit into an apple slice. “It’s annoying.”

Laughing, Kravitz looked away, grabbing a grape off the tray. “I’m sorry. I can’t stop.”

“Why not?” Taako asked, chewing slowly and deliberately as Kravitz met his gaze again.

“I’m just kind of in shock. That you said yes.” Kravitz said, smiling.

Taako laughed. “I’ve been flirting with you mercilessly for weeks, Krav.”

“I couldn’t tell if you were joking or not.” He admitted sheepishly.

Taako had to reach over Kravitz to set the tray aside, trying not to visibly wince when it pulled at his broken wrist. Sitting back up, Taako rested his good hand on Kravitz’s chest before gripping his tie, curling his fingers into it and pulling slightly. “Was I not being obvious enough?” Taako asked, quirking a brow as he tugged him closer.

“Maybe you need to spell it out for me.” Kravitz replied, leaning into Taako’s grip.

Meeting his eyes before actually doing anything, a silent request for permission, Taako pulled Kravitz forward and craned his neck up, their lips meeting. His eyes fluttered closed, his fingers loosening on the tie to instead loop around his neck and draw him closer. One of Kravitz’s hands hovered at Taako’s waist for a long moment before finally settling there as he leaned further into the kiss.

Taako pulled back a fraction of an inch to breathe, his nose bumping up against Kravitz’s as he let himself process exactly what was going on.

“Is this okay?” Kravitz asked, voice hushed. Taako nodded, shifting just slightly to keep his injured arm out of the way before leaning back in. Out of instinct, Taako raised his other arm, too, groaning
when he remembered that his wrist was broken and that moving his fingers hurt.

Kravitz paused, frowning. “Are you okay?” He carefully took his hand, kissing his fingers before settling it back in Taako’s own lap. “Be careful.”

Taako wasn’t sure how long they stayed there, Kravitz hunched over the bench while Taako reached up from his chair. By the time they’d actually pulled away and Taako dropped his hand from Kravitz’s neck and instead laced their fingers, he was slightly breathless and Kravitz was grinning at him again.

“Okay, seriously, that has to stop.” Taako said, dropping his hand and resting his arms in his lap.

“I can’t.” Kravitz laughed, shaking his head as he sat back up. “You’re radiant.”

Taako covered his face again, sighing exasperatedly into his palm. “You’re ridiculous. You were supposed to feed me, what happened to that? I’m going to get in trouble for skipping breakfast.”

“Oh please.” Kravitz pushed the tray back toward him. “You started that, I’m not taking the blame. Besides, there’s plenty of time for breakfast.”

“You wanted it to happen.” Taako retorted, grabbing another apple slice.

Kravitz groaned, tipping his head back. “Obviously, but I assumed you did too.”

Taako winked at him when he looked back and Kravitz just gave him an affectionate look before encouraging to finish eating before it got too cold. When they’d finally finished eating, stopping only for idle chatter, Kravitz took the tray back to the cafeteria and returned, stooping over the back of the chair to give Taako a very quick, very chaste kiss.

“How are you feeling, by the way?” He asked suddenly.

Taako snorted, covering his face as he giggled. “Oh my god. Yeah, I mean. I’m doing pretty good, I guess.”

Kravitz smiled warmly, his expression filled with a fondness that Taako wondered if he’d ever get used to. “Fantastic. Shall we head back to your room, then? I’m sure you’ll have visitors today and I’d like to capitalize on my alone time.”

Taako waved a hand, kicking his feet back up in his chair and tilting his head back to watch as Kravitz began to push the chair back toward his room. “Sounds like a plan, Krav.”
Chapter 6: Kravitz

Chapter Summary

Things seem to change for the better after Taako and Kravitz have their moment. Kravitz admires. Taako flirts. Brian gets outcooked.

Chapter Notes

I am SO late posting this chapter and I'm so sorry about that, you guys! Griffin was supposed to be at a convention really close to where I live so I got together with some friends to go and check it out last minute! I am tardy though and hopefully you guys can forgive me ;w;

Thank you again to all of the readers and commenters and the people who leave kudos. I'm continually astounded by your responses and I try to reply to everything I can! Feel free to talk to me any time at Ness-writes.tumblr.com or to send in ficlet requests! This next chapter is going to be a LITTLE different than usual, but I'm really excited to see where it goes :) I'll talk to you guys on Wednesday, have a great rest of your weekend, and Texas readers stay safe with hurricane stuff!!

“You’re fucking kidding me, right?” Taako asked, eyes narrowed.

Sloane sighed, pushing her glasses up her nose. Kravitz was familiar with the look of mild irritation. “It’s good news, really, that the fainting wasn’t caused by something more serious.”

Taako threw out his hands. “The fact that I fainted because I don’t have enough iron in my system is deffo on you guys.” He huffed. “I thought I was getting everything from this stupid tube. What happened to that?”

“If you’re naturally deficient in iron, the normal daily amount isn’t enough.” Kravitz offered. “But it is good news. All you need is more iron and the fainting won’t happen again.”

Taako turned toward him, glaring fiercely. “You’re not a doctor right now, Krav, you’re supposed to be on my side.”

Kravitz chuckled, holding both hands up. “Sorry, I’m sorry, but it’s better than the alternatives.”

“It was too difficult to tell when you arrived, since you were deficient in pretty much everything. There was a clear difference this time, though. We’re going to go ahead and do an IV iron treatment today, but if you start taking supplements, you should get out of it pretty quickly.”

Taako stuck out his tongue. “Oh, gross. Will I at least get off bedrest, then? Because that shit sucks and we’re supposed to do cooking class tomorrow.”

“You can go back to limited bedrest tomorrow, but you need to be on the lookout for signs of
fainting. I’d recommend not staying on your feet for an extended amount of time. So long as you’re responsible, though, I can’t see why cooking class can’t happen.” She said.

Taako grinned, holding out his good hand for a high five. Kravitz obliged.

Sloane rolled her eyes. “You have group therapy in a half hour, I trust Kravitz can get you there safely?”

Taako glanced up to meet his eyes, winking when he was convinced Sloane wouldn’t see. Kravitz blushed.

“Of course.” Kravitz said, looking back toward Sloane. She raised one eyebrow, curious, but didn’t say anything.

“Alright, sounds good. We’ll do the iron treatment once you get back, and I think the swelling on your wrist is down enough for you to get your cast. I have Avi scheduled to come in before dinner. Make sure you eat your lunch.”

Taako gave her a lazy salute, and Kravitz couldn’t help but grin. “Aye aye, captain. See you on the flipside, homie.”

Kravitz watched as Sloane shot him a look and turned to leave, turning more toward Taako as the door to his room was shut.

“Have you decided what color cast you’d like?” Kravitz asked, as Taako grabbed his lab coat and pulled him closer to the bed.

“Babe, do you even have to ask?” Taako asked, leaning in to kiss him.

It’d only been a day since their breakfast ‘date,’ and Taako had proved that he was having a tough time keeping his hands to himself. It was endearing, really, and Kravitz hated to admit that his demanding nature in terms of attention was kind of attractive, but he still hadn’t quite computed that they were a thing, now. He wondered if Taako had been thinking about kissing as long as he had.

“Pink, then?” Kravitz asked, only an inch or so from Taako’s face.

“Absolutely. Lup better show up with sharpies, today, or I’m disowning her. I need everyone in cooking hell to know how popular I am. If I’m gonna have some clunky thing on my wrist, it might as well be fucking cute.”

Kravitz smiled as he watched him talk, earning a glare and a measured smack on the arm when Taako’s gaze settled back on his face.

“What was that for?” Kravitz asked.

“You keep staring. You know that’s rude, right? Take a fucking picture or something and stare at that.” Taako grumbled

“I would, if you’d let me.” Kravitz said, challenging.

Taako shifted over on the bed and threw off the blankets, striking a rather ridiculous pose with one leg in the air and a hand tangled in his messy hair. “Go for it, babe.”

Kravitz took out his phone and snapped the photo before Taako could change his mind, grinning stupidly at the screen. “I don’t know if it quite captures your alluring beauty, but it got pretty close.”
Kravitz said, as he turned the phone around to show Taako.

He snorted. “Yeah, right.” Taako pushed the phone away, wiggling the fingers of his bad hand and making a face.

“Stop that.” Kravitz said, bumping his shoulder. “It’ll be easier once you have the cast on, since it’ll immobilize your wrist and you should be able to move your fingers without irritating the break.”

Taako groaned. “Ugh, fine.” He glanced up at Kravitz, pursing his lips. “You’re still staring, dude.”

Kratvitz sighed, feeling the blush spread across his face again. “Look, we’ve talked about this already —”

Taako just grinned. “That one was just to get that blush outta you, my dude.” He said, resuming his previous position sitting up against the pillows. “Well, as enticing as all of this is, I’m supposed to eat something before group therapy, so.”

Pushing the tray over the bed, Kravitz smiled. “Please, go ahead.”

Taako narrowed his eyes, taking a half of the sandwich and taking a bite, his eyes fluttering somewhere else.

“You’re doing quite well, Taako.” Kravitz said, grabbing a grape from his plate and chewing on it slowly. The last thing he wanted was for Taako to feel like he was under the radar while he was trying to eat. It’d only make him nervous. It was the first thing Sloane had told him when he’d started visiting Taako more regularly.

Scoffing, Taako took another small bite. “Yeah, like eating half a fucking sandwich is so fantastic.”

Nodding, Kravitz patted his leg. “It is. Really fantastic, in fact. I’m impressed every day. You know when you first came that you wouldn’t have said anything. Now, you had to remind me that you needed to have lunch before therapy. It’s amazing.”

Taako wrinkled his nose. “You flatter me.” He said simply, taking another bite. “Eat the other half so I don’t have to worry about it.”

Kravitz didn’t complain, simply taking the other half of the sandwich and taking a bite. It was mostly quiet after that, though Kravitz was just relieved to see Taako finish his half of the sandwich as well as a handful of grapes.

Standing up to take the tray to the counter, Kravitz watched as Taako yawned hugely and shifted to the end of his bed, combing his good hand through his messy hair.

Grabbing the wheelchair from the corner of the room, Kravitz wheeled it over to the edge of the bed and took Taako’s hand to pull him to his feet. Once he was standing, Taako grinned mischievously up at Kravitz and pushed up on his tip toes, putting both arms around his neck. “Hey, handsome.”

“Hello to you too,” Kravitz chuckled, still unused to the close contact. Taako wasn’t hesitant at all in his touch, which was strange but also intriguing. Kravitz’s few relationships through his life had never been so physical, certainly not this quickly. He kind of enjoyed it, though.

Taako kissed him, soft and tasting of cucumbers. That, perhaps, Kravitz would never get used to.

“Alright.” Kravitz said, steadying Taako with a hand on his waist when he swayed, slightly breathless from the kiss. “Into the chair so I can fix up your IV and we’ll get you on your way.”
Taako stuck out his tongue but flopped into the chair, kicking his feet up on the rests. “Yeah, yeah. It wouldn’t be so bad to be late, though. I can only listen to fuckin’ Pringles go on about his moon bases for so long.”

Chuckling, Kravitz got everything settled, pushing the chair toward the door. “I doubt they allow him to talk the entire time.”

Taako groaned, tilting his head back to look up at Kravitz. The bruise on his forehead was covered meticulously with concealer, the bandages on his hand swapped for a normal bandaid.

“You don’t understand, it sucks.”

Kravitz rolled him to a stop in front of the group therapy room, where patients were already gathered, and stooped over to give Taako a very quick kiss. “Have fun, good luck. I’ll see you when my shift ends.”

“You better.” Taako said, sighing. “I need all the luck I can get, homie, hopefully I don’t lose my mind today.” Kravitz pushed him the rest of the way inside, waving at the therapist and patting Taako’s shoulder.

“I’ll see you in a bit.” Kravitz said, giving him the briefest squeeze. He nodded to the other patients, unable to help his little smile when Taako blew him a kiss as he walked out of the door and back toward his own ward. He was beginning to wonder if maybe he needed to switch. It seemed more and more, lately, that he was spending more time in Taako’s room than his own office.

Kravitz watched as Taako meticulously prepped their workspace for cooking class the next night. ‘Magic’ Brian had yet to make an appearance, though it’d given them plenty of time to get ready and select aprons. Taako was wearing the same apron he’d chosen last time, but he’d picked out a new one for Kravitz, blue with hot pink trim.

Glancing at his phone to check the time, (the photo he’d taken of Taako the day before was his background, now, despite the fact that Taako had insisted he could do a better pose,) Kravitz turned back toward their station.

Every ingredient in the recipe was set out in, the knives, bowls, and tools they’d need spread out orderly. “You’re ahead of the game, this time. I’m sure our instructor will be impressed.”

“Our instructor is a fucking moron.” Taako grumbled. “He has no idea what he’s doing.” They’d only been to the class twice, now, but Taako seemed to take the cooking rather seriously. Kravitz wasn’t sure what he’d expected to get out of the class, but Taako liked the organization and the methodic cutting a prepping, and he always at least tried what they made once they finished, so Kravitz considered it a win.

“Be that as it may,” Kravitz began, “You seem to have a knack for cooking.”

Taako rolled his eyes. “Fucking ironic, huh? I can cook, just can’t eat. What a tragedy.” He sighed dramatically, leaning onto the counter with both elbows, careful not to bump his new cast. There were only three names on it, now, Kravitz, Lup, and Angus, though he knew as soon as Taako saw the rest of his friends, it’d be filled out further.

Kravitz had opened his mouth to add something but the door was suddenly swung open and Brian was bounding inside, all smiles, as usual.
“Hello, hello!” Brian greeted cheerfully, setting up his own station and pulling on an apron. Taako looked up at Kravitz and stuck out his tongue, making faces as the instructor began speaking about his week and how excited he was to be there.

By the time they started cooking, Kravitz was already nursing a headache from the over-exuberant voice and Taako was struggling to uncork a bottle of wine, which was supposed to go in the sauce they were making. Kravitz took the bottle and instead trading places so Taako could start working on the homemade pasta. They were making some sort of fancy ravioli, filled with ricotta cheese and garnished with a white wine sauce. Uncorking the bottle with ease, Taako snatched it away, poured a little into the sauce that was simmering on the portable stove top, then dumped a pretty fair amount into a cup before setting the rest aside.

Kravitz raised an eyebrow, and Taako made eye contact with him, holding his gaze as he grabbed the cup and drained it all in one sip.

“Oh, my god.” Kravitz laughed, shaking his head. “I can’t believe you just—you’re not supposed to be drinking, Taako.”

Taako grinned, pouring another glass and pushing it toward Kravitz. “Come on, Krav, lighten up. How are we supposed to have a good time listening to that guy without a little help?”

Kravitz chuckled. “I’m not so sure that’s a good idea.”

Taako shot him a look. “Don’t be a fucking stick in the mud.”

Kravitz rolled his eyes, taking a sip from the cup and continuing to simmer the sauce in the pan while Taako poured the egg mixture into the well in the flour. He followed the instructions on the paper and kneaded the dough with his good hand, not looking up as Brian instructed in front of them. A glance around the room showed him that Taako’s pasta dough was easily superior, the right color and texture as opposed to the others.

“It looks great.” Kravitz said, smiling.

Taako grinned. “Damn right it does. You’re gonna need to cut out the squares, though. Start rolling that shit out while I make the filling.”

Taako and Kravitz finished long before Brian was there, instruction wise, their tiny filled raviolis cooking in the water as Taako prepped two plates. By the time Brian had gotten to sealing the pasta, they were both eating, leaning on their workstation. Kravitz watched curiously as Taako finished almost his entire plate, completely impressed. He didn’t think even he’d noticed it, but it was as close to a full meal as Kravitz had ever seen him eat.

“Alright, darling, we’re out!” Taako called, rather loudly, as he removed his apron and tossed it on their station. “See you next week!”

Brian frowned, raising an eyebrow. “You’ve already finished? You weren’t following along?”

“Nah, my dude, fuck that.” Taako waved, all fingers. “See ya later!”

Kravitz quickly followed suit, removing his own apron and lying it next to Taako’s before awkwardly following after him.

Once they were both in the hallway, Taako dissolved into a fit of giggles as he leaned against the wall. His cheeks were just slightly flushed from the wine he’d downed earlier, and while Kravitz doubted that it was enough to impair him too badly, it was certainly enough to give him the giggles.
“Did you see the look on his face?” Taako wheezed, hunching over his middle. “Holy shit, that was fucking amazing.”

Kravitz began to laugh, too, Taako’s giggles practically contagious. “I can’t believe you just—he looked so sad.”

They both stood a few feet outside of the room, laughing wildly and breathlessly, until Taako was swiping away tears of mirth and Kravitz was catching his breath. They made eye contact and instantly started laughing again, and Taako had to slump against Kravitz’s side when he couldn’t stop.

Finally, blissfully, they both calmed down, and Kravitz stilled with his arm around Taako’s waist. He looked radiant, almost, so much better than he had a few weeks ago when they’d first met. Leaning down, he quickly caught Taako’s lips in a kiss, tilting his head to the side and resting a hand on Taako’s cheek. Taako looped his arms up and around his neck despite the awkward clunkiness of his cast, pulling him closer and deepening the kiss. Despite it being only three days into their ‘relationship,’ it felt like so much longer. Kravitz could hardly remember a time in his life when Taako wasn’t there.

They stood there for a long time, Kravitz’s arms going around Taako’s waist to steady him. He wasn’t sure when they’d have stopped, really, had it not been for the voice behind them.

“I knew it!” The voice belonged to none other than Angus McDonald, who looked very triumphant in his position behind them. “I knew you two were together! I cracked the case!” He cried gleefully.

Kravitz felt his face heat up, trying hard to avoid making eye contact. Taako leaned back in his arms, peaking around Kravitz’s shoulders and raising an eyebrow at the child. “Nice try, Agnes, isn’t it past your bedtime? Busted.”
Chapter 6: Angus

Chapter Summary

Angus McDonald was pretty attuned to Taako's moods by this point, so of course when things change, he wants to get to the bottom of it. Why was Taako so smiley, all of the sudden? Could it be the meds? Maybe Lup said something? Kravitz seems like a pretty likely subject...

Chapter Notes

Hey guys!! Back at it again with the random switching up of things. Not a Taako chapter, not a Kravitz chapter, but an ANUGUS chapter! I couldn't resist the urge to give some insight on his investigation!

In other news, @princecryptid on tumblr did some beautiful fanart of the picture Kravitz took of Taako in the last chapter! You can find that Here! Also, I'm hoping Saturday will be a regular update but I'm actually going to be at another convention so depending on how it goes, I may be late again;; I'll definitely post about it on my twitter (@nesselizabeth55 ) or my tumblr, ness-writes.tumblr.com! Thank you again to everyone who does art, leaves comments, or even just reads this! It means so so so much to me, I'm always so happy to see what you guys have to say! I hope everyone has a good rest of the week and if you happen to be at San Japan, hit me up!

Angus McDonald wasn’t bragging when he said he was probably one of the brightest students of his age.

Surpassing most children as far as intelligence went, Angus was already on his way to earning a high school diploma at the very ripe age of 11. He wasn’t there, not quite yet, but he was certainly getting close. He’d mastered several extra-curriculars, his only short coming seeming to be sports, which he didn’t find quite so important, himself.

So, no, Angus wasn’t bragging. He had all the skills to back it up, and Taako had always taught him to ‘flaunt what you’ve got,’ and he knew he at least had that.

The relationship that Angus had with Taako was unconventional, to say the least. Starting off as an irritated and begrudged babysitting gig for Taako and an unattainable hero and mentor to Angus, he’d been captivated by Taako’s presence from the beginning. He was confident, unafraid, and funny, and Angus longed to be respected by him. He was lucky enough that Taako had eventually taken a liking to him.

Angus was well acquainted with Taako’s moods, by this point, their relationship having spanned over the past three years. He could tell, usually, when Taako was goofing and when he was being serious, and when his insults were teasing or meant to bite.

Luckily, Angus was not usually on the biting end of insults or goofs. For the most part, Taako just teased him, and while it’d been off-putting at first, Angus had become adjusted quite quickly.
“That’s just how he shows that he loves you, Angus.” Magnus had told him, a long time ago. “He doesn’t mean that stuff, the whole... Taako show, that’s not how it is. He just has a hard time saying that kinda stuff, y’know?”

Angus considered himself lucky when he got a glimmer of pride, a compliment, a hug. Taako had been dishing them out a little easier, more recently, and while Angus knew that it was mostly because he knew that everyone worried about the hospital situation, he appreciated it anyways. He wouldn’t trade those moments for anything.

“Lookin’ sharp, kiddo.” Taako said, shooting Angus finger guns with his good hand as the boy shuffled into his room. Angus gave him a curious look, stepping inside of the hospital room and setting down his bag. Online schooling was more suitable for him, since he got so frequently picked on, but it meant having to always stay on top of his assignments.

“How are you feeling, Taako?” Angus asked, slipping off his shoes and climbing up onto the bed when Taako scooted over and patted the spot next to him, drawing back the covers. The bruise on his head wasn’t too bad, but he looked exhausted, with dark circles under his eyes. His hair was braided and pulled into a bun neatly, (Angus suspected Lup had done it the night before,) and his wrist, though still swollen, was bandaged up and resting on a pillow at his bedside.

Despite Angus’ advanced maturity and intelligence, seeing Taako faint had probably been one of the scariest things he’d ever experienced. It was unexpected and sudden. One moment, they’d been walking down the hallway, and the next, Taako slowed almost to a stop and collapsed. Angus had been caught completely off guard. He’d seemed okay, if not a little tired, beforehand. Had it been his fault? Taako had said he was tired, he should have gotten a nurse earlier, or made him sit down. He’d started crying almost immediately, his friend on the ground, unconscious, and he couldn’t do anything but shout his name. The commotion was noticed quickly, though, and a nurse ran over to help before Angus could fully panicked.

Taako wrapped his good arm around his shoulder, squeezing gently. It wasn’t unlike him now, Angus supposed, to hug him, but it still wasn’t a frequent occurrence. He sighed and leaned into it his side.

“Sorry about yesterday, pumpkin.” Taako said into his hair. “I know I probably scared the shit outta’ you. Taako’s all good now, though, they got me fixed up.”

“I don’t know about that, sir.” Angus said, hating how choked up his voice was, already.

Taako pulled back, giving Angus a measured glare. “Hey. No tears in casa de Taako, got it? Not today, Agnes, we’ve got more important things to worry about.”

Angus nodded quickly, scrubbing his face with one hand before hugging Taako around the waist, quickly. “Yessir.” He said, sitting back up and taking a deep breath.

“It won’t happen again, so quit worrying about it. Besides, we have more pressing matters. They added the new Caleb Cleveland movie to Netflix and you said you’d watch it with me so you can help me solve it faster.” Taako said, motioning for Angus to grab the remote.

Snatching the device from the bedside table, Angus tried to find a reason why Taako would be so eager to watch a series that he claimed he hated. “The movies aren’t nearly as good as the books, Taako.”

Taako rolled his eyes. “Can it, Agnes, just turn on the movie before I change my mind.” Even this, he said with a smile.
Perhaps Angus wouldn’t go as far as saying he was a detective, but his favorite book series was a set of mystery novels, and he’d read them all cover to cover, multiple times. His adopted mother was a very intelligent pediatrician. He liked to think he had surrounded himself with a pretty competent crowd of people. With his combined skill in sneaking and his heightened intelligence, Angus liked to think himself at least on par with his beloved Caleb Cleveland.

It was almost instant, the strange change of mood that Taako had experienced. Of course, Angus hadn’t been around him since he was in wild amounts of pain and very out of it the morning before, but it was incredibly out of character for Taako to be in such high spirits. He had been expecting grumpiness and gogginess, certainly not a smile or anything.

“You seem like you’re feeling better.” Angus said, fishing a little.

Taako leaned back into the pillows, settling an arm around Angus’ shoulders. He looked less bony than he had when he’d come in, if only by a little bit. Angus had been tracking his progress, little by little, and he was so relieved to see Taako getting better, slowly but surely. “Probably the narcotics, my dude. We’re not gonna have much alone time today, so hurry up and start your movie. Lulu’s coming over after work and Krav’s gonna be back with pizza for dinner, later.”

Suspicious, Angus turned the movie on and set the remote aside, choosing to file the information for later and to spend as much time as he could relishing in Taako’s good mood.

“So, this movie takes place almost right after the one about the train, which ended with…”

Taako acted strange for pretty much the entire day. Angus entertained the idea that, maybe, it was the narcotics, but despite every comment or snip, he retained the same smile, the same aura. He could tell, at points, that Taako was overcompensating. Making jokes and goofs for the sake of covering up his real intentions. Unsure of those as he may be, Angus listened intently to what he said as he tried to narrow down the possibilities.

Lup was always a possibility, but the familiarity of their talks and relationship left little reason for Taako to be so upbeat, so Angus doubted it. There was a chance of good news, progress, but Taako seemed to be more afraid of progressing rather than excited about it. For good reason, Angus had to admit. Gaining weight and moving forward had to be scary, for someone who had focused on doing quite the opposite for so long. That couldn’t be it either, not to mention the fact that with the broken wrist and fainting epidemic, it was unlikely that any good news had even come up.

When he came down to it, Angus could only think of two plausible situations. Either the medication that Taako was on was actually messing with his moods, or something had happened with Kravitz. It was the only other option—Kravitz had visited that morning, apparently, and he’d been the only other one to see Taako before Angus had, aside from Lup and possibly one of the doctors.

Angus wasn’t stupid, of course. Anyone could see the way that Kravitz looked at Taako and know the guy was crushing, but he hadn’t pegged the surgeon as one to make a move. Truthfully, Angus had been waiting for Taako to do just that, but again, it didn’t quite add up. Taako had been a little spacey all day, good mood or not. He’d taken a nap after lunch and he’d been kept on a pretty steady stream of medication. The likelihood of him having been levelheaded enough to make the decision to say something about it was pretty low, but Angus supposed it could have been spur of the moment.

Angus was a little stumped. He wasn’t quite sure what was going on. He’d have to do a little more snooping, if he wanted to get anywhere.

When Kravitz visited later that night, Taako didn’t say anything, and their dynamic didn’t appear to have changed. Angus spent a good chunk of the evening listening in on conversations and squinting
in Kravitz’s direction. Something had happened, and it probably had happened that morning. Angus hadn’t noticed this strange mood change before.

The day after next, since Angus had been stuck doing an online lecture the day before, Angus woke up to a 6 AM alarm, and only had just enough time to get dressed and run to the kitchen. Lucretia raised an eyebrow at him, already wearing her full business regalia and making a cup of coffee.

“What are you doing up so early, Angus?”

“I wanted to go to the hospital with you, if I could! I wanted to visit Taako again, and see if the nurses would let me look at the X-rays and stuff again. I’m studying anatomy, so I figured maybe—“

Lucretia chuckled, shaking her head. “I can’t take you this morning because I have a conference. Magnus was going to come over for lunch after he finished work, though, so I’m sure he’ll be willing to drive you at a much more reasonable time.” She said, ruffling his hair.

Angus chewed his lip. “But I wanted to go earlier. Can I ask Mr. Merle? Or Mr. Barry?”

“Barry will be going to work and Merle is visiting his kids. Magnus can take you after lunch. Go and get some rest and try to get started on your class work, alright? Besides, I’m sure Taako is still resting and recovering, so he won’t be up for a while.” She smiled at him and squeezed his shoulder, grabbing her coffee from the counter and waving at him as she bumped the front door closed behind her with her hip.

Angus crossed his arms and sighed, stepping over to the counter and pouring the left-over coffee into a mug, adding sugar and cream, (Taako had taught him how to make the perfect cup.) Angus wasn’t a huge fan, really, but he was tired and he wanted to get all his work done so that he could spend his day cracking this case.

By the time Magnus arrived, just after 12 o’clock, Angus had already finished his work and prepared sandwiches for lunch. Magnus chuckled, shaking his head as he sat down in the chair across from him and put his keys in his pocket. “You seem pretty eager.” He said, watching as Angus took a bite of his sandwich, then another.

“I have important business to attend to at the hospital today, Magnus.” Angus said, nodding seriously. “I wanted to go with Lucretia this morning, but she said she’d be too busy.”

Magnus watched him curiously, taking a bite of his sandwich. “Oh, do you now?”

Angus hummed an affirmative. “Yes, I do. So, if we could just. Get this show on the road.” He said, taking another bite of his sandwich and setting down the other half.

Shrugging, Magnus finished his own sandwich and stood. “Yeah, okay, fair enough.”

Angus put away the dishes while Magnus changed into normal clothes, then they made their way to the car. Angus sat shotgun, waiting patiently the entire drive and hopping out of the car once they got there. While Magnus headed straight up to Taako’s room, Angus insisted he needed to go and get something from his mother and went in the opposite direction. It was a lie, sure, but good investigations never got away without a few white lies.

Angus spent the day sneaking around, trying to find any clues that may further the investigation. He hung out with Taako for a while, but he was more concerned with getting ready for his cooking class than anything else. Angus had gotten almost nothing, at least not to prove his theory. He was still highly suspicious that it had to do with Taako’s relationship with Kravitz, (Taako had been texting someone, but he was good about hiding his screen,) but he still couldn’t be sure what that even was.
It came to him in the hallway outside of the cooking room, one that he’d actually stumbled upon accidentally. He hadn’t even known where the room was, he’d just been trying to make his way back to his mother’s office before she left without him. It was getting late, and today’s dead end was a little frustrating. Angus was beginning to realize that the possibility of it being Kravitz was very high, and that maybe it didn’t need to be his concern, but the idea that Taako never wanted to share these important things was pretty disheartening.

Angus knew that was how Taako was, sometimes. Maybe he was just trying to prove himself wrong.

He rounded a corner, curious as to where the smell of delicious food was coming from. He was pretty far away from the cafeterias, so he was certainly perplexed. There was a man standing with his back to Angus, who seemed pretty distracted by whoever he was talking to. It took him a moment to realize that it was Kravitz, the gears in his head turning. The smells... It had to be the cooking class.

Angus heard giggling, mixed voices, and he knew instantly that it was Taako standing in front of Kravitz. Angus couldn’t see him at all, though, not until he noticed a hot pink cast and black painted finger nails drape around Kravitz’s neck.

Angus watched, wide eyed. He certainly hadn’t expected evidence like this. They were kissing. Gross.

It took him a few moments to process it all, before finally he managed to said, “I knew it!”

It blew his cover instantly, Kravitz’s head turning toward him with wide eyes.

“I knew you two were together!” Angus said, surprising even himself. “I cracked the case!”

Taako’s head appeared over Kravitz’s shoulder, wearing a bemused expression. His lipstick was smeared, and Kravitz had several marks of residue on his own face.

“Nice try, Agnes,” Taako said, “Isn’t it past your bedtime? Busted.”
Chapter 7: Taako

Chapter Summary

Taako has a bad day.

Chapter Notes

Hey guys! So sorry for being super later, I ended up deciding to just skip Saturday's update and wait until now since I was so busy! The hotel didn't have any wifi I could use so I couldn't post what I had written and then I ended up rewriting the entire thing lol @themindofcc did TWO awesome pieces of fanart that you can find here and here! I'm going to be printing (with artists permission!) some of the fanart that I've gotten to put up in my room so if anyone else does any fanart please let me know! Thank you to everyone for being so patient and kind with this story! There is an end in sight and I'm excited but also nervous to try to start bringing something I've worked so hard on to a close! Don't worry though, I already have plans for my next Big AU that will hopefully be exciting and fun as well! I'll see you guys on Saturday with an update and I'll have a better idea of how many chapters we have left and such! Have a great rest of your week!

Taako watched as Sloane rubbed at her temples, clearly trying not to get too irritated.

“Please, Taako, it’s therapy, just like every other day. You need to go.” She said, “It won’t be long and you’ll have plenty of time to relax afterwards.”

Scowling as she spoke, Taako picked at the skin around his IV. “Look, I already told you that I’m not going. I’m fucking tired today, okay? I don’t want to go.”

Taako knew that he was pushing, that it’d probably be a lot easier just to go to the stupid group therapy, but the thought of having to get out of bed and be around other people literally made him feel sick to his stomach. He was too tired to deal with this; his brain wasn’t working—he wasn’t going to therapy.

With a small sigh, Sloane sat down next to his bed and crossed her legs. “Why don’t you want to go, Taako?” She asked, her tone measured in a way that indicated she was speaking very deliberately. “We’ve never had this problem, not after the first couple of days. Did something happen?”

Her voice was condescending as hell, and Taako hated it. “Sloane, I just don’t want to fucking go. I’m tired.”

It looked like she wanted to say more, but she just nodded a little. “Alright, fine. You’re clearly not feeling well, so I’m not going to force you to go, but if this continues to happen, we’re going to have to make a new plan.” She warned.

Taako shrugged, grabbing the TV remote and rolling onto his side, effectively ending the
conversation. As soon as she’d closed the door, he muted the volume and pulled the blankets over his head.

*Did something happen?* No, everything was the same as it’d been the past few days. He was dating Kravitz, his family was fucking awesome, shit was coming up roses left and right.

Taako felt like he didn’t have an excuse to feel so shitty. Stuff was better than it’d probably ever been. He didn’t have the right to be upset like this; he didn’t have a reason to.

Still, reason or not, he felt like garbage, so he just closed his eyes and drowned out the noise in his head with music blaring from his headphones.

Kravitz’s cool hand was what woke him up. Taako hadn’t even realized that he’d dozed off, certainly not with the music blaring the way it was, and the light from the room was now incredibly disorienting. He was too warm and a little sweaty, probably from sleeping with the comforter pulled over his head, and Kravitz was looking at him curiously.

Taako blinked, pulling out the headphones and pausing the music on his phone. The time indicated that he’d been out for a couple of hours. “Hello.” He said, his voice groggy.

Kravitz waited as Taako sat up and slowly shuffled to one side of the bed, sitting near his feet once he’d gotten situated. “Hello. What happened this morning?” Kravitz asked, taking Taako’s good hand and kissing it gently. Taako couldn’t help but feel like it was forced.

“Did Sloane talk to you?” Taako asked instead, pulling the blanket closer with the fingers outside of his cast and trying to hide beneath it. “What happened to Doctor-Patient confidentiality?”

Kravitz rolled his eyes fondly. “What happened to going to therapy?”

Taako just shrugged, feeling put on the spot. “I don’t know. I just wasn’t feeling up to it, okay?”

Settling Taako’s hand in between both of his own, Kravitz squeezed gently. “Are you feeling any better, now?”

Another shrug. “Not really.” Kravitz nodded thoughtfully. “I don’t know.”

Running his thumb over the back of Taako’s hand, Kravitz shifted to face him. “Do you think you’re coming down with something?”

“No.” Taako paused. “Maybe? Probably not. It doesn’t matter, Krav, just—just sit here with me.”

Smiling a little, in a way that made Taako’s chest warm even when he felt like crap, Kravitz shifted so he could sit next to Taako against the pillows. Kravitz was much broader than Lup, which made sharing the bed a little more difficult, but Taako shifted to rest against his side and it wasn’t too bad.

“One day of missed therapy won’t kill you, if you’re feeling so bad, but we can’t let this turn into a slump.” Kravitz said, lacing and unlacing their fingers. “You’re very strong. You have to push past these things. And you have to eat, Taako.”

Taako wrinkled his nose. “Krav, stop. I don’t want to talk about it.”

Kravitz sighed. “I know that you don’t Taako, but—“

“Why do you think I skipped therapy? I’m not—I can’t, right now, okay?” Taako countered.

“I understand, but you have to eat today, and I don’t know what happened, or why you’re upset. I’m
not saying you need to tell me, or anyone, not right now, but you can’t just skip food.”

“I used to skip food all the time.” Taako snapped, sitting up. “If you’re going to fucking interrogate me, I don’t want you here.” He said, shying away from Kravitz’s hand.

Kravitz sighed. “I’m sorry.” He rested his hands in his lap. “I’m not being very tactful.”

“It’s not your job to be my therapist, Kravitz.” Taako muttered, looking at the ground. “I just want to be alone, okay?”

Kravitz looked hesitant to leave, but he began to get out of bed, anyways. “I’m sorry, Taako, I didn’t mean to—I just worry about you.”

Taako rubbed at his temples. “I know, I’m just. I’m not in a good mindset, just… I’ll text you later.”

Pausing by the bed, Kravitz bent over to quickly kiss the side of Taako’s head, before squeezing his shoulder and heading out.

Hating being talked down to, especially by someone he actually liked, Taako groaned audibly and laid back down, following his earlier routine of turning on his music and hiding under the covers. Kravitz didn’t need to lecture him, Taako knew he was fucked up, and he didn’t need his boyfriend to be his therapist. Kravitz was supposed to be on his side.

It didn’t really occur to him that maybe Kravitz was, and Taako was the one fighting against himself.

Taako preferred to pretend it wasn’t happening. He didn’t like to think about how he’d just potentially fucked up his very new and very fresh relationship.

It was another hour before someone else came in, though this time he didn’t sleep. The entire time he just laid under the covers, picking at his skin until he felt the tell-tale stick of blood beneath his nails and biting his lip until he tasted copper. Still, he closed his eyes as he felt someone draw the covers back, and a hand went to card through his hair, gently combing out tangles and smoothing it down. Blinking his eyes open, he squinted up at his sister, knitting his eyebrows. “Hey.”

Lup rolled her eyes, patting his cheek a little too hard. “Hey. Move over, it got cold outside and I’m freezing.” She said, pushing him a little.

Taking his time, Taako moved over to make room, shuddering when Lup climbed into bed and settled down next to him. “Jesus, you’re cold.” He muttered, drawing into himself.

Lup shrugged, turning the already muted television off and holding up one of Taako’s headphones up to her ear. “This is super loud, and super angsty. What are you, 12?”

Taako scowled. “Shut up, Lulu, I’m not in the mood.”

Lup huffed, bumping his shoulder. “Yeah, I heard. Sloane said you didn’t go to therapy. Any reason why?”

Huffing, Taako shrugged. “I don’t know, I didn’t want to go. Thinking about having to sit around a bunch of other people made me want to claw my eyes out.”

Nodding, Lup grabbed a package of cheese crackers off of the bedside table. “Here, you need a snack.” She said, unwrapping them and hand one over. “What the fuck did you do to your arm, bro?”
Taako groaned. “I don’t fucking know, Lup, it just happened.” Reluctantly, he crammed down the cracker, grabbing the cup of water from Lup when she offered it.

Through a mouthful of cracker, she replied, “You’re really having a shitty day, then. You don’t get like this often.” She remarked. “What do you want to do?” She asked, grabbing a handful of tissues from the bedside table and dunking them in the water, gentle wiping away the dried blood. There wasn’t much, nothing more than the crescent shaped scars from Taako’s nails, but she cleaned it up anyways.

“I don’t want to do anything.” Taako said, eyeing the crackers distastefully. “I just want to lay here.”

Lup nodded. “Alright. Finish the crackers and you can.”

Narrowing his eyes, Taako considered arguing against it, but trying to fight Lup was pretty much a lose-lose for him, every time. He took another cracker. “I hate you.”

Laughing, Lup shook her head. “You wish. Finish your snack, dingus, I know you haven’t eaten all day.”

Taako did finish, relieved that Lup had taken a couple for herself. He finally settled against her side, closing his eyes and taking a deep breath. She took his headphones, putting one in her own ear and offering him the other, before scrolling through spotify for something to listen to. She didn’t ask anymore questions, just turned the music on and settled down, lacing her fingers through Taako’s hand and stilling there.

It took Taako three songs to speak up. “I snapped at Kravitz earlier. He kept asking me shit and I told him he wasn’t supposed to be my therapist.”

Raising an eyebrow, Lup nodded. “How did that go?”

“He apologized and I told him I wanted to be alone.”

She nodded again. “Hm. Okay. Did he seem upset?”

Taako shrugged. “Not really. Mostly sad, I guess, but not upset with me.”

Lup hummed an affirmative. “Maybe text him and say sorry for snapping. You don’t have to apologize for having a bad day though. I bet he understands.”

Taako held his hand out and Lup deposited his phone in his grip. “I don’t know why I got so worked up today.” He muttered.

“There doesn’t always have to be a reason, Koko. Sometimes you just have bad days. That’s always gonna happen in the healing process. Just try not to let it get to you.”

Taako sighed, typing out a message.

’Hey, Krav. Sorry for snapping earlier. Bad day or something, I guess.’ He sent it without much thought, rubbing the bridge of his nose. Lup squeezed his shoulder.

“You wanna turn on a movie or something? That’d be a good distraction.” She offered. Taako just nodded.

“Yeah, just pick something.” He muttered. Kravitz’s reply came only a couple of minutes later.

’Don’t be sorry, I shouldn’t have been interrogating you. Are you doing alright?’
Taako rolled his eyes. ‘Yeah, I’m okay I guess. Kind of hungry.’

Kravitz’s reply was instantaneous, almost. ‘I can bring you something, if you’d like.’

An hour later, Kravitz arrived with takeout from a burger place down the street, greeting Taako with a brief kiss that made him feel at least a little less terrible.

They all managed to sit on the bed, and Kravitz held Taako’s hand while they ate. The movie played in the background, but nobody was really paying attention.

Taako broke the silence after taking a long sip of his drink. “Sloane said she thinks I’m ready to switch to outpatient treatment.” He said, unable to make eye contact with either of them. “She said I’ve been putting on weight well and that as long as my diet is being closely monitored and I come in for therapy and stuff, I should be able to go back to living at home.”

“Holy shit, Taako, that’s fucking cool as hell!” Lup said, grinning. “Is that what’s got you all freaked out?”

Taako glared, nudging her with his foot. “Shut the fuck up, Lulu.”

Kravitz smiled warmly, leaning down to kiss him again. Taako wasn’t so sure he’d ever get used to that. Lup stuck out her tongue. “That’s wonderful news.”

Taako shrugged. “Yeah, I guess so. I’m just waiting to inevitably fuck everything up again.” He huffed. “Like, fuck, how am I supposed to keep up with all of this on my own?”

“It’s not gonna be on your own, dumbass.” Lup said, nudging him. “You literally live in a building surrounded by people who care about you. Besides, I’m sure Krav is practically gonna live there, too. Right, Krav?”

Kravitz turned a little pink as Taako rested his cheek against his hand. “I mean, ah. I’d like to visit, yes. As much as I can.”

“See? Even your boyfriend is on board.” Lup said, grinning. “That’s fucking awesome, Koko, I’m so tired of living alone.”

Taako rolled his eyes, though the assurances did help quell some of the lingering anxiety about leaving the hospital. As much as he disliked living there, it at least gave him some comfort to know that, yeah, if anything went sideways, there were people equipped to deal with it. Leaving meant no feeding tube, nobody monitoring his vitals and his weight and all that. It was scary to realize he may have to do it alone.

“Yeah, okay, okay, quit bragging and turn the movie up. I have to see who the killer actually was.” Taako said, shaking his head and leaning into the pillows.

Despite the fact that he felt a little better after all of that, Taako was still pretty worn out, his eyes heavy as he tried to keep up with the movie. He was pretty sure he ended up actually falling asleep, propped up against the pillows with his head falling onto Lup’s shoulder. He woke up when Lup was climbing out of the bed, Kravitz very carefully shifting him so he was lying down properly.

“Are you comfortable?” Kravitz whispered, the room only illuminated by the television at this point. Taako flashed a sleepy thumbs up.

Lup ruffled his hair gently. “Get some sleep, Koko, see you tomorrow.”
Kravitz bent over to kiss him again. “I’ll be over for lunch, alright? Try not to fight with the nurses again.”

“No promises.” Taako yawned, dragging Kravitz down for another kiss.

Kravitz chuckled, fixing the coves and murmuring something else that Taako didn’t quite catch. He was already dozing off again, out completely before the door even shut.
Chapter 7: Kravitz

Chapter Summary

Kravitz reflects as he hangs out with Taako on his last night in the hospital.

Chapter Notes

Hello, lovely readers!
This is it, you guys, the entrance to the end game for Refractory! I have 4 more chapters planned, and I will give you a heads up that three out of four of them are going to be Taako's perspective, just because that's what I need. This FELT kind of like the end but I promise, not quite yet. I also may do a couple more bonus chapters if anyone has any suggestions, so feel free to let me know in the comments or on my tumblr, ness-writes.tumblr.com!

I've had a lot of mixed emotions as I've been drawing this to a close. This is going to end up being a novel length project, and I was always so afraid that I wouldn't be able to truly finish something this big. I've always wanted to be an author and this has given me the hope that maybe I can make that dream a reality! I never would have been able to keep up with posting if I hadn't had so many amazing supporters and kind people, so I owe a lot to everyone who has been keeping up with this story! I'm so grateful to have been lucky enough to have something I created catch wind and be enjoyed by so many! This IS NOT my last story, though, that's for sure! I have another BIG Au planned and a few smaller stories as well. I hope that you guys will stick with me even after Refractory ends, too! Thank you guys so much, I hope everyone is having an awesome weekend, and I will talk to you all on Wednesday for the next update!

Kravitz tapped on the door to Taako’s hospital room, turning the knob and pushing it open the slightest bit. “Anybody home?”

“One sec, babe, I’m not dressed!” Taako called, from inside the bathroom. “Come on in, m’almost done.”

Stepping inside and setting down the flowers he’d brought, (it turned out Taako loved to get flowers, so Kravitz used pretty much every excuse to bring them,) smiling at Lup, who had a bag full of Taako’s possessions thrown over one shoulder. “Hey, Kravitz!” She hummed, waving with her fingers. “I just stopped by to grab some of Taako’s stuff so we wouldn’t have to worry about getting it all home tomorrow.”

She was just as dressed up as Kravitz guessed Taako would be, wearing a tight red gown with her hair styled up and her lips painted perfectly, black at the top and red at the bottom. He would always admire the twins tenacity for makeup and fashion—Kravitz had only ever been good with suits, really. He couldn’t imagine putting together outfits like they had. “You look lovely. Are you having date night, as well?”
Lup chuckled, carefully shouldering a second bag and nodding. “Yeah, Barry is taking me to see the new *It* movie. It’s gonna be fuckin’ fantastic and I’ll bet it scares the shit outta him. That’s love, huh?”

Kravitz laughed. “Yeah, I suppose so.”

Lup stepped over to the bathroom door, knocking twice. “Koko, I’ve gotta go— Hurry up so I can say goodbye.” She called.

“Jesus, Lulu, hang on, nobody gets dressed that fast.” Taako’s voice came muffled from behind the door, followed by some more shuffling and the click of the lock. Lup stepped back as the door was pushed open, grinning as Taako walked out.

Of course, Taako was always stunning, whether he was wearing a faded pink hospital gown or a t-shirt and sweatpants. There was always something about seeing him dressed up though, too, that left Kravitz in awe. He was wearing an oversized red sweater, (Taako never seemed to wear anything that fit properly,) that was tucked into a black, flowy skirt, finished off with grey leggings and maroon flats. Lup whistled, shooting Taako a thumbs up. “Lookin’ good, bro!”

Taako rolled his eyes, turning toward Kravitz with a small smile. “Hey, hot stuff.” He hummed. The IV was gone, as well as the feeding tube, the only medical looking thing being the hospital bracelets peeking out from under one sleeve and the hot pink cast on his other arm, decorated in swirling designs by Magnus and littered with signatures. Kravitz crossed the room, bending just slightly to give Taako a quick, chaste kiss.

“That’s my cue to head out, see you guys later, be responsible!” Lup called, grabbing the last of her things and waving on her way out of the door.

“Seeya, Lup.” Taako rolled his eyes, leaning up to kiss Kravitz again. “Revenge for all of the times her and Barry had all that gross PDA when they started dating. *Yuck.*”

Kravitz chuckled, pulling back. “You look lovely, by the way.”

“Lulu brought me an outfit.” Taako grinned, fixing Kravitz’s tie with one hand. “This is her skirt, actually.”

Stepping back to fully admire his boyfriends get up, Kravitz moved to retrieve the flowers. “These are for you. To commemorate your last night in the hospital.” He said, smiling.

Taking the flowers, red and pink carnations, Taako took a long sniff and set them on his bedside table. “Love that. Thanks, Krav.” He reached up on his tip toes so he could kiss him again, and Kravitz placed a hand on his waist.

“Special occasion, and all that. Shall we head out? This may be our last cooking class with Magic Brian. Aren’t you going to miss that?” Kravitz teased, wrapping an arm around his shoulders as they began their trek downstairs.

Groaning loudly, Taako slung his own arm around Kravitz’s waist, sauntering alongside him as they went. “Oh yeah, deffo gonna miss that guy, about as much as I’ll miss art therapy and Pringles.”

“You do know that you’re coming back for therapy, right?” Kravitz teased. “I’m taking you with me on Tuesday mornings so you can make group therapy, remember?”

After a couple of minutes of small talk, they approached the classroom downstairs. It was certainly strange to think this was the last time they’d do this together, though Taako leaving meant they’d have opportunities to do everything else. Kravitz would miss seeing Taako every day at work, but he’d enjoy so much more being able to spend time with him in their respective homes. This was a change for the better, Kravitz was sure, and the support system that Taako surrounded himself with assured Kravitz that things would end up just fine.

The classroom was still mostly empty, aside from a couple of patients who’d been accompanied by a nurse. Taako went to retrieve their aprons and Kravitz went to get the supplies, grabbing a recipe card. Taako hopped up on the counter of the makeshift workspace, winking at Kravitz as he returned. Since the class had become so popular, the hospital had invested in better equipment, the rooms more organized and more kitchen like in appearance. Taako looked comfortable next to the stove top, snatching the card from Kravitz with a mischievous grin and beginning to read it over.

When Taako had arrived in the hospital, he’d been so, so sick. Anyone could have seen him and known that something was wrong, that his weight was unhealthy. But it hadn’t just been his weight, it’d been his mental well-being, too. He’d looked so worn down, so sad, depressed in a way that Kravitz wasn’t used to seeing in his own ward.

The Taako sitting in front of him now looked like an entirely different person. His blonde hair was full and wavy and soft, no longer brittle and thin from the lack of nutrients. He was still skinny, not quite at his weight goal yet, but he looked softer, less angular, less skeletal. He ate more normal sized meals and had even begun willingly snacking in the middle of the day. Taako’s smile was small but genuine, the bags under his eyes nearly faded away and the sharpness to his face now smooth and healthy. He’d jumped up on the counter like it was nothing when just a few weeks earlier, he’d barely been able to walk down the hall without getting winded. He looked warm. He looked happy.

Thinking that he’d been one to contribute to Taako’s current state of being made Kravitz’s chest feel warm.

Taako raised an eyebrow at him, clearing his throat. “You all good, dude? You’re staring.”

Kravitz’s cheeks went warm, shaking his head a bit and smiling. “I’m great, actually.” Taking his phone out of his pocket, Kravitz opened the camera, angling it at Taako, who struck a glamorous pose and grinned.

When Taako waved him over, Kravitz stepped over to the counter and watched him take out his own phone, putting it in selfie mode and beckoning Kravitz to come closer. His boyfriend wrapped an arm around his shoulders, pulling him close and sticking his tongue out, waiting for Kravitz to make an equally ridiculous face before snapping the picture and adding a caption.

“Don’t send that to anyone.” Kravitz groaned. “I look stupid.”

“You look hysterical, and this picture is adorable. I need to show Lup that our date night is superior, anyways.” Taako said, sending it out via snapchat before setting his phone aside.

Slowly, people began to file in and Kravitz watched as Brian bumped the door open and stepped inside, just as extravagantly as usual. Taako was already scowling, something that Kravitz found quite endearing, slipping off of the counter and starting to get everything ready to begin cooking, ignoring Brian’s usual introduction speech.

Kravitz ended up stepping aside and letting Taako do most of the work, simply doing the littler tasks of chopping up ingredients and the like. They were making some sort of pan fried fish, though Kravitz couldn’t be sure of which one. Taako was seasoning it, though, glancing at the instructions
and wrinkling his nose. “Hey, babe, look up a recipe for lemon butter salmon, this honey glazed recipe doesn’t sound good.”

Kravitz raised an eyebrow, watching as Brian showed the proper means of cooking a piece of fish in a pan before finding another recipe online and propping his phone up so Taako could read it. He looked almost scarily natural as he sliced up ingredients and squeezed lemon juice on the uncooked fish, putting a dash of oil in the pan as well as something to season it.

“You’ve gotten pretty good at this, Taako.” Kravitz said, genuinely impressed.

Taako glanced up, flashing him a quick smile. “Yeah. I’ve been watching those buzzfeed cooking videos. Hate to say that I actually like cooking. Kind of wanna try to start doing it once I go home.”

Kravitz smiled, nodding. “That sounds like a great idea. You can start making things that you want to make, too, instead of just following instructions here.”

Nodding, Taako slipped the fish into the pan, his smile widening as it began to cook in the oil. “Oh, yeah. Brian here is a shit teacher. I’ve learned way more just watching videos online, seriously.”

Looking back toward the front of the room, Kravitz watched as Brian slowly made his rounds, checking and helping people who needed assistance. When he finally got to their station, he raised an eyebrow, frowning. “Oh, dear, what’s going on here? This isn’t the proper way to season the fish, darling, did you look at the recipe card?”

Taako snorted, shaking his head. “Thanks for the advice, pumpkin, but I’ve got this under control. We’re gonna do this one Taako style.”

Looking somewhat affronted but unsure of how to respond, Brian just stepped away to go and assist someone else with their seasoning. Kravitz was unable to help his little snicker. “That wasn’t incredibly kind, Taako.”

“Never claimed to be kind, babe, just here to make some baller salmon so we can eat and then get outta here.” Taako said, carefully flipping the fish over. “Take the potatoes out of the oven, will you?”

They finished their dish much quicker than the others, their teamwork making the process go much quicker, especially since Taako could hold his own so well. Kravitz watched as he meticulously put everything on a plate, arranging it so it looked pretty and carefully drizzling leftover sauce from the pan on top of everything. It actually looked amazing, far better than the plate that Brian had prepared at the front of the room, and Taako looked pretty proud of his creation.

“That looks delicious, Taako.” Kravitz said, leaning on the counter and dusting his hands off on his apron.

Taako rolled his eyes. “Of course it does. Let’s eat this so we can make it to the cafeteria for a candy bar before it closes.” Settling down on the counter side by side and ignoring the dirty looks that Brian was shooting toward them as he tried to encourage others to keep working, Taako stuck his fork into the fish and took a bite. Nodding as he chewed, Kravitz followed suit and took a bite of his own, relishing in the flavor.

“Shit, Taako, that’s really good.” Kravitz said, taking another bite.

Taako grinned. “Way better than that other sauce, right? The lemon tastes good with this fish.”

They ate contently without any problems, and together they finished it all, Taako without any
hesitance at all. Kravitz was honestly just impressed, at this point.

Untying his apron with one hand, Taako dropped it onto the counter and flipped Brian off with both hands. “See you never, darling, good luck with your garbage class! I’ll rule it someday, don’t you worry.”

With that, he marched out of the room, leaving Kravitz to fumble with his own apron, giving Brian a half-apologetic look as he finally dropped it next to Taako’s and jogged after him, much like their last class together.

Taako was leaning against the wall outside, carefully dusting off his skirt to remove any excess crumbs. His nails had been repainted, Kravitz realized, probably by Lup, a dark red. He flashed Kravitz a thumbs up. “Cooking class, done. I’m craving something sweet, though, so let’s hurry up and go get a fucking kit kat before the hospital stuff closes up.”

Kravitz smiled, just as wide, taking Taako’s hand and pulling him close, kissing his forehead before wrapping an arm around him, again. “You’re incredibly attractive when you’re being vindictive.” He admitted.

Taako winked. “Maybe that was the plan all along, huh?”

Making it back to the cafeteria wasn’t a problem, and Kravitz was happy to get a couple of candy bars if Taako was feeling up to it. He rarely ate sweets, so to see him so readily suggesting they have some sort of dessert was reassuring that all of this progress was really happening.

Once they’d paid the cashier, they headed wordlessly to their usual spot, Kravitz sitting down on one end of the bench as Taako fumbled with the wrapper of his Kit Kat. Things were mostly quiet while Taako nibbled on his candy bar, Kravitz unwrapping one of his own. The glow from the fishtank illuminated the mostly dim hallway, washing Taako’s face in the pale, blushing light coming off of the tank. Kravitz had to force himself to look back toward the water to avoid staring for too long.

“Y’know what, Krav?” Taako said, breaking the silence. Kravitz allowed his gaze to stray back to his boyfriend.

“What?” He asked, raising an eyebrow.

“As stupid as it fuckin’ sounds, I’m kind of glad I ended up here, y’know? Lup was probably a couple days away from forcing me, anyways, and… shit was getting pretty bad, I guess. Probably wouldn’t have made it far had I not gotten admitted.” He said, sighing softly. “And, I wouldn’t have met you. Obviously scored in the boyfriend department, there. Also the, uh. Health department too.”

Kravitz smiled at him, nodding. Taako wasn’t making eye contact, which was fine, because Kravitz could tell that it was something he was having a hard time talking about. “I’m glad, too. Well, not that you were in the hospital, but that… you were able to get the help you needed, when you did. You look… so much happier, Taako. So much healthier. I’m so proud of how far you’ve come.”

Taako shrugged, but he was smiling as he licked chocolate off his fingers. “Yeah, yeah. Cut the sappy stuff, you’re making it seem like this is the end or something.” He grumbled, kicking his feet underneath the bench.

Kravitz laughed, shaking his head. “Sorry, sorry. It’s certainly not the end, though. In fact, I plan on bothering you for as long as you allow.”

Rolling his eyes, Taako leaned against Kravitz’s side, but something about it seemed so different from the last time. Things were so good, now. So hopeful. Kravitz leaned over and kissed his
forehead, closing his eyes.

“Get used to it, thug, you’re stuck with me now.” Taako said, voice uncharacteristically soft.

Kravitz wrapped an arm around him, watching the fish swim, his vision occasionally shifting toward Taako, who leaned against him with his eyes closed.

It didn’t feel like the end, no. It seemed a lot more like the beginning. The beginning of a new life, of another chance, of their relationship. A beginning to something that Taako and Kravitz would hopefully enjoy, together.

After a few moments of sitting in a very comfortable silence, Kravitz shifted into a sitting position. “Alright, you look like you’re about to pass out. Let’s get you back to bed.”

Taako wrinkled his nose, sitting up. “Come on, Krav, can’t you just stay the night?”

“Unfortunately not, but I’d be happy to stay for a movie until you fall asleep. You have an earlier morning, though. I’ll be over when it’s time for you to get discharged and such, anyways.”

Taako didn’t argue too much, probably because when he opened his mouth to, he just yawed. Instead, they got back up and Kravitz held his hand as they made their way back to the hospital room, waiting patiently as Taako removed his makeup and changed into some pajamas.

Kravitz could get used to this, really, watching Taako cross the room and slip right onto his lap instead of onto the hospital bed, wrapping his arms around his shoulders and settling his head against his shoulder. He smelled like strawberries and his hair was done up in a messy bun, eyeline smudged just slightly under his eyelids. Kravitz gave him a quick kiss, earning a tired grin as Taako made himself comfortable.

This could be our life, Kravitz mused, watching another commercial break flash by as he held a sleeping Taako in his arms, content to relish in the comfortable closeness before leaving for the night.
Chapter 8: Taako

Chapter Summary

Taako has his last appointment with Sloane and finally gets released from the hospital. Lup and Kravitz are less than sneaky about the surprise party they planned.

Chapter Notes

Hey guys, this is super late and I'm so sorry about that. I've been a little sick the past couple days and my work schedule got changed around so I could work more hours. I've been thinking on it for the past week or two, though, but I think I may have to go down to one update a week. I want to make sure each chapter has all of the work and love and care put into it that I can manage, and I'll admit that lately writing so much has felt more like a chore and it's burning me out. I also have to continue working on my novel, and I just want to make sure I have time to make sure the things I post are all the quality I want them to be.
I'll be posting on Saturday like normal, but I will most likely be posting on Saturdays only after that, instead of twice weekly. I'm sorry for the sudden change and I hope you all understand and will support it.
Either way! I worked hard on this chapter and I hope you'll enjoy it either way. You can always reach me at ness-writes.tumblr.com for any questions or to see information updates! I appreciate all of the love and support I've gotten lately, and I hope you all will continue to support over these last few chapters! We're in the home stretch, now. (Ps, I am also late on replying to comments but I will get to then very soon!)

Taako slumped in the chair across from Sloane’s desk, his feet propped up on the edge of it, his arms crossed over his chest. Sloane watched him with a bemused expression, flipping through his file and then setting it back down.

“Well, Taako.” Sloane said, smiling. “The improvement that we’ve seen since you arrived here is—it’s incredible, really.”

Taako rolled his eyes, braiding his hair as he listened. “Yeah, yeah, gained a little weight, started eating at semi-normal times during the day. Shit that people do literally every day.”

“Don’t be ridiculous, Taako.” Sloane said, shaking her head. “I hadn’t ever seen an eating disorder so severe, Taako, and the progress you’ve made it just remarkable. It’s only been a couple of months and you’re only slightly underweight and you’ve gotten up to eating at least 1,500 calories a day. I never could have anticipated that you’d be able to improve so quickly. It won’t be easy, to maintain these habits, but you have such a wonderful support system that I fully believe you can. I’m very—I’m very proud of you, Taako.”

Continuing to mess with his hair, Taako was unable to bring himself to meet her gaze. “Geez, okay, I get it. Healthy weight, good eating, whatever. I know that I fucking crushed it, believe me.” All of
the talk about him was more overwhelming than anything. He was still afraid of being at home, of having to rely on himself to keep up with eating and his weight and his habits—and the array of medications they had him on. Not only vitamins and that kind of stuff to continue helping his body heal (there had been plenty of harm done before this turn around, and he’d have to be weary of his heart and his internal organs from the damage he’d caused by not eating,) but antidepressants, too.

Then, though, he remembered his sister, his friends, his boyfriend. Taako doubted it’d be easy to forget to eat or take his medicine or go to therapy without someone breathing down his neck about it. Not to mention the, admittedly, pretty okay doctors that had been working with him.

Instead of voicing any of this, Taako gave Sloane a thumbs up. “Thanks, Doc. Couldn’t have done it without you, and all that jazz. You know how it goes, you changed my life, blah blah. Can I go now? I’m like. 99% sure my friends are throwing some ridiculous ‘Welcome Home’ party and I’d hate to make them wait.”

Sloane chuckled. “I may or may not have received an invitation to said surprise party, but unfortunately won’t be able to attend. It’s date night.”

Raising an eyebrow, Taako grinned. “Oh shit, really? First date or something? Hard to imagine you being… not a hardass at work.” He admitted.

Laughing, Sloane stood up and walked over toward the door, handing Taako a folder with information on his therapies and such, as well as several suggestions for his diet. “Certainly not a first date. I’m married.”

“What the fuck?” The idea of Sloane being married seemed incredibly strange to him. He stood up and walked over to meet her at the door. “Holy shit, that’s fuckin’ wild. I had no idea. Who’s the lucky person?”

Rolling her eyes, Sloane turned the photograph on her desk around so that Taako could see it. “Holy shit, is that Hurley? How the hell did I not know this?” He exclaimed.

“Most of us don’t talk about our personal lives at work, Taako, but I am surprised that you didn’t figure out. I suppose you had other matters on your mind.” Sloane teased. “Don’t forget, group therapy on Tuesday morning.” She said, resting a hand on his shoulder. “I need you to keep up with your journal, just make sure you’re recording meals.”

Taako narrowed his eyes, elbowing her side and snatching the folder. “Yeah, yeah, I get it. See you on the flip side, Sloane.” He said, ducking under her arm and slipping out of the room, looking over his shoulder to wave and almost instantly crashing into something.

Taako cursed, stumbling backwards but quickly being steadied by two hands grasping his elbows. Kravitz stood in front of him, wearing an entertained smile. “You seem pretty eager to get out of here.”

“Watch where you’re walking, Krav, you know I have a one track mind.”

“I do.” Kravitz chuckled, bending down to kiss him. “I got out of work a bit early. Do you need any help with your packing and such?” He asked, taking one of Taako’s hands and beginning the walk back to his hospital room.

Shrugging, Taako laced their fingers together. “Not that I know of. I’m pretty sure everything is cool, packing wise. I think we’re pretty much ready to roll. I haven’t eaten lunch yet—don’t give me that
look, it’s just ‘cause I had therapy, but I was thinking about eating real food at home or something instead of the hospital stuff.”

Nodding thoughtfully, Kravitz squeezed his hand. “That sounds like a good idea, then. I suppose all that’s left is to head out, then.” Kravitz had brought Lup earlier that morning when he’d arrived for his shift and was driving them home now, something Taako found stupidly endearing. He hadn’t ever imagined being the kind of person to find that sort of stuff cute.

Getting back to the room, Lup stood up from her spot sitting at the edge of the bed, looking at Taako expectantly. “So? How’d it go?”

“115 pounds, only 15 underweight.” Taako said, flashing a peace sign. “Out of the danger zone as far as that goes but she’s hoping it’ll keep getting better over the next couple months.”

Lup grinned, walking over and dragging Taako into a tight hug. “That’s fuckin’ awesome, Taako, I’m so proud of you.” She said, pulling back and holding him at arm’s length. “You know you look great too, right?”

“Obviously.” Taako said, “Can we just get all this shit and get this show on the road? I’m ready to be home, it’s been fucking forever.”

Lup and Kravitz carried most of the bags, though there wasn’t really that much to begin with. Taako slung his backpack over his shoulder, winking up at Kravitz as they used the staff exit to head down to his car. Once everything was packed away, Taako slipped into the passenger’s side and began to wrangle on a sweater because it was way colder outside than he’d anticipated.

Once Kravitz was in the car, he leaned over the center console to kiss Taako. Lup mumbled a quiet ‘ew’ in protest, but she didn’t say anything else, letting them have their moment.

“Well, are you ready, then?” Kravitz asked, raising an eyebrow at Taako.

Taako rolled his eyes, sinking into the seat and turning on the heater. “Hell yes I’m ready, let’s get the hell outta’ dodge.”

Kravitz smiled warmly and pulled out of the parking lot, Taako fiddling with the radio until he found some obnoxious pop station, turning the volume up and wishing it were warm enough to roll down the windows. Instead, he shoved both of his hands into the pocket of the hoodie he was wearing and watched as the hospital blurred into the distance.

He knew he was going to have to go back, but there was something cathartic about watching as it disappeared around the corner. Taking out his phone, he opened snapchat and waited as Lup quickly leaned into the frame with practiced ease, snapping a picture. Once he’d captioned it with ‘Finally leaving the hospital!’ and an obnoxious amount of emoji’s, he posted it to his story and set his phone back in his lap in favor of keeping his hands warm.

Lup and Kravitz were both strangely quiet, raising Taako’s suspicions even more. There was definitely something happening. “You two are quiet.” Taako said, eyes flickering over toward Kravitz. “Seem to be thinkin’ a lot.”

Kravitz glanced back at him, smiling briefly. “Just glad to see you out of the hospital, Taako. And excited to see your home for the first time.”

“Yeah, Koko, and not everyone gets to nap whenever they want, so I’m tired. No judgement.” Lup said, flicking his arm.
Shrugging, Taako raised an eyebrow. “I mean, it just seemed a little strange is all. Can we go to the movies, though? Fuck going home, there’s the new scary clown movie and I wanna see it. Turn around, Krav, let’s go grab lunch and see the movie.” He wore an almost challenging grin, as if daring one of them to make an excuse. This wouldn’t be any fun if he just let himself be surprised by it.

“I don’t know about that.” Kravitz said, laughing nervously. “We’re nearly there, anyways, and I don’t want to leave your things in the car all afternoon.”

“Besides, I already saw that movie with Barry.” Lup said, huffing. “And I was gonna take you this weekend, with Magnus,”

“I’ll see it again, Lulu, and my stuff isn’t gonna go anywhere. I’ve been trapped in a hospital for forever, I thought today was supposed to be my day.” Taako complained, though he still had a mischievous glint in his eyes.

Glaring at him from the backseat, Lup pushed his shoulder. “I don’t care what you do later, Taako, but you’re going home right now because we’re not leaving your shit in Kravitz’s car all day.”

“But Krav doesn’t mind, right darling?” Taako asked, fluttering his lashes.

“Lup, he knows, there’s no use in—“

“Kravitz! Not cool!” Lup said, smacking him, too.

Taako snorted. “Don’t hit my boyfriend, goofus, I need him in top condition.” Taako said, patting Kravitz’s arm.

Thankfully, Taako was saved as they pulled up to their apartment complex, Kravitz parking next to Lup’s car and going around to open Taako’s door and grab some of the bags. Lup did similarly, gathering what they needed and nudging Taako forward. “Okay, dingus, you guessed It apparently. Go enjoy your stupid party that you don’t deserve.”

“That’s not nice, Lulu. You don’t mean it though, so I forgive you.” Taako teased, walking toward the building and climbing up the steps to the second floor.

“Of course I don’t mean it.” Lup said, following Kravitz up the steps. “I’m proud of you, even if you are an asshole sometimes.”

Taako turned around to stick his tongue out at her before turning toward the door, taking out the keys he hadn’t used in so long and unlocking the front door. Kravitz and Lup lingered behind him, one of them muttering ‘at least act surprised’ as he pushed the door open and stepped inside, dropping the bags on the floor at the front. He was halfway through slipping off his shoes before Angus popped up from behind the couch, grinning. “Surprise!”

Then, a moment or so delayed, the rest of the party popped up too, spanning from Magnus to Killian. Aside from most of their apartment neighbors, there was also Johann, Ren, and Barry, all people he’d coincidentally met in college. In the end it wasn’t a huge group, but it seemed pretty fitting to Taako.

“Holy shit, Ango, you scared me!” Taako said, holding a hand over his chest. “Trying to give me a heart attack or something?”

Angus ran across the room, throwing his arms around Taako and squeezing him tight. “I missed you, Taako. I’m so glad you’re home.” He muttered into Taako’s shirt, his voice muffled by the fabric.
Placing a hand on Angus’ head, Taako ruffled his hair. “Yeah, yeah. I missed you too.”

People started to mill around again after that, Lup and Kravitz going to take his things to his room while everyone came over to greet Taako. Magnus was right after Angus, (though Angus remained right next to Taako for the time being,) wrapping him in a crushing hug and grinning hugely and tearing up instantly as he started to talk about how proud he was and all that.

“Calm down, Maggie, this is supposed to be a happy time, I’m pretty sure.” Taako laughed, nudging his arms. “Crying is lame, anyways. Quit it.”

Swiping his eyes, Magnus just shook his head. “I’m just so glad you’re—doing so much better.” He said.

One by one the guests came over to give their well wishes, to go on about how happy they were and how great Taako looked and some congratulating him and introducing themselves to Kravitz. He hovered, albeit a little awkwardly, at Taako’s side, though Magnus and Barry both took turns trying to entertain him while Taako was rambling. In the end, Kravitz and Angus sat next to each other on the couch as Angus excitedly showed him some of his Caleb Cleveland novels.

The party wasn’t anything fancy, though there was a nicely wrapped gift on the kitchen counter. Taako didn’t dwell too much on it, though, excusing himself to go to the bathroom after two glasses of champagne. Splashing some water in his face, Taako took a deep breath and tried to relax a little. He wasn’t nervous, really, but he was certainly feeling the pressure. Everyone praising him, telling him he was doing so well—it was a little strange.

Stepping out of the bathroom and resolving that another glass of champagne and that anxiety would probably fade, Taako paused as he caught sight of one of the photos plastered on the door to Lup’s room. Some were from a while back, from their college days, but some were more recent, too. Only one or two were present from the hospital, but the ones from just before—specifically, a picture of the two of them at their birthday dinner just two weeks prior to Taako being admitted—was almost scary.

Looking at it now, it was a lot easier to pick out how sick he looked. How exhausted and worn and almost skeletal he’d been. His skin was washed out, his hair was dull and stringy. His smile was only halfhearted and next to Lup he looked maybe half her size. From under the sweater he wore, you could see the sharpness of his collar bones, the dip in his neck.

Back then, Taako hadn’t seen the problem—he hadn’t cared to. He thought that was what he needed to look like. The reflection he’d just seen in the bathroom mirror, though, it was so different. It was so much better. Taako was still thin, of course, too thin. Sloane wanted him to gain at least 15 more pounds, which he was still a little unsure about. In the hospital, he hadn’t been able to see much of a difference as he gained weight, but looking at the before and after now? Taako was kind of able to see why people were so amazed.

“Taako?”

Nearly jumping out of his skin at the voice, Taako spun around on his heels, coming face to face with Kravitz.

“Jesus, dude, you’re going to give me a heart attack.” Taako breathed, turning around more to block the door.

Frowning, Kravitz patted his shoulder. “Sorry, sorry. Are you alright? You’ve been gone for a while. I was beginning to get worried.”
Waving a hand, Taako took Kravitz’s hand and squeezed it. “Yeah, no. I’m all good. Don’t worry about it.” He promised. “I’m gonna need another glass of champagne though, because let me tell you, that’s the good stuff.”

Chuckling, Kravitz nodded and stooped to give him a gentle kiss on the lips. “Okay, but first, you need to come and open this gift.” He said, smiling.

“Gift? Is that what that thing was?” Taako asked, sauntering back into the living room and crossing to the kitchen.

“It is.” Kravitz confirmed. “It was Lup’s idea. Everyone pitched in—I think you’ll like it.”

Relieved that Kravitz hadn’t stopped the party to call attention to it, Taako stepped over to the counter and carefully undid the bow on top. Angus walked over to peer up at him, smiling widely.

“I told you to quit it with the ‘sir’ Ango, we’re friends.” Taako muttered, undoing the wrapping paper at one corner on the end and peeling it back. It certainly wasn’t what Taako had anticipated—though he wasn’t sure what he would have guessed anyways. It was a rather large box of some sort of fancy looking cooking wear. Their apartment certainly didn’t have very good kitchen supplies, which Taako hadn’t even thought about before now. Realistically, this was actually a pretty useful thing to have around.

“Shit.” He muttered, turning the box over to look at the list of its contents.

“You loved that cooking class so much, I figured we needed some better stuff, y’know?” Lup piped in, grinning. “So we can start making stuff at home more. Do you like it?”

“Of course I like it, dumbass. It’s fucking awesome.” Taako said, turning it over in his hands. “This is… Fuck, Lup.”

Kravitz smiled. “It’s sort of a… congratulations, from us all. For doing so well. We’re just happy to see you healthy again.”

Taako shook his head. “Uh, wow. Thank you. This is, um. Kind of awesome.” Kravitz pressed a kiss to his head and Angus hugged his side.

“We love you, Taako!” Angus said, squeezing tighter.

“Love you losers too.” Taako said. “And I’m definitely only saying that because I’m obligated to, don’t get any ideas.”

Kravitz handed him another glass of champagne, ‘as requested,’ and Magnus started up Mario Kart on the TV, and then the party got really wild.

The night ended after pizza for dinner as everyone began to wind down and head out. Taako was tucked into Kravitz’s side, his legs stretched out over Magnus and Lup’s laps. Pleasantly tipsy and full, Taako was perfectly content to doze off right there, to the sounds of Lup and Magnus getting into an argument over Rainbow Road.
Chapter 9: Taako

Chapter Summary

Taako adjusts to life back at home after the hospital, and it takes some getting used to.

Chapter Notes

Hey guys! Another update pretty soon after the last one, but I’m excited to say this is the last filler-like chapter and now we’ll get into the end of this! I’m super excited for these last two chapters, and I’m really excited to see a project I’ve worked so hard on finally come to a close. This chapter is shorter than usual but I wanted to make sure to give everyone a little look at Taako’s life outside of the hospital before getting into the ‘finale’ of sorts, lol. Remember you can always find me at ness-writes.tumblr.com and that there WILL NOT be a mid-week update anymore, at least not for the near future. Refractory is almost finished but my next multichapter fic will probably follow a similar update pattern once this one is finished. I hope everyone has an awesome weekend and I promise I’m about to catch up on comment replies! Next update will be a week from now, Thank you for reading.

Adjusting to life back at home was—strange.

The upsides: Taako loved his bed, and his car, and not having to listen to the constant beeping of machines. Leaving the house was an option pretty much whenever he wanted and he didn’t have to worry about constantly going for check ups or appointments.

Having a little bit of freedom and space went a long way, apparently, and it left Taako feeling like more of an individual again, with his own agenda and his own time to do what he pleased.

There were some downsides, too, though. His time with Kravitz was far more limited, and he was alone way more often than he imagined. He’d had a couple of freaky moments, where he realized it was three in the afternoon and he hadn’t eaten lunch or that the snacks in their pantry had gone mostly untouched. There was a whole lot of pressure to keep up with calorie counts and all that jazz while still trying not to psyche himself out.

After a particularly bad moment a week after he’d gone back home when he’d called Lup in a panic about forgetting to eat all day, Angus started showing up more frequently, as well as the others. Lup woke him up early before she left for work during the week with muffins or bowls of cereal or something to make sure that he ate before she went, and while he usually just went back to sleep after that, Angus usually popped up around 11 to sit on the other side of his bed and do homework. Taako knew that Lup had probably told him to come over more often, but Angus was probably the least stressful person to be around sometimes, and Taako liked to think that he probably kept coming because he wanted to.

Taako spent a lot of time at home, the first couple of weeks. He was less inclined to get up and drive somewhere than he’d anticipated he’d be and when everyone tended to come to him anyways, the
incentive to leave the house was even lower. He went to therapy and stuff, of course, and he’d be returning to work once he got the okay from Sloane, but most of his time was spent in bed or on the couch.

It was early one morning when Taako woke up to Angus’ hand on his shoulder, shaking him slightly. Blinking tiredly, Taako rolled over onto his back and squinted up at the kid. “What’s up, kid?” He asked, yawning widely. “You usually don’t come over this early.”

“Can you take me to the mall?” Angus asked suddenly. “I know you don’t really like leaving and it’s kind of early but the author of the Caleb Cleveland books is going to be doing a signing today and I really want—“

Taako sat up, waving a hand. “Jeez, slow down, Agnes, I just woke up. We can go to the mall, chill, just—give me a minute, I need to shower and all that.” Angus threw his arms around him instantly, squeezing tight.

“Thank you, Taako!” He said, sitting back down as Taako shuffled out of bed and moved toward the bathroom.

It’d been a couple of days since his last therapy session, and he hadn’t been to the mall for a while, so Taako guessed it’d be worth his energy to get out with Angus for a while. He made quick work of showering, then got dressed and did quick makeup to make sure he didn’t look too dead.

Angus waited patiently, handing Taako a granola bar as he finished tying his boots. “Maybe we can have lunch at the mall, after we get the books signed!” He offered, smiling. Taako smiled back, nodding.

“Yeah, sure, pumpkin. You ready to head out?” He unwrapped the granola bar, taking a bite. Angus nodded enthusiastically, hopping up and bounding for the door.

Taako drove with the radio on, letting Angus choose the station and trying not to keep smiling at how excited the kid looked. He had his box set of Caleb Cleveland novels in his lap, kicking his feet restlessly and humming along to the songs on the radio.

Once they’d found a parking spot at the mall, Taako locked the car and rested a hand on Angus’ shoulder as they walked inside. He almost couldn’t keep up as the kid bounded in front of him, looking incredibly pleased and bouncing with excited energy. “Come on, Taako! We’re almost there!”

Chuckling to himself, Taako walked a little faster to catch up. A short line had formed outside of the book store, and Angus quickly took a spot and starting rocking back and forth on his heels. Thankfully it didn’t look too busy, probably since it was the middle of the day on Friday and most kids were in school at this point, and they only had to wait about 15 minutes before they were nearing the table where the author sat.

“Taako.” Angus whispered, clutching onto his skirt. “That’s him. He’s right there!”

Taako snorted softly, shaking his head. “I know, cupcake, just relax.” He said, ruffling his hair.

Angus bounced on his heels, watching intently as the line progressed.

Instantly, Angus had put down his box set and launched into a monologue about how much he loved the series, the author signed each individual book, and Angus got a little teary eyed as he went on about how much this meant to him. Taako snapped a quick picture of the two of them before Angus gave the author a very awkward handshake, gathered his things, and followed Taako out of the shop.
Stopping in the walkway to let Angus collect himself, Taako swiped his eyes and tsk’d affectionately. “Come on, Angus, can’t lose your cool like that.” He teased. Angus held out his hands to show Taako how they trembled.

“I’m shaking a little.” He laughed, staring at the books in his hands. “He signed all of the books, Taako!”

“Sure did, with your name and everything. He must’ve known you were his number one fan.” Taako said, ruffling his hair. “You wanna go grab a bite and then shop around for a while? I’ve got nowhere to be.”

Angus nodded, sniffling a little and smiling. “Yeah, that sounds good!”

Taako spent the next couple of hours wandering the mall and eating lunch and listening to Angus gush about how cool the author was. By the time they were beginning the trek home it was already well into the afternoon, and Taako was pleased to see Kravitz’s car parked outside of his apartment when they arrived home. Angus thanked Taako with a tight hug before heading back to his own apartment to finish his homework, and Taako took the stairs two at a time.

Kravitz was sitting on the couch, Lup doing something in the kitchen. Taako grinned, crossing the room and sitting right on Kravitz’s lap, leaning in to kiss him quickly. “Hey, handsome, what’s up?”

Kravitz kissed him back, smiling into it like a complete dork and wrapping an arm around him. “Not much, I was just itching to see you. I’m glad Lup was here to let me in.”

“Yeah, sorry, I took Agnes to go see that author he likes so much at the mall.” Taako said, tossing an arm around his shoulders and leaning into Kravitz’s side.

“Oooh, did he freak out?” Lup asked from the kitchen, grinning. “I bet he freaked out.”

Kravitz smiled, kissing Taako’s cheek. “That was nice of you to take him. Did you have lunch?”

“Yeah, we ate in the food court.” Taako assured. “What were you to up to?”

Shrugging, Kravitz shifted and drew Taako closer. “Well, I brought over some groceries, I thought maybe we could cook tonight and watch a movie?”

Humming, Taako nodded. “That actually sounds dope as hell—a good date night.”

“Speaking of date night—“ Kravitz began, “ Have you decided yet when I’m going to be allowed to take you on a proper date?”

Sighing, Taako rubbed his eyes. He’d told Kravitz that he wasn’t ready to go out on a real date yet, not because he didn’t want to but because he wanted to wait until he was a little more—put together. As nice as leaving the hospital was, it’d been a little harder than he’d anticipated. The first couple of days had been particularly rough, but now as he got adjusted to it, things were getting better, slowly. He wanted to make sure he was in the right mindset for when that did happen.

“I don’t know. Not yet. Soon, though, probably.” Taako said, nodding. “I’m just—“ He waved a hand, motioning to himself. “I’m not there yet, I guess.”

Kravitz chuckled, nodding. “Don’t worry, Taako, I understand. I want you to take your time,
obviously, I was just curious. I think cooking together is plenty romantic.” Kravitz smiled.

Taako felt his cheeks go a bit warm. “Yeah, yeah, okay.”

“I’m telling you guys now, you can’t be weird and gross because Barry’s coming too.” Lup called from the kitchen, flipping Taako off when he stuck his tongue out at her.

Barry arrived within the hour and he and Lup went to turn on something mindless on TV while Taako and Kravitz started to cook. It felt nice, to be doing this again, the monotony of chopping and cutting and preparing. Taako really did like cooking. Maybe he’d have to convince Lup to go to the grocery with him to get some more supplies to keep at the house.

Once they’d finished preparing dinner, a cream based pasta dish, Kravitz set the table of their tiny kitchen and everyone gathered around to eat. It was still a strange sensation, to sit down and be able to eat without feeling absolutely miserable. He didn’t quite finish his plate, but both Lup and Kravitz looked content, and he took that as another win. A semi normal day shopping with Angus and eating with his boyfriend and his family, and he wasn’t completely exhausted or worn down or sad.

Lup turned on a movie, some horror film about demons haunting children and families, and Taako tucked into Kravitz’s side with a glass of wine. The movie was actually pretty good, as far as scary movies go, but Taako was beginning to get tired by the end of it and he knew he wouldn’t last through another. Kravitz followed him to his bedroom, sitting on the edge of the bed and awkwardly averting his eyes while Taako changed.

“Get comfy, handsome. You’re staying until I fall asleep.” Taako warned, crawling across the bed and pushing Kravitz back against the pillows. Kravitz shook his head, chuckling softly.

“I suppose there’s no arguing that, then.” He mused, settling against the headboard and letting Taako get comfortable against his side. “I will warn you though, I’m quite tired. I’ve been up since 6 this morning and I may pass out if you take too long.”

Taako glanced up at him, grinning. “Maybe that was the plan, Krav.” He teased, his smile spreading as he watched the blush spread across his cheeks, barely visible without concentration. Turning the lamp off at his bedside, Taako shuffled under the covers and threw some over Kravitz, too.

“If you want me to spend the night, Taako, all you have to do is ask.” Kravitz mused, beginning to comb his fingers through his hair.

“Spoiler alert, I always want you to spend the night. I hate not seeing you all the time.” Taako grumbled.

Kravitz sighed, nodding. “I know, it’s quite disappointing, though I have been investigating the job opening in the flower shop downstairs.” He added, “If you were interested.”

Taako yawned widely, resting a hand on Kravitz’s chest. “Yeah, that would be cool. Power couple of the hospital.” He joked.

Kravitz sighed, nodding. “I know, it’s quite disappointing, though I have been investigating the job opening in the flower shop downstairs.” He added, “If you were interested.”

Taako yawned widely, resting a hand on Kravitz’s chest. “Yeah, that would be cool. Power couple of the hospital.” He joked.

“I’ll keep an eye on it.” Kravitz said, stifling a yawn of his own. He turned on some sort of classical music playlist on his phone and set it on the bedside table, continuing to play with Taako’s hair.

Taako tried to keep himself awake, just to enjoy cuddling and to enjoy the feeling of his boyfriend right beside him and the careful fingers through his hair, but he realized he was fighting a losing battle. Shifting somewhat so his head was pillowed comfortably on Kravitz’s chest, Taako closed his eyes, feeling himself slip away as the fingers in his hair lulled him to sleep.
Chapter 10: The End

Chapter Summary

Taako goes off the grid for a while and Lup and Kravitz panic. Kravitz and Taako go on their first date.

Chapter Notes

Hey guys! I know I said there would probably be two more chapters but... This is it. I liked the way it ended here and didn't want to push anything that didn't need to be written just to add another chapter. I'm going to make a long, sappy post about this all on my tumblr later, (ness-writes.tumblr.com) but I just want to say this: Thank you SO. MUCH. I never could have anticipated this amazing response to this story and I am so incredibly floored and grateful and humbled by all of the views and comments and messages I've received since starting this. This, and all of you, are what have inspired me to chase what I want to do, and this has shown me that I have the potential to actually complete something for once. I am so so grateful for this experience and I sincerely hope that this story has done some good for someone out there. I appreciate every single person who has read this, who has done fanart, who has talked to me and enjoyed this story. For the next week or two I'm going to focus on doing some one shots I've wanted to hash out for a while, but after that I'll be starting up work on my next multichapter fic! Please feel free to shoot me a message or ask on tumblr, or to send in some requests! And to continue sending me any art or any messages about Refractory so I can see them! I love love love and appreciate every single one of you and I hope you enjoy the end of this. Thank you SO MUCH!!!!

“Wait, he isn’t with you?” Lup’s voice was fuzzy and muffled through the phone line, which lead Kravitz to assume that the phone was wedged between her face and her shoulder.

“No, I haven’t heard from him all day.” Kravitz replied, bending over to fill the dog bowl with food and moving the phone from his ear to whistle. The shuffling of paws across tiled floors broke the silence of the house and Calliope scurried in, Kravitz’s small black and grey terrier. She barked twice and jumped up on his leg, licking his hand before dropping back down and trotting back over to her food bowl. “I texted him this morning but he hadn’t responded. I just assumed he was busy or something.”

“His car isn’t here and he isn’t answering my phone calls, Kravitz, where else could he be?” It was hard to miss the growing anxiety in Lup’s tone, the pacing of her footsteps audible through the line. “I mean, I woke him up this morning before I left, but—“

“Lup, just try to relax.” Trying to keep his tone level, Kravitz took a slow breath. “Taako has been doing really well lately, I’m sure he just went out to shop or something. Have you talked to Angus, is he home? Or Magnus?”
“Angus said he wasn’t here when he came over for lunch and Magnus is still at work. He hasn’t
gone out on his own yet, not that he can’t handle himself, but he hasn’t liked being alone since he left
the hospital. He had a bad day yesterday, did he tell you?”

Now Kravitz was beginning to feel a little in the dark. They’d talked on the phone yesterday
afternoon and Kravitz had offered to come over, but Taako had said he was tired and probably
wouldn’t be up when Kravitz got off work. Typically, Taako wasn’t too guarded about his bad days,
not since he’d come home, and Kravitz was beginning to get nervous too, now that it seemed like
something may actually be wrong. “It didn’t come up.” He finally managed, dusting his hands off on
his jeans.

“I’m going to go check around the building.” Lup said. “He won’t answer my phone calls but it goes
straight to voicemail so I think it might be dead or off or something.”

Rubbing the bridge of his nose, Kravitz nodded until he realized that she couldn’t actually see him.
“I’ll see if my calls go through. He had therapy this afternoon, didn’t he? I’ll just go check in at the
hospital and see what’s going on. Let me know if you figure something out.”

There was an exhausted, nervous sigh from the other end. “Yeah, okay. Okay. Thanks, Kravitz.
Keep me updated.” The line went dead almost instantly, and Kravitz slipped his phone into his back
pocket.

The anxiety that Lup was feeling for her brother was something that Kravitz respected, in a way.
Consistently he found himself grateful that Taako was surrounded by so many people who cared, but
he knew this entire epidemic had been rather taxing on her. The struggle of keeping her family afloat
—Kravitz couldn’t imagine how difficult it had been. Surely Taako would be fine—he may have
been busy, or fallen asleep at a friend’s house, or got held up at the hospital. Nothing that bad could
have happened.

Snagging his keys from the counter as he tried to ignore the intrusive thoughts of all the terrible
potential scenarios, Kravitz stooped down and murmured a quick apology to Calliope and kissed her
head before heading straight for the door.

Thankful for the quick commute to the hospital, Kravitz parked in his usual spot and took the steps
up to the staff entrance two at a time. Realizing he was still clad only in jeans and a button up and
sweater vest, Kravitz already knew that if he bumped into any of his coworkers, he’d probably never
hear the end of it. He had certainly been rather intent on dressing professionally always in his
workplace, even on the days when he’d just come to visit Taako.

The first time Taako had ever seen him wear jeans, he’d whistled loudly and inappropriately and
made him walk out of the apartment and then back inside so he could ‘appreciate it fully.’

Rather than going anywhere near his own wing of the hospital, Kravitz headed straight for
psychiatrics. Taako had definitely been scheduled for a one on one therapy session earlier in the
afternoon, and Kravitz told himself he wasn’t going to panic until he heard that Taako hadn’t shown
up or something.

Practically breathless by the time he arrived at Sloane’s office, Kravitz tapped twice on the door and
waited for a ‘come in’ from inside to open it up. Pushing the door in and trying to force the growing
anxiety in his chest back down, Kravitz waved awkwardly at Sloane, who was sitting at her desk
and filling out paperwork.

Glancing up, Sloane raised a curious eyebrow and tried to suppress the growing, amused smile.
“Good afternoon, Kravitz.” She said. “It’s a little late to see you around, and in such casual
clothing.” She teased, grinning.

Flashing a brief smile, Kravitz gave a quick nod. “Uh, yeah, it’s a little late. I didn’t work today, but—Lup called me and she hasn’t heard from Taako all day. Nobody has, actually. Did he show up for his therapy session?”

Sloane watched him curiously, glancing over at the clock. “He came to therapy, yeah, and he left… An hour or two ago? We had lunch together, actually.”

Kravitz sighed with near tangible relief, his shoulders slumping somewhat. “Okay. That’s—that’s good, at least. He hasn’t answered his phone all day and we have no idea where he might be.”

“This isn’t particularly information I should be sharing, but he did seem a bit stressed out. I suggested he try to find something to blow off some steam. Maybe he’s just out trying to relax a little. I wouldn’t be too concerned either way.” Sloane said, smiling reassuringly. “Though I do find your worried face amusing. You’ve fallen pretty hard for him.”

Smiling sheepishly, Kravitz rubbed the back of his neck. “Perhaps. I think I’m in love with him.” He admitted.

“I had a feeling.” Sloane replied, her expression knowing. “Good luck on your search, then, but I have a feeling he’s alright, so I wouldn’t worry too much. I’ll see you later, Kravitz.”

With that, Kravitz backed out of the room. “Thank you, Sloane, I appreciate it. I’ll see you on Monday.”

Closing the door behind him, Kravitz pulled his phone out and leaned against the wall. ‘I haven’t found him yet, but I talked to Sloane and she said he was at therapy a couple of hours ago. I think he may still be around here, so I’ll keep looking.’ Once he’d finished typing the message he sent it to Lup, then doubled checked to make sure Taako hadn’t called back before beginning to walk around to their most visited areas.

The cafeteria was void of much life at all, and the bench across from the fish tank was unoccupied. Kravitz looked around outside, looking around where his old room had been, and there wasn’t a trace of his boyfriend anywhere. Resigning himself to a quick trip around the parking lot to see if Taako’s car was there before heading out, Kravitz took the back way to get down to the staff parking area.

So caught up in his own concern and the task at hand, Kravitz almost didn’t hear the music from down the hallway. It occurred to him, suddenly, that he hadn’t even thought to look around the rooms where the different therapies took place. Turning down one of the extra hallways, Kravitz made his way toward the newly renovated cooking room, quickening his pace when he was finally able to distinguish the sound of familiar pop music.

The door to the room was wide open, and standing at the station right in the center was Taako, his back towards Kravitz. Pleasant aromas wafted out, and though Kravitz couldn’t tell exactly what it was, it was definitely sweet. Music was playing from Taako’s phone, which was face down on the counter next to him, and he was humming along to it as he bent over to grab something from a shelf below. His hair was tied up in a messy bun, clad in jeans of his own and a t-shirt that hung off of one shoulder, leaving his arms mostly exposed.

Taking out his phone, Kravitz didn’t even read Lup’s earlier reply as he typed out a new message. ‘I found him. He’s cooking in the hospital. He seems fine.’
Rather than announcing his presence, Kravitz hesitated at the door, watching Taako’s relatively impressive knife skills as he chopped up something on the cutting board. His movements were calculated and methodical, almost mesmerizing to watch, and Kravitz didn’t want to disturb the mood of the room. Something was in the oven, an empty piping back discarded on the counter behind him. Taako seemed to be in the zone, and while Kravitz felt a little creepy just watching, he couldn’t seem to draw his gaze away.

It wasn’t until the chime of a text message on his phone rang out that Taako stopped, though Kravitz probably would have been content to watch silently for the remainder of his project. Turning around, Taako tilted his head to the side and smirked.

“Hey, handsome.” Taako hummed, sticking his tongue out. “How long have you been here? You know staring is rude.” He teased.

If Taako had been upset earlier, Kravitz had a hard time believing it now. “Just a couple of minutes.” Kravitz said, feeling his cheeks heat up the slightest bit. “I was watching you cook.”

“Bake, actually.” Taako corrected, setting his knife down as Kravitz came inside and wrapping an arm around him and kissing him quickly. “Did you come here looking for me? You’re in casual clothes.” He teased, going back to mixing some sort of filling.

“I did. Lup called me an hour ago or so. She said nobody knew where you were, and she got me a little, ah, worked up, so we went out looking for you. Speaking of…” He took his phone out, glancing at Lup’s reply.

'ugh finally tell him to take his sweet ass time because when he comes home im going to strangle him :(

‘Will do. I’ll make sure he gets back safely.’ Once Kravitz had written out his reply he set his own phone aside, looking back toward Taako.

“Hey, not my fault you guys freaked out over nothing.” Taako said, holding both hands up. “I went to therapy and had lunch with Sloane and now I’m here.”

Kravitz’s expression was fond. “I know. I’m sure Lup was just worried since you hadn’t told anyone and you weren’t having a great day yesterday.”

Taako shrugged. “Yeah, I guess I just needed a break or something.” He said, dipping a spoon into the filling and tasting it. “Oh shit, that’s fucking amazing. I just wanted to think about something else so I put my phone on ‘do not disturb’ and turned on some good old CRJ and got down on this new recipe.” He dipped another spoon, handing it over to Kravitz to try.

The filling was amazing. Nodding as he took both spoons and set them in the sink, Kravitz turned on the water and began to clean off some of the used dishes. “I can relate. I can head out if you want, then, I just wanted to make sure you were safe and well.”

“And lose my dishwasher? Yeah right. Get to work babe, you’ve gotta earn your keep.” Taako joked, bumping his hip. “If you want some of the bomb ass cookies, that is.”

Relieved, Kravitz grabbed the dish soap from the station behind them. “I suppose that can be arranged.”

They continued quietly, aside from the music blaring from Taako’s phone. He started to sing along, spinning around as he got out piping bags and prepared the strawberries for the center of the cookies. They were macaroons, Taako explained, as he took the finished ones out of the oven and set them on
the counter to cool. They were hard to make, and Taako had needed a challenge, apparently.

The piping of the frosting wasn’t completely neat, but it was pretty good for someone’s first go at it. Kravitz helped put slices of strawberry in the center, and Taako carefully sandwiched the cookies together as Kravitz finished the last of the dishes. Thanks to his extra hands, the station was clean and organized by the time Taako had finished plating his cookies and taking pictures for his snapchat story.

“Thanks for the help, hot stuff.” Taako said, kissing Kravitz again. “You ready to try this shit? We’ll have to bring some home for Lup and maybe she won’t strangle me.”

Kravitz smiled warmly at Taako and accepted the offered macaroon. There was a strange sense of pride, seeing the way Taako had been able to turn his mood around—the ability to know what he needed to do to put himself back on the right track was incredible.

Taako bit into the macaroon, chewing slowly and narrowing his eyes. “Not bad.” He said. “Actually, pretty good.”

Taking a bite of his own, Kravitz relished in the pleasant sweetness of it. “This is amazing, Taako.” He said, finishing it off in another bite. “Really, I can’t believe you made these all on your own.”

Taako grinned, finishing off his own cookie. “Pretty fuckin’ cool, huh? Love that.” They each had one more before boxing up the rest to take home. Taako removed the apron and hung it on the hook by the door and turned off his music, slipping his phone into his back pocket and grabbing the sweater that was folded on the counter—it was one of Kravitz’s, the insignia for his medical school embroidered on the front.

“You ready to get outta here? I’m like, way tired, so if you want to drive me home and Lulu can take me to my car tomorrow, that’d be dope.” Taako said, wrapping an arm around Kravitz’s waist and shoving his hand into the back pocket of his jeans.

Kravitz rolled his eyes at the PDA, kissing the top of Taako’s head and walking him toward the staff garage. “Yeah, I think that can be arranged.”

It wasn’t until they were both in the car that Taako spoke up again, breaking the pleasant silence as he rested the box of macaroons in his lap. “I applied for the flower shop today, and Sloane said I can come in on Tuesday to get the cast removed. I was thinking maybe—it was time for a real date, y’know? I’ve gotta make sure you’re 100% committed, get you cemented into this gig. It’s hardly a relationship until I get all dolled up and you buy me expensive dinner.”

Smiling, Kravitz turned the car on and nodded. “That sounds wonderful. Next Friday, perhaps? I’m off of work that day.”

Taako shot him a thumbs up, sticking out his tongue. “Sounds good, my dude, just know that I’m ready to be swept off my goddamn feet.”

“I’d expect nothing less, dear.”

Standing in front of the mirror, Taako pulled awkwardly at the collar of the top he was wearing. It hung off of one shoulder and stopped a couple of inches above the high waisted skirt that Lup had loaned him. He didn’t love the getup, honestly—too form fitting, to exposing, but Lup insisted he looked great and he did kind of like the eye makeup that went along with it, as well as the accessories.
Smiling widely, Lup loosened the braid she’d just finished and dropped it over Taako’s shoulder, tying a bow over the hairtie and patting his cheeks. “You look fucking awesome Koko. Have I told you how proud I am of you?”

“Like, twelve thousand times since lunch.” Taako grumbled, poking her side. “I get it, I’m going on a date, big whoop.”

“It’s totally a big whoop, Taako! Look at you! Kravitz’s is going to die.” Lup said, fixing his bangs and then pulling him into a tight hug. “I love you, Taako.”

Taako rolled his eyes, wrapping his arms around her and squeezing back. “Yeah, love you too, dingus.”

“Shut up, goofus, I just did you up all nice for your date.” Lup said, pulling back, still smiling. “He should be here any second, too, so go put on your shoes.”

Taako went back to his room to slip his shoes and scrutinize his appearance on his own, without fear of Lup getting onto him. The clothes actually fit, for the most part, and they weren’t the usual baggy, concealing thing that he tended to gravitate to. Taking a deep breath, he rubbed at his temples. He looked fine. He looked good.

The reflection was interrupted by the doorbell ringing, and Taako straightened up and smoothed down the skirt.

“Taako, your date is here!” Lup called, unnecessarily, as Taako came out of his room and headed toward the door. Kravitz stood just inside of the door, clad in a grey button up with the sleeves rolled up to just under his elbows, with a dark tie and dark pants. Taako whistled, grinning. “You clean up good, Krav, damn.”

Kravitz smiled hugely, stepping forward to kiss him. “I think I should be saying the same to you.” He said, taking his hand. “You look… amazing, Taako.” He murmured, squeezing his fingers and just sort of staring as Taako wilted slightly under his gaze.

Taako felt his cheeks go warm, and he broke eye contact awkwardly. “I know, obviously. But seriously, wow, that ass won’t quit.” He joked, turning back to grin up at him. “You ready to go, hot stuff? We have reservations, right?”

“We do indeed.” Kravitz mused, kissing him once more. “I brought you these, but I figured Lup could put them in water so they don’t die,” He said, brandishing a bouquet of flowers.

“Oh shit, this is the real deal.” Taako said, admiring them before handing them over to Lup. “Alright, I’ll see you later, Lulu, we’re—“

“Wait wait, I want a picture.” Lup said, waving them to the side and making them stand next to each other as she snapped a photo of Taako flipping off the camera as they laughed at each other. Lup gave Taako another quick hug, then shot Kravitz a look. “Look after my brother, Krav, have him home by 11.”

“Yeah right, Lulu.” Taako said, sticking his tongue out. “See you later, we have places to be, love you!” Grabbing Kravitz’s arm, he pulled him outside and closed the door behind them, hearing Lup’s muffled ‘be safe’ and ‘love you too!’ through the door.

Kravitz opened the passenger door for Taako, smiling gently at him and earning a wink back. “Your chariot awaits.”
“It’s no chariot but it’s pretty nice.” Taako mused, climbing in and buckling his seatbelt, turning toward Kravitz as he climbed in on the other side. “So, do you have an incredibly romantic evening plotted out?”

“Absolutely.” Kravitz said, grinning. “I intend to definitely sweep you off your feet. I’m sure with all of your suitors, I’ve gotta be pretty quick in locking this one in, right?”

Taako rolled his eyes, leaning over to kiss Kravitz, long and slow. “You got that right. Let’s do this, then.”

Kravitz turned the music up, playing the opening notes of Carly Rae Jepsen’s Cut To The Feeling. Taako locked eyes with his boyfriend, feeling, for the first time in a long time, completely ready to face the rest of his life. He was healthy again, or at least on the road to it, he had a great fucking family, and he was in love with this stupid doctor.

Kravitz put the car into drive and Taako rolled down the windows, uncaring of whether or not it fucked up his hair or screwed up his makeup. Kravitz followed suit as Taako cranked the volume up, grinning wildly at him. “I had a dream, or was it real? We crossed the line and it was on—“

The look on Kravitz’s face as Taako started to yell the lyrics was something priceless, something that Taako thought he could get very, very used to.

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