Trying Through The Trauma

by BBCotaku

Summary

Evan Hansen is a Patient; a person who developed supernatural abilities in reaction to a traumatic event.
Now with the power to control and communicate with various plants, Evan finds himself rounded up and taken to the secretive government facility known only as The Ward.
Trapped within the walls of this part-hospital part-school Evan and his fellow Patients must learn to control their powers or be forced to simply disappear.

Notes

Yeah...I don't know where this idea came from either. And yes, I am fully aware I have fifty-billion other fanfictions I need to finish. Yes, I am starting a new one. At least I have the plot for this one basically laid out so. Fingers crossed.
Thanks to my buddy Levi for helping me edit.

TW: Anxiety Attacks and Medical procedures.
(If I need to add any more just ask!)

See the end of the work for more notes.
"Maybe this is the right thing for you," the bamboo shoot said.

Evan hummed quietly in agreement, running his fingers slowly around the rim of the flowerpot. The scent of soil was thick in his nose, wet and cold and soothing. He looked up at the rows upon rows of empty seats in front of him. He had a feeling that the bus had once been used for school runs—well if the graffiti was anything to go by at least.

_V 4 J_  
_Mz F is a bitch_  
Fuck!

A collage of black marker, chipped paint and chicken scratch. Someone had written a phone number with a love heart next to it and Evan felt oddly tempted to call it.

Do they still have that number? He wondered to himself. Perhaps they'd graduated, got a job, a family. What would their reaction be to some random kid calling them? Would they find it funny? Cute?

No. They'd be freaked out. Besides, it wasn't as though he had a phone to call it with. One of the first things they'd done was take his phone.

"You'll be safer," the bamboo continued, knocking Evan back to reality. "Much safer."

From what? Evan asked silently, clearing his throat. "E-excuse me," he called to the bus driver. His voice shook and croaked as though it had not been used in a long time. In truth, it hadn't, he'd barely spoken all week. When the driver didn't answer he tried again. "E-Excuse me, sir. I-I was w-wondering if you could turn on the radio? I-I've heard some buses have radios and speakers a-and stuff and...uh."

Silence.

"Sir, could you turn on the radio?"

Silence.

The boys' hands tightened around the pot. "He's ignoring me," he murmured aloud, though he made sure to keep his voice low enough for only the bamboo to hear.

"He's probably not allowed to talk to you."

"Why not?"

"Because you're cargo. Do you talk to your groceries when you take them home? No."

Evan scowled down at the plant. "But I'm not groceries, besides" his voice became a mumble "I'm talking to you, aren't I?"

The plant was quiet for a moment before chuckling. "Can't argue with that."

Evan pouted, watching the driver through his rear-view mirror. To anyone else the man would have
seemed jolly; fat and pale and balding with a bushy moustache that made Evan think of the old Wild West Movies his dad had forced him to watch as a kid. He looked like a grandad, despite his military uniform, the sort of man that would make chocolate coins appear from behind his grandchildren's ears.

Evan, however, wasn't most people. He found the driver terrifying. He was too tall, too broad. His moustache was too big and bristling and reminded Evan of Stinky Pete from Toy Story. His uniform didn’t help calm Evan’s nerves either, nor did the holster on his hip. Evan could clearly imagine the man stopping the bus, taking out the gun, walking over to him, pulling the trigger. He could see it all happening plain as day and the thought of it made Christmas Roses dig into his arm. He knew the thought was stupid, but the feeling of unease that twisted his stomach and flushed his neck refused to go away, even for a moment.

Evan pulled his gaze from the driver and looked to graffiti again. Slowly, he reached out his left hand, his fingers shaking like leaves. He tried to focus, mentally tugging at the stems and flowers that poked out from under the sleeve of his hoodie. A thorny vine wriggled out from under the cloth, grazing his skin slightly as it moved across the back of his hand and wrapped around his index finger, a sharp thorn sticking outwards from his fingertip. He scratched the sharp point against the back seat, peeling away the paint in thin strips.

Evan, he wrote in shaky lettering before letting his hand fall back to his lap.

"Me too," the bamboo said, sounding almost impatient and Evan couldn’t help but roll his eyes as he added:

And Lucky.

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The Ward was located in what had once been a small desert town in the middle of Arizona; the home of Patient Zero, the first person to develop powers. According to Evan’s mother, no one had quite believed the news that a boy had suddenly developed the ability to spit acid like some kind of snake.

“I was only six or seven at the time,” she’d told him. “I thought it was just one of the boys at school playing a prank, that there was no way in hell that kind of thing could actually happen, that, well,” she’d laughed. “God, it sounds so stupid saying it now, but it sounded like something out of a comic book.”

Evan had thought it sounded stupid, but that was because he was a Witness, part of a generation born after the discovery of Patients. He’d grown up with stories of people who had the capability to develop almost supernatural abilities as a result of trauma. He’d watched hundred upon hundreds of PSAs telling kids what to do if they found themselves adapting “unusual attributes” (find your nearest police officer or trusted adult and ask to be transferred), seen the news broadcasts of the riots in Time Square protesting The Ward; the hospital-turned-holding-pen for people with strange powers. He’d just never expected any of it to ever apply to him.

He looked out the window, watching the desert skyline roll past as the bus approached the fifty-foot-high walls surrounding what had once been Farnfoss General Hospital. There was a crowd of protesters yelling and screaming behind a chest-level barbed wire fence. A few of them turned to the bus, waving signs above their heads:

Give Us Back Our Children!

Humans aren't Property.
Kill the Freaks.

Obviously, the protest hadn't been planned, not very well at least. Evan busied himself counting the ratio of pro-Patient and anti-Patient protesters. Twelve-to-nine. That made Evan feel a little better.

The bus doors opened with a hiss and another man in uniform stepped on board, this one with a much larger gun. Evan knew nothing about weaponry but he knew enough to tell that the man was carrying an AK-47. The soldier talked to the driver for a moment, his voice so low that Evan could only barely make out what was being said over the raging blood thudding at his eardrums. His heart skipped a beat as the soldier turned to face him, his lip twisted into a sour expression. The two stared at each other for a moment until Evan looked down at his lap, gripping onto Lucky’s pot so hard that their leaves shook. He heard the thud of the soldier stepping off the bus, the hiss of the closing doors and the steady whirr of the gates to The Ward creaking open.

“Calm down,” Lucky told him.

“I...I can’t,” Evan whispered to them, his breathing becoming quick and shallow. “I’m scared. I-I want to go h-home. I shouldn't be here. I can’t do this. They’re g-gonna kill me.” Can’t breathe, can’t breathe, can’t breathe, can’t breathe. He could feel thorns digging into his left arm, the itch of flowers blooming under his shirt.

“Patient 467,” the low voice of the driver knocked Evan back to reality, his heart thudding hard in his chest.

“Y-yeah?” he squeaked, assuming the driver was referring to him.

“We’re here, ya’ need to get off now.”

“O-oh, right.” Evan got up shakily, his grip white-knuckle on Lucky’s pot. He dragged his feet to the front of the bus, looking up to find a group of men and women in scrubs waiting for him. His stomach twisted and he paused on the top step of the bus.

“Evan Hansen?” One of the scrubs, a woman with long black hair and a clipboard asked.

Evan nodded and didn’t move. “Y-yeah.”

The woman wrote something down. “Please step off the bus, Mr Hansen.” Evan still didn’t move and the woman sighed. “Mr Hansen, get off the bus. You’re perfectly safe here, I promise.” Her tone was flat and in no way matched the friendliness of her words. When Evan still didn’t budge she nodded to another scrub who stepped forward and grabbed Evan’s left arm, dragging him forward and onto the sidewalk. Evan flinched when they touched him, his breath catching in his throat. The scrub gave a loud shout, suddenly letting go of Evan with blood on his palm.

“What the fuck!?” they snapped, looking down at his hand. A small collection of prickles and thorns stuck out of his palm, thin dribbles of blood running over his skin. “Freak!” he growled as Evan shrank away.

“I-I’m sorry, I didn’t mean t-to. I...it happens when I--” Evan was cut off by a man in a lab coat bolting out of the hospital entrance, pushing his way through the crowd of people.

“I’ve told you a thousand times, Jacobi,” he snapped at the injured man, shoving him away from Evan, “Don't agitate the Patients--and Peet,” he turned to the woman with the clipboard. “I expected better from you, honestly. I said no crowds!”
The woman, Peet, rolled her eyes. “We have a protocol, Doctor, I have to follow orders.”

“You have to follow, my orders.” The doctor gave a loud sigh, running his fingers through his hair. “Look, I’ll take care of him. Just, go inside.”

Peet raised an eyebrow. “You want to take care of a Patient by yourself?”

He nodded. “Yes, I do.”

“He could hurt you.”

“With what? Thorns?” The man laughed dryly and shook his head. “Honestly, he’s a kid. I can handle a kid.”

Peet pursed her lips and hummed disapprovingly. “Very well.” She handed him the clipboard and turned away, stalking back into the hospital. The other scrubs soon followed, some more hesitant than others.

Once he and Evan were alone the man in the lab coat spoke up again. “I’m sorry about Peet, she means well I promise. We’ve just had a bit of difficulty with new arrivals recently and...well,” he shrugged, slanting his head slightly as he looked Evan up and down. “Are you okay, son? You look quite pale.”

Evan nodded. “I...I’m sorry I hurt that man,” he murmured, hugging the flower pot to his chest. “I...when I get scared...I...I get thorns a-and…”

“It’s perfectly okay, son.” The doctor smiled and held out his hand. He had a nice smile, a little crooked but with bright teeth and green eyes that seemed to spark behind his glasses. He looked a little young to be a doctor, early-to-mid-twenties at best with dark hair pulled back in a messy quiff. “I’m Dr Sherman, I’ll be your GP while you stay with us.”

“E-Evan.” He didn't shake the doctor's hand, partly out of nerves, partly because he had to keep hold of Lucky.

“I know who you are. Patient 467, more commonly known as Evan Hansen.” Dr Sherman didn’t seem to mind when Evan didn’t return his handshake, slipping his hand coolly into the pocket of his lab coat. “Do you want to go inside? We can wait a little bit if you need to catch your breath.”

Evan hesitated before taking a small step forward. “I...we should go inside.”

“Okay, only if you’re sure.” Dr Sherman smiled softly before leading him through the double automatic doors and into The Ward. He continued talking to Evan as they walked, his tone casual and friendly. “Now, you’re fifteen, yes? Okay, so you’ll probably be put on the third floor. We have around ten or so other Patients around your age, great bunch, all really friendly.”

Evan hummed slightly, letting his eyes wander around the hallway. His gaze met those of the men and woman in scrubs and lab coats that crowded the place, along with the odd teenager or child. The adults didn’t seem to give Evan much thought, continuing on with what they'd been doing or turning away completely, it was the kids that stared and whispered.

Is he new?

Yeah, I’ve never seen him before.

What do you think he can do?
What do you think happened to him? Bet it was a car crash or something.

Why is he carrying a plant around?

Dr Sherman sighed again and pulled one of the kids aside. “Chris, you should be in class.”

“Nah-uh,” the kid, who looked no older than nine or ten, shook his head. “Nurses evacuated everyone off six floor. Classes are cancelled.”

Sherman raised a doubtful brow. “Are they now?”

“Yep!” The kid grinned and Evan felt his stomach drop as he spotted that his teeth were as sharp and pointy as a shark’s. “Cause someone put a tack on Connor Murphy’s seat.”

Dr Sherman’s expression darkened, his smile falling into a heavy frown. “God above,” he groaned. “Do they know who yet?”

“Nah, his class is in detention. My bet’s on Jared.”

Evan flinched as Lucky spoke up. “What’s a Connor Murphy?” they asked. “Evan, ask them what a Connor Murphy is.” Evan said nothing and looked down at his shoes.

Sherman noticed this and placed a hand on his shoulder. “It’s alright, things can get a little hectic here sometimes but it’s really nothing to worry about.”

“He just said they had to evacuate the floor!” Lucky cried out and Evan bit his lip.

“W-why did they have to evacuate?” He echoed meekly.

“Cause they're gonna take Connor down to the basement,” Chris said matter-of-factory. Something about the way he said ‘basement’ made Evan think of it as capitalised. Basement.

“Now, now, don't go spreading rumours like that,” Sherman scolded. “It's rude. Now, hurry along, Evan and I are going to have a chat in my office, aren't we Evan?”

Why did he say that like it was a question? Evan wondered. It wasn’t as though he could refuse the offer. “Y-yeah. We are.”

The doctor smiled and gave Evan’s shoulder a final pat, pulling him further down the hall.

Lucky spoke up again. “Ask my question!” they demanded, their voice ringing in Evan’s ears.

“U-Uh, Dr Sherman?”

“Hm?”

“Who’s Connor Murphy?”

“Ah,” the doctor hesitated slightly. “You’ll probably meet him later. He’s one of our...special cases. Difficulties with his powers, poor boy.” He left it at that, walking over to one of the doors lining the hall and pulling it open. “We’ll discuss that later. Right now, Evan, let’s focus on you. Come in, come in.”

Dr Sherman’s office was just that, a doctor’s office; one with a desk, two chairs and an examination table. It even had those odd PSA posters outlining the symptoms of cancers and various mental illnesses.
“So,” Dr Sherman said as he took a seat behind his desk. “How are you doing?”

“H-huh?” Evan asked, still standing in the middle of the room.

“Mentally, how are you doing? And please, take a seat,” he gestured to the two chairs in front of him. “I know how hard the first week can be for new Patients.”

“U-uh…” Evan promptly sat down, placing Lucky’s pot on the other chair. “I’m...okay...”

“Are you sure? You’ve been through a lot of trauma.” Dr Sherman chuckled, “that’s kinda the point.”

Yeah, Evan agreed silently. That is kind of the point. “N-not really,” he said instead, fiddling with the hem of his shirt. “I-I mean, falling o-out of a tree isn’t really t-traumatic is it? N-not when compared to other p-people.”

“It was enough for your powers to activate,” Dr Sherman pointed out. “Besides, other people’s experiences don’t negate your own. Believe me.” He started typing on his computer and Evan leaned over to try and look at the screen, but it was just out of view. “Now, your file states that you’re Chlorokinetic with a mild healing factor, do you mind elaborating on that?”

“D-doesn’t my file e-explain it?” Evan asked, curling his shirt with his fingers.

“It does, but I’d like to hear it from you. Patients are often the best at explaining their powers.”

He sighed and unzipped his hoodie, pulling it off. His left forearm was covered by bunches of Christmas Roses, Sweetpea, Citron flowers and brambles. Thick thorny vines wrapped around his wrists, digging hard into his skin. “I-I grow flowers out of m-my...uh..arm… that reflect my mood a-and I can...uh...t-talk to plants...well, everyone c-can talk to plants b-but they c-can talk back to me. O-or I can hear them...I guess, they c-can still talk to other people--”

“Evan, deep breaths,” Dr Sherman interrupted. “Take your time, you don’t have to rush.” Evan nodded and drew in a deep breath as instructed as Dr Sherman peered at his arm. “You’re very nervous aren’t you…” he frowned. “Why are you sad?”

Evan’s eyes widened and he felt himself relax slightly. “Y-you know the language o-of the flowers?” he asked curiously, signally the doctor to give a small laugh.

“A healing factor is a perfect power for superheroes to have!” Sherman argued. “Speaking of, why don’t you go into that?” he prompted.
“Uh,” Evan was a little taken aback. “W-well, I can h-heal myself if I-I get hurt. L-like, flowers b-
bloom over the injury and i-it just... kinda... goes away.”

“Very interesting,” Sherman typed something again. “Now,” he showed Evan his computer screen
revealing the black, white and purple image a brain scan. He gestured to an arc-shaped lobe with his
finger. “Your limbic lobe is much more active than a non-Patient, we can assume that that is where
your powers originate.”

“My... what?”

“The part of your brain that controls your emotions.”

“A-ah. Uh. Why are you showing me this?”

“I find it’s easier to control your powers when you understand the source of it,” Sherman explained.
“At least in my own experience.” He turned the screen back. “We also picked up a very sharp
chemical imbalance.”

Evan furrowed his brow. “B-because of my powers.”

“Because of your trauma, or possibly predating it. It’s common for Patients to develop some form of
mental illness, depression, anxiety or even PTSD in some cases.”

Evan felt his shoulders hunch. “Oh…” Just another thing that was wrong with him.

“It’s nothing to worry about, son. Like I said, it’s common enough. We’ve been ordered to put you
on Zoloft, you’ll be given it with your breakfast. Is that okay?”

Why wouldn’t it be? “Yeah. I... I guess.”

“Great!” Sherman beamed. “Now, one more thing.” He got to his feet. “I’m going to have to take
your vitals.”

Evan’s cheeks paled and he swallowed a lump in his throat. He’d had to have his vitals taken every
day in the week since he’d developed his powers and he still hated it.

He didn’t like being forced to stand against a wall and have his height taken, nor looking at how little
he weighed, nor the harsh grip of the blood pressure monitor, or the coldness of the stethoscope
being pressed against his chest. However, he managed to get through most of the examination
without freaking out. That was until Sherman announced that he was going to take a blood sample.

“W-why?” Evan asked sharply. “T-they already took a bunch before.” He felt as though
someone was pushing down on his shoulders, a flush of warmth rising up the back of his neck.

Dr Sherman sighed, holding a syringe he’d seemed to have summoned from nowhere, or more likely
Evan hadn’t noticed him fetch it. “It’s protocol, son. I’m sorry.”

Evan tried his best to breathe deeply as Lucky started speaking again. “Relax, Evan. It’s hardly the
worst thing that could happen to you.”

But it is, Evan thought, closing his eyes tightly, tensing as the doctor wiped his arm with a cotton
swab.

“It won’t hurt, don’t worry,” Dr Sherman assured him.

“T-they told me that before,” Evan mumbled, not opening his eyes.
“They did?”

“Yep.”

“And did it?”

“Y-yes--Ow!” Evan gave a sharp cry as Sherman stuck him with the needle.

“Sorry, sorry,” Dr Sherman said quickly. “Almost done, there.” He withdrew the needle. “Was that so bad?”

Evan nodded and opened one eye to watch as a small sprig of sage grew over the pin prick in his arm, the pain subsiding.

“Very interesting,” Dr Sherman said, touching the leaves with the end of his finger.

“D-don't pick it,” Evan snapped, pulling away. He felt a slight tickle run up his forearm as a collection of Begonias sprouted on his arm, the brambles withering slightly and falling away to make room. As they hit the floor the plants blacked before disintegrating into nothingness.

“I wasn't planning on it,” Sherman said, withdrawing his hand. His lip was twisted slightly, as though Evan’s words had physically hurt him and he watched the flowers shifting on Evan’s skin. “I've made you uncomfortable, haven't I?”

Evan shook his head. “I-I just...I'm fine.”

“I can tell that you're nervous,” Dr Sherman told him, cocking his head to the side. “It's perfectly okay for you to feel that way, you do know that right?”

Evan looked down at his arm, fiddling with hem of his polo shirt. He said nothing but managed to steady his breathing somewhat as Dr Sherman stored the vial of his blood away for whatever The Ward was planning to use it for.

“I think we should skip the formalities for now,” Dr Sherman said as he started digging through drawers in his desk. “The tour and whatnot. I'll arrange for you to be shown round tomorrow, is that okay with you?”

Evan’s shoulders relaxed slightly and he nodded. All he wanted to do was climb into bed and hide under the covers. “Y-Yes please.”

“O-Kay,” Sherman gave a sheepish grin, lingering on the “o”. He placed a plastic sleeve full of various scraps of paper and what looked like some kind of key-card. “This is your map and timetable along with your phone card. There are four phones on every from floor but they can get a little busy, especially on weekends.”

Evan looked genuinely surprised, his eyes widening slightly. “A-a phone?”

“Yes. To call friends or family, that kind of thing.” Evan blinked dumbly and the doctor chuckled. “You didn't honestly think we’d just cut you off from your family did you?”

“N-no...I-I mean...” Evan sighed before giving a small nod. “Y-yeah. I kinda d-did.”

Dr Sherman laughed again, handing him the plastic folder. “Believe it or not, Evan, we’re not actually heartless.”
“Could have fooled me,” Lucky said dryly, earning themselves a swift glare from Evan.

“What did he say?” Sherman asked as watched Evan turn to face the bamboo shoot.


“Right,” Sherman gave a small nod. He pushed his glasses up his nose, examining Lucky for a moment. “I guess it makes sense for plants to not adhere to human gender. Interesting.”

“M-mm,” Evan looked down at the plastic slip. “Can I…?”

“Go? Yes, of course.” Dr Sherman stood, making his way over to the office door. “I'll have a nurse show you to your room. Dinner’s at six o’clock in the cafeteria and tonight is pizza so don't be late.” Evan still couldn’t get over how casual the doctor was. “And Evan,” he said as Evan prepared to leave.

“Y-yes, doctor?”

“It’s nice to meet you.”
Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

The more I work on this story the darker it gets. Seriously, one of the people betaering it said a later scene was the "darkest thing I've ever written" that scene won't come for a while so...look forward to that. I also added the "Major Character Death" warning and bunked the rating up from T to M. So. Yeah.
And thanks to all the people kudosing and commenting, yous always brighten my day.

TW: Anxiety attacks, Self harm.

It took Evan a long time to find his way to his room. The map he'd been given by Dr Sherman was too large and covered too much space for him to be able to properly decipher it. He'd wandered aimlessly around the ground floor for around fifteen minutes before figuring out that he'd been reading the ninth floor map instead, much to Lucky’s amusement.

Eventually, he managed to find his way to the elevator. He'd hesitated once the doors opened and he spotted a group of scrubs huddled inside, Peet included.

"Are you lost, Mr Hansen?" She asked him dryly, pushing a button on the control panel to keep the doors open for him.

Evan took a small step back, hugging Lucky to his chest. "N-no, I-I'm trying t-to...I need to get to F-Floor Three? U-uh." He glanced at the elevator, wondering for a moment if it was staff only.

Peet pushed the button again, the doors closing slightly before springing open. “Come on then.”

“U-uh.” Evan stepped inside. He couldn't really refuse now that she'd held the door open, twice. The elevator moved painfully slowly, the cables above his head creaking and squeaking as they climbed higher. “S-so...I-is that man...uh...Jacobi...is he okay?”

“He's fine,” Peet said dully, looking down at her phone screen.

Evan wondered what they'd done with his phone. Had they given it to his mom? Left her with another reminder of a son who was legally no longer her own? Had they smashed it? Gone through it? There wouldn't be much for them to find, mostly an endless stream of "Can you pick me up?" and "Sure."

Evan’s eyes moved to the elevator’s control panel, busying himself by examining the brail stamped onto the buttons. He noticed that a few floors had keyholes in them, which made sense. One, labelled B, had a fingerprint scanner beside it. That made less sense.

_Basement_. Evan thought with a frown. The place Connor Murphy was apparently being taken to.

He opened his mouth to ask what was down there when he was cut off by the doors sliding open. Not wanting to risk angering Peet any further he hurried out into the hall, the elevators shutting behind him.

The hall itself reminded him of college dorms he'd seen in teen movies; Messy, with socks and
clothes and towels strewn about the place, the air thick with the smell of a boys’ locker room. A few guys in their early teens milled about in doorways, talking either to friends or to one of the payphone-like machines attached to the walls. For a moment Evan just stood by the elevator, his papers gripped tightly in his free hand.

“Evan?” Lucky asked after a while. “Are you stuck again?”

Evan started to rock back and forth on his heels, not saying anything.

“Evan!” The plant snapped, knocking him back to his senses.

“W-what?” He stuttered, painfully aware that he was basically talking to himself. Not for the first time the thought that perhaps he wasn't a Patient after all wriggled into his mind. Perhaps he was just insane and talking to the voices in his head. Maybe the fall had actually killed him and he was in some screwed up version of hell.

“Where do you need to go?” Lucky prompted Evan to look down at the plastic folder.

“R-Room 309,” he mumbled under his breath.

“Do you know where that is?”

Evan looked around until he spotted the number of the door closest to him. Room 302. He looked to the left side of the hall: Room 303. “I think so.”

“Then go!”

Evan clambered forward as if someone was pushing him, trying to keep his breathing steady. A few of the boys turned to stare at him, mumbling to themselves as he passed but he did his best to ignore their mumbled whispers.

Eventually, he found Room 309, the door was closed but unlocked and he quickly stumbled inside. The room was relatively bare apart from a duffle bag that had been left atop one of the two twin-sized cots.

Evan kicked the door shut behind him, walking to place Lucky on the windowsill, opening the closed blinds and allowing streaks of sunlight to line the floor. “This spot okay?” He asked the plant.

“Yes. It's fine for now.”

“Good.”

There was a long pause.

“Why are there two beds?” Lucky asked.

Evan swallowed thickly, reaching up to try and unlock the window. “I...I guess I'm g-getting a roommate?”

“Another roommate.”

He chuckled slightly, fiddling with the window bolt. “Yeah. Another roommate.” He frowned, his fingers aching as he tried to twist the lock free. “I-It won't open.”

Lucky seemed to sigh. “That's fine. Go unpack.”
Evan nodded, happy that someone was giving him something to do. He unzipped the bag and started laying out his clothes. They still smelt of home, of the lavender oil burner his mom always had lit in the living room in an attempt to make their rundown bungalow seem that little bit more homely. He hesitated before picking up one of his pyjama shirts, breathing in the warm smell. As he held it he heard the slightest crackling of paper, the sound sending a sharp shiver down his spine.

Evan froze. Moved his hands. Heard more crackling.

The pyjamas had a small breast pocket, mostly for aesthetic reasons. In the moment, however, it held a small folded up piece of paper.

Evan plonked himself down on the edge of his bed, shifting to try and make himself more comfortable on the stiff memory foam. He unfurled the paper with shaking hands and started to read.

Dear Evan,

I don't know if I'm allowed to give you this or if they'll search your clothes before giving them to you but it's worth a shot.

By now you'll be at The Ward, I hope they let me say goodbye. The doctors said they would but, well, if the rumours are anything to go by they aren't the most truthful bunch.

Evan bit his lip. They hadn't been lying, they'd given them an hour together. Evan had cried, his mom hadn't, though he had a sneaking suspicion that she'd only done it so he didn't freak out any more than he already had. She'd not actually said goodbye either, not properly.

“I'll see you soon.”

That had only made Evan cry harder. Patients were allowed visitors but there was no way in hell she'd ever be able to afford it.

I wanted to write this so you know that even if we can't see each other face to face I still love you. You are still my son. No matter what anyone tells you, no matter what powers you have or how much time passes.

You are my son and I love you.

I know you are worried, Evan. But I promise everything, eventually, will be fine.

Please call me if you feel overwhelmed.

I love you.

Mom.

Evan reread the letter a handful of times. He felt his eyes sting, the words becoming blurred smudged of blue ink. He thought of his mom, alone. No husband, no son, just a house. His arm itched and sprigs of Sorrel and clumps of Stargazer Lillies replaced the Begonias as he wiped his eyes.

“Evan?”

“I'm fine,” he said quickly. “I-I just. I need to...to...” he smoothed out the wrinkled letter on his lap and reached for his phone card. “I'm gonna call her. I-I have to.”

Lucky was quiet for a moment. “Okay.”
There was a phone on the wall opposite his room that, by some miracle, no one was using, allowing Evan to make a mad grab for the receiver. Quickly he scanned his card and punched in his mom’s number. He didn't pause to wonder if she'd be a work or busy, he just focused on stopping his hands from shaking enough to hit the right buttons.

He heard a buzz.

“Mom!”

“Please enter your code,” a tinny voice said back.

“U-uh?”

The phone hung up.

Frowning, Evan scanned his card again, cursing under his breath. Maybe he had to enter a specific area code first? He punched in the number and listened.

The phone buzzed. “Please enter your code.” The phone hung up.

Evan tried again, this time swiping his card on the opposite side. The phone didn't even buzz, just greeting him with a hollow dial tone.

“Damnit!” He snapped, slamming down the receiver with a loud bang.

“Woah, calm down.”

Evan almost jumped out of his skin, whirling round to find himself face-to-face with another boy his age.

The boy laughed, crossing his arms over his chest. “Jeez, you're really jumpy aren't you?” He was a little shorter than Evan with dark hair that seemed to stick out at odd angles.

“N-no,” Evan said quickly. “I-I just...couldn't get the phone to work a-and...uh…”

The boy raised a hand to silence him and Evan saw that he was wearing winter gloves despite the desert heat. “Do you need a paper bag?”

“A...a what?”

“A paper bag, you're hyperventilating.”

Evan looked a little taken aback. “I-I’m not hyperventilating!”

“Really? You're having significant trouble breathing--”

“I'm fine!” He snapped loudly, clapping his hands to his mouth.

The boy pushed his glasses up his nose. “Want me to fix the phone?”

“...y-yeah.”

The boy rolled his eyes slightly, taking Evan’s phone card and scanning it. Evan watched over his shoulder as he turned over the card to reveal a four-digit code stamped on one side. He entered the code and held the phone to his ear, though Evan noticed that he held it a little ways away from his head, so that it didn't actually make contact with his skin.
“Here,” the boy handed him the phone.

“U-uh. Thank you,” Evan mumbled, feeling foolish. “S-so I just...enter the number?”

“Yeah.”

Evan punched in the number one last time. The phone started to ring before another tinny voice spoke up:

“All calls are recorded for your safety.”

He slammed down the phone again.

“Now what?” The boy asked, a small groan of annoyance escaping his lips.

“T-hey record…” Evan stuttered, his heart thudding. More Christmas Roses started to dig into his arm and he winced.

The boy watched Evan’s arm curiously and nodded. “Our calls? Yeah. Everything’s on a couple of seconds delay too.”

“What? Why?”

“So you don’t go spilling all their dirty secrets, duh!” The boy said as though it was obvious, probably because it was. “Are you gonna use the phone or what?”

Evan felt his stomach twist and he hesitated. “L-later.”

“Right.” The boy looked Evan up and down a moment. “You’re new,” he said suddenly, as though it had just occurred to him.

“U-uh. Yeah. I-I just got here today.”

“Nice, nice.” The boy started circling Evan before holding out his hand. “I’m Jared Kleinman.”

Evan hesitated before shaking Jared’s hand. “Evan Hansen.”

“Nice to meet you.” Jared gave Evan’s arm a sharp tug, examining the flowers blooming from his skin. “So what, your thing’s flowers?”

Evan tried to pull his hand free but found Jared’s grip to be much stronger than he expected. “Yeah...uh…”

“So what happened to you?”

“H-happened?...can you let go of me?”

Jared’s eyes widened slightly and he nodded, letting go. “What made you activate?”

“Oh…” Evan’s hands went to fiddle with the hem of his shirt. “I...I fell...i-i mean I...I fell outofatree.” The last words jumbled together into a mumbled mess of sound and Jared cocked his head.

“You fell?”

“Yes.”
“Out of a tree?”

“Yes.”

Jared gave a small laugh. “Seriously?!”

Evan’s shoulders hunched and he rubbed his arm self-consciously. “Y-yeah...well...u-uh.” He searched blindly for something to say. “What’s your thing?”

“My thing?” Jared grinned widely and pulled off one of his gloves. He held two fingers in a ‘V’ and Evan watched with wide eyes as a spark of electricity ran between them in an arc. “Yeah, cooler than flowers, huh?” Jared said as he put the glove back on.

“Yeah...I guess...uh...h-how...were...did...you...get...?” The words trapped themselves in Evan’s throat.

“My powers?” Jared raised an eyebrow. “I’m not telling you, that stuff’s personal.”

“But…” Evan frowned. “I told you about how I got mine!”

“I never said you had to tell me. You could have always just said no.”

Evan fixed Jared with a hard scowl and started fiddling with his shirt again. He was starting to wish he’d just gone on the tour instead then at least he wouldn’t have to be dealing with this. He made a mental note to keep his tree-incident firmly to himself for now.

“So,” Jared continued as though he hadn’t done anything wrong. “Which room are you in? Most of the rooms down this end are empty so I’m guessing you got a single, lucky bastard.”

“Uh…” Evan shook his head. “309.”

Jared froze. For a moment he didn’t look as though he knew whether to smile or frown, instead deciding to reach forward and place a hand on Evan’s shoulder. “Well, it was nice knowing you, kid.”

“...Huh?”

He patted Evan’s shoulder and Evan felt the hair on that side of his head start to click with static. “You’re with Murphy, he’s kind of…” Jared hummed, thinking of the right word “psychotic.”

Evan felt his stomach twist, the chicken sandwich he’d choked down at lunch lurching hard. “Connor Murphy?”

Jared looked genuinely surprised. “You’ve heard of him?”

“A-a kid downstairs s-said the nurses h-had to evacuate because someone…” Evan paused and suddenly remembered where he’d heard this boy’s name before. “Because you put a tack on his chair.”

“Me?!” Jared let go of Evan’s shoulder. “Who said I did it?”

“The kid...uh...Chris.”

Jared raised a hand, “yay high, dark skin with braids?”

“And shark teeth.”
“That little shit,” Jared scowled. “No, I didn't put the tack on his chair, I'm not that stupid. God.”

“Then who did?”

Jared shrugged. “No one owned up to it so we all got put on washing up duty, well, I didn't for obvious reasons,” he waved his hands, “but still! It scared the shit out of me.”

Evan watched Jared’s eyes carefully as he spoke, trying to figure out if he was lying or not. He couldn't tell. “The boy...uh...C-Chris, he said Connor was being taken to the Basement.”

“Holy shit, is he?”

Evan hesitated before shaking his head. “Dr Sherman said it wasn't nice to spread rumours so...uh...I don't think so.”

“Damn. Well, it's only a matter of time before he does.” Jared crossed his arms. “Still, good luck.”

“G-good luck?”

“Yeah, good luck. You seem nice, I hope Murphy doesn't end up killing you.”

Evan’s cheeks paled. “What?!”

“If he ever tries to, just scream really loud cause I'll probably end up hearing through the wall,” Jared gestured to the door for room 307. “Then I can burst in and save your sorry ass.”

Evan could taste bile at the back of his throat, Christmas roses digging harshly into his arm. He felt hot blood running across his skin as their thorns wrapped tightly around his wrist.

“Woah...you okay, man?” Jared asked and Evan shook his head, actually starting to hyperventilate now. “Good God, I was kidding, calm down and...I dunno, take some deep breaths.”

Evan tried, gasping for air. “Why...would you...joke...about that?” He asked between breaths.

“I dunno, cause it's funny?” Jared frowned. “Lighten up a little.”

Evan wanted a hole to open up in the ground and swallow him. He was stupid, so so stupid. Jared was right, he needed to lighten up, he needed to stop being so nervous and tense and just learn to take a joke.

“Hey, Evan.” Jared waved a hand in front of his face. “You okay?”

“Huh?” Evan realised he'd started to rock back and forth on his heels again. He blinked dumbly for a moment, giving his head a quick shake. “I'm fine.”

“You sure about that?”

No. “Yeah.” Evan straightened his shirt, swallowing in an attempt to return some form of moisture to his mouth. “I-I should go...finish unpacking.”

“Yeah, sure...seriously are you okay?”

“I'm fine, uh, Jared.” Evan turned, gripping his phone card so hard that it dug into his palm. “See you,” he said and stepped back into his room.

The moment he closed the door Evan’s legs gave out. He flopped down, holding his knees to his
chest and breathing heavily. Nearly his entire arm was full of Christmas Roses now, their thorny stems wrapping around his elbow, the only solace from them were the tiny sprigs of sage where the pinpricks on his skin had started to heal. His arm only got like that when he'd fucked up real bad, like when he woke up in the ambulance surrounded by paramedics explaining how "everything was going to be alright, honey." Like when he'd been sat down by a room-full of doctors and told exactly what was wrong with him. Like when he’d made his mother cry at the news that her son, the only person still in her life was going to be taken away and experimented on like some kind of freak.

No, Evan realised. That was exactly what he was. A freak.

Evan stared down at his arm, grabbed a handful of roses and pulled, hard. Pain shot through his arm as their stems snapped, the roseheads coming away in his hand. For a moment the patch of skin where the roses had once bloomed was completely smooth apart from the dark welts of blood that pooled where the flowers used to be. Quickly, however, more sage and roses took their place and once again Evan yanked them out by their roots. He moved quickly, trying to get his entire arm free of the damn things, but always only just failing. He needed scissors or a knife or something, he just needed to get them off.

“Stop it,” Lucky ordered lowly from their spot by the window.

“S-shut up,” Evan snapped as the hunk of plant matter in his hands started to turn black before disappearing completely. “S-stop talking to me for five minutes. Please.”

“Evan—”

“Shut up!” Evan screamed, not caring how stupid he sounded. “Let me be normal, for five minutes.”

With that Lucky went quiet and Evan got to his feet. He headed to a door at the side of the cramped bedroom, opening it to find a bathroom the size of a cupboard. He walked over to the sink and started washing the blood off what little skin that wasn't covered by the petals. The water was icy cold and he didn't bother to towel dry his arm. Instead, he took one of his old shirts and pulled it over the pillow of one of the beds, slipping his mother’s note between the fabric. He moved so he was laying with his head at the foot of his bed, the direction he’d usually lay at home. He pulled the cold, stiff sheets over his head, closed his eyes, breathed deeply and covered his ears with his hands.

For a moment he could have sworn he could hear his Mom fixing dinner in the kitchen.

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Evan didn't move when someone knocked at his door.

“Evan?” It was Dr Sherman. The door creaked open. “Dinner started fifteen minutes ago, are you asleep?”

Evan didn't move.

“Come on, son. There's still some pizza left if you want it.”

Evan cringed as the doctor pulled the covers away from his face. “I'm fine,” he mumbled and buried his face in the crook of his arm.

“You have to eat.”

“I'm not hungry.”
“I didn't ask if you were hungry, I said you need to eat.”

Evan buried his face in his pillow and said nothing.

Dr Sherman gave a small sigh and sat down next to him on the bed. “I know you're homesick—”

“I know. Cause you're screwing with my head, right?” Evan mumbled into his pillow.

“I don't...screw with people's heads as you put it. I sense their emotions.”

“Same thing.”

Dr Sherman was quiet for a moment and Evan hoped he would just go away. If he ever got like this at home his mom would just bring dinner to his room and they'd eat sitting at either end of his bed. He didn't feel like that was appropriate now.

“Why...why didn't you tell me who my roommate was?” Evan asked, turning his head away from his pillow so he could face the doctor.

Sherman rubbed the back of his neck, looking puzzled. “I was going to tell you at dinner. I didn't want you to stress out any more than you already had.”

“O-oh well. Too late for that.” Evan scowled. “A-a boy in the hall told me. Said C-Connor was going t-to kill me.”

Dr Sherman’s expression faltered. “Oh for...” he pressed a hand to his face. “Who told you that?”

“Someone, I dunno.” Evan wasn't sure why he was lying.

“Well, he won't. He's not some kind of monster, he just...has trouble—”

“Controlling his powers, yeah. I know.” Evan hunched his shoulders nervously. “B-but what if he loses control of them when I'm around?”

“Then we have methods in place to deal with it,” Dr Sherman said certainly. “Look, hang on,” he reached into the pocket of his lab coat and pulled out a small square piece of metal. “Call this a panic alarm,” he explained as he handed it to Evan. “Press the button on it twice if and only if Connor loses control and it'll send an alert to security. They'll take it from there.”

Evan sat up, looking down at the device in his palm. “W-where is Connor?” He asked cautiously.

“Oh,” Dr Sherman gave a small shrug. “Probably just blowing off some steam.”

“Not at dinner?”

He shook his head. “He'll be back later tonight.”

Evan raised an eyebrow and slipped the panic alarm into his pocket. “Can I go back to sleep?”

Dr Sherman patted his shoulder. “Not until you eat something.”

Evan groaned, his stomach clenching.

“Come on,” Dr Sherman stood up, brushing down his lab coat. “It'll take ten minutes tops and you can come straight back here when you're done.”
“D-do I have to?”

“Yes. Evan. You do.” Sherman held out his hand to help him up. “Come on.”

Evan reluctantly took the other’s hand and pulled himself off the bed. “Fine, but only ten minutes.”

“No more, no less.”
Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

Huh, this is the first one without any triggers. Well, unless any of you need me to add anything. Again, don't be afraid to ask.
Also, I made a mistake in the previous two chapters. I was under the impression that Christmas Roses had thorns, they do not. They are actually butter cups, not roses. SO The thorns now belong to vines that also appear when Evan's anxious as well as the not-roses.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Evan could hardly believe it when Jared waved at him to join his table. He simply stared, his brows raised slightly as he stood at the entrance to the hospital cafeteria, Dr Sherman at his side.

“You’ve met Jared,” it was more of a statement than a question.

“Y-yeah, he helped me figure out how to use the phone.”

Dr Sherman hummed to himself. “Well, that was nice of him.” He gave Evan a small pat on the back. “Why don’t you go sit with him?”

Evan wanted to scream. “I thought I would...I dunno.”

“Be sitting with me? No, I sit at the staff table.” Dr Sherman chuckled. “Unless you want to sit with Jacobi and Peet?”

Evan flinched. “I’ll sit with Jared.”

“That’s what I thought.” He led Evan to collect his food at the front of the cafeteria. Admittedly there wasn't much left, a single slice of pepperoni and nearly a quarter of what looked to be a vegetarian pizza.

Evan bit his lip and went to take a slice of the vegetarian pizza, bidding a quick goodbye to Dr Sherman before heading off to sit with Jared. The other boy sat at a mostly empty table in a sea of about a hundred Patients, chatting idly to a boy sitting next to him.

Evan took an empty seat across from Jared, his shoulders hunched. “U-uh. Hi.”

“Hey new-kid,” Jared grinned, cramming a bite of pizza into his mouth as he turned to the person next to him. “This is the acorn-guy I was telling you about.”

The boy had dark hair that had started to turn grey at the roots, his eyes hidden by a pair of thick-lensed sunglasses. “Right, Connor’s roommate.” His voice was thick with a southern accent, the kind Evan had assumed only existed in movies. “I’m William, most people just call me Will though. I share a room with this one,” he nodded to Jared with a small smile, holding out a hand to Evan.

Evan wiped his palm on his shirt before shaking his hand. “Evan...uh...” he raised an eyebrow. “A-apparently I’m acorn now?”
“Cause you fell out of a tree,” Jared clarified, speaking with his mouthful. “Like an acorn.”

Evan tried to stop himself from frowning, resting his left arm on his knee so he could hide his flowers under the table. He forced a small smile and prayed it didn’t look uneasy. “Right...uh, can you not...talk about it?” he asked quietly.

Jared opened his mouth to say something, hesitating when Will shot him a dirty look. “Yeah sure, whatever,” he shrugged and Evan felt himself relax.

“Thank you,” he said, starting to pick the vegetables off his pizza, placing them in a neat pile at the edge of his plate. He tried his best to think of something else to say, not looking up from his food.

“You arrived today, right?” Will asked, beating Evan to the punch.

“Uh, yeah.”

“How long was the ride?”

The question clearly took Evan aback and he cocked his head. “U-uh. More than a day, we h-had to s-stay in this motel in the middle of nowhere.” He couldn’t help but wince at the memory, he’d ended up spending the night with his door barricaded shut from the outside. Apparently, it was to keep him from “wandering off” as the bus driver had put it, not that he’d had anywhere to go anyway.

“Damn, really?” Will’s eyebrows shot up his forehead. “I’m from Texas, if ya’ couldn’t tell, so mine was what? A little under a day? Complete silence just sitting tight in the back of that bus. I’d’ve gone mad if I had to stick it out as long as you did.”

“I-It wasn’t too bad,” Evan mumbled. He decided not to tell them about Lucky, they probably thought him weird enough as it was. “Kind of peaceful actually.”

Jared rolled his eyes. “Sure, if you call mind-numbing silence peaceful.”

Will punched his shoulder. “You’re from Los Angeles, you have no right to complain. Yours took, what? Half a day?”

“A long ass half-day,” Jared grinned, shoving the last of his pizza into his mouth. “You going to eat that?” He asked Evan, pointing to the picked-clean pizza slice on his plate.

“Uh. Yeah,” Evan nodded, picking off the last few olives. His stomach felt like a roller coaster, twisting and tightening. He looked over to the staff table out the corner of his eye and caught Dr Sherman glancing at him. He lifted the pizza slice and took a small bite. He held the food in his mouth for a moment, looking down at his plate as he chewed the bread to mush.


Jared leaned back in his chair, lifting it up on two legs. “That's what he gets for being so late, what were you doing anyway?”

Evan swallowed hard, the pizza getting stuck in his throat. “Sleeping.”

Jared raised an eyebrow. “Ah, sleeping. Is that what the kids are calling it nowadays?”

Evan blinked dumbly. “Huh?”

“I'm just saying you took advantage of the fact that Murphy was out of your hair,” Jared grinned.
“Had some fun on your last afternoon alone—ow!” William had hit him lightly over the back of his head.

“Stop teasing, Jared.”

“I wasn't teasing, it was a genuine question.”

Evan felt his face turning red as realisation dawned on him. “N-no, really, I was tired.”

“Sure you were—stop hitting me for God’s sake!” Jared snapped as Will raised his fist. Jared's hair seemed to puff up slightly, his eyes sparking behind his glasses.

Will withdrew his hand, letting it drop to rest on the table. “That's cheating.”

“No, it's using my power effectively,” Jared grinned and small flickers of lightning darted across his skin.

Almost instinctively Evan shrank back in his seat. He could smell a faint whiff of burning tingling the air, the hair on his arms standing to attention. “C-could you not...uh…”

“How?” Jared looked up at him, his head slanting as if he was confused. “Calm down, it won't hurt you unless you touch me. Like static.” He pointed to Will with a grin. “He's the one who should be worried.”

“Shut up,” Will shot back. By the tone of his voice, Evan guessed that he was rolling his eyes, though he couldn't tell behind the heavy tint of his glasses.

“Yeah, yeah.” Jared pushed back his chair from the table, bending over to slip the sandals he was wearing off his feet. As he placed his feet on the ground his hair deflated back to normal, if slightly messier. “Better?” He asked Evan.

“Uh…” Evan pulled his feet up onto his chair. “Yeah.”

“Literally nothing is going to happen, calm down.”

“R-right.” Evan started to pick apart his dinner, his stomach twisting nervously. “U-uh…” he tried to think of something to say to further the conversation, wondering if he'd passed the ten-minute mark. No one had gotten up to leave yet which meant he couldn't either. There was no way in hell he'd be the one who came to dinner early and left before anyone else. He'd look like a freak. More of a freak. He clenched his fist under the table, not bothering to look at the flowers that bloomed there. “I-I like your glasses,” he said to Will, trying to sound normal.

“Hm? Oh, thanks. Dr Peet made them for me.” The other boy tapped the side of his specs with a small smile. In reality, they looked more like goggles than regular sunglasses; Their frames thick and white like the glasses in Tim Burton’s Charlie and the Chocolate Factory and they covered far too much of Will’s face to be flattering, however, they didn't necessarily make him look ugly either. Just different. He took them off, rubbing the lenses on the hem of his shirt. His eyes, both iris and pupil, were a dull grey in colour. They looked as though they'd been filmed over with a layer of white paint. However, the certain way in which his eyes moved told Evan that Will could definitely see, even if he didn't look like he should be able to.

“A-are you…?” Evan asked, gesturing to his own eyes.

“Blind?” Will finished for him, not looking up as he continued to clean. “Nah.”
“Then why...uh...why are they?”

Will glanced up at Evan, studying him for a moment before placing his glasses back on his nose. “Why are there flowers on your arm?”

“Uh...” Evan looked down at his arm. “Cause I fell out of a—”

“I know.” Will shook his head, a hint of a smile on his face. “It’s my power, I can see fine. Don’t worry about it.”

“Oh...” Evan nodded, staying silent for a moment. “Can I ask what it is?”

Will actually laughed at that. “I can’t stop ya’ can I?”

“M-mm,” Evan mumbled, popping another bite of pizza dough into his mouth. He swallowed it too quickly, coughing hard. He banged his chest with his fist, clearing his throat.

“You okay?” Jared asked, raising an eyebrow.

“Fine,” Evan croaked, reaching for Jared’s glass of water only to have Will slap his hand away. “I wouldn’t do that if I were you unless you want to get a shock,” he warned, handing Evan his own cup.

Jared rolled his eyes. “You need to learn to relax.”

“Who?” Evan asked, sipping at the water. “Me or him.”

“Both of you,” Jared grinned. “Acorn and Grandpa.” He prodded the roots of Will’s hair.

“Whatever,” Will stuck out his tongue.

“You...uh...never answered my question,” Evan mumbled into his drink.

“Huh?”

“Your power.”

“Oh.” Will tapped his specs again. “I...” he twisted his lip, trying to find the right words.

“He sees the bad in people,” Jared said for him.

“...eh?”

William sighed, raking his fingers through his hair. “When I look at people I see...when I look at people I see this ‘shadow’ surrounding them. If they’re normal like you that shadow isn’t very big, but when they’re...evil, the ‘shadow’ is...bigger.”

Evan furrowed his brow uneasily. “Right...uh...what’s my ‘shadow’ like?”

“Yours? Hm.” Will lifted up his glasses for a moment, frowning. “It’s a little stronger than others but that’s to be expected what with your trauma and all.”

Evan felt his stomach sink. “Oh.”

Will’s eyes widened slightly and he shook his head. “No, that’s not a bad thing,” he reassured hurriedly. “I mean it fluctuates, the shadows. When people have gone through trauma it makes sense
for their bad thoughts to...increase.”

Evan got the feeling he was trying to help, it just didn't work. His face seemed to make this obvious as Will quickly pointed to Jared.

“His is worse—”

“Hey!”

“It's true! ” Will pointed again, this time to the staff table. “And most of them are even worse than him.”

Evan looked over at Dr Sherman again, watching quizzically as he talked to a scrub by his side. He had a wide smile on his face, looking more like a gossiping teen than a doctor.

“But...they're nice,” Evan said, his confusion plain on his face. “W-well, mostly. ,” he thought of Peet and Jacobi, “some of them are.”

“Yeah, that's cause it doesn't actually mean you're evil, that's just him being all over dramatic,” Jared said matter of factly.

Will rolled his eyes. “Whatever. Still, like I said it fluctuates.”

Evan kept his eyes on the staff, nodding slightly. “Y-yeah,” he said. “I heard you the first time. Under the table, small sprigs of Oleander started to bloom among the Roses.

---

Evan waited until a handful of other Patients had headed back upstairs before making his leave. Will and Jared remained behind, complaining about having to do the washing up—or rather, Will complained and Jared gleefully boasted about getting out of it.

He was surprised to still find his room empty when he pushed open the door, left exactly as it was before dinner. “Has anyone been in here?” Evan asked Lucky as he rifled through his bed covers, looking for where he’d put his phone card.

“Nope,” the bamboo replied. “Not a soul, I was starting to get lonely.”

Evan gave a huffed laugh, finding the card tucked under his pillow. “Dr Sherman said my roommate would be coming back tonight.” He didn't quite feel comfortable referring to him as ‘Connor’ yet. It didn't feel right to refer to him as though he was a guy he knew.

“There’s still plenty of ‘night’ left,” Lucky pointed out.

“True.” Evan signed and tapped the card against his palm.

“Are you actually going to call her this time?”

He chewed his lip. “They record us.”

“And?”

“And what if I say something embarrassing? What if I say something on accident that gets me in trouble o-or what if they decide I can't call her anymore? What then?”
Lucky huffed, despite not having lungs to do so. “That won’t happen.”

“How do you know it won’t?”

“How do you know it will?”

Evan scowled at the plant, moving his hands to fiddle with the hem of his shirt. “I don’t.”

“Exactly! Besides, your mom wants to hear from you. That I know for sure.”

“Yeah. I know.” Evan rolled his shirt between his fingers, his shoulders slumping. “Fine. I'll go call her.”

“Talk like nobody's listening,” Lucky said, their voice almost reassuring.

All the phones in the hall were in use when Evan came out of his room so he ended up cowering awkwardly beside the closest one he could find, waiting for the boy using it to finish talking to his family. Judging by the sound of his voice he was talking to a young kid, his tone jovial and upbeat.

“Wow, that’s amazing!” He said to the phone, a large smile on his lips. “I bet mama was real proud, huh? You gotta stop being so smart, you're making me look bad.”

A sibling, Evan decided. Definitely a younger one. His stomach turned inwards on itself. At least those parents weren't left alone. He kept his eyes on his arm, the Christmas Roses and thorns had lessened somewhat, thinned out by newly blooming Yellow Hyacinths. The sound of the receiver being placed back into its holder snapped him back to reality.

“Don't listen to people's calls next time, new-kid,” the boy warned, prodding at Evan with his finger.

“R-right, sorry. I won't,” Evan said quickly, reaching for the receiver. The Hyacinths on his arm turned from yellow to purple.

“Whatever,” the boy grumbled, leaving Evan alone to shakily punch in his code and home number. He listened to the ringing buzz, counting the sounds until he heard a click.

“Hello?”

Evan’s words got stuck in his throat. He felt as though someone had stuffed his lungs with cotton, he couldn't breathe, he couldn't talk.

“Who is this?” His mom asked, sending shivers down his spine. “Hello?”

Evan forced his mouth to move. “H-hi. Mom.”

For a moment there was complete silence.

“…Evan?”

Evan nodded before realising his mistake. “T-they have phones.”

“Oh, honey! You're okay!” Heidi’s voice was ecstatic, the tone causing a lump to form in Evan’s throat. He felt his lip quiver and made sure to keep his voice somewhat calm.

“Yeah, mom, I'm okay. I'm...I'm doing really well.”

His mother’s voice seemed to relax slightly. “That's good, honey. The trip wasn't too long, was it?”
“N-no, it was fine. Well. I mean it was really boring but it wasn't h-horrible or anything.” *They're listening* he reminded himself. “Everyone's been really nice so far, a-and I made some friends. Jared and Will, they're in the room next to mine.”

“Mm-hm,” Heidi sounded as though she was nodding. “And they're all treating you okay?”

“Yeah, mom. Everyone's fine.”

“The doctors too?”

“The doctors too.”

Heidi sighed with relief. “Good, good. So, do you have a roommate? You said those two boys are in the room next to yours?”

“Y-yeah. Connor.” Evan curled the phone cable around his finger, thinking for a moment. “He's nice too.”

“Is he?”

Evan's mouth went dry. *No, apparently he's a psycho who's so dangerous they had to evacuate because someone pulled a prank on him.* “Yeah. He's really chill.”

“Huh, well, you know that support group the doctors wanted me to join?”

“Parents of Patients?” Evan remembered her complaining about it during their allotted hour together. An online support group made to help parents adjust to a life without their child. He hadn't actually expected her to sign up.

“Yeah, well. One of the members, Cynthia, her son was called Connor.”

“Was?”

Heidi huffed. “Apparently referring to you lot as past tense helps adjustment.”

“So...I was Evan?”

“Honey, no. You are my son and Connor is Cynthia’s, no matter what any old shrink says.”

Evan chuckled dryly, tying the cord tighter around his finger. “Like in your letter.”

“Like in my letter,” Heidi agreed. “But anyway, her son was called Connor so maybe he's your roommate.”

“Maybe. What's Cynthia like?”

“Hm. Oh,” Heidi hesitated for a moment. “I think all this hit her quite hard. Both her kids developed powers at around the same time which must have been difficult for her.

“Both?!” Evan's eyes widened. Having more than one Patient child was virtually unheard of.

“Both. Like I said, it hit her hard. She's been nice enough though, been giving me tips and stuff.”

“M-mm,” Evan looked down at his shoes, tensing as he heard someone approach him, starting a queue for the phone. “Hey, mom.”
“Yes?”
“I’m sorry.”

Heidi sounded slightly taken aback, “for what?”

“For this, for ruining everything.” Evan winced as he heard his mom sigh.

“It’s not your fault, Evan.”

“But it is. If I didn't...it’s my fault,” his voice became a murmur. “I'm sorry.”

“Evan, it was an accident. Besides, you had no way of knowing this would happen.”

Evan’s shoulders hunched, the end of his finger starting to turn purple where the cord was wrapped too tight. “I-I know...but still.”

“Besides, could be worse.”

“O-oh?”

“You could have hurt yourself far worse than you did.”

Evan drew in a short breath, his arm thudding with a dull ache, a collection of thorny vines dug into his skin. “True.”

“Very true.”

Evan opened his mouth to continue talking when someone tapped him on the shoulder.

“You gonna hurry up?” The boy behind him asked.

Evan’s brows narrowed with confusion. “H-huh?”

“The phone, you're hogging it.”

“Evan?” He heard his mother’s voice again. “Honey, are you there?”

“U-uh, yeah. Sorry, hang on,” Evan garbled quickly. He placed his hand over the receiver. “I'm talking to my mom, s-sorry.”

“Yeah, and?” The boy asked impatiently.

“I-I haven’t talked to her in a while.”

The boy actually laughed. “None of us have. Stop hogging the phone.”

Evan’s mouth snapped shut, his gaze moving to the other phones. Each of them had a line of boys waiting to use them, some more impatiently than others. “H-hey, mom.”

“Yes, sweetie?”

“There...a lot of people want to use the phone. I...I need to go.”

“Oh,” Heidi’s word had a slight crack to it. “Are you sure you can't stay a little longer?”

Evan felt a pang of guilt in his chest, casting a wary glance to the boy behind him. “I...I can’t, mom, I
don't think it would be fair...w-we have to share a phone.”

That seemed to knock Heidi to her senses. “Oh. Right. Of course.”

“B-But I'll call you tomorrow,” he added quickly. “I promise. Every day, I'll call you every day and we’ll talk and it'll...it'll be like...” It wouldn't be like old times, he told himself. She isn't here, you're not there.

“I'll be at work, sweetie.”

Evan's stomach sank. “I-I know...but...do you have a break?”

“I'm meant to have one at eight.”

“Then I'll call you at eight,” Evan heard his voice crack. “Promise.”

For a beat there was silence, broken by Heidi giving a small sniff.

“Okay,” she said quietly. “I love you.”

“I love you too,” Evan said, not caring that the people around him could hear him. “T-talk to you tomorrow?”

“Talk to you tomorrow.”

“Bye.”

“Good night, honey.”

There was a brief pause before the phone hung up. Evan stood there for a moment, listening to the dull buzz of the dial tone. Slowly, he started to rock back and forth on his heels, his lower lip clenched between his teeth.

“Hey, man,” the boy behind him put a hand on his shoulder. “You okay?”

“Fine.” The word came out choked and Evan’s eyes stung as he set down the receiver.

“No you're not,” the kid patted his shoulder. “It’ll be okay, you get used to it.”

Evan looked down at his arm, now a collage of Hyacinths, Christmas Roses and Striped Carnations. The thorny vines had fallen away which made him feel a little better.

“I don't think I will.” he said and stepped away from the phone.

---

When lights out rolled around at ten o’clock Evan’s roommate was still nowhere to be seen. A nurse knocked on his door, poking her head into the room when she noticed his light was still on.

“Time to go to sleep now, love. Lights out.”

Evan lay with his head at the foot of his bed again, his hands resting on his stomach. “My roommate isn't back yet,” he pointed out, nodding to the unmade mess of a bed beside him.

“Ah,” the nurse frowned. “Connor’s still being treated, he’ll be back by the time you wake up.”

“Treated?” Evan echoed. “For a tack?”
The nurse gave a small hum, tilting her head to the side. “No, well. I suppose. He’ll probably want to explain it to you himself.”

Evan strongly doubted that. “R-Right.”

“Don’t lose any sleep over it,” she smiled and switched off his light. “Good night.”

“Night.”

With that, she closed the door. Evan waited a moment before slipping out of bed and turning the handle. It wasn’t locked, they trusted them not to wander the halls at least.

“Where are you going?” Lucky asked.

“Nowhere,” he answered before padding over to Connor’s bed, rifling through his chest of drawers.

“I’m pretty sure that’s an invasion of privacy,” the plant scolded.

“I’m just looking.” Evan had to squint, waiting for his eyes to adjust to the darkness of the room. The drawer was mostly filled with things that would normally be there; a hairbrush, toiletries, random scraps of paper and junk thrown in there instead of the bin. The only two things that did catch his eye was a small notebook and three vials of nail polish; one black, one clear, one gold.

He took these out, examining them for a moment. So, Connor wasn’t stereotypically manly, that was good. Those with the general mindset of "men are men" usually ended up hating Evan with a passion. He was also brave enough to actually wear nail polish, unlike Evan who had bought a cheap bottle of blue polish from the One Dollar Shop near his house only to hide it away in his closet, never to be used. Evan placed the vials back where he found them and moved onto the notebook, flicking to the first page.

_Dear Connor Murphy,_

_Today is not going to be a good day._

_This thing is bullshit._

_Sincerely,_

_you._

Connor’s handwriting was scratchy, the lines thick where he’d pressed too hard on the paper.

“Now that’s definitely an invasion of privacy,” Lucky said again, their voice flat and unimpressed. “Really, Evan?”

“S-shut up,” Evan stuttered, turning the page.

_Dear Connor Murphy,_

_Today is going to be a good day because Sherman says it has to be._

_Sincerely,_

_You._

The letter made Evan raise an eyebrow and he turned the page.
Dear Connor Murphy,

Today is going to be a good day because you don't have to deal with Larry's shit.

Sincerely,

You.

Another page turned.

Dear Connor Murphy,

Today is going to be a good day because you still have—

Whatever Connor had said had been scribbled out so hard he’d torn the paper. The pen he’d used to cover it was a different colour, black instead of blue. Perhaps he’d made the change on a different day.

Evan closed the notebook and placed it back in the drawer.

“Done?” Lucky asked him as he climbed back into bed.

“Done,” he mumbled into his pillow.

“Good night, Evan.”

Evan pulled the covers over his head, trying to get comfortable on the stiff memory foam. “Good night.”

---

“There we go, almost there.”

Evan’s eyes cracked open as light flooded his room. He narrowed his eyes to slits, peering at the three figures that stood in the doorway. Two of them held one up, the middle one’s arms draped over their shoulders.

The middle figure—Connor’s head lulled, his hair in his face his feet dragging as he was carried over to the empty bed.

“There we go, son” one of the figures, who Evan recognised as Dr Sherman mumbled, setting the boy down.

“We going to wake him up?” The other figure—a scrub—asked, holding Connor upright by his shoulders.

“No, let him sleep,” Dr Sherman told them. “And keep your voice down, Evan’s sleeping.” He took off the hoodie Connor was wearing, folding it over the crook of his arm before helping to lay Connor down. “Poor kid,” he mumbled under his breath.

“Poor kid?” The scrub echoed, going to take off Connor’s shoes. “You're kidding me, right? He's nuts.”

Evan heard Sherman give a loud sigh. “He's not.”

“After watching what he did you still think he's sane?”
Evan’s stomach sank. *What did he do?*

“We all make mistakes when we’re angry,” Sherman pointed out, taking off the other shoe.

“Yeah. But not everyone destroys shit.”

“Not everyone, but some.” There was a thud as Sherman dropped the shoes onto the ground.

“Doesn’t make him any less human.”

“He isn’t human, Doc. None of them are.” A moment of silence passed before the scrub realised what they had said. “No offence.”

“None taken.” Sherman covered Connor with the quilt, stepping back. For a brief moment, he caught Evan’s eye, making his heart drop. Quickly, Evan snapped his eyes shut, hoping Sherman hadn’t seen him. “We should go,” Sherman said, “both of them have had a long day.”

“Yeah. Whatever.”

Evan listened to their footsteps patter around the room before leaving, closing the door behind them. He waited, counting to a hundred-and-twenty before kicking off his covers and slipping out of bed. He walked silently over to the other’s bed looking down at him.

Connor looked far too peaceful to be the boy everyone was so scared of. His eyes lightly closed, his long hair spread out around his head like a halo, expression relaxed as he slept. However, that wasn’t what Evan noticed.

Thick straps had been fastened across Connor's chest, over his quilt. They'd tied him down.

*What are you?* Evan thought, his eyes narrowed. *What did you do?*

Connor shifted in his sleep, causing Evan to jump out of his skin. Quick as a cat he darted back to his bed, pulling his covers over his head again, heart jackhammering in his chest. He didn't dare move again until he drifted off into an uneasy sleep.

Chapter End Notes

Before you comment:
Yes, I am fully aware of the irony that an OC called Will is roommates with Jared.
No, it was not intentional.
Bit of a short one this time round.

TW:
Anxiety attacks, School-shooter Chic (That'll make sense later)

Evan opened his eyes to find himself face to face with Connor Murphy. He stood over Evan’s bed, hands in his pockets, a sharp glare twisting the corners of his mouth into a deep frown.

“H-huh?” He mumbled, rubbing the sleep from his eyes.


“What. The fuck. Are you. Doing in. My room?” Connor repeated, spitting out each word one by
Evan peered up at him for a moment, still trying to wake up. Connor’s eyes were weird, he realised. At first glance, they seemed blue but on closer inspection, his left eye had a slice of brown to it, as though someone had stitched two eyes together. “I-I,” he finally found his voice. “I’m your roommate.”

“I don’t have a roommate,” Connor snapped back.

“W-well…you do now?”

The other boy looked down at Evan, his brows knitted heavily. “What day is it?” He asked suddenly as he turned away.

“Huh?”

“Are you fucking deaf? What day is it?”

Evan was more than tempted to dive under the covers, his arm twinging with pain under his quilt. “T-Thursday,” he stammered.

Connor drew in a sharp breath through his nose. “Thursday,” he repeated, more to himself than to Evan. “Okay. Not too much of a loss.”

“A-a loss?” Evan asked curiously.

“None of your fucking business,” Connor muttered, digging through his chest of drawers. For a moment Evan held his breath, hoping he didn’t notice that his things had been moved. “You going to shower and stuff? Breakfast is in ten minutes.”

Evan opened his mouth before quickly closing it again. Was that it? Was the conversation over? “U-uh…yeah.” He swung his legs out of bed, wincing at the coldness of the floor. “I'm Evan Hansen,” he said, getting up.

Connor kept his back to him, taking his hairbrush out of the drawer. “Connor Murphy.”

“I-I know.” Evan ran his fingers along the hem of his pyjama top. “People were talking about you…I mean, people told me about… I mean Dr Sherman…” he shut his mouth sharpish. “I should just stop talking.”

“Yeah. You should.” Connor ran the brush through his hair, tutting when it got caught on a knot. “Ow.”

“Sorry,” Evan said without thinking.

“For what? You didn't do anything,” Connor mumbled, still not turning around. He dragged the brush through his hair again, the sound like Velcro being torn apart.

“W-well.” Evan paused for a moment. “T-the brush can't exactly say sorry…so…I thought…” he jumped as a third voice entered the conversation.

“Seriously?” Lucky asked, a small chuckle to their voice. Evan had almost forgotten they were there.

“The brush can't say sorry, so you will?” Connor asked slowly, finally turning around to face Evan. “That's the saddest fucking thing I've ever heard.”
“U-uh. Evan’s face flushed, geraniums blooming from his skin. “S-sorry.”

Connor’s eyes flick down to Evan’s arm and he prepared himself for the barrage of questions, setting up what he was going to say in his head. I can control flowers and heal myself. No, too vague. It didn’t explain the flowers on his arm. I can control plants and they grow out of my skin. Did Connor really need to know about his healing factor? Maybe it was best to just be transparent about things, build trust.

“Oi.” Connor was waving a hand in front of his face, knocking Evan back to reality. He’d started rocking back and forth on his heels again.

“S-sorry,” Evan muttered quickly, looking down at the floor. “T-that happens sometimes...I just...I get stuck...I mean I get lost in my thoughts and…” he trailed off as Connor turned away again.

“Whatever,” he shrugged indifferently.

There was a pause as Evan simply stood there, his hands picking and curling the hem of his shirt.

Lucky’s voice made him jump. “Go shower, Ev.”

“O-okay...uh,” Evan winced as he realised that he'd spoken out loud. Connor however, didn't seem to notice, he just kept brushing his hair. Quickly Evan moved to one of the two wardrobes at the back of the room, grabbing some clothes as well as a plastic bag. He put the plastic over his left arm, covering the flowers.

“Won’t the water be good for them or something like that?” Evan jumped at the sound of Connor’s voice.

“P-probably, but d-drying them is a pain s-so I don't normally bother.”

Connor hummed and went back to his hair. Another conversation ending as quickly as it began. At least he hadn't sworn that time.

---

Connor had already left for the cafeteria when Evan got out the shower. He spotted him shoved into the back corner, his nose in a book as he picked at a bowl of cereal.

Evan offered him a small wave as he walked to get his food. Connor didn't return the gesture but Evan couldn't tell if that was because he was ignoring him or if he was just too engrossed in his reading to notice.

It was probably the former.

“How was your first night with Murphy?” Jared asked him as soon as he sat down at their table.

“U-uh. Alright. I guess,” Evan shrugged. “H-he didn't come back until r-really late so…” He looked down and prodded at his yoghurt with his spoon. He'd gotten Greek as it was the only one without any fruit with it. It tasted like it had gone off in its tub, sour and thick.

“I'm kinda surprised he's even up at all,” Will commented, casting a quick glance to Connor over his shoulder.

“O-oh?”

Jared nodded. “Yeah, usually using his power puts him out of commission for, like, three days.
Conks him right out.”

Evan furrowed his brow and looked down at his food. What day is it? He'd wanted to know how long he'd been asleep. “H-he didn't seem too bad,” he said quietly. “I-I mean...he was kind of rude but he's not too scary or anything.”

Jared rolled his eyes. “Say that again when you see him get pissed off. It's a fucking sight to behold.”

“Mm,” Evan hummed, stirring his food. “I-I guess I'll just have to not get him angry.”

Jared actually laughed at that. “You will, everyone does that eventually.”

“You're the only one that gets him angry, Jared,” Will said, prodding Jared’s arm.

“It's not my fault if he can't handle my winning personality,” Jared grinned.

“He's going to end up killing you one day.”

Jared waggled his eyebrows, small spurts of lighting darting across his skin. “I'd like to see him try.”

Evan jumped when he felt a hand clap down on his shoulder.

“No powers at breakfast, Jared,” Dr Sherman scolded softly. “You know the rules.”

Jared rocked back in his seat. “Yeah, yeah, doc. I know.”

“Good.” Dr Sherman patted Evan’s shoulder before letting go. “I just wanted to ask if you could come to my office first period instead of going to class.”

Class? Evan hadn't even had a chance to look at his timetable yet. “Y-yeah, sure.”

“Great.” Dr Sherman smiled, his hands tucking neatly into the pockets of his lab coat. “Which reminds me, Jared you have a free second period don’t you?”

“Yeah...well, I have Power Control,” Jared’s skin sparked again, “but I pretty much have the covered.”

“Perfect, then you won't mind showing Evan around.”

Jared gave a small groan. “I mean, I guess I could.”

“He will,” Will finished for him, earning himself a prod in the arm. “Ow! You haven't discharged yet, asshole!”

“I know,” Jared’s grin widened and he slipped off his sandals under the table, setting his feet on the ground. “That's kind of the point.”

“Jared, no powers at breakfast.”

“ Heard you the first time, doc.”

Dr Sherman rolled his eyes. “Watch it, son.” He shot Evan a sideways glance. “I'll meet you in my office at nine, alright?”

Evan nodded, spooning his yoghurt into a pile at the centre of his bowl.

“Good. And eat up, first days are tough.” With that he was gone, retreating back to the staff table.
“I-is he always so...uh…” Evan hesitated, trying to find the right word.

“In your face?” Jared finished for him. “Pretty much. I don't think he gets that he's not a patient here anymore. Still acts like one of the kids.”

“B-but, he is a Patient,” Evan pointed out.

“Patient with a lower-case ‘P’,” Will clarified. “He used to live here too, learn to control his powers and stuff. As far as I've heard he hasn't left the grounds since he arrived.”

“I bet he's gone crazy or something,” Jared added. “Like stir-crazy.”

“W-wait, he's never left?” Evan asked, what little breakfast he'd eaten turning over in his stomach. “L-like, at all?”

Will nodded. “As far as I can tell, yeah. We stay here until we’re eighteen and then get assigned a job that suits our powers. His suits psychology so,” he shrugged.

“God.” Evan bit his lip. He was fifteen, so that would mean almost two years in the same place. Unable to leave or move or anything. Same people, same room, same doctors, same desert.

“It's not too bad.” Will did his best to smile. “Take it from a vet, you get used to it real quick. It's like a small town but everyone’s a kid.”

“H-how long have you been here?” Evan asked him.

Will thought for a moment. “I just turned sixteen so...seven years.”

“S-seven years!” Evan’s mouth opened slightly in disbelief. “And you've never left?”

“Yeah. Well. Kinda?” The other boy cocked his head. “I've been outside, we have a garden and stuff but I've not been off the property, no.”

Evan looked back down at his food. “I'm sorry.”

“Why? It's not your fault.”

“He does that.”

Evan almost jumped out of his skin when he heard Connor’s voice. He was a few paces behind him, hands stuffed into his pockets of his hoodie.

Jared took the opportunity to grin up at Connor. “Hey, sleeping beauty. Didn't expect you to be up so soon after that stunt you pulled yesterday.”

Connor scowled down at him, his nose wrinkling. “Fuck off, Kleinman.”

“Remind you of your trauma?” Jared continued. “All those kids running screaming, scared for their lives.”

Connor narrowed his eyes, a humourless laugh escaping his lip. “Funny,” he deadpanned. “Real fucking funny.” His shoulders hunched uneasily, as though his skin was too tightly pulled against his body.

Evan looked to Will who had pressed himself as far back into his seat as he could manage. “W-what's he talking about?” He asked.
Before Will could reply Jared opened his mouth again. “Didn’t you hear? Murphy here tried to shoot up a school.”

Evan felt his stomach drop like a stone, a cold flush of panic running up his spine. “W-what?”

“Yeah, apparently he got shot by police. That’s what activated you, huh, Connor?”

Connor said nothing, his jaw tightening as he clenched it hard. His eyes looked off, what had once been only a thin slice of brown in his left eye now consumed the entire iris. “Shut the fuck up, Kleinman.”

“Jared.” Will placed a hand on Jared’s shoulder. “Don’t.”

“What? I thought it was important for Evan to know things about his roommate.”

“Jared, please stop.” Will’s voice warbled as he spoke. “You're freaking them out.”

“Do you have a death wish?!” Will yelled, giving Jared’s shoulder a hard shake. “He could have killed us!”

“Pft!” Jared actually had the audacity to smile. “As if. Security would get him before he even landed a hit.”

“Still!” Will held his hands out in front of him. “God, I'm shaking.”

“Is it true?” Evan blurred out. “He didn't...he didn't really...” he couldn't say the words.

Wil propped his elbows up on the table, holding his brow. “D-dunno.”

“You don't know?”

Jared shook his head. “No one knows why he was here for sure. But he didn't take the bus like the rest of us. Had to airlift him in cause he was in a coma, cause he got shot—

“We don't know that he got shot,” Will interrupted.

“Still,” Jared continued. “They had like...all the cops here that day. They didn't want him waking up and going berserk.”

Thorny vines wrapped themselves around Evan’s wrist, Monkshoods and Christmas Roses pulsing at his skin as they bloomed in full force across his forearm. “S-so.” Evan forced himself to speak. “H-he didn't...I mean, we don't know...?”

“It's a rumour,” Will said, more to the table than Evan. “It's just one he's never denied.”
Chapter 5

Chapter Notes

Tw: Reference to self harm, reference to eating disorders, eating disorders (technically?), anxiety attacks.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Evan couldn’t stop himself from shaking after that. He felt as though his brain was cut in half; one side acting rational, the other acting immature.

They wouldn’t let him stay here if he was that dangerous, said one side of his brain.

They probably want to use him as a weapon, said the other. If he’s this dangerous in a school imagine what he’d be like in a warzone. They probably won’t even care if he kills you. You’re power’s useless, who gives a shit about flowers? That’s probably why they put you with him, to weed out the useless Patients. They probably want him to kill you. You’re useless to them. The only reason they took you in was cause they have to take all Patients, even the ones with crap powers.


Will had offered to show him where to get his medication, much to Jared’s chagrin (“I’m drug-free, baby,” he’d told Evan after breakfast was finished). The meds station turned out to be a little window by the cafeteria, the line snaking up the hall. As far as Evan could tell, Jared was the only “drug-free” kid in the whole Ward. He could see Connor at the front of the queue, glaring flatly at the nurse as she handed him a small paper cup of pills. Evan’s stomach twisted, his brain a-buzz.

School-shooter, school-shooter, school-shooter, school-shooter.

“What are you on?”

“H-Huh?”

“What meds are you on?” Will asked again.

“Z-Zoloft, why?”

“You look like you need a distraction. I’m on Prozac.”

“W-what’s the difference?”

Will offered a small smile. “Prozac is for the kids who are really crazy.”

Evan felt his brow furrow. “Y-you’re not crazy but, you’re really nice.”

That made Will grin. “Um. It was meant to be a joke, but thanks.”

“Oh. Sorry.” Evan scuffed his feet, taking a step forward in the line. “I’m really bad at getting jokes.”

“That’s fine. Most people are,” Will finished as he walked up to the window. He took a tablet out of the cup pushed in front of him and placed it in his mouth, taking a sip of water to wash it down.
before opening his mouth to prove it was gone.

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Dr Sherman physically winced when Evan walked into his office. “Bad breakfast?” He asked.

Evan knew there was little use in lying and nodded. “J-Jared and Connor had an argument.”

“Yeah,” the doctor sighed. “That happens. Want to sit down?”

Evan nodded and slipped into the seat across from him. “D-do you need to take my vitals again?” He asked as Dr Sherman started rifling through his desk.

“How? Oh, no. We’re good for vitals.” He placed a piece of paper and a pen in front of Evan. “Can you fill this out for me?”

Evan looked down at the paper, scanning it over. It looked like a quiz with each question laid out in neat little rows.

*How often do you feel tired for no reason?*


*How often do you feel anxious?*


He looked back up at the doctor. “W-what’s this?”

“It helps us get a feel for how you are mentally,” Dr Sherman explained cooley.

“But you know how I am mentally.”

“No. I know your emotions. Emotions fluctuate.”

Evan looked back down at the paper.

*How often do you feel tired for no reason?*

Sometimes.

*How often do you feel anxious?*

Always.

Did that really have to be a question?

The rest of the questions were in similar vain.

*How often have you felt so nervous nothing could calm you down? (Often)*

*How often have you felt depressed? (Often)*

*How often have you felt so fidgety that you couldn't sit still. (Always)*

*How often do you feel useless?*
The question made Evan pause, his pen held just above the paper. ‘How often do you feel useless?’ I am useless, he thought glumly. I always have been. He wasn't particularly smart or strong, he had no special talents, no real ambition. Even when he was younger and adults asked him what he wanted to be when he grew up, he’d just shrugged. The only thing he was remotely good at was helping out at the national park and he couldn't do that anymore because he'd developed useless powers. Now he was just a waste, a superhero without the super, hell, he wasn’t even a hero.

For a moment he felt the urge to tug at the flowers on his forearm again; a raging itch that traveled under his skin and through his veins. The fingers of his right hand tingling, ready to make the grab.

But he couldn't.

He looked up at Dr Sherman who sat patiently at his computer, tapping idly at the keys. He’d have to wait until later.

Always.

Evan held out the paper to him. “Done.”

“Ah, thank you.” Dr Sherman took the form, giving it a brief look over before tucking it away in a drawer. His mouth formed a deep frown. “You can tell me if something’s making you upset, Evan.”

Evan looked down at his lap, wishing he had Lucky to hold. “I don't have to though, do I?”

“If you do I can try and help you. Emotions are vague.”

“I know.”

“Do you want to tell me what’s wrong?”

Evan looked down at his arm and shook his head.

Dr Sherman’s shoulders slumped. “Later, perhaps.”

“M-mm.” Evan picked at his shirt. “M-maybe.” For a moment there was silence. “Can I go now?”

The doctor offered a small smile and slipped off his glasses, cleaning them on his lab coat. “Not quite.”

Evan’s face fell. “Oh?” What else had he done wrong?

“I just wanted to talk to you about your…” Sherman tilted his head in thought “eating habits.”

Evan felt his mouth go dry. “O-oh?”

“Yeah. We were told before you arrived that you have a ‘peculiar way of eating’.”

“I-I'm not...like...anorexic or anything,” Evan said quickly.

“It's never said you were.” He sighed, pausing again as he considered about how best to phrase his next sentence. “You can't just chose not to eat plants, Evan.”

It sounded so much more stupid when someone said it outloud.

“I-I can. I have been. I'm fine, really.”
“You’re not fine, Evan. Humans are omnivores you can't just eat meat.”

Evan shook his head. “I-I don't just eat meat, I eat dairy too.”

“That really doesn't make it any better.”

He fiddled with his shirt again, Striped Carnations and prickles of Holly blooming to life on his arm. “I just...I can't...I can't eat them.”

“Why not?” Dr Sherman asked, lacing his fingers together. Had it not been for the clear look of concern in his eyes he wouldn't have looked like some kind of Bond-villain.

“Because they...they have thoughts and feelings and...and—”

“So do animals.”

“Animals don't talk.” Evan shuddered. “At the hospital they kept me at...I was right next to the kitchen and all day for a week all I heard was screaming. I know it’s stupid and...I just...it’s like I'm looking at a pile of corpses on my plate.” He clenched his jaw, his hands curled into tight fists. “I know it’s stupid,” he said again.

“Not really,” Dr Sherman shook his head. “I’m sure if I could talk to animals I'd have the same problem with meat. Actually a few years ago we had a patient that could talk to animals and she went through nearly the exact same issues.” He leaned forwards in his chair. “The problem is, Evan, humans can survive without meat but they can't survive without fruit and vegetables. You’ll make yourself sick.”

“I know,” Evan mumbled, swallowing dryly. His mouth still held the bitter taste of his medication which didn't help his mood.

“Mm,” Sherman hummed and reached into his desk again. “I'm going to have you put on a Meal Chit,” he said as he started filling out yet another form.

“A what?”

“It's a program we have. You’ll be given servings instead of choosing them yourself and you have to show that you've finished it before you can leave.”

“B-but—”

“Evan,” Dr Sherman sounded almost stern. “I know that it makes you uncomfortable, but really this is for your own good. Now, do you have any allergies?”

Evan’s shoulders slumped in defeat and the Carnations started to wilt. “Peanuts, a-and I can't eat pork or shellfish.”

He scribbled down a few notes. “I'll tell the kitchen,” he looked up from the form “and Evan.”

“Y-yeah?”

“I am sorry.”

Dr Sherman let Evan trail back to his room after that with yet another plastic card in his pocket. This one he had to show the people serving food at breakfast, lunch and dinner so they knew not to let...
him pick his own food.

He felt physically sick, like his breakfast had gotten lodged in his throat in protest of more food.

“Hey,” he said to Lucky as he walked into his room, freezing when he spotted the figure lying prone on one of the beds.

“What?” Connor snapped, his face buried into his pillow.

“U-uh,” Evan looked down and saw more Monkshood sprouting on his arm. “S-shouldn't you...be in class?”

“No,” Connor said into his pillow.

“Why not?”

“I'm tired. Fuck off.”

Evan stood in the middle of the room, his mouth closed firmly. He glanced to where Lucky sat by the window, one eyebrow raised.

“He's been watering,” the plant said. No matter how many times Evan corrected they Lucky never seemed to figure out that the word was “cry” not “water”.

“W-what’s wrong?” He asked slowly, taking a small step toward Connor’s bed.

“Nothing,” came a very blunt reply. “I'm tired. I get tired after I...act up.”


Connor remained quiet, his shoulders hunching tightly. He held tightly onto the pillow, hands curling into fists.

“I'm s-sorry.”

Connor was still for a moment longer before he looked up from his pillow, turning to face Evan. “Are you fucking stupid?”

“W-what?” Evan took a sharp step back.

“You heard what Kleinman and his friend said, why the fuck are you still talking to me?”

“U-uh.” Evan looked over to Lucky out the corner of his eye. *Because a plant said you’d been crying. Because I'm scared of you. Because I don't want you to kill me. Please don't kill me. Please don’t kill me. I didn't mean to. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry.*

“...you look upset and I thought...I should...” he stuck out his hand. “My name’s Evan Hansen.”

Connor’s eyes narrowed. “You said this morning.”

“I d-did?”

“Yeah. You did.”

“Oh...uh...” Evan let his hand fall to his side. “Sorry.”

Silence.
“You say that a lot.”

“Huh?”

“‘Sorry’. You say it a lot.”

“Oh.” Evan looked down at his shoes, examining the floor. “S-s—nevermind.”

Connor tilted his head to the side, watching Evan with a look of caution in his eyes. “Did Kleinman put you up to this?”

“Did...did he put me up to...?” A puzzled look passed over Evan’s face, followed quickly by a spike of panic in his chest. He’d screwed up. He’d done something wrong. Said something he should have--

“To talking to me.” Connor sat up proper, his shoulder raised uneasily. “To try and screw with me.”

“N-no!” Evan said quickly. “I-I wouldn’t even if he had asked anyway. I-I mean. You seem nice a--and.”

“Nice?”

“Y-Yeah, nice!” That was a lie. A huge huge lie that Evan prayed Connor couldn’t see through. He felt like his heart was going to break through his chest, his eyes slipping down to the flowers blooming on his arm. White Cherrytree leaves and Dogsbane spread themselves across his forearm and Evan silently cursed them. For once he hoped the person he was talking to didn’t know what flowers meant.

Connor studied his face a moment, brows knitted closely. His left eye had a slice of blue to it again, though the iris was still mostly dominated by a rich hazel. Evan felt his hands coat with a thin layer of sweat as Connor got to his feet.

“Then you really are fucking stupid,” he muttered dully as he pushed passed Evan, heading out of the room. “

“W-where are you going?”

“Anywhere but here,” Connor shot back, slamming the door behind him.

Evan’s eyes remaining fixed on the closed door for a moment before Lucky’s voice pulled him out of it.

“He’s rude,” the plant said bluntly.

“Y-yeah. Kind of.” Evan walked over to his bed and flopped down onto it, letting out a low, long sigh. “I think he hates me.” Lucky didn’t say anything and Evan took that as agreement. “Everyone’s terrified of him.”

“I’m not.”

“Everyone who’s human.”

“Why?”

Evan bit his lip, staring up at the ceiling. His dad always used to joke that he’d chew through his lip ‘one of these days’. He’d laugh but Evan knew the habit had annoyed him. “He...hurt people.”
“Lots of people hurt people, it's what humans do.”

“Yeah, I guess.” Evan took the panic alarm Dr Sherman had given him out of his pocket. He lifted it out in front of him, held gently between his thumb and forefinger.

*If* he loses control, Dr Sherman had said. *If and only if.*

When, Evan corrected silently. *When* he loses control.

---

Jared knocked on the door at exactly eleven o'clock.

“Hey, Acorn,” he grinned as Evan opened the door, looking a little more than tempted to slam it shut again in his face.

“I...I told you not to call me that,” he said, trying to make his voice sound stern and not soppy.

“I know, force of habit,” Jared said as he stepped inside. “So this is Murphy’s room.”

“A-and mine.” Evan scratched at his flowers. “And how can it be habit? I met you yesterday!”

Jared waved his hand dismissively, walking over to one of the bedside drawers.

Evan couldn't help but sigh. “P-please don't go through his stuff.”

“Why not? I wanna see what creepy shit he has tucked away in there.”

“Because it's not yours and he'll get angry.”

“What he doesn't know won't hurt him.” With that Jared tugged open the drawer, frowning at the content.

“What did you expect was going to be in there?” Evan asked as the other boy started fumbling through Connor’s notebook.

“I dunno. Drugs, knives, voodoo dolls, *something.*” Jared sounded genuinely disappointed, shoving the book back in its place. “Which one’s his closet?” He asked, gesturing to the two doors either side of their bathroom.

“J-Jared.”

“I'm curious!”

Evan huffed, his fingers itching to fiddle with something. “Just...show me around. Please.”

Jared gave a long, melodramatic sigh. “Fine.” He reached out his hand. “Gimme your timetable.”

“My...uh...”

Another sigh. “You haven't looked at it, have you?”

“I've been busy!” Evan collected his plastic slip of papers from his bedside drawer and handed it to Jared. The other boy flicked through it until he found one containing a small grid.

“Here.” He handed it over to Evan. “So, everyday has three two-hour periods; you have maths and English everyday, Power Control two times a week and therapy with...who's your GP?”
“My GP?” Evan asked.

“The doctor who’s looking after you.”

“O-oh. Dr Sherman.”

“Thought so, he's mine too. Anyway, you have therapy with him twice a week and then you have group therapy once a week.”

“G-group therapy?” Evan asked quietly. The thought of doing anything in a group made him feel sick, let alone therapy.

“Yeah, we all sit in a circle and talk about our feelings…” Jared wrinkled his nose. “It's about as shitty as it sounds.”

Evan pulled a face, checking his timetable. He had group therapy later that day, the thought made his stomach twist. “A-are you gonna…?”

“Show you around? Yeah, Sherman’ll kill me if I don't.” Jared gestured for Evan to follow him, heading towards the door. “Be prepared to take notes, you will be tested at the end.”

---

The Ward was too big, Evan decided. Far. Too. Big. The building itself had been made to house thousands but now accommodated for some two hundred Patients and roughly the same amount in staff. As a result much of what Jared showed Evan consisted of empty hallways.

“You'll have maths and stuff on the sixth floor with the rest of us.” He told him as they waited for the elevator to make its slow ascent.

“The one they got evacuated.”

“Yep!”

Evan fidgeted with his shirt, a thorny vine wrapping tightly round his wrist.

“That looks painful,” Jared said, prodding the vine with his finger.

Evan pulled his arm away, cradling it to his chest. “I can deal with it.”

“…can't you just, like, cut them off?” Jared asked as the thorns dug into his skin.

“That would probably hurt more.”

Jared’s lip twisted. “Yikes.”

“It's not t-too bad.” Evan tried to keep the pain from his voice. His wrist was on fire, tens of sharp thorns pricking at his skin. He just had to tough it out, wait until he calmed down enough for the vine to wilt. Then the sage would do its job and he’d be fine. He just had to grin and bare it for now.

The elevator doors creaked open and he and Jared stepped out onto the sixth floor. It was much cleaner than Evan had been expecting. Instead of a hall ripped apart in the aftermath of Connor’s outburst of power he found an exact copy of the other halls Jared had showed him; White walls, cream doors, a handful of Patients milling about in groups.

“What?” Jared asked once he saw the confusion on Evan’s face.
“I thought…Connor…”

“Destroyed the place? Nah. He hurt the people around him pretty bad and broke a bunch of desks but he didn't get out the classroom. I can show you if you want?”

“Uh…” Christmas Roses began the place of the vine, soothing the thorns’ harsh bite. “Maybe later.” Jared’s grin widened and he started off down the hall. He gestured to Evan’s forearm with a free hand as he did. “See! You are an acorn!”

Evan looked down and saw that a collection of Sycamore leaves had sprouted on his arm. Silently, he cursed his curiosity.

“So they mean stuff?” Jared asked him, not bothering to keep his voice down. “The flowers, I mean.”

Evan nodded. “Well, all plants have some kind of symbolic meaning, usually linked to an emotion. It's really fascinating actually.”

“Mm-hm.” Jared walked backwards so he could face Evan, peering at the flowers. “So, what do those mean?” He asked, pointing at the Christmas Roses with his finger.

“U-uh.” Part of Evan wanted to lie, to say they meant something like confidence or happiness or something that wasn’t weird. “Anxiety.”

Jared nodded. “You're anxious a lot, aren't you?”

Evan nodded.

“And the sycamores?”

“Curiosity.”

Jared raised an eyebrow.

“Stop it.”

“Stop what?”

“That look.”

Jared grinned. “What look?”

Evan scowled. “Like you've just thought something dirty.”

The other boy placed a hand to his chest in mock offence. “I would never!”

Now it was Evan’s turn to raise an eyebrow.

“I was just thinking about how you could be lying and that they could actually mean—”

“They don't,” Evan said quickly. “Whatever you think they mean, they don't.”

“So they don't mean anxiety and curiosity?” Jared smirked.

Evan opened his mouth, closed it again and let out a long, hissing sigh. “It doesn't matter.”
Jared chuckled as Mistletoe started to hang around Evan’s arm. “Aw, if you want to kiss me all you had to do was—”

“It means to get over difficulties, Jared! Let’s just go.” Evan pushed past him, his hands tugging nervously at the hem of his shirt. All Jared could do was laugh.

---

The room very end of the hall could have been a waiting room at some point in its life.

Unlike the classrooms Jared had showed Evan, this room was fairly large and spaced out. The nearly every inch of space was taken up by a shelf, creating a cramped maze of books. Had it not been for the clinical whiteness of the walls or the stark metal of the shelves it could have almost been called homely.

“Do you like reading?” Jared asked Evan as he gazed around at the fairly expansive collection.

“N-not really,” he admitted, keeping his voice low so as not to disturb the handful of Patients milling about between the shelves.

Jared patted his back. “Well, learn to like it cause we don't have wifi.” With that he walked off into the room.

“Wait, what?” Evan frowned and hurried after him.

“We don't have access wifi. Or computers. Or TVs unless it's Saturday. It sucks.” Jared pointed to one end of the room, “that’s non-fiction,” he pointed to the other “that’s fiction. Take your pick.”

Evan hesitated. “Why can't we use computers?”

That made Jared groan and he pulled off his gloves. “One,” he raised a finger. “So we don't spill any secrets online. Two,” He raised another finger. “So we don't fight over who gets to use them. Three!” Instead of raising a third finger Jared ran an arch of lightning up between the first two. “Some of us can't use electronics.”

“Oh...uh...sorry?”

“No biggie.” Jared slipped off his sandals. “So, which section?”

“They’re all in fiction.”

“Nerd. Okay, follow me.”

The non-fiction section was, all in all, extremely small and mostly filled with medical textbooks from the early seventies. Evan figured they’d probably just filled it with old books laying around from when The Ward was just a regular hospital. He glanced around the shelves in search of something worth reading and promptly tripped over something on the ground.

“O-ow,” he turned and saw that the thing he’d tripped over was in fact a girl. She sat with her back against the shelves, her eyes closed, head lulled. Evan felt his eyes widen, scrambling to his feet. The girl didn't look asleep, she looked empty, dead. “I-is she okay?” She asked, kneeling down beside the girl. He gave her shoulder a quick shake. “Hello?” The girl didn't move.

“She's probably left the building,” Jared said casually.”

“She's...what?” Evan knitted his brow. “I-I think she's unconscious. Shouldn't we get a nurse o-or
“She’s fine.” Jared bent down and picked up a red spiral notebook that the girl had set beside her. He flicked through the pages, his head tilted. “What’s the time?”

“The…time?”

“Yeah.”

Evan stared dumbly for a moment, his forearm itching as Sainfoin bloomed there. “She could be hurt a-and you’re asking what the time it I-is—”

Before he could finish his question the girl’s eyes snapped open and she lurched forward, gasping. Evan jumped back with a shriek, all the plants on his arm apart from the Christmas Roses wilting and falling from his arm with the force.

“Hi, Alana,” Jared said, flipping through another page. “How was Stonewall?”

Alana looked up at him, clambering to her feet. “It was exciting, a little scary.” She said, taking the book from him. She slipped a pen from her pocket, starting to scribble down notes furiously on the page.

Evan blinked dumbly. “…what just happened?! Why are you talking about Stonewall?”

“Oh, hello!” The girl smiled and tucked her notebook under her arm, holding out a hand. “I’m Alana Beck, you must be Evan Hansen. I’ve heard a lot about you.”

“Y-you have?” Evan paused and wiped his hands on his jeans before shaking hers.

“We don’t get many new patients, news spreads.”

“A-ah. Uh…why were you…?”

“Passed out? Oh. I’m a mental time traveller.”

“A wha—”

“I’m able to mentally project myself into the past. I pass out when I do it though. I’m sorry that I scared you.”

“It’s...okay. I guess.” Evan withdrew his hand, picking at his shirt.

Alana offered him a wide and reassuring smile. “I know it can be worrying to people who haven’t seen it before.”

“Yeah. No I get it. Uh. So, you were in at Stonewall?”

“Yes. It was fascinating.”

“I bet.” Evan rubbed the back of his neck. “I make flowers.”

“I can see that.”

“Your power’s cooler than mine.”

“Thank you!”
She didn't even deny it. Evan kept smiling but felt a thorn dig into the skin between his thumb and forefinger. Of course she didn't deny it. Flowers are stupid and useless. Time travel is amazing.

“Don't you think?”

Evan blinked and realised Alana had been talked to him. “Uh. Yeah.”

“I think he’s off with the fairies,” Jared said, raising an eyebrow and patting Evan’s back with a gloved hand. “Wanna grab a book or get on with the tour?”

Evan looked down at his feet. “U-uh...tour, please. I don't read much.”

“Oh,” Alana looked to Jared. “He should really change that.”

“Yeah, I know. We don't have wifi, Jared said.” Evan scuffed feet against the floor. “It was nice to meet you.”

“Same to you,” Alana beamed back. Her voice was upbeat but somehow very clinical at the same time, almost as though she was reading her speech from a textbook. She sat back down by the shelf, closed her eyes and promptly went limp, leaving Evan and Jared to stare at her a moment.

“T-this place is...weird,” Evan said after a while.

Jared clapped his hands to his cheeks. “A place full of mutant freaks is weird? No way!” He rolled his eyes. “Come on Acorn, on with the tour.”

---

Evan was slightly confused when Jared stopped in the middle of the hallway, rattling the doorknob of one of the classroom.

“What are you doing?” He asked, brows knitted.

“You wanted to see what Connor did, right?” Jared asked, pushing his shoulder against the door.

“Oh. Yeah, I’d almost forgotten about that.”

“What would you do without me to remind you?” Jared grinned and pushed his weight against the door. “Bit of help?”

“I-is it locked?” Evan asked.

“Nah. Just stuck.”

Evan frowned and went over to the door, leaning his shoulder against it.

“On three,” Jared said. “One, two, three!”

The two pushed hard against the door and eventually it gave. It swung open, catching Evan off guard and sending him tumbling. He landed on his hands and knees, his palms itching as sage grew over possible future bruises.

“You okay?” Jared asked. He'd managed to catch himself, avoiding the fall.

“F-fine,” Evan got up gingerly to make sure he didn't accidentally injure the plants on his palms and knees. He stared at his hands a moment before finally looking up and searching the room.
His heart sank like a stone in his chest. Desks had been thrown across the room, their metal legs bent and dented. One of the table tops had been splintered clean in two, a large crack running down the centre. The wall at the back of the classroom was littered with craterous holes and dents the size of Evan’s head and what looked to have once been a blackboard had a spidered cracked in the centre of it, like something had been thrown against it.

It looked as though someone had set off a bomb in the centre of the room.

“God,” Evan mumbled under his breath.

“Yeah.” Jared actually had a grin on his face. “Luckily no one was seriously hurt...well, James, this telekinetic kid, Connor broke his arm, but that was the worst of it.”

Evan’s arm stung. “God,” he said again. “D-does this happen a lot?”

“Nah,” Jared shook his head. “He gets set off a lot but not normally in the middle of class. Usually the only person who ends up getting hurt is himself.”

Evan stared at the broken blackboard and made a mental note to never make Connor angry.

Chapter End Notes

So in case you didn’t see in the last chapter @miracu-plot on tumblr drew some freaking amazing art of Evan and Connor. Like. Literally. I can't stop looking at it it's amazing. Go send them love because holy shit their art is awesome.
Chapter 6

Chapter Notes

Sorry this one too a bit longer than usual, blame life.
Thanks to my buddy Levi for helping me kick this chapter into shape.

TW: Anxiety Attacks, Blood, Violence, Reference to Abuse, Reference to Suicide

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Jared was laughing at Evan. Again.

“I-It’s really not that funny,” Evan mumbled, looking down at his tomato soup. It seemed that the kitchen’s best idea of how to make him eat fruit and veg was to make it unrecognisable as such.

“No,” Jared giggled, a wide grin stretched across his lips. “It's hilarious. Also sad, really, really sad.”

Evan wasn't sure exactly what he'd expected Jared Kleinman’s reaction to his ‘peculiar way of eating’ to be, but uncontrollable laughter wasn't one of them.

“They're plants!” He laughed, pointing a finger to Evan’s bowl. “Who gives a shit about plants?”

Will raised an eyebrow and Evan could tell by the way he tilted his head that he was rolling his eyes behind his glasses. “Wiccians, hippies, Jainists,” he listed off, taking a large bite of his sandwich. “A lot of people.”

“J-Jan-what?” Evan asked, his brow furrowed.

“Jainists,” Will repeated. “It’s a religion where they don't eat root vegetables because ripping them out the earth is too violent and goes against their mantra of peace and respect for all living things. If I remember correctly some of them don't even eat fruits unless they fall off the branch on their own.”

Jared narrowed his eyes. “So what, they just eat meat? That’s stupid.”

“Ah, no.” He took another bite, talking with his mouthful. “They’re vegetarian.”

“So they can't eat meat or plants? So what do they eat? Rocks? Or would the fact they’re breaking them up be too violent for them?”

“I don't know, Jared. I read about it in a book ages ago.”

“Sounds stupid and complicated to me,” he continued matter of factly.

“Remind me why you don't eat pork again?” Will asked Jared, a smug smile on his lips.

“Because God, and that’s not stupid or complicated.”

“Your diet is ridiculously complicated!”

Evan smiled and stirred his soup around his bowl, looking at his red-tinged reflection. It actually smelled pretty good, but that didn't exactly help. His stomach growled and he sighed.
“You need to eat something,” Will said, halting his and Jared’s argument (if one could have even called it that).

“Yeah,” Jared added. “You're on the dumb Meal Chit thing, right? They won't let you leave if you don't finish it.” He leaned forward, elbows resting on the tabletop. “Once this girl literally thought the staff would just get annoyed and let her go if she waited long enough and she ended up staying here from lunch until dinner. It was kind of amazing…who was her GP again?”

Will cocked his head. “Are you talking about the shapeshifter or the one with forcefields?”

“Forcefields.”

“Dr Cowan.”

“Right, Dr Cowan just sat down with her for like, four hours and ended up doing that aeroplane thing with the spoon like she was a five-year-old. Like I said, it was kind of amazing.”

Evan’s smile vanished, he wouldn’t put it past Dr Sherman to try something like that. He looked down at his food again, the portion was a little big for him, plants or no. It wasn’t exactly like he wasn’t used to skipping meals, his dad would send him to bed without dinner at all if said he didn’t like something, even if he’d only mentioned it offhandedly. Usually, his mom would end up waiting until his dad had fallen asleep or became too engrossed in his TV shows to notice her sneaking upstairs, usually with a sandwich or chocolate bar in hand. He wondered what his dad would do now? He’d probably just be ashamed that his son was acting like such a sissy.

Slowly, Evan lifted the spoon to his mouth and took a small sip.

Will offered him an encouraging nod. “There, was that so bad?”

“You sound like Dr Sherman,” Evan mumbled back. He stood the spoon up in his bowl, glaring at the soup. Maybe, he decided, he could just try to pretend it was something else. That it was fake or flavoured like that weird rehydrated mash potato thing he’d been served at school that was definitely not made out of anything remotely close to potatoes. With this in mind he worked his way slowly through the bowl, in truth, it didn't make it any easier, his stomach still lurched and twisted with every spoonful.

Jared got bored and left the table fairly quickly, muttering something about having better shit to do than wait for some idiot to finish his food. Will stayed put, offering encouraging smiles whenever it looked as though Evan was going to stop eating. Eventually, though, he got up as well.

“I got to go to class, sorry,” he said.

“O-oh. Uh. Have fun?”

Will smiled, giving a quick thumbs-up. “Will do. Good luck with the food.”

By the time Evan ended up finishing his soup the cafeteria was nearly completely empty. He took his bowl to the front of the room, watching for a moment as the cafeteria worker peered at it as though the soup would reappear in the blink of an eye.

“Okay, off you go then,” they said with a small shake of their head. “You’ve still got a few minutes before class starts.”

Evan gave a small nod before hurrying out into the hall, trying to remember what room Group Therapy was meant to be held in. Was it 512 or 514? He couldn’t remember. It was definitely 5-1-
something. He made a b-line for the elevator, slipping in amongst a small group of other Patients.

He couldn’t deal with how slow the elevators were. Too slow, too small, too loud and far too cramped. Out the corner of his eye, Evan could see one of them staring at his arm. He caught her gaze and the two quickly looked away from one another. He rubbed the flowers with the palm of his hand. Tomorrow I’m wearing long sleeves, he thought to himself.

The moment the doors opened on the fifth floor Evan bolted out, wincing at how tense his movements were. Most of the classroom doors on this floor were open and empty, with one or two still containing the cast-iron bed frames of their 1970s-hospital-roots.

Jared had said therapy was on the fifth floor. Or was it on the third? Fourth?
Evan winced as a small thorn dug into his arm, and leaned against the hallway wall to clear his mind. He needed to think, to remember what his timetable had said. He should have brought it with him, he was such an idiot. He scratched at his arm, the thorn disintegrating away, only to be replaced with a handful of Christmas Roses.

Check the door. He told himself. Find out where you are. He turned his head, 505.

So it’s properly down the hall. Go check.

Evan swallowed hard and forced himself to keep walking, his eyes scanning desperately for any sign of another person. People meant he was in the right place. He half expected to find another Patient milling around, or perhaps Dr Sherman or another one of the scrubs, but instead, he found music. Music means people, he smiled to himself, a small gather of reeds appearing in the crook of his arm.
It was a guitar, that much he could figure out on his own, though he didn’t recognise the song itself. It sounded like something that would be played in the background of a bar scene in one of his dad’s old crime movies; loose and flowing. Evan followed the music further down the hall, hearing it grow louder and louder with each step until he came to its source, another open door.

A girl sat there facing him, her eyes closed as she strummed at the guitar resting on her lap, a dreamy smile on her lips. Surrounding her, floating and twisting in the air, were small spheres of pure light; blue, green and white all shifting and turning in time with her music.

Evan stood there in the doorway, listening and watching the balls of light float around the room. Buckbean flowers sprouted in small clusters up his arm, his shoulders loosening as the girl quickened her movements before bringing the piece to its end with one final strum.

Evan clapped, he couldn’t think of anything else he could do. He wasn’t sure what he expected the girl’s reaction to be, but yelping sure as hell wasn’t it. Her eyes snapped open and her fingers flinched as she strummed a single sour note. Instantly, the balls of light shot forward, stretching into ribbons. One of them hit Evan’s neck, lifting him off his feet and slamming him against the hallway wall. His skin burned where the light touch it, his jaw clenching with the pain.

“Oh, shit!” the girl quickly strummed the guitar again and the lights disappeared, letting Evan drop to the ground, landing hard on his butt.
“Oh-ow,” he mumbled as the girl ran forward to help him up.

“I’m so sorry,” she said quickly as she pulled him to his feet. “You made me jump.”

It’s fine. I mean, I’m fine. Yeah, I’m fine,” Evan mumbled. He could already feel sage healing over any possible injuries.

“Oh.” The girl’s eyes widened slightly and she pointed to his neck. “Evan Hansen, right?”
He scratched at the sage on his throat and nodded. “Y-yeah. Flowers, right?”

“Yeah.”

“Word...uh, word spreads quickly around here, huh?”

“Yeah, it does.” The girl smiled and held out her hand for Evan to shake. “I’m Zoe.”

He wiped his hands on his khakis before taking hers. “E-Evan...you already know that.”

“Yeah,” she laughed. “What are you doing up here anyway?”

“O-oh.” Evan tilted his head, looking down. “I was looking for, uh, group therapy? I mean. I got lost and...your...I heard your music and...uh...it’s really good. Jazz, right?”

“Yeah. Thanks,” Zoe smiled. “And you’re part of Sherman’s group, right?”

“U-Uh, yeah.” He nodded. “H-How’d you…”

“Guess? His therapy thing’s down the hall, I’m part of it too.” She walked back into the room to put her guitar back in its case.

“Oh, that’s cool.” Evan felt the sage on his neck start to wilt away. “Uh, could you show me where it is? I’m kind of...uh...hopelessly lost.”

“Sure.” Zoe slung her guitar case over her shoulder, stepping back out into the hallway. “It’s just down here.” She turned and started walking down the hall, Evan trailing a few paces behind her, picking at the hem of his shirt. He didn’t quite know what else to say and so he kept his eyes on his shoes, scratching absentmindedly at the flowers on his arm.

“U-uh. The lights are pretty cool,” he mumbled.

“Thanks, sorry about zapping you with them.”

Evan smiled at his shoes. “I’m fine, I’m a healer anyway so. Yeah. All good.” He gave a thumbs-up.

“I’m still sorry.” Zoe smiled at him over her shoulder.

“And I-I’m still fine. I promise.” Evan curled his shirt between his fingers. “S-so, they’re linked to your music?”

She nodded. “Yeah.” She gave a small whistle and another ball of light flashed into existence beside her. She whistled a short song and the light twisted about in the air, circling around Evan before disappearing in a flash. “Tada.”

Evan grinned from ear to ear, looking up. “Wow, that’s really cool.”

“You’ve said.” Zoe fiddled with a hair tie on her wrist. “It’s alright, I guess. Kind of annoying when they just...” she waved her hands vaguely. “Flip out.”

“F-flip out?”

“Like with you.” She turned her head so she could actually look where she was going.

“So you didn’t want them to attack me?” he asked.
“No, I didn’t. It was fight or flight if that makes sense.”

“Kind of?” Evan scuffled his feet and the conversation fizzled out as quickly as it had started. He heard voices coming from the end of the hall and Zoe pushed open the door to room 513.

“Just in time.” Dr Sherman smiled at the two as they walked into the room. He, Jared and Alana were sat in a circle at the centre of the floor. “I was scared you’d gotten lost, Evan.”

“He did,” Zoe grinned, propping her guitar case against the wall before sitting down next to Alana.

“Mm,” Sherman frowned and shot Jared a slightly sour look. “Someone was meant to help him find his way up here.”

Jared rolled his eyes. “Not my fault he takes forever to eat.”

“S-sorry,” Evan murmured, sitting down next to Jared.

Sherman sighed. “It’s not your fault either, son. You don’t have to apologise.”

“R-right. Sorry.” Evan looked at the floor again, turning his shirt between his fingers.

“I just said you didn’t have to apologise.” Sherman looked to the closed door again, taking a phone out of his pocket. Unlike Peet’s his was a chunky, old Nokia. The kind of phone with gelled buttons that tended to stick together. He typed out a quick message before slipping it back into the pocket of his lab coat. “Right, let’s get started shall we?”

Evan noticed Zoe raising an eyebrow at that but kept his own mouth shut, twisting and turning the hem of his shirt. Keep calm he reminded himself. Just keep calm.

“Since we’ve got a new member—” Sherman continued, almost as though he were reciting the words line-by-line from the pages of a textbook. “—we’re going to introduce ourselves and why we’re here.”

Jared, Alana and Zoe all groaned in unison.

“S-sorry,” Evan murmured.

“Not your fault, Son,” Dr Sherman said again. “Alana, do you want to start?”

She hummed and nodded somewhat reluctantly. “My name’s Alana Beck,” she said as though she’d done it a million times before. “I’m a mental time traveller and I’m here because I suffer from mild panic attacks.”

“Thank you.” Dr Sherman looked to Zoe expectantly. She rolled her eyes, shifting uncomfortably in her seat.

“My name’s Zoe, I’m Symphokintic and I’m here because I…” she trailed off, her lips twisting for a moment. “I’m here because my brother is a selfish asshole.”

Dr Sherman gave a heavy sigh. “Zoe—“

“What? It’s the truth isn’t it?” She asked with a frown. “He’s the reason I’m here.”

Evan tried to keep his face as neutral as possible, though he privately found himself wondering what she’d meant by that. Her trauma? Evan wondered. Maybe her brother had done something to her. Evan knew that it wasn’t uncommon for Patients to develop powers as a result of another’s actions.
He’d done a report on the most common triggers for Patient activation in eighth grade. Abuse had been number three on the list. Death of a family member had been number two and physical injury was number one. *What did he do? Maybe he’d died? Did that count as selfish?*

“Evan.” Dr Sherman’s voice brought him back to reality. “Do you want to introduce yourself?”

“Huh? Uh. Y-yeah.” Evan wiped his hands on his khakis before slowly scratching at the sycamore leaves that had sprouted on his wrist. “I’m Evan Hansen and. Uh. I’m, uh, C-Chlorokinetic, which sounds really weird but I just do stuff with plants so... I’m here cause. Uh, well. Heh.” Why was he here? Because he fell out of a tree? Alana had said she was here because she got panic attacks but Zoe had mentioned her trauma. Which one sounded less sad? ‘I’m here cause I’m a useless nervous wreck’ or ‘I’m here cause I fell out of a tree’?

Evan cleared his throat. "I-I’m here cause I’m, uh, kind of nervous—"

“Kind of?” Jared scoffed. He raised his hands defensively as Sherman shot him a withering look.

“W-well, not kind of. I’m really nervous,” Evan stuttered. “And uh. I do this thing where I...get caught up in my thoughts, Lu—my friend calls it ‘getting stuck’, uh.” He paused for a second to look back down at his shoes. “Yeah. That’s it. Sorry.”

Sherman offered him a small smile. “Thanks for sharing, son.”

“Mm,” Evan murmured, rubbing his arm.

“Jared?” Sherman turned to the last person in the circle. “Your turn.”

Jared grinned, leaning back in his chair. “My name’s Jared,” he said calmly, “and I don’t know why I’m here. I’m fine.”

Another sigh escaped Sherman’s mouth. “Jared, therapy doesn’t work if you don’t take part.”

Jared rolled his eyes. “I don’t need it. There is literally nothing wrong with—"

He was cut off by the door opening yet again. Connor Murphy stumbled into the room, Jacobi at his heels. The scrub was holding onto the back of Connor’s collar, pushing him forward.

“Connor,” Sherman’s smile widened warmly. “How nice of you to join us.”

Connor didn’t say anything, just plonked himself down in the chair between Evan and Zoe. He held his head in his hands, his foot tapping against the ground.

Jacobi walked over to Dr Sherman, muttering under his breath. “He’s almost two-eyed, do you want me to stick around?”

“I can fucking hear you,” Connor snapped, not looking up. Evan could see that he was shaking, his fingers gripping tightly at his scalp.

“My apologies,” Jacobi mumbled with a roll of his eyes. He grabbed one of the spare chairs from the circle and dragged it over by the door, all while under Connor’s watchful glare.

Once Jacobi had settled himself down Dr Sherman spoke up again. “We were just doing introductions. You’re the only one out of us left I’m afraid.”

Connor said nothing, his jaw clenching. Evan couldn’t help but notice that his eyes almost seemed reversed now. What had once been two predominantly blue eyes with a slice of brown to the left was
now two predominantly brown eyes with a slice of blue to the right. Evan leaned forward in his chair, trying to get a better look.

“Connor, can you introduce yourself please?” Dr Sherman continued.

“Why?” Connor snapped. “Hansen knows who I am. He fucking lives with me.”

“That’s not what I meant and you know it.”

“Well, it doesn’t matter. He already knows who I am and he knows why I’m here so there’s no point.” Connor’s voice was loud and sharp, each word spitting out like a gunshot.

Dr Sherman’s lip curled into a heavy frown. “O-kay,” he said slowly. The doctor had a wince to his eyes. His posture, once straight, was now hunched over, his head in his hand, fingers digging into his scalp in a near mirror image of Connor. “If you’re feeling angry we can try those breathing exercises I told you about—“

“They don’t fucking work. How many times do I have to tell you?!” Connor said through gritted teeth. His fingernails dug into his skin, shoulders raising.

Evan’s arm itched as Monkshood sprouted all up his arm, thick thorns digging into his skin. He hissed in pain, catching Zoe staring out the corner of his eye.

“Perhaps if you actually tried them,” Dr Sherman suggested calmly “they would work.”

Evan’s wasn’t sure exactly what happened after that. One moment Connor was sat, practically doubled-over in his chair and the next he was standing, his hand gripped onto the lapels of Dr Sherman’s lab coat. He hit out of his chair with a fierce tug, teeth bared into a sharp glare. Chairs scraped loudly against the tile floor as Alana, Zoe and Jared pushed their chairs back and Jacobi got to his feet.

“It’s fine,” Sherman said quickly, raising his hands as best he could despite Connor’s hold on him. “I’m fine, he’s fine. Connor,” he almost sounded stern. “I need you to calm down. If you want you can leave and come back when you’re ready, but I need you to—woah, woah, woah!”

Connor lifted him off his feet, forcing him against the opposite wall. Dr Sherman’s glasses slipped halfway off his face, his head banging against the wall with a stomach-churning thwack. In an instant, Connor’s entire body seemed to change. His muscles tensed, skin drawing tightly across his flesh as his entire form stretched and shifted. His shoulders widened, becoming broader as his clothes drew tight against his body. His muscles bulged, limbs stretching to accommodate for his new height as his body stretched upwards, joints popping and cracking like burning wood. Connor pulled back a fist, aiming it squarely at Dr Sherman’s face—

Evan barely heard Zoe’s whistle over the roar of blood in his ears. A ribbon of blue light appeared from thin air, wrapping itself around Connor’s wrist and stopping the punch mid-swing. Connor turned his head, looking at it quizzically before another wrapped around his waist. The light-rope yanked him backwards, knocking Connor clean off his feet as Zoe uttered another short whistle. Light bound his wrists to his sides, leaving him kicking and writhing on the floor like a rabid dog.

Evan looked down and realised he was hugging his knees to his chest, a lump of fear lodged in his throat as blood trickled down his thorn-infested arm. He watched as Connor kicked his legs. He slammed the heel of his foot against the floor, a loud crack piercing the air as the tiles under him shattered from the blow, the material spidering into a dozen tiny pieces. Underneath the floor looked
dented, a small, sharp crater where Connor's heel had struck the ground.

Jacobi bolted to Sherman who sat crumpled on the floor, his back pressed against the wall. “Are you okay?” He asked, examining the doctor’s head for any sign of injury.

“Yeah, I’m fine.” Dr Sherman rubbed the back of his head with a wince. “I should be anyway. Thank you, Zoe.”

“You’re welcome,” Zoe replied as Connor let out an angered howl, struggling against his bonds. Even his teeth seemed sharper behind his peeled-back lips, canines filed to a point. His eyes were dark as sludge with not even a hint of blue to be found, his face wrinkled into a red-hot mask of rage.

Dr Sherman got to his feet slowly, still rubbing his head. “Sorry about that everyone.” He sounded calm, calmer than he should have been all things considered. The doctor reached into the breast pocket of his lab coat and took out a small square of metal, tapping the button in the centre of it twice. “I think we should call it a day for now.”

Evan didn’t move, neither did Zoe. Alana and Jared, on the other hand, ran out the room sharpish with Jared muttering a small “freak” under his breath. Connor continued to scream and howl on the floor, twisting and turning his body like a madman.

“Evan,” Dr Sherman called to him as he slid his glasses back onto his nose. “Are you okay, son?”

Evan looked up at him before looking back at Connor, watching his jerked attempts at freeing himself. Connor’s foot slammed against the floor again and another tile shattered. “No,” he said. “I’m not.”

[Art by Athansai]

Chapter End Notes

Athanasai drew Evan and Connor from a bunch of different fanfictions and I every-so-slightly died.
Evan’s parents had always sent him to bed early on Halloween, that was the rule. Instead of having dinner at six they’d have it at five and instead of going to bed at half-past seven, he’d go to bed at half-past six. He was never entirely sure why, neither was his mother. The whole thing had been his dad’s idea, something about getting Evan out of their hair so they could enjoy the holiday “like we used to when we were in high school, remember sweetheart?”

Evan hated it when his dad called his mom that. It made her eyes go all soft, her lips form a small smile as though she was looking at someone else. Not her husband, but someone kinder. Someone less strict and quick-tempered and slimy. That was what Evan had heard his grandma Hansen call him.

“He’s a slimy bastard, all those Prescotts are.”

Maybe that was why Evan was so determined to not act like one. A Prescott would have stayed in bed, but a Hansen, a Hansen would go downstairs and not listen to what some ‘slimey bastard’ said. That was how he ended up sat with his eye to the door, his head angled so he could see the movie his parents were watching on TV. The dialogue was muffled but the picture was clear enough for him to understand what was going on, something about werewolves in London.

He’d ended up watching through the crack with wide eyes as the main character’s body stretched and twisted into the shape of a wolf, the muffled dialogue changing into loud howls of pain. He’d tried to bolt back to his room, but ended up slipping on the hallway rug and slamming his face into the floor.

“You could have hurt yourself, Ev,” Heidi had scolded, pressing an ice pack against his face. “You need to be more careful.”

Connor’s transformation reminded Evan of the werewolf in that film. The way his skin had stretched, the way his teeth sharpened, the way he’d screamed and screamed and screamed.

“Evan?”

Lucky’s voice brought Evan out of his thoughts.

“Y-Yeah?” he asked, pressing his face into his pillow. He rested his fingers against his mother's letter, finding comfort in the feeling.

“You’re watering.”

Evan put a hand to his cheek, swallowing hard. “I am?” He sniffed, tasting snot on his lip.
“Are you okay?” Lucky asked from their perch on the bedroom windowsill.

“I’m fine.”

“You don’t look fine.”

The letter crinkled under Evan’s fingers. “You don’t even know what ‘fine’ is.”

“That is not true.”

“O-oh yeah? Then why do you not know what crying is? Y-you don’t know anything about humans so you can’t exactly talk.”

Lucky was quiet for a moment. “Then tell me.”

“What?”

“Tell me what is wrong.”

Evan rolled over so he had his back to the plant, his bedcovers pulled up to his chin. “Nothing’s wrong. I’m fine.”

“You are not. Tell me.”

Evan didn’t say anything, just curled up into a small ball, his knees to his chest.

Lucky gave a breathless sigh. “You never used to have trouble telling me your problems.”

“Yeah, well, that was before you could talk back. So.”

“I could talk back. You just couldn’t hear me.”

“Same thing.”

Lucky huffed again. “Was it the Connor Murphy?”

“No.”

“I distinctly remember you saying you were going to stop lying.”

Silence.

“Yeah. Okay. Fine. It was Connor.”

“I knew it.”

Evan rolled over again to face them, one eyebrow raised. How the hell did a plant manage to sound smug? “It’s not...I-it's not just...” he tried to force his words to work. “I just...I want to go home.”

“You have been here a day.”

“Y-Yeah and I don’t want to be here anymore! I want to go h-home. I want to see my mom. I want...to be normal!” Evan felt tears prick his eyes. Don’t cry, he scolded himself. Nothing's happened. Don’t cry.

“You can’t. It’s only been a day,” Lucky said again. “You’ll feel better tomorrow.”
“I-I won’t.”

“Why not?”

“Because it’s going to happen again!” Evan snapped. He twisted his blankets between his fists, shoulders raised.

“What’s going to happen again?”

“Connor!” Evan sat up, resting his quilt around his shoulders. “He’s… Jacobi called it ‘two-eye’ or something like that. He almost hurt Dr Sherman. He smashed through the floor just by kicking it. It’s going to happen again if I stay here.”

“It might not.”

“It will! It happened yesterday and it happened again today. I-I live with him, he literally sleeps next to me! What if it happens again and I’m here and he—”

“You’ll use the panic alarm thing the Dr Sherman gave you,” Lucky said plainly.

“Y-Yeah and he’ll just stop in his tracks, like ‘oh no! He pushed a button! What will I do now?’ He could kill me!”

“If he was that dangerous they wouldn’t have put you with him.”

“M-maybe they just want him to kill me, d-did you ever think about that?”

“Why the fuck are you talking to yourself?”

Evan felt a hot blush creeping up the back of his neck, turning his head to see Connor leant against the door frame. His eyes were hooded, dark circles stained underneath them. His irises seemed back to normal, one blue, one with a touch of brown.

“I-I’m not talking to myself,” he stuttered quickly.

Connor raised an eyebrow at that but said nothing. Instead, he stumbled forward, flopping down onto his bed.

Evan shrank back, pushing himself to the very edge of his mattress.

“You’re scared of me now, aren’t you?” Connor murmured, closing his eyes.

“I-I.” Evan bit his lip, his hand moving to fiddle with the buttons on his shirt. “A bit.”

Connor let out a long sigh. “At least you’re honest about it.” He was like a deflated balloon, as though his form hadn’t quite shrunk back to its normal size.

“S-sorry,” he mumbled.

Silence.

“He does not seem dangerous,” Lucky piped up again.

“You weren’t there,” Evan clamped a hand over his mouth, realising he’d spoken aloud.

“What?” Connor asked, lifting his head off his pillow to look at Evan.
“W-what?”

“You said something.”

“W-what? No, I didn’t.” Evan mumbled the last part, focusing on his shirt buttons. He could feel Connor staring at him. *I’ve made him angry. He hates me. Please don’t kill me. Please.*

Connor rolled over, facing his back to Evan. “Whatever.” He almost sounded calm, his voice thick and tired.

Now it was Evan’s turn to stare. How the hell was this the same person from therapy? How was this the same person who tried to shoot up a school? “H-Hey, Connor?” he murmured.

The other boy’s shoulders raised as he gave another long sigh. “I’m trying to sleep.”

“R-right, sorry. Uh.” Evan’s words felt like they got stuck behind his teeth, climbing back into his throat before he could even speak then. “What...what happened today?”

Connor didn’t move. “My power.”

“Yeah. I, uh, I guessed—I mean I thought that but, what is your power?”

“Hasn’t Kleinman told you yet? He seemed more than happy to tell you everything else about my life.”

Evan pulled his quilt tighter around his shoulder. “N-no. He hasn’t. I asked the nurse if s-she’d tell me but she said you’d probably want to tell me yourself so…”

“Well, I don’t.”

“Oh. Sorry.”

The room sank back into quiet, but only for a moment.

“I’m The Hulk without the green,” Connor said finally.

“The...the what?”

“The Hulk. Don’t you read comics?”

“Ah. No.” Evan shook his head. “I read this post a while ago that said they promote the stigma around Patients and, uh, glorify their trauma and that Patients found them really offensive.” He rubbed his arm. “And, my mom said a bunch of people died when she was a kid cause they were trying to get powers and be superheroes. So—“

“Hansen.”

“Y-Yeah?”

“You’re a Patient, right?”

“Yeah…”

Connor rolled over and pulled a cardboard box from under his bed, flicking through it a moment. “Are you offended?” He held out a thin book with the cover depicting a man in a lab coat, a gigantic green monster standing over him. The people surrounding the man all seemed shocked, their hands
plastered to the sides of their faces in horror, mouth’s open and screaming.

Is he a man or monster or…is he both? The caption proclaimed. The Incredible Hulk. The Strangest Man of all Time!!

Evan stared down at the book like it was a loaded gun. “I—“

“Read it.”

“I...can’t you just tell me what you mean? I don’t—“

Connor frowned, blinking for a second. When he opened his eyes again his left eye was half-brown. “It’s a fucking book. It’s not going to hurt you.”

“I-It hurt those people.”

“Those people were stupid if they thought traumatising themselves was a good idea.”

Evan’s arm itched.

Connor sighed. “When I get hurt or angry I...change. Get bigger, stronger, faster, all that bullshit.”

Evan nodded silently, continuing to scratch. “O-oh. Cool.”

“It’s not cool,” he said sharply. “It fucking sucks.”

“Right. Sorry.”

“It’s fine.” Connor tossed the comic onto Evan’s bed. “Now let me sleep.”

“Oh. Right. Uh. You get tired when you…yeah. I mean, you mentioned before.”

Connor buried his face into his pillow. “Damage my book and I kill you.”

The words sent a shiver down Evan’s spine and he looked down at the comic again. Slowly he turned the cover page, looking down at the author’s note.

Written by Stan Lee

Art by Jack Kirby

Didn’t they get sued? He wondered to himself. A bunch of people blaming their stories for deaths and injuries of friends and families pressed charges for damages or emotional distress or something like that. Evan closed the book and placed it neatly on his bedside table. He’d read it later. Probably.

“He doesn’t seem too scary,” Lucky said again. Evan said nothing in reply, just got out of bed. He wandered over to his wardrobe, searching through it until he found his hoodie and gingerly pulled it on. The sleeve looked a little lumpy where his flowers pushed against it, but hid them well enough. He cast Connor a quick glance, watching his body rise and fall with each breath. He snored softly, his body spread-eagled across his tiny cot, hair in his eyes. He almost looked peaceful.

Evan caught himself staring and shook his head. **Murderer**, he reminded himself. **He’s a murderer.**

“What did they think was going to happen?!?” Will practically screamed the words once Jared had
explained what had happened at group therapy. “He was two-eyed!”

“Almost two-eyed,” Jared corrected. “Apparently that makes it all okay.” He propped his head up in his hands, elbows resting on the cafeteria table. “Should have seen Sherman’s face, he looked like he was pissing himself.”

Evan kept his eyes on his food, a weird mix of fried rice and vegetables. He hadn't eaten a bite so far, no way of pretending this wasn't real.

“I can imagine. Jesus.” Will shook his head. “I don't get it. Why isn't he in The Basement yet?”

There was that word again, Basement.

“Because Sherman actually likes him, for some reason.” Jared leaned back in his chair. “They’re both nuts! Alana ended up passing out in the hallway, I had to carry her to the infirmary. On. My. Own. Believe me, she might not look it but that girl is heavy.”

Evan looked up at that. “Alana fainted? When?”

“A few minutes after we left, just passed right out while we were waiting for the elevator. Scared the shit out of me.” Jared gave a melodramatic shudder.

“It happens when she panics,” Will clarified. “Activates her power.”

“Yeah, apparently she ended up at Disneyland during the sixties,” Jared pouted, rocking his chair back. “Wish my power sent me to Disneyland.”

Evan started burying his peas with rice, making a white mountain in the centre of his plate. “Me too.”

“Hey, at least your powers don't blow stuff up.” He waved a hand vaguely in Evan and Will’s direction. “You two’ve got it easy.”

Evan raised an eyebrow. “A-at least you don't get thorns,” he pointed out.

“Neither would you if you were all anxious all the time. I bet you'd be all sunflowers and honeysuckle if you learned to take a chill pill.”

“That's not how it works. B-besides, s-sunflowers and honeysuckle don't mean calm. I mean, they’re love and admiration—”

“If you have a crush on me, Evan, you can just say. First mistletoe now this.”

Evan wanted to scream, but instead, he went back to building Mount Everest in the centre of his plate. Alana was kind of lucky in a way, he'd trade flowers for time travel any day. Granted the amount of time he spent panicking would probably mean he’d end up spending more time in the past than the present.

“It’s a good thing she didn’t faint in the room,” Will said with a small shake of his head. “I wouldn’t put it past Connor to lash out at someone who’s unconscious.”

“To be fair,” Jared pointed out, “according to Dr Sherman he doesn’t actually have control of himself when he gets angry.”

“That makes it worse!” Will scowled, pressing a hand to his face. “That’s like letting a bull loose in a china shop and expecting nothing to break. He's going to kill someone one day, I swear.”
“No,” Jared jabbed a finger at him. “It’s like letting a bull loose in a bull shop. We all have powers too, remember? And Zoe sorted him out, the only person who got hurt was him.”

Evan frowned. “He got hurt?” He hadn’t noticed any injuries when Connor had returned to their room. He just looked a little tired.

“Yeah,” Jared nodded. “Burns all around his wrists cause of the light show. Alana heard the nurses in the infirmary talking about it when she woke up.”

Evan winced, rubbing his throat. “Sounds painful.”

“Yeah, probably was. Bet the pain just ended up making him worse.” Jared sighed and leaned his chair back onto two legs. “How do you deal with him, Ev?”

“I-I don’t,” he mumbled. “I mean. I’ve only really met him once or twice...he’s kind of, uh, he’s kind of a loner I guess.”

“Understatement of the fucking century—wha!” Jared’s chair almost slipped out from under him causing him to grab onto the table for dear life. His hair stood on end, small sparks of surprise shooting from his skin.

“Careful!” Will scolded before turning his attention back to Evan. “But yeah, he doesn’t really come out of his room much. Hell, he barely comes to class most days unless security drags him there.”

“Oh,” Evan frowned. “Do you know why?”

Jared piped up. “Because he’s a freak,” he said at the same time Will stated simply: “because he’s smart enough to know better.”

“...huh?”

Will raised a hand to quiet Jared before he could speak. “I think he knows he’s dangerous, or that people are scared of him at least. So he keeps away. Like I said, smart enough to know better.”

Evan looked back and forth between the two a moment. “Are you scared of him?” he asked.

“Nah,” Jared grinned. "Don't get me wrong, he's a fucking nutcase but we could probably take him, huh Willy?" His skin cracked with electricity as he spoke.

Will offered a small smile but said nothing, his eyes flicking down to his food.

—

Evan had barely touched his food when Will and Jared left. All of the tables were empty and cleared leaving him alone in the caf. Well, almost alone.

“Not eating this time, son?” Sherman pulled out the chair across from him.

“Not hungry,” he mumbled back, prodding at the mound of rice on his plate. “I had a big lunch.”

“You and I both know that isn’t true, Evan,” Sherman sighed, a slight impatience to his voice. “I understand that it’s hard—“

“I know you do,” Evan mumbled. “That’s the point. You know everything about me.”

That seemed to take Dr Sherman aback. “Well, I don’t know everything about you, I’m no mind
reader. I just...pick up stuff.”

Evan grunted in reply and turned his fork over in his hand.

“You have to eat it.”

“I can’t.”

“You can and you have to.”

Evan’s shoulders slumped and he picked the smallest mouthful he could and pressed it into his mouth, feeling his throat try to close around it. He coughed, but managed to swallow it.

“Was that so bad?”

“You sound like Will.”

“Good to know you have friends who care about you.” Sherman offered a small smile. “Now eat up, it’s getting late.”

“Late?”

Sherman showed him his watch, a chunky and cheap thing made from plastic. It was almost quarter past eight, Evan had been there longer than he’d expected.

“I-I have to go,” he said quickly as he got to his feet.

“You haven’t finished yet.” Sherman pointed to Evan’s still full plate.

“I promised my mom I’d call her,” he tried to explain. “I said I’d phone at eight, she’s probably worried about me.”

“You can’t leave until you finish, Evan, that’s the rules.”

Evan felt flowers bloom under his sleeve, no thorns yet at least. “I’ll come back after I call her.”

“That’s really not how this works, son.”

“B-but I can’t eat it, I keep tryingtotellyou!” Evan’s voice raised, the words jumbling together into a mess of sound. “Please, just let me go call her. I’ll be right back I promise.”

Sherman seemed to hesitate for a moment, his fingers moving to turn the hem of his shirt. He shook his head. “It’s the rules, you can't leave until your plate is clean.”

Evan furrowed his brow. “I can’t.”

“You can.”

The two fixed eyes for a moment, their stubborn expressions mirrored. Eventually, Sherman reached into the pocket of his lab coat and placed his mobile between them.

“You can use it if, and only if you eat at least seven mouthfuls.”

Evan’s lips drew into a straight line. He knew his mom only had a half-an-hour break and if it was already a quarter past…

He picked up a very small amount of rice and shovelled it into his mouth. “One,” he said once he’d
swallowed it.

“Proper mouthfuls, Evan.”

Evan shot him a sour look and wordlessly picked up a larger forkful.

“One,” Sherman smiled as Evan swallowed the rice. “Six more to go.”

Evan slumped his shoulders and picked up another mouthful. He didn’t eat, just stared at it a moment. Rice was grains and grains were seeds. Seeds couldn’t talk, he knew that. They were unborn—not even that. They were the possibility for a plant. He wasn’t eating living, breathing beings. He was eating what could have been.

And that didn’t help.

He kept his eyes fixed on Sherman’s phone as he pressed the food into his mouth. Two mouthfuls. He had to if he wanted to talk to his mom. Three mouthfuls. She’d worry about him otherwise. Four mouthfuls. She didn’t deserve to worry. Five mouthfuls. This was all his fault. Six mouthfuls. He was so selfish. Seven mouthfuls.

Evan set down his fork and held out his hand expectantly. Silently Sherman smiled and handed him the phone.

“Well done, son.”

Evan said nothing, just dialled in the number and stuck the phone to his ear. The slow buzzing as the number dialled made his mouth dry. She’d gone back to work. She’d turned off her phone. She thought something had happened.

“Well?”

Evan let out a breath. “Hey, mom—“

“I can’t come to the phone right—“

Evan hung up and dialled the number again. The phone rang twice before being picked up.

“Hello? Sorry, I’d stepped away from my phone for a few minutes. Who is this? I didn’t recognise your number.”

“H-hi, mom. It’s, uh. It’s me. I’m using one of the doctor’s phones.”

“Oh, hi honey! Sorry for not picking up quicker. Charlotte asked me to help her out with one of the patients.”

“On your break?”

“We’re a bit understaffed today. Amir and Jenny are both off with the flu and Michael’s wife went into labour.”

“I thought she wasn’t due for another two weeks?”

“Tell that to the baby,” Heidi laughed.

Evan laughed too, though he was painfully aware that Sherman was watching him. Would The Ward record his calls as well? He was a Patient too after all even if he was working for them.
“How was your day, Ev?” Heidi’s voice brought him out of his thoughts.

“O-oh. Uh. Good. I h-had group therapy today.”

“What about?”

“Yeah. To. Uh. Make sure my trauma doesn’t come back to bite me.” He tried to laugh again. “It was really helpful, actually.”

Sherman raised an eyebrow, his head held up on one hand.

“Oh, that’s great, honey.”

“Yeah. Uh. And everyone’s been really nice.”

“Have you made any friends?”

Evan nodded to himself. “Will and Jared. Jared’s kind of weird but Will’s really nice. They’ve been helping me find my way around and stuff. Showing me the ropes.”

He could hear Heidi’s smile. “I’m happy everything’s worked out good so far.”

“M-me too,” he lied. “Uh. How was your night?”

She sighed. “A bit lonely,” she admitted. “The people in the support group have been really helpful though. I asked Cynthia and Connor is definitely her son. She’s happy to hear that he finally has a roommate. Apparently, he’s been on his own for the past year and a bit.”

For a reason, Evan replied in thought. But if Connor was Cynthia’s son then that meant he had a brother or sister. Evan thought for a moment, trying to figure out who it could be. No one had sat with him at any meal. No one had started a proper conversation with him. No one had ever really spoken to him, other than Jared of course and they had different last names so there was no way in hell they were related. Step-brothers maybe? Evan felt as though his brain had physically rejected the idea. He’d just ask Connor about it later...or maybe Jared or Will. Probably Will.

“Oh, shit,” Heidi swore under her breath. “Honey, I gotta go, sorry.”

“So soon?” Evan felt his heart sink to his stomach.

“Yeah. sorry. Break’s over.”

“Oh. Right,” he murmured. “Talk to you again tomorrow?”

“Same time?”

“At eight. Properly this time. I’m really sorry, I lost track of time.”

“Don’t apologise, Evan. Losing track means you’re having fun.”

Evan held back a laugh.”Yeah, still. I’ll try to do better tomorrow.”

“Oh, sweetie. Have a good night.”

“I will.”

“Love you.”
Chapter End Notes

Okay! Two things.

The film mentioned at the beginning to this chapter was American Werewolf in London (AKA the film that traumatised me as a child) which actually acts as the inspiration for Connor's transformation. If you want to watch the actual transformation clip you can watch it: here. It's kind of disturbing though and contains a lot of body horror. It is a horror movie after all.

Also: if TTT was a film Will would be played by Michael Lee Brown. Because I say so!
“Come on boys, up and at’em.”

Evan opened his eyes to the sound of a nurse clapping his hands. He let out a small groan and pulled his blanket up over his head.

The nurse snapped on the light, the UV glare inescapable even under the covers. “Breakfast in fifteen, we let you sleep in yesterday Evan but today’s a new day.” He was chipper. Too chipper for quarter-to-seven in the morning. “How are you feeling today, Connor?”

Connor’s eyes cracked open, his left iris half-brown as he glared at the scrub.

“I’ll take that as a ‘could-be-better’” The nurse walked over to his bedside as Evan pulled his blankets over his head. “You don’t look tired, up you get. Come now, don’t sulk.” He started removing Connor’s restraints, letting him sit up.

Evan swung out of bed, stifling a yawn.

“Good morning, Evan,” Lucky said from his perch.

“Morning,” Evan mumbled back, still half-asleep. The nurse didn’t react, probably thinking Evan had meant the greeting for Connor. Evan felt sluggish, as though like he hadn’t really slept, the kind of night where you blink and suddenly it’s morning. In ways, they were worse than nightmares, but at least they gave him time where he didn’t have to do anything. Evan reached for the plastic bag he’d left on his bedside table and tugged it over his arm.

Shower. Breakfast. Class. That’s all he needed to do. Nothing bad was going to happen. Connor wasn’t going to go two-eyed. It was going to be fine.

Connor hadn’t even bothered showering and was gone when Evan came out of the bathroom. Evan saw him out the corner of when he reached the cafeteria, crammed into his usual corner. Would he bother going to class or would he just spend the day in his room? Evan couldn’t help but hope that he’d stay in their room. Just in case.

Breakfast was Greek yoghurt again, though the kitchen had drizzled some honey on it for sweetness. At least this time Evan could eat without issue.

“Good to know we won’t have to baby you all the time,” Jared said as Evan finished his final mouthful.

“S-sorry,” he mumbled and propped is spoon up in the empty bowl.
“Yeah, yeah.” Jared waved his hand, “if you’re really sorry you could not make so much noise when you go to bed. We could hear you stomping past at like, two o’clock.”

“I-it was only eleven,” Evan said, his fingers curling the hem of his shirt. Sherman had kept his word and not let him leave until he’d cleaned his plate. “I-I thought I was being quiet…”

“You were,” Will reassured. “Jared’s being hyperbolic.”

“I’m not!”

Will raised an eyebrow and Jared pouted in reply.

“Still kept me up,” he muttered in mock-defeat.

“I-I’ll try to be quieter next time.”

“Or You could just learn to eat like a normal person?” Jared suggested.

“Uh. Well. It’s not really that easy.”

“I still think it’s stupid.”

Evan looked down at his lap. “Yeah. Well. I just...I can’t eat them, so sorry.”

Will shook his head, speaking up before Jared could get the chance. “It’s okay, isn’t it, Jared?”

Jared pouted again, crossing his arms over his chest. “I never said it wasn’t okay, I was just saying it was fucking stupid.” He pointed out.

“So you keep saying.” Will sighed.

“S-sorry.” Evan turned the hem of his shirt between his fingers. His gaze wandered, moving gently around the room, to the staff table, to where Zoe and Alana sat talking, to Connor sat crammed in the corner. He sat slumped over his cereal, his head propped up in one hand, hair pulled away from his face by his fingers. He wasn’t really eating, just pushing his food round and round its bowl. The three tables surrounding him were all empty, like a semicircle barrier sectioning him off. Connor’s shoulders were raised high, his legs crossed, arms close to his sides.

He looks lonely, Evan realised before shaking his head. He’s dangerous, that’s why he’s alone. He killed people. He’s a murderer and a monster and he could snap your neck in a second if he wanted. He doesn’t deserve your sympathy.

“Stop giving the psycho bedroom eyes.” Jared waved his hand in front of Evan’s face.

“W-What?” It took a moment for the words to register in his brain. “I’m not giving him bedroom eyes!” He snapped, quickly ducking his head to look at the ground. “I was just…”

“Giving him bedroom eyes.” Jared poked the sycamore leaves poking out of Evan’s arm. “You can admit it, I’ll only judge you a little—Ow!” Jared winced as Will aimed a kick at his shins.

“Leave him alone, Jared. It’s too early for this.”

“I’m just saying what we’re all thinking!”

“I want to know what demented planet you live on where anyone thinks that.”
Jared grinned from ear to ear. “It’s the planet of the sane people, population uno.”

Will moved his head, almost as though he was rolling his eyes. “Please, none of us are sane. That’s the whole point.”

Jared stuck out his tongue. “Asshole.”

Evan took time preparing himself for class, he wasn’t about to let himself get lost again. He took his schedule and map folded up in his back pocket, covered his arms with the sleeve of his hoodie and tucked the panic alarm nearly in his front pocket, making sure it was all by itself to avoid pressing it by accident.

He was fully prepared. It was going to be okay. He just had to not get lost, or nervous, or freak out. He could do that? Right?

His throat was already tight but the time he walked into his first class of the day, math. Each of the desks had a pen and notepad already left out, with each student’s name and patient number printed in big capital letters. Evan wandered from desk to desk until he found the notepad labelled HANSEN Evan, P: FOUR-SIX-SEVEN.

Slowly, the classroom started to fill and Evan held his breath, not relaxing until the teacher walked in, closing the door behind him. All the seats were full bar one, and if Evan craned his neck he could only just make out the messy blur of MURPHY Connor, P: FOUR-SIX-FIVE. He couldn’t help but feel relieved.

The teacher’s eyes also met Connor’s empty seat. A small, low sigh escaped his lips and he took a phone out of his pocket, tapping out a quick message before turning to chalkboard to start explaining the basics of area. Evan pulled opened his book and started taking notes, though he already knew most of it. The lesson plodded on slowly with note-taking gradually turning to page upon page of question after question which gradually turned into Evan doodling into the margin. The blank page transformed into an orchard of tiny trees, flowers and half-moon eyes.

His next class was much the same, only with vocab words instead of math. It all felt so simple, so easy. Evan couldn’t help but be taken back to elementary school, back when he thought he was smart. He sighed and rolled up his sleeve, rubbing his arm as walnut leaves wilted off his skin.

“What class do you have next?” Jared asked him at lunch, grabbing Evan’s schedule from his hands. He held the paper out in front of him, peering at the it “Power Control? Ha!” He let out a sharp laugh and slid the paper back across the cafeteria table.

“Ha?” Evan echoed.

“You have Peet as your teacher.”

Evan’s face paled. “O-oh. Uh. I thought I’d be...with Dr Sherman again.”

“Nah. He’s probably busy.” Jared poked Evan’s arm. “Which means you’re stuck with Dr Stick-in-the-mud.”

Will frowned at that. “I like Dr Peet. She’s nice.”

“You only like her cause she made you those shades,” Jared pointed out.
“Do I need another one? And screw you, I like my glasses.” Will pushed them up his nose with a frown. “Besides, she as less of a shadow than Sherman.”

Jared rolled his eyes. “And I still call bullshit on that! Sherman’s a big softy, she’s a bitch.”

“Remind me of the last time Dr Peet put a group of kids at risk because she has a soft spot for a psychotic school shooter.”

Jared stuck out his tongue. “Fuck you. She’s a bitch. Besides, what would she have done better?”

“Not let the two-eyed psycho into the same room as a bunch of kids!” Will snapped and Evan saw Connor look up from his food, shooting a glare at the back of Will’s head. Evan ducked his head, his eyes focused on his food.

He couldn’t exactly argue with Will, but he felt oddly tempted to... Connor was scary, yes. But after he’d calmed down he seemed fine, rude and grumpy as all hell, but fine all the same.

*Murderer!* Evan mentally slapped himself. *He’s a murderer. Murderer. Murderer. Murderer. Attempted murderer at best. You were put with him so he’d kill you, Dr Sherman cares way more about him than he does about you. That’s why Pete’s teaching you. He’s tired of dealing with you.*

Evan felt Jared poke his arm again. “Ev, you okay? You look constipated.”

“U-uh. Sorry, just...thinking.”

“Never a good idea, bad for your health.” Jared thumped him hard on the back. “Eat your damn food before Peet drags you to class herself.”

—

Evan became wary of his Power Control class when his schedule told him to head to the hospital roof. What kind of teacher held a class on the roof of a building? From what Evan had seen Peet definitely didn’t seem to be the *Dead-Poet-Society*-kind of teacher who’d be into stunts like that.

*Maybe she wants to push you off it to see how well you can heal yourself?* said a small voice at the back of his head.

Evan wiped his hands on his shirt, letting go of the stair railing. Could he heal himself if he fell that high? The tree had been forty feet at least and he’d patched up just fine. How tall was The Ward? Eleven floors? How tall was that in feet? Tall enough to kill an adult, that’s for sure. Probably more than tall enough to turn a teenager into a pancake.

Evan felt as though there was a ball in his throat by the time he stepped onto the roof. A swelling bubble of pure anxiety that clogged his airways and made his head spin.

And then, suddenly, it popped.

The roof was a greenhouse. Rows upon rows of flowers, vegetables and herbs lined up like soldiers one after another. Evan could sense them all; rosemary, tomatoes, lavender and the roses, so many roses.

“I hope it’s not too loud for you.” A voice behind Evan made him start and he turned to see Dr Peet walking up the stairs towards him.

“L-Loud?” He asked, stepping away from the exit so as to let her up onto the roof.
“I’ve heard you can hear them, plants I mean.” Peet’s voice was still as stern as ever, her arms crossed over the front of her lab coat.

“Oh, r-right.” Evan nodded. “Plants don’t really...uh...they don’t usually t-talk to you. They talk back to you.”

Peet gave a small hum. “Interesting.”

“Y-Yeah...I mean...I guess it kind of is.” He fiddled with the front zipper of his hoodie.

Peet walked up into the greenhouse. “You’re lucky, I’ve had to teach both Chlorokinetics and Healers before.”

Evan blinked dumbly for a moment. “There are other people like me?”

“Of course. Well, not exactly, you’re the first person we’ve found with those two powers combined, but we’ve had similar cases. Speaking of,” she waved a hand at him, “roll up your sleeve.”

“U-Uh. Right, sorry.” He pulled his sleeve up around his elbow, putting his arm on full display. Evan’s skin was a garden of Christmas Roses and Columbine flowers, a few vines housing tiny thorns not yet sharp enough to do anything more than press harmlessly against his forearm.

Again, Peet hummed. “Do those flowers speak as well?”

“Uh…” Evan hadn’t considered that before. “No, I...I don’t think. I think they’re a part of me so...they would just be my voice.” He looked down at the flowers as though he expected them to suddenly start chattering at him, though they remained silent.

“Makes sense.” Peet cupped her chin between her thumb and forefinger. “Have you ever tried to use your powers on something other than yourself?”

Evan shook his head. “I-I don’t think I can. I mean, I can move the flowers on my arm but the healing...I can’t really control that.”

Peet nodded. “So it’s possible that your powers may be passive then.”

“Passive?”

“Yes, passive. We sort Patients’ powers into three categories: Passive, Honed and Active. Passive powers are powers that work in the same way as a heartbeat, they’re often constantly active or the Patient doesn’t have to physically think about using it.”

Evan rubbed his arm. That sounded about right. “What about the other two?”

“Active powers are those that the Patient has to physically or mentally trigger,” Peet explained. “For example, one of my other students is telekinetic, he has to focus on what he wants to move before he can move it. Honed is like a mixture of the two, their passive powers that with practice can be forced into being used a certain way. You’re friends with Jared Kleinman, yes?”

“K-kind of?”

“He constantly produces low levels of electricity but can ‘hone’ his powers so that he procures larger amounts or directs the flow of electricity to a specific part of his body. Do you understand?”

“I...I think so?”
“Good, now, I want you to try something.” Dr Peet gestured for him to follow her further inside the greenhouse.

“Try something? But I thought you said my powers are Passive,” Evan pointed out as he followed her.

“I said it's possible that they could be Passive. Chlorokinesis and healing are rarely outright passive so I'm not about to take them being honed off the table just yet.” The Doctor pulled out a metal fold-up chair and set it down, placing a potted plant in front of it. “Sit down, Mr Hansen.”

Evan sat and looked down at the flowerpot in front of him. It was parsley, he didn't need his powers to figure that out.

“You said you could control the plants on your skin, yes? Can you show me.” It wasn’t a question.

Evan held out his arm, feeling her gaze on him. He drew in a slow, deep breath and pulled at a small, thornless vine prodding out of his wrist. The plant moved, stretching around his wrist until it came full circle and hung around him like a bracelet. “I can only control the plants that are already there, I can't pick which ones grow.”

“Then at least that aspect of your powers is Honed,” Peet mumbled to herself. “Do that to this plant,” she gave the pot in front of him a light kick.

“I…I don't think I can.”

“Mr Hansen, did I ask you ‘do you think you can move this plant?’”

“...no.”

“What did I ask you to do?”

You didn't ask me to do anything, Evan pointing out silently. “To move the plant.”

“Exactly, so move it.” Dr Peet watched him expectantly, lips drawn into a hard, thin line.

Evan felt thorns start to dig into his skin and pulled down his sleeve. How was he even supposed to do this? It was like asking someone to lift someone else's finger. He leaned forward in the chair and fixed his eyes on the plant. He tried to imagine that it was just another flower on his body, that he could pull it upwards with a simple tug.

Nothing, the leaves didn't even ruffle.

Evan worried his lip and gave another sharp tug. Again, the plant didn't move. “Come on,” he murmured quietly, giving one last tug. “Grow, please.”

“Why should I?”

Evan paused, staring down at the plant. Right. It could talk. He looked to Peet out the corner of his eye before replying. “Because I need you to.”

“Why do you need me to?”

Evan clenched his jaw. Because if you don't I'm just a useless piece of shit. “I just...I-I really really need you to. Please?”

They sat there in silence for a moment and Evan reached out again, mentally pulling at the leaves of
the plant.

“Stop that.”

Evan hunched his shoulders. “Sorry, but I really need you to grow.”

“Will you leave me alone if I do?”

“U-uh. Yeah.” Evan nodded. “Yeah, I'll leave you alone.” The plant didn’t say anything in return and it was another minute of solid silence before Evan tried to move the leaves again. He pictured a phantom hand in front of him, the fingers holding gently onto the tops of the herb’s stem as they coaxed it upwards. Slowly, the parsley’s stem began to stretch and grow, the leaves lightening to a bright and vibrant green. Evan let out a long, heavy breath, letting go. “Thank you.” He looked to Dr Peet, rubbing his arm. “I-I did it.”

“Indeed.” The corners of her mouth raised into something that could almost have been called a smile. “Well done, Mr Hansen.”

“T-thank you,” he sighed in reply.

“Do you feel tired at all?”

Evan shook his head. “N-no. I think I’m fine.”

“Good. Then you won’t mind trying it again.

Chapter End Notes

I'm really nervous about this chapter? I dunno.
Chapter 9

Chapter Notes

Wow. So. The last chapter got a lot of comments and just. WOW thank you all so much. Any comment, no matter how small really brightens up my day. On another note, I've removed Zoe X Alana from the tags. I've changed the plot slightly from the original plan and as a result, they don't really have as much screen time (page time?). While they will still appear, their relationship is going to be more of a background thing.

Also! I made a playlist for TTT. Link in the end notes of the story!

Thank you Levi, God of Editing.

TW: Anxiety, because this is Evan Hansen we're talking about.

Evan had a headache. A deep, throbbing headache right at the centre of his brain. It reminded him of when he'd first gotten his powers. Patient Headache; a feeling of extreme located within the brain, usually lasting for only a few seconds. Now, however, the pain was lasting.

It hadn’t been too bad at first. A little twinge that had started as he tried to make the third plant Peet had placed in front of him grow. They had been particularly difficult, even more so than the Parsley. Evan had continued to tug and pull at the leaves but no matter how much he asked or beg or pulled the plant refused to grow.

And then it had started.

Evan had just clenched his jaw at first. “P-please,” he said under his breath. “J-just a little. I-I mean, if y-you really don’t want to that’s...that’s fine but...please.” As he spoke he continued to pick at the leaves, coaxing them to move upwards. With each movement, his brain pulsed, like it and his heart had swapped places.

And then the pulses became stabs and the stabs became brain-splitting jolts of pain.

Evan let out a hiss, holding his head in his hands.

“Are you alright?” Peet asked with a frown.

“H-headache,” he mumbled, massaging his temples.

“What kind?” The question took Evan aback.

“Like...in the centre,” he said, tapping the back of his head.

Peet gave a small sigh, picking up the plant pot and placing it back on the greenhouse shelf. “When did it start hurting?”
“Uh,” Evan tried to think through the pain. “About...ten minutes ago?”

“Why didn’t you tell me then?”

“Be...because you never...I thought it was just a headache.” He felt a hot rush of panic bloom in his chest. “What is it? What’s wrong with me?”

“Nothing,” Peet said quickly. “Your brain isn’t used to being strained like that, you’re overworked.”

That made Evan relax a little. “O-oh. Uh. Can I...can you make it stop?”

“With rest and painkillers, yes. You should have told me when you started getting it.”

“Y-you didn’t tell me to say if I got a headache,” he pointed out.

“No. I didn’t. Usually, it’s common sense for people to say if they have a headache, or if they need to take a break.” Peet shook her head and dug around in the pocket of her lab coat. “Here,” she took out a foil sheet of tablets and popped two into her hand. “You’re meant to take these with water but I’m guessing you don’t really care about that.”

Evan didn’t, he just wanted the pain to stop. The pills burned his throat on the way down, the taste sticking to his tongue as he waited for them to take effect.

“That’s enough practice for today,” Peet said, offering him a hand.

Evan hesitated before standing up on his own. “Sorry.”

That made the doctor cock her head. “Sorry? Why on earth are you sorry?”

“Uh.” Evan’s shoulders hunched. Why was he sorry? “Sorry,” he said again.

“For what, Mr Hansen?”

His shoulders rose even higher and thorns dug into his arms. “I don’t...Sorry,” he murmured, quieter this time.

Peet frowned and slipped her hands into the pockets of her lab coat once more, resting them there. “That didn’t answer my question.”

“S--”

“Ah,” she cut him off. “Answer the question.”

Evan fell quiet, his thoughts a jumble of pain and worry. “I-I don’t know. I just...say it a lot.”

“Because you feel like you have to or because you think it’s the right thing to do?”

Evan had to think about that. “A...a bit of both. I think. Sorry.” He pulled at the hem of his shirt, picking and curling it between his fingertips. “I just...I should have told you and...uh...you’re p-probably mad at me now and that’s why you made me stop--” Evan flinched as Peet raised her hand.

“I’m not mad at you, Mr Hansen. I’m curious,” she said, letting her hand fall back to her side. “It’s alright.”

“C-Curious?”
“To find out why you keep apologizing.”

“So--”

“Uh-ah,” she shook her head. “Is sorry the only word in your vocabulary?”

Evan fought through the pain in his arm and head. “...No.”

“Then use some more, take a deep breath and tell me why you needed to say sorry.”

Evan did as she said, taking in a deep breath through his nose. “You...said it was common sense for me to...to tell you that I was in pain. But I didn’t. So, I was stupid. A-and...you said we should stop because you do want to be around me anymore and w-want me to go...so...uh...sorry.”

Peet’s mouth drew into a sharp line and she shook her head. “I said we should stop because you’ve reached your limit. All Honed and Active powers need your body to produce extra psychic energy to use them. You've pushed yourself too hard and you need a rest that's all.”

Evan said nothing.

"Would you be able to run a marathon without training first?” Peet asked him.

“No.”

“Then why would you be able to push your powers past their limits on the first try?”

Evan looked down at his shoes. “I wouldn’t.”

“Exactly.”

“...Sorry.”

Peet gave a long, loud sigh. “From now on, Mr Hansen, my classes are going to have three rules, understand?”

Evan nodded.

Peet raised a finger, “First, be here on time. I don’t want to waste class time waiting for you.” She raised another finger. “Second, you will tell me when you start to reach your limit. You having a headache helps no one.” She raised a third finger. “Lastly, you will not say the word ‘sorry’ while I’m in the room. Understood?”

Evan clenched his jaw and nodded.

“What was that, Mr Hansen?”

“Understood. I’ll try.”

“Good. Now go have a lay down, you look like you need it.

---

Evan was starting to think that all Connor did was sleep. Once again Connor was strapped to his bed, eyes closed, his chest rising and falling with each slow breath. For a moment Evan stood, watching him.
“You told me before that humans think it’s rude to stare,” Lucky said sharply, knocking Evan back to reality.

“I know, s-sorry,” Evan murmured, rubbing his temple. The pain in his head had started to dull, but only slightly. “I just...I don’t understand.”

“Understand what?”

Evan made sure Connor was asleep before replying, his voice low. “Everyone says he’s a monster, and...I kind of get it, but...”

“But?”

Evan settled down on his bunk, laying with his head at the foot of his bed as per usual. “When he’s angry he’s scary but...now when he’s not he...he just seem kind of...bitter.”

“Bitter?”

“Like...he’s mad. But not at anything specific...if that makes sense. Like he has to be angry.”

Lucky was quiet for a long time. That was the annoying thing about talking to plants. Evan could never tell if they thinking or just wanted the conversation to be over. “Like the venus flytrap on the window sill.”

“Huh? Wait, you mean back home?” On the last day of middle school, Evan’s science teacher had handed out various awards to all her students. Best worker, most organised, most resilient, et cetera. The venus flytrap had been a special treat for the student who was ‘the best listener.’

“Yes. They would snap shut if anything landed in their jaws, they had to. The Connor Murphy has to get angry if something lands in his jaws.”

“Maybe...” Evan lay down, rolling onto his side so he could face Lucky. “Do you miss the others?” he asked, referring to the mini-garden he’d had propped up on the window sill of his old room. Pansies, cacti, succulents, the venus flytrap and the shoot of lucky bamboo all lined up in a neat row. He couldn’t help but wonder if his mom was doing anything to make sure they were still alive.

“A little,” Lucky said honestly. “We didn’t talk like you humans do but it was nice to have something beside me.”

“I could only bring one of you...s-sorry.”

“It is fine.”

Evan kicked off his shoes, letting them fall to the ground with a soft thud. “There’s a greenhouse upstairs.”

“A green house?” Lucky asked. “What is a green house? We are already in a house.”

“Right. Uh. It’s like a garden, but inside.”

“Like the window sill.”

“Yes,” Evan nodded. “But much bigger and with more plants.” He hesitated. “Would you be happier there?”

Silence.
“Probably.”

Evan’s heart sunk. “I’ll...I’ll take you up there later then. Not now I...I have a headache—uh, that’s when my head hurts, this bit,” he tapped his temple.

“No.”

Evan narrowed his eyes. “N-no?”

“I do not want to go to the green house.”

“But...but you said you’d be happier there.”

“Yes. But I would not see you.”

“Me?”

“I want to see how the Evan Hansen continues to grow.”

That made Evan chuckle. “Grow?”

“Humans grow differently to plants.”

“No, we don’t. We just get bigger.”

Lucky sighed. “Plants grow bigger, Humans get...thicker.”

“You mean I’m...fat?”

“No. Thicker. You speak more, your sounds change, you change.”

“And plants don’t?”

Had they had a proper body Evan was sure Lucky would have shaken their head. “Plants are not made to talk, to be thicker. We are tall.”

“That’s...one way of saying it.” Evan pulled his covers up to his chin. “You’re thicker though. You could barely talk properly when I first started speaking to you.”

“Because of you. I scared I might grow thicker as well.”

Lucky’s choice of words made Evan raise an eyebrow. “You’re...scared of...becoming like me?”

“Of being like a human,” they corrected. “Plants are not meant to grow thicker.”

“Do you see dead people or some bullshit?” Connor’s voice made Evan start, his head flaring with pain.

“W-what?” He rolled over and saw Connor craning his neck to look at him. Evan made sure to check his eyes; two mostly blue, one partly brown. He wasn’t too angry. Good.

“I know plants are your thing but you talk to yourself as well. Either your trauma made you crazy, you’re trying to freak me out, or you can talk to dead people.”

“I...uh...I don’t...”

“So you are crazy?” Connor blinked and the slice of brown took up half his iris. “Or is Kleinman
trying to get you to piss me off? Do you think it’s fucking funny or some shit? To see me freak out like some kind of fucking monster?”

Evan shook his head, Christmas roses darting up his arm. “I-I don’t. I mean. I t-talk to plants...I think.”

“You think?”

“I talk to plants,” he corrected himself.

Connor clenched his jaw, turning to look at Evan as best he could. “…that’s the stupidest thing I’ve ever fucking heard.”

“I know. Sorry. I-I thought you were asleep.”

“I was, you woke me up talking to your goddamn plant.”

Evan avoided his eye. “Oh. Sorry.”

“It’s fine. I’m not tired anymore anyway.” Connor squirmed against his restraints a moment before looking back to Evan. "Let me out.”

It took Evan a moment to realize what he’d meant. “O-oh. Uh. Am I allowed to?”

“Why the fuck wouldn’t you be?” Connor asked. “They’re uncomfortable as shit, let me out.”

Slowly, Evan got up out of bed, unsure of what to actually do.

“There are clasps round here,” Connor said, nodding to the side left side of his bed.

“R-right,” Evan nodded, heading to the other side of the bed and bending down to fiddle with the straps. “Uh...Can I ask you something?”

“You can, but I can’t promise I’ll answer.”

Evan nibbled his lip, unbuckling the first of three clasps. “Why do they tie you down?”

Connor let out a long groan. “Did they not tell you anything? Fuck.”

Evan ducked his head. “Sorry.”

“Whatever. I get nightmares, they set me off sometimes.”

“So you...wake up and—“

“I’ve gone Hulk. Yeah.”

Evan unbuckled the second clasp. “Does that...happen a lot?”

“It happens enough.”

Evan went back to fiddling with the straps. They felt relatively thin...

He broke a tile like it was nothing, a voice at the back of his head reminded him. What makes you think that some straps could hold him? False sense of security, that’s all this is.

“O-ow,” Evan flinched as a particularly large thorn jabbed at the skin under his wrist.
“You okay?”

Evan pulled at the sleeve of his hoodie, making sure every patch of his skin was covered. “Yeah. Caught my finger, sorry. Um.” Connor pulled the first two straps off himself, managing to sit up. Only his legs stayed trapped beneath his covers.

“You going to let me out or what?”

Evan nodded. “Um,” he unbuckled the last clasp. “You...Y-you seemed pretty strong before, can’t you just—”

“The straps are made out of Graphene, it’s ten times stronger than steel. So, before you ask, no, Hansen, I can’t just break through it.” Connor’s expression turned sour. “Believe me, I’ve tried.” He tugged off the last strap and stood up, stretching his arms above his head, joints popping.

Before Evan could even start to say something Connor was out the door, slamming it shut behind him.

Snippets, that was what Connor Murphy was. Quick snippets of conversation, glances and glares.

Even couldn’t figure out if that was a good thing

—

Fridays in The Ward were much the same as Wednesdays and Thursdays. Be woken up by a nurse, eat breakfast with Will and Jared, two hours of maths, two hours of english, dinner, sleep. Rinse and repeat.

“Evan.” Dr Sherman waved his hand in front of Evan’s face. “You off with the fairies?”

“Hm?” Evan blinked dumbly. Right. Therapy. That was a thing too.

Dr Sherman just laughed and shook his head. “Back to reality now, son.”

“S-sorry,” Evan mumbled, rubbing his face absentmindedly. “W-what were we talking about?”

“You were talking about how you get stuck and then, well,” he gave a small laugh, “I’m pretty sure you got stuck.”

Evan nodded. He picked at a hangnail on his thumb, wincing as the skin drew away to reveal a garden of sage leaves.

“Do you mind telling me what you were thinking about?” Sherman asked, pushing his glasses up his nose. There was a clock in his office, the first one Evan had seen in almost three days. It was the kind that didn’t tick, the seconds hand just moving in a small circle around the face. Seven minutes past three. Fifty-three more to go.

“You mentioned me getting stuck,” he answered, watching the hands move. “And I tried to remember all the times I got stuck while I was here. But...but then I started thinking about everything I’ve done. Like, I mean, like class and stuff. And I realised I hadn’t really done much.”

“You’ve only been here a few days, that’s to be expected,” Sherman pointed out.

“Yeah. But I mean,” Evan cocked his head, trying to force his words to make sense. “I mean everything’s really...really...” he waved his hand as though he could pluck the word from the air. “Boring.”
“Boring?” Sherman asked and Evan nodded. Sherman sighed and made a note on his clipboard. “We’ve had a few complaints about that, mostly from newbies. You get used to it fairly quickly, things aren’t boring, they’re just a bit spread out. Have you checked out the library? If you’re ever feeling bored you could always find something to do there. We have puzzles or board games on the weekends—”

Evan wasn’t listening. It wasn’t just that things were boring. The boring things weren’t going to go away, they weren’t going to change. Friday was always going to be exactly the same as Thursday. “Stuck again?”

“A bit,” Evan pulled at a sprig of sage on his thumb.

“Is it kind of like your thoughts snowball? You’ll think of one thing and then that links into another and another.”

He nodded again.

Sherman wrote something down.

*He thinks you’re crazy,* Evan thought to himself. He shook the idea from his mind and tried to focus on reading the upside down scrawl. Why did doctors always have to have such bad handwriting? It was almost as though they did it on purpose so Evan couldn’t read what they were thinking about him.

“I think you need an anchor,” Sherman said as he wrote.

An...anchor?” Evan echoed.

“A way to stop your thoughts from going out of control. Something to keep you grounded.”

Evan frowned. “I don’t know if that’ll work.”

“No harm in trying.” Sherman tucked his pencil behind his ear.

“But...if I just think about something to anchor myself I’ll just get stuck thinking about that.”

Sherman hummed. “Would you say that your anxiety usually plays a role in you getting stuck?”

“My...anxiety?”

He nodded. “It’s common for some people with general anxiety, like yourself, to have snowballing thoughts. You need is a topic or moment that you can use to stop the snowball in its tracks. If you were, say, thinking about what you wanted for dinner, would you get stuck?”

Evan bit his lip. “Probably, cause then I’d start thinking about what I’m going to have to eat.”

“Ah, bad example.” Dr Sherman twisted his lip, humming softly. “A moment then. A moment where you don’t have to worry, can you think of anything like that?”

Evan hesitated. Something that didn’t cause him to worry.

Another moment’s silence passed before Sherman spoke up again. “Having trouble?”

“No, I’m fine. I’m just...I’m just thinking.”
Sherman nodded. “Any hobbies or safe spaces that help you stay calm?”

Evan looked down at his hands, flexing his fingers. “Gardening,” he said quietly.

“Gardening? That’s a good one, keeps your brain and hands busy.” Sherman offered him a small smile. “Next time you feel yourself start getting stuck I want you to count down from five and try and pull your thoughts to gardening. Hopefully, that'll help you calm down and get your thoughts in order.”

Evan tugged at the hangnail on his thumb again. “I don’t know if I can do that.”

“I’m not expecting you to be able to do it straight away, Evan. It’ll take a while but eventually you’ll get the hang of it.”

“B-but what if it doesn’t work?”

“Then we’ll find something that does.”

“But what if we can’t.”

“We will.” Sherman sighed, scratching his jaw. “Mental illness can’t...it can’t be cured, not in the way that people expect it to. I can’t prescribe you a pill that’ll instantly switch off your anxiety, but what I can do is help you find a way to manage your anxiety. Okay?”

Evan nodded, not meeting his eye.

_You’re broken. He can’t fix you. You’re broken. He can’t fix you. _Thorns dug into Evan’s skin and he clenched his jaw. _Pretend to be better. That’s all you can do. Like before, with mom. Pretend to be better._

“Evan,” Sherman fiddled with the hem of his shirt under his lab coat. “Deep breaths, you’re alright.”

“I know. I’m fine,” Evan said quickly. Pretend to be better and he’ll let me leave.

“We both know you’re not,” Sherman said, tapping his temple. “You can tell me if something’s bothering you, son. It’s my job.”

“I know...you keep saying that, but...”

“But?” Sherman pressed.

“I mean. People don’t...they don’t actually want to deal with...with me. They have their own problems a-and I mean. Why am I even here? I fell out of tree, which i-is just...stupid and I mean. What’s the point in doing this when that’s all that happened? I bet t-there are a bunch of kids here who have it way worse than me.”

Sherman’s shoulders slumped and he slipped his glasses off his nose. “What did I tell you when we first met?”

“...other people's trauma doesn’t negate my own.”

“Exactly,” Sherman nodded. “I don’t know what happened to you when you fell, I don’t know how much it hurt or how scared you were and neither do they. What matters is that you have your anxiety. It doesn't matter if it was caused by your fall or if it predates it, just that you have them now. I’m going to help you through them, but to do that I need you to tell me why you feel the way you do.”
Evan scratched his arm. His sleeve was bulging with the number of flowers blooming on his arm. He didn’t have to look at it to know what they were, all he had to do was focus. Mock-oranges, Snapdragons, Christmas Roses and vine after vine of pointed thorns.

“What if I don’t know why I feel the way I do?” he asked, resisting the urge to pull the plants from his skin.

“Then we’ll figure it out together, okay?”

Evan hesitated. “Okay.”
Chapter 10

Chapter Notes

Happy Thanksgiving (I'm Australian so I have no idea how to celebrate it but eh). If I got anything wrong with any of the Jewish customs in this chapter please tell me in the comments so I can fix it. While I did do research that can only get you so far.

Thank you, Levi for putting up with my 3am writing and editing it into something halfway decent.

TW: Anxiety, Self-harm.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It felt a little strange for Evan not to be woken by his mom.

He was used to getting up and heading off to sermon every Saturday, but now there wasn't any point in waking up early for it. There wasn't going to be any long car ride, any small talk with the other attendance, or big community lunches. Nothing. All he had to do was get up, get dressed and go downstairs.

What would usually take him and his mother an hour and a half now squeezed into ten minutes.

The Ward still had a chapel from when it was a regular hospital. A single room tucked away at the
back corner of the ground floor used for practically every religious gathering under the sun.

Evan had always thought the services at home had been small, but The Ward seemed more than happy to prove him wrong. The congregation consisted only of himself, Jared, and two other boys. One, tall and lanky, practically an adult, and the other no older than twelve.

Evan couldn't help but feel a little sorry for the kid. Connor’s Patient number had been Four-six-five, so unless this kid was Four-six-six he must have been there a while. Years, even.

Evan fiddled with the hem of his shirt and his mind started to wander. He’d gotten curious around two years ago and googled the Registry of Patients: a record of every superpowered child in America. While the register hadn't mentioned what the children’s abilities were, it did mention their trauma and the age that they’d experienced it. Apparently, this was so parents could figure out what type of situations would cause their children to activate. He wondered what number the twelve-year-old was and, more importantly, exactly how long he'd been kept within the walls of The Ward.

A few of the names in the registry had linked off to news articles. Stories of pyrokinetics who had lit their family homes on fire, of shapeshifters who had randomly changed appearance in the middle of class, of assault or abuse victims who had (accidentally) killed their aggressors, and parents charged for neglect and endangerment for trying to hide their child away.

Was trying to keep your own family safe really neglect? What punishment could they be given anyway? They were already losing their children, what else was there to take?

Evan couldn't help but wonder what his trauma would be labelled as. Usually, they were simple, bare-bones descriptions. Physical Assault, Sexual Assault, Neglect, Physical Abuse, Emotional Distress, Mental Abuse, Death of Kin, Illness, Drowning, Non-Fatal Injury, Near-Fatal Injury.

Probably Injury. Yeah, that would be it.

HANSEN Evan. 15. Non-Fatal Injury.

His name would be at the end of that long, long list. Would his name have a news story if you clicked on it? Probably, all the Prescotts were journalists so chances were at least one of them would have written something. Slimy bastards.

What would it say?

*Local Boy Becomes Patient After Falling From Tree.*

He’d be a laughing stock. He’d be a laughing stock and he wouldn’t even know it--

Something tapped Evan’s foot and he looked to see Jared about to stand up for the Amidah. Evan clenched his jaw and stood up as well. He needed to focus, he needed to stop thinking.

*What would Connor’s entry say? The voice at the back of his head asked him. Near-fatal injury, probably. He did get shot. Or maybe emotional distress. What about Jared? Evan looked to the boy at his side out the corner of his eye, murmuring the prayer under his breath. What happened to him? Do you know?*

No. He didn’t.

*He knows what yours is. That’s unfair.*
Yeah. It was.

He doesn’t trust you. That’s why he doesn’t want to tell you. Will and Sherman probably know, he trusts them. Why is Will here? Why is Sherman here? They both came when they were kids. They have a real reason for being here. You fell out of a tree, you don’t deserve to be here. You’ve been through way worse before, why was that the thing that activated you? It’s stupid. No wonder your powers are so useless. No wonder they hate you.

Evan couldn’t breathe, his throat clogged with anxiety. It was as though a set of hands were pushing down on his shoulders, forcing him to the floor. He wanted to sit down again, to curl up and hug his knees to his chest. He wanted to feel Heidi’s arms around him, hear her say everything was going to be okay.

She can’t. She’s on her own because you fucked up. You probably won’t ever see her again. That’s a good thing. Now she’s free to do what she wants with her life.

Evan was going to be sick. His arm was pulsing with pain and he could see red stains on his sleeve where the sage hadn’t healed fast enough. His skin felt too tight, the room felt too small.

Can’t breathe can’t breathe can’t breathe can’t breathe can’t breathe can’t breathe can’t breathe can’t breathe can’t breathe can’t breathe can’t breathe can’t breathe

The words repeated themselves in his head again and again. His hands shook as he tried to keep his voice calm throughout the rest of the service. He sounded shaky and in such a small congregation it was impossible for him to simply pretend it was someone else’s singing.

They all know you’re freaking out. They think you’re a freak, the voice told him. Pretend nothing’s wrong or they’ll hate you for sure and then you’ll be alone again.

Evan swallowed hard, a sob sticking at the back of his throat.

Get out get out get out get out get out get out get out get out get out get out get out get out get out get out get out get out get out get out

The moment the service was over Evan ran.

Don’t. He told himself. They’ll think you’re weird. Walk.

Evan slowed to a fast walk, his eyes glued to the ground. He had to get to his room. He kept moving, not looking where he was going until something got in his way.

“Watch where you’re going!” Connor snapped and Evan instantly shrank back.

“Sorry,” he said quickly. “Sorry.” Please don’t hurt me. Before Connor could even open his mouth Evan had hurried past him.

People were staring, he could tell. Staring at the kid in a Kippah with an arm full of thorns bawling his eyes out over nothing. Was he crying? Evan rubbed his eyes on the back of his hand, finding his cheeks hot and wet with tears. When had that started? When he was with the others? When he left? When he’d been running? When he’d run into Connor?

He pushed open the door to his room and made a b-line for the bathroom, turning on the tap and splashing his face with water. The face of his reflection was crumbled and red with thick blobs of tears running down it.
'You’re an ugly crier, kid.' That was what his dad had said when he was younger. 'Like your mother.'

Hansens were ugly criers.

Prescotts got angry instead.

Prescotts left.

Hansens stuck together.

Maybe he was more Prescott than Hansen after all.

Evan’s eyes moved away from his reflection, focusing on his armful of Christmas Roses, Sainfoin, Columbine and thorns. He was such an idiot. Getting so worked up over nothing.

Biting his lip Evan laced his fingers between the plants and pulled, hard. He winced as the stems snapped. It felt like he was ripping out hangnails, the sage covering over the cuts faster than they could bleed. The chunks of plant matter in his hands disintegrated into nothingness. He needed to get rid of them. He needed to stop freaking out.

“Stop it.” Evan felt a hand grab his wrist and turned his head. Connor had a death-grip on his arm, one eye brown, the other blue.

“I-I.” The words got stuck in Evan’s throat. He’d be mad. Connor was mad.

“Stop it,” Connor said again. “Let go of them.”

Evan loosened his grip on the flowers, Monkshood and Sage blooming under his fingers. Connor moved Evan’s hand away from his arm, still keeping a stern grip.

“What the hell were you doing?” He snapped.

“I-I...I wanted t-to...to stop…” Evan looked down at his feet, shoulders raised.

“To stop?” Connor prompted.

“To calm down.”

Connor’s expression hardened, his jaw clenched. “Hurting yourself isn’t going to help you calm down,” he stated flatly.

“I-I wasn’t...I wasn’t hurting myself I was just...getting rid of them.” Evan spoke on autopilot, not really thinking about what he was saying. “Y-you see, p-picking the flowers s-stop the emotion so, s-reallyiithelps.”

Connor fixed him with a blank stare. “You’re bleeding.”

“N-no I’m not. See.” He looked down at his arm. “N-no blood. I’m fine.”

“You were bleeding.”

“I-It didn’t hurt. P-picking the flowers m-makes the emotion—“

“Go away, Yeah. I heard you the first time.” Connor didn’t sound in the least bit convinced. “You still shouldn’t do that.”
“B-but it—“

“It clearly fucking hurts, Hansen. Don’t try and bullshit me.”

Purple Hyacinth bloomed around Evan’s wrist, the words in his mouth still not taking shape. He couldn’t meet Connor’s eye, his chin practically stuck to his chest.

Connor sighed and let go of Evan’s hand, grabbing a wad of toilet paper and handing it to him. Wordlessly, he walked out of the bathroom and lay down on his bed, leaving the door open.

Evan sniffed and wiped his eyes, the Hyacinths overgrowing the monkshood on his arm.

—

“Hey son, could I talk to you a minute?”

Evan felt his stomach drop when he heard Sherman speak up. He calls a lot of people son, he thought. He probably doesn’t mean you.

Yeah right, the voice at the back of his head spoke up again. You’re the only one here. Who else takes an hour and a half to eat their food?

Evan turned and saw Sherman walking over to him, a polite smile on his lips. “How are you feeling?” The doctor asked.

Evan shrugged. “Alright. Um. Have I done something wrong?”

Dr Sherman shook his head. “Could you come to my office for a little bit?”


“Sure,” He said instead.

“Perfect. I didn’t think you’d want anyone else to hear.”

Evan’s thoughts became a jumbled mess of screaming:

WHY?!

“You don’t have to be scared,” Dr Sherman said once they got to his office, settling down behind his desk. “I’m not angry at you, I just want to talk.”

Evan sank down into one of the seats, looking anywhere but at Sherman. “About what?”

The doctor took off his glasses and started cleaning them with the cuff of his sleeve. “A few people have told me that you seemed to be struggling today.”

Evan swallowed thickly. “O-oh?”

He nodded. “You seemed on edge this morning and…” he hesitated, focusing on scrubbing at the lenses. “Connor mentioned that he was worried about you.”

Evan dug his nails into his palms. “He did?”

“He did.” Sherman sighed and looked up at Evan. He had a slight squint without his glasses on. “Evan, have you been...hurting yourself?”
Evan’s stomach twisted hard. “No,” he said quickly. “No. I mean.” He scratched at his arm. “I...I don’t know.”

“You don’t know?” He echoed, cocking his head.

“I mean. I. I...pull them up.”

“Pull what up?”

Evan kicked his legs, staying silent.

“...Evan, you can talk to me,” Sherman said quietly. “I promise, I’m here to help you.”

“The flowers,” Evan murmured. “I pull up the flowers.”

Sherman sighed, his brow creased. “Okay,” He murmured under his breath, more to himself than Evan. “We can work through this.”

“I-I’ve only done i-it twice.”

Sherman slipped his glasses back on his nose. “That doesn’t make it okay. What matters is you felt the need to do it.”

Evan drew his mouth into a straight line. “I’m sorry.”

“It’s alright. Can you tell me why?”

Evan shook his head. “I-it’s stupid.”

“It’s not. Whatever it is,” Dr Sherman said with a kind smile, “I promise it’s not stupid.”

Evan picked at the hem of his shirt. “I...I want to get rid of them.”

“The flowers?”

“My powers. I hate them.”

Sherman’s expression flickered for a moment before returning to his look of concern. “Your powers could do a lot of good, Son.”

“It’s not. They’re useless a-and they’ve only...they’ve only made things worse.”

“Your powers aren’t useless, Evan. Do you know what a Chlorokinetic could do during a drought or famine?”

“I could grow one plant a-a a time, give myself a-a headache and show everyone h-how I was nervous about it,” Evan mumbled.

“You’ve only just started to learn how to use them. Over time I’m sure you’ll get to grips with it. Jared ended up almost short-circuiting the whole hospital when he first arrived and look at him now.”

“Y-Yeah, but I’m not Jared. I-I can’t do the stuff he can.”

“Your powers are different, but that doesn’t mean you can’t learn to control yours like he controls his.”

Evan rubbed his arm and looked down at the flowers blooming there. “I still don’t want them.”
“Few people do, son.”

Evan nibbled at his lip. “Do you want yours?”

The question seemed to take Sherman aback, a frown tugging at the corner of his lip. He went quiet, sucking the inside of his cheek as he thought. “It depends on the day,” he said. “Every Patient has days where they love their powers, every Patient has days where they hate their powers. We just have to learn to deal with them because, like it or not, we’re stuck with them.” The two sat there for a moment before Dr Sherman reached forward and took a marker out of a pen pot on his desk. “We can’t keep an eye on you all the time and given your powers we can’t be sure when you’re...having one of your bad days.” He offered out the pen to Evan. “If you ever feel the urge or need to hurt yourself I want you to draw on your arm instead. It can just be a line or a little doodle but I want you to try and distract yourself.” He dug through a drawer and took out a small pocket notebook. “If that does work, rip up a piece of paper and if that doesn’t work come and find me. Can you do that for me, son?”

Evan nodded, taking the pen and book.

“Thank you. I also want you to do an exercise for me, Okay? Just something to help improve your mood.” Sherman tapped a finger against his desk. “Every morning write a little message to yourself. ‘Dear Evan Hansen, today's going to be a good day and here’s why.’ It helps put things into perspective and make things not as bad as they may seem. Can you do that for me?”

Evan nodded again and Sherman smiled. “Thank you. Now,” he clapped his hands together. “Saturday is movie night, do you feel up to going?”

Evan shrugged. “I-I dunno. I think so.”

“Good. It should be all set up in the cafeteria by now. If you’re quick you can make it before the film starts. You look like you deserve a good night.”

Evan stood up, holding tightly onto the pen and pad. “Thank you.”

“Thank me when it works.”

---

The movie ended up being the Fox and the Hound. Evan didn’t pay much attention, he’d seen the film a lot as a kid. It had been his dad’s favourite and thus it had also been his favourite by proxy. His eyes wandered, peering around the room. Jared and Will were sat near the middle of the crowd. Occasionally, Jared would lean over and mutter something and Will would either laugh or shake his head. Part of Evan was tempted to go and sit with them, but a larger part of him knew that people would end up staring if someone decided to move now.

Connor was nowhere to be seen, but that wasn’t exactly surprising anymore.

Eventually, Evan turned his attention back to the film, doing his best to ignore the eyes of the doctors and security guards watching them. Before he knew it the film was over and the lights were turned back on. As the credits rolled the room started to fill up as the Patients who had decided to skip the movie filtered in one-by-one. Once everyone was settled one of the doctors headed to the front of the cinema, a tablet in hand.

“Tomorrow I want these Patients to report to floor ten at oh-nine-hundred-hours.” In the moment it took her to take her next breath the room seemed to seize up, the air thick with tension. “Benna, Caine, Hughes, Hakim, Long, Murphy,” Evan paused, frowning softly. He looked around again but
saw no sign of Connor anywhere.

“U-uh,” he murmured under his breath, leaning to the girl sat beside him. “Why is she...why is she...”

The girl turned and scowled. “You’re the new kid, right?” she asked, not waiting for Evan’s answer before continuing. “It’s all the kids who are getting visitors tomorrow. Be quiet, they haven’t said the Ns yet.”

“Oh. S-sorry.” Evan looked up at the doctor. He wasn’t sure what he expected. She’d already read out the Hs and the Es. He knew there was no way in hell his name would be called, Heidi didn’t have the time or the money for a trip to The Ward. Besides, she would have mentioned if she was planning to visit. She knew how much he hated surprises.

Evan knew this but still he listened right up until the doctor set down her tablet and sent them all off to bed.

Chapter End Notes

Look at the adorableness Rainfallen9 drew. Holy shit I can't get over how cute it is.
I'm surprised no one's commented on the Heathers references in the first chapter yet...

Thank you, Levi for editing.

TW: Violence, Anxiety attacks, Connor being Connor.

BANG BANG BANG BANG.

Evan’s eyes opened to someone hammering against his bedroom door. The nurses weren’t supposed to wake the Patients on Sunday.

BANG BANG BANG BANG.

Or maybe they were? He sat up, rubbing his temple. Connor was still asleep—or at least pretending to—his eyes closed despite the ruckus outside. Evan did the same. Maybe if he just ignored them they’d go away.

BANG BANG BANG BANG.

Maybe not. Evan got up, pulling open the door in a half-asleep haze.

“Excuse me.” Zoe pushed past him, heading straight for Connor’s bed. “Mom and dad are here, get up.”

“Mom and dad?”

He’s her brother, he realised. Connor is Zoe’s brother. The brother that caused her trauma. The brother who was selfish. Did shooting up a school count as something selfish or psychotic? Both?

Connor’s eyelids flickered and he tilted his head, looking up at Zoe. “Fuck off,” he mumbled. “I’m tired.”

“You’re always tired,” Zoe snapped, kneeling down beside his bed to unstrap him. “Mom wants to see you.”

“No, she doesn’t.” Connor closed his eyes again. “She just says she does cause she has to.”

Zoe looked like she wanted to hit him. “She cried last time, Connor. In front of the doctors, in front of everyone. I’m not dealing with that again.”

Connor said nothing.

“U-uh.” Evan couldn’t help but feel like he was prying. “Are you s-sure it’s safe t-to let him out?”

Zoe didn’t look up as she unclamped the second strap. “Yep.”

“Nope,” Connor said blankly, opening his eyes to fix his sister with a hard glare, one blue eye, the
other brown. “Go away before I make you.”

“Get up before I make you!” Her voice seemed to make the air crackle and Evan felt the hair on the back of his neck stand on end.

He didn’t like the look in their eyes. That ‘try me, I fucking dare you,’ kind of look his parents had always got when they wanted to fight, but couldn’t because their dumb kid was with them. The kind of look that meant an argument was somewhere on the horizon whether he liked it or not.

“Who are they?” Lucky asked from their sill. “Why are they yelling?”

Evan wished he was telepathic, then at least he could answer without looking like a crazy person.

The Murphys’ staring contest comes to an end as Zoe undid the final clamp. “You’re coming.”

Connor sat up, a sour look on his face. “I’m fucking not.”

“I’ll tell Sherman.”

“I’ll go two-eyed.”

Zoe furrowed her brow. “What the fuck will that do?”

“Sherman’ll get pissed and finally have to take me to The Basement and I won’t have to deal with you bullshitting me anymore—“

Evan flinched as Zoe slapped her brother. The silence that followed felt like it lasted forever, the remnants of the hit echoing in his ears. “Don’t you dare,” Zoe snapped. “Don’t even joke about that.”

Evan stared at the two, his jaw slack as Connor got to his feet. He had a red mark across his cheek, both eyes almost completely brown apart from the tiniest streak of blue in his right iris.

“Are you fucking happy?” He spat, his lips twisted into a hard scowl.

Zoe took a sharp step backwards. It was as though she’d suddenly regained control of her body, the tenseness of her expression melting away. “I didn’t mean to—calm down, Connor, please.” There was fear in her eyes, that deer-in-headlights kind of fear that made her eyes widen and her brows tense.

Connor took a step towards her and Evan tried to sort through his racing thoughts, searching for what he should do next.

He should step in front of her, he decided. Put himself between her and Connor, take any punches he threw and any insults he spat. But as he went to move forward all he could think of was that tile and how easily it had shattered under Connor’s foot.

“You can heal yourself,” the back of his head said. She can’t. Stop being so useless and help her.

Evan knew that, he knew that if anyone deserved to be on the recovering end of Connor’s wrath it was him. His feet just didn’t seem to agree. Instead, they stayed frozen. Stuck to the ground as Connor shoved Zoe hard. Her arms flailed, catching herself on the edge of Connor’s bed. Before she could straighten up he had a hold on her hair, yanking her upright.

“Is this what you fucking wanted?” He growled, pulling her hair again. “You wanted me to set off,
didn’t you? To get rid of me.”

“Connor, stop it!” Zoe’s voice was nowhere near as scared as her eyes. Her tone was low, almost like a trainer trying to scold some kind of wild animal. “Let go of me.”

Why isn’t she fighting back? Evan asked himself.

Why aren’t you? He answered.

“Or what?” Connor gave his sister’s hair one final tug before shoving her forward again. This time she fell to her knees, glaring up at him. “Stay out of my way,” he spat down at her before storming out of the room, slamming the door so hard that it rattled on its hinges.

For a moment, Evan and Zoe were frozen, and then his legs finally decided to start working. “A-are you alright?” He asked, kneeling beside her. She grabbed onto his shoulder to push herself to her feet and Evan became painfully aware of three things:

1) He was still in his pyjamas.
2) He was sweating, a lot.
3) Zoe had a bruise on her knee. He didn't have to look, he simply knew. Three bruises, one on her left knee and two on her right. Some of the hair follicles on the back of her head were partially ripped out. This information planted itself neatly in his head, before disappearing as she removed her hand.

That was creepy, the back of his head told him and Evan couldn't help but agree.

“I’m fine.” Zoe’s mouth was a stiff line, her eyes fixed on the closed door. “He didn't hurt me.”

Yes. Yes, he did, Evan corrected silently. “Why didn’t you..?” he waved his hands vaguely, not really sure what to say.

“He was nearly two-eyed. If I used my powers…” she paused for a moment, her foot tapping against the ground as Evan straightened up. “If I’d hurt him he’d go two-eyed and...and there’s a chance he’d get transferred.”

“Wouldn’t...w-wouldn’t that be a good thing? I mean…” Evan fiddled with the hem of his shirt. “If he needs to be...to be transferred.”

Zoe’s expression shifted and Evan flinched back, preparing for a hit the never came. Instead, Zoe turned and left, slamming the door just as hard as her brother.

—

Evan missed having something to do. At least on weekdays he had classes and therapy and on Saturday he’d had temple. Now he had nothing. He didn’t fancy hanging around his bedroom just in case Connor ended up coming back. Will and Jared were nowhere to be seen, not in their rooms, the cafeteria or any of the halls. No one wanted to hang out with him, they just stared at his arm.

He wanted somewhere to be alone. He wanted something to do. He wanted to stop thinking.

Eventually he found himself in the library, staring blankly at his new notebook. It was the kind without lines so his handwriting was messy and slipped diagonally down the page.

Dear Evan Hansen,
Today’s going to be a good day because at least Connor Murphy didn’t punch you in the face.

Dear Evan Hansen,

Today’s going to be a good day because Zoe didn’t completely hate you. And hey, being talked to by a pretty teenage girl is what all teenage boys want, right?

Dear Evan Hansen,

Today’s going to be a good day because you get to call mom.

Dear Evan Hansen,

Today’s going to be a good day because…

He paused. Sighed.

Because Sherman says it has to be—

Thud.

Evan looked up and felt his blood run cold, quickly snapping his book shut.

“Give me an excuse to not talk to my parents,” Connor Murphy said like a completely normal person, opening a box of chess pieces. He’d changed out of his pjs and into his usual jeans and hoodie, looking at Evan with a flat expression.

Evan couldn’t move. “I thought you were two-eyed.”

“No. Almost was. They shoved me in a padded room till I calmed down.”

Evan laughed, he wasn’t sure what else to do.

“I’m not joking,” he said flatly. “And. Uh.” He tilted his head ever-so-slightly. “I’m sorry for freaking out.”

“I-I, uh, thanks.” Evan set down his book as Connor pulled up a chair. “A-are...are you gonna apologise to...to Zoe?” It was the only thing he could really think to say.

Connor started setting up the board. “You really think she’d want to talk to me after that?”

Evan shrugged, picking at the cover of his book.

“Sherman got you doing those bullshit letters?” He asked, setting the pieces on the board.

Evan nodded, not looking up.

“They’re pretty fucking stupid, aren’t they?”

Evan nodded.

“You’re scared of me now, aren’t you?”

Evan gulped. “I-I mean...I was scared of you b-before...I mean. Uh. I--”

“It’s fine.” It clearly wasn’t fine.
“Oh.” Evan nibbled at his bottom lip, thorns scratching the surface of his skin. “Why don’t you go play with Zoe?”

Connor sighed. “Because she doesn’t want to fucking talk to me, Hansen,” he set down the last white pawn. “Besides. She’s with mom and Larry.”

“Larry?”

“My dad.”

“Oh.” Evan hesitated a moment. “I call my dad by his first name too.”

“That’s really not a good thing.”

“I know. I mean. I was just saying. Uh. We have it..we have it in common….”

Connor pushed the board towards him. “You can have white.”

“Oh. Thanks.” In truth Evan really, really did not want to play white. White meant you got the first move, which meant your opponent would be judging you, which meant if you made a bad first move they might think you’re stupid, which means you are stupid because what kind of idiot agrees to play chess and then screws up the first move? “H-how come you know how to play?” He asked. Maybe if he got Connor talking he’d forget about the game.

Connor shrugged, bouncing his knee. “You know how some moms force their kids into beauty pageants so they can achieve their goals vicariously through their children?” He didn’t give Evan time to reply. “Larry’s like that, but with chess competitions. Me and Zoe both got to national levels.”

“You must really like the game then.”

“I fucking hate it.”

A hot flush of worry rose up the back of Evan’s neck. Connor had competed at national competitions. The best he’d done was the D division at his middle school’s chess tournament and he’d lost in the first round and almost puked on the board.

You’re meant to start with a pawn, right? Yeah. A pawn. Middle one? No, there isn’t a middle one. One of the middle two. Yeah. You move them forward.

Evan moved his left-middle pawn forward one space. There.

Connor raised an eyebrow and moved his left knight in an L shape towards the centre of the board. He places it down roughly, making a loud tap as it touched the board.

Why did he do that? He couldn’t take any of Evan’s pieces so why did he move his knight? Weren’t you supposed to move pawns first? Evan looked up at Connor and met his eyes. Brown and Blue.

He picked up his right-middle pawn and moved it forward one space, setting it down with a muted thud rather than a tap.

Connor’s hand shot out quick as lightning and he moved the same pawn on his side, snapping it forward one space.

Panic bloomed in Evan’s chest and he grabbed his left-middle pawn again, pushing it forward another space.
Again, Connor reacted quickly and snapped the pawn opposite forward two spaces so it was right in front of Evan’s. They could move two spaces? What? No. Right. They could only do that if it was the first time moving that pawn. Right. Okay.

“U-uh.” Evan kept his eyes on the board. “Why did you...uh...hit Zoe?” He moved his bishop to D2.

“She hit me first,” Connor pointed out. Pawn to D6.


Connor continued to bounce his knee. “You know how when someone pisses you off you want to hit them upside the head?” Queen to E6.

“K-kind of?” Evan moved his pawn diagonally to take Connor’s. He couldn’t help the little puff of pride he felt as he took the black piece off the board. He’d gotten the first kill. That was a good thing, right?

Connor moved one of his pawns to take Evan’s with a sharp snap, destroying any sense of accomplishment. “You know that little voice in your head that goes ‘don’t do that, that would be psychopathic’?”

Evan felt his stomach drop and he nodded. Bishop to E2.

“My brain thinks that,” knight to F6 “but my body doesn’t listen.”

“O-oh...” Evan went to move the bishop stationed in front of his king.

“Check.”

“Huh?”

Connor pointed to Evan’s king. “If you move that piece my queen can take your king.”

“Oh. Uh.” He really was an idiot. Evan moved his king one space to the right. “I suck at chess.”

“I can tell.” Pawn to H6.

Evan moved his bishop to take the pawn and Connor moved his rook to take his bishop.

“You’re scared of me,” Connor said again.

“Y-Yeah. You keep saying,” Pawn to G4

Knight to E4. “What else can I say?”

Queen to D3. “Dunno.”

Pause.

“Why are you here?” Evan asked Connor.

“Because it’s this or talking to my parents.” Knight to B4

“What’s wrong with your parents?” Queen to E4, Evan placed Connor’s knight beside his other taken pieces.

“Last time I talked to them I got a three-hour lecture about how I didn’t need to do what I did.”
Connor fingered the top of his Queen before moving it forward with a hard tap to take Evan’s.

“D-do what you did?” Evan murmured and Connor nodded.

“My Trauma.”

*Murderer.* There was that word again, stabbing in the centre of Evan’s mind. *He’s a murderer who shot up a school and hits his sister and stops you from hurting yourself and asks you to play chess. He’s a murderer. That’s why he’s here. That’s why Zoe is here. He’s a murderer. He’s a murderer —*  

CRASH.

The board went flying, bouncing and cartwheeling across the carpet.

“Stop looking at me like that!” Connor yelled, his nose wrinkled into a hard sneer.

Evan’s elbows stuck to his sides, his hands clutching at one another and for a moment. His skin felt too tight, too itchy. He wanted to hold his head and hide but he couldn’t. Instead, he could only manage a small “like what?”

“Like I’m some kind of fucking freak!” He shot back.

You just threw a chessboard at my head! Evan argued quietly. “I—I’m not,” he stuttered.

“Yeah, you are. Like I’m a fucking shark in a tank or some bullshit!”

Evan could see people peeking around the bookshelves and prayed to God one of them had a panic alarm. “I—I’m not,” he said again.

“I’m not a fucking freak!”

“I—“

“You’re the fucking freak!”

“I know!” The words left Evan’s mouth before he could stop them. “I…” he lowered his voice. “I know.”

Connor froze and there was a shift to his eyes. A softening. “What?”

“What?”

“What did you say?”

Evan felt like he’d been punched in the gut. “I—I didn’t...I mean it...it—*it didn’t matter so…”*  

Connor fixed him with a long, hard stare. “I—fuck—didn’t mean to freak out,” he said quietly.

“Y-you. Uh. Your body didn’t listen again?” Evan asked.

“Yeah.”

Silence.

“Why did you do it?” Evan continued under his breath.
“Do what?”

“Your Trauma.”

Connor’s brows knitted together in a tight line and he cocked his head. “I felt...it felt like the only option.”

“Oh…”

“Why did you do yours?”

Evan hesitated. “Accident.”

The two stand and sit in silence until Connor eventually bent down to pick up the pieces.

——

By the time they headed back to their room Connor found a manila envelope left on his bed. He picked it up, frowning when he noticed that it had already been opened.

“Customs didn’t like my present,” he said dully, flicking it open with his thumb. He peeked inside and let out a small sigh through his nose. “You’ll like this one,” he said, offering it to Evan.

“W-What is it?” He asked, picking at the hem of his shirt.

“My parents buy me shit sometimes, Zoe too. You can have it.” Connor waved the envelope at him again. “An apology for screaming at you.”

Evan hesitated before taking it from Connor, peeking at the contents.

THE AMAZING SPIDER-MAN

2 GREAT FEATURE-LENGTH SPIDER-MAN THRILLERS!

_the CHAMELEON STRIKES!

It was a comic.

“Uh. I don’t...I don’t need…” Evan nibbled at his lip. “Thank you.”

“You’re welcome. I guess. I dunno. It’s kind of shit.” Connor rubbed the back of his neck. “Thank me when you actually read it.”
Chapter 12

Chapter Notes

Sorry for taking so long for such a short update, let's just say shit happened.

Thank you, Levi, etc etc.


“So, what did you get up to today, honey?”

Evan leaned with his back against the wall, the phone to his ear as he tried to figure out exactly how to answer. He’d half hoped that the question wouldn't come up, especially since he’d asked her about her day first. Heidi was usually more than happy to natter on for hours about who did what at The Valley Hospital. Besides, he couldn't exactly follow up her stories about how adorable Michael’s son was with ‘I watch my roommate hit his sister and got a chessboard thrown at my head. Also, he's a school shooter and he gave me a comic. You were saying about Michael?’

“Hung out in the library,” he said instead, “with Jared and Will. It was cool.”

“Oh, it's good to see you going out with friends, Evan,” Heidi said in that sickly-sweet tone of voice she always used when she wanted to be sure Evan knew she was proud of him. It was also, rather painfully, the same tone of voice she always used when she didn't know he was lying.

Evan curled the phone cord around his finger his skin turn from pale, to red, to blue. “W-we don't really 'go out’. It's all in the same building. I mean...we all just went upstairs...so.”

“It's still good. Though you are getting to go outside right? I don't like the thought of you being cooped up all the time.”

_That’s literally the point_, Evan thought to himself. _We're in a chicken coop for superpowers. “We have a roof terrace—” that didn't count as a lie, right? “—so we get fresh air and stuff, still.”_

“Good, good. Oh, I was speaking to Cynthia last night—”

Evan felt his finger start to tingle with pins and needles. _Don't ask about Connor_, he begged. _Please, God, don't let her ask about Connor._

“—she said she was going to visit her kids today. Do you know if that went well? She mentioned Connor doesn't usually turn up.”

Evan silently sent half a dozen swear words God’s way. “I-I don't know. I didn't see him much today.”

“Oh. Well, hopefully, that means he went, huh?”

“Yeah, probably.”
“She really worries about them,” Heidi continued, her words causing Christmas Roses to bloom on Evan’s wrist. “Apparently Connor used to really struggle at school.”

That’s one way of putting it, Evan thought, wrapping the cord tighter and tighter around his finger. He couldn’t help but wonder if she knew what Connor had done. It would have been all too easy for her to search his name on the Registry of Patients. To have been linked off to half a dozen articles about the school-shooter kid bunking with her son. Was she scared for him? Was she pretending to be calm and happy while secretly hoping he somehow didn’t know he was sleeping four feet away from a murderer?

“Evan?” Heidi’s voice knocked him back to reality.

“Huh. What?”

“You went quiet, did you get stuck?”

Evan nodded. “Yeah, sorry. I was thinking.”

“Thinking?” Heidi prompt.

“Yeah.”

“About?” Heidi asked, hanging on the ‘O’.

Evan shrugged to himself. “Stuff.”

“Stuff and things?”

“Stuff and things,” Evan nodded. “S-sorry. Just...a lot’s happened.”

“In the library?”

Evan sent God a few more swears. “Yeah. We have homework.”

“Homework? On a Sunday?”

“Yeah. Well. Uh.” Evan’s mind was a jumble of cuss words and internal screaming. Think think think think think, he told himself. Think of an excuse. “They gave us it on Friday, I...I kinda put it off.”

“Oh, when’s it due? Maybe I can help?”

Evan winced and thought back to nights spend with his parents either side of him, gradually getting more and more ticked off at him as he struggled over multiplication worksheets and wrong answers. “N-no. Besides, other people need the phone.”

“Right, I keep forgetting. They should get more phones. It’s unfair that they make you all share. Kids need to talk to their parents.”

“Mm,” Evan grunted, wishing there were fewer phones so he’d have an excuse to bolt to his room. Maybe Connor wouldn’t be there and he’d have some time on his mind own. How many times had he actually been alone the past few days?

He paused. It had barely been a week and he was already thinking of how to get out of calls with his mother. What kind of son was he?

“Evan, sweetie.”
“Y-Yeah?”

“If something’s bothering you, you can tell me.” Her voice was earnest and calm and Evan felt the corners of his mouth grow heavy, a shaking frown forming on his lips. I hate it here and I want to go home, he answered wordlessly. I’m sorry I fucked up. He swallowed hard and managed to force himself to smile. “I’m fine, just feeling a bit homesick.”

“I’m sorry I couldn’t come visit.”

“No, no, it’s fine,” he said quickly. “I mean. You don’t have to, I know how expensive it is and it’s only been a few days.” He’d never expected her to come visit, not for a single minute.

“No, I mean. You’re a growing boy and it’s not right that you’re being separated from your family.”

“That’s not your fault though! You s-shouldn’t have to visit me because I shouldn’t be here in the first place. I-I mean, I climbed the tree, I fell.”

Heidi was quiet for a moment. “It’s not your fault, Evan. You didn’t know you’d fall.” She gave a small sigh. “You Activating wasn’t the worst thing that could have happened.”

“Mm.” The end of Evan’s finger was completely purple.

“But I am happy that you’ve managed to make the most of it at least. You have friends, you’re being social,” she sounded like she was trying to convince herself more than she was trying to convince him. All Evan could do was hum in agreement and shake the feeling back into his hand. “Oh shit,” Heidi swore under her breath and Evan’s stomach twisted. A part of him couldn’t get used to hearing her swear. “I’ve got to go, I’ve have to cover for Dan.”

“Oh,” Evan unwound the cord, rubbing his hand on his khakis. “O-okay. Talk to you tomorrow.”

“Talk to you tomorrow. I love you.”

“Love you too, mom.” He listened to the dial tone for a moment before sighing and putting the phone down.

“Hey, Acorn.”

Evan turned round to see Will and Jared. Jared had a large grin spread across his face, the kind that made Evan more than a little uneasy.

“I-I told you not to call me that,” he mumbled, scratching his arm.

“I know, I know.” Jared waved his hand as though he was trying to waft away the comment. “Where the hell were you today? I was looking for you.”

Will raised an eyebrow. “You weren’t.”

“We went to the garden, that counts. It has plants and shit so—“

“Garden?” Evan asked, cocking his head.

Jared nodded “Yeah, on the roof.”

“It’s more of a greenhouse,” Will pointed out.

“Same thing.”
“We’re allowed to go in the greenhouse?” Evan asked, his brows knitted.

Jared grinned. “Why wouldn’t we be? Who do you think takes care of it?” He grinned and leaned against the wall beside Evan, the static in the air causing the hair on his arms to stand on end.

“I dunno, I thought it was just a classroom or something.”

“Nah.” Jared prodded Evan’s side. “So where were you? Jerking off in your room?”

“N-no! I was in the library.”

“Oo, so you got to see Murphy’s freak out then?”

“Huh?” Word really did spread quickly around here.

“Yeah,” Jared nodded. “I heard he threw a book at someone or something. Seriously that guy is freaking insane.”

Evan rubbed the back of his neck. “I-It was a chessboard actually.” He swallowed hard. “He threw it at me.”

Jared’s eyes lit up, his smile spreading into a wide grin. “No way! How the hell did you manage to piss him off? What, did he finally notice you ogling him?”

“I-I don’t ogle him.”

“Yeah, yeah you do.” Jared clasped his hands together, fluttering his eyelashes. “Getting lost in his weirdo eyes.”

“Why’d he throw a chessboard at you?” Will asked, giving Jared a soft kick to the back of his shins.

“I...I dunno,” Evan admitted truthfully. “He said I was looking at him funny. Maybe I was?”

“Probably not,” Jared spoke up before Will could have a chance to. “He’s paranoid as all hell. Once he literally threw a chair at the staff table. Missed Dr Pete’s head by this much,” He held a inch’s distance between his thumb and forefinger.

“I don’t know why he hasn’t been transferred yet,” Will sighed, taking off his specs and rubbing the lenses on his shirt.

“Transferred?” Evan asked.

“To The Basement.”

“Ah. Right.” There it was again, Basement with a capital B. The word everyone but Evan threw around like they knew exactly what it meant. Evan hesitated. “Hey, Will?”

“Yeah?” Will looked up at him, his milky-white eyes glinting under the stark hospital lighting. Evan couldn’t help but wonder what he could see--how thick his ‘shadow’ was.

“What is The Basement? No ones...uh...” he trailed off when he noticed Will’s eyebrows raise.

“Nobody told you?” He asked in disbelief. “Seriously?”

Evan shook his head. “Sorry.”
“Not your fault.” Will put his glasses back on, hiding his eyes. “When kids...well, the official phrasing I got told is ‘when Patients prove themselves to be an uncontrollable threat against the facility they’re transferred down to The Basement’.”

“An uncontrollable threat?” Evan echoed. Connor definitely seemed to qualify as that.

Will nodded. “Like, if the doctors can’t sedate them or stop them, that kind of thing.” His lip twisted into a small frown. “I’ve only seen one person get taken down there since I arrived. This Pyrokinetic girl set fire to the old arts therapy craft shed.”

“We have an art therapy shed?” Evan asked.

“We used to,” Jared said matter-of-factly. “Now we have a big pile of ash out back.” He flexed his fingers for a moment. “They were gonna send me down there at one point.”

Will looked genuinely surprised at that, his shoulders raised ever-so-slightly. “They were?”

“Yep,” Jared said, popping the ‘p’. “Heard Dr Sherman and that asshole talking about it.”

“Which asshole?” Will asked.

“Jacobi. This was like, ages ago, back when I fried anything I touched.” He made sparks crackle the air around him for emphasis. “Jacobi thought I should be sent down there and Sherman bit his fucking head off and told him not to tell him how to treat his patients. Scared the shit out of me, lemme tell you. It was like hell had opened up. I’ve never seen anyone so angry—well, apart from Murphy but he doesn’t count.”

“Why didn’t he?” Evan asked after a moment.

“Hm?”

“Why didn’t he transfer you?”

“Oh.” A cheeky grin replaced the look of seriousness on Jared’s face and he grabbed onto Evan’s wrist. “Lemme show you something,” he said, yanking him further down the hall.

Will let out a groan and followed him. “Don’t show him the phone.”

“Why not? It’s my pride and joy! My one great achievement.” Jared rugged Evan along, past his and Connor’s room at the end of hallway made up of empty bedrooms. A few boys were milling about using the phones that dotted the walls between each bedroom door. One or two of them looked up as Jared bustled past them but most seemed more interested in whoever they were talking to than three weirdos they didn’t know.

Eventually, Jared stopped, letting go of Evan’s wrist to gesture towards a burned out lump attached to the wall. Wait, no. When Evan peered closer he could just make out the melted hunk of metal that had once been a keypad, the broken cord and husk of ashen plastic that looked kind of like a phone receiver if he squinted hard enough.

“You did this?” He asked, looking to Jared.

“Yep, I accidentally hit it with my hip. Again, this was back when I was basically a walking electrical storm. Evan nibbled at his lip, tensing when Jared grabbed his wrist again, holding Evan’s hand to his shoulder. ‘I’m fine now, see? I’m not gonna, like, electrocute you or anything.’”
Evan nodded and watched as the hairs on his arm stood to attention one by one. His eyes moved to the phone again. “It’s like Stranger Things,” he mumbled softly.

“What?” Jared asked.

“Oh. Uh.” Evan pulled his hand away, his skin still tingling from the static. “It was this show, Uh, it had a psychic character in it a-and there was this scene where a phone exploded.” He twisted his lip. “A bunch of people boycotted it cause it glorified psychic powers. It got cancelled…”

“Damn,” Jared pouted. “Sounds cool.”

“I never saw it, just read a bunch of stuff about it.” Evan turned the hem of his shirt between his fingers.

“Still sounds cool.” Jared drummed his fingers against the phone.

“How come you didn’t get transferred?” Evan asked.

He shrugged. “Sherman says I ‘mellowed out’” he made finger quotes around the phrase. “When people become Patients their powers are all over the place but eventually they even out.”

“Oh. Is that why Connor hasn’t been transferred either?”

“In theory,” Will said. He almost sounded bitter, his lips bunched at the corner of his mouth. He’d leaned against the wall by the phone, his arms crossed tightly over his chest.

“In theory?” Evan echoed.

“Powers usually take a few months to ‘mellow out’, two or three max.” He gestured down the hall towards Evan and Connor’s room. “He’s been here for a fifteen. It’s stupid. Apparently, them being able to sedate him is enough to let him stay.”

“Bet Sherman has a thing for him or something--ow!” Will punched Jared’s shoulder, not really hard enough to hurt.

“That’s gross.”

“I never said it wasn’t! And it’s a better explanation than nothing.”

“Didn’t you just say Sherman stopped you getting transferred?”

“Yes. Maybe he’s just an idiot.”

“Probably.” Will sighed and shook his head. “It doesn’t matter, we’re still stuck with him. Well,” he nodded towards Evan. “You are.”

He picked at a loose thread on the hem of his shirt. “Not really. I-I mean, he’s not that bad.”

“He threw something at your head.”

“Yeah, cause I pissed him off.” For a moment Evan was tempted to tell Will and Jared about the Amazing Spider-man book sat at the bottom of his drawers. Was giving him a comic actually a good thing? A friendly thing or a here’s-a-reminder-of-how-much-of-a-freak-you-are thing? Both?

“Other people breathing pisses him off,” Jared pointed out. “That’s the point, he’s fucking crazy!”
“He doesn’t seem crazy most of the time though.”

“We’ve known him fifteen months,” Jared said matter-of-factly. “He’s crazy and I’m hungry, can we go eat now?”

Will nodded and stood up straight again. “Yeah, one second though.” He looked to Evan. “Connor acting nice to you doesn’t take away all the shit he’s done, you know that right?”

_Acting Nice_, Evan echoed. Was that what the comic was? What stopping him from hurting himself was? What asking him to play chess was? He felt the fabric of his shirt tighten as he pulled the thread free, snapping it off with a flick of his hand. “Yeah,” he said aloud. “I know.”
Chapter 13

Chapter Notes

Sorry for being late! Was extremely busy over new years and Christmas but I'm back!

Blame my dad for this chapter: He kept going on about how much he hated the name Jacobi, so have some Jacobi.

Thank you, Levi. Etc etc.

TW: Medical procedures (Ish?), Reference to self-harm, Blood, anxiety attacks.

While Evan’s first few days at The Ward had crawled by at a snail’s pace, the second week just clicked. His days no longer felt like a stagnant slog, but slipped along as quickly as sand through his fingers, blurring together.

Breakfast, class, lunch, listen to Jared and Will in the library, more class, talks with Dr Sherman and lessons with Dr Peet, sitting in circles between Zoe Murphy and Alana, listening as the others muttered about how better or worse they were feeling, dinner, bed.

Pause.

The days seemed to click, but the nights froze in place. As though all of a sudden time got tired and decided to crawl.

Instead of listening, writing and practising his powers, Evan found his eyes drifting slowly around his room. He stared at the panels on the ceiling, counting all twenty-eight of them again and again. His gazed out of his window at the wall surrounding The Ward until the dark looked blue instead of black. He fiddled with his blanket, picked and pulled at the rough sheets, buried his face against his old pyjama shirt and held tightly onto his mother's letter until the weeks made it so that they smelt of hospitals instead of home.

Occasionally he'd spare a glance at Connor's oddly peaceful face, see the ways the corners of his mouth slipped into the tiniest hint of a frown as he dozed. Evan could pretend Connor wasn't Connor when he slept. That he was just some boy in the bed next to him. Not a murderer, not a threat, just a sleeping boy.

_Freak_, the voice at the back of his head scolded.

But after he'd looked at the ceiling, and the window, and his pillow, and Connor's eerily calm face all Evan could do with was think. That was never a good thing.

_You're a freak._

_Everyone hates you._

_Will and Jared are just putting up with you because they have to._
Dr Sherman and Peet are just putting up with you because they have to.

Your powers are useless, no matter what Peet says. You can grow one plant at a time, and that's only if they want to. If it weren't for the flowers on your arm no one would even know you were a Patient. They'd just think you're crazy. That your schizophrenic or something. Then your mom wouldn't be on her own anymore. She probably doesn't even notice you're gone anymore. She barely noticed you were there, to begin with. She's free now. She doesn't have to waste time worrying about her stupid son who can't deal with answering the door or using his phone because talking to people is scary. She's probably happy your here. She's free now. She can live her life. Move on like David. Make her own family. When you really think about it you're the one constant between them. You made David miserable and he left, now he's happy. He's got June and Jason and Anna now. His kids aren't fucked up freaks like you. That fall was the best thing that ever happened to your mom really--

Evan closed his eyes and felt thorns start to dig into his skin, he raised his arms, inspecting the clumps of Christmas Roses, Begonias, and Marigold. Sage covered the gaps in his skin where the thorns were sharp enough to draw blood.

For a moment Evan wanted to rip them out.

How many weeks had it been since he'd done it? Two? Three.

A month, he realised. He'd been there a month.

He stared and felt stray drops of blood run slowly down his arm, followed by the soft tickle of more sage.

Would doing it again be a good thing, or a bad thing?

Good because he hadn't done it in thirty days, he'd lasted that long.

Bad because all the time would be for naught.

He stared and wished he had some way of knowing what time it was. It could be eleven o'clock at night or four in the morning and he had no way of telling which.

He clenched his fist and let his hand drop to his side, rolling over so he had his back to Connor. He watched the window, closed his eyes and waited for sleep. He forced his shoulders to relax and his body to become heavy and sink into his mattress.

Then someone started screamed.

Evan's eyes snapped open with a start and he sat up.

Connor, he realised, his eyes fixing on the other boy's bed. Connor looked bigger, his skin pulled tight against his body, lips peeled back into a hard scowl. The bed creaked underneath him as he thrashed his limbs against his restraints.

For a second, Evan was frozen. Monkshood rippled up his arm and Connor twisted his head to look over at him, as though he was only just realising that Evan was even there. His eyes were wide and dark, nose wrinkled into a wolfish glare.

“C-Connor?” He asked, scrunching his blanket between his fingers.

Connor didn’t say anything, twisting his body and pulling against his straps.
Evan had forgotten just how big he was when he transformed. He looked two-times as big as he was before, his pyjamas stretched flat across his shoulders as he kicked and screamed.

Evan couldn’t move. He felt his heart hammering in his throat, the sting of thorns in his arm. He could feel every inch of his body screaming at him to run, but he didn’t.

*This is why you were put here*, said the back of his head. *So he’d freak out like this and kill you. Accept it.*

Connor was screaming.

“Evan!” Lucky’s voice roared over the sound of the screams, knocking Evan out of his thoughts. “The panic.”

It took Evan’s brain a second to start working again. It took him another few seconds to realise what Lucky meant. Quick as a flash he lunged for his bedside table, grabbing the small piece of metal he had placed there. He held it in his palm, scrambling off his bed as Connor gave another howl. He backed up until he felt his body lurch and he thudded against the back wall, the window sill digging into the small of his back. He pushed the button once, wide eyes fixed on Connor’s writhing form.

Connor’s face was pale.

He pushed the button twice.

Connor’s brow was drenched in sweat.

Three times.

Connor’s body was shaking.

Four times.

Connor was crying.

Evan stopped and stared. Tears were streaming down Connor’s cheeks, his breaths coming out in strangled howls. Evan’s brow wrinkled and the monkshood began to wilt—if only slightly. Replaced by the soft touch of Sycamore Leaves.

Their bedroom door swung open.

“What’s going on?” Jacobi snapped on the lights, looking more than a little frazzled.

Evan didn’t say anything, just pointed to Connor’s bed as he gave another scream. Jacobi’s eyes narrowed, his shoulders slumping.

“That’s it?” he asked, like all this was completely normal.

“Y-yeah,” Evan nodded.

Jacobi ran his fingers through his hair, giving a great and long sigh. “Great.” He turned to walk back out the room.

“W-where are you going?” Evan asked quickly, a flush of panic raising the hair on the back of his neck. “You can’t just leave me here—n-not on my own.”

“I’ll be back in a minute, relax,” Jacobi called, giving a small wave as he headed out. “He can’t hurt
you.” With that, he disappeared out of sight. At least he had the courtesy to leave the door open.

Evan kept perfectly still, his gaze flicking back and forth between the door and Connor. He could make a run for it if he really wanted to, bolt out into the hallway and hide there. But that would mean having to go past Connor and he’d rather not risk that. So instead, he stayed put and waited.

Jacobi couldn’t have been gone more than a few minutes, but for Evan it felt like forever. Eventually though, he returned, this time with a duffle bag in tow. He placed it down on the floor beside Connor’s bed, not at all bothered by the fact that he hadn’t calmed down in the slightest. If anything Connor was worse.

Evan watched as Jacobi took out a small box, opening it to reveal something that looked vaguely like a syringe without a needle.

“What’s that?” Evan asked, scrunching his shirt between his fingers.

“Tranquilizer,” Jacobi said simply, walking over to Connor’s bedside. Connor turned his head to look up at him, about to open his mouth to scream again when Jacobi placed the object to his neck and pushed a button with his thumb. There was a small click and Jacobi pulled his hand away quick as a flash. “Countdown from ten,” he said to Connor, almost jokingly.

Connor didn’t but Evan did, in his mind of course. By the time he’d reached three Connor’s movements had started to slow, his breathing as well. By five he’d stopped moving altogether, his head lulled back against his pillow. At seven his eyes moved to look at Jacobi. At eight he moved them to look at Evan. At ten Connor was asleep.

Jacobi let out a long, heavy sigh. “There, all sorted,” he said, packing away the empty syringe.

“T-that’s it?” Evan asked.

“Yeah.”

“What if he wakes up again?”

“He won’t. Not until tomorrow morn—“ Jacobi cut himself off “—well, later this morning if you want to get really technical with it.”

“What if he’s angry when?”

“He won’t be. It’s a tranquilizer. Tranquil, you know, as in calm?”

Evan didn’t seem satisfied. “D-does this happen a lot?”

Jacobi rubbed his eyes. “Often enough. Sherman’s a real dick for letting you bunk with him—uh, don’t tell him I said that.”

“I won’t.”

“Mm, back to sleep now. It’s late.”

Evan didn’t move from his spot by the window sill and Jacobi let out a long sigh. “He’s not going to hurt you. He literally can’t get up.”

Silence.

Another sigh.
“Christ, you kids.” Jacobi picked up the duffle bag. “You mind sleeping on a mattress?”

Evan shook his head.

“Perfect. Grab your blanket and stuff.”

Evan did as he was told, scrunching his quilt and pillow into a ball tucked neatly under one arm. He hesitated before taking Lucky’s pot in the other.

“Oh, leave the plant,” Jacobi groaned.

“What is this?” Lucky asked, referring to Jacobi.

Evan didn’t answer. “I just want to make sure they’re safe.”

“It’s a plant.”

“They don’t like being called ‘It’. It’s dehumanising.”

“It’s a plant!” Jacobi facepalmed, hard. “God. Fine. Take it.” With that he turned, switching off the light as he headed into the hall. “Follow me.”

Evan cast Connor a final glance before trailing after Jacobi.

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They didn’t go very far, just two doors down the hall to a near exact copy of Connor and Evan’s bedroom, though the mattresses and bedside tables were completely bare.

“Here,” Jacobi gestured to the closest of the two beds. “You can sleep in here tonight if you want.”

“U-Um. Thanks.” Evan placed Lucky down on one of the bedside tables before throwing his blanket onto the bed, setting his pillow at the foot-end of the bed.

“That the way you slept at home?” Jacobi asked, catching Evan off guard.

“Um. Yeah,” he nodded.

“You kids are weird.”

“Mm.” Evan looked down, turning the hem of his shirt between his fingers.

“You okay, kid?”

Evan shook his head.

“He can’t hurt you.”

“I-I know.” Evan hesitated. “Sorry. Um. I’m worried about him. I think?”

Jacobi raised an eyebrow. “You think?” he echoed.

“He was upset.”

“He was angry.”

“S-same thing.”
“Different thing.” Jacobi sighed heavily, raking a hand through his hair. “Go to sleep, Kid.”

“Sorry.” Evan held his arm loosely, wincing. The skin under his fingers was still raw from the thorns.

Jacobi hummed. “Do you want a Xanax or something? You’re bleeding.”

“Oh. Uh. I’m fine.”

“Sure you are.” Jacobi rolled his eyes. “You sound like you’re going to start crying or something.”

“J-just. Um. Spooked.”

“Yeah, I was too the first time I saw it. Like I said, putting you and him together was a massive f—” he paused, giving a heavy sigh, “a big mistake.” He paused before turning to leave. “You sure you don’t want anything?” he asked, looking over his shoulder at Evan.

“Y-yeah,” he nodded.

“If you’re sure.” Jacobi switched off the light as he left, closing the door behind him.

Once he was sure that Jacobi was gone Evan flopped down on his bed, pulling his covers over his head.

“Who was that?” Lucky asked.

“Jacobi,” Evan said into his pillow.

“What was wrong with the Connor Murphy?”

“He was just...angry, I think.”

“Angry?”

“Yeah.” Evan wasn’t too sure if Lucky knew what he meant by that. He wasn’t even sure if plants could get angry in the same way humans could, if at all.

Evan pulled his head out from under the covers to stare at the ceiling. The mattress was cold and lumpy against his skin. He turned over onto his side, facing the open window. Here he was again, staring at nothing all night. Maybe he should have asked Jacobi for something to help him sleep?

*He’d just think you’re an idiot if you did,* said the back of his head and Evan pressed his face into his pillow.

Evan stayed like that until he had to take a breath and he sat up, his quilt wrapped around his shoulders. He stood up and paced a little while before sitting back down on the edge of his bed. He rocked backwards, rocked forwards.

*What are you doing? You look like an idiot!*

He stopped. Stared. Got up.

“Where are you going?” Lucky asked him as he went to open the hallway door.

“Nowhere, I’ll be right back,” Evan said, peeking through the crack in the door to make sure no one was there before slipping back out. The sudden light hurt his eyes, and it took a moment for him to
blink away the dancing black spots in his vision. He took care to be as quite a possible, walking down the hall on his tiptoes. He couldn’t help but be reminded of the Halloween night were he’d snuck downstairs to watch TV. There was that same tension in the air, that same, deep-rooted fear of getting caught.

Connor was unmoving in his bed, still completely out cold. Evan still made sure to say silent as he stepped into the room, leaving the door open ajar so he could rush back out if his needed to. He went over to his bedside drawer, easing it open inch by inch. Evan couldn’t help but feel painfully aware of how loud each individual creak and scrap of the the drawer was, quickly glancing away every now and then to make sure Connor hadn’t suddenly woken up again. Once the opening was wide enough he reached inside and took the comic between his thumb and forefinger, taking it out.

Evan didn’t bother closing the drawer, he just hurried back to the door.

“What is that?” Lucky asked.

“Comic,” he replied, switching on the light before settling back down on the bed.

“Comic?” Lucky echoed.

“Like a book, but with pictures.” Evan stared down at the cover for a moment. The Amazing Spider-man, he’d heard of that one. Just off-handedly in the news once or twice whenever they spoke about Patients. Usually nothing anyone said about it was positive.

Slowly, Evan opened to the first page.

_Stan Lee._

There was than name again.

It still felt like he was holding some kind of forbidden object. Evan could picture every single tumblr post and article he’d ever read telling him how evil and dangerous they were. Despite that, he could still feel Sycamores sprouting on his arm.

It was either this or listening to that stupid voice in his stupid head.

Evan wrapped his quilt tightly around his shoulders, propping himself up against the headboard before turning the page and starting to read.
Evan ended up reading *The Amazing Spider-man NO.1* nine times before he finally fell asleep. He did so awkwardly, his back pressed against the metal frame of his bed and he woke up with one hell of a pain in his neck, though a couple of Sage leaves quickly fixed that.

He slipped back into his and Connor’s room to get dressed, only to find Connor still completely conked out. He no longer looked like the writhing madman of the night before, instead, he was peaceful. His eyes lightly closed, head tilted slightly to the side as he slept.

Evan caught himself staring again and shook his head.

*Connor acting nice to you doesn’t take away all the shit he’s done,* he reminded himself. *Acting Nice. Connor isn’t nice.*

*He Acts Nice. It doesn’t matter that he gave you a comic, it doesn’t matter that he asked you to play chess, it doesn’t matter that he told Dr Sherman about you. He was Acting Nice. He’s still the boy from last night. He’s still the boy who tried to kill people.*

He’s still the boy who was crying.

Evan swallowed hard and placed Lucky back down on their window sill.

“Are you okay, Evan?” They asked.

He nodded. “Y-Yeah,” his voice was no louder than a breath.

“No.”

“No?”

For the first time since Evan had first started hearing Lucky’s voice, they almost sounded angry. “You are lying.”

“I-I’m not.”

“You are not okay.”

“I am.”
Lucky grew quiet and Evan could have sworn they were staring at him.

“You are doing the thing.”

Evan cocked his head. “Thing?”

“T-thing. You do the t-t-thing when you are not okay.”

“You mean I stutter?”

“Stutter? Yes,” Evan could have sworn Lucky’s leaves were nodding at him. “The Evan Hansen stutters when he is not okay, just like how the Connor Murphy waters or Venus Flytrap yellows. You are lying.”

Evan looked away from them, focusing on the Orange Mocks blooming across his arm. “I’m fine,” he said again before shaking his head. “You wouldn’t understand.”

“Yes. But tell me anyway.”

Evan bit his lip, looking back at Connor over his shoulder. His eyes were still closed, his body still a little too big and deflated.

*He could be asleep*, said the back of his brain. *Or he’s faking. If he hears you talking about him he’ll flip out again.*

“I…” Evan hesitated before picking up Lucky’s pot again and taking them into the bathroom. The door didn’t have a lock on it, but it would muffle the sound enough. He put Lucky down by the sink, taking the opportunity to scoop a handful of water over them. “I’m...I’m scared.”

“Of the Connor Murphy.”

“No. Um. I-I don’t really…” he sighed. “I’m confused.”

“Confused?”

Evan nodded. “Because I don’t know how to deal with it.”

Lucky was quite a long moment. “I don’t know either,” they said eventually.

Evan sighed and spooned more water over them. “Didn’t expect you to. You’re...well, lucky. Plants don’t have to deal with this stuff.”

“I do. I watch you.”

“That doesn’t count, not really.” He turned off the tap, using the remaining water on his hands to rub at his face.

“I like the Connor Murphy,” Lucky said simply. “He gives me water.”

That made Evan pause. “He does?”

“Yes. When you are not here.”

Evan added that to the list. A maybe-murderer who gave him a comic, told Dr. Sherman, asked him to play chess and watered his plant without being asked.
He rubbed his face again. Why couldn’t things just be easy?

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“We’re going to try something different today,” Peet said.

Evan was sat on his usual chair in the roof garden, his brow slightly furrowed. The past six lessons had mostly been focused on growing whatever plant had been placed in front of him. He’d gotten quite good at it too, though he did still find himself returning to his room with a headache from time to time. The routine was comfortable, unchanging. Or so he thought.

“I want to focus on your Healing Factor,” Peet said, finding another folding chair and settling down in front of him.

“My Healing?” he echoed and she nodded.

“Dr Sherman told me it’s connected to your flowers, correct?”

“Y-yeah. Uh.” Evan held one hand palm-up, slamming his other fist against it a handful of times. It didn’t actually hurt, but it was enough for some Sage to bloom.

“It’s very sensitive,” Peet observed, tapping a finger to her chin.

“Yeah, it’s kind of annoying sometimes.” Evan watched at the Sage disintegrated into nothing.

“Have you ever tried to heal another person?” she asked.

Evan cocked his head. It never occurred to him to try that. “I haven’t had the chance. Um. I’m pretty sure it’s automatic.”

“Healing Factors are rarely completely Passive or Active. There is a chance that it may be automatic, but I want to test just to make sure.”

“Test?”

“Yes. Can you activate it again?”

Evan hesitated before nodding.

“Good. And when you start healing I want you to focus on how it feels. Tell me if you feel a surge.”

“A surge?”

“If it really is Passive, you’ll feel nothing. If it’s not, then you’ll feel a surge of energy. It might just be small, barely noticeable if you’re not looking for it, but it will be there.” Peet gestured for him to try with her hand and Evan looked down at his palms.

He twisted his lip before raising his fist and tapped it against his palm a few times. He had no idea what he was supposed to be looking for and he felt a hot flush of worry working up the back of his neck.

You’re going to miss it. You’re going to miss it. You’re going to get it wrong.

Sage started to bloom across his skin and he knitted his brows closely, focusing hard. He could feel the flowers pushing through his skin, he could feel the very slight tingle of pain start to fade, and then he felt something else. He felt a thin layer of warmth pooling just underneath his skin, a surge.
Peet smiled softly. “See. I told you.”

Evan closed his hand into a small fist as the Sage disappeared, taking the warmth with it. “So. Um. Now what?”

“Now, we’re going to have to work on controlling it,” she said, like it was going to be that easy. “Once you can control the psychic energy within your body we can work on pushing that energy outside of it.”

Evan opened and closed his hands. “And how do I do that?”

“Through practice, like anything else.” Peet drummed her fingers against the clipboard resting across her knees. “I want you to try and picture that surge again and replicate it without an injury. If your head starts hurting, stop. We don’t know how much strain this’ll put you under.”

He rubbed his hands together. “I...I can try.”

“Tell me if you manage it. Remember to stop if you start feeling any pain.”

“O-Okay.” Evan closed his eyes and focused on the patch of skin again. He’d grown used to picturing things, growing plants and phantom limbs mostly, but picturing feelings was a lot harder.

He sat there for a long moment and felt nothing.

“It’s not working,” he sighed, hanging his head. “I can’t do it.”

“You can,” Peet said bluntly.

“I-I can’t. I can’t picture it properly.”

“And that’s okay. But it means we have to find another way.”

Evan’s mouth formed a hard, straight line.

You probably just can’t do it, his head said. She’s wasting her time. You’re wasting her time. You can’t do it. You can’t do it. You can’t do it. Your powers are useless. Don’t start crying. You’re being stupid.

Evan wanted to pull at his flowers again, but he couldn’t. Not with Peet there. Instead, he closed his eyes and just imagined. He imagined his hand holding onto the flowers, pulling at them, the sharp spikes of pain that came before Sage took its place.

He heard Dr Peet draw in a sharp breath and hunched his shoulders.

“Evan,” she said quietly.

He opened his eyes to slits, keeping his head down. Small bunches of Sage littered his arm, the odd feeling of warmth once again pressing against his skin. “I...” he trailed off.

“I told you,” Peet said smugly.

“I wasn’t...trying to...” he blinked dumbly, staring as the Sage slowly started to disappear. “I wasn’t trying to control it.”

A look of confusion flashed across Dr Peet’s face for a moment and she narrowed her eyes. “What were you doing, then? Because whatever it was worked.
Evan froze. He couldn’t just tell her the truth. He’d end up in Dr Sherman’s office again. She’d think he’s a freak. “I…” he started. “I was thinking about my arm.”

“Your arm?”

“Yeah,” he nodded, wincing a little at the sight of more Mock Oranges blooming across his skin. “I was thinking about when I broke it.”

Dr Peet pursed her lips, humming softly as she noted that down on her clipboard. “Interesting. So you were thinking of pain?”

Another nod.

“Very interesting.” She tapped the end of the pen against the clipboard. “Think about having a headache?”

“Huh?”

“Think about having a headache,” she repeated. “I want to try something.”

Evan frowned a little but did as he was told. He remembered the sharp stabbing pain he got when overworked himself, the feeling of his hands pressed against his eyes as he nursed a migraine, the unbridled sting of Patient Headache. Sure enough, he felt the same layer of warmth, the feeling of small leaves pressing their way through his forehead.

Peet wrote something down. “Looks like your powers are more sensitive than we thought. Have you ever been shot?”

“Uh. No?”

“Imagine it.”

Evan’s brows knitted close together. “O...kay.” He closed his eyes again and tried to picture it, the way people’s body lurched forward on TV as they were shot in the back. His shoulders slumped and he shook his head.

“Anything?” Peet asked.

“Nothing.”

“Interesting.” More notes. “It looks like it’s more to do with you remembering pain than simply imagining it. Tricking your powers into thinking you’re hurt. So we’re limited in how you can control it, but we’ll have to work with it.”

Evan rubbed his arm gently. “Work with it?” What did that mean?

She probably wants you to hurt yourself. More injuries mean you have more to remember. The thought made his stomach twist.

“How’s your head?” Peet’s knocked him back to reality.

“F-fine.”

“Good. I want to see if you can pass on some of that energy. I’m going to remember an injury and we’ll see if you can heal it.”
“Okay. Uh. How do I do that?”

Peet tapped her pen again. “The last Patient with a Healing Factor I met said it was easier to focus the energy at the tips of her fingers, then push it outwards. That way the energy won’t have to travel too far.”

He nodded. “Right. Um…” Evan fiddled aimlessly with the hem of his shirt until Peet held out her hand. Hesitantly, he reached out and held it, focusing on his fingers. He imagined a hangnail, the steady sting as the dead skin pulled up and up his cuticle, warmth pooling in his fingertips. For a moment, that was all he felt, and then everything stretched.

It was as though he was being split, painlessly, in two, another body connected to his own. He felt a slight tingling to the other body’s cheek, the heat of a handprint struck across its face.

“You got hit,” he murmured quietly.

Peet drew in a small breath. “You can tell,” it wasn’t a question.

“Yeah. I can feel it.”

“And are you healing it?”

Evan shook his head. “No. Um. I’m not sure how.”

The pain in Peet’s cheek wavered. “The last healing Patient said it felt like she had to poke holes in a piece of paper with a pencil. Push her energy through her skin if that makes sense.”

“Kind of? Um. Could you focus on the pain again?” The feeling on her cheek flared in reply. Evan bit his lip. ‘Poking holes through paper’ wasn’t exactly the most descriptive instruction.

You can’t do it.

His grip on Dr Peet’s hand tightened a little.

You can’t do it. You can’t do it.

He did his best to focus on the warmth in his fingers.

You can’t do it. You can’t do it. You can’t do it.

He felt a hard lump form in his throat.

You can’t do it. You can’t do it. You can’t do it. You can’t do it.

He pushed the energy outwards and gave a loud yelp.

It was as though he had thrown his whole body against a window. A sudden and dull thud that shook his skull and rattled his teeth. He let go of her hand to hold his head, his fingers digging into his scalp.

“Are you okay?” Peet asked quickly, leaning forward in her chair.

“Yeah,” he hissed in pain. “I...um...I don’t think I can do it.”

“What happened?”
“I dunno. It...it was like I hit a wall.”

“Okay. Well. We’ll call it a day for now,” Peet said as a crown of Sage started to sprout around Evan’s head. “We can try again later.”

Evan felt his cheeks pale a little. “I don’t think I can do it,” he said again.

“You can feel the injuries of others, it makes no sense for you to be able to do that but not heal them.”

“But…” Evan scrunched his hands into fists.

“No buts. I’ll see if I can get into contact with the other Patient and ask if she ever experienced anything similar.”

Evan kept his mouth shut, relaxing a little as the pain in his head subsided. There was another person like him, a person who’d been through The Ward and was out there in the world.

*Her powers are probably better than yours*, said his head. *She’s not as useless as you.*
Chapter 15

Connor stayed asleep for another two days. He lay completely still on his back, his breathing deep and slow as he slept. It was almost peaceful, or it would have been if Evan wasn’t so nervous.

Evan spent Thursday and Friday night curled up under his covers, peeking out at the other boy’s bed for any sign of movement. A large part of him expected Connor to start screaming and writhing again, but luckily, he didn’t. He just lay still, his chest rising and falling, eyes closed. Eventually, Evan found himself dozing off in the early hours of the morning. His body felt like a coiled spring, ready to snap into action in a moments notice

When Evan woke up on Saturday morning to find Connor still unmoving. Part of him couldn’t help but wonder if Connor would just stay like that forever. He’d slept enough as it was, but then he’d always moved a least a little, rolling over or getting up to eat. This time things felt different. Connor didn’t move or wake up even for a second.

After Evan got dressed for service he managed to pluck up enough courage to stand over Connor’s motionless form, peering down at his face.

What day is it?

Connor had asked him that when they first met.

Not too much of a loss .

So this was what happened when the loss was a little greater.

Evan slowly reached out his hand, waving it in front of Connor’s face. His eyes didn’t even flicker.

“Can...can you hear me?” Evan murmured.

Nothing.

“Connor?”

Nothing.

Evan swallowed hard. “I’m going now.”

Connor breathed in, breathed out, and Evan left without another word.
His mind kept wandering back to his room during service, back to Connor and comics and snowballing thoughts.

*Connor and comics and snowballing thoughts, these are a few of my most stressful things.* He sang in his head, wincing. There was a reason he wasn’t a songwriter.

“You’re disappearing on me already?” Jared chided once service was finished.

Evan paused, already halfway to the elevator. “I’ve got to go get changed,” he said. “Um. Sorry.”

“It’s fine, learn to take a joke.” Jared grinned. “I know sleeping beauty’s waiting for you.”

“I...he’s...I need to get changed,” he said again.

“I know, I know. I just don’t think you should be cooped up all day like some kind of angsty teenager with a masturbation problem.”

Evan choked on dry air. “I don’t...I need to get changed!”

Jared laughed, a wide grin spread across his face. “I don’t know why you’re so stressed out, I mean there’s nothing wrong with the feelings one man has for another.”

“I don’t...I’m not…” Evan’s hands bunched at his hem, Wormwood leaves dotting his wrist. “He’s asleep anyway.”

“Mm-hm. Me and Will would probably have to hold an intervention.” He stepped in front of Evan and grabbed him by the shoulders, holding him at arm’s length. “You’re too good for him, Evan.”

“I don’t like him! I-I barely know him.”

Jared raised an eyebrow. “You live with him.”

“Y-yeah, but I mean...we don’t really talk much.” *At all,* he added silently.

“Damn, I was kind of hoping I could get you to spill all of his juicy secrets. I want to know how that psycho thinks.”

“Then...talk to him?”

Jared gave his shoulders a small squeeze. “Nooo, he’d kick my ass.”

“Well...sorry, but I don’t know anything.” Evan looked down at his feet.

“Boring.” Jared patted him before letting go. “Fine, go see your boyfriend.”

“I don’t like him! A-and make up your mind, do you want me to hang out with him or not?”

He shrugged. “I never said I wasn’t fickle, but Will would probably skin me alive if I told you to hang out with Connor, so, don’t.” He moved behind Evan, pushing between his shoulder blades. “Off you go.”

Evan stumbled, but still managed to shoot Jared a scowl before he hurried to the elevator. He didn’t really want to spend a lot of time in his room, hop in, get changed, go to the greenhouse. Simple. Easy. He could even take Lucky if he wanted.

He drew in a deep breath and sighed. Simple. Easy. He opened the door and saw Connor sitting
upright on the edge of his bed, a bottle of nail polish held between his knees.

“O-oh, you’re up.” Betony sprouted up his forearm and he hesitated in the doorway.

“Yeah,” Connor said bluntly. “I woke up, like, an hour ago.”

“It’s Saturday.”

“Huh?”

“Um.” Evan swallowed thickly. “B-before you ask, it’s Saturday.”

Connor looked back down at his nails, blowing on them lightly. “I know.”

“Oh. Cool.”

“You can come in, you know.”

“Oh. Right.” Evan shuffled slowly inside, taking off his Kippah. “How are you feeling?”

“Fine.” The word was sharp, his lips pursed gently as he painted on another layer.

“Um...black looks good on you.”

“Thanks.”

Evan put his stuff away in his wardrobe before sitting down on the edge of his bed.

“Are you okay?” Connor asked, not looking up.

“Y-Yeah. Why wouldn’t I be?”

“You look like you were going to piss yourself last night.”

“Last night?”

“Two nights ago, when I was two-eyed.”

“Three nights ago,” Evan corrected.

“Whatever.”

Evan picked at a loose thread on his shirt. “You could see me?”

“Yeah. Well. Kind of.” He cocked his head. “It’s hard to explain.”

“Sorry,” Evan said quickly.

“Why? It’s not your fault.”

“I dunno. I just am. I mean. Sorry.” Evan ducked his head, focusing on the small imperfections on the floor.

“It’s fine.” Connor screwed the lid back on his vial of nail polish, setting it on his bedside table before reaching into his drawer. “You like gold?”

“H-huh?”
“The colour, you like gold, yeah?”
Evan furrowed his brow but nodded slowly.

“Cool, catch.”
Evan squeaked, struggling to grab the small glass vial Connor threw his way.

“It’s not going to kill you, calm the fuck down,” Connor sat back down, waving his painted hand.
“You know how to paint your nails, right? You don’t seem like one of those assholes who thinks they’re above it.”

“N-no, I mean. I don’t,” Evan looked down at the bottle. “Are you sure I can use it?”

“Yeah, I never use that one anyway, it’s the least I can do after I scared the shit out of you.”
Evan hesitated before slowly unscrewing the cap and taking out the brush. “You. Um. Weren’t that scary.”

“Bullshit, Hansen. I’ve seen a video of myself, it’s fucking scary.”
Evan was oddly surprised. “You have?”
Connor nodded, adding a coat of clear polish nearly over the first. “When I first came here, that shit was more common back then.” His brows knitted, head bowed over so he could peer at his hands. “The smallest shit would set me off.”

“You...your powers Settled.” Evan tried to copy the smooth way Connor dragged the nail brush over his fingers, but his hands were too jittery.

“You’ve been hanging round Sherman too much,” Connor scoffed. “Yeah, I guess they did. It was funny though cause I’m pretty sure if you cut my arm open back then I’d have leaked horse tranquilizer instead of blood—“Evan’s eyes grew wide “—not literally, Christ.”

“Right. Um. Sorry.” Evan didn’t look up, smudging his cuticles with gold.

“It’s fine. Anyway, shit settled after a month or so...not that it made a fucking difference.”

“I-I think it did.”

“You didn’t know me then, you can’t say that,” Connor pointed out.
Evan twisted his lip a little. “Tell me.”

“Huh?”

“Tell me what you were like—um. If that’s okay.”

“I mean. I guess.” Connor frowned, focusing on adding another layer to his pinky. “Best way I can explain it is Sherman and co didn’t know my eyes were, like, a spectrum of how angry I was. But then I started...well, not mellowing out, but stuff that made me go two-eyed before just made me get a little annoyed. It’s when that annoyance builds up that I completely lose control.”

“Yeah…um. What set you off the other night?”
Connor shrugged. “Nightmare.”
“A nightmare?” Evan asked slowly.

“Well, night terror.” Connor’s frown deepened.

“Well, night terror.” Evan’s shoulder’s raised a little. “Used to annoy my dad a lot.”

“I bet your night terrors never made you hulk out like me.”

“Heh…Yeah…I’m not really a Hulk.”

“Nope.”

“M-more Peter Parker,” Evan scratched at a blob of polish on the edge of his finger, smudging a streak across his skin.

Connor perked up, turning his head to look at him. “You read it?” He asked. “Like, you actually read it?”

“Yes. Yeah.”

“And, what did you think?” He leaned forward, waiting expectantly.

“It was…” Evan considered his next words very carefully.

“A bit shit?”

“A bit—A bit—I still liked it though!”

Connor nodded. “To be fair, the older comics are kind of shitty, especially the original ones. Stan Lee fixed his backstory later on, around the sixties, making it have a bit more weight. Like, in the original Uncle Ben is just bam, dead, but later he sets it up more and makes him a person instead of a word in a speech bubble. It’s kind of a shame that he didn’t get to do more with him and Peter, but the indie writers have really dived deep into their characters,” he waved his hands as he spoke, seemingly not caring about his nails. A small smile pulled at the corner of Evan’s mouth when he noticed the slight glint to Connor’s eye and the way his shoulders fell into place.

“You really like comics, huh?” He asked, not aware of the goofy grin on his face.

It made Connor freeze, his stance suddenly tensing again. “Yeah. Well. I’ve been reading them for years, way before all this shit happened,” he gestured to his eyes.

“Yes. I guessed…” Evan trailed off. “Kind of ironic though. You liked comics and...um...became the hulk.”

“God, you sound like my sister.” Connor rolled his eyes.

“Sorry. Um. Wanna know something funny?”

“Yeah. I guess.”

Evan raised his arm. “I like gardening. Like a lot, I used to work at a National Park near my house.”

Connor huffed a laugh. “Great. Good to know we’re both irony’s bitch.”

“Heh. Yeah. I have a feeling God hates me or something.”
“Night terrors, irony and comic books.”

“Huh?”

“Those are the things we have in common.”

Evan chuckled awkwardly, waving his hands. “And nail polish.”

“Given how shit yours is, I’m insulted,” Connor said flatly.

“Oh. Sorry.” Evan looked down at his hands. “How do I get it off?”

“You have to go ask a nurse for nail polish remover. They don’t trust us to do it ourselves without downing it all.”

Evan winced. “Like shaving?”

Shaving in The Ward was such a pain in the ass that most of the kids didn’t really bother with. Any Patient, male or female had to do so under the watchful eye of a nurse or scrub for fear of accidental (and not so accidental) injury.

“Yeah. Exactly like shaving, come here a sec.” Connor stood up and went over to Evan’s bed, taking his brush in one hand and Evan’s hand in the other. “Everyone here has to be wrapped in ten layers of bubble wrap, it was a pain just getting them to let me bring in comics. They were worried it would trigger the other Patients or something stupid like that. It’s not like I was planning on sharing them.

Evan knitted his brow, praying that Connor somehow wouldn’t notice the crowds of Christmas Roses filling up his arm.

“What?” Connor asked.

“Nothing,” Evan said quickly, triggering a sigh from Connor.

“I know what you’re thinking.”

“O-oh?” Evan asked as Connor tried to clean up the golden Massacre plaguing his nails.

“You’re thinking if comic books are almost dangerous enough to get banned then why am I still here,” Connor said with all the confidence of a man who knew he was exactly right. Which he was.

“No! No...I mean,” Evan bit his lip.

“It’s okay, I think that too,” Connor laughed dryly. “I mean, what’s more traumatic? A Hulk comic or the real-life equivalent?”

Evan stayed quiet, looking down at their hands. Connor’s were warmer than he’d expected, softer too. Warm and soft and comfy. For some reason, he’d just assumed they’d be cold and rough, like his hands. Gardener’s hands. Worker’s hands.

Murderer’s hands. The voice in the back of Evan’s head made him flinch. Stop thinking about him like that, it’s disgusting. You’re acting like a pussy. It sounded far too much like his dad for Evan’s liking.

“You okay?” Connor asked.
“Yeah. Fine. Just thinking about stuff.”

“Bad stuff by the looks of things.”

Evan forced himself to laugh. “Yeah, you could say that.”

Connor hummed, dipping the brush back into its pot. “You’re lucky, kind of.”

“Lucky?” Evan echoed, ignoring the quiet ‘what?’ coming from the window sill.

“Yeah. That you are the way you are,” Connor sighed as Evan cocked his head. “You’re a healer. That’s probably why they put you with me in the first place.”

Evan blinked dumbly. “Oh. That’s why.”

“Yeah. Why’d you think we were put together?” Connor asked, releasing Evan’s hand and moving onto the other.

“So they could kill me because I’m a waste a precious resources and tax dollars. “I just kinda thought it worked out that way. You had a bed, I needed a bed.”

“Could be,” Connor shrugged. “I hope not, they’d be assholes otherwise.”

“You’re not that bad.”

He raised an eyebrow. “I’d love to know what you constitute as “bad” then.”

For a moment, the room fell silent as Evan kept his mouth firmly shut. “C-Can...can we talk about how Jonah still hated Spider-man even after he saved his son’s life?” He asked quietly.

Connor dipped the brush again. “Yeah. Yeah, we can.”

—

It turned out that along with night terrors, irony, comic books and nail polish Evan and Connor both shared a deep-seated annoyance with the plot of The Amazing Spider-man N.O 1, which managed to tie over their conversation until lunch rolled around. Connor didn’t return to their room after that.

Why are you disappointed? Evan scolded himself. You barely know him. He’s acting nice, remember. Don’t say it’s working on you. He’s pretending.

Evan sighed and did his best to ignore the voices in his head, pushing them deep, deep down. He hated them.

Hanging out with Connor made the scared side of his brain chastise him for being stupid. Thinking about passing time in the greenhouse made the Jewish side of his brain chastise him for working on a Saturday. Reading comics make the tumblr side of his brain chastise him for reading dangerous, deadly picture books.

He couldn’t win.

Eventually, it became an acceptable time for Evan to return to the cafeteria for movie night, praying that Bedknobs and Broomsticks would help to distract them at least somewhat. In a way it did, replacing their garbled thoughts with the lyrics to Beautiful Briny.

He was barely listening when the scrub started calling the names of the kids getting visitors the next
day.

“Benna.”

**It's lovely, bobbing along**

“Cannell.”

**Bobbing along on the bottom of the beautiful briny sea**

“Delgaro.”

**What if the octopus, the flounder and the cod think we're rather—**

“Hansen.”

He froze, blinking dumbly for a moment as he looked up at the scrub. Surely he meant another Hansen. There was another Hansen, right?

Why hadn’t Heidi told him?! He felt his stomach twist, butterflies making havoc of his nerves as he prepared for the sting of thorns in his arm.

But they never came. He peeled back his sleeve, looking down at the garden of roses and leaves and Chrysanthemums. Bronze Chrysanthemums where the thorns should be.

*Excitement.*
Chapter 16

Chapter Notes

Tw: Emotional abuse, mentions of/implied abuse, gaslighting, homophobia

Thank you, Levi, for editing, you know the drill.

50,000 words, whoo!

Evan had almost forgotten what excitement felt like. The fuzzy warmth splashing around his stomach, the way his mouth would randomly stretch into a smile, how his eyes watered without ever spilling into tears.

For once he didn’t feel thorns in his arm, the Voice in the Back of His Head drowned out by a constant chorus as he sat in the small visitor’s waiting room.

Mom’s coming to visit. Mom’s coming to visit. Mom’s coming to visit.

Every now and then his thoughts would be interrupted by a scrub opening the door to call one of the Patient’s names and usher them off out into the hall. Evan would hold his breath each time, hoping to hear his name, frowning when someone else stood up.

Mom’s coming to visit. He reminded himself every time the door slid close. Mom’s coming to visit. Mom’s coming to visit.

“Evan Hansen.” He hadn’t heard the door open that time, jumping to his feet.

“H-here!”

The scrub smiled. “Come on then.” He held the door open, letting Evan rush past him. “Third door on the right.”

Evan nodded, mumbling a quick ‘thank you’ before making a b-line for the door.

Mom’s coming to visit. Mom’s coming to visit. Mom’s coming to visit. Mom’s coming to visit. Mom’s coming to visit. Mom’s coming to—“

“Long time no see, Ev.”

Evan’s breath caught in his throat. David Prescott stood up from his chair, smiling.

“I want this off the record,” he said quickly.

“Ah, heh.” David chuckled. “That’s not how that works.”

Evan’s hands were clenched by his sides. “W-Why are you here?”

“Can’t I come see my only son?”

“Only son? What happened to Jason?”
“Jason’s a stepson, that doesn’t count.” David kicked his foot under the table, pushing out the chair opposite from him. “Sit down, Evan.”

Evan moved automatically, stepping forward and planting himself down.

“Finding you was hard, I almost didn’t recognise you when I read about it. Smithy, you remember Smithy, right? Well, he was writing this report about a Patient and asked me to read it over and I saw the kids name, Evan Hansen, and I didn’t think it was you at first cause you’re a Prescott but I remembered your mom’s name was Hansen before we got married—“

“I didn’t think you could use the names of kids in articles,” Evan said flatly.

“Not usually but the rules are different with Patients.” For a moment he and Evan were both quiet. “When’d you change your name?”

“Two years ago.

“Heidi made you I’m guessing?” David tutted. “That’s a cruel thing to do. You know, I’m sure that if you asked the staff here they’d be glad to change it back—“

“I-I did it.”

“What?”

“I-asked her to change my name,” the words were barely a whisper.

David’s mouth formed a hard line, his tongue moving across his teeth behind his lips. “Why’d you do that?”

Evan bunched his shirt between his fingers under the table. “I wanted to, a-and it didn’t make sense for a family to not have the same name—“

“So she did make you.”

“N-no! It’s just...people kept thinking she was my stepmom s-so...”

“What about me?” David snapped. “People will think I’m your stepdad.”

“Yes, well...I don’t live with you.”

“You don’t live with her anymore either.”

“She didn’t leave me,” Evan murmured softly.

The corners of David’s smile twitched. “I didn’t have a choice.”

Yes, you did, Evan rubbed his arm. No one forced you to leave.

David cleared his throat. “I bought some stuff,” he said tactfully, reaching under the table and pulling out a briefcase, laying it flat on the table. “I was thinking about how we used to watch movies together, remember that? You’d wear your Gran’s old sunhat and pretend to be a cowboy.”

“Yeah,” Evan nodded. “I remember.” He also remembered that hat being snatched off his head, the sudden jolt of the brim catching on his brow.

“You shouldn’t be wearing girl’s stuff, Ev. People will think you’re a sissy.”
“I asked if I could give you a movie, they said I could donate a DVD to The Ward, but not to you specifically.” He opened the case, taking out a thin plastic case, the cover still coated in cling film, unopened.

Evan stared down at John Wayne, brandishing a rifle...revolver? A gun.

*True Grit.*

“You loved this film when you were little.”

_No, I didn’t._ “Thank you,” Evan said, his voice automatic.

“Shame I can’t watch it with you,” his father continued. “It’s been too long.”

_It only took me developing superpowers for you to visit me. You’ve had eight years to contact me._

Evan’s nails dig into his palms under the table.

“When was the last time I saw you?”

“My Bar Mitzvah.” The words came out sharper than Evan had expected. “S-sorry.”

“It’s fine,” David said, though his smile was completely gone now. “I remember, I’m sorry it went so poorly.”

_You’re sorry you berated your ex-wife in front of everyone and ruined everything?_ Evan hadn’t been invited to many Bar Mitzvahs but he was pretty sure it wasn’t supposed to end with him curled up on the couch comforting his mother.

“But now I can come see you more often,” David continued.

_Great._

“And we can spend more time together.”

_Perfect._

Evan wanted to scream, a hot flush rushing up the back of his neck. He winced as thorns started to dig into his wrist.

“Are you okay?”

Evan nodded. “I’m fine.”

“You’re very quiet, then again you always were.” David chuckled. “You should hear Jason and Anna, they’re always talking. Can’t shut them up most days. ‘Daddy do this, daddy look at that.’”

He shook his head. “Kids.”

“Anna?” Evan narrowed his eyes.

“Oh, right. She wasn’t quite born last time I saw you.” He rifled through his bag again until he found his wallet, opening it before holding it out to Evan. Two pictures looked back at him: one a boy probably about eleven or twelve years old, the other a rosie-cheeked toddler. Both had black hair and green eyes like their mother, but the toddler, Anna, Evan guessed, had the same round face that he and David both shared. She was grinning at the camera, her hands blurred as she waved at whoever was taking the photo.
“She’s my half-sister?” Evan asked as David put the wallet back.

“Yep,” David said the word casually, as if he was talking about a new shirt and not a new child.

“Does she know about me?”

“Of course she does! Like I said, your story was all over the news a little while back. You know how it is, a kid gets powers and people start asking tricky questions. Good for business, not so much for talking to a three-year-old.”

Evan wrung his hands. “What are people saying about me?”

David’s mouth twisted for a second. “Not much. Just the stuff on the register. Non-fatal injury and all that.” He leaned forward over the table. “I wanted to ask you about that.”

There it was. The reason he came.

“I said I wanted this to be off the record,” Evan said quickly.

“And I said that’s not how this works. I just want to know what happened to my son, is that so bad?”

Evan frowned. “I guess...I-I’m sorry.”

David nodded, slowly moving back in his chair. “So, what happened?”

“I dunno. I just...I fell and hurt myself and...” he swallowed hard.

“You...fell?”

Evan nodded. “I fell a-about, um, forty feet?” He felt like his mouth was on autopilot. “And...the doctors at the hospital said my brain Activated to save itself. But the injury probably wouldn’t h-have been fatal anyway cause I landed on my arm.”

Shut up, said the voice in the back of his head. Why are you telling him this stuff? Shut up, shut up, shut up.

“And the power?”

“Huh?”

“None of the reports really mention your power.”

“R-really?” Evan couldn’t help but feel a little thankful for that.

“Yeah. But I was hoping you’d tell me.” David smiled, a far too wide smile. “I deserve to know what happened to you.”

I deserved to know I have a little sister.

“I...I mean...I don’t...I feel comfortable...it’s weird a-and stupid.”

David shook his head. “It’s not. Come on, Evan. You can trust me.”

No, I can’t. I can’t, I can’t, I can’t.

David flicked at the handle on his briefcase, causing it to thud dully against the smooth leather casing. “Maybe I could bring Anna and Jason along next time, I’m sure they’d love to meet you.”
Evan raised an eyebrow, about to say something when David cut him off.

“Anna was really excited when she heard, to have a big brother who’s a superhero. I promised her I’d find out what your powers were. She’s a little obsessed with superhero stories.” She saw this interview with one on the news the other day, obviously she didn’t really understand it but it was telekinetic, she was trying to move things with her mind for ages afterwards.”

Evan clenched his jaw. He was bargaining, Evan could tell. Anna in return for a detailed story. He pulled nervously at the cuff of his sleeve.

*Say no,* one half of his brain said.

*You know what will happen if you do,* said the other.

Evan looked down at his hands and drew in a deep, long breath. He placed his arm on the table in front of him, rolling up his sleeve.

Almost instantly, David’s eyes lit up. “I’ve never heard of a power that’s so visible,” he murmured softly. “Is that all? Can’t you do anything else? Are they just on your arm?”

“I…” Evan swallowed, trying to return moisture to his mouth. “I can help plants grow…kind of, and they’re just on my arm.”

*Don’t tell him everything. You can’t tell him everything. Don’t tell him. Mom will be mad. Don’t tell him. He won’t find out you lied. He won’t be mad, he won’t be mad, he won’t he won’t he won’t he won’t—*

“Ow!” Evan pulled his arm away, looking up to see David holding a Christmas Rose between his thumb and forefinger.

“Did that hurt?” He asked as the flower quickly disintegrated into nothingness.

“Y-yes!” Evan rubbed his arm, feeling a sprig of Sage starting to bloom.

“I didn’t think it would. And they disappear so quickly…” David trailed off. “What’s that on your fingers?”

“Huh?” Evan looked down at his hands. He’d almost forgotten about the nail polish. “Oh. Um. I—“

“Did a girl give it to you?” David asked. “Paint them, I mean. A right lady’s man, huh?”

Evan shook his head. “My roommate.” He wanted to kick himself.

“Your roommate?” He echoed. “They have co-ed rooms?”

“…no.”

“So they let boys have nail polish?”

“I-it’s not that surprising,” Evan’s voice was barely a whisper.

“No, I mean, it’s just not normal you know? Kind of weird. What’s he like? What’s his power?”

*Stop asking questions. Please go away.*

“He’s fine. I guess.”
“Fine?” David leaned forward again, a hunger to his eyes. Evan remembered that look, he’d often been on the receiving end of it. It meant that David had found something juicy, a story not many people have covered yet, if any.

“Just you wait!” He’d say to Heidi, bent over the computer desk in the corner of their tiny living room. He never sat when he wrote, he always stood, fingers tapping against the keyboard. “This is my big story!”

Evan hadn’t known what that meant when he was little. Not really. All he knew was that he wasn’t allowed to make a sound his dad was writing a big story. No TV, no cassette tapes, no talking and definitely no crying.

“What’s his power?” David asked again, bringing Evan back to the present.

“Um. Super strength, I mean...k-kind of.”

“Fascinating. He doesn't sound like the type to be all that tough, I mean, most guys who wear that kind of thing are kind of like wet noodles, you know? What was his trauma?”

“I don't think I can tell you.”

“Of course you can. I'm interested, I want to get to know your friends.”

Evan looked down at his arm, at the thorns and the little white roses and orange lilies. “D-do you?”

“Of course, Ev. You're my son, I want to get to know you again. Jason and Anna do too, and June, she always used to say she wished I had taken you with me, she always wanted three kids.”

June. The Other Woman, that was what Heidi had called her after she’d found out. The Other Woman that her husband went to behind her back when he said he was working late, or after they argued. The woman who was a good ten years younger than her.

“Then why didn't you?” Evan asked, taking his arm off the table and pulling down his sleeve.

“Huh?”

“Why didn't you take me too?”

David drummed his fingers against the briefcase. “You know how it is. Divorce courts are always more likely to side with the mom. I did try.”

No, you didn't.

“You could have visited.”

“Your mom wouldn't let me.”

“R-really? Cause I distinctly remember her phoning you to ask you where you were on my birthday.”

“Which birthday?”

“Every birthday.”

“Come on, Ev, you're just being over-emotional. You haven't forgotten how I feel about that, have you?”
That made Evan shut up, his jaw clenched tightly.

“So,” David said, his voice low. “What happened with your roommate?”

“I don't know.”

“You don't know? Come on, he must have told you. What’s his name? I can look and see if anything was written up about him.”

Evan felt like his stomach had sunk through the floor. He could see it clear as day, front page articles about the journalist who found out his Patient son was best buds with a school shooter. “I don't know him that well.”

“You don't?”

“He's quiet. We don't talk much.”

“You talk enough for him to be comfortable painting your nails.”

“Yeah. But. We were bored, I guess.” Evan picked at a hangnail on his thumb, winding a little as sage quickly bloomed as the skin pulled up in an arc around his nail.

“Is he gay?”

_Everywhere the fuck did that come from?!_ Evan’s eyebrows shot up his forehead. “Excuse me?”

“Well, I mean, the nail polish and stuff.”

“Lots of people wear nail polish.”

David waved his hands as though he was trying to waft away what Evan had said. “You know what I mean.”

“No, Dav—dad, I don't.”

He sighed. “I just want to make sure, you know, just in case.”

“In case?”

“Well, you know there's a reason they don't put guys and girls together.”

“I'm not gay!” Evan pointed out.

“That doesn't always make a difference.”

Evan stared at his father in complete disbelief. “He's not gay either!”

“Are you sure?”

“Yes!” No, but it wasn't any of his business. “He had a girlfriend before he came here.”

“So you do know things about him.”

Evan wanted to scream. He wanted to go back to his room. He wanted David to shut the hell up.

“Ev, talk to me.” David’s voice poked and prodded at him, each word a needle digging into the back of his neck.
“What are Jason and Anna like?” Evan asked, cocking his head a little. He wanted to talk about anything else. Anything but more questions.

“Oh, well, you know, kids. Anna’s a bit tech-obsessed, always watching those weird things on YouTube. She teaches me how to use that stuff half the time, it's kind of embarrassing.” Had anyone else said it it would have sounded like a joke, but David’s tone was deadly serious. “Like I said, she likes superheroes, that’s got June worried but she’s a smart kid, Anne’s young, but she knows better. That's why I wanted to talk to you about all this, so she doesn't try and find out herself.”

He was bargaining again.

“And Jason?” Evan prompted, his voice quick.

David’s expression soured, his lips drawing close together as though someone had just forced-fed him a lemon. “He’s fine, a bit rowdy, but that’s to be expected. Boys will be boys, you mess with him he’ll mess with you back.”

“Do you like him?”

“Of course I do. He’s my son, same as you.”

“I thought you said I was your only son.”

“You know what I mean.”

Evan kept his eyes low. “I spoke to him on Facebook a little while ago.”

“Oh?”

He nodded, rolling the hem of his shirt between his fingers.

“Stop that,” David scolded and Evan quickly placed his hands in his lap.

“Jason found me on Facebook and we talked a bit.” Evan watched as his father’s eyes narrowed.

“That’s good,” he said slowly. “You are brothers after all.”

“H-He said you told him not to contact me.” A lump formed in Evan’s throat. “Said you didn’t want the families ‘mixing’.”

David snorted, huffing a quick laugh. “He’s a weird kid, always making stuff up for attention—“

“Like I did?” Evan’s words hung in the air, and for a moment the room was filled only by the steady tick of the clock hanging on the wall. “L-Like that time I told my babysitter about everything and you laugh in my face and said I was lying.”

David rolled his eyes. “You can’t still be going on about this—“

“Which was funny,” Evan continued. “C-cause you told me all dads hit their kids. It shouldn’t have mattered that I told her.”

“C’mon, Ev. You’re being stupid. I just want to talk.”

“A-About my powers, right? So you can go home and write a big article and earn lots of money—“

“Ev.”
“A—and keep hitting Jason like you hit me—“

“Evan!”

Evan’s mouth snapped shut, Purple Hyacinths dotting up his arm. “I’m sorry!” He said quickly. “I’m sorry, I-I’m sorry.”

“It’s fine.” David rubbed his temple. “Just calm down and talk to me, properly this time.”

“I—I—“

“And stop stuttering, Jason pulls that all the time and it does my head in.”

Evan kept his head down, feeling like a five-year-old again.

You’re in trouble, the voice in his head taunted. You’re in trouble, you’re in trouble, you screwed up, you’re in trouble. Evan barely heard the door behind him open over the chanting in his head.

“Mr Prescott,” Dr Sherman said. “I think you should go.” He wore more casual clothes on the weekend, a turtleneck and jeans despite the desert outside. His voice was low and spiteful, his face a mask of calm.

“Visiting hours aren’t over yet,” David pointed out, offering the doctor a soft smile.

“Yes,” he walked calmly into the room, leaving the door open behind him. “You see that clock over there,” he nodded to the wall, causing David to turn in his seat. “It just recorded your whole conversation, for your safety of course.” He placed a gentle hand on Evan’s shoulder. “You should go.”

David clenched his jaw, scowling. “I’m his father.”

“Father’s don’t hit their children. Leave before I call security.”

David didn’t move for what felt like forever, but eventually, he stood up. “This isn’t the last you’ll hear of me, it’s not right not letting me see my son.”

Dr Sherman’s grip on Evan’s shoulder tightened. “Oh, I know it won’t, and if you’re not careful a lot of other people will be hearing that recording.”

Silence.

“I’ll talk to you later, Ev,” David said as though nothing was wrong, as if they’d just finished up a completely normal conversation.

“You okay?” Sherman asked once David was gone.

Evan shook his head.

“Do you want a cup of tea?”

Evan nodded.

“Come up, up you get.” He helped Evan to his feet, still holding onto his shoulders. “Why didn’t you tell us?”

“I-I didn’t know it was him,” Evan said, keeping his voice quiet as Sherman lead him down the hall.
“I thought it was my mom...I-I didn’t think...” he trailed off. “He’s going to be mad at Jason.”

“It’s okay.”

“It’s not okay.”

“We’ll contact the right people, Son, really.” He gave Evan’s shoulders a reassuring squeeze. “He’ll be okay.”

“A-are you sure?”

“I’m sure, c’mon. Let's get you sat down.”

Evan had expected Sherman to take him to the cafeteria, but instead, he directed him to one of the many doors labelled ‘STAFF ONLY’. Evan couldn't help the sudden twist his stomach made as the doctor opened the door, relaxing a little when he realised it was just an empty staff room.

“You can sit down,” Sherman said, pointing to a lumpy, old couch as he busied himself with the kettle resting on the counter of a cramped kitchenette.

Evan sat, playing with the hem of his shirt until Dr Sherman held out a mug of bright yellow liquid.

“It’s hot,” he warned as Evan took it, sniffing it curiously. “It’s chamomile,” the doctor explained. “It helps anxiety.”

“I-I know, my mom made me drink it.”

“Oh yeah?”

“I never really worked...”

“Oh, well, it’s worth a shot.” Sherman drummed his fingers against his mug.

“Um.” Evan sipped his tea, it was far too hot and burned his tongue. He winced, tasting sage. “Why were you recording me?”

Dr Sherman twisted his lip. “We weren’t just recording you, we listen in on most of the conversations between parents and Patients just to make sure everything’s...okay.”

To make sure you aren’t spilling any of their secrets, Evan corrected.

“Most of the time we delete the recordings once visiting hours end, but I think we’ll hang on to yours just in case he tries to pretend we kicked him out for no reason.”

“Right,” Evan bit his lip.

“Do you want to talk about what happened?” Sherman asked.

Evan shook his head, though he got a feeling he was going to have to talk about it at therapy, no matter what he said now.

“He won’t hurt you again, I promise.”

Evan just nodded, staring down at his cup. “Um. Dr Sherman?”

“Yes, Evan?”
“Can I have some nail polish remover?”
I was hesitant to post this chapter after what happened in Florida recently. To put it simply, this chapter briefly touches upon the school-shooter rumours surrounding Connor. If you do not feel comfortable reading about that just send me a message on tumblr and I'll send you a summary, no questions asked (yes I am pinching this idea from Charactershoes).

I don't know if I'm being overly cautious, but it's better safe than sorry.

Thank you.

TW: Mentioning of physical and emotional abuse, gaslighting, blood, anxiety attacks, mentioning of school-shootings.

Thank you, Levi. You know why by now.

By the time Evan returned to his room he was about ready for bed.

It was only around eleven o’clock in the morning, but to him it felt like evening. Too much had happened already today. Way. Too. Much.

Evan flopped down on his bed, his face pressed up against his pillow. It didn’t smell like home anymore.

_You’ll suffocate_, the back of his brain warned and he turned his head to face the window. If he listened hard enough, he could hear people playing outside.

“How was the mom?” Lucky asked, making Evan jump.

“How was the mom?”

Evan brought his knees to his chest. “It wasn’t her.”

“Oh.” Lucky went quiet, but only for a moment. “Did you have fun?”

“No.”

“Oh.”

Silence, and Evan rolled over, pulling his covers around him. He just wanted to sleep, to pretend David hadn’t visited, that he’d just had a nice talk with his mom, but he couldn’t. David would be on his way back home, back to Anna, back to Jason. Evan closed his eyes tightly, ignoring the thorns in his arm.

Sleep, he thought, trying to block out the worries snowballing in his brain. _Just go to sleep. Just go to sleep. Just go to sleep._
BANG BANG BANG

Evan’s breath caught in his throat, his head turning towards the door.

BANG BANG BANG

He went completely still. Maybe he could just pretend he was asleep and whoever it was would go away.

BANG BANG BANG

Or not. He couldn’t just tell them to go away. Could he?

Slowly, Evan got up, dragging his quilt with him like a cape.

“Hi,” Will smiled at him when he opened the door.

“Um. Hi.” Evan narrowed his eyes a little. “Jared...Jared isn’t here.”

“I know, I’m not looking for Jared. I wanted to see if you were okay.”

“Yeah. Why wouldn’t I be okay?” Evan could see his reflection in the lenses of Will’s glasses, his face blotchy, eyes tinted and red.

“Carly said she heard security and your dad arguing in the halls.”

“Carly?”

“Girl I know.”

Evan looked down at his feet. “We just had an argument.”

“She said she heard you say he hit you.”

Thorns pricked at Evan’s skin. “I….” He stared at the lines between the tiles under his feet. “W- Word travels quickly around here.”

“It has to.” Will rubbed the back of his neck. “Is he the reason you activated?”

“N-no,” Evan shook his head. “I haven’t s-seen him in years. I’m...I’m kind of surprised he wasn’t.”

Will nodded, tapping his temple. “These things work in weird ways. What activates one person won’t phase another.”

“Yeah…”

“You can sit back down if you want.”

“Right.” Evan bit his lip.

“Do you want--”

“I don’t want to talk about it.”

Will cocked his head to the side. “I was going to ask if you wanted me to ask for some water or something. We’re not technically meant to have cups in our rooms but I could try and pull a few strings.”
“Oh...Right...Sorry.”

“You can sit down,” Will said again, gesturing to the beds.

“Right.” Evan looked at them over his shoulder. “Do you want to come in?” He asked slowly. What else could he say?

“If you don't mind,” Will nodded. “And I can still go get that drink if you want.”

Evan shook his head, heading back to sit on the edge of his bed. “I'm fine.”

“Did I wake you up?” Will asked, closing the bedroom door behind him.

“No. I couldn't sleep.”

“Are you tired?”

The question took Evan back. “Um. Not really?”

Will stayed standing in the space between his and Connor’s beds. “Then don't try to sleep, all you’ll end up doing is thinking about what happened.” He turned his head to Evan’s bedside drawer. “Do you have a book or something you could read?”

“No really,” Evan figured Will wouldn't be the kind of person to be okay with comics. “It's best if you have something to take your mind off what happened. Thinking about it right now will only make it worse.”

For a long moment Evan stayed silent, scratching aimlessly at the sycamore leaves blooming just below his elbow. “Did...d-did your...” he trailed off. “Sorry. I-I mean...you know...you talk like you know what to do...so...”

Will shook his head. “It's okay. My mom...wasn't the best person. I don't know exactly what you're feeling, I mean, she never dared to step foot in this place,” he gestured to the walls around him, “but that stuff kind of sticks with you, you know?”

Evan knew.

The nightmares, the sudden prickle of panic when he did something wrong, the cracks in his thinking where he caught himself wondering if...

The sting of thorns brought Evan back to the present. “Is that how you...um...” he pointed to his own eyes. “You don't have to say if you don't want to.”

“It's fine.” Will reached up and slipped his glasses off his face. Despite the fact that Evan had seen him without them before he couldn't help the sudden twist of his stomach when he saw the milky-white colour of Will’s eyes. They didn't look right. “She never hit me or anything,” Will continued, putting the specs into the breast pocket of his shirt, “but she'd do shit to my dad.”

“To your dad?” Evan echoed.

“You can ask, you know.”

“Huh?”

Will plonked himself down on the edge of Connor’s bed. “Why him getting hurt made me Activate. I
“Oh. Uh.” Evan felt like his words kept getting stuck in his teeth, unable to form properly. “Why did him getting hurt make you Activate?”

A slight smile tugged at the corner of Will’s lips. “I didn't mean you actually had to ask.”

“S-sorry.”

“No, no. It’s fine. Living with Jared’s made me used to people not hesitating to ask questions, you know how he is. Likes asking questions but never answering them.” His dull eyes focused on Evan and he could tell that Will was looking at his ‘shadow’.

“You don't have to tell me if you don't want to,” Evan said.

“I know, it happened a long time ago, I don’t mind.” Will rubbed his eyes. “Mom would yell at dad a lot, say he was useless or stupid and all that. She’d hit him too, but she’d never lay a hand on me.” He drew in a small breath, his eyes moving up to look at the ceiling. “Whenever I'd ask either of them about it they’d just say nothing happened or that I'd imagined it. My dad was a personal trainer, a real big guy, so no one really believed me when I told them his wife was hitting him. I mean, she was so sweet and kind to everyone else, wouldn't hurt a fly so why would she hurt the guy who could snap her in half like a toothpick.” His voice was bitter, his nose wrinkled into a hard scowl. “They kept telling me again and again that I was lying or making it up and eventually...I don’t know if I started believing them but something kind of...snapped. Like my mom would come into my room and be all nice and sweet and give me chocolate and help me with my times table, but then my dad would come home and she’d go downstairs and they’d just start arguing and I’d try and convince myself it wasn't happening. And then one time I heard this bang, like someone had thrown something and I ran downstairs and there was this vase broken on the ground and my dad’s arm was bleeding and--” his voice had grown quick, his breath shallow “--and my mom smiled and said everything was fine and I knew she was lying but she couldn't be lying because she was kind and sweet and she’d never hurt anyone…” he trailed off, gathering himself for a moment. “And then I got a headache and I could see that...well, that she was lying…”

Silence. Evan didn't know what to say. He realised he’d leaned forward in his seat, his hands curling and uncurling his shirt. “What was her shadow like?”

“Her shadow?” Will scratched the back of his neck. “I couldn't see her, she was just a ball of darkness, like I said, she wasn't a good person.”

“I’m sorry.”

“It's alright.”

“Was your dad okay?”

Will nodded. “A few cuts but nothing permanent. Last time I saw him he and mom were getting a divorce.”

“Oh. Good.”

“Yeah...I Probably shouldn’t have told you. It’s kind of...intense.”

“No, I mean, yes it was, but. Um. David was kind of the same? Kind of?” Evan bunched the hem of his shirt between his fingers. “He’d only hit me if I was bad. Like if I spoke back to him or did something that pissed him off. I thought mom knew about it, he acted like she did. He had...he had...
kind of like a system, like a list of things I had to do, keep my room clean, do my school work on
time, do my readings, and if I forgot something he'd stand me up against my bedroom wall and hit
my arms or my stomach. Places people couldn’t see the bruises I guess.”

“And your mom didn’t know?”

Evan shook his head. “He said every parent did it, that it was normal. He said it was what happened
to kids who got detention.”

“But that’s not true.”

“I know that now. That was actually how I figured out something wasn’t right. Some kids told my
teacher I was spreading rumours about them—“

“Where you?”

“No! But they told her I did and she gave me a detention and I was terrified, but all she ended up
doing was giving me lines at recess.”

“Did you confront your dad about it?”

Evan shook his head. “I mentioned it to my babysitter and she told dad but he lied and said I was
making it up. He was like your mom, nice to everyone else so they wouldn’t believe he did the stuff
he did.”

“Did you ever tell anyone?”

“No. Mom and David ended splitting up when I was seven. I...I kind of convinced myself it didn’t
happen for a while. But then his stepson sent me a facebook message and everything just kind
of...came back.”

“Yeah. That happened with me a few months ago. It’s like your thoughts just kind of click--”

“And it’s all you can think about.”

“Exactly!”

Evan felt his shoulders slump. “How...How long does that last?”

The corner of Will’s mouth twitched, dipping into a slight frown. “I’ll get back to you on that.”

“Oh…”

“Yeah.” Will took his glasses out of his pocket and started cleaning them with the cuff of his sleeve.

“Um. Do you mind if I asked what...made you remember?”

He put his glasses back on and Evan looked into the eyes of his reflection. “Connor.”

“Connor?”

“Yeah.” Will’s head tilted forward, looking to the ground.

“Why?”

Will’s fingers drummed lightly against his knee. “I can’t...I can’t see Connor properly if I have my
A deadly foe is near.

Evan felt Monkshood bloom around his wrist, a cold flush rushing down his spine. “You...can’t see Connor?”

Will’s brows knitted closely together. “I shouldn’t have told you, you’re already stressed. I’m sorry.”

“No, no. What do you mean?”

“I mean he looks like my mom.”

_That was what I was scared of_, Evan thought, biting his lip. “That’s why you say he’s pretending to be nice.”

“Yeah. Cause I can see otherwise.”

---

Evan couldn’t sleep. Again.

He could hear Connor breathing deeply a few feet away, on the borderline of snoring. He wasn’t being loud, he was just being noticeable.

_At least you’re not worrying about Jason and David anymore_, said the back of his head. _Now you’re just thinking about a murderer instead._

Evan let out a long and heavy sigh, raising his arm in the air. He could just make out the bunches of Monkshood that covered his skin.

_Don’t think about it_, he told himself. _Don’t think about it. Don’t think about it. Don’t think about it. Don’t think about it._
He got out of bed, pacing the length of the room. It was too hot, his pajamas sticking to his skin.

*Don’t think about it. Don’t think about it. Don’t think about it. Don’t think about it. Don’t think about it.*

Connor’s blankets rustled as he turned his head, making Evan freeze. “Connor?” he murmured softly.

Nothing.

“Are you awake?”

Nothing.

*He could be pretending. He probably thinks you’re a freak. What kind of weirdo gets up in the middle of the night like this?*

Connor’s head was turned to the side, his left cheek resting against his pillow. It didn’t look comfortable, especially since his straps stopped his body from turning with his head. Just looking at him made Evan’s neck hurt. He was about to turn away when he saw a small mark just beside Connor’s ear, or at least, he thought he did.

*You need to sleep, go back to bed,* Evan scolded himself, not moving. Slowly, he turned around and opened the bathroom door, switching on the light. It was enough to let Evan see Connor properly, but not enough to wake him up. Besides, even if he did Evan could just make the excuse that he needed to go to the toilet or something.

He edged forward until he was right beside Connor’s bed, trying his best not to block the stream of light. Connor’s had tucked his hair behind his ear, revealing a circular, white mark on the skin between his temple and ear.

Evan could vaguely remember seeing a similar mark on his granddad’s shoulder, though his had been a little more faded with age.

“My keepsake from ‘nam,” that had been what he’d called it when Evan asked. A scar from where he’d gotten shot.

*Got shot by police,* the words echoed around Evan’s head. *That’s how he Activated. He got shot. He shot up a school. He traumatized Zoe.*

Connor’s eyes fluttered, cracking open into squints. “Hansen?” he mumbled, turning his head to look up at him. “What are you doing?”

“I--” Evan’s words caught in his throat. “You…”

“What’s wrong?”

“You’re...you’re…” *You’re a murderer.* “You’re head.”

“My...what?” Connor tried to sit up as best he could. “What the fuck are you talking about? What time is it?”

Evan opened his mouth. Closed it again.

“Why are you staring at me like that? What the fuck is wrong with you?”
“S-Scar.” The word was barely a murmur, but Connor definitely heard it. In an instant his eyes turned from blue to brown, his shoulders raised.

“What about it?”

“I just...I noticed…”

“Why were you even looking at me? You fucking freak!”

“I’m sorry. I didn’t...I didn’t mean to. I’m sorry.” Evan stepped back, trying to deepen his breathing. “I’m sorry.”

“Get out!”

Evan didn’t need to be told twice.
Chapter 18

Chapter Notes

Apologises for being late, I just started College and it is kicking my butt. Literally, I'm there from 8-5. Kill me.

Thank you Levi for managing to edit this without internet, he deserves all the props.

TW: Anxiety attacks, Suicide, references to school shootings.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

No one asked Evan why he’d spent the night curled up in the hallway outside his room. The nurse who came to wake him up the next morning just took one look at Connor’s unmoving form and figured he’d gone two-eyed, which he probably had.

Evan peered at Connor from behind the nurse’s back. He looked so calm, eyes closed, his breathing slow and deep, his head turned ever so slightly to the side. Evan couldn’t help but drift his gaze back to Connor’s scar. It was a lot more noticeable now it wasn’t hidden behind his hair.

“Why didn’t you send for security?” The nurse asked, walking over to give Connor’s shoulder a small shake. He stayed unresponsive, completely conked out.

“I—“ What could Evan say? I was watching him sleep and saw the scar on his head and he freaked out?

“You’ll get in trouble, the back of his head told him. They’ll know you were out of bed.

Evan swallowed thickly. That had been one of David’s rules. Never leave your room after bedtime, not for any reason. But don’t wet the bed either, that only pissed him off more.

“I think he had a nightmare,” Evan said, rubbing his arm. “He scared me and I...I dunno, I wasn’t thinking properly.”

“You were probably half asleep, really though it's nothing to worry about. If it happens again you can just move to a different room, beats sleeping on the floor, huh?” He patted Evan’s shoulder. “Breakfast’s in ten.”

“Right.” Evan didn't take his eyes off Connor. He’d gone two-eyed, he’d gotten mad, worse he’d specifically gotten mad at him.

He’s gotten mad at you before, pointed out one side of his brain. He threw a chessboard at you and things turned out fine.

Yeah, said the other. But he wasn’t two-eyed then, imagine how much worse he’ll be when he wakes up. He’ll probably hate you. He’ll probably try to kill you.

“Just a rumour,” Evan mumbled to himself once the nurse had left.

Look at his head! You can't deny it anymore. He’s a murderer, plain and simple. You were friends--
if you could even call it that—with a murderer and now he knows you know what he did and he hates you. Remember what Will said? He’s bad, he’s evil.

Evan dug his nails into his palms, trying to slow his rapid breathing.

Get out, the back of his head told him. Get dressed and get out and pray he never wakes up.

Evan did as it said, not even bothering to take a shower, instead just throwing on the closest clothes he could find, a hoodie over his pyjama top, yesterday's khakis and his old, too-small knock-off Ugg boots without socks.

He was the first one in the cafeteria, which only made his stomach twist into a tighter knot. People stared at the loser who came to eat breakfast alone. They stared and murmured and wondered why he was so early. The scrubs would take one look at him and send him back to his room to get changed and Connor would wake up and be angry again.

But they didn't. Instead, the cafeteria workers took his meal chit and gave him egg on toast in return with barely any more than a mumbled ‘good morning’.

That was a good sign. Right?

Evan sat down at his usual seat, keeping his head down, eyes focused on his very watery scrambled eggs and soggy toast.

Don’t think, he told himself. Don’t think don’t think don’t think don’t think don’t think don’t think—

“Hey.” A gloved hand clapped down on Evan’s shoulder, “you look like shit.”

Evan looked up as Jared threw down a heaped bowl of Corn Flakes, milk sloshing over the side of the bowl. “I'm fine.”

“You don’t look it, your hair’s defying gravity.”

Evan clapped a hand to his head, feeling his hair. “Sorry.”

“It's fine, it's funny. Like I said, you look like shit.” Jared grinned from ear to ear, stuffing a spoonful of cereal into his mouth. “Did you have fun last night?”

Evan’s stomach twisted. “Huh?”

“I heard stuff last night,” he raised his eyebrows, as if prompting Evan to explain further.

“Stop being an ass,” Will said as he sat down next to him.

Jared put a hand to his chest, mocking offence. “I'm not being an ass! I'm just curious as to what our wonderful friend got up to last night—”

“A-argument,” the word stuck behind Evan’s teeth. “We had an argument. It...it was nothing like that...”

Jared’s smile dropped. “Shit, sorry.”

“I-it's okay...I mean...I-it happens, I guess...”

Will’s brow creased and Evan saw his face reflected in the darkness of his glasses. He looked like he’d been put through the dryer on the wrong setting.
“Hey, Jared,” Will said, his head turning suddenly to face the other boy. “Remember that time Diego climbed down one of the laundry shoots?”

“Uh…” Jared cocked his head. “Where the fuck did—“

“It was funny, you should tell Evan about it.”

“What are you—oh! Right. Yeah.” He propped his elbows against the table. “So, there was this kid who could, like, stick to walls and stuff…”

---

Evan didn’t really find the story very funny, but to be fair he didn’t exactly listen. He was more focused on piling his eggs into a small mountain in the centre of his plate, murmuring small ums, ahs, and laughter whenever it seemed appropriate to do so. Eventually, Jared left for class with a clear bowl, around ten minutes later Will patted Evan on the shoulder and did the same. He, meanwhile, was still playing with his food.

“I was starting to think you’d gotten better at eating, Son,” Sherman said, taking Will’s place.

“I’m sorry…I’m not hungry.”

“I can tell, what’s bothering you?”

Evan started to dig a hole in the middle of his mountain.

“Is it your father? He can’t hurt you anymore, I promise.” Sherman leaned forward in his chair, trying to tilt his head in a way that linked their lines of sight.

“No. I mean. Kind of?” Evan threw down his fork. “I’m just not hungry.”

“Eating isn’t always about being hungry. Food is fuel and we need fuel to get through the day.”

Evan’s lips curled into a hard glare and he started a staring contest with the eggs.

“June and her family were relocated yesterday,” Sherman waited for Evan to say something, continuing after a moment of silence. “One of our secretaries called ahead and told her what happened.”

“Good.”

“Very good,” he agreed. “And Hopefully that’s the last we’ll see of him, so you don’t have to be so frightened anymore.”

“I’m not frightened.”

Dr Sherman raised an eyebrow.

“I’m sorry.”

“Don’t be, I’m here to help.” Sherman offered a small smile. “It’s kind of my job.”

“R-right.”

“So. What’s bothering you if you’re not frightened?” He asked. “Unless you are frightened.”
Evan scowled, propping his head up on his hands. “Dr Sherman?”

“Yeah?”

“You know what we’re all feeling, right?”

Dr Sherman looked a little taken aback. “That’s the basics of it, yes.”

“So...so you know what everyone’s like?”

“In theory.”

“Is...” Evan trailed off, avoiding the doctor’s eye. “Is Connor a good person?”

The question made Dr Sherman pause. His lips pursed for a moment, arms crossed as he leaned back in his chair. “That depends on your perspective,” he said. “‘Bad’ and ‘Good’ aren’t emotions, they’re opinions. I can tell you if Connor is a happy person, or a sad person, or if he’s an angry person or a calm person but I can’t tell you if he’s a bad one. Not for sure, anyway. That’s something you’re going to have to figure out yourself.”

_He’s bullshiting you_, Evan thought, his shoulders slumping. “Oh, right.”

“Is he the reason you’re scared?”

Evan nodded.

“Do you mind telling me what happened?”

“I-It...I spoke to Will yesterday and...he wanted to help me cause he heard about my dad...but he mentioned...Jared said Will can see the bad in people and Connor is covered in shadow--”

“Do you know what we officially call William’s power?” Sherman asked, cutting him off. “Visual Empathy. He can see people’s negative emotions, but negative emotions don’t always mean a bad person. It just means they’re going through difficult times.”

Evan didn’t say anything.

“Do you want me to play helicopter? Cause I will.”

Without a word, Evan picked up his fork and started to eat.

—-

Time moved weirdly. Days went past in the blink of an eye, but nights ground to a crawl.

Evan felt like he was floating, walking a few centimeters behind himself, a thick layer of fog surrounding his brain as he dragged his feet from class to class and room to room. Occasionally, one of the scrubs would ask if he was okay or Will or Jared would say something that was maybe meant to be funny. He’d nod, try on a small smile and laugh but the actions felt distant, as though he was looking at the world through a long and winding tunnel.

And then night came and Evan was sucked back into his body by the sound of Connor’s quiet snoring. He kept his eyes glued to the ceiling, his hands pushing either end of his pillow in an attempt at drowning him out. Evan stared and stared and stared until his eyes started to water, thorns digging into his arm.
His brain wouldn’t shut up.

*He’s just upset.*

*He’s angry. He’s an angry monster with a bullet hole in his head. He’s a murderer. Sherman’s just trying to make sure you don’t freak out or something.*

Evan rolled over, turning his back on Connor. He screwed his eyes shut, breathing in deeply.

*I’m home. I’m in my room. Mom’s downstairs. I’m going to school tomorrow and then I’m going to help out at the park and help Mel clean the benches. I’m home. I’m normal. Everything is fine.*

Connor mumbled softly sending a shiver down Evan’s spine. He peeked over his shoulder, watching Connor for a moment, waiting for him to wake up and start screaming again. But he didn’t, he just turned his head a little and kept on sleeping.

Evan stayed perfectly still, listening to his heart thud in his chest.

*You’re here because you were traumatised,* the back of his head reminded him. *You shouldn’t be this scared of your roommate. This is supposed to be a mental hospital. It’s supposed to help you.*

He bit his lip before slowly sitting up, wrapping his covers around his shoulders. Keeping his eyes on Connor he shuffled over to the window sill, picking up Lucky’s pot.

“Evan?” They almost sounded sleepy. Did plants sleep? “Where are we going?”

Evan kept his mouth firmly shut, padding over to the bathroom. He switched on the light and closed the door, letting out a long breath.

“Are you okay?” Lucky asked him.

He shook his head.

“Are you going to use the panic thing?”

He shook his head, sitting Lucky’s pot beside the sink. Evan took two towels from the rack and folded them in half vertically and lay them on top of each other before laying his quilt over it and wrapping himself up, closing his eyes.

“Are you sleeping?”

“I’m trying to.”

“Why aren’t you using your pot?”

“I don’t want to.”

“Why not?”

“I don’t want to.”

Lucky sighed heavily. “Goodnight.”

“Goodnight.”
Evan lifted the covers over his eyes, closing them tightly and trying to sleep again. He wasn’t sure how long it took, but suddenly he was waking up with a pain in his neck.

---

Evan stuck to his bathroom bed for the rest of the week. Even if it hurt, it was better than staring at the ceiling all night.

He was still stuck in that haze, the world around him thick and distant. That was until Sunday evening.

“Hey.”

Evan’s stomach jumped as Connor put his plate down beside him.

“This seat isn’t taken right?” He asked, pulling up the chair and planting himself down.

Jared opened his mouth to say something, inhaling his food in the process and starting to choke.

“Careful!” Will thumped his back.

“I was being careful!” He croaked as Will hit his back again. “Stop it! I’m fine, I’m fine.”

Connor didn’t say anything, he just picked up his knife and fork and started eating.

Evan glanced at him out the corner of his eye, watching him carefully as he ate, shoveling food into his mouth. “Y-you’ll,” his voice stopped and started like a scratched record. “You’ll make yourself sick if you eat too quick.”

*Why do you even care?* The voice scolded.

“Right. God, you sound like my mom,” Connor muttered, though he did slow down a little.

“Mm...yeah w-well...”

“Why are you here?” Jared asked, clearing the last of his food from his throat.

“Well, I woke up and I wanted something to eat, I thought that was pretty obvious.”

“I mean with us, usually you’re on your own doing your weird broody bullshit.”

Connor raised an eyebrow. “Didn’t feel like it today,” he turned his head to Evan. “Did you read anymore of my comics while I was asleep?”

“I-I...” he shook his head.

“You can borrow them whenever, I’ve got a couple more you’ll like. Like some more Spider-man and stuff. You can have all my Spider-Man ones actually, fuck it, I never read them anyway.”

“...huh?” Evan blinked dumbly.

“You can have them,” he said again.


“Do you guys know what movie they’re putting on tonight?” Connor asked, stabbing a piece of chicken with his fork.

Connor ignored his question. “How Long is it?”

“I dunno, like an hour and a half?”

“Oh, I won’t bother watching it then,” with that Connor went back to his food.

Evan couldn’t see Will’s eyes behind his glasses but he could have sworn he was staring daggers at him. His jaw was clenched, fingers curled tightly around his cutlery.

A heavy silence lulled in the conversation, hanging around just long enough for it to become awkward.

“Did anything cool happen while I was out?” Connor asked, sending a shiver down Evan’s spine.

*Why are you acting like this?!!*

“N-not really,” He murmured. “S-Same old same old.”

“Casey cut his lip on a pen lid and now we’re not allowed to have them,” Jared said.

“Shit, really?”

“Yeah.”

“How’d he manage that?”

“Dunno. Just did. It was probably an accident. I’m waiting for the day someone gets a paper cut and they decide to ban books.”

Connor chuckled. It was a dry noise with very little humour behind it, more of a forced cough than an actual laugh. “I wouldn’t put it past them.”

Silence.

*What do you want from me?!* Evan wanted to scream. Was this some kind of weird revenge? Was he toying with him? He started shoveling his food into his mouth, the quicker he ate the quicker he could leave.

“Are you guys going to watch the movie?”

*Why was he still talking?!*

“Me and Jared probably will, I don’t know about Evan though,” Will said. He hadn’t looked away from Connor since he sat down.

“You should,” Connor nodded. “You’d like it.”

Evan forced his mouth to work. “W-what’s it about?”

“I dunno, I just think you’ll like it.”

Yeah, cause that’s not ominous or anything, the back of Evan’s head said. *He’s probably going to try and kill everyone. Shoot up the place.*

Evan bit his tongue. *He couldn’t get a gun.*
Fine, he’ll go two-eyed and kill everyone.

He just said he wasn’t going.

He’s obviously lying! You know he’s not trustworthy.

Evan felt like his brain was being split in two, his food clogging his throat and weighing down his stomach.

“You’ll make yourself sick if you eat too quick,” Connor teased, finishing the last of his plate. “But seriously, go watch that film, it’s supposed to be really funny.”

“Y-Yeah. Maybe.”

“Mm,” Connor scratched the back of his neck, his eyes moving from Evan, to Jared and finally settling on Will. “Thanks for letting me sit with you.”

“Welcome.” Will still didn’t move.

“...yeah.” Connor hesitated before holding his hand across the table. “Enjoy the film.”

Will nodded, taking Connor’s hand in a firm shake. “We will.”

With that Connor left, leaving his plate for someone else to clean.

---

Evan didn’t go to watch the movie. He wasn’t stupid like that.

He also wasn’t stupid enough to go back to his room, so instead, he found a corner of the library and pretended to read. Eventually, his eyes started to wander over to the clock on the wall. He couldn’t help but wonder if it was another recording device, another way for them to watch him. Then he spotted the bulb-like camera hanging from the ceiling and figured otherwise.

The film had started at seven-thirty and now it was almost eight, way too late to go and join in now. People would stare at him as he walked in. He pulled at his hair and sighed. Eight o’clock on a Sunday, his mom would be at work.

She’s on break. You should talk to her.

Yeah. He should. Only he really didn’t want to move, and she might ask questions. Would they have told her about David? Would she be mad at him?

She’ll hate you. You should call her.

Why did everything have to be so difficult?

Slowly, he stood up, dragging his feet over to one of the phones in the hall, fishing his hand into his pocket for his card. He closed his fingers around the cold metal of the panic alarm, the soft paper of his pocket notebook, but no phone card. A sudden spike of panic raised in his chest as he patted his other pockets, searching for the rigid plastic of the card. Nothing.

He’d left it in his room. Like a complete idiot.

For a solid minute, Evan just stood there in front of the phone, one hand on the receiver, the other in his pocket.
His shoulders slumped as he turned on his heel, trailing back down the hall towards the elevator. The halls were weirdly empty now that everyone was watching the movie, what was usually full of milling teenagers was completely bare, the sound of Evan’s footsteps echoing off the walls. His stomach twisting with every step.

The elevator ride was particularly slow, each squeak and creak of the cables above his head sending shivers down his spine. All he had to do was go in, grab the card, go out. That’s it. Easy.

*If it’s so easy then why aren’t you moving?* The voice snapped as Evan stared holes into his bedroom door. Maybe Connor would be asleep. Hopefully.

He drew in a breath, raised his hand and knocked.

Nothing.

He knocked again.

Definitely asleep.

*Either that or he’s ignoring you.*

Evan turned the doorknob, pushing against the door. It hit something, stopping when it was only just ajar.

“Connor?”

He knocked again, leaning against the door with his shoulder. Inside the room, something creaked. The bed, he realised. Connor had moved one of the beds in front of the door.

Thorns exploded up Evan’s arm as he pushed with all his strength, the rickety metal bed frame scraping across the tiled floor, the door edging open until there was a gap just big enough to squeeze through.

“Connor?” he asked again, slipping into the room. “What’s going--” the rest of his words got trapped in his throat.
Chapter End Notes

Edit: ALMOST FORGOT! Khocokat on tumblr made an OC! Her name is Carly and you can read her extensive Bio [here](#) She's actually featured a few times in the last few chapters.
A week before Evan became a Patient he’d googled the symptoms of an overdose;


Depending on what you took that death could be painless and quick or slow and agonising.

He'd imagined his mom finding a cold and blue body. He’d imagined waking up and living through the next few days as his liver and kidneys failed. He’d put the pills back and went on with his day.

Connor was collapsed on the floor. His lips were blue. His eyes were brown and dull, staring up at the ceiling as his chest raised and fell in shallow gasps. There was a handkerchief laid beside him, a pile of white and green pills piled in the centre of it.

Time ground to a halt, each second dragging forward for what felt like years. Evan felt his heart sink,
inch by agonising inch. A slow flush of panic spun the room around him like a top.

The plants on his arm grew and wilted rapidly as Evan’s mind searched for something to feel. Fear. Horror. Sadness. Shock. Each one stabbed against his gut, blood trickling down his arm as thorns dug into his skin.

And then was on his knees beside Connor, his arm a shredded mess of thorns as he reached for the panic alarm in his pocket.

“Connor! Connor, wake up. Stay with me.” His voice sounded distant, as though someone else was speaking. As though he was watching something happen from a far. “Can you hear me?”

Connor’s eyes didn’t focus as Evan wrapped his arms around him. His head lulled as Evan tried to lift him upright.

“Y—You’re okay, you’re okay,” he told him, pressing his finger down on the button. “You’re going to be okay.” He could feel what was wrong as he held Connor, as though his entire body was screaming in pain. It felt like he was holding a fire alarm in his hands, drilling and yelling that something was wrong, wrong, wrong!

He faintly heard Lucky say something, but their words were lost behind the roar of blood in his ear.

*Heal him,* the back of his head said like it was oh-so-simple.

‘I can’t,’ Evan said back silently. ‘I can’t heal other people. The doctors will help him.’

*He’s dying.*

‘The doctors will help him.’

*His lips are blue.*

‘The doctors will help him.’

Connor lurched a little, a soft gargle sounding from somewhere deep in his throat. He couldn’t breathe, something was stuck in his throat. Evan’s mind raced, trying to figure out a culprit.

Stories. There had been stories on the website with the symptoms. Someone had given their friend food, they’d heard a gargle and thought it was nothing. Their friend had puked and choked.

Evan’s mind was a storm of thought.

*Recovery position.*

*Heimlich.*

*CPR.*

*Something!*

Connor’s head lulled forward, his chin against his chest.

*He’s choking,* Evan told himself, wrapping his arms around Connor’s abdomen, his thumb pressed just under his rib cage. *When someone’s choking, you do the Heimlich maneuver.* He pulled Connor close to his chest, trying to keep him upright as he forced his fist against his stomach. Connor lurched
limply in his arms as he tried it again, hot tears falling down his cheeks.

_You’re doing it wrong_, the voice told him. _You’re hurting him. You’re killing him._

Evan tried it again. _Come on_, he begged. _Please_.

Connor’s lungs were pleading for air, his heartbeat a faint pulse.

_Heal him!_ The voice screamed. _Heal him!_

Trying to keep his breathing steady, Evan kept pushing his fist against Connor’s abdomen, closing his eyes tight as he tried to imagine the prick of hangnails on his fingertips. He felt the warmth of the healing sage pooling around his fingers and pushed outwards, flinching as it hit the invisible barrier that surrounded him. He felt as though he’d just run into a window, his brain reverberating in his skull.

Another attempt at the heimlich, another push of the warm energy in his fingers. Again, he hit the window, but this time he kept pushing and pushing and pushing and pushing and pushing and pushing an--

Connor’s heart stopped.

Everything stopped.

The blood in Evan’s ears silenced, the twist of his stomach untied. His breath caught in his throat.

_He’s dead_

He clenched his jaw, drew in a deep breath and slammed against the barrier again.

_You’re holding a dead body._

He stopped bothering with the Heimlich. He dug his fingers into Connor’s skin, his fingertips and nails a garden of sage.

_Why are you even trying?_

The warmth under his skin had become a fire, burning the inside of his fingers. They felt swollen, a sudden explosion of pain cracking against the inside of his head like an icepick.

_He’s dead. He’s dead he’s dead he’s dead he’s dead--_

The barrier shattered.

It was as though he was being sucked out into space. Every inch of him was being pulled in different directions, ripped apart.

Connor was in his arms.

Evan squeezed his eyes shut and tried to push some of the energy towards Connor. To his brain, lungs, heart, liver, kidneys, everything.

They weren’t working.

_He’s dead._

Evan kept pushing.
He’s dead.
And pushing.
He’s dead.
And pushing.

He’s dead he’s dead he’s dead he’s dead he’s dead he’s dead he’s dead he’s dead he’s dead he’s dead
Connor lurched forward, shuddered and coughed up a mound of flowers and partly-dissolved pills.

The next thing Evan knew he was looking up at the infirmary ceiling, a dull ache in his head.

He’d never been in the infirmary before, but it was exactly what he’d expected: rows of small
hospital cots lined up like dead soldiers. He turned his head and saw Connor on the bed next to him,
or more accurately, he saw Zoe’s back. She sat on a stool between the two beds, her knee bouncing
a little as she looked down at her brother, his body held to the bed by the same straps as the ones in
his room.

“U-um.”
Zoe jumped as Evan spoke.

“Oh. Sorry.”

“It’s fine, I didn’t think you were awake.” She turned round on her stool to face him. “How are you
feeling?”

“My head hurts.” Evan rubbed his temple, his fingers brushing against leaves of sage.

“Yeah, I bet.” Zoe went back to bouncing her knee. “You, like, passed out in the hall.”

“I did?”

“Yeah. Nurses said it was exhaustion.”
Evan winced. That definitely sounded right. “I feel like I ran into a brick wall.”

“You look like you ran into a brick wall.”
Evan managed a small laugh. “Uh. How’s Connor?”

“Down for the count right now,” she looked at her brother over her shoulder. “But he’s perfectly
fine. Well. He keeps waking up, coughing up flowers and passing out again which is...weird.”

“Oh. Sorry.”

“Not your fault...Thanks for saving my brother by the way.”
Evan tried to sit up, propping himself up on one elbow, his head protested and he opted to just roll
onto his side instead. “Y-you’re welcome, it was the least I could do.”

“Yeah. Still, thank you.” Zoe tucked a loose strand of hair behind her ear. “Are you okay?”
Evan blinked dumbly. “A-am I Okay?” He echoed.

“Yeah. After finding him, I mean.”

“Oh. Uh. Yeah. I think so.”

She raised an eyebrow.

*He was dead*, the voice in the back of his head reminded. *What would she say if you told her that?*

“Yeah. He was fine,” Evan cleared his throat. “I-I mean it wasn’t too difficult.”

“You fainted .”

“Oh, right.” Evan shifted a little, his fingers scrunching at his quilt covers. “I don’t really…it’s kind of fuzzy.”

“Yeah. I know the feeling. Apparently it’s a form of dissociation or something like that.”

“Um. You know the feeling?”

Zoe bit her lip, her knee bouncing up and down a little quicker. “I…was the one who found him last time.”

Evan’s eyes narrowed, his head cocking slightly to the side.

“His trauma?”

“I thought he tried to—“

“Oh, please don’t tell me you believe that stupid school-shooter thing!” Zoe said with a roll of her eyes.

“No. I mean. Uh. I didn’t…” Evan’s shoulders raised, “s-sorry.”

Zoe just shook her head. “It’s fine. I’m guessing Jared told you, right?”

“Yeah. Sorry,” he said again. “What happened to him? U-Um. If you don’t mind me asking.”

“He…tried to kill himself.”

Evan felt his stomach twist. “Oh. But. His scar…”

“My dad’s one of those weirdos who thinks it’s, like, his right to own a gun to protect his family,” her lip quivered slightly, though her voice managed to say relatively calm. “Connor stole it and tried to shoot himself.”

“O-oh.” Evan didn’t know what to say. “Sorry.”

“It’s fine. It’s not like he ever tried to deny it or anything.” She looked at Connor again. “He can be really stubborn sometimes; he gets it from dad.”

Evan nodded, staying quiet for a long moment. “U-Uh. So. Um.” There really wasn't a good way of asking. “Why did you activate?”

“Like I said, I was the one to find him.” Zoe turned back to him. “Mom and dad were both out. I thought he’d died or something but his powers apparently activated like that,” she snapped her finger
“like, in the time between him pulling the trigger and the bullet hitting him. It was his super strength that saved him.”

“I-I know the feeling. Um.” Evan kept his eyes on his arm. “My powers activated pretty quickly too.”

“Yeah, well they are meant to be a defence mechanism, so it makes sense for them to, you know, defend people.”

“Mm.” Evan bit his lip. “C-can...can I ask a weird question?”

“I’ll probably give a weird answer, so sure.”

It felt as though Evan had to force the words out of his mouth. “H-how...you said what Connor did was selfish...”

“It wasn't selfish because he tried to kill himself,” Zoe said quickly. “He did it on purpose.”

“...isn't that the point of suicide?”

“No, I mean,” she gave a heavy sigh. “He became a Patient on purpose. They did a search of his computer history and found a bunch of stuff about those kids who killed themselves trying to become Patients back in the nineties. The ones who got those comic writers sued?” She stopped bouncing her knee, leaning down a little to pluck at a loose strand on the cuff of her jeans. She’d doodled a little galaxy of stars there, the ink smudging little blue streaks on her ankles. “The psych at the hospital said he probably did it to become a superhero. People didn't like him much back then so he was trying to make himself popular or something stupid like that.”

_Those people were stupid if they thought traumatising themselves was a good idea._

That’s what Connor had said.

“I'm sorry.”

“Stop apologising, it's not your fault.”

Evan clamped his mouth shut, rubbing his quilt between his fingers.

“You want to say it again, don't you?”

Evan nodded, freezing as the sound of sharp footsteps against tiles echoed into the room. Quick as a flash Evan closed his eyes, making his body limp as the door to the infirmary creaked open. He couldn’t see Zoe's reaction, but he hoped it wouldn’t give him away.

_If dad sees you're still awake he'll be upset_, said something deep in his gut.

_You're being stupid_, said the back of his head.

Evan didn’t say anything, instead he focused on his breathing, making sure not to keep them too deep or too shallow. There was a fine line between ‘asleep’ and ‘clearly pretending to be asleep’ when it came to breathing.

“Oh.” Evan tried not to flinch when he heard Dr Sherman speak up. “I didn’t know you were in here.”
“I wanted to keep an eye on Connor,” Zoe said with a small shrug.

“Naturally.” Sherman padded forward, his shoes tapping against the floor as he walked. Evan focused on the sound, trying to gauge where Dr Sherman was exactly. Making sure to keep his brown smooth, his eyelids lightly closed. He was asleep. He was asleep. “You should go to bed, tag team?”

For a moment, there was silence and then Evan heard a small clap of Zoe’s hand against Sherman’s, the scrape of her stool as she got up and her footsteps, soft and even on their way to the door. Again, the world was still before finally ending in a long, deep sigh. The stool creaked as Sherman sat down.

“I know you’re awake,” he said, sending a shiver down Evan’s spine.

Don’t move. Don’t move. Don’t move.

Sherman sighed heavily. “Don’t ignore me.”

Evan’s heart skipped a beat, his tongue pressed to the roof of his mouth. Just as he was about to move he heard the creak of a mattress moving.

“I was asleep,” Connor muttered.

“No, no you weren’t.”

“Whatever.” Connor shifted in his bed again, the quilt and sheets rustling. “What do you want?”

Dr Sherman kept his voice calm as he spoke. “To make sure you’re okay.”

“I feel fine.”

“I know.” Evan heard the shuffling of paper. “According to our samples, you only have bare amounts of Fluoxetine left in your system. Good as new.”

“Great.”

“More than great, you’re very lucky given the amount you took.”

Evan let his eyes crack open into slits, he could see the blurry, white outline of Dr Sherman’s back and the brown smudge that was Connor’s mop of hair, his head raised off his pillow.

“It’s a miracle, right?” Connor’s voice was sharp and hard. “That’s what Nurse Rani kept saying.”

“I was going to say it’s a marvel of science, but miracle works too.”

Connor turned his head away from him. “Whatever.”

“It’s true! God knows what would have happened if Evan hadn’t—”

“No, I’m pretty fucking sure I know what would have happened.”

“Connor.” Dr Sherman’s shoulders slumped, his head tilting forward.

“What? What do you want? You just said I’m fine.”

“You know exactly what I want.”
“I’m not the mind reader round here—“

“Who gave you the pills, Connor?”

That was enough to shut Connor up. Slowly, he lay his head back down onto his pillow with a soft *thud*. “I took them from the storage cupboard—“

“No, you didn’t.”

“Yes, I did—“

Evan bit his tongue to keep himself quiet. He hadn’t stopped to think where Connor had gotten the tablets. As far as he was concerned they’d appeared out of thin air.

“—I went into the storage cupboard and I grabbed as many as I could find.”

“No,” Dr Sherman said again, “you didn’t.”

“I *did*.

“We have cameras, Connor, we’re not stupid. We checked the records and the only people who’ve been in and out of there was staff. Stop lying and tell me.” There was a hardness to Dr Sherman’s voice, something between a demand and a plea. “You aren’t going to get in trouble if you tell me.”

Evan closed his eyes again, tasting sage as he waited for Connor to speak. Only staff had access to medication, so it had to be one of them, but who would be okay with Connor killing himself?

*Who wouldn’t? He’s a murderer.*

Evan fought the urge to shake his head.

Not a murderer.

He knew that now.

“I told you,” Connor’s voice brought him out of his thoughts. “I took them.”

“You’re being stubborn,” Sherman said, the papers in his hand crinkling as his fingers folded them nervously.

“I’m not, I’m telling the truth!”

Evan couldn’t help it, he clenched his jaw. A warm haze started to form around his temples as he thought.

Dr Peet? No, she didn’t seem like the type to kill someone like that.

*That’s the point,* the back of his head taunted. *It’s always the least-likely person.*

The warmth spread down from Evan’s temple to his stomach and he swallowed hard, trying to return moisture to his mouth.

“We both know you aren’t,” Dr Sherman said, his voice still fairly quiet. “Just tell me, Connor.”

Maybe Jacobi? He definitely hated Connor. Did Connor ask them to get him the pills or did they give them to him on their own?
Evan’s skin felt like it was on fire. Part of him wanted to cry out, screaming at him that something was wrong with him. A fever or something.

Hot flush?

He could dimly remember one of his classmates complaining about those. Hot flushes, where your body decided to suddenly warm up for no reason. But only girls were meant to get them, weren’t they?

“You’re not listening to me,” Connor snapped. “I’m not fucking lying.”

Evan’s hands were shaking. He felt like he had when he saw Connor’s body, his mind filled to the brim with too many thoughts.

The stool scraped against the ground, Dr Sherman’s feet tapping the tiles as he backed up. “Connor, calm down.”

He imagined Connor standing in his room, tipping pills into his hand. No. Grabbing them from that handkerchief on the ground. Full of little green and white pills.

“I am calm!”

Fluoxetine. He’d heard that before.

“I’m trying to help you. Come on, deep breaths, don’t let yourself get angry.”

“I’m not angry!”

And then, something clicked.

Evan sat up, opening his eyes.

“Will.”
Chapter 20

Chapter Notes

Sorry, this chapter is short, blame college *jazz hands*

Thank you Levi, he's amazing and deserves all the credit for helping me edit this shit show.

TW: Anxiety, Violence, Extreme mental distress.

For a moment, everything was silent.

“...Will?” Sherman asked.

Evan felt thorns dig into his arm. “U-uh. I mean...Fluoxetine is Prozac, r-right? And he’s on...Prozac…” he trailed off. “I dunno. His name just kind of popped into head. I’m sorry.”

Dr Sherman shook his head. “It’s fine, son.”

“Dean and Kleinman both hate me--” Connor said matter-of-factly “--why the hell would he give me anything?”

Evan bit his lip. “S-sorry,” He said again.

“Don't apologise.” Sherman turned back to Connor. “Could you explain why you were so frightened by William’s name?”

Connor's jaw tightened. “He made me jump.”

“No. That’s a different feeling. That’s a sudden fear, yours was…” he cocked his head, eyes narrowed, “sinking.”

“And?” Connor’s voice was sharp, one eye brown, the other blue.

“And I think you should tell me why.”

“I told you why, he freaked me out!”

“Connor, calm down,”

“I am calm!”

The warmth boiling at the bottom of Evan’s stomach became a fire, burning his insides.

Will, Will, Will , his name ran through his head again and again. Each time it stabbed his brain like a needle, spreading to his arms, itching his knuckles. Will, Will, Will.

“Evan?” Sherman’s voice made him look up. “Are you alright?”

Evan’s realised that his hands were bawled into hard fists, jaw clenched and tense, his arm a garden
of Petunias. “I’m fine,” he said, trying his best to relax his face. He swung his legs over the side of his bed, trying to keep his legs steady. “I-I’m going to...to go for a walk.”

“I’m not sure that’s a good idea, son,” Sherman said, getting up from his stool. “You don’t look good.”

*I don’t feel good.* He felt like he was burning up. Like someone had pushed him into a bonfire. Like his hands were too jittery. Like his skin was too tight. “I’ll just go walk.”

Sherman hesitated before sitting back down. “Go back to your room and get some sleep.” He looked back down at Connor. “We’re going to sort this out.”

“Fuck off.”

“Connor.”

Evan’s body moved of its own accord, forcing him down the hall. He was watching himself from two steps behind. Watching as he went up the rickety elevator, as he walked down the silent halls of floor three, as he stopped outside room 307, opened the door and stepped inside.

He could see a lump under the covers of the bed furthest from the door, presumably Jared, fast asleep. Will was closer, propped up in bed, his hands resting on his stomach. His milky eyes widened and he pushed himself against the headboard, crawling back.

“Y-You…” Evan’s voice was hard and sharp. “Did you…” he couldn’t form the words.

“Evan?” Will looked genuinely confused, peering forward as though he was trying to see through a thick fog.

“Did you give Connor the pills?”

The question was heavy in the air, hanging there until Will opened his mouth. “No.”

Evan snapped.

He bolted forward, gripping the collar of Will’s shirt and yanking him upright. “Stop lying!” He screamed at the top of his lungs.

Jared sat up, pulling his covers away from his face. “What’s happening?” He asked, blinking dumbly in the dim light of the room.

“He, h-he tried to kill Connor!”

Will shook his head, trying to pull himself free of Evan’s grip. “I didn’t, he’s lying.”

*Liar liar liar liar liar liar liar liar liar liar liar liar liar liar*.

Jared raised his hands, like a trainer trying to calm two lions. “Stop, Evan, let go of him for God’s sake.”

Evan couldn’t. He didn’t know why. His hands locked into Will’s shirt like a vice, his jaw aching from how hard he was clenching it. “Y-you gave him the pills, right?” He asked, ignoring Jared. “You knew he was going to do it, that’s why you shook his hand, c-cause you knew!” His voice came out louder than he was expecting, making his own stomach jump with fright.

*Stop it,* the back of his head commanded. *Stop it, stop it, stop it!*
His skin was too tight.
He couldn’t breathe.
Will tried to kill Connor.

“Right?!”
Will shrank back and Evan heard footsteps behind him as Jared bolted out the room.

“You don’t understand,” Will said with a shake of his head. “You don’t understand.”

“What don’t I understand?!”

Part of Evan wanted to strangle Will there and then. His knuckles itched, pleading to make contact with Will’s face.

He tried to kill Connor.

Will swallowed hard, his collar digging into his neck. “He’s dangerous. I’ve told you. H-he’s going to kill someone a-and—“

“And what? You thought you’d try and beat him to it?!”

“No! You don’t understand, you can’t see what he’s like, not like I can. You don’t understand!”

Will’s words were quick; short and sharp. “Let go of me. Please. Let go of me!”

“You gave him the pills, yes or no?”

Will stared up at Evan, his eyes wide white circles. “I had to,” he whispered.

The fire in Evan’s stomach became an inferno. He pulled back his fist, about to slam it into Will’s face—but his hand wouldn’t move. It took a moment for him to register exactly what was happening. He turned his head, eyes fixed on the ribbon of light wrapped around his wrist.

Evan heard a sharp whistle and felt himself jerk back, Will’s shirt slipping from his fingers as he fell onto his ass. He tipped his head back to see Sherman, Jared and Zoe crowded around the bedroom door.

“Thank you, Zoe,” Dr Sherman stepped forward, eyes narrowed. “Evan, are you alright, son?”

The light disappeared and Evan rubbed his arm, sage blooming under his fingers. “Y-yeah,” the warmth was gone, replaced by the usual twist of nerves. “Sorry.”

“Don’t be.” Sherman slipped his hands into his pockets. “So,” he looked to Will, “what do you mean by, ‘had to’?”

Will’s shoulders raised and he pushed his quilt off his lap. “I didn’t mean anything.”

Sherman raised an eyebrow. “If you don’t want to talk I can easily ask one of the nurses to give you a blood test. I’m guessing they’ll come up as negative for everything, prozac included.”

Will didn’t say anything, he just slowly got out of bed.

“William—”
“He asked me to.”

*He’s lying,* said something at the back of Evan’s head.

“And you didn’t tell the nurses, because...?”

*Because he’s lying.*

Evan sat up, one hand pressed lightly against his back. He heard footsteps and saw Zoe kneel down beside him.

“You okay?” She asked, and he nodded, though his arm did still sting a little, a bracelet of sage covering his wrist.

Will stood beside his bed now, his back pushed up against the wall. “I didn’t...I couldn’t.”

“Why not?” Sherman’s face was expressionless, cool and calm.

“Connor said he’d hurt me if I told anyone.”

“Why are you scared?” Sherman asked him.

“Connor said he’d hurt me—“

“He can’t. He’s downstairs.”

“He’s alive?” Will sounded genuinely shocked.

“Yes, you’re upset about that. Why?”

Will stayed silent for what felt like an eternity. Eventually, his shoulders slumped, a long sigh escaping his nose. “You can’t see what I see,” he said. “You don’t know what he’s like.” He ran a hand through his hair, tugging it. “He’s going to kill someone someday. I can see it!”

Sherman’s mouth became a straight line and he turned to face the door. “Jacobi, Maya, could you come here a moment?” He called before looking back. “How did you do it? Slight of hand?”

Will nodded. “I had to,” he said again. “He’s not safe, you don’t get it!”

Dr Sherman stepped forward, drawing his face close to Will’s. No, I don’t. But I feel what he feels and I feel what you feel. And you know what? Right now the only difference between you is that you tried to kill someone.” He stepped back, his hands clenched. “I know you’re scared and sad and angry and I know you gave a scared, sad and angry boy the means to kill himself with the express hopes that he’d carry it out.”

Evan hadn’t heard Dr Sherman talk like this before. He sounded too loud, too heavy, too sharp.

“Doc?” Evan turned to see Jacobi by the door, another security guard at his side. “You called?”

Dr Sherman crossed his arms. “I need you to help me transfer William to The Basement ward.”

Evan felt his stomach sink.

Will moved back again, as though he was trying to push himself through the wall. “No!” He snapped. “Please, you can’t.”
Evan looked around, to Zoe and Jared. Both of them had their heads down, avoiding Will’s gaze. He looked smaller, skinner, as though he was shrinking down and back, his cheeks as grey as his hair.

Jacobi took a slow step forward. “Alright, kid, come with me.” He extended a hand to Will who shook his head. “Don’t make this difficult.”

Again, Will said nothing. He bolted forward, his arms outstretched as he pushed Jacobi back. Jacobi stumbled and Will took off, making a break for the door.

Sherman didn’t try to stop him, neither did Zoe or Jared. He wouldn’t make it very far.

Will got four steps out of the bedroom door before the female security guard grabbed the back of his collar. She yanked him back, one arm wrapping around his middle as she lifted him off his feet. Will squirmed and kicked, trying to twist himself out of her grip.

“Let me go!” He screamed. “Let me go!” His voice echoed through the empty hall, spit flying from his mouth. “Don’t, please, you don’t understand. I had to. I had to!”

Jacobi took his other arm and he and the other security guard began to pull him towards the elevator. Out of Evan’s line of sight.

Evan scrambled up, tripping over his own feet before righting himself on the doorframe. He could see a few other boys looking out of their bedroom doors, their brows furrowed as Will continued to scream and thrash.

“He’s going to kill someone. Please. Don’t do this. Let me go. Let me go!”

The security guards took no notice, hauling him further down the hall. Will’s face was bright pink and crumbled. Tears started to stream down his cheeks as Jacobi pushed the button to open the elevator door. They slid open slowly, with Will’s movements becoming more erratic with every passing second.

“You’ve got it wrong! You can’t see what Connor’s like when he’s angry. Not like I can. Please. Please! Let me go. He’s the one you should be taking, not me!” Will’s eyes met Evan’s, pleading with him.

Evan did nothing. He just stood there, watching as he was dragged into the elevator.

“Help me!” Will looked away, glancing to each of the other boys watching from the safety of their room. “Please!”

They did nothing.

The doors slide shut, cutting off his screams.
Chapter 21

Thank you all for the comments last chapter, seeing all the different reactions really helped to make my week.

Thank you Levi for the edit.

TW: Reference to suicide, Reference to self-harm, murder, and a bucket load of angst.

Evan was surprised by how easy it was for him to sleep.

He expected himself to spend the night curled up on the bathroom floor, counting ceiling tiles as the day replayed in his head again and again. But he didn’t. Instead, he collapsed onto his bed and fell asleep the moment his head touched his pillow. He felt like a balloon that someone had let all the air out of. Flat.

He woke up late the next morning, his joints popping as he got to his feet. There was an ache between his shoulder blades. Almost as though someone had tried and failed to pull him in half. For a brief second, he forgot about the night before to focus on trying to rub the ache away, his fingers brushing against little sprigs of sage as he tried to reach over his shoulder.

“Good morning,” Lucky said from their spot on the sill. “Where is the Connor Murphy?”

Evan blinked and let his hands drop to his sides. “He’s downstairs.”

“What happened to him? He did not look....” they were quiet, thinking for a moment. “Good.”

“He was…” Evan didn’t know how to put it in a way Lucky would understand. “He did something bad.”

“Something bad?”

“He made himself sick.”

“I saw. He vomited. Like you did when you caught the flu.”

“Yeah. He did.”

“He has petals.”

Evan winced. “No. He doesn’t.”

“I saw them. He has petals, like you do.”

“No, he doesn’t,” he repeated. “I don’t know what happened but he doesn't...he doesn’t do what I do.” He looked down at his hands and froze. The joints of his fingers were covered in thick bands of sage, his knuckles too. He pulled up his sleeves and saw more sage around both his wrists, on his elbows.
“Evan?” Lucky sounded concerned. Could plants get concerned?

Evan wasn’t listening. He made a beeline for the bathroom, pulling off his hoodie and shirt and staring at his reflection in the mirror.

More sage.

A band around his waist, around his shoulders, across his collarbone, under his chin, around his ears, along his hairline. He pulled up the leg of his pyjama pants and saw similar patches growing around his knee and ankles, between his toes, around his hips.

Evan stared, his fingers gripping either side of the sink. Thick brambles wrapped around his forearm, thorns stabbing his skin. More sage. Too much.

His arms ached. His legs ached. Everything ached. He felt like a piece of gum that had been chewed up and spat out.

Evan scrunched his eyes shut. He took in a long, slow breath and opened them again.

The sage was gone.

He closed his eyes again, opened them. Still nothing. No sage, just skin.

Well done, The voice at the back of his head said. You’ve officially started hallucinating.

Evan lifted his hand to his face, looking for any sign that something had been growing there. He checked between his fingers, under his nails, even between his cuticles.

You imagined it. Stress makes people hallucinate.

Does it? Evan rubbed at the skin between his thumb and forefinger.

“Evan?” he could hear Lucky calling. “Are you okay?”

He looked in the mirror, pulling his ears forward. Still nothing. “Y-Yeah,” he called back. “I think so...uh…” Evan went back out into his room. “Did I look weird before?”

“Weird?” Lucky echoed.

“Did I have flowers on me?”

“You always have flowers on you.”


Yeah. That was it. Sleeping on the floor had just caught up with him. That was all.

Is it? The voice asked, stabbing his brain like an ice pick.

Evan wasn’t sure if he had an answer.

——

The cafeteria was empty when Evan finally headed down to breakfast. For a moment he was scared that he’d missed it, but the person working there still exchanged his meal chit for a bowl of oatmeal, though it was a little cold.
“You’ll be coming off that soon,” he said as he took the chit from him. “Be able to pick your own food.”

Evan knew he should be happy about that, but the thought of having the other Patients waiting behind him as he chose what to eat and getting more and more angry as he took far too long made his stomach turn. Still, he murmured a quiet ‘thank you’ and headed off to eat.

For a moment, he caught himself looking for Will and Jared.

*Will’s gone,* The Voice reminded him. *Jared probably hates you now. You’re the reason Will’s gone.*

Evan tried to push the thoughts from his head, his spoon clinking against his teeth.

The Basement. The place where they took Patients who were too dangerous.

His eyes drifted downward and he stared at the spaces between the tiled floor, trying to imagine the Patients kept far below his feet. He tried to imagine them sitting in a circle, talking in groups about whatever had got them sent down there.

*I destroyed the crafts shed, said one.*

*I tried to kill a boy, said another.*

*And he succeeded,* the voice in the back of his head pointed out. *He’s a murderer.*

*Murderer. Murderer. Murderer.* There was that word again, the one that wouldn't leave Evan’s head no matter how much he tried to push it out. *Murderer. Murderer.*

*Connor Murphy is a Murderer.*

*William Dean is a Murderer.*

Evan scooped the last of his oatmeal into his mouth, feeling it gum up between his teeth, coating his tongue. The fire was back in his stomach, a few embers hissing in the very base of his gut. He set down his spoon, resting his hand on his stomach.

*William Dean is a Murderer. Not Connor. Will.*

He drew in a deep breath, trying to focus on the warmth.

*Go away,* he told it. He didn't have the time for stomach problems. Not now. He tasted a faint hint of sage at the very back of his throat, and just like that the warmth was gone.

---

Connor was reading when Evan nudged open the infirmary door. He lay back, propped up on a pile of pillows, eyes narrowed as he read.

“Um.” Evan closed the door behind him. “H-How are you feeling?”

Connor looked up, snapping the book shut. “Fine.”

“Oh. Good.” Evan kept his eyes on his shoes.

“You can sit down, you don’t have to keep standing there.”
“Right.” He sat on the bed beside Connor’s, still avoiding his eye. “Anymore flowers?”

“Huh?”

“Zoe said you’d been puking them up.”

Connor put down the book. “Right, yeah. That stopped last night.”

“I'm sorry.”

“For what?”

“For the flowers. I know how freaky they can be.” Evan rubbed his arm as he spoke.

“Yeah. Well. I probably won't have to deal with them again. Like I said, the doctors say I'm fine.”

“Mm.” Evan’s eyes searched for something to look other than Connor. Eventually, his gaze settled on the book, Kafka’s The Metamorphosis and Other Short Stories. “Is it good?” He asked, pointing to it.

“Hm? Oh, yeah. It's one of my favourites.”

“What’s it about?”

“Dude who gets turned into a cockroach.”

“Oh.”

“Yeah.”

“Cool.”

Connor hummed, fiddling with the hem of his pyjama top, turning it over between his fingers. You probably wouldn't like it.”

Evan furrowed his brow. “Why not?”

“It's kind of freaky. It's meant to be a horror story but it’s mostly just kind of sad.”

“I like horror.” For once, Evan wasn't actually lying. “I watch stuff like that with my mom sometimes.”

You WATCHED, the voice in the back of his head corrected.

“You did?” Connor raised an eyebrow. “No offence, but that sounds like bullshit.”

“I know. But it's like...the only socially acceptable time for people to be scared. You know?”

Connor nodded and the room slowly slipped back into silence. Eventually he spoke up again. “I heard Dean got taken downstairs.”

Evan fiddled with his hands, picking at one of his cuticles, searching for any sign of sage. “Word travels fast round here.”

“You watched, the voice in the back of his head corrected.

“Yeah, it does.” Connor continued folding and unfolding his shirt. “Never expected him to get taken down there. Not before me anyway.”
“He tried to kill you.”

“I tried to kill myself,” he corrected. “He just helped.”

“Same thing.”

“Different thing.”

Evan looked up at Connor, finally meeting his eyes. They were mostly blue now, not brown husks like they had been the night before. “Why did you...I mean...how did you--”

“Convince him to give them to me?” Connor finished. “I didn't.”

“You...didn't?”

Connor shook his head. “Back when I first came here, when the slightest thing would set me off, he walked into my room and said to me ‘you either want to kill yourself or everyone here, I can help with one of those’,” he picked at a stray thread of cloth.

“And you...accepted?”

“Fuck no! I went two-eyed and broke his fucking nose.”

Evan winced. “Did you tell anyone?”

“No.”

“Why not?”

Connor sniffed. “Cause they wouldn't have believed me. Why would they? I'm the crazy one. They probably would have just said I was looking for attention or some bullshit.”

“They wouldn't.”

“They would. They always do.”

“You don't know that.”


“Yes. It does. You tried to kill yourself, of course it matters.” Evan chewed at his lip. “So...if you refused, how did…” he waved his hands, gesturing to the room around them “…this happen?”

Connor shrugged. “Shit happens.”

“Shit happens?”

“Yeah. Shit happens.” He looked down, his long hair falling either side of his face.

Evan kept nibbling at his lip until he tasted sage.

Sage, sage, sage. The damn thing wouldn't leave him alone.

“What changed your mind?” he asked. “Uh. If you don’t mind me asking.”

Connor’s mouth stayed shut, his head bent, brows narrowed. “I finally figured out that I’m not exactly a good person.”
“You are.” Evan’s response felt automatic. “I mean. You help me out...sometimes.”

“Yeah. But I also hulk out and try to kill everyone all the fucking time.” Connor ran his fingers through his hair, catching them on a knot.

“No. You don’t. I-I mean, you can’t control it right? And Will did, he chose to do that stuff, you didn’t.”

“That doesn’t make a difference. I asked him to help me.”

“He wasn’t helping you!” Evan hunched his shoulders, surprised by how harsh his voice sounded. “Sorry. I mean. You’re not a bad person.”

“You don’t know me.”

“I’ve been living with you for two months!”

“Yeah, and you should know I should be in The Basement by now!”

Evan’s hands curled into fists, a hot flush creeping up the back of his neck. “No, you don’t!”

“Yes, I do! You don’t get it.”

“Then tell me!”

“Because I’m going to end up killing someone!” Connor’s voice cracked. “Because I’m sick and tired of being angry and hurting everyone all the fucking time. I hate it. Are you braindead? Do you want me to spell it out with me?” His left eye was completely brown now.

Evan felt a lump in his throat. “You don’t hurt everyone.”

“Oh, bullshit.” Connor kept his eyes fixed on his bedsheets.

“But you can’t control it right? So, it’s not your fault, it’s your power.”

“This was a problem when I was normal too. I can’t control anything. I can’t control when I get angry, or when I go two-eyed or who I hurt. There’s only one person I can actually choose to hurt and everyone seems pretty fucking fixed on stopping me from doing it.”

“Because this isn’t going to help anything!”

“Bullshit.”

“No, it’s not.” Evan clenched his jaw. His skin was too tight again. He was too hot. “You can...we’re here to learn how to control our powers, aren’t we? That’s why The Ward was set up, right? So...S-so you could ask Dr Sherman for help, and he’ll help you figure it out.”

Connor shook his head. “They don’t want me to control my power, don’t you get it?” He looked back up at Evan. “You know what happens to people like me. Right? They suit us up and stick us in the middle of some warzone and let us have at it. They don’t want us to be in control, they want to control us. They want me to be a freak so they can use me as a weapon, same with you, same with everyone.”

Evan could barely hear him over the sound of blood pounding in his ears. He knew he was angry, he just didn’t know why. He didn’t get angry, he got nervous. That was how things always were, that was what happened with Hansens.
Prescotts got angry. Hansens just cried.

“That’s not true,” he said, wincing at how loud his voice had become.

“What did you think we were here for? What did you think this was? A fucking vacation?!”

No.

“That we’d get to go home at the end?”

No.

“That they actually care?”

Evan didn’t know. He never did.

“They want weapons,” Connor continued. “They want to use people like me and Kleinman to beat the shit out of whoever they don’t like and they want people like you to bring us back to life so we can get back up again when we die.”

Evan felt like Connor had punched him in the gut. He drew in a short, sharp breath. Something was lodged in his throat, a phantom ball of anxiety, or maybe vomit?

“Y-you remember that?”

Connor’s mouth drew into a hard, straight line. “Yeah. I remember it. For the record, you're meant to hit someone’s back when they're choking on puke.”

Cold sweat ran down the back of Evan’s neck. “R-right. Sorry.” He swallowed hard, trying to get rip of the lump. “Do...do you remember--”

“Yeah, full of hellfire and brimstone.”

Evan’s eyes grew to the size of dinner plates.

“I'm joking, Hansen. Relax.” He rubbed his hands together, locking his fingers.

“Do...do you remember what it--”

“Nothing.” Connor’s voice was short and sharp.

“You...you don’t remember--”

“No, it was like...nothing.”

“Like...darkness?” Evan asked slowly.

“No, like nothing, like an absence of anything.”

“Oh.” Evan felt his hair stand on end. “S-sorry.”

Connor’s brows knitted together. “Why the fuck are you sorry?”

“I-just am.” Evan tried to relax his hands, turning his palms up and looking down at the little indents peppered across his skin. “If...If they didn’t care about us...why do they have The Basement?”

Connor cocked his head, curling and uncurling the hem of his shirt again and again. “What do you
mean?”

“I-I mean. They take the kids who have trouble...down there.”

Connor stared at Evan for a long, quiet moment. “What do you think they do to the people they take down there?”

Evan’s mouth went dry. “They...they help them.”

Connor laughed. Evan didn’t think he’d ever heard him laugh before, not properly anyway. He still hadn’t. The sound was bone dry and humourless. “God, you’re fucking stupid.” He put a hand to his brow, shaking his head slowly from side to side. “They take them down to a room and they never come out again.” The laughter stopped, his voice lowering to a dull growl. “What the fuck do you think they do to them?!”

Evan didn’t have to answer. He felt all the colour drain from his cheeks, a garden of dark-pink Begonias blooming along the inside of his arm.

“They...they wouldn’t...” he didn’t want to say it. “They come back--”

“They kill them, Hansen.”

Evan could barely hear Connor over the sound of the voice screaming at the back of his head. *Will’s dead*, it told him. *And it’s all your fault.*
Sorry, this is short, but I've been sick the past few days. I wrote most of this while sick with a fever, guess which parts.

Thank you Levi, ya goof.

TW: Anxiety, reference to murder, Descriptions of violence.

Evan couldn't breathe.

_Dr Sherman wouldn't let them kill Patients_, he rationalized. _They can't do that, it's illegal, they can't kill kids, they can't kill Will. His parents wouldn't let them._

_His parents don't have custody_, The Voice reminded him. _They're the government and you're second class citizens, not even. You're freaks. They can do whatever they want to you and no one would care. Will’s dead. If you didn't open your big mouth he’d still be alive._

The room was spinning, and Evan gripped his knees tightly. The lump in his throats was too big—he couldn't breathe.

_He killed Connor. He killed Connor. He killed Connor._ He repeated it to himself over and over again. _The reason he’s in the basement is because he killed Connor. If you hadn't told on him then Connor would still be dead._

_But did he deserve to die?_

Yes, Evan clenched his jaw. He pushed the thought from his mind. _No. No one deserved to die._

“Shit.”

Evan looked up to see Connor hunched over on the bed. He held his head in his hands, tugging at his hair.

“What’s wrong?” Evan asked. His mouth was dry. His voice too croaky.

Connor raised his head, his eyes were almost completely brown apart from the tiniest slither of blue. “Get out!”

“I-I--”

“GET THE FUCK OUT!”

Evan couldn't move. His arms and legs were like lead weights, sticking him in place.

_If they can’t control Connor, they’ll send him down there too_, the voice murmured. _He’ll die again and you won't bring him back and all this will be for nothing._

Evan got up, his knees shaking. He felt like someone had their hands on his shoulders, pushing him
down against the floor. His arm stung as thick brambles digging into the crook of his elbow.

“What are you doing?!” Connor asked, his face contorted into a look of pure anger.

“W-what’s wrong? Why are you--”

“I don't know! Just get the fuck out!”

Evan shook his head. “L-lay down, I'm gonna…” he grabbed one of the three graphene straps and held it up.

Connor stared up at him with a look of confusion on his face. His breaths were shallow, his cheeks a splotchy shade of red. He pushed some of the pillows supporting his back onto the floor. “Be quick and get the hell out.”

“R-right.” Evan pulled the first strap over Connor’s legs, securing it in place before quickly grabbing the second. “Just...just try and keep calm.” He racked his brain, trying to remember the exercises his school nurse had taught him. “B-breathe in for eight sec--”

“That isn't fucking helping, Hansen!” Connor snapped. “Hurry up.”

“I'm trying!” The warmth was back in Evan’s stomach.

No. Not a warmth. A raging fire.

His eyes stung, like someone had stuck red hot needles straight into his pupils. His arms ached. His legs ached. His jaw, fingers, toes. Everything ached!

The second strap snapped into place and Evan picked up the third, pulling it over Connor’s chest. His body had started to stretch now, like the werewolf in the film.

Connor clenched his jaw tight, his eyes screwed shut almost as though he was in pain. Evan could see the way his teeth became sharp, his shoulders became broad, his body contorted and stretched like clay. Evan clicked the final strap into place, stepped back, and watching Connor writhe and scream.

You made him angry, the voice pointed out. You’re the reason he went two-eyed. He probably got ticked off.

For once, Evan ignored the voice.

He stumbled towards the infirmary door, searching his pockets for the Panic Alarm. His brain was constantly buzzing, his body was too hot. The button slipped out of his palms, slick with sweat.

What the fuck is wrong with you?

He practically fell to his knees, his breaths came in short, sharp gasps through his nose. A hot beat of sweat ran down his temple as he reached for the button. Suddenly, Evan cried out, a shot of pain bolted up his spine, lingering at the base of his neck. His hands gripped the tiled floor, his fingers digging into the cool, smooth surface.


He clenched his jaw and closed his eyes.

The tiles shattered.

Evan’s eyes snapped open. His fingers were bleeding, the cuts were already starting to heal. Jagged pieces of tile stuck into his skin, his knuckles white where he’d been gripping the floor.

Evan stared.

*Stop it*, he told himself.

But his body didn’t listen.

He raised his fist into the air and brought it down hard against the floor. More tiles smashed. He did it again, and again, and again, and again.

*Stop it!* Evan tried to scream but his mouth refused to move. His arm was covered in a thick blanket of petunias and thorns, his knuckles hidden by a carpet of sage and blood.

Evan tried to close his eyes, but they refused, staring unblinkingly down at the floor.

*Please*, he begged. *Stop it.*

His whole body was on fire.

Fire.

Evan tried his best to focus his mind on the fire boiling away in his stomach. He let go of his limbs, letting them do whatever they wanted. He could still feel his fists pounding against the floor. The way his lips were peeled back into an animalistic snarl, but he tried not to pay it any mind.

*Stop it.* He spoke directly to the burning heat in his gut. In his mind’s eye, he pictured the fire: bright blue flames surrounded by darkness. He imagined sage sprouting around it—it’s leaves covering the fire, smothering it.

His arms stopped moving, and the heat was gone.

For a moment Evan just sat there on the ground, propped up on his hands, trying to slow his rapid breaths. Then, slowly, he lowered himself to the ground, resting his flushed cheek against it. The floor felt ice cold against his skin, like the un-slept-on side of a pillow.

Dimly, he could hear Connor still thrashing in his bed.

Evan reached for the Panic Alarm, closed his eyes, and fell straight to sleep.
Evan woke with a start, pulling himself upright—or at least he tried to.

Something was holding him down.

He lifted his head and felt his eyes widen he saw the thick straps stretching across his body. He wriggled his arms, but they wouldn’t move; caught between a bed and a hard place.

Garphene, he realised. He wasn’t in the infirmary. The lights were off but he was sure this place was far, far smaller. Single bed. Small walls that seemed to curve inwards at certain places. Like the pillows on his grandma’s old couch, like they had been padded.

_Evangel._ The word made his heart jump to his throat. _You’re in the basement. They're going to kill you. The sponge is so no one can hear you scream._

Evan gasped as the light was switched on, his vision splattered with fuzzy, black dots. One of the padded walls moved a little and opened up into a door frame. Jacobi stood there, propping it open with one hand. He knit brows tightly together and stared at Evan. Studied him with the same kind of look he’d given Evan back when he’d got a handful of thorns.

Jacobi turned his head to look over his shoulder. “Four-six-seven’s awake,” He called and closed the door again with a muffled thud.

Evan swallowed hard and tried to sit up again, twisting and turning his body. He knew it wasn’t going to do him much good—if Connor Murphy couldn’t get out of these things then wimpy Evan Hansen wouldn’t be able to either—but there wasn’t really anything else he could do.

He looked down at his body and saw the bands of sage wrapped back around his joints. Hundreds of little sprouts peppered across his skin like a rash.

Evan felt the warmth again, this time in this chest, but this time he was ready for it. He clenched his hands into tight fists and smothered the flame, his legs kicked and bucked as he tried to wriggle himself free from the restraint’s steely grip. The metal bed beneath him creaked and squeaked, but didn’t let up.

_You're in The Basement, The Voice said. You lost control. They’re going to kill you._

“Evan.”

He froze, and turned his head to face the door.
Jacobi was gone, replaced by Dr Sherman. “Try to keep calm, Son. You’ll just end up hurting yourself otherwise.”

“Where am I?” Evan asked quickly, not giving up his struggle.

“You’re on the tenth floor. We just had to move you and Connor out the infirmary for a bit.”

Evan felt a sudden wave of relief wash over him. Not The Basement.

“Here.” Dr Sherman walked to the side of Evan’s bed, starting to undo the straps. “Doesn't look like we’ll be needing these for a bit, huh?”

Evan watched him work, finally able to sit up. He looked down at his arms to find the sage now gone, whatever injuries they’d been covering now healed. “Do you...do you know what...happened to me?” He asked.

Sherman undid the final strap and stepped back. “Kind of? well, we have theories.”

“Theories?”

Sherman nodded. “Well, a theory.” He slipped his hands into the pockets of his lab coat. “I want to show you something. Can you come with me for a second?”

Not like you can say no.

Evan nodded and hopped up, rubbing a crick in the back of his neck.

“Great.” Sherman waved his hand, gesturing for Evan to follow him out of the room.

Jacobi was still in the hall outside, his lips turning into a deep frown as they passed. “You sure he’s safe to let out, doc?” He asked, his eyes fixed on Evan, watching him as though he was some kind of rabid animal.

“I think I can look after myself.” Sherman said over his shoulder, not stopping to chat.

“No. no you can't.”

Evan’s shoulders tensed as Jacobi started to follow them. He walked close, practically stepping on the backs of Evan’s heels. He tried to speed up--get away from him, but almost bolted straight into Dr Sherman’s back. He was trapped like a car in a convoy.

Or a criminal being led to the chair.


He walked straight into Dr. Sherman’s back.

“Careful there, son.” Sherman turned around, gently pushing Evan back a few paces. “You alright?”

“Y-yeah.” Evan turned his tongue in his mouth, trying to bring back some form of moisture. “Um. What did you want to show me?”

“Ah, well.” Sherman had stopped him in front of another door. The wall next to it was clearly some kind of window, though it was completely blacked out. For a moment, Evan wondered if it was still
night. “Come here.” Sherman moved over to the side of the window and raised a hand to a small knob on the side of the wall. He turned it and the glass suddenly became clear, revealing the room inside.

At first glance it was almost exactly the same as the room Evan had been in before—one with the same windowless, padded walls and the creaky steel bed. Connor lay strapped down, his eyes closed and his chest moving gently up and down in slow, deep breaths.

Evan’s mouth dropped open.

Connor Murphy was completely covered in sage. His neck, his cheeks—even curled into his hair.

“W-what...how...?” Evan couldn't find his words.

Sherman couldn't either. His lips moved a little, hesitantly, as though they were ready to speak when the rest of him was not. “We’re not entirely sure how, but we have a feeling of what.” He turned the knob and the window went dark again. “Do you remember what happened in the infirmary?”

Evan nodded. “I-I-I.” He clenched his jaw, breathing sharply through his nose. “I was...I was thinking...thinking about stuff, I think I started panicking...a-a-and he went two eyed and then...” he scrunched up his face. “I don't know exactly what happened but everything got...” he waved his hands vaguely.

“Hot?” Dr Sherman finished for him.

“Y-yeah.”

“And your arms started hurting, or maybe your back?”

Evan nodded again. “W-What happened to me?”

Dr Sherman kept his eyes on the darkened window. “For a lack of a better term...Evan, I think you went Two-eyed.”

Evan felt his gut twist. “What?!”

Sherman had a hand to his chin, his brow furrowed with thought. “Interesting…”

Not interesting! Evan wanted to scream. Anything but interesting! But he didn't say any of that, instead, he laughed. A short, sharp ‘ha!’ That clogged up the back of his throat. “That's not possible,” he said. “That's...that's not my power, right? That’s Connor’s, I'm not Connor!”

“I'm not saying you are.” Sherman finally turned to look at him, offering Evan his softest smile. “You don't have to worry, Evan, relax. Everything is going to be alright.”

Liar! The voice screamed. Liar, liar, liar!

Evan felt a warmth in his stomach and the prickle of thorns on his arm. He smothered the flame in his gut, but there wasn't much he could do about the thorns. Would Connor get them too? Would Connor’s arm become like his? Or would he just puke them up?

He has petals!

“Son.” Sherman took Evan by the shoulders. “Look at me.” He bent his knees a little so he and Evan were eye to eye. “You're okay. Deep breaths.”
Breathe in for eight seconds.

Evan did.

“And out,” Dr Sherman let out a long breath of his own, waiting for Evan to do the same. “Good. Now. We’re going to get to the bottom of this, okay? But first we need Connor to wake up.”

“I want to talk to him,” Evan said without thinking.

Jacobi scoffed. “What part of ‘we need him to wake up’ don’t you get?” He asked.

Sherman shot him a dirty look over Evan’s shoulder. “In a while, okay?”

“Maybe...m-maybe I could try and wake him up? Please, I want to talk to him.” And my mom, and Lucky, he added silently. “Please.”

“I’m not sure if that’s a good idea, Son. He gets tuckered out after a fit.”

“I'm not tired,” Evan pointed out.

“You might be different. We need to run some tests.”

They want to dissect your brain, the voice in the back of his head translated for him.

“Please!” Evan did his best to ignore it.

Dr Sherman looked at Evan, then to Jacobi, then to the window. “Five minutes, but that’s it.”

“Thank you!” Evan managed a smile as Jacobi facepalmed, hard.

“Suck up,” he muttered as Sherman unlocked the door to Connor’s room, holding it open.

Evan hurried inside, tensing a little as the cushioned door thudded shut behind him. For a moment, he didn’t move—not even a muscle. He just stared, searching Connor for any sign of movement.

The window was one way, so he could only guess whether or Jacobi and Sherman were watching him, but that didn’t stop the hairs on the back of his neck from standing on end. Anyone could be peering through the window: any doctor, any Patient, anyone.

So you better be doing something useful.

Evan took a step forward, moving towards Connor’s bedside. His hands played with the hem of his shirt, wrapping it around his thumb. “C-Connor?” he said, his voice little more than a murmur.

Connor said nothing.

Evan cleared his throat. “Connor,” he said, a little louder this time.

Still nothing.

Evan walked right up to the edge of his bed, looking down at him. “Are you awake?”

He wasn’t.

Connor’s eyes were lightly closed, his lips pursed as he slept. He’d turned his head a little to the side and Evan could see the faint scar where a bullet had hit his temple.
Connor Murphy tried to kill himself, twice.

Evan pushed the voice from his mind and leaned over. His eyes scanned along Connor’s arms, looking for any sign of a thorn or little, white Christmas rose.

Connor Murphy tried to kill himself. Cause no one liked him.

His sleeves were rumpled, almost as though plants were trying to poke their way through the fabric.

That’s what Zoe said.

Slowly, Evan extended his hand. He kept his eyes on Connor, making sure he didn’t stir as he pulled his sleeve up and held his breath.

They thought he was a freak.

No thorns. No roses. Just sage.

Just like you. I guess that makes sense.

Evan quickly moved the sleeve back down, letting out a sigh of relief.

Connor Murphy tried to kill himself.

Evan swallowed hard, wiping his sweaty hands on his jeans.

Just like you.

A shiver bolted down the back of Evan’s neck and he stepped back. Recoiled. Almost as though he’d been zapped with a static shock.

He tugged at his own sleeve, looking down at his wrist. Oak leaves. What did they mean again?

A twenty foot oak tree—or was it forty?

Power. That was what it meant right? Power. Leftover from him going Two-eyed.

Maybe fifty?

Ancient wisdom. He’d always wondered why Willow didn’t mean ancient wisdom, because of that one character. Mother Willow. That was her name. The wise old woman from Pocahontas. He’d liked her.

The one in the clearing near that pond. The one where you used to eat lunch. Maybe it was sixty feet? Who knows? Who cares? It wasn’t tall enough.

Survival. That’s what it meant.

You should have just drowned in the pond.

Evan clenched his jaw hard, smothering the sudden spike of fire in his stomach. His nails dug into his palm. He couldn’t breathe.

“Son?” Dr Sherman pushed the door open a jar. “It’s been five minutes. Are you okay?”

No. I tried to kill myself.
“Yeah. I’m fine.” Evan let go of his shirt. “I-I don’t think Connor’s going to wake up for a while.”

_How do you forget that you tried to kill yourself? What kind of freak does that?_

“Me neither.” Dr Sherman shook his head. “How about we go grab something to eat, huh? You must be starving.”

_Fell out of a tree. How did they believe that bullshit?!_

“Yeah. I am.” Evan moved towards him. He wanted to cry. He wanted his mom. He ignored Connor. Ignored the voice.

_How did you believe that bullshit?!_

“Evan...are you sure you’re okay? You look kind of pale.”

_Freak._

Evan pushed passed Sherman and out into the hall, wishing he could leave the voice behind with Connor.
Chapter 24

Chapter Notes

This is a long one.

Thank you, Levi for editing this beast.

TW: Suicide, Self-harm, Graphic description of body horror.

Evan didn’t wake up on August 26th thinking about killing himself. He woke up with a cold, or maybe the flu? Whatever it was, it made his throat hurt like a bitch and his nose run like a river.

“Ugh,” he sniffed hard and wiped his nose on the cuff of his pajama top. Part of him—an extremely large part, wanted to take the opportunity to stay in bed and do nothing. But another part, smaller, yet louder, spoke up.

They’ll think you’re skipping. It’s the last few days of summer vacation. Who gets sick in summer?!

So. Evan got up and stuffed his nose full of tissues from the box on his bedside table.

The house was eerily quiet, and every noise Evan made sounded like a thunderstorm. The hospital was always busier on holidays; that was why Heidi wasn’t there.

Day time spent working. Night time spent studying.


Granted, Evan was too. Busy with work at the Park.

And you’re going to be late if you don’t hurry the fuck up!

Evan rubbed his temple and stumbled into the hall, and made a beeline for the bathroom. He didn’t turn on the light since was connected to the extractor fan, which sounded like the wailing screams of an angry ghost and always managed to freak him out. The gloomy light didn’t exactly matter; Evan knew the shelves of the cabinet by heart.

Top shelf for his mom’s stuff: Caffeine and sleeping pills.

He wrapped his fingers around the small bottle and took it down, just holding it. His eyes drifted over the label, reading over the ‘Keep Out Of Reach Of Children’ warning again and again.


It was at this point that Evan thought about killing himself.

He pictured it in his mind’s eye: downing the bottle, washing it down with water from the tap, sitting
in the bath and waiting to black out.

Evan bit his lip.

*Mom’ll find you. What will she do? She’s used to dead bodies, right? She’s a nurse.*

Evan thought about it. He thought about it for a long time.

The empty house around him creaked.

Some kids were playing outside in the street. They were riding bikes. Evan could hear the bell.

He put the bottle back on the top shelf and reached for the DayQuil on the bottom. He swallowed the tablets dry and swapped the packet for a bottle of nasal spray, and a throat lozenge.

Evan looked at himself in the mirror.

*You look like shit.*

*I feel like shit.*

*You should stop talking to yourself. That’s what crazy people do.*

Evan put the medicine back in the cabinet and forced himself to start his morning routine.

First came the plants. Six of them, all lined up along his windowsill in a neat little row. He watered the ones that needed it, put a fly in the jaws of his venus flytrap and picked off any dead or dying leaves. Simple. He could do it blindfolded.

If only humans were that easy.

---

At some point over the summer vacation Evan realised that breakfasts just weren’t for him. He didn’t know exactly why or when he came to this conclusion, but one day, for some reason, instead of fixing himself a bowl of cereal or toast as he made his packed lunch he just, well, didn’t.

The first few times he skipped breakfast he’d turned up at the park cranky as all hell. Not hungry, like he’d expected, just frustrated. Not that he let anyone know that. Over time, he figured that coffee was the best way to fix this sudden switch in mood and started each day by raiding his mom’s supply of instant.

He’d fixed his first cup the way his dad used to before work: two teaspoons of coffee, one of sugar, no milk. It didn’t take Evan long to realise that he and his father did not share the same taste in coffee and ended up loading all future ‘breakfasts’ with at least three sugar lumps and a *lot* of creamer.

As far as breakfasts go, it wasn’t the healthiest, but it made dealing with visitors at the park a little more bearable. Not that he dealt with many visitors in the first place.

Mostly Evan spent his volunteer hours scraping gum off the undersides of benches and tables. He was pretty numb to it by now.

That was how he spent the first half of August 26th: hunched under the picnic benches outside the visitors centre with a spatula and bucket full of wads of gum and used tissues. The nasal spray, as it turned out, really hadn’t helped all that much.
Part of Evan was tempted to put his headphones in. He’d seen other volunteers listening to music as they picked up litter or went around making sure no one impaled themselves on a tree branch. It just seemed like something that would be against the rules. As though the moment he let his guard down someone would appear out of nowhere and yank his ear buds out and berate him for making their park workers look lazy.

So instead, Evan spend his time listening to the people around him.

It wasn’t eavesdropping, he’d only listen if people were being particularly loud. Besides, no one really cared if some random kid heard them, not if they were in a park ranger’s uniform, anyway.

He mostly listened to the other rangers telling people facts about the park. Like how it used to be some rich family’s property and their great-great-great-grandchildren had transformed into a park in hopes that it would somehow make up for the travesties that their ancestors had committed.

What these ‘travesties’ were, Evan never actually found out, but he had a few theories. Mostly slavery.

On that day, Candy—a plump woman who Evan never actually spoke to—and Scott—a balding man who Evan had also never actually spoke to—were teaching a group of kids about oak trees. It was pretty simple stuff that Evan had already heard a million times before, like how you could tell the age of a tree by counting the rings in its trunk and how they could live to be over two-hundred years old. Evan already knew all this, mostly because they’d said the exact same things about elm trees the day before, but he listened all the same. It interested him. And sometimes they actually said some pretty cool facts. Like how trees filter rainwater as it passes through their leaves or that they’re the longest living organism on planet earth, or that tree seeds were taken in to space to grow.

No one really said anything that day.

Around one o’clock Evan put down his bucket and shovel, took another Dayquil and went to eat lunch. Usually, volunteers ate in the breakroom at the visitors center.

Evan never did. He took his sandwiches and pudding cup and walked off into the forest on the far side of the park. No one in the breakroom ever said anything. No one ever offered him to come sit with them as he took his food out his shoebox-of-a-locker. No one ever objected to him leaving.

He kind of wished they would.

He had it all set out in his head; he’d go to leave and someone—probably Linda, Linda seemed nice—would say ‘hey, why don’t you come sit with us?’ and he would and he’d listen and occasionally talk as he ate and he wouldn’t stutter or make a fool of himself.

Yeah right.

---

At the far end of the park there was a clearing—one with a pond and a twenty-foot oak tree (or was it forty?). Someone, at some point, had set up a duck house in the middle of the water. Though, he’d never actually seen any ducks.

A quarter way through summer vacation, he started to wonder if they were scared of humans—that him eating there was the thing keeping them away. He’d sat there, wondering this, before climbing a little ways up the forty-foot oak tree (or was it sixty?) and eating the rest of his lunch propped up on one of the branches.
Since then it became routine; find the clearing, climb the tree, wait for the ducks who never came.

So, Evan sat around ten feet up, slowly picking his way through a jelly sandwitch and watched the empty duck house.

*Jump*, said the voice in the back of his head.

Evan swung his legs a little in reply and took another bite of his sandwich. A drop of peach jelly fell on his shirt as he ate, and he scowled at it as though he could scare the stain away.

*You should jump.*

Call of the void, or *lappel-du-vide*. The inbuilt instinct in a human to jump off the edge. Evan had read about it online. Apparently, humanity was hard-wired to take the easy way out.

*Juuuuump.*

Evan didn’t listen. He thought of something else. He thought of his mother. Of her promise that they’d order pizza and watch something on Evan’s laptop that night. He was pretty damn sure that she’d end up going back on her promise. Either that or she’ll forget and come home apologizing at ten.

She always did that.

Evan got it. He was kind of proud of his mom, going to school and making a better life for herself. But he still couldn’t help the anger he felt every time he got a text saying she had to work overtime or skip plans or go study. He knew it was selfish. He knew it wasn’t fair on her. But he also knew it wasn’t fair on *him*.

He’d practically spent his vacation on his own. He could run away and his mom probably wouldn’t even notice until the school phoned her up asking why her son had skipped the first day. And that was assuming she’d have enough time to answer their call.

*You could die and she wouldn’t even notice*, said the voice at the back of his head, wiggling its way into his thoughts like a worm rotting an apple. *No one would.*

Evan bit his lip and looked down at the Duck House.

*Jump.*

He threw his sandwich crusts into the water and watched the crumbs float on the surface.

*Why not? It’s not like you’re going to accomplish anything. Yeah, Evan Hansen, the guy who spends his free time scraping gum off seats and waiting for ducks because he has nothing else to do. No one’s going to remember you. No one’s going to care. You’re just going to end up getting in the way or fucking things up like an idiot. You’re a fucking idiot.*

Evan slowly got up, balancing on the branch and grabbing onto another with a vice-like grip.

*You’re like Candy and Scott. They’re spending their retirement scraping gum and telling bullshit facts about bullshit trees. Best hope you’ve got is some office worker. Someone who goes to work to pay rent and hates their life like everyone else. Like mom. Like David. Like everyone else.*

He started to climb. Slowly at first.

*And that’s if you manage to get a job in the first place. I mean. I bet there are hundreds of places*
who want to hire some stuttering idiot who can’t even answer the door. Right? The real world means communicating with people.

I can work nights, Evan interrupted his own thoughts. He started to climb a little faster, testing the weight of each bough as he pulled himself higher and higher.

Yeah. Work nights. Sleep days. See no one. Fade into fucking obscurity. You’re a blip. No one is going to see you. No one cares. Killing yourself would be a favour to everyone. You weigh them down. That’s why David left. That’s why he hit you. Cause you were stupid. Cause you stuttered and stressed and drove him up the fucking wall. It’s not normal. You’re not normal. You’re a sickness. A cancer. You bring everyone around you down. You kill them.

He looked at the ground and felt his head spin. How high up was he? Ten feet? Twenty? Fifty? His knuckles were white where he held onto the branches, his grip so tight he worried the wood might snap under his fingers.

You’re the reason mom’s poor.

You’re the reason dad left.

You’re the reason you don’t have any friends.

They all hate you. So why don’t you just jump and make the world a better place--

He felt one of the branches beneath his feet snap.

He cried out.

He fell.

It took longer than Evan expected for him to hit the ground. Enough time for him to realise what he’d done. Enough time for him to realise he was hurtling to his death. Enough time for him to realise he was perfectly okay with that.

He hit a branch on the way down, felt it lash across his skin. He saw the ground bolting towards him. He closed his eyes.

Thud.

Evan landed on his side, sharp twigs digging into his skin. He felt his left arm bend under him and snap. It felt oddly numb for a moment, and then the pain started. Like someone had hallowed out his bone and replaced his marrow with lava.

“Fuck!” He hissed, rolling onto his back. He tried to lift his arm, but that only made it worse.

Well done, said the back of his head. You fail at everything, including killing yourself.

Evan reached over with his right hand and tried to pick up his left. His arm was bent back at an angle. Definitely broken. He tried to move his fingers and drew in a sharp breath through his nose in pain.

He closed his eyes tight and breathed. You’re alright, he told himself frantically. You’re alright.

A sudden pain exploded in the centre of Evan’s head, like someone had cracked his head open with an icepick. His eyes snapped open and saw a lump the size of a golf ball bulging out of his skin. And then another. And then another. His arm looked like it was boiling, swollen with red bubbles.
A strangled cry escaped his lips and one of the bubbles burst.

Bloody chunks exploded out of his skin, like an alien parasite pushing its way out of his body. His arm spasmed in random directions, bone cracking and snapping with every jagged movement. Bile rose in Evan’s throat and he gagged and turned away from the mess of blood and skin and pain and—

He vomited. His head spun. Everything hurt.

And then it all stopped.

Evan wiped his mouth with his right hand. The pain was gone, so were the bubbles and the blood, in their place were flowers, Sage. Begonia. Christmas Rose. Thorns.

Evan stared at the flowers and slowly, cautiously, lifted his left arm.

It didn’t hurt.

For a long time, Evan stayed perfectly still, his arm in the air.

*Patient,* said the voice in the back of his head. *You’re a Patient.*

Again. Evan was still.

*They’re going to take you away.*

Evan’s legs were shaking when he eventually got up. He leaned his back against the trunk of the oak tree, breathing deeply. His throat didn’t hurt anymore. His nose was clear. He was perfectly fine.

*They’re going to take you away!* The voice screamed.

What were you supposed to do in this situation? Evan wondered.

*Find your nearest trusted adult and ask to be transferred.*

He didn’t want to.

Evan could dimly hear children playing near the visitor’s centre and screaming their heads off as they played tag.

He looked around, looked at the Duck House, and ran.

---

*What the fuck are you doing?!* The voice at the back of his head asked as Evan pushed open the Visitor’s Centre’s back window.

*Climbing,* Evan replied wordlessly, staring through the window at the cardboard box of lost and found—or more specifically— the hoodie that had been left there for the past six weeks. The Park Ranger uniform’s sleeves hadn’t been made with ‘hiding a hideously deformed arm’ in mind, and ended halfway around Evan’s bicep. He just hoped the hoodie would do the trick.

Evan used his phone’s camera to check that no one was in the room before he climbed inside, his back pushed against the wall next to the window. He angled his phone so he could see in side, eyes narrowed as he check that no one was in there. The coast was clear.

Evan pulled himself up onto the windowsill and scrambled inside, tumbling onto the floor and
whacking his shin on the way down. He held his breath and waited for the bubbles to appear there as well. They didn't, instead, the bruise itself with a layer of sage. His shin stopped hurting and Evan tried his hardest not to puke.

He found the box labeled LOST AND FOUND fairly quickly and dug his way through the small mountain of toys, picnic blankets and umbrellas until he found what he was looking for. The hoodie was more than a little tight—so tight that he couldn’t actually zip it up. Still, it covered his arm well enough, though the sleeve was bumpy. Maybe people would just think he had long sleeves underneath and it had been crumbled up, or that he’d stuffed some tissues up his sleeve. His grandma had done that.

*All you have to do,* he told himself as he walked out the Visitor’s centre. *Is get to the parking lot, hop on the Number 145 bus and get home. You can do this. No one will see you--*

“Prescott!”

Evan’s heart jumped to his throat.

Cal Green was calling his name. Cal, the one guy at the park who Evan had good reason to be scared of. He was big—bigger than anyone else Evan had ever seen before. Big and bald with beady brown eyes and thick brows that scrunched together whenever he was pissed. The guy who’d known his dad and refused to call Evan by anyone else’s name. The guy who shared David Prescott’s uncontrollable temper.

Evan fought hard not to scream.

“Where are you going?!” Cal asked, his brows bunched together. “You don’t go home till four, right?” He always sounded like he was shouting, even when he didn’t mean to.

“I-I-I--”

“Christ, kid! What’s wrong with your shirt?!”

Evan looked down and saw a bright red splatter on the centre of his uniform. Blood. Must have stained it when his arm had… He wasn’t sure what his arm had done. Exploded?

“J-Jelly,” Evan forced the words from his mouth. “It’s Jelly. I spilt some on my shirt. I feel sick. I’m going home.” He clenched his hands, feeling them shake.

Cal looked him up and down and Evan tucked his arm behind his back. “Yeah,” Cal said after a moment. “Scott said you looked like shit earlier.”

“He did?”

“Yeah. Well. He said you looked bad.” Cal’s brows relaxed a little. “You look like yer gonna faint, Prescott. What’s that woman been feeding ya?”

“U-Usual.” Evan swallowed hard. “I feel really sick, sorry!” With that he bolted.

---

The bus ride from the park only took about ten minutes, but to Evan, it felt like ten hours. Each time it stopped he held his breath and waited for some officer to get on, or for someone to point at him and scream ‘He’s a Patient!’ at the top of their lungs. But no one did.
His hands shook as he tried to unlock the front door. He dropped the keys twice and both times he felt like his heart would stop.

Once inside, Evan’s legs gave out. He sat on the hallway floor, head in hands, shaking from head to toe.

**Patient. Patient. Patient. Patient.**

He prayed his arm would be back to normal and pulled up his sleeve.

No such luck. The flowers were still there.

Evan covered them again and got up, trailing to his bedroom. He sat down on his bed. He lay down. He sat up again. Stood up. Paced the room. Sat down. Stood up. Grabbed his laptop. Opened it. Closed it. Sat down.

“What is wrong with The Evan?”

Evan almost jumped out of his skin, his laptop falling to the ground with a loud *crash!* He looked around, searching for the source of the voice.

“I do not know,” said another.

“Perhaps it is wilting?” suggested a third.

“Perhaps,” the others agreed.

Evan peeked through his blinds, the group of kids were still in the street. Maybe, just maybe, they were playing some kind of sick prank on him.

“I do not think it is okay.”

“Me neither.”

Evan gave the room one more glance before clearing his throat. “I-Is anyone there?” he called out.

Silence.

“It can hear us?” said one voice.

“Humans cannot hear us,” pointed out another.

“Definitely not. Not ever.”

“But maybe it can.”

Evan raked his fingers through his hair and forced himself to breathe. “Are…”

*Why do you even think that?* The voice cut him off before finished his question *That’s impossible.*

*All of today has been impossible.* Evan scowled and lowered himself so he was eye-to-eye with his makeshift garden. “Are you talking about me?”

Silence.

“Yes. We are.”
Evan felt a shiver run down his spine and the hairs on his arms stand on end. He was going to puke.

He turned and left, slamming his bedroom door behind him.

*This can’t be happening. Not to me. I should be dead. I should be dead.*

He looked down at his shirt, at the blood.

*I should be dead!*

---

Evan stuck his shirt in the washer with far more detergent than was necessary. Anything to get the stains off.

He didn’t go back to his room after that. Instead, he found himself climbing into his mom’s bed and burying his head under the covers.

*Maybe this is a fever dream?* He thought to himself, his eyes screwed tightly shut. In that case all he needed to do was sleep it off. Wait until his fever broke. Wait until the talking plants went silent and revealed that he’d spent the day in bed and dreamt up his day at the park in some sickness-induced haze. He just had to sleep.

Only, he wasn’t tired and he could still hear the muffled sound of the plants talking, though he couldn’t make out any actual words. So, Evan put a pillow over his head, closed his eyes as tightly as he could, and waited.

At some point he must have fallen asleep because the next thing he knew Evan could hear the front door slamming shut.

“Honey?” his mother called from the front hallway.

The room was pitch black now and Evan could only just make out the red numbers of his mom’s dying alarm clock.

22:33.

“Evan?” His mom called again.

“I-I'm in your room,” he called, doing his best to make himself sound as sick as possible.

“You are?” He heard her footsteps, socks on carpet, as she padded closer. “Is something wrong?”

Evan made sure his arm was covered, and felt his breath catch in his throat as Heidi pushed open the bedroom door. “Y-Yeah,” he croaked. “I think I caught the flu o-or something. My room was too hot.” That wasn't too far-fetched, the air conditioning in his bedroom had been busted since spring and neither of them had gotten round to having it fixed. Heidi had been too busy, Evan too nervous.

Heidi walked over to the bedside, placing a hand to his brow. “You're a bit warm.”

“I've got the flu,” Evan repeated, his voice a little more steady. “I had to come home early.”

“Only you’d get sick in summer, huh?” Heidi smiled softly and took her hand away. “Want me to tuck you in properly?”

Usually, Evan would have said yes. It was kind of a Hansen-family tradition, even back when they
were Prescotts. It was dumb and cheesy, but that was the point of it.

But, Evan knew that tucking him in meant moving the quilt, and moving the quilt meant her possibly seeing his arm. Then everything would be over. So, Evan shook his head.

“I’m good.” He looked up and saw his mom’s face. She was unusually pale in the dark of the room, her eyes tired. Too tired for someone her age. For anyone, at any age. “Um. You should go to bed soon.”


“What happened to the movie night?” Evan winced at his own words. It was almost automatic at this point given how many times he’d been forced to eat a whole cheese pizza by himself.

Heidi narrowed her eyes for a moment. “Oh shit!” She clapped a hand to her mouth. “I’m so sorry, Ev, I completely forgot!”

Evan forced a cough and rubbed his nose on the back of his hand. “It’s fine. I’m sick anyway.”

“Are you sure?”

“Y-yeah. And I made some toast,” he lied. “I didn’t see the money.”

Heidi pushed his bangs back off his forehead. “I’m sorry, sweetheart. Maybe next time? I can see if I can get Michael to cover. He owes me anyway since I’m going to be taking over for him once Sarah has the baby. I could see if I can get Friday off.”

“Yeah...t-that would be great.”

Heidi stepped back from him, her hands on her hips. “I’m going to put the kettle on, do you want a cup-a-soup? Or I could make some camomile tea to help you sleep?”

“I’m fine, mom--but thanks.”

“Well, only if you’re sure.” Heidi pet Evan’s shoulder and left, leaving the door open ajar.

Evan let out a long, shaky breath once he heard the kettle start to boil.

How long do you think you can keep this up, huh?

He closed his eyes again, but this time he only pretended to sleep. He made his body limp, his eyes lightly closed. He heard his mom bustling around in the kitchen, the clinking of cups, the pouring of water boiling. A few minutes door creaked open and Heidi got into bed beside him, not bothering to change out of her nurse’s scrubs.

After what felt like forever, Heidi’s breathing became slow and turned to quiet snorts and snores. Evan opened his eyes and stared up at the ceiling. His arm throbbed under the quilt. He winced and ran his hand over the twisted thorns and brambles coating his skin. Still there.

Did you really think they’d just disappear?

Evan grabbed a handful of plants and pulled. It took all of his willpower to not immediately cry out in pain. It felt as though he’d tried to rip a hundred hangnails, his fingertips warm with blood.

His lip quivered and he tried again. His eyes watered. Shit! He pulled again. Shit, shit, shit!
“Evan? Honey?”

He froze. Hot tears dribbled down from the corners of his eyes, slipping behind his ears.

Heidi propped herself up on one elbow, eyes narrowed. “Oh, honey,” she sat up. “What’s wrong?”

Evan sniffed, his breathing ragged. “N-nothing. I’m fine. I—I just…”

“I can’t breathe.” His chest was too tight, his arm prickled with pain as thorns jabbed into his skin.

“You just?” Heidi asked.

He shook his head. “I’m fine, I’m sorry I woke you up.”

“Evan, if something’s wrong, just tell me.”

“I—I’m just sick.”

“No, Evan. Please, don’t lie.”

Evan met her eyes and swallowed hard. Slowly, he took his arm out from under the quilt. It wasn’t bleeding anymore, though he could see sprigs of sage where hunks of thorns and brambles must have been.

Heidi’s mouth dropped open. “H-How?” was all she could manage.

“I… She’ll hate you if you tell her. She’ll HATE you. “I fell out of a tree. I was c-climbing it at lunch and I fell. I was stupid. I hurt…I think I broke my arm, but…but it healed and…and…” he gestured to the flowers.

Heidi switched on her bedside lamp. “Can I?” she asked, holding out her hands. Evan nodded and she held his arm, moving it forward into the light. “I didn’t…I didn’t know something like that could activate…I didn’t think you’d ever…I mean the chances of being one are so small…” She nibbled her lip, leaving little dents under her teeth. “Did anyone see you?”

“I-I don’t think—”

“Evan, did anyone see you?!”

Heidi’s tone made Evan jump, his pulse thudding in his throat. “N-No. No, they didn’t. I’m sorry.”

That seemed to make her relax, if only a little. “Okay,” she murmured softly. “Okay, okay, okay.”

“Are…are you going —”

“I’m not letting them take you away.” Heidi’s voice had a firmness to it. Evan had only heard her talk like that once in his life—back when he was seven and asked her if she’d leave him too.

“You’re not going anywhere, Ev. Not if you don’t want to, understand?” She sounded like she was trying to convince herself more than Evan.

Evan nodded and Heidi wrapped her arm around his shoulders, pulling him into a tight hug.

“You’re not going anywhere.”

Liar.
Chapter Notes

HOLY CRAP 10,000 VIEWS WTF?!
Seriously, thank you. Like. Damn.

Thank you Levi, for editing this mess.

TW: Medical Exams...I think that's it??

“This is stupid.”
Connor’s voice brought Evan back to reality. “It is?”

“Yeah, it is.”
Evan didn’t ask exactly what ‘this’ was, but he guessed it had something to do with the tests.

Over the past few hours Dr Sherman had put the two of them through almost every medical examination known to man: Blood tests, brain scans, the lot. According to Sherman, nothing seemed too out of the ordinary just yet (apart from the fact that the pin pricks on Connor’s arm now healed within a few seconds), but he was determined to keep looking.

“Better safe than sorry, huh, son?” He’d said to Evan with each result.

Safe from what? Evan had wondered.

“You okay?”
He flinched and turned to look at Connor. The two were sat outside an examination room. He could dimly hear the hum and beep of machinery being set up inside.

“Yes. I—I’m fine. Just thinking, you know?” Evan said, wiping his hand on his khakis. Connor was back to normal, or at least he seemed to be. His skin was free of sage, his eyes both predominantly blue. Still, Evan knew something felt off. He had an odd twist in his stomach and it was almost as though he could feel Connor’s presence. Like a blip on a radar, or an alarm that wouldn’t stop ringing.

“What about?” Connor asked, leaning his back against the wall.

“Oh...you know.” Evan waved his hand.

“No, I don’t. That’s why I’m asking.”

“Heh. Right.”
Connor started curling the hem of his shirt between his fingers, brow furrowed.

“Are...are you okay?” Evan asked slowly.
“I’m fine, Hansen. Just thinking.”

“About what?”

Connor fixed him with a hard look. “Oh. *You know.*”

Silence.

“Does going Two-eyed…” Evan winced at how loud his own voice sounded. “I mean. Sorry, I’ve been meaning to ask. Does it always...feel like that?”

“Like what?”

“Like...Does it always hurt?”

Connor was quiet for a long time, and for a brief moment Evan wondered if he had ignored the question all together.

“It’s like,” Connor started. “You get used to it. Or your body does anyway. It hurts cause you get bigger and your muscles have to stretch out and your teeth move around and stuff.” He rubbed a hand over his mouth. “You get used to it,” he said again.

“Sorry.”

“Not your fault. Besides, your flower-thing helped a lot.”

“It did?”

Connor nodded. “Still. It’s fucking weird.”

“It is,” Evan agreed.

Connor sat up straight. “Going Two-eyed used to kill my shoulders, but one of the nurses said if you do this,” he put his hands behind his back, “and arch your back a bit, it helps them heal or something. So, if that ever starts bothering you.” He put his hands back in his lap.

“I’ll keep that in mind,” Evan smiled.

Connor didn’t. “I’m sorry.”

“For what?”

“For putting you through that shit.”

The door to the examination room opened and Jacobi stuck his head into the hallway. He looked drained. Probably because he’d spent the last six hours being dragged around the place. “Doc wants you,” he said, gesturing behind him with his thumb.

Evan jumped to his feet. “Coming.”

Connor got up too, cracking his knuckles. “Yeah. Coming.”

Inside the room was an ESPograph. Evan had only seen one once, back when he’d first become a Patient. At first, it looked somewhat similar to a normal camera, though it was hooked up to a computer tower and monitor. If he tried, Evan could almost imagine he was getting his school picture taken.
Dr Sherman smiled at the two as they entered. “Hey,” he said. “We’re going to take Connor’s first.” He pointed to the stool they’d set up in front of the camera. “Evan, you can stay here with me, okay?”

Evan nodded and Connor plonked himself down, arms crossed.

Dr Sherman tapped at the monitor, bringing up a picture and moving it to one side of the screen. It was of Connor, his eyes closed, lips slightly parted, a gauze band-aid pressed against his temple where his scar now was. His hair was much shorter and styled into a neat crew cut. It looked weird on Connor, made his face seem far too thin and boyish, too young.

He is young. The voice pointed out. How old was he? Fourteen? Fifteen?

Surrounding Connor was a thin aura of red light; his own brand of psychic energy.

“Say cheese,” Dr Sherman said, earning him a scowl from Connor. He tapped the screen and the camera clicked, letting off a flash of bright light. “There we go.” Sherman started messing around with the files again. “You can come round and look too, if you want.”

Connor grunted and got up. The three of them watched as a new picture slowly came into view. In this one, Connor had his eyes open, spread wide because of the sudden flash.

He looks better with long hair, Evan decided.

Again, there was a thin line of red energy surrounding him, but this time it wasn’t the only one. Right in the centre of Connor’s forehead was a splotched of green.

Connor raised an eyebrow. “You know what this means?” he asked Dr Sherman.

“I think so.” Dr Sherman put a finger to his chin. “I have a theory anyway. Evan, can you take a seat please?” With that, he cleared the screen.

Evan nodded and sat down. The stool was wobbly, and he gripped the seat with his fingers to stop himself from falling.

Then, he heard a laugh.

“Your old photo looks like shit,” Connor said. “Like you’re on meth.”

Evan winced. “They said I wasn’t allowed to smile.”

“Yeah, smiling wouldn’t’ve helped.”

Evan opened his mouth, but was cut off by the sudden flash of the ESPograph. He tilted back, causing the seat beneath him to squeak.

“You okay, son?” Sherman asked.

“Y-Yeah. Sorry, sorry.” Evan’s heart pounded in his throat. He could hear the hollow thud of Sherman’s finger against the screen, the steady hum of the machine processing his photo. Had Connor’s taken this long?

Dr Sherman cocked his head to the side. “Interesting,” he said simply. “Very interesting.”

“What’s wrong with me?” Evan asked.
The doctor waved his hand, gesturing for Evan to come and look for himself.

His picture was like Connor’s: wide eyes and a shocked look. He had an aura of green psychic energy lining his body, as well as a similar splotch of red in the dead centre of his forehead like some demented third-eye.

Evan and Connor exchanged looks.

“So...what?” Connor asked, and Evan knew his left eye had gone brown. He didn’t need to look, he just knew. “What does that mean?”

“I’m not too sure,” Dr Sherman admitted. “But I have a theory.”

“Are you going to let us in on it?”

“In a moment.” Sherman stabbed at the screen and Evan’s older picture disappeared, replaced by Connor’s new scan. He pinched his fingers together to make both pictures smaller and moved them to the corner of the screen. “I want you to take a picture together--Jacobi, can you get another stool?”

Jacobi gave a thumbs-up. “Sure thing, Doc.”

Connor shook his head. “I can kneel or something, just get this over with.” With that he went back over to the stool.

Evan looked to Dr Sherman and then to Jacobi, who shrugged and went back to leaning against the wall.

“If you insist,” he said. “Less work for me.”

Dr Sherman rolled his eyes. “Fine. Son, could you sit back down?”

Evan did and Connor bent his knees so they were at roughly the same height.

_He’s pissed_, pointed out the voice.

_Not pissed_, Evan corrected. Connor felt like a flame beside him, but not necessarily an angry one. _Frustrated_, he decided. _Or maybe confused?_

_Or maybe, he’s just tired of all this._

_I think that just means frustrated._

Evan’s stomach jumped as the ESPograph flashed. He felt Connor’s shoulders jolt and his head move back.

“Fuck that flash,” Connor muttered, rubbing at his eyes.

By the door, Jacobi grinned. “Like to see you try.”

“What are you, five?”

The flame was definitely angry now.

Evan curled the hem of his shirt, his eyes focused on Dr Sherman. The doctor squinted down at the computer monitor. He didn’t look concerned, per say, but his expression didn’t seem to bode well.
“What is it?” Evan asked.

“Hm?” Dr Sherman rubbed his chin. “Oh, just give me a second and I’ll show you. I just have to check a few things.”

Evan’s stomach sank as Dr Sherman started to jab at the monitor again. “Is...are we alright?” He asked.

Dr Sherman nodded, saying nothing.

“Are you actually going to tell us or are you just going to keep your big mouth shut?” Connor snapped.

Sherman waved his hand. “Give me a moment, I just have to check a few things.”

“Check what?” Connor stepped forward. “Let me see.”

Jacobi moved away from his spot by the door. “Stay where you are.”

“I just want to see. I’m not going to kill him or anything. Christ!”

For once, Evan actually believed what Connor was saying. He knew, deep in his gut, that Connor was definitely angry. That he had one blue and one brown eye. That he was tempted to slam Jacobi’s head against the wall. But he also knew that Connor did not want to hurt them. Not really.

“H-he’s fine,” Evan said quickly. “Please, can we just see the screen?”

Jacobi looked to Evan before turning his head back to Sherman. “You ready, Doc?”

Dr Sherman nodded, seemingly unphased—or unaware—by what was going on around him. “This is...well, it’s fascinating.” He said, beckoning for Evan and Connor to take a look.

Connor bolted over to his side. For a second, he looked. “The hell?”

Evan felt his stomach tie itself into knots.

You’re going to be sick, murmured the voice. You’re going to be sick and make a fool out of yourself.

He shook the thoughts from his head and went over. It didn’t take long for him to see what was so surprising.

He and Connor stared back at him from the screen with twin looks of fright on their faces. Like before, Evan could see the familiar, green outline of psychic energy surrounding his body, and Connor’s own red outline. The spots of colour were still in the centre of their foreheads, but unlike the previous photos they were connected by a faint line, almost like a spiderweb.

Evan felt an odd pressure on his brow, and put a finger to where the red spot on his head would be. “What does it mean?”

Sherman clapped his hands together. “I have a few theories—”

“Cut to the chase,” Connor said quickly.

The doctor sighed. “Fine.” He brought up another photo. “I thought the line between you looked familiar,” he said. The new photo was of two identical young girls, both surrounded by an outline of
grey, psychic energy. At the centre of their foreheads was a small spec of grey, connected to one another by a faint line. “This is a picture of Patients 56 and 57,” Dr Sherman explained. “It was taken back in 89, I think. Maybe a little earlier? Still,” he pointed to the line connecting the two. “They’re the only scientifically verified example of psychic twins. See, they suffered their trauma at the same time and somehow that resulted in them becoming linked.”

“So, what? Connor said slowly. “You think we’re connected?”

“Exactly. Though I don’t know how.” Dr Sherman grew quiet for a moment. “Perhaps it’s a result of Evan healing you? Though I’ve never heard of something like this happening before? Maybe it’s a hidden part of Evan’s powers? Maybe it was a hidden part of yours?” He trailed off again before suddenly pointing a finger to Connor. “Think of a number between one and ten.”

“Huh?”

“Just do it.”

Connor narrowed his eyes. “Okay.”

Sherman looked to Evan. “What number is he thinking of?”

“Uh.” Evan thought for a moment. “Six?”

Connor shook his head. “Two.”

“Damn.” Dr Sherman’s hand went back to holding his chin. “This explains the shared powers...on the Espograph it almost looks like you’ve both got a bit of each other’s psychic energy lingering about. I’ll have to run more tests—”

“No,” Connor interrupted. “No more tests. Not today.”

Dr Sherman looked genuinely taken aback. “Don’t you want to figure this out?”

At this point, Jacobi cleared his throat. “It’s almost six, Doc,” he pointed out.

“It is?” Dr Sherman frowned. “I must have lost track of time.”

“Yeah, I’m starving,” Connor said. “And tired and this is fucking stupid anyway.”

“I’d hardly call this stupid! Nothing like this has ever happened before. This could be a breakthrough in what we know about Patients.” Dr Sherman gave a sigh, his shoulders slumped in an almost exact copy of Connor’s posture. “But if you’re not up to it we can continue this tomorrow.”

“Great,” Connor was already almost out the door.

“U-Uh.” Evan stepped forward, casting Dr Sherman a quick glance. “See you tomorrow.”

“See you tomorrow, Son.”

---

The elevator felt far slower than normal. Squeaking and creaking and squealing like a pig.

Connor leant against the wall, his arms crossed tightly across his chest.

“D-Do,” Evan murmured softly, his voice caught in the back of his throat. He opened his mouth
again, tried to speak, gave up. Sometimes questions weren’t worth asking.

“Did you tell them about what happened?” Connor asked suddenly.

“H-Huh?” Evan’s mouth still wasn’t cooperating.

“Did you tell t-them,” Connor paused and cleared his throat. “Did you tell them about what happened to me?”

“They know I healed you, if that’s what you mean.”

Connor shook his head. “No, I mean did you tell them about me...dying.”

The cables above their head squeaked and Evan reached out to steady himself against the wall.

_It’s going to fall. You’re going to die._

“I thought you’d...I thought they already knew,” he said. “Why?”

“Do you think that’s what caused this?” Connor asked, tapping the middle of his forehead. “Like Sherman said, healing someone isn’t supposed to make us all...fucked up.”

“That’s one way of putting it.” Evan winced as thorns dug into his skin. “I mean...it might have...I don’t know?” _I don’t know anything._

Connor let out a long sigh through his nose and turned his head.

Conversation over, the voice decided.

“Do you think you can bring other people back?”

_Or maybe not._

“U-um. I don’t know. Probably. I mean. You, you were only dead a couple of seconds so...maybe it’s just like I jump started everything? Like, you know how sometimes people die and then the doctors bring them b-back?”

Connor nodded. “That happened to my grandad.” He rested one fist against his palm and cracked his knuckles. “But he said he saw, like, angels and all that shit.”

“Really?”

“Yeah.”

“But you saw nothing?”

He nodded again and Evan felt an odd prickle run down the back of his spine, as though someone had placed an ice cube against the back of his neck.

“Creepy,” Evan said.

“Yeah,” Connor agreed.

“You probably shouldn’t be thinking about it.”

“Probably not.”
Silence.

The doors creaked open.

---

It took Evan around two minutes to realise looking for Will and Jared was a waste of time.

He stood at the edge of the cafeteria, his tray held tightly between his hands as he scanned table after table. It was mostly empty since it wasn’t quite dinner time just yet.

Will’s dead, said the voice in the back of his head. And it’s your fault. Jared probably hates you.

Connor had gone off to sit in his usual corner, and for a moment Evan was tempted to go sit with him. Again, the voice stopped him.

He’s been with you all day. He’s sick of you.

Evan felt a drop of blood run down his arm and Connor looked up from his food. The two met eyes for a second before Evan bent his head down to focus on his feet. He turned and walked over to the closest empty table he could find and slowly started to eat. The food stuck in his throat. At the very edge of his mind, he was still aware of Connor, a small blip on his radar.

“Are these seats taken?”

He jumped as Zoe pulled out the chair across from him, setting down her tray. Alana Beck stood beside her, offering Evan the best and most pearly-white smile she could muster.


“Great.” Zoe sat down, picking up her knife and fork. “Alana said you weren’t in class today.”

“I took notes for you,” Alana said. “I’m sorry in advance for my handwriting.”

“Your handwriting would be fine if you didn’t insist on using cursive,” Zoe said, picking at a slice of lamb pie.

“It’s quicker.”

“No one under the age of forty uses cursive.”

Alana rolled her eyes and turned her attention back to Evan. “I can give you the notes later if you want.”

“T-That would be great, uh, thanks.” Evan pulled the sides of his mouth into what he hopped looked like a genuine smile.

You look like a serial killer.

The smile dropped.

“You’re welcome.”

“You also missed Chris accidentally destroying a fork at lunch,” Zoe added quickly. “You know the dude with the shark teeth?”
Evan nodded.

“Yeah, well apparently they can bite through metal.”

“Oh, cool.” Why are you here? Evan asked silently. Your brother almost died. Why are you with me?

Because they feel sorry for you.

“Are you okay?” Zoe’s voice pushed him back to reality.

“Yeah, just thinking.”

“About what?”

Evan looked down at his food. “Stuff.”

A hand clapped down on his shoulder. “Not-safe-for-work-stuff,” said Jared Kleinman, settling down into the seat next to him.

“I was not!” Evan snapped.

“Sure you weren’t.” Jared prodded him with his elbow.

Evan couldn’t help but scowl. Finally, his mouth started to work properly. “Uh, are you okay?”

“Yeah. Hey, where were you today? I heard someone say the infirmary got trashed. Murphy didn’t go crazy did he?”

No, Evan thought. I did. Just had to do some stuff with Dr Sherman.”

“‘Stuff’ isn’t an answer.” Jared said matter-of-factly, prodding Evan’s arm with each word. “Come on, Acorn, give us the scoop.”

“Don’t call me Acorn!”
Chapter Notes

In advance, deep red roses mean embarrassment.

Thank you Levi for helping with the edit.

TW: Anxiety.

Zoe and Alana finished their food fairly quickly, both saying a polite ‘see you’ before making their excuses. Jared took a little longer, but Evan didn't exactly mind. He seemed to be making enough conversation by himself, as though he was trying to pull Will’s weight since he wasn't there.

Since he's dead.

Evan just stayed quiet, occasionally offering a small nod in response. There was something a little unnerving about it, about seeing Jared Kleinman talk like a relatively normal human being.

Maybe Will never existed? suggested the voice. Maybe you made him up? Maybe that’s why you’re the only one who’s upset?

“Hel-lo,” Jared called, waving a hand in front of Evan’s face. “Anyone home?”

Evan blinked and looked up. “Uh. Yeah. Sorry.”

“I’m going to my room, ‘kay?”

Evan gave a small nod. “Yeah. ‘Kay.”

“Sweet.” Jared pointed to Evan’s still-full plate. “You’re taking forever, by the way.”

“Sorry...I’m kinda...I’m just thinking.”

“Never a good idea. Fucks you right up.”

“Mm.” Evan pushed his food around his plate.

“Bye.”

“Bye.”

Once Jared was gone Evan looked for Connor. He was still in his corner with his head tilted down. His hair was curtained around his face, but Evan could tell—somehow—that his eyes were mostly brown. Connor stood out. He burned bright at the edge of Evan’s mind like a flare and made thorns and monkshood clay the inside of his wrist.

He’s going to kill someone someday. Will had said that.

But Will didn’t exist, remember? Will’s a murderer, remember?
Evan moved without thinking. One moment he was sat alone, the next he’d pushed his chair back and hurried to Connor’s table.

“H-Hey,” the word stuck behind his teeth.

Connor’s head snapped up to look at him. Sure enough, only half of his right eye was blue. “What?” His voice alone was enough to make Evan’s hair stand on ends

“I—“ *What the hell am I doing?!* Evan resisted the urge to slap himself. “A-are—“

“—are you okay?” Connor asked at the same time, his brows knitted closely.

“U-Uh,” Evan’s hands balled into fists. He could feel his nails digging into his palms, his stomach twisted into a tight knot. “Y-Yes. I mean. What about you?”

Connor looked back down. “I’m fine.”

Evan’s lips bunched to one side. “Are...are you sure?”

“Yes, Hansen, I’m fucking sure.”

Evan opened his mouth, thought for a moment, and closed it again. Something felt wrong. Out the corner of his eye he saw a group of other Patients gathered around a table. They were looking at Connor. Most of them looked like they were trying to be at least somewhat discreet, but a fair few were far more obvious in their gawping. Evan’s gaze flicked from table to table, from Patient to Patient and staff member to staff member. They all looked back.

*Word travels fast around here,* the voice murmured.

Again, without thinking, Evan grabbed Connor’s arm and pulled him to his feet.

Quick as a flash, Connor yanked Back. “What the hell are you doing?!”

“U-Uh, uh, uh.” *Speak, dammit.* “You--we--everyone is…do you want to leave? We should leave.”

*They’re looking at you now too.*

Connor’s face twisted into a hard scowl. “*We?*”

Evan nodded.

Silence.

“Fine, whatever.” Connor abandoned his plate and pushed past Evan, making his way out into the main hallway.

Evan spared a glance back to his own plate, still piled high with scrambled eggs and toast.

*You’re not supposed to leave unless you’ve finished. They’ll stop you.*

He rocked back on his heels, drew in a deep breath and made a beeline for the door. Evan waited for someone to stop him, for Jacobi or one of the other security guards to grab him by the shoulders and yank him back to his chair. But no one did.

---
Evan’s bed had Graphene straps on it now. The sight of them made him stop dead. His lips parted in a small O shape.

Connor stood beside him in the doorway, his arms crossed. “They’re not taking any chances, huh?” He muttered under his breath.

“Mm.” Evan stepped slowly into the room, his eyes fixed on the bed. Whoever had set it up had been kind enough to make it so that his pillow was still at the far end. At least he had that.

Lucky started to speak. “Evan--”

“Jesus Christ!” Connor’s head snapped to face the window sill.

It took Evan a moment to understand what had happened. “You...You can hear them?” he asked slowly.

“Hear what?” Connor asked.

“Me,” Lucky said, sounding just as surprised as Connor. “Only Evan can usually hear me.”

“Who the fuck is saying that?!?”

Evan hurried over to the windowsill and picked up Lucky’s pot. He held it out to Connor, spilling a few grains of dirt in the process. “Them.”

Connor was quiet. “Right...” he said slowly. “You can talk to plants. I forgot.” He rubbed his temple and went to sit down on the edge of his bed. “Fucking great. Anything else I should start worrying about? Are flowers going to start blooming out my skin too?”

Evan felt deep red roses start to form a bracelet around his wrist. He couldn’t help but wonder if flowers had started to grow from the scar on Connor’s temple. He couldn’t exactly ask to check, could he? “I don’t think so. I-I mean. They only grow out of my arm cause I broke it.”

“Yeah, when you fell,” Connor muttered.

“Yeah. When I fell.”

_You should tell him the truth._

“It’s weird having the Connor Murphy understand me,” Lucky said as Evan put them back in their usual spot.

Connor raised an eyebrow. “The, Connor Murphy?” he echoed.

“O-oh. Um. They call people ‘the’ sometimes. I...I don’t know why.”

“Because that is what they are,” Lucky said, as though it were really that simple. “I am the lucky bamboo. You are The Evan Hansen and you are The Connor Murphy.”

“No. I’m Connor. Just, Connor.” He paused. “Don’t you fucking dare start calling me ‘just’ or a swear to God--” Connor slapped a hand to his face. “Fucking hell, I’m talking to a plant.”

“You get used to it,” Evan said softly. He sat across from Connor. His hands bunched at the hem of his shirt. “Um,” he said after a long pause. “You never answered my question.”

Connor held his head in his hands. “What question, Hansen?”
“Are you okay?”

“I did. I said I’m fine.”

Evan fixed him with a long, hard look.

“God, you look like Dr Sherman.” Connor ran a hand through his hair and changed his tone in an attempt at matching Sherman’s. “‘But what are you really feeling, Connor?’ Jesus Christ, Why does no one ever listen to me?”

“I listen to you,” Lucky said.

“Yeah, and that’s not fucking creepy in the slightest.”

Evan rubbed his wrist. Sycamore leaves had started to replace the roses, though he could still see the odd tongues of red sticking out among the green. “I’m sorry everyone was...everyone was looking.”

Connor met his eyes, but only for a moment. “Yeah. Well. I’m the new freak, aren’t I?”

“Y-You’re not--”

“I am, Hansen. I tried to kill myself.”

“That doesn’t make you a freak. You just...they want to know you’re okay.”

“No, they don’t.” Connor started to bounce his knee. “They don’t give a shit if I’m okay or not. They just care if you’re okay. They care that you brought me back. They care that I was so close to being out of their hair forever.”

“Zoe was happy,” Evan interrupted. “She said she was happy you’re alive.”

“Only cause she had to be. If I’d actually died she wouldn’t give two shits--hell, she’d probably be fucking ecstatic.”

Evan shook his head. “You’re her brother.”

“And? What does that have to do with anything? You don’t like your dad, right? Would you care if he died?”

“I—” Evan felt a sudden twist of panic in his gut. Had Will told him?

Will’s dead. Word travels fast.

“I don’t know.”

“Whatever.” Connor’s shoulders hunched and he looked back down at his feet.

“I’d care if you died,” Evan mumbled.

“Sure you would.”

“I would.”

“I would too,” Lucky added.

“You don’t know me. You’re a plant,” Connor said sharply.
“I know you like to pace a lot. I know you read, but never out loud. I know Evan talks about you--that one earned Evan an odd look from Connor ‘‘--I know you’re here a lot, and I know you water.”

“And I know you’re fucking creepy,” Connor said lowly.

“Creepy?” Lucky echoed.

“People don’t say stuff like that,” Evan muttered under his breath.

“And I am not people.”

“And I think you should shut up,” Connor snapped. “Both of you.”

Both did.

---

Evan opened his eyes to darkness. He looked up and saw a small slice of a crescent moon through the window. He wished the room had a clock. At least then he’d know how long he had to wait before he could get up.

He tried to sit up. His heart sank as he was held in place by a thick strap across his chest and shoulders. His breath caught in his throat and he tried again. The straps were like strips of concrete brushed across his skin. Unmoving. He felt them stop his stomach from rising and falling as he breathed. He couldn’t breathe.

A boiling fire bloomed in the pit of his stomach again, spreading through his veins to the tips of his fingers and toes. Evan tried to open his mouth, to call out to Connor or Lucky, but his jaw was locked tight. His temples ached with the force of his grit teeth, all sound lodged like bile in his throat.

*You’re two-eyed,* the voice said, and Evan felt his body start to move of its own accord. He kicked his legs and thrashed his arms, feeling sage bloom over bruising skin as he whacked himself against the metal straps.

He tried to close his eyes, but even that was out of his control.

*Stop it!* He screamed silently. *Stop it, stop it, stop it, stop it!*

He pictured thick vines smothering the forest fire in his gut. Imagined Saltbush and noon-flowers and pigfaces surrounding the flames in a great cocoon as their heat subsided before eventually burning out.

Slowly, Evan unclenched his jaw. The sheets beneath him stuck to his back with a warm layer of sweat. His breaths short, but relatively deep.

*You’re okay,* he told himself quietly, before forcing his mouth to work. “You’re okay.” He turned his head and glimpsed Connor’s face. He looked pale in the lowlight, his face scrunched up in his sleep. He looked like he was in pain.

Evan furrowed his brow. *He’s two-eyed too. You made him two-eyed. You made him like this.* He wanted to reach out and make sure Connor was okay, but his arms wouldn’t—no—couldn’t move.

And then. Somehow. He reached out.

It was as though he was using a kind of phantom limb, a hand that stretched out to hold Connor’s.
Evan became aware that he wasn’t just laying at the bottom of his bed, but somehow at the top as well. That he was being held down by three more straps in different places, that he was taller, that there was more hair framing his face, that he was asleep but at the same time, he was also awake.

Suppressing a gasp, Evan let go and felt himself return to normal.

For a long while, he just lay there and started out the window. And then, the voice at the back of his head spoke up.

>You just read his mind.</
“...Six?” Evan said slowly. He looked across the table at Connor, practically pleading with him to say the same number. They both had electrodes stuck to their temples and the wire had tangle itself up in Connor’s hair. It would have been funny if he wasn’t so pissed.

“Twenty-seven.”

It took all of Evan’s willpower not to swear. He was starting to regret telling Dr Sherman about what had happened the night before. “Maybe it was a fluke,” he muttered, his chin propped up in his hands.

Sherman looked up from his computer screen and shook his head. “I’m getting spikes of psychic energy from both of you. Something is definitely happening.”

“He’s just not reading my mind,” Connor said sharply. He was leant back in his chair, rocking it dangerously far. “This is stupid.”

“It’s not,” Dr Sherman said matter-of-factly. He closed the lid of his laptop. “Maybe we should take a break.”

Evan nodded. He could tell Connor was getting frustrated. Once again, he didn’t know how, he just knew. “Can we go back to our room?”

The doctor nodded. “I’ll have Jacobi come get you in a few hours. He smiled at Connor. “That alright with you?”

Connor said nothing, just pulled off the electrodes and stood up.

Evan did too, murmuring a quick ‘goodbye’ to Dr Sherman before following Connor out into the hall.

They were on one of The Ward’s higher floors, one full of mostly lab equipment and very few people. Evan had a hunch most of the equipment was left over from the early days of The Ward, back when the doctors were first trying to understand the nature of Patients.

“Did you actually do it?” Connor asked as he jammed his finger against the elevator button.

“Huh?”

“Read my mind?”
Evan paused for a moment. “Not...not like Dr Sherman thinks I did.”

“Oh?”

He nodded. “It was like…” he trailed off. “Like I was me, but I was also you...I-if that makes sense.”

“It doesn’t,” Connor said flatly as the elevator doors slid open.

“I mean.” Evan rubbed the back of his neck, his brow tightly knitted. “I mean I could feel that I was in my bed, but I was also in yours.” He winced. “That sounded weird, oh god.”

“It did. But you mean like an out-of-body experience, right?”

“Uh. I think so? But like...I was still in my body.”

“Half-out-of-body experience then.” He didn’t sound all that mad, Evan realised. He’d expected Connor to yell at him--to call him a freak-- but he didn’t. He just stood beside him with his hands in the pockets of his hoodie.

“A-aren’t…” Evan swallowed hard. “Are you mad?”

Connor said nothing, just watched as the numbers on the elevator’s tiny screen slowly crept down to Floor Three. “I don’t know,” he said finally. “This is creepy as all hell and I want to be mad, I really fucking want to.”

“But you’re not?”

Connor shook his head. “It’s like...I dunno, like what you’re saying is how it’s supposed to be?”

“That doesn’t make sense.”

“I know it doesn’t!” Connor raked a hand through his hair, tugging at it. “Do you remember anyone ever telling you that you have to breathe?”

The question took Evan aback. “No?”

“But you just know, ‘okay, that’s something my body does. It just happens’ right? That’s what this feels like. It’s just...it’s something.”

Evan felt thorns start to dig into his wrist. “Yeah...it’s something,” he agreed.

“You’re aware of your own breathing now, aren’t you?”

He sucked down a gasp of air and nodded. “Yeah. I hate you.”

---

Evan didn’t actually have to water Lucky all that much. It was the perks of taking care of bamboo, they were extremely difficult to kill. He only watered them when they asked him to. He’d take them into the bathroom by the sink and cup a few handfuls of water into their pot, it was practically habit now.

“Does it cause hayfever?” Connor asked him suddenly. He was sat on his bed, peeking over the pages of Captain America. It was by far the weirdest-looking comic Evan had ever seen. The cover showed a dude in blue tights punching Hitler, which, okay.
“What?”

“Does Lucky Bamboo cause hayfever?”

“Uh,” Evan furrowed his brow and turned off the bathroom tap. “I don’t think so.”

Connor grunted and sat up properly, turning his gaze to Lucky. “Are you gonna make me sneeze, yes or no?”

The plant was quiet. “Not intentionally.”

“I don’t think they know what hay fever is,” Evan added. He picked Lucky up off the side and took them back into the bedroom, setting them down on their usual windowsill.

“I do not,” they confirmed.

“Great.” Connor flopped back down onto his pillow, his face hidden behind the pages of the comic.


Connor turned a page. “It’s funny. But it probably wasn’t meant to be.”

“Oh. R-Right.” Evan sat down on the edge of his bed, fiddling idly with the straps. He’d told the doctors that he’d been able to fight off becoming Two-eyed, but apparently they didn’t trust him just yet. “I didn’t know you were allergic to that kind of stuff,” he said, not looking up.

Connor just turned a page.

“I wouldn’t have brought Lucky if I’d known—I mean, I’d have kept them somewhere else so y-you wouldn’t…” he trailed off. Was it possible for plants to glare at people?

“Yeah. Well. Like I said, I’m irony’s bitch. My only friend’s a guy obsessed with shit I’m allergic to.”

The word made Evan freeze, Acacia leaves pricking up the underside of his arm. “Friend?” He asked.

Connor looked up again. “Yeah...we’re friends, right?”

Evan nodded. “Yeah, Yeah, of course,” He garbled, doing his best to not stutter. It would just his luck to trip on a word and make Connor think he was lying. “Sorry. I just, I thought, cause you don’t know me all that well and I don’t really know you...I d-didn’t think you thought we were...you know?”

“Friends?”

“Yeah.”

Connor closed the comic and placed it down on the bed beside him. “You know plenty about me.” There was something odd to his voice—something small.

_Doubt_, said the voice.

“N-Not...really. I...I mean...until a few days ago I thought you were a school shooter.” Evan forced a laugh.
Connor didn’t. He just chewed at his thumbnail. “I don’t know much about you either, so I guess we’re even.”

“Mm.” Evan looked down at his feet for a moment before getting up. He stood in the space between their two beds, one hand extended. “I’m Evan Schiff Hansen.”

Connor cocked his head to the side before giving a small chuckle. “Connor Lazarus Murphy.” He took Evan’s hand and shook it.

“L-Lazarus?” Evan couldn’t help but laugh.

“My dad’s Catholic as shit.”

“I can tell.” Evan dropped his hand back to his lap. “So. Uh…what kind of things do friends know?”

“I dunno. You’re the one who’s had some before.”

“Yeah, but me and Jared and—“ he cut himself off. “We don’t plan what we talk about. It just kind of happens.”

“Ah.” Connor cracked his knuckles. He was quiet for a while before finally speaking up again. “What did you want to be when you got out of school?”

The question took Evan aback. “Huh?”

“Larry would always have clients and stuff round for dinner, either that or other lawyers or something. They’d always ask me and Zoe what we were going to do after school, but since we can’t choose what we want to do…” he shrugged. “I’m guessing something with plants. Like…what’s the name for plant science?”

“Botany.” Evan scratched the back of his neck. “And probably not.”

“Why not?”

“Cause you have to go to college for that.”

Connor cocked his head. “And?”

“And we didn’t really have the money for it. I mean. I’d’ve loved to go, but...I’d have to get a bunch of scholarships and even then I probably wouldn’t have enough.” He sighed softly. “It doesn’t matter.” Not now, anyway.

“Your parents didn’t have a college fund or anything?”

“That’s the most rich-kid thing I’ve ever heard,” Evan said without thinking. He clapped a hand to his mouth. “S-sorry,” he added. “Sorry, just--”

Connor laughed. He genuinely and wholeheartedly laughed.

Evan hadn’t heard that before. Not for a moment.

“It’s fine,” Connor said. He was almost smiling The lopsided kind that only used one half of his mouth. It looked weird on him, like his lips were curled too far inward in a way that made Evan think of a smiley face with a squiggly mouth. It was a good smile. Cute, even.

Your staring, warned the voice, and Evan realised that for a brief moment it had sounded quite a lot
like his dad.

“Larry’s a lawyer, so, yeah,” Connor continued. “Kind of true. Rich enough for mom to not have to work--though that drove her up the wall.”

Evan couldn’t help but feel a pang of jealousy. He couldn’t remember a time when both of his parents weren’t working. I bet.” He looked down at his shoes.

“So, what did you want to do?”

“H-huh?”

“If you weren’t going to go to college, what where you going to do?”

Evan’s response was practically automatic. “Work at the park.”

“The park?”

He nodded. “I used to volunteer at this park, so, I’d probably just keep working there until they started paying me.”

“That where you fell?”

Another nod.

Liar.

“It wasn’t a park, really. It was originally an orchard, but the grandkids of the owner turned it into a park for some reason. I think it was cause the apples didn’t actually taste very good. Like, really, really, sour. I had a mom ask me if they were poisonous once.”

Connor laughed again. Evan Hansen had made Connor laugh, not once, but twice over the course of five minutes.

You shouldn’t be that excited.

“We had a place like that,” Connor said.

“Yeah?”

“Yeah.”

Now Evan was smiling too. “So, what were you gonna do?”

Connor’s crooked smile faltered. “The plan was I’d be a lawyer too, work with Larry. Cause he’d worked with his dad and he’d worked with his, blah, blah, blah.” He rolled his eyes.

“You...you’d be a good lawyer,” Evan said kindly.

“Yeah, bullshit, Hansen. I’d end up punching a judge or some shit like that. Besides, my SATs were shit, so I probably wouldn’t get into college anyway.”

Something about that rubbed Evan the wrong way. “You had trouble at school?”

“Kind of?” Connor shrugged. “Teachers didn’t give a shit about me, so I didn’t give a shit about them.”
So you didn’t even try. Evan didn’t dare say that out loud, he wasn’t stupid.

“So, what were you going to do?” He asked instead.

Connor raised an eyebrow. “Nothing.”

Evan’s eyes flicked to his temple. “Sorry.”

“It’s fine.”

Silence.

You ruined it, said the voice. You fucked it up. You fucked it up. You fucked it up. You fucking up. You fucking up. You fucking up. You fucking up.

You--

“When I was really little,” Connor said suddenly “I wanted to…” he stopped and shook his head. “If you tell Kleinman this, I swear to God I’ll kill you.”

Evan’s stomach leapt. “I won’t. I promise.”

More Silence.

Connor said something quickly, a tangled mess of sound that barely even counted as words.

It took a moment for Evan to realise what Connor just said. When he did, he couldn’t help but grin.

“Don’t laugh,” Connor said sharply, his arms crossed.

“I’m not! I think you’d be a good dancer.”

“Like I said, tell Kleinman and you’re dead.”

“I won’t, I won’t.” Evan raised his hands defensively. Geraniums poked out from the cuff of his sleeve. “Um. What kind of dancing? Ballroom?”

Connor pulled a face. “No! Tap. Me and Zoe used to take it when we were little. Well, mom signed Zoe up for it, but she didn’t want to do it on her own, so I joined too.”

“Cool.” Cute.

“She quit after, like, a month,” Connor continued. “But I kept going. It was fun.”

“You must be really good at it now.”

Connor scoffed. “I wish. No, I haven’t done it in...six years now?”

“Oh.” Evan’s shoulders slumped. “Sorry.”

“It’s fine.”

“Why’d you stop?”

“I didn’t want to. Larry chucked a fit, said I’d end up being bullied or something. Like I said, he’s repressed as shit, so if we didn’t act like the perfect nineteen-fifties family, he’d have a meltdown.”

Evan bunched his lips to one side of his mouth. “I know the feeling,” he said weakly. Uh...So, can
“Sometimes.” Without getting up, Connor rapped his feet against the tiles and tapped out a muted beat. “I’m kind of rusty.”

“It’s great,” Evan said honestly. “Better than anything I could do. And I think you’d be a better dancer than a lawyer.”

“Definitely. Not that I can be.”

“You still could, like a hobby.”

Connor snorted. “Yeah, the tap-dancing weapon. That would strike fear into the hearts of the enemy.” He rolled his eyes.

“Sorry.”

“It’s fine.” It didn’t sound fine.

Evan stood up and went back to the windowsill, fiddling with Lucky’s pot.

“What’s one thing you miss?” Connor asked behind him. “From home.”

Evan turned Lucky’s pot around, then moved it to the other side of the sill. “My mom,” he said simply. That wasn’t entirely true. Yes, he missed Heidi, but he’d always missed her, even back before he’d become a Patient. “You?”

In the reflection of the window Evan saw Connor grin. Not just a smile--a full-on, teeth-showing grin.

“Pot.”

“Pot!”

Connor burst out laughing. “I didn’t think you’d be all sentimental.”

Evan found that he started laughing too.

And then he blinked, and he realised he was sat on Connor’s bed. But he couldn’t be, he could still feel the smooth surface of Lucky’s pot, he could still see out the window, he was standing. Long curls of hair lay across his shoulders, tickling his skin.

“Ow!” Connor’s voice knocked Evan back to his body. His arm throbbed where thorns had dug into his skin, the geraniums were gone, replaced by a thick forest of christmas roses. Evan turned around, leaning the small of his back against the window sill.

Connor had pulled up the left sleeve of his hoodie, his eyes narrowed as he peered down at his forearm. There were scars, but nothing that would cause any pain.

“D-Did…” Evan swallowed hard, feeling sage starting to heal over the jabs in his skin.

“Yeah,” Connor said, not looking up.

The two were silent once again.

“We should tell Dr--” Evan began.
“No!” Connor’s head snapped up. His smile was gone and his eyes were a hard slip of brown and blue. “No,” he said again, quieter this time. “I don’t want to deal with anymore of his stupid tests. Not again. Not now.”
Chapter 28

Chapter Notes

Late happy Tonys? Which I haven’t actually watched yet???

Also, I feel like I should add the tags BenPlatt!Evan, MikeFaist!Connor and WillRoland!Jared since. You know. They’re gone.

Double thanks to Levi because I forgot to thank him for editing last chapter.

TW: Attempted Selfharm and Reference to Suicide.

Evan waited a full week for Connor to tell him to talk to Dr Sherman. Part of him knew that he didn’t have to. If he really wanted to he could march down to Dr Sherman’s office and just tell him straight away. “We read each other’s minds.”

Only, that didn’t feel right. It wasn’t just his information to share.

*Liar, liar.*

Did withholding the truth count as lying? Was he even withholding the truth? Dr Sherman knew they could read each other’s minds; he just didn’t know how. He was still stuck on getting them to think the same number.

So, regardless of what Connor wanted, they were still subjected to three more days of tests—if having them call out words and numbers even counted as a test.

It wasn’t until Thursday evening that Jacobi said it. “This is pointless, Doc.”

Dr Sherman ran a hand through his hair. His expression was an odd one: he brow was creased into four hard lines, eyebrows narrowed and mouth pursed into a nervous frown. He hunched over the monitor he had wired up to Evan and Connor’s temples, almost as though someone had slammed a fist into his stomach. Still, there was a curious glint in his eye.

“I just need to figure this out—“

“Oh,” Jacobi said, raising a hand. “You need to learn when to quit.” He looked to Evan and Connor. “Either of you read each other’s minds recently?”

Evan looked at Connor. His expression didn’t change--didn’t let anything go. His eyes were three-quarters Brown and his brows hung low over his eyes. “No,” he said sharply. “Have you, Hansen?”

Evan’s stomach twisted.

Don’t stutter, the voice snapped.

“No,” he answered slowly. “I think it was a fluke.”
“There you go.” Jacobi tucked his hands behind his head and stretched his back. “Case solved.”

“That’s not how science works,” Sherman muttered. His shoulders slumped and he sat back in his seat. “But we’ll take a break, just for a week or so.” He started to rock the chair back, his hands cupping his chin. “Maybe it’s cause we’re trying to force it.”

“Exactly,” Connor was already pulling off his electrodes. Evan could see little red splotches on his temples, which made his scar stand out all the more. “This is bullshit.”

“His words, not mine.” Jacobi grinned as Sherman fixed him with a long, hard look.

“Fine,” he sighed. “You can go.”

Evan stood up so quickly he got tangled in the wires. With a wince, he pulled the electrodes off his skin. “See you, Dr Sherman.”

“Jacobi and Connor can go,” he said quickly. “Can I speak with you for a sec, Son?”

You’re in trouble. You fucked up.

A cold sweat formed on the back of Evan’s neck, thorns dug into his wrists. “Yeah,” he did his best to smile. “Sure.”

Dr Sherman waited for Jacobi and Connor to leave before starting to speak again. “Is everything okay, son?” His expression had changed, all irritability draining away from his face.

Evan crossed his arms behind his back to hide his thorns. “Yeah. Why?”

“You’re a bit on edge.”

“No, I’m not.”

Dr Sherman raised an eyebrow.

“...right. Sorry.” Evan looked down at his feet. “I’m just tired.” That wasn’t really a lie. He was tired, but that wasn’t what bothered him.

“You can talk to me if you need to, son. You know that, right?”

“Mm-hm.” Evan nodded, not looking up. He could feel Dr Sherman staring at him.

He knows you’re lying. You’re fucked.

There was a sharp tap as Sherman leaned his chair forward again. “Alright then,” he said with a smile. “I’ll talk to you later.”

Evan let himself start breathing again. “S-see you later.”

---

Dr Sherman had stopped his experiments didn’t mean that Evan had to put a stop to his own.
Every now and then, usually at night, Evan would try and read Connor’s mind again. It was difficult at first since he couldn’t quite get the hang of Reaching Out with a hand he didn’t actually own.

It wasn’t until a week after his experiments began that Evan finally managed to get it to work again.

He was in math at the time, his worksheet pretty much done, even though he still had an hour until class finished. He could see Jared drawing doodles on his work out the corner of his eye, little squiggles of smoke drifting up the margin of his notebook. Evan watched him a whilebefore moving on to the rest of the class.

Most of them had finished as well and were either doodling or making small talk with the people next to them. One of them—a girl with air manipulation—had folded her a page into a paper crane and made it float lazily around her desk.

Again, Evan watched it for a little while, before looking up at the clock. Only ten minutes had passed.

*It’s probably another recording device*, the back of his head murmured. *They’re watching you.*

Evan looked down at his desk.

Connor wasn’t in class, as per usual.

*He’s probably in bed. Lucky.*

Evan bit his lip.

*You can’t do that when you’re right next to him. What makes you think you can do it two floors away?*

He imagined his arm reaching out, though he didn’t actually move it. All the floors were carbon copies of each other, and the math class was two doors down from the elevator, so Evan reached his phantom hand downwards. He imagined it passing through the floor, moving a bit to the side until it had reached Room 309.

*This is creepy. You are being creepy.*

Evan ignored the voice. He pictured the room in his mind’s eye: tiled floor, white walls, two metal cots: one with the pillow by the headboard, the other with the pillow at the end of the bed. He imagined Connor sat on his bed, probably reading one of his comics—the weird one with the man punching Hitler on the cover—and Reached Out and grabbed his arm.

Suddenly, Evan realised he was laying down. His head spun, thorns digging into his arm. He was sat at his desk in the classroom, but he was also laid down on a bed. He could feel thick bands of Graphene across his chest and stomach, a birds nest of hair framing his cheeks. His eyes felt tired, his limbs like lead weights at his side.

Evan’s face slammed against the desk, knocking him back to his senses. He sat up with a start. He wiped his the top of his lip and felt something warm and wet stain his fingers. The scent of sage was almost overpowering.
“Dude.” Jared had reached over to put a hand on his shoulder, his voice a harsh whisper. “What the fuck?”

Evan blinked dumbly in reply. “Uh,” he said slowly. “I didn’t get a lot of sleep last night, must have dozed off o-or something.”

“You passed out!”

“M-mm.” Evan swallowed thickly. “I’m fine.”

“Sure you are.” Jared took his hand away.

Evan was fine, really. But it took a few minutes for him to figure out exactly what had happened. At first, he thought he might have had a full-on out of body experience. That his soul had completely left his body, and without it, he’d gone limp.

But you could still feel your body, the back of his head pointed out.

What else could it be? Evan asked himself. Hesitantly, he propped his head up in his hands, just in case he passed out again.

Connor was asleep, and you’re an idiot.

Right.

He waited another two days before trying again.

Zoe and Alana had become permanent fixtures at their lunch table now, or at least it seemed that way. Evan didn’t really talk much, just listened. Not that it mattered, since Jared more than made up for his silence.

Evan’s eyes kept wandering, either down to his plate or over to where Connor sat in his usual corner.

Zoe’s noticed, the voice warned him, and he looked up to see her looking directly at him. She thinks you’re a freak.

Evan ignored the pain in his arm and forced a smile onto his lips and Zoe smiled back. But before Evan could relax, Zoe had clambered to her feet. She abandoned her food and hurried off, making a beeline for Connor’s corner.

Evan’s stomach sank.

She’s going to tell him you were staring. She’s going to tell him, and he’ll be mad and he’ll think you’re a freak. He’ll hate you. He’ll hate you. He’ll hate you.

Out the corner of his eye, Evan watched Zoe approach Connor’s table. He could see her mouth moving and Connor replying, but what they were saying was a complete mystery.

Eventually, Connor stood up.

He hates you. He hates you. He hates you. He hates you!
Evan ducked his head, his eyes fixed on his food. He waited. Waited for Connor to go two-eyed, or come over and call him a freak. But he didn’t.

Instead, Connor set down his tray and pulled out a chair.

“He looked like a loner,” Zoe said, sitting back down. “You don’t mind if he sits with us, right?” Her voice was sharp, making Evan wince. She didn’t sound all too thrilled about having Connor there.

“Depends,” Jared spoke through his food. “You gonna try and kill yourself again?”

Evan stamped on his foot.

“Ow! Lighten up, it was a joke! I’m just saying, last time he sat with us things didn’t go great.”

Connor rolled his eyes and looked down at his plate. Evan knew, without even having to look, that one of his eyes had become half brown.

“Shut it, Kleinman,” Connor muttered, stabbing a stick of carrot with his fork.

Jared raised his hands defensively. “Just being safe.”

Evan stopped listening after that, though he was dimly aware that Alana had started talking about some speech from the 1800s she’d attended the night before. He kept his head bent over his plate, looking at Connor through his lashes.

He looked half his height sat across from Evan. His back and neck so crooked that his face was practically parallel to the table. If Zoe sat up straight the two siblings looked almost the same height.

Gingerly, Evan Reached Out with an imagined hand, his fingers lightly curling around Connor’s wrist. Again, he suddenly became aware that his place in the universe had changed, that he was looking at himself, that he was also looking at Connor, that there was a fire raging in his gut--

Evan yelped as something kicked his shin. Hard.

“You alright there?” Jared asked, one eyebrow raised.

“Y-Yeah,” Evan said, a little too quickly. “Yeah, I’m fine.”

“Sure you are.” Jared turned to Alana and Zoe. “I think he’s gone crazy,” he stage-whispered, earning himself a punch to the arm. “Ow!”

“I’m fine!”

“I never said you weren’t!”

A loud sound cut Jared off as Connor scraped his chair against the floor. “I’m going to the bathroom,” he said.

“Me too,” Evan said quickly, clambering to his feet.
Connor narrowed his eyes. “Whatever,” he muttered. He turned and left, quickly tailed by Evan.

“Why the fuck are you following me?!” Connor snapped once they were alone.

“Why’d you kick me?!” He asked, puffing out his chest a little.

Connor opened his mouth, closed it again, and went to check the stalls. Once he was sure that they were empty he looked back at Evan. “Why’d you read my fucking mind?” he hissed.

“I-I…” he trailed off. “I dunno. I...I wanted to work it out.”

“And you had to do it without asking me? Without warning?” His eyes were three-quarters brown. Evan felt like a fire was standing in front of him.

“I’m sorry,” he murmured. “I wasn’t thinking. I…” he fiddled with the hem of his shirt. “I’m sorry.”

“Don’t you fucking dare do it again. Got it?” Connor snapped.

Evan’s stomach twisted. “I won’t. I promise.” He hesitated. “Why don’t you want Dr Sherman to know about...about this?”

“Why should he?”

“Why shouldn’t he?”

Connor clenched his jaw. “Because it’s none of his fucking business, Hansen!”

Evan felt a fire spark in his gut. “He’ll help us figure it out!”

“Y-You don’t know that.”

“And you do?!”

Connor looked a little taken aback, and the heat that had started to bubble in Evan’s stomach went cold.

“S-sorry,” he said under his breath. “Sorry. Just...why don’t you trust him? He’s nice.”

“He killed Will, and god knows how many others. Or have you forgotten that already?” Connor spat. “There are Patients and Doctors. Us and them. They don’t give a shit about us, Hansen. All they’re going to do is try and figure out how to use us as some kind of weapon. Hell, they probably already have.” Without a word, Connor slammed his fist against the sink bowl. It cracked and Evan winced, his shoulders raised up around his chin. Connor held up his hand. Bits of enamel stuck into his skin, forming small beads of blood. Suddenly, sprigs of sage started to heal over the damaged skin. “A psycho with a healing factor.” He grabbed at the sprouts with his fingers—

Evan grabbed Connor’s wrist. “Stop it!” His voice hung in the air for a moment. Connor froze, his eyes wide.

The two just stood there. Evan could feel Connor’s pulse thudding in his wrist. He could feel the raging burn threatening to consume his gut. He could feel tears in Connor’s eyes, anxiety clogging
his throat.

Connor pulled his arm away. “Get off me,” he scowled. “And stay the fuck out of my business. Got it?”

Evan looked down at his hand and nodded. “G-Got it.”
Evan couldn’t sleep. Again. Part of him wondered if he had developed insomnia.

He could hear Connor snoring softly a few feet away and couldn’t help but feel a little jealous. The straps across his made him itchy. Only, he couldn’t scratch or adjust them with his hands trapped by his sides. He needed to pee.

How long until he got used to being stuck in bed?

He wriggled himself around, trying, in vain, to get at least somewhat comfortable. Thorns dug into his skin again, though the pain had long since become numb. He crossed his feet at the ankles. Uncrossed them. Sighed.

Connor was still snoring.

Evan looked at him for a moment before turning his gaze to the window sill where Lucky slept—if plants could even sleep. He’d read online that nothing could stop a bamboo from growing. Long ago, people were tortured by being tied down and having a bamboo plant grow underneath them. It wouldn’t stop, even when the shoots hit the person’s back, so it would just keep growing until it broke through their skin and muscle and bone. The thought made Evan shudder, but, in a weird way, it also gave him an idea.

He mentally tugged at the vines on his arm, coaxing them into growing. They moved across the mattress until they reached the edge of the bed and slowly started to creep down. Out the corner of his eye, Evan saw the tips of stalks poking out from under his quilt. He clenched his jaw and tried to move the plants like fingers, like a phantom hand, wrapping them around the clamp closest to his head. And then, once he was sure they were in place, he pulled.

The vines went taunt and he their leaves quiver with the effort. The metal creaked ever-so-slightly as sweat started to form on Evan’s brow. He relaxed, took a deep breath and pulled again. The clamp creaked again—a long, tooth-aching noise—before finally coming loose. The strap across Evan’s shoulders went slack.

One down, two to go.

He tugged at the vines again, leading them down to the second clamp. This one took a bit more effort, since it was stiff even when the nurses tried to undo it. Twice, the vines that held it snapped, sending a sudden shiver through Evan’s entire body. Still, he kept trying until finally—thankfully—it opened.
Evan sat up and undid the final clamp with his own two hands. His left arm felt heavy, weighed down by the overgrowth bursting out of his skin. He considered ripping them off himself, but the plants--almost as if they’d read his mind--started to wilt away, disintegrating into nothing.

Evan rubbed his arm before he got up and headed to the bathroom, trying to be as quiet as possible so he didn’t wake Connor. Once he was done and sure that Connor was, in fact, still asleep, Evan tried to figure out what to do next. He knew he should just go back to bed, but he still wasn’t tired. So, he made his way to his bedroom door, opened it a crack, and peeked out. The sudden light made his eyes cloud up with black splotches, but after a moment he managed to see that the hall was completely empty. No security, no nurses and no doctors. Nothing at all.

He opened the door a little more and stuck his head out. No one jumped out at him. No one asked what he was doing. No one told him to go back to bed.

Evan stepped out, leaving the door on its latch so he could run back at a moment’s notice.

While the hallway was bright he could still kind of make out the small slips of darkness under each of the other doorways. He walked past them, his ears piqued and footsteps soft. He didn’t find anything all that interesting, but he did find out that someone in room 302 snored so loudly that Evan could still hear him from the other end of the hall. He couldn’t help but feel sorry for his roommate.

Once he reached the elevator he doubled back and headed to his room again, stopping only when he reached room 307. Unlike the other doors, this one had a thin strip of light under it. Evan hesitated before putting his ear to the wood.

He heard the rhythmic thud of footsteps pacing back and forth, back and forth. Jared’s breathing was loud and shaky, but slow. An odd mix of racked sobs and heavy breathing.

Evan bit his lip, his fingers resting against the door handle. He couldn’t just walk in. That would be weird, not to mention creepy.

He flinched as the light snapped off.

He knows you’re here. He knows you’re here. He knows you’re here!

Evan froze and waited for Jared to pull open the door. For him to start screaming at him for listening in on whatever the hell was going on in there.

But the door didn’t open. Instead, he heard Jared’s footstep move back to the other side of the room and the soft squeak of a metal bed frame as he sat down. Evan let himself start to breathe again. His shoulders slumped.

There wasn’t much else to do after that, so he returned to his room. Back to bed. He did up the strap across his knees and used his vines to do up the rest.

Once again, he was stuck staring at the ceiling. His little adventure had done absolutely nothing to make him any more tired. He closed his eyes and listened to Connor’s snoring. At least he was sleeping.

He wriggled his fingers and rolled his shoulders. Waiting for sleep that didn’t seem to be coming anytime soon. Evan hesitated before slowly Reaching Out towards Connor with his phantom arm.

You promised, the voice hissed at the back of his head.

Evan ignored it and gently took hold of Connor’s arm. Again, he felt his body shift so he was laying
on the opposite side of the bed and the now-familiar feel of Connor’s hair on his shoulders and neck.

And then, just like that, he fell asleep.

---

Evan didn’t dream much — not usually, anyway. Most nights he eventually just closed his eyes, only to wake up a second later. But this time, Evan found himself in an unfamiliar bedroom. It was way too big to be his own, and far more cluttered. Clothes littered the floor in crumpled mountains, the bed was left unmade and the wall was covered in marker. Evan couldn’t read the words—they kept wriggling around like worms and changing every time he blinked.

He turned away from the wall. The air around him felt thick, as though he was wading his way through water.

Someone else was in the room.

A boy, only about nine or ten, with short brown hair and a sharp face. He looked up at Evan, his face set into a hard scowl.

*Connor.*

Evan tried to smile, to say hello, to say *something*. But his body didn’t listen. Instead, he walked towards Connor and extended one hand to him.

The child tilted his head to the side. His lips bunched to one corner of his mouth. Evan tried to move again. To pull his hand away, but he was completely frozen. As though his feet had been glued to the floor.

Finally, Connor took his hand. His skin was like ice, a wave of cold rushing up Evan’s arm and down his spine. The child gripped Evan’s hand and bit it. His jagged and pointed teeth digging into Evan’s skin.

It didn’t hurt, but Evan flinched back anyway. He ripped his hand from the child-Connor’s hold, watching as bubbles of blood started to form on the surface of his skin. Without a second thought, Evan lurched forward and grabbed Connor by the throat.

*Stop it!* Evan screamed silently as his other hand closed around Connor’s throat as well, squeezing hard. The child kicked and screamed, but made no sound as Evan lifted him off the floor, his nails digging into his skin, drawing blood.

*Stop it. Stop it. Stop it. Stop it. Stop it. Stop it. Stop it. Stop it!*

Evan tried in vain to loosen his fingers, to let Connor go. The child’s face had become scarlet, his two-toned eyes bulging out their sockets. Soft gargles escaped his throat, like he was choking on vomit. Like he was dying.

Evan couldn’t breathe. His hands were shaking. The back of his hand was stained with blood. Connor was kicking him, his knees and legs, but it didn’t hurt. Connor’s face was turning pale. Too pale. White. Like his skin was made of paper. His lips were far too red, his teeth far too sharp, his face far too white. He was made of china, ready to shatter if Evan held him too tight.

*You’re dreaming,* a small part of Evan realised. *You’re dreaming!* He screwed his eyes shut and felt his grip tighten on Connor’s throat.
Wake up! He screamed to himself, the words echoing around his head. Wake up. Wake up. Wake up!

He could feel Connor’s kicks start to soften, his movements slow and sluggish.

Wakeupwakeupwakeupwakeupwakeupwakeupwakeupwakeup

Evan’s eyes snapped open. His heart pounded in his chest, each beat making his whole body shudder and shake. His pyjamas stuck to him with a cold layer of sweat, pressing down on his chest.

What the fuck was that? The voice in the back of his head hissed as Evan sucked down several deep breaths. Before he could even start to think of an answer a deep, raging fire struck him like a punch to the gut. Liquid fire shot through his veins and a harsh scream ripped through his throat. He felt like his arms and legs were being pulled in opposite directions, stretched out and out and out.

Dimly, Evan could hear the now familiar sound of Connor struggling against the straps tethering him down.

You’re two eyed, the voice told Evan as he tried to sit up, the bonds across his chest making it hard to breathe. Every inch of him hurt and he could see sage starting to bloom out the corner of his eye.

He bit his lip until he tasted blood, and brought to mind images of saltbush and Oleander and sour fig creeping up and around the blazing fires in his chest and stomach. He pictured their leaves smothering their flames and turning it first to embers, and then little clumps of ash. Slowly, Evan’s body stopped thrashing. His breathing became deep and the warmth pooling in his gut completely subsided, though he still had a dull ache in his joints.

Off to the side, Connor was still thrashing. He was like a blip at the edge of Evan’s conscience, stabbing against his temple. Evan turned his head to the side, his arm numb with pain.

“C-Connor…” his voice was like sandpaper. “Connor…” But he wasn’t listening, or if he was, Connor had no way of telling him. So, Evan turned his gaze back to the ceiling, drew in a deep breath and started to cry.
Chapter 30

Chapter Notes

Can you tell my asexual-aromantic ass sucks at writing romance?

Thank you, Levi, for editing, as per usual.

TW: Anxiety, References to suicide.

Evan woke up to the reek of sweat. He wrinkled his nose and tried to roll over, only to be stopped yet again by the straps across his chest. His whole body felt heavy and numb with pins and needles.

The sunlight coming through the window was far too bright. It was too early for this.

Last night’s memories slowly crept forward to the front of his mind. He winced. Evan was more than a little tempted to just undo the straps by himself again, but he knew one of the nurses would be in to let them out soon enough so it wasn’t worth the risk.

“You overslept,” said Lucky.

Evan turned his head to face them. “I have?”

“A little. Yes.”

“Great.” Despite his extra sleep Evan still felt completely and utterly exhausted, like his eyelids were made of lead. He heard Connor shifting in the bed next to him.

“Christ,” Connor muttered. He had sage lining his neck and framing the edges of his face.

Evan moved his head so he could just see his own shoulder out the corner of his eye. Small sprigs of sage poked out from under his quilt, and made his gut tie into knots. “What happened?”

Connor looked almost startled when he saw Evan. “Huh? Uh. Nightmare--night terror, I mean...Jesus Christ..”

“M-me...me too.” Evan shuddered. “I had one too.”

“Really, what about?”

“Mm-hm.” His throat felt tight, a thick, phantom wad of anxiety clogging his airways. He couldn’t exactly tell Connor what he’d dreamed about. Not without freaking him out, at least. “W-we have it in common, remember?” He coughed, trying to get some air into his lungs. “N-Night terrors, irony and...a-and comic books.”

“...Right.” Connor rolled his neck and Evan started breathing again. “How long was I out?”

Evan paused. “What?”

“How long was I out? I went two-eyed, right?”
“O-Oh. Uh. Lucky said we overslept a little, but it’s only been a night.”

Connor went quiet. “What do you mean?”

“You went two-eyed last night.” As he spoke, Evan felt an odd jump in his stomach. A twist of excitement that seemed to come from absolutely nowhere.

“Holy shit,” Connor’s voice was barely a murmur. “The bamboo-thing’s called Lucky, right? Lucky, how long were we asleep?”

“I do not know exactly,” they answered after a moment’s contemplation. “But not very long.”


“I do not know,” they repeated. “I need a little water though.”

“I’ll give you all the water you want once the nurse lets us out.” Connor was smiling again. It was his crooked, little half-smile, but still. His happiness was infectious. “Do you think it had something to do with your healing factor thing? Like, that sped up the recovery?”

“M-Maybe.” Evan realised he was smiling too, feeling like a weight had been lifted from his chest.

“Still, that’s fucking amazing!” He faltered, a little bit. “Uh. Usually when I conk out like that nurses are sent to check on me every half-hour. They’ll probably let you out then, too.”

“G-good.” Evan really needed the bathroom, but like the dream he couldn’t exactly say that out loud. He looked out the window again and saw that the sun had climbed quite high in the sky. It was probably about ten or eleven in the morning. “Hopefully they’ll come soon.”

“Yeah.” The sage on Connor’s face had started to wilt and fall away, but small clumps still curled around his hair. It reminded Evan of an illustration from a book of fairy tales. A prince within a glass coffin surrounded by flowers. In a weird way, it made sense, since he and Connor weren’t exactly normal humans. Maybe, a long time ago, they would have been myths and legends.

And then, like a sharp and unwelcome thorn, the image of a throttled Connor burned itself into his brain.

“You okay?” The real Connor’s voice caught him off guard.

“Yeah, yeah. I’m fine. Just thinking.”

“Never a good idea.”

“Definitely not.”

After what felt like forever, the door to their bedroom creaked open.

“Oh,” the nurse looked genuinely a little taken aback. “You’re awake.”

“Yeah,” Connor spoke before Evan even had the chance to open his mouth. “Can you let us out? I’m starving.”

“Yes, of course.” The nurse stepped into the room, closing the door behind him. He let Connor out first, undoing his straps before moving onto Evan. “Be careful,” he warned as Connor leapt to his feet. He wobbled slightly, righting himself on the edge of his bed.
“I’m fine, I’m fine,” Connor said. “I’m great, actually.”

The nurse raised an eyebrow, but didn’t say anything more. Instead, he went over to Evan’s bed and started fiddling with the clamps at his side. “How are you feeling?” he asked Evan, who nodded.

“I’m fine.”

The nurse just hummed. “Be careful when you get up. Your legs are going to be stiff, you’ve both been asleep for quite a long time.”

That made Evan freeze, his back deathly straight. “I thought we’d only slept a night…” he trailed off. Connor wasn’t smiling anymore. His eyes, which for a moment had both been almost completely blue, were back to being half brown.

“How long?” Connor’s voice was so hard it rang in Evan’s ears.

The nurse unclamped the final strap across Evan’s knees. “About four days?”

Mom’ll be wondering where you are, hissed the voice at the back of Evan’s head.

Connor scowled. “Oh yeah. Not very fucking long, huh?”

The nurse cocked his head. “Excuse me?”

“Nothing,” Connor snapped, heading into the bathroom and slamming the door shut behind him.

Evan and the nurse exchanged glances. “Um. We didn’t think...I-I didn’t think it had been that long.”

“Ah.” The nurse nodded, but didn’t take his eyes away from the bathroom door. “If it helps, you haven’t missed that much…tell you what, I’ll go get you two something to eat, alright? You can have it in here.”

Evan swallowed hard and offered a small smile. He was hungry, but not as hungry as a person who hadn’t eaten anything in four days should have been, which was more than a little unsettling.

Connor didn’t talk to him as they ate. Each of them sat with a tray of juice and a mountain of toast balanced on their knees. Evan kept his eyes on the floor, counting the number of tiles.

You pissed him off, again, whispered the voice. That’s all you’re fucking good for at this point.

Evan tried to ignore the voice. He tried to think of other things, but ‘other things’, like how the hell he was going to explain yet another days-long absence to his mom, just made him want to puke. Last time he and Connor had slept for a long time, he’d lied--well, only partly lied--and told his mom he’d been pulled into a surprised round of tests.

He knew, deep down, that nothing was stopping him from outright telling Heidi the truth. But he also knew that suddenly being told that your son was somehow psychically connected to a not-school shooter would just freak her out. Well, freak her out far more than a sudden surprise test. It was easier to just lie.

He glanced to where Connor was bent over his food. The sage had completely disappeared now. Evan couldn’t help but wonder if he’d lied about what had happened too. If he or Zoe had told their parents that he’d tried to kill himself. Again. How would he bring it up? ‘Hey, mom, you’ll never guess what happened.’

Evan cringed at the thought.
If they did tell their parents then they would have told mom. Cynthia and Heidi know each other, remember?

He pushed the thoughts from his head and tried, again, to think of other things. This time, he thought of the dream.

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The Ward, as far as Evan could see, wasn’t allowed to let any Patients use computers. Which meant that the library used a manual system, with the books being sorted into alphabetical order determined by topic. He figured D would be the best place to find books about dreams, which lead him through the maze of shelves to the non-fiction half of the library.

He turned down into the aisle, froze and quickly doubled back to hide behind the books. Connor stood between the two shelves, his nose in a book. Evan wanted to scream.

*Go back to your room. It's not that important,* said the voice in the back of his head. *He hates you. He's just going to be mad.*

Evan bit his lip, his hands curled into tight fists. Slowly, he started back to the hallway, when his eyes decided to stop working. For a split second, Evan swam in darkness. He waved his arms aimlessly, his fingers splayed against the cool wood of a shelf. He blinked a few times, trying to clear his vision. He couldn’t breathe. His arms and legs trembled under his weight.


A hand clapped down on his shoulder, and suddenly Evan could see again. The room was too bright, making dark splotches creep across the edges of his gaze. He rubbed at his eyes with his palms before turning to look at whoever had knocked him back to reality.

“That’s what happens when you read my mind without warning,” Connor said sharply.

“Y-You…” Evan stepped back, out of Connor's grasp. “I’m sorry!”

“It’s fine. Sorry I freaked you out.” Connor had the book he’d been reading under his arm. *Dream Dictionary.*

Evan hesitated. “Can...Can I read that?”

Connor looked down. “Yeah. In a sec.” He sounded weirdly calm. “I wish this place had google.”

Evan opened his mouth, but no sound came out. Instead, he just nodded.

Connor didn’t say anything either. Instead he just flicked through the pages of the *Dream Dictionary*. Evan rested his back against the shelves, holding himself up.

“You look like you’re going to pass out, Hansen, Jesus Christ,” Connor muttered, his eyes glued to the floor.

“Y-You caught me by...I didn’t think you saw me.”

“I didn’t.” Connor turned a page. “I...I just kind of knew you were there.”

“Oh. Um. Weird.”

“Yeah. This whole thing is fucking weird.”
Evan kept his gaze on the book, watching as Connor worked through page after page.

“If you…” Connor paused, considering what word to say. “If you look through my eyes you can see again. For reference. Like, I see through your eyes, you see through mine.”

“Is that why you hit me?”

“Huh?”

“At dinner. You hit me when I read your mind.”

“Oh yeah.” Connor read through the entry for “Childhood” before moving on. “It scared the shit out of me.” He stopped again at “Home.” “So, stop.” He turned a handful of pages before finally finishing on the entry for “Murder.”

Evan felt the hairs on his arms stand on end. He looked around, making sure no one was around before speaking. “Can I ask a weird question?”

“No promises that I’ll answer, but yeah.”

He drew in a deep breath. “Did you dream that I killed you?” He garbled, avoiding Connor’s eye.

*Why did you say that?! He’s going to think you’re a freak! Are you stupid?! Do you want him to kill you?!!*

Connor snapped the book shut. “…No.”

“No?”

“I dreamt I strangled myself.”

Evan’s nails left little indents against his palm. “I-I-I...When I...If I read your mind when you’re asleep I fell asleep and...and...and…” He felt like his words were getting stuck behind his teeth and clogging his throat.

“We had the same dream?” Connor finished.

“Um…” Evan nodded.

“Hansen,” Connor said slowly. “When I say, ‘don’t read my mind’, I fucking mean it.”

“I know, I know. I’m sorry. I promise, I won’t do it again.”

“You promised you wouldn’t do it again before.”

Evan looked at his feet, his hands gripping the hem of his shirt for comfort. He felt like a kid who’d been caught doing something by his parents. Like he’d been sent to the principal’s office. Like he was hiding his bloody arm on a bus. “I really promise this time.” His eyes went black again.

“Sure you fucking do.” Connor stopped reading his mind and went back to the book. “You want to know what it means, or what?”

Again, Evan didn’t bother talking. He just nodded.

“Right.” Connor rifled back through the pages. “I looked at child and childhood first. Dreaming about that shit means you feel unfulfilled or that there’s a new aspect of yourself, or that you’re
immature.”

Evan turned his hem between his fingers, bobbing his head every now and then so Connor knew he was interested and listening.

“It says the meaning of dreaming about home depends on the kind of house. That’s real fucking helpful, this book’s bullshit.” He turned the pages again, stopping once again on the entry for murder. He huffed. It was a small sound—one that Evan could almost interpret as a laugh. “God, this book is fucking bullshit,” Connor repeated, his eyes turning a little more brown. He closed the book tightly and popped it back on a random shelf.

“Dreams...dreams mean things, you know?” Evan said softly.

“No, they don’t. They mean my, and your respective brains are fucked up.”

Evan’s shoulder’s raised around his chin. “Sorry.”

“Why?”

“For giving you that dream.”

Connor rolled his eyes. “You didn’t give me that fucking dream, Hansen.”

“How do you know that?”

“First,” Connor raised a finger. His nail polish was splotchy—a mix of pink and black. “It’s reoccurring.” He raised a second finger. “I was already asleep when you read my mind, right? So I was already dreaming.”

“…Right.” Evan swallowed hard. “Still. I’m sorry.”

“For what?”

“For...for lying? I guess...” he sighed. “I’m sorry I made you think it had been a day. I thought it had and...and... you were so happy and I’m sorry.”

Connor narrowed his eyes. “…why?”

Evan blinked dumbly. “B-B-B,” He raised a hand and sucked in a long, hard, breath. “Because I made you…mad?”

“No. No you didn’t.”

“...huh?”

Connor shook his head. “Jesus Christ. You’re a fucking idiot, you know that? I’m not mad at you. I’m mad at your stupid plant.”

“Lucky?”

“Yeah. It told you, right?”

“They,” Evan corrected. “And yeah. They did.”

“So, it’s their fault.”
“No. They don’t really understand human things all that well.”

“So, it’s your fault that they don’t know what time is?”

“...yeah.”

Connor clapped a hand to his face. “Oh my fucking god, Hansen.”

“What?”

“And people say I’m dense.”

“What?!”

Connor sighed and shook his head. He took a few steps towards the door. “Figure it out yourself.”

Once again, just for a flash, Evan’s eyes stopped working.
“Evan, do you have anything you want to add?”

“Um.” Evan hadn’t been listening. He knew that literally all he was supposed to do at group therapy was listen, but actually doing so was...well, hard. He looked around the circle of chairs, meeting the eyes of each of the other Patients. “Um...n-not really,” he said slowly. “Sorry.”

Dr Sherman smiled kindly. “That’s alright, son. Connor, what about you?”

Connor sat right next to Evan this time, which Evan couldn’t help but feel surprised at. Well, that and surprised that he’d even bothered to show up in the first place without being dragged there kicking and screaming. In the months that Evan had been at The Ward, Connor had attended exactly one group therapy session, which hadn’t ended well, to say the least. But here he was, sitting next to him. Not next to Zoe, or Dr Sherman, him.

Connor pressed a fist into his other hand, as though he was trying to crack his knuckles, but the joints refused to pop. “Medication helps,” he said.

Dr Sherman sighed. “True, but that’s not the kind of coping mechanisms we’re talking about here, Connor.”

Coping mechanisms. Evan could talk about that.

“Um.” His voice got stuck behind his teeth. “Be...before, I used to go on walks to try and calm down….and stuff.”

Jared snorted. “Alana can’t really do that, Acorn.”

Evan flinched. “Please, don’t call me that.”

“Why not?”

“I...because I don’t like it?”

Alana cleared her throat, silencing the both of them. “Thanks for the advice, Evan,” she said and her plump lips drew back into a magazine-worthy smile. “I’ll definitely try that next time.”

“Yeah, walk around the 1950s,” Jared jeered, earning himself a swift look from Dr Sherman.
“Physical exercise is a great tension relief,” he said matter-of-factly. “Maybe if you start to feel panicked, Alana, you could try and stop your...trips, before they have the chance to happen.”

Alana nodded a little too enthusiastically. “Like I said, I’ll definitely try it.” She laughed, though something about it sounded a little odd. “Beats passing out at a moment’s notice, oh,” she snapped her fingers. “Almost forgot. Jared, I checked, and April was right. People already knew about electricity before Benjamin Franklin did the key and the kite. It was common knowledge.”

Jared winced. “You told her that yet?”

“No.”

“Good. Don’t.”

Alana rolled her eyes.

“What?” Jared asked, making small sparks of lightning crackle in the air around his head. “I’m the electricity-guy, I’m meant to know my stuff!”

“Maybe we could talk about this after today’s session, you two,” Dr Sherman interrupted.

Connor finally cracked his knuckles. The sound made Evan wince, his own fingers aching. “Maybe she doesn’t need a coping mechanism,” he said.

Dr Sherman raised an eyebrow. “You think there’s a different solution?”

Connor shrugged. “Maybe she can’t fight her powers?”

“I can,” Alana pointed out. “I can use them whenever I want, it’s just when I get nervous that I can’t pick when I go back.”

“And maybe that’s just something you have to deal with.”

Dr Sherman gave a heavy sigh. “Connor.”

“What? I’m just saying what we’re all thinking.” He cracked his knuckles again.

Zoe, who’d been sitting quietly on the other side of the circle up until then, spoke up. “No, you’re not. Literally only you think that.”

“How do you know?”

“I dunno, Connor, how do you?”

Evan felt his stomach twist, and Connor’s eye turned half-brown. He felt a little spark of Connor’s anger...No, this felt different. Not anger; that was like a red-hot pike being stabbed into his intestines. This was just a little flush up the back of his neck. Annoyance? maybe embarrassment?

“Because,” Connor sat sharply. “I know, more than anyone, that some powers just can’t be controlled. She should count herself lucky she’s figured it out as much as she has already.”

Zoe scowled, her voice barely a murmur. “Maybe if you actually tried to—“

“I do try!”

“Okay, okay,” Dr Sherman clapped his hands together. “I need you all to relax, okay? Deep breaths
—and I do mean everyone.” Evan noticed that Dr Sherman’s jaw had become incredibly tight. A small vein was just visible below his temple, throbbing against his skin. Still, his voice was relatively calm.

It occurred to Evan, for the very first time, that Dr Sherman was putting himself in the middle of a minefield. Surrounded on all sides by all sorts of emotions that he couldn’t help but feel.

“Um. Dr Sherman?” he asked quietly.

“Yes, son?”

“How do you...cope?” He turned his dry tongue around in his mouth, trying to ignore the voice in the very back of his head screaming at him to Shut Up!

No one cares, it told him.

“W-With your powers, I mean…” he added, his voice becoming quieter and quieter with each word.

The question seemed to take Dr Sherman by surprise, and he sat up straight. “Well…” he cocked his head a little. “Mine’s a little different from Alana’s. My power’s Passive, so it might not work for her Honed…” he smiled a little. “Worth a shot, I guess. I use visualisation.”

“Oh great, more bullshit,” Connor muttered under his breath, only just loud enough for Evan to hear.

“I came up with it when I was around your age, now I think about it,” the doctor continued. “I picture a kind of forcefield around me that keeps the more—” he took care not to look at any of the other Patients in particular “—problematic emotions at bay. It doesn’t actually stop me from feeling them, of course, but it gives me a little control.” He thought for a moment. “We could try something like that with you, Alana. Maybe to keep yourself in place?”

Evan stopped listening again. Instead, he thought about the thick brush of pigface, saltbush and the other plants he used to smother the blood-bubbling heat of two-eyed rage. He looked to Connor out the corner of his eye.

He obviously wasn’t listening either. He lent back with his chair on two legs, fist pressed into his palm as he tried (and failed) to crack his knuckles for a third time.

Evan offered a small and slightly reassured smile. Connor caught his eye, and the fire radiating off him weakened a little.

Evan’s smile widened, inviting Connor to smile back. He liked Connor’s smile, the realisation hit him like a punch to the gut. He really wanted Connor to smile again, even if it was just one of those little half-smiles he pulled every now and then. But he didn’t. Instead, Connor just looked away, his brows knitted together into a heavy scowl.

—

Evan hung back at the end of the session, his fingers playing with the hem of his shirt.

Dr Sherman’s and Alana’s private conversation about exactly how she should imagine the earth swallowing her feet and keeping her in place, and what to do if she felt it wasn’t working, and how she could come and talk to him whenever she needed to, seemed to stretch on for an eternity.

Evan knew he should have left, that what he was going to say wasn’t really all that important. But, he didn’t leave. He waited at the edge of the room until Alana had left.
“Can I help you, son?” Dr Sherman asked as he stared to stack the chairs. The heavy *thud* of them falling against each other made Evan jump.

He opened his mouth, took in a deep breath, and told Dr Sherman everything. He told him about going two-eyed, about the dream, and about the way he fought off the red hot rage that came with going berserk.

Evan looked up at Dr Sherman once he’d finished, his pulse hard in his throat. The doctor had leaned against one of the stacks, his lips pressed tightly together.

“And you think the same thing would work with Connor?” he asked, and Evan nodded.

“Well, maybe? I dunno.” He fidgeted with the hem of his shirt again, curling it between his fingertips. “I hope so?”

Dr Sherman hummed softly. “Have you told him about this?”

“About me talking to you?”

“No. About your way of dealing with it.”

Evan opened his mouth, his palms slick with sweat. “I…” he said slowly.

*God, you’re an idiot.*

“Don’t think so. No.”

Dr Sherman gave him a polite smile—or maybe it was more of a grimace. “Do you want me to pull him aside later, or do you want to tell him yourself?”

*He thinks you’re an idiot too.*

Evan shook his head. “I-I-I,” he paused and cleared his throat. “I think I-I should,” he said. “He’ll probably j-just, um, freak out, if he heard it from you.”

“That’s what I thought.” Dr Sherman seemed to relax a little, which made Evan realise just how tense the doctor had become. His jaw was set hard, his shoulders raised, and his lips drawn into a stiff line. “Maybe wait a bit, though,” he suggested. “Calm down a little.”

“G-Good,” another pause. “Good plan.”

Dr Sherman straightened up and patted Evan on the shoulder. “I’ll talk with some of the other doctors, figure out a way we can test this,” he winced a little at the word ‘test’ as a sudden knot twisted Evan’s gut. “Later though. When you’re both ready. That alright, son?”

---

Connor was in bed when Evan returned to their room. His face was smooshed down against his pillow, his hair parted to reveal the pale skin at the back of his neck. At first, Evan assumed he was sleeping, given the slow and steady rise of Connor’s shoulders with each deep breath. But then, his vision went black.

“Can you stop that?” he asked, fumbling around in the dark for the edge of his bed. “I’m pretty sure you’ve done it to me more than I’ve done it to you.”

“Probably,” he heard Connor say.
Evan Reached Out in the direction of Connor’s voice, jumping a little as the world suddenly came back into focus. Connor had rolled over onto his back, so Evan could see himself. He looked like an idiot, waving his hands aimlessly in search of something to grab on to. Slowly, carefully, he edged forward, inch by inch, until he felt the soft fabric of his quilt under his palms. He watched himself sit down, and let himself feel a little proud that he’d managed the maneuver without walking into something.

The world went black for a split second and Evan’s sight returned to his own eyes, only to see Connor hunched over on his bed, dry heaving,

“Y-You okay?” he asked quickly.

Connor gave a quick shudder and nodded. “You ever used one of those VR things?”

“That’s the most rich-kid thing I’ve--”

“I didn’t own one! Christ! They had a demo at a shop before…” he gestured to his eyes. “It made me motion sick cause my eyes saw that I was moving, but my body wasn’t. Same with watching you move around.” He stuck out his tongue and flopped back down onto his pillow. “Remind me never to try that again.”

Evan felt himself smile. “I-I will.” For a moment, he was quiet. “Y-You said you got motion sick in the store--”

“They had a bucket on stand-by, I wasn’t the only one. You should have seen my mom. She freaked out.”

Evan laughed. “W-Wish I could try it.”

“Maybe you--” Connor cut himself off and pulled a face. “Shit, sorry.”

“Um.” Evan felt like whatever atmosphere the room had before—whatever it was-- had been snapped firmly in two. “I-It’s fine. May...Maybe whatever job I get will have me doing hacking...o-or...something.”

“Hacking in VR?” Connor asked, one brow raised. “A flower-healer who hacks.”

“I-In VR,” Evan said with a grin.

Connor snorted. “Sounds like a d-list sci-fi movie.”

“O-Our lives are a d-list sci-fi movie.”

“No, our lives are an angsty Frank Miller comic.”

“I...have no idea what you’re talking about.”

“Count yourself lucky.” Connor tucked his hands behind his head, looking up at the ceiling. Evan hesitated before laying down on his bed and doing the same.

*If you don’t tell him then Dr Sherman will, and he’ll be pissed,* hissed the voice.

*He’ll probably be pissed if I bring it up now,* Evan reasoned, wincing a little as thorns from his arm dug into the back of his neck. He shifted a little, trying to get comfortable on the heavy bush of brambles and little, white christmas roses that covered his arm. Eventually, he just gave up and let his hands rest by his sides. “H-Hey, Connor,” he said.
“Yeah?”

“You know...You know that visualising--”

Connor cut him off with a long, exasperated groan. “Don’t start on that bullshit, Hansen. You sound like my sister.” He didn’t sound mad, just tired.

“M-Maybe I sound like her ‘cause we both care,” Evan shrugged. “I mean...it works for me.”

“You don’t have the same issues I do,” Connor pointed out.

“I do now, and that’s what I use it for.”

Connor went quiet. Slowly, he sat up, his brows furrowed into a tight and heavy frown. “You do?” he asked, meeting Evan’s eye. “Like, with the two-eyed stuff, not your plant healing shit.”

“I’m. Kind of with both? But mostly with your stuff.”

“And you’re not bullshitting me, right? Kleinman or Sherman or whoever didn’t put you up to this, right?”

Again, out of the blue, Evan felt a little jump of excitement in his gut. Bronze Chrysanthemums bloomed across his arm, but only for a moment, before they were swiftly replaced by vines and thorns.

“They didn’t,” Technically, he added wordlessly.

“And it works?”

Evan nodded. “Yeah. It does for me anyway.”

“But you still passed out,” Connor pointed out.

“C-Cause you did. I think?” Evan knitted his fingers together, resting his hands on his stomach. “Maybe...if you didn’t go Two-eyed...I wouldn’t...neither of us would…”

Connor sat up properly, his long legs crossed. “So,” He asked. “What do you do?”
Chapter 32

Chapter Notes

Thank Levi that you guys didn't read the horrific first draft of this chapter. Pro-tip kids! Never write while under the influence. It does not go well.

Also! I made a DEH Fan Creators discord server. Hit me up @bbcotaku on tumblr for the link.

TW: Violence, Reference to death and abuse.

Evan had expected Dr Sherman to demand a test as soon as possible, but it was another two days before a scrub turned up outside their bedroom door asking if she could “borrow them for a minute?”

He and Connor exchanged looks before slowly getting to their feet.

“How long is this going to take?” Connor asked.

The nurse smiled. “We’re not sure yet, but probably not that long. At worst, a few hours.”

She herded the two of them into the elevator and selected the eleventh floor, which made Evan’s stomach twist uneasily. He’d been to the tenth floor, and the roof before, but nothing in between. The ride up felt, somehow, even slower than normal. The cables above his head creaked and squealed with each passing second, as though ready to give way at any moment.

To steady himself, Evan looked at the control panel and watched as the little digital display counted up and up. In his peripheral, he could see the button for The Basement. His arm hurt, and he thought about Will for the first time in what felt like a long time.

He thought he was helping, muttered the voice in the back of his head. He died for no reason. You could have just not told anyone and he’d still be alive--

Evan steadied himself against the wall as his vision went black. Fumbling for a moment, he swung his fist until he hit something vaguely Connor-shaped. “S-Stop doing that!” He snapped once the world had come back into focus.

“You looked like you were going to pass out,” Connor muttered, rubbing his arm.

“A-and so you made me blind?!”

“What else was I supposed to do?!”

Evan’s words lodged in his throat. The nurse was looking at them both with one brow cautiously raised.

“Um.” His hands automatically tugged at the hem of his shirt.

Connor followed Evan’s gaze, wrinkling his nose at the nurse. “What?”

“Nothing,” she said, offering them a fresh, pearly-white smile. Evan recognised that smile, it was
nurse-speak for 'I-have-no-idea-how-to-help-you.' The kind of look Heidi had give him when he showed her the flowers on his arm. The ‘Everything-Is-Going-To-Be-Okay-No-Really’ look.

He felt his throat become tight; He was going to be sick.

Mercifully, the cables gave one final squeak and the doors slid open to reveal an empty hallway.

Still smiling, the nurse stepped out. “Follow me:it’s just around the corner.”

“I know.” Connor moved past her, his hands shoved deep into the pockets of his jeans.

“Right…” The nurse stuck her arm out to keep the elevator doors from closing. “Come on, Ev.”

**Why did she have to call him that?**

Evan held back a scowl and stepped out, following her as Connor disappeared around the corner.

“It’s room 11--” the nurse started.


---

Room 119 reminded Evan of a recording studio: two sections separated by a pane of thick glass. On one side, Dr Sherman and two other people in lab coats fiddled with touch screens and keyboards and in the other was a plain, padded cell.

Evan’s stomach sank.

“Hey, son,” Dr Sherman said, sharing the nurse’s smile. “You feeling alright?”

Evan stayed in the threshold. He could see Connor, already in the padded room, through the window. Another lab coat was with him, sticking electrodes to his temples, throat and chest.

“Y-Yeah,” Evan said quietly, finally managing to force some words from his mouth.

Dr Sherman raised an eyebrow.

“I’m fine,” he insisted. “Just…” he looked at Connor again. “Nervous, I guess.”

Dr Sherman’s tense shoulders slumped a little. “It’s all going to be fine, son. We can hold it back a bit more if you want.”

Evan swallowed thickly and shook his head. “I’m fine,” he said again.

“Are you sure?”

No. “Yeah.”

Dr Sherman patted his shoulder.. “Alright then.” He drew in a deep breath. “So. This is a pretty simple test,” he explained, leading Evan deeper into the room. “We’re going to use a sound cannon, kind of like a dog whistle for humans--”

**So, a normal whistle?** Evan thought to himself.

“--it won’t hurt Connor,” the doctor continued. “But it will make him go two-eyed--can you move your shirt? We need to put a heart monitor on both of you.”
Evan nodded as he was forced into a stool then pulled down the neck of his shirt so yet another nurse could attach more electrodes to him.

“Thank you.” Dr Sherman tapped his finger against one of the screens and Evan’s heart rate came up: 75 beats per minute. “Still, we’re going to have Connor go Two-eyed and see if he can use the same technique as you. Are you sure you can...how did you describe it? Reach Out? You’re sure you can do that from different rooms?”

Another nod.

“Good.”

Connor’s heart rate showed up beside Evan’s. 75 per minute.

“Fascinating,” Sherman murmured, making a quick note before continuing. “If things are getting too much just say the word and we’ll stop. Okay?”

“Yeah.” Evan fiddled with his shirt, trying to get it comfortably over the nest of wires attached to his skin.

Now it was Dr Sherman’s turn to nod. He turned his back to Evan, facing the window. He pressed a finger on a button and spoke, his voice a little louder through the speakers. “All good in there?”

“As good as I’ll ever be.” Connor’s voice came out through a small speaker on the desk. The sound had a little bit of lag to it.

“Great. Sharp, you all good to leave?”

The doctor with Connor gave a thumbs up and headed to the door. It was a thick and heavy thing, made of metal on one side and cushion on the other. The doctor, Sharp, smiled at Evan as she stepped into the room. He was starting to get sick of smiles.

“You ready, son?” Dr Sherman asked, halting Evan’s train of thought.

“A-all ready?” He asked. His mouth was dry.

“We’re all set up, so why not now? We can wait if you’re not--”

“No, no. I-I’m...I’m ready.”

Dr Sherman pushed the button to talk to Connor again. “Ready?”

“As I’ll ever be,” Connor said again. He didn’t look particularly tense or nervous--well, no more than normal. His hands rested in his pockets, and for a moment his eyes locked with Evan’s: one brown, one blue.

A garden of Christmas Roses and Monkshood bloomed across Evan’s arm. A thick vine of thorns rested at the crook of his elbow, biting at his skin.

Sharp moved over to the controls by the window, turning a dial a little ways before looking to Sherman. “Starting in five, four—”

Evan saw Connor’s eyes screw shut.

“--three, two--”
His shoulders raised as though bracing himself for a hit.

“--One.”

Suddenly, Connor was doubled over, his hands gripping tightly at his head. Evan felt as though he’d been dropped into a pool of lava. He screwed his eyes shut, hunching over as well as he tried to focus on smothering the forest fire burning through his stomach and chest.

“Evan? Hang in there, son.” He heard Dr Sherman say.

“Both Patients are over 120 BPM,” said Sharp.

_You’re dying._

Evan held back the urge to scream and pushed down on the fire with thick piles of saltbush, drowning the red in green.

“Four-six-seven’s down to 110, 100, 90.”

Evan blew out a long, deep breath and opened his eyes. He’d expected to see Connor thrashing about and punching and clawing at the walls. But he wasn’t. While Connor had transformed into his larger, stronger self, he’d doubled over on the floor. He’d clamped his hands on his ears, his face hidden by a wave of hair.

“Connor!” Evan’s voice rasped as he spoke.

“He’s alright,” Dr Sherman said quickly. He didn’t look great either. All the colour had drained from his face and he had an unhealthy paler around his eyes. “It doesn’t hurt him, son, I promise.”

_He’s lying_, hissed the voice.

Dr Sherman pressed the talk button on the controls. “Connor, remember the technique. I know you can do this.”

Connor didn’t say anything in reply. A deep rumble—somewhere between a cry and a growl—escaped his lips, sending shivers down Evan’s spine.

“Please work,” Evan whispered softly as thorns pressing deep into his skin. “Please work.” He waited, but nothing happened. Connor’s pulse didn’t slow, his stretched body didn’t deflate and he didn’t get up.

After what felt like forever, Evan slowly Reached Out. The moment he grabbed onto Connor’s arm he felt another flush of fire flood his veins. His head whirled as though someone was drilling into his skull and scraping at his brain. Bile hit the back of his throat as the room started to spin. He felt trapped, like his skin was too tight and everything was too hot and spinning and spinning and spinning—

“Stop it!” He screamed. “Stop it! Stop it now!” He stumbled to his feet as Dr Sharp turned the dial again, cutting off the piercing sound. The room came to a standstill and Connor’s body relaxed, though only for a second.

“Son, stop.”

Evan was dimly aware of Dr Sherman’s voice as he ripped off the electrodes and rushed to the door. He still had a firm Hold on Connor. His vision blurred between the padded cell and the room
outside.

He was going to be sick.

He tugged at the metal door handle, his body was acting on pure instinct as he pushed his shoulder up against it. Hands tried to grab at him, but he slipped out of their reach, twisting at the lock with his fingers. The door creaked open, letting him narrowly escape the hold of whichever doctor was trying to get a hold of him.

“Connor.” He was still curled up on the ground. Sleeping, the voice in the back of his head told him. Evan threw himself to his knees beside Connor, reaching out for real and taking him by the shoulders. Begonias crowded his arm, choked on all sides by more Christmas roses. Connor was limp in his hands, his eyes rolled up to the whites. Evan shook him. “Connor, wake up. Please.”

For a split second, Connor’s eyes came into focus. Both brown.

Evan’s blood ran cold.

Connor reached up and grabbed Evan by the throat, dragging both of them to their feet. He slammed Evan against the cushioned wall, crushing his windpipe.

Someone was screaming, though Evan didn’t know if it was him or one of the doctors. Over Connor’s shoulder he could see the ashen face of Dr Sherman through the window. The two other doctors were holding him back.

“Are you crazy?” Dr Sharp snapped at him. “Do you want to die too?!”

And then, suddenly, Evan realized that he could still breathe.

His lungs inflated and deflated in a shallow rhythm, but no air traveled through his throat. Out the corner of his eye, Evan saw that Weeping fig and Spider Plant leaves had joined the garden on his arm, their leaves long and upright.

Clenching his jaw, Evan Reached Out again.

Stop it. Stop it. Stop it. Stop it. Stop it. Stop it. Stop it. Stop it. Stop it.

The words repeated themselves in his mind again and again, and it took him a moment to realise that the voice saying it didn’t belong to him.

Connor’s hands were shaking, and while his lips were peeled back into an savage sneer, his eyes were wide with fright.

Evan inhaled deeply and grabbed onto Connor’s wrists. Again, he pictured saltbush and pigface curling up his arms and over his hands and fingers. They curled around Connor’s wrists and held on tightly.

You’re okay, he said silently. You’re okay. He could feel the burning fire at the centre of Connor’s body, so bright that it hurt, burning the back of his eyes. He wrapped the plants around the flame, pushing them down.

“You’re okay,” he croaked, wincing hard.

Connor’s brows narrowed and slowly, gradually, his shoulders relaxed. As the fire dulled, so did the grip on Evan’s throat. He lowered his hands, holding lightly on to Evan’s.
The doctors watched cautiously from their spot at the doorway and Evan took a deep breath through his mouth, holding back a cry. It felt like he’d swallowed a handful of razor blades.

Connor’s legs buckled and he fell to his knees, still holding onto Evan’s hands. Both of them were shaking from head to toe.

“C-Connor…?” Evan murmured softly. His neck itched where sage has started to sprout, healing any harm Connor’s hands had caused.

Connor’s face was hidden by his hair. His voice was so quiet that Evan had to strain to hear it. “I’m sorry. Jesus Christ, I’m so sorry.” His voice hitched. “I’m so so sorry.” He looked up, and Evan saw he was crying. “Thank you. Holy shit, thank you so much.”

Evan opened his mouth, but no sound came out. So, he just smiled.

“Are you okay?!” Dr Sherman finally managed to free himself from the hold of the other doctor’s and bolted to Evan’s side. He gingerly touched Evan’s neck, as though feeling for any kind of break or injury. “How’s your breathing?”

“F-F…” Evan cleared his throat, tasting the smallest hint of sage at the back of his tongue. “Fine. I’m fine.”

“No,” Connor interrupted. “No, you’re not. Jesus Christ.” His hold on Evan’s hand was incredibly loose.

Evan shook his head. “No, no. I’m fine. Really. I promise. S-See,” he breathed in deeply to prove his point.

Dr Sherman relaxed, but only a little. “Good. Once more thing: what were you thinking?!”

“I…” Evan hesitated and helped pull Connor shakily to his feet. “I wasn’t thinking.”

“You could have gotten seriously hurt.”

Evan squeezed Connor’s hand. “I know. I’m sorry.”

“Don’t be. Just…promise me you do that again.” He waited for Evan to nod before finally turning to Connor. “What about you?” he asked him.

Connor let go of one of Evan’s hands to rub the back of his neck. His body had started to deflate a little, shrinking back to his normal size. The outline of his face was framed with sage and Evan could feel small leaves blooming in the gaps between their fingers.

“I’m…” he trailed off. “I’m good.”

“Any pain at all? Are you tired? Let me see your eyes?” Dr Sherman peered at Connor’s face. His eyes were mostly blue, but there was still a little slither of brown to his left iris.

Connor swatted him away. “I’m fine. I’m not the one who got fucking throttled.”

“You’ve both been through a lot.” Dr Sherman took a step back. “I’m going to call Jacobi and have him keep an eye on you— both of you.”

——

The elevator ride back down to their room was a lot faster, though Evan didn’t know if it just felt that
way, or God had just decided to be merciful for once.

Or, maybe not, since Jacobi was with them. He stood between Evan and Connor, his arms tightly crossed.

Connor leaned against the wall, chewing idly on his thumbnail. The corner of his mouth raised into a slight smile.

Evan couldn’t help but wish he was always this way.

*You sound like an abused housewife*, the voice muttered.

*This is different. He can’t actually control it.*

*You sure about that?*

Evan met Connor’s eye again. *Yeah. I am*, he smiled, not noticing the pink Rose Buds lining the crook of his arm.
Chapter 33

I feel like every chapter is just me apologising for how short it is.

Thank you Levi for editing, you goddamn Horse.

TW: Anxiety.

Time moved in fast-forward again. Thursdays took the place of Tuesdays and Saturdays turned into Mondays in the blink of an eye. And then, before Evan could really be sure of what was happening, his birthday arrived.

There was no cake in The Ward. No party, no nothing. Just a reassuring smile and a too-chipper ‘Happy Birthday’ from Dr Sherman and a card left on his bedside table while he was in class. Inside was a typed message:

Dear Evan Hansen,

From The Ward to you, happy birthday.

“They suck, don’t they?” Connor said when he spotted it. He’d not gone to class, as per usual. He’d not moved an inch since Evan last saw him after breakfast, sat on his bed with a comic in hand. The only thing that had actually changed was the issue, from Champions Issue #12 to Conan the Barbarian Issue #22.

Evan nodded and put the card back down by his bed. Even the decorations on it looked stale: a simple clipart picture of a birthday cake with HAPPY BIRTHDAY written in word art Evan hadn’t seen since he was six. “A-at least they try?” he shrugged, trying his best to sound optimistic.

“Literally doing nothing would be better than those cards.” Connor set down Conan and reached over the side of his bed, supporting himself against the floor with one hand. He reached under the bed and pulled out his cardboard box of comics, placing them on his lap. He took out a thick pile of comics and set them down, searching through them for a moment before taking out another pile and looking through those as well.

Evan fiddled with the hem of his shirt. “Is…Is it bad that I kind of forgot?”

“Your birthday?” Connor asked, not looking up. “It’s not bad, it’s just really fucking sad.”

“Yeah…well. We didn’t really celebrate birthdays…so.”

“Cause you’re Jewish?”

Evan couldn’t help but roll his eyes. “Jewish people still celebrate birthdays. Mom and me didn’t really make a big deal out of it, you know? Like…we had a big party once.”

“Once?”
“S-she and David rented out the town hall one year and invited a bunch of people and I freaked out,” Evan mumbled quickly.

“Sounds like shit—ah-ha!” Connor grabbed two comics and raised them triumphantly above his head. “Here.” He held them out to Evan. “Happy Birthday.”

Evan blinked dumbly and gingerly took them. “T-thanks, um. You didn’t have to.”

“Yeah, but I wanted to. Call it a thank you for…” Connor huffed a small laugh, “pretty much everything.”

Evan looked down at the books, The Amazing Spider-man Issue #2 and #16.

“Cause you’re sixteen, right?” Connor explained. “Uh. You can borrow the other issues...actually, that one’s kind of weird cause Daredevil’s in it. And I just realized you have no idea who that is. Great.”

Evan felt his stomach twist a little with nerves that didn’t belong to him. “No, no. I like it, it’s cool.”

He looked down at Issue #16. It showed Spider-man with his spine contorting in a way that made Evan’s own back hurt as he leapt through the air, away from a man in a hideously yellow devil costume and black leotard.

“SPIDEY BATTLES DAREDEVIL!” The cover proclaimed. FEATURING THE EERIE MENACE OF THE RING MASTER!!

“D-Daredevil looks kind of dumb,” Evan said, smiling a little.

“Hey, don’t diss Daredevil.” Connor crossed his arms. “His costume’s shit, but he’s really cool.”

“What’s his power?”

“Oh.” Connor twisted his lip. “He’s blind.”

Evan raised an eyebrow.

“But! He uses his hearing to see, kind of like a bat, and beats people up.”

“That’s...not really a power,” Evan pointed out.

“Lots of superheroes don’t have powers.”

“I thought the point was they had superpowers. That’s why they’re superheroes.”

Connor let out a long, deep sigh, and for a moment Evan was scared he’d annoyed him. “Common misconception. A lot of superheroes have superpowers, but just as many don’t. Like Iron man and Black Widow, or Batman, they make their own powers. Well...Black Widow sometimes has superpowers, that’s kind of confusing. Like, originally, she was a villain who worked for Satan, because of course she fucking did.” He rolled his eyes before continuing. “A lot of supervillains don’t have powers either,” he gestured to the other comic on Evan’s bed. “The Vulture doesn’t, but he is kinda dumb. Well, all old comic villains are kinda dumb--uh,” he cut himself off. “Shit, sorry.”

Evan shook his head. “It’s fine. It’s fine. It’s interesting.”

“No. It’s stupid.”

“It’s not. Be...besides, I need to know this if I want to read issue #16.”
“Do you want to read issue #16?” Connor asked, raising an eyebrow.

“Y-Yeah...yeah! Of course.” Evan nodded.

“Right...Cool.”

Evan sat there, absentmindedly curling the hem of his shirt with one hand. It was another minute or so before he moved again and swung his legs over the side of his bed. He held his hands over the comics before making his decision and grabbing issue #16.

He rested it open on his lap and turned the first page, only to be greeted by the familiar name of Stan Lee, and the less familiar one of Steve Ditko.

Evan had barely read a few pages before he hit his first brick wall. “Is Mary Jane important?”

“Oh my god.” Connor facepalmed.

Evan opened his mouth to say sorry before being cut off by a small laugh from Connor.

“Okay.” Connor sat up and moved to the edge of his bed so he was facing Evan. “Mary Jane is Peter Parker’s girlfriend and/or wife, unless Gwen Stacy is his girlfriend and/or wife because parallel universe.”

Evan blinked dumbly.

“She’s one of the love interests.”


“She’s not actually in it until issue, like, forty, though.”

“Mary Jane or Gwen Stacy?”

“Mary Jane.”

“T-then why is she mentioned now?”

“Because...I don’t know, Hansen. Because Stan Lee said so.”

“S-Stan Lee needs to get his s-story straight.”

“Stan Lee is a goddamn hero.”

“D-didn’t he kill a bunch of—“

“God. Damn. Hero.” Connor had his little half-smile on. His eyes, for the first time since Evan had met him, were practically one-hundred-percent blue.

Evan grinned, looking back down at the book. “A-and that’s Daredevil?” He pointed to a man with sunglasses, tilting the comic so Connor could see the picture.

“Yeah.”

“He looks better out of his costume.”

“Agreed.”
There was a small lull in conversation and Evan went back to reading. After a few more pages, a stupid idea entered his head.

No, The voice scolded. No, no, no. But for once, Evan ignored it. Instead, he got up and moved to sit beside Connor.

“Here,” He said, putting the comic between them. “Uh…” his anxiety spiked, hitting him hard like a whack to the back of his head. His chest felt weird. Sore, like his heart had decided to move to his stomach instead. “I-it’s…you don’t have to watch me read it. I-I mean. Um…” he swallowed hard. “Who’s that guy,” he pointed to a man in a top hat.

If Connor was bothered by Evan moving, he didn’t show it. “The Ringmaster. He hypnotizes people.”

“Oh. Cool.” Evan winced a little as thorns dig into his arm.

Idiot.

Again, he went back to reading. But now the words on the page refused to make any kind of sense. He re-read the villains plan at least half a dozen times, but it still wouldn’t sink in.

Out the corner of his eye, Evan saw that Connor had finished the page and quickly turned it. He didn’t bother even trying to read this one, just waited for Connor finish before turning on to the next.

They—well, Connor—read another six pages before speaking again.

Connor cleared his throat and the sound was enough to make Evan flinch. Keeping an eye on the page, Connor moved over a little, away from Evan.

“You okay?” He asked, and Evan nodded.

“Y-Yeah. Why wouldn’t I be?”

It’s not like you managed to work yourself up over nothing, The voice chimed in. As per usual.

“I dunno, you tell me.” Connor pushed one fist into the palm of his hand like he was trying to crack his knuckles.

You ruined it. Well done.

“I’m fine,” Evan insisted. He could barely hear his own voice over the voice in his head.

Why are you freaking out? Why are you so fucking stupid?

Evan’s throat felt tight, like someone was strangling him. He tried to breathe through the flowers on his arm, but his lungs felt like they were going to burst.

Connor stood up. “This was stupid.” Any hint of clam his tone had had before was long gone.

Because you ruined it.

How?! Evan wracked his brain trying to think of what he’d done. He’d sat next to Connor, but that was normal, right? People sit next to each other all the time. Maybe he was too close? They’d practically been shoulder to shoulder. But he’d had to be that close for them to share the book.

Evan looked down at his arm, numb with pain and slathered in Christmas roses and thorns and vines
and rose buds.

Rose buds? His breath caught in his throat.

“God, I’m stupid,” Connor continued, leaning his hands against the window sill.

Evan pulled his gaze away from his arm to look up at Connor. “...you’re stupid?” He asked slowly.

Connor whirled round. “Oh thanks, Hansen, I didn’t know you felt that way,” he snapped, his lips contorted into a hard scowl.

Evan felt the twist of anger starting to spark in his stomach. “No, no, no,” he said quickly, his words gumming up his mouth like glue. “I-I meant...I mean...” he felt like his voice was trying to climb back down his throat and nest in his lungs.

“You are not stupid,” Lucky said for him.

“You’re a plant, no you don’t get a say.” Connor sat down heavily on Evan’s bed. He bounced his knee up and down, reminding Evan a little too vividly of paranoid meth-heads he’d seen on the train.

“You’re not stupid!” He finally managed to say. “I meant...like a question.”

Connor raised a brow.

“Like. Like. Like.” Evan scrunched up his face. “W-Why are you stupid?”

Connor pressed his heel against the floor, making his leg still. “Because I freaked you out.”

“...h-huh?” Evan cocked his head to the side. “B-but I—“

“Don’t try and tell me you’re not freaking out. I can see it and sense it.”

“I’m not!” Evan clenched his hands, his nails digging into his palms. “I f-freaked out because I...I made you freak out.”

Connor paused. “Why would you freak me out?”

“Because I sat next to you!”

The two just looked at each other for a moment before Connor leaned forward, hanging his head. “God, I’m stupid.”

“I-I’m stupid too.”

“We’re both stupid.”

“Neither of you are stupid,” Lucky said matter-of-factly.

“Plants don’t get a say in stupid.”

Evan laughed, and he wasn’t sure if it was a nervous one or not. “W-we’re messes.”

“Stupid messes,” Connor agreed and the rage in his stomach started to smoulder.


It wasn’t until halfway through Connor’s rant on why Mary Jane was, by far, the better of the two
love interests that he remembered the rose buds.
Holy crap! 15000 views?? when did that happen???? Thank you so much!

Also, I'm really sorry for not updating in, like, a month but I am currently drowning in a sea of journalism and Media Relations. Kill me.

Also, happy (late) first birthday to TTT. Hard to think that it's been over a year since I started writing this thing.

Thank you, Levi, for your essay-of-an-edit, this dude deserves all the kudos.

TW: Internalised biphobia/homophobia.

Evan tried not to pay too much attention to exactly what flowers were on his arm. Unless they were causing him physical pain they were really no different from the hair on his head—at least in theory—and he’d gotten pretty good at just zoning them out.

So, when he first caught a little flash of pink at the edge of his vision he hadn’t really paid it much mind. He’d just scratched at a spot between the undergrowth and nodded along to Connor’s rambling. But then, he did a double take.

The flower was small—only about the size of his fingernail and choked on all sides by thick vines and Acacia leaves. Barely visible, but definitely there—a tiny, pink, rosebud.

“Hey.” Connor’s voice stopped his train of thought.

“H-Huh?”

“If I’m boring you, you can just tell me. I’m not going to flip out over small shit like that.”

“Uh...right.” Evan sat up a little. “I mean. You’re not boring me, I was just t-thinking.”

Connor raised an eyebrow.

You can’t tell him, hissed the voice. If you not listening isn’t going to freak him out then that definitely will.

“You ever had one of those ‘drugs are the devil!’ talks at school? Like when the teachers got someone to come in to talk to you?”

“You ever had one of those ‘drugs are the devil!’ talks at school? Like when the teachers got someone to come in to talk to you?”
Evan nodded and did his best to disguise his confusion. “A-A few.”

“Did they talk about weed?”

“A bit.”

“It’s a street name, Mary Jane. Well, it’s supposed to be a street name. If anyone actually calls it that you know they’ve definitely never touched a joint in their fucking life.”

Evan laughed and hoped it didn’t sound forced. “S-sounds about right.”

“Yeah, well, this was written in the sixties after all.” Connor looked down at the comic spread across their laps and turned the page. Evan just kept looking at his arm.

*New Love.*

*Love.*

He’d barely thought about that in months. Love and romance were for normal people, not Patients. Patients were weapons, people were...well...*people.*

He scratched his arm again. *Maybe it’s platonic?* He reasoned.

*It’s a fucking rose!*

*It’s pink! Pink means friendship.*

*Pink rose buds mean new love, stop lying to yourself.*

Evan bit his tongue. He couldn’t just love someone. Not Connor. Besides, he didn’t love Connor. Not in that way. They were friends, they were roommates. He suppressed a nervous laugh.

*I’m not gay,* he told himself, pulling his gaze to the comic page. Connor was talking. Something about Gwen Stacy and Gerry Conway--whoever the hell that was. *I like girls,* Evan continued, blocking Connor out. *I gave Chelsea Malcom a valentine.*

*When you were six.*

*It counts. I’m not gay. And besides, Connor had a girlfriend--*

*That you made up to get David off your back.*

*Name a celebrity crush.*  *Hayley Williams.*

*Or, is she just a singer you think you have a thing for because everyone says you have to have a thing for her? And stop making faces, you look stupid.*

“Seriously, Hansen. What’s the matter?” Connor sounded tense too now. His brows narrowed.

“N-nothing,” *just according to the plants on my arm I have a thing for you. My friend. My male friend.*

Connor moved a little to the side and the comic slid off his lap and onto the bed. “Sure.” He stood up, scratching the back of his neck.

*And now you’ve upset your crush.*
HE’S NOT MY CRUSH.

Evan closed the comic and stood up as well. “S-Sorry.”

“For what, Hansen?”

“For freaking out!” The words came out more forcefully than Evan had intended.

Connor shrank back, his shoulders raised and tense. “Why?!”

“I don’t know!”

Connor scowled. “Yeah. Sure you don’t.” He raked a hand through his hair and gave it a hard tug.

“Y-You…it’s not your fault,” Evan said quickly.

“Sure it isn’t.” Connor looked down at his feet. “Sorry for ruining your birthday.”

---

“Can you please just grow?” Evan asked, holding his head up with his hands.

“No,” said a particularly stubborn pot of geraniums. Evan knew that plants didn’t have faces, but he could have sworn this one was glaring at him.

“Is everything alright?” Dr Peet asked, one brow raised.

“Y-Yeah. Sorry…”

“You know my rules about saying sorry, Mr Hansen.”

Evan rolled his eyes. “Yes. I’m fine. They’re just…being difficult.” He gave the plant a small tug with his powers, trying to coax them upwards, but nothing happened. “Sorry.”

“No ‘sorry’s.” Dr Peet sighed heavily, pulling her lab coat tighter around her body. It was unusually cold on the roof garden—at least Evan thought I was. But then again, he’d never spent his winters in the desert before. “I know a lack of concentration when I see it.”

Evan winced a little and looked up. The roof of the green house was clear, and for once there were a few clouds dotted around the sky. “So-”

“Instead of apologising, Mr Hansen, try telling me what’s the matter.”

Despite having known Dr Peet for months, the harshness in her voice took Evan aback. “I…” He pressed one fist against the palm of his hand, waiting for his knuckles to crack. “Um.” He looked up at Dr Peet through his bangs and saw her shoulders slump slightly.

Dr Peet looked around before pulling up a chair to sit across from him. “You don’t actually have to tell me,” she said as she moved the flowerpot to the side. “Not if you don’t want to.”

Evan swirled his tongue around his mouth, trying to bring back some form of moisture. “Just…the usual stuff. I guess.” He changed hands and his left knuckles popped. “Anxiety. U-Usual stuff,” he repeated, his voice growing softer with every passing word.

Dr Peet’s lips drew into a straight line. “You have nothing to be anxious about, Mr Hansen. I promise.”
You can’t say shit like that, said the voice. You don’t know shit.

“Yeah....right.”

“I’m being serious.” She leaned forward, bringing her hands together on her lap. “Despite what people like to say about me--don’t raise your eyebrow at me. I’m not deaf--I do actually want to help you kids. We all do really. Well,” she wrinkled her nose a little. “Most of us do, anyway.”

Evan’s gaze moved to the ground. A sharp thorn dug into the skin between his thumb and forefinger, making him wince. “It’s dumb.” He forced the words out of his mouth.

“Is it making you worry?” Peet asked, and Evan nodded. “Then it’s not dumb, and I can promise you I’ve heard stranger.”

Evan raised an eyebrow.

“I once had a seventeen--almost eighteen year-old come crying to me because her mother had called to tell her that her goldfish had died.”

“T-That’s not dumb though.”

“No. But it’s strange.”

Evan bit his lip. “I...” He felt like his stomach was being tossed about. His breakfast twist and turned around his gut as though it were trying to break out. “It’s really stupid,” he said again. “But...I think I have--”

You’ve said to much. Stop it. Stop it. Stop it right now. She’ll think you’re a freak. She’ll tell everyone and then they’ll fucking laugh and think you’re even more of an abomination than you already are.

His hands balled into tight fists. “I think I have a thing for someone.” It was like the floodgates had been opened, now he’d started talking he couldn’t stop. “I mean. I mean I like them. I-I saw...on my arm there was this rose--well, a rose bud. A-and they’re meant to mean I’m in love with someone. But that doesn’t feel right because...because--”

Dr Peet raised a hand, silencing him. “Is that all?” She wasn’t smiling. She wasn’t laughing. Her face was completely smooth and unreadable.

Evan nodded.

“Mr Hansen, having feelings for someone is nothing to worry about.”

“I know!” Evan’s shoulders hunched a little as he spoke. “It’s not that...it’s who.”

Dr Peet remained quiet for a moment, looking Evan up and down. “Ah,” she sighed. “Dr Sherman mentioned something like this...”

Evan felt a pang of worry in his chest. “H-he...what?”

“He didn’t mention you specifically,” she said coolly. “Patient-doctor confidentiality and all that. He just said he was worried because he sensed one of the Patients had feelings for another. Relationship drama can cause problems under normal circumstances, so adding superpowers into the mix can be...a unique challenge.”

See, hissed the voice. Even she thinks this is a shit idea.
“If you don’t mind me asking,” she continued “who exactly do you like? Don’t feel like you have to answer. If you really want I can just pretend this never happened.”

Yeah, Evan thought. You can pretend this never happened, but what about me? He fiddled with his shirt again.

“You really don’t have to tell me if you don’t want to, Evan, truly.”

That caught him off guard.

Slowly, Evan looked up. “U-Um.”

Don’t tell her.

“It’s—”

DON’T YOU FUCKING DARE.

“—a g-guy.”

Dr Peet let out a small breath. “I see.” To Evan’s surprise, she actually smiled. “There’s nothing wrong with that.”

“I know there isn’t,” he said quickly. “I-I mean, I’m not homophobic or anything. I know it’s fine, it just...I dunno. I like girls.”

“You could like both.”

“B-But I don’t like guys.”

“You just told me you did.”

Evan ran a hand through his hair. “My arms says I do.”

“Which means that’s what you feel.”

“But—”

“But nothing.” Dr Peet crossed her arms. “Do your parents have anything against gay people?”

“No!” The word came out of Evan’s mouth a little too quickly.

Dr Peet fixed him with a long, hard, look.

“...My mom doesn’t.”

“And we all know what a wonderful person you father is,” she said with a roll of her eyes.

“I don’t think being gay is bad. And I’m not gay.”

“I’m not saying you are, I’m just saying what you’re saying. You have feelings for a boy, that doesn’t mean you’re gay. You could be bisexual, pansexual, whatever.” She waved a hand dismissively as she spoke. “That’s up to you. What I’m curious about is why you’re so frightened.”

“I—I’m not frightened! It’s just…” he trailed off.

“It’s just?”
Evan drew in a deep breath. “J-Just...just another thing that makes me a freak,” his voice was barely a whispered.

“Mr Hansen, you are anything but a freak.”

“I h-have flowers growing out of my arm!” he pointed out.

“You’re a Patient, a scientific phenomenon that has been observed for decades, maybe even longer. Did the Greeks think Hercules was a freak? What about Merlin, or King Arthur? They were considered heroes.”

“Yeah. But they’re not real.”

“Fifty years ago, Mr Hansen, people could have said the same thing about you.” She paused for a moment. “I know what you’re going through. You’re confused and everything tells you that what you are isn’t normal--”

“It’s not,” Evan said automatically. “And you don’t.”

“I’m Transgender.” She said it so casually that it hit Evan like a hard slap to his face. She said it like it was nothing.

“I…” Evan swallowed hard, trying to think of something to say. “You don’t look it.”

Dr Peet rolled her eyes. “Mr Hansen.”

“Y-Yeah?”

“This is one of those moments where you should say sorry. Never say something like that again.”

Evan’s stomach twisted. “Sorry.”

“Apology accepted.” She straightened her lab coat. “I’m not you. I don’t know exactly what you’re going through, but I do know something similar. When I was your age I hated what I am.” She gave a sour laugh. “God knows everyone else did too. I remember when I wore a skirt it felt like I’d broken a law. Is that what it’s like for you? Your feelings I mean. Unless you actually want to wear a skirt.

Evan laughed nervously. “Yeah. T-that’s how it feels, I mean. Like it’s not normal.”

“It is. Back in ancient Greece it was considered not normal for people to be straight.”

“This isn’t ancient Greece.”

“Why not?”

“I-I don’t know! Times change.”

Dr Peet sighed again. “Look, as much as I’d like to flick a switch and have you suddenly be okay with your feelings, I can’t. No one can. And that’s awful, but that’s the way things are and the best I can do is try to help you as best I can.” She let out a long, deep breath. “Do you want to be okay with your feelings?”

NO! Screamed the voice, and Evan clenched his jaw.

Shut up. Just shut up. “I do.”
Dr Peet’s expression softened. “My friend used to tell me ‘the first thought is society’s, the second thought is yours’” she snorted to herself “‘and fuck society’. What I ended up doing--and it took me a very long time, mind you--was shutting out the first thought. After a while it just went away. It took me up until recently, but it went away. Like I said, it’s not like a switch in your head. It’s hard, but it happens. Do you think you could do that for me?”

Evan hesitated.

No. No you can’t.

“I can try.”

“Good. That’s a start.”
Chapter 35

Chapter Notes

Sorry for another long break.

Also, 100,000 words. TTT is officially the longest story I've ever written! And I'm not even done.

Thank you, Levi for editing. As per usual.

TW: ...none? I think.

“Patients 427 through 447 please report to the cafeteria.”

Evan jumped, knocking his hand and running a line through his math work. He looked up and watched as a few of the other Patients got to their feet, leaving their work on the desk before heading out.

The announcements appeared without warning around 10 o’clock, asking Patients 302 through 320 to stop what they were doing and report downstairs.

No one had really spoken up about it. There were no weird looks and no soft murmurs. The Patients just left and came back some twenty minutes later as though nothing had happened.

They’re in trouble, said the voice at the back of his head. Someone did something wrong and you’re all in trouble because of it.

Evan swallowed hard and penciled in his next answer. They look fine.

Do they? The voice jeered. Do they really? Isn’t it a little suspect? If it was just some announcement they’d have called you all in at once. Why the groups?

In a way, it kind of reminded Evan of school picture day.

He turned his head, checking his reflection in the classroom window.

You look like shit. And why the fuck would they give a crap about school photos? The voice chided as he combed his fingers through his hair. One curl stood up at the side of his head, refusing to lay down.

Maybe it’s a morale thing? Like. Hey, don’t be sad, we have pictures.

Or maybe you’re all in trouble.

He clenched his jaw. One part of Evan knew that he could just ask Jared; there was little only one desk’s distance between them after all. But another knew exactly how Jared would react.

He’d laugh, that part said matter-of-factly. He’d laugh and call you stupid. Or, he’d laugh and make something up.
Evan’s arm throbbed and, just like that, his vision went black.

“I’m trying to work,” he hissed under his breath and the classroom came back into view. Thank you, he thought, rolling his eyes.

Darkness.

“O-Oh come on!”

From somewhere in the dark classroom Evan heard the teacher speak. “Are you alright, Mr Hansen?”

Evan could sense that everyone else was staring at him. “Uh. Yeah. S-sorry.”

“Back to work, Mr Hansen.”

Easier said than done.

For a good few minutes Evan sat there in darkness, waiting for Connor to get bored and give him back control over his eyes. But, he didn’t.

Something’s wrong, said the voice. A sudden twist of worry hit Evan’s gut. Something bad has happened.

Drawing in a small breath, Evan Reached Out and blinked away the darkness of the classroom.

Connor wasn’t in their bedroom like he’d expected. Instead, Evan was met with a desk and walls upon walls of bookshelves crammed to bursting. In front of Connor, face up on the table, was a simple note in his usual chicken-scratch scrawl.

‘Sorry. I’m bored. How are you?’

Evan huffed a laugh and Let Go of Connor’s sight. Looking down at his own notebook, he started to write. Once he was done, he Reached Out again and waited for Connor to read.


Again, Evan Let Go and waited for his sight to disappear.

This time, Connor had only written one word. ‘Sorry.’

‘It’s fine. Warn me next time.’

There was a long pause before the world went dark again.

‘Warning! You’re blind now.’

‘I hate you.’

‘Most smart people do.’

Evan’s stomach twisted. ‘Sorry,’ he wrote quickly.

‘Don’t be. It was a joke.’

Evan bit his lip. ‘Why don’t you come to class if you’re bored?’
‘Because,’ Connor wrote back. ‘I don’t hate myself that much.’

‘It’s not that bad. Bit tedious.’

There was another long pause.

‘Not the work. The people.’

Evan furrowed his brow and Let Go. Slowly, he turned in his chair. He’d seen some of the others stretch their back this way, by holding onto the back of their chair and twisting around. It was a pretty good way of getting answers from other people’s books without getting noticed. That, and surveying the scene.

The other Patients looked pretty normal to him. Some had moved their desks closer together so they could talk in hushed voices, others were just getting on with their work.

‘What’s wrong with them?’ Evan asked.

‘They stare at me. Talk about me.’ Connor drew a little cartoon gun at the end of the sentence. ‘Usual b.s.’ He was starting to run out of paper.

‘Why don’t you tell the truth?’

‘I did.’

Evan paused. ‘Will said,’ he hesitated before crossing it out and turning the page.

He’s lying to you, said the voice. Will said he didn’t deny it. He’s lying.

Will’s a murderer, Evan argued, and he’s not. I know he’s not.

Do you really though? It hissed. Do you?

Evan tapped his pen against the paper.

‘I heard you didn’t,’ he finally wrote in a tiny and uncertain scribble.

‘Zoe did.’

Evan groaned. He could practically hear The Voice laughing at him. ‘But YOU didn’t’

‘Wouldn’t’ve listened.’

‘You don’t know that!’

‘You’re all confident n’ shit when you write.’

That caught Evan by surprise. ‘Sorry.’

‘Nah. I like it.’

Evan’s heart skipped a beat and he mentally slapped himself. Stop it, he scolded silently before starting to write again.

‘Thanks,’ He drew a little smile before deciding it was far too cheesy and scribbling it out.

‘Ur welcome.’ Connor was really starting to run out of space now. ‘Tho u don’t tell truth either.’
Evan cocked his head. ‘?’

‘Fallin out tree.’

‘What do you mean?’

‘Kind of obvious.’

His heart sank. ‘I don’t want to talk about it.’

‘Tis ok. Don’t hav to.’

‘Thanks.’

‘Np.’

‘Can’t you just get a new page?’

There was another, very long pause before Connor replied again, this time on a fresh scrap of paper.

‘Curse you and your logic’ he wrote and Evan couldn’t help but smile.

‘You learn logic if you go to class.’

‘B OR I N G.’

Evan lifted his pen to write another reply, when the PA system crackled to life.

“Patients 447 through 467 please report to the cafeteria.”

Evan winced as thorns buried themselves in his arm. He reached out, expecting to see another note, but instead watched as Connor got--a little clumsily--to his feet.

Back in the classroom chairs scraped against the floor and Evan let his sight return. Only a handful of Patients were leaving this time round, none of who looked all that anxious or scared. In fact, if the grin plastered across Jared’s face was anything to go by, most of them actually seemed weirdly excited.

“You coming, Acorn?” Jared asked Evan, who nodded.


---

When he first walked into the cafeteria Evan couldn’t help but wonder if they were watching a film.

The tables were all pushed up against the back wall, making space for the rows of chairs set up at the front of the room. A man Evan didn’t recognise stood in the place of the projector screen. He wasn’t a doctor or nurse--his suit and tie made that obvious enough. He looked more like one of the characters from Men in Black , complete with an earpiece and shades. At least he wasn’t wearing them, instead choosing to keep them tucked in the breast pocket of his blazer.

“Hey.”

Evan jumped a bit as Connor sat down next to him. In the back row, naturally.
Jared beamed a wicked grin, pressing his hands against his face in mock-shock. “Behold! The cryptid has emerged!”

Connor rolled his eyes. “Only ‘cause he has to, asshole.” He crossed his arms and leaned back in his chair to make it squeak.

“No one’s forcing you,” Jared pointed out, earning another eyeroll.

Connor said nothing. Rather, he looked to the front of the room, then to the sides before turning his head to look behind him, all the while bouncing his knee and looking more than a little bit crazy.

Evan cleared his throat. “W-w-why…” he paused and tried again. “What’s this about.”

Jared shrugged. “Probably just pot.”

“...huh?”

“You know.” Jared waved his hand dismissively. “Pot.”

“No...no, I don’t.”

He’s fucking with you, said the back of his head. Bullshitting. Trying to make you look stupid.

Evan turned to Connor, hoping for some kind of confirmation or quip, but he just kept bouncing his knee.

“Okay,” Jared continued. “Someone has to have told you about pot. You can’t have lived here for this long without hearing about pot.”

Look at his grin! Definitely screwing with you.

Evan forced his mouth into a hard, straight line. “Right. Y-yeah. Pot.” No Mary Jane, he added to himself. It didn’t make him laugh per say, or even lighten his mood all that much, but it helped. At least, he hoped it helped.

The man stepped away from the wall and the room fell silent.

“I know most of you will want to be going back to class so I’ll keep this quick.” The man’s voice was so loud that Evan had to squint to make sure he wasn’t wearing some kind of microphone. “My name is Parchman, for those of you who don’t know, and I’ll be staying with you for the next month or so.”

“Great,” Connor hissed under his breath.

“I’m thrilled that I was the one chosen to help observe you through this important time. Yet again.” Parchman’s voice—while loud—fell flat, and even with a good view of his face Evan couldn’t entirely tell if he was being sincere or not. “At the end of this assembly you’ll each be given your new timetable to start tomorrow. I don’t want to have to run after any of you so get all your questions out of the way today, do you understand?”

There was a small murmur from the crowd before him.

“Good. I wish you all the best results.”

Results. The word made thorns dig into Evan’s arm. Results implied tests, and tests implied a chance at failure.
You’re fucked, hissed the voice, and Evan agreed.

Parchman rubbed the back of his bald head and grunted. “Good,” He said again. “Now,” he waved a hand towards the cafeteria door. “Report to Nurse Stybi when you hear your number called to get your new time table. I don’t want any of you trying to sneak off.” His eyes fixed on Connor as he spoke. “Like I said, this is very important, for all of you.”

That seemed to be it, as after a moment’s silence a nurse moved over to the door with a large stack of papers tucked under her arm. “Patient 427,” she called, causing a scraping of chairs as a boy stood up in the third row--the taller boy from service.

He really has been here a while, Evan thought, watching him.

“Do you really not know?” Connor asked, his voice barely a whisper.

Evan’s shoulders hunched. “I-I know.”

Connor scoffed. “Bullshit, Hansen.” He tucked a long strand of hair behind his ear.

“Patient 428.” A girl stood up this time.

“You know those dumb tests schools make you take?”

“W-Which ones?”

That made Connor smile. “The ones that pretend to know what you should do when you leave school. Aptitude, you know?”

“Oh. Uh. Yeah.” Evan’s hands went to the hem of his shirt. “I got a bunch of random stuff.”

“I did too. I think they just give everyone the same list.” Connor glanced at the nurse over his shoulder. “So, this is kind of like that. They see who’s strongest, fastest and smartest and decide where to put them. If you’re smart they make you a scientist or something like that, and if you’re strong they send you to fight somewhere.” He met Evan’s eye, a crooked smile tugging at the corner of his mouth. “If you’re stupid they make you work here,” he said, nodding to where Dr Sherman was sat with a few other members of staff.

“Hey!” Evan fought off a little chuckle. “That’s mean.”

“But you know it’s true--”

“Four-Six-Five!” Parchman’s voice shook through the room. “Has your name been called?”

To the side of him, Evan heard Jared snigger. “You’re in troooouble,” he murmured childishly.

Connor, meanwhile, didn’t even look up at Parchman. “Yeah. Just now.”

The man in black’s grey face flushed an odd shade of pink. “I see your behaviour hasn’t changed much in a year.”

Connor said nothing, but Evan could feel the anger starting to bubble in his gut. The slice of brown in his iris spread until it took up one of his eyes.

Parchman hummed and raised his eyebrows at nurse Stybi. “They used to teach Patients to speak when spoken to.” He gave her a nod and the number calling resumed.
As the nurse spoke, Evan closed his eyes and smothered the rage with a handful of leaves.

Again, Connor still didn’t speak, but he turned to Evan, his lips moving in an exaggerated ‘asshole’.

_He’s talking about you_, said the voice, but Evan ignored it.

One by one the numbers were called until only he, Zoe and Connor were left, then just him and Zoe, then no one else.

The nurse didn’t bother to read his name. Instead, she walked right over and handed him a yellow slip of cardstock paper.

_Patient Observation Test_
He’d failed.

Evan’s stomach twisted itself into knots, his hands balled into tight fists as he fixed his eyes on Parchman. He could feel his nails digging into his skin, blood gathering in the creases of his palms.

Weirdly enough, it didn’t hurt.

Parchman just shook his head.

“No good.” His voice sounded far off over the blood roaring in Evan’s ears and the quick and heavy thudding of his heart echoing around his head.

He scratched his chin, looking completely unfazed by the look of pure and utter terror on the young Patient’s face.

“No good,” he repeated.

He was a tall man--too tall-- looming over Evan like a monster over prey.

Evan tried to open his mouth to say something--anything--but his jaw felt locked shut.

He looked around desperately for Connor--or rather, he tried to look around.

His neck was frozen in place.

He was stuck.

“He didn’t even try,” said someone outside his line of sight.

_I did!_

Evan wanted to scream, but his voice stayed trapped in his throat.

_I did! Why won’t you listen to me??_

“What did you expect? They should have gotten rid of him the moment he got here,” said someone else.

Evan tried to Reach Out, searching in vain for Connor.

He felt nothing.
The air around him was swampy and thick, pushing down on his mind from all angles to keep himself in his own head. It was as though someone had tied his hands behind his back. He couldn’t reach anything.

“They should have,” Parchman agreed. He walked closer to Evan so they were practically nose to nose. His eyes narrowed. “Don’t you think so, freak?”

Evan clenched his jaw harder and harder until he felt something crack—no! Shatter.

He opened his mouth and moved his hand to his lips, sucking in a wheezing gasp as his fingers came away bloody. He coughed and small, sharp chips fell into his palm.

Teeth. Pieces of teeth.

His jaw ached and ached and it took Evan a second to realise he wasn’t healing.

Instead, the blood trickled down his throat and the corners of his mouth. No one cared.

With shaking hands he reached his fingers into his mouth and started pulling out the loose and cracked teeth, gagging on thick clots of blood.

And then, his eyes opened.

His quilt was crushing him, the fabric damp with a thick layer of ice-cold sweat.

*Just a dream,* Evan thought as he smothered the fire of anger and fear boiling away in his gut.

It was almost a subconscious effort at this point.

He heard Connor thrashing about and calmed him as well, trying to gather his nerves back.

“W-was that one of yours?” He asked once Connor was back to normal.

“If it was, it wasn’t a recurring one,” Connor replied breathlessly. “Besides, there’s no way in hell your brain could’ve come up with that.”

Evan swallowed hard, trying to bring moisture back to his mouth. “Y-Yeah. Maybe.” He kicked off his quilt, thankful that he no longer had to deal with the straps. “D-did that book say anything about dreaming about teeth?”

“That book was bullshit, Hansen.” Connor shifted a little—well, as much as he could given the graphene. “Dreams are just really freaky bullshit.”

Evan raised an eyebrow before realising Connor couldn’t see it in the dark. “T-then why did we dream about the test.”

“I dunno! Cause one of us was thinking about it?”

“So, it’s not just random bullshit.”

Connor groaned. “It’s too late for this.”

“I-I think it’s actually too early.”

“Probably.”
Evan wished their room had a clock, or at least something to help him tell the time. He hesitated before slowly getting out of bed.

“What are you doing?” Connor asked.

“Opening the blinds.” Back at home, he’d just had to pull on the right string, but The Ward was different. Instead of having strings to pull, the blind just had a long stick you were supposed to twist to get them open.

Evan fumbled with the stick until the blinds finally opened, taking care to not accidently knock Lucky off the windowsill.

It was still dark, but Evan couldn’t make out the moon, no matter how much he twisted his head. “I think it’s behind us. The moon, I mean.”

“Is that all you wanted to do?”

“Means it’s morning.”

“No shit, it’s morning!”

Evan turned to face Connor, frowning slightly. He looked a little pale in the low light, his hair a tangled mess framing his face.

“Are…are you okay?” Evan asked quietly.

Connor shifted again.

“Yeah, Hansen, I’m perfectly fine,” he scowled.

The horror of the dream was starting to set in.

What if they actually do that to you? Muttered the voice.

They won’t! Evan rationalized. They can’t let us get hurt.

Tell that to Will.

Evan rolled the hem of his shirt between his fingers. He looked to Connor again.

Don’t, said the back of his head. That’s a shit idea. He’s going to think you’re a goddamn freak.

Evan looked down at the floor.

“You just going to stand there?” Connor asked.

“Um. Yeah—I mean.” Evan winced. “Just…u-um.”

Don’t, hissed the voice as Evan took a small step forward.

Don’t you fucking dare.

Evan kept walking, passed his bed and around to Connor’s.

“What are you doing?”

He didn’t reply, just knelt beside Connor’s bed and started undoing the clamps.
He threw the free straps over the other side of the bed, holding his breath each time they thumped against the floor.

“B-Better?” He asked as Connor sat up.

“A bit.”

Evan paused again before getting up and sitting on the very edge of Connor’s bed. “I’m sorry.”

“For what?”

“For the dream.” Thorns pricked against his skin. “It was mine. I mean. I-I’m pretty sure it was mine —“

“It wasn’t yours.”

“How do you know that?”

“I just do, Hansen!”

“W-well I just know it’s mine, M-Murphy!”

There was a long pause, and then Connor snorted.

“Was that your attempt at being intimidating?”

Evan crossed his arms. “N-no. I’m just trying to make a point.”

“Yeah, and here’s mine: the last time we shared a dream it was mine, therefore this one is mine too so don’t freak out about it.”

“I’m not freaking out about it!”

“Bullshit, Hansen!”

“Maybe it was both.”

Both boys jumped with surprise at the sound of Lucky’s voice.

“H-huh?” Evan asked, turning to face the plant.

“Humans do not always make everything on their own,” they pointed out.

Connor raised an eyebrow. “Do you even know what we’re talking about? Plants don’t dream.”

“You do not know that.”

“Do plants dream then?”

“We do not—“

“Ha!” Connor crossed his arms.

Evan bit his lip. “They could be right. I-I mean...it makes sense.”

Connor groaned. “You’re ganging up on me, Hansen. It’s too late for this shit—early, Whatever!”

He flopped back onto his pillow.
There was a long pause.

“S-sorry.”

Connor groaned again. “Jesus, Hansen, I swear to God.” He gave a small chuckle and Evan’s heart skipped a beat.

“I-I mean,” he started before cutting himself off.

“You want to say sorry again, right?”

Evan nodded.

“And people say I have issues.” Connor ran a hand through his hair. “Can I do something weird real quick?”

Evan raised an eyebrow.

“Don’t look at me like that! I just want to test something.” Connor propped himself up on one elbow.

“You can kind of control my emotions, right?”

Evan shrugged.

“You can talk, you know.”

“I know. Sorry. But, I-I mean, I can kind of control them. Like, I can stop you from hulking out.”

“So maybe I can stop you from freaking out.”

“Uh…” Evan furrowed his brow. He glanced down at his arm, his skin raw and covered in a light blanket of thorns. “I-I’m not sure that’s how it works…”

Connor kicked off his quilt and sat up properly. “Worth a shot, right? I’ve got this theory—“

“You sound like Dr Sherman—“

“Fuck you, just hear me out.” He pressed his fist against his palm. “You gotta close your eyes,” he cringed. “That sounded less creepy in my head.”

Evan felt a pang of something in his gut. It was similar to Connor’s usual brand of anger, but a little different. Not as bright or burning, but instead like a fizzle of nervous embers. He made a mental note to keep an eye on them, just in case.

“So how does this work?” He asked.

“Well, like, anger is assertive in a way? Like in the right amount, that’s the issue with mine.” Connor managed to crack one of his knuckles. “You suppress my anger right? So I just flare up yours a bit—not a lot. Just enough to make you less…” he waved his hands in a vague gesture.

“Less me?”

“Yeah, but in a good way…” Connor winced. “Fuck, I’m being stupid.”

“N-no, no you’re not. It makes sense for the connection to go both ways. Besides…worse comes to it I-I can stop us from going Two-eyed.”
“Yeah, well. Hopefully I won’t fuck up that badly.” Connor budged up, crossing his legs to give Evan enough room to sit across from him. “Do you want to try it?”

Evan’s stomach twisted. “R-right now?”

“No, next week. Yeah, right now.”

“Ah. Right.”

Connor’s expressions softened. “You don’t have to.”

“N-no, no. I want to try it.” Naturally, Evan was nervous about having someone mess with his head, especially someone with powers like Connor’s. On the other hand, however, he’d be lying if he said the idea of less anxiety didn’t sound appealing.

“Cool,” Connor nodded his head. “So, uh, close your eyes?” He didn’t sound all that certain himself.

“W-Why?”

“Cause I’m going to...What’d you call it? Reaching Out, right. I’m gonna do that, so you’re going to be blind anyway.”

“O-oh, right.” Made sense.

Evan closed his eyes as asked and waited.

His stomach was twisting itself into knots, but not in the same way it usually did when he and Connor went Two-eyed.

There was no fire, just a flutter of butterflies.

He felt the mattress shift beneath him as Connor moved a little and then…

Evan’s eyes snapped open.

He could see perfectly fine.

Connor was kissing him.

Evan’s heart skipped a beat, but for once it didn’t scare him.

And then, just like that, Connor pulled back and Evan’s arm prickled with thorns and his skipping heart became a hard and heavy thud and the voice was screaming and—

“Sorry,” Connor said, short and sharp.

Evan tried to force his mouth to move. “F-f—“ he swallowed hard “—for what?”

“For tricking you...I guess.” Connor shook his head. “I saw the roses ages ago and...I dunno, freaked out? But kind of in a good way?” He was starting to ramble.“Cause I’m not an idiot, I know what they mean.”

Evan knew that if this was a movie, he would have just shut Connor up with a kiss there and then. The music would have swelled and it would have been very smooth and romantic.

Part of him really, truly wanted to, but he knew wasn’t smooth and romantic, and this wasn’t a
Connor pulled at his own hair. “Fuck, I’m so fucking stupid.”

“No, no! You’re not! I-I mean….” Thorns dug into Evan’s arm and he winced. He looked down, expecting to see the usual thicket of Christmas roses and vines, but he didn’t. “U-Um.” He awkwardly stuck out his arm. “T-Tulips,” he spat out.

Connor’s eyes narrowed, but Evan found his voice again before he could speak.

“R-Red tulips,” he said again, pointing to the flowers blooming around his wrist. “De--”

*Don’t. This is stupid. You’re being stupid. Shut up. Shut the fuck up.*

“D-Declaration of love.” Evan pointed to another flower, this time nestled into the crook of his arm.

“Am...Ambrosia: your love is reciprocated--” and another, between the veins under his hand “--Jonquil: affection returned--” and finally “--red roses...but....um...you know what those mean.” he trailed off, scanning Connor’s face for any kind of reaction or sign that he didn’t completely hate his guts.

A moment passed.

“Now what do we do?” Connor asked slowly.

He definitely hates you, said the voice matter-of-factly.

“Huh?” Evan stuttered.

“What do we do?” Connor repeated.

“Movies usually cut away at this part.”

Evan laughed--well, it was really more of a nervous giggle. “R-Right...um...” He thought for a second before edging forward and awkwardly wrapping his arms around Connor.

“What are you doing?”

“Hugging.”

Connor snorted. “Adorable.” He put his arms round Evan’s waist. “…Are you shaking?”

“A-a bit. Sorry.”

“Don’t be.”

Another moment passed.

“Your thorn’s are digging into my back.”

Evan let his arms drop to his sides. “Sorry.”

“It’s fine...should we lay down or something?”

“Uh...yeah.”

Connor let go of him and lay down, not getting under the covers.
Evan didn’t either, mostly because he felt too awkward to.

It took a little bit of shifting around the small bed for them to both be comfortable, but eventually, they settled on a big-spoon-little-spoon with Connor’s arms around Evan once again.

It wasn’t exactly comfortable, but it worked.

At least for a while.

“Hey, Hansen.”

“Yeah?”

“My arm’s asleep.”

“Your elbow’s digging into my ribs.”

Connor chuckled quietly.

“We’re really shit at this, huh?”

Evan hummed in agreement and rolled out of Connor’s arms, clutching onto the mattress to keep himself from falling straight onto the floor.

He lay on his side, and Connor did the same.

Hesitantly, he reached out and took Connor’s hand, holding it lightly.

“C-Comfy?” he asked quietly.

“Yeah.”

Evan’s eyes had adjusted to the dark just enough to see the little half-smile on Connor’s lips.

Slowly, Evan closed his eyes and kept a soft grip on Connor’s hand.

His arm still hurt–it always did–but it felt a little more manageable somehow.

He didn’t know exactly how long he lay there, but eventually he heard Connor’s breaths become deeper and slower as he dozed off.

Freak, the voice in the back of his head sent a shiver down Evan’s spine. Why now?

He likes me back, Evan thought to himself. He doesn’t hate me.

Doesn’t make you any less of a freak. You’re in his bed. Do you have any idea how bad this looks? What if a nurse comes in to check on you? What if they see? Sherman already knows you like him so it’s just a matter of time before he figures out what happened.

Dr Peet said it was okay.

I’m not talking about Dr Peet. I’m talking about everyone else. Besides, if she found out you and him were together you’d be fucked. It’s Connor fucking Murphy. Being in a relationship with superpowers causes problems, fuck knows he doesn’t need any more. What about when you break up? You’ll be stuck sharing a room, sharing a fucking mind.

Evan screwed his eyes shut. Shut up. Please. Let me be happy.
You don’t deserve to be happy! What if David or mom finds out? How ashamed they’d be to find out their son’s a fag.

He clenched his jaw. It’s okay. It’s normal.

Oh yeah, so is growing plants out your arm. Look at where you are, you’re a freak! A disgusting freak.

Evan winced as the thorns flared up again. Stop it. Let me sleep.

The sooner you sleep the sooner everyone finds out.

His stomach dropped. I’m not going to tell anyone.

Word travels fast right? And Connor will.

No, he won’t.

What if he does? Everyone will find out and know you’re even more of a freak. Maybe you should just bite the bullet and tell everyone everything; about David, and about Connor, and how you actually fell. You think they hate you now? Just you wait.

Connor likes me.

Freaks stick together. Well, until he figures out what you’re really like and breaks up with you—

Evan’s heart skipped a beat as Connor rolled onto his back. He held his breath, waiting for the other boy to sit up or say something, but he didn’t. Connor didn’t even let go of his hand.

Still asleep.

Before the voice had the chance to speak again, Evan Reached Out, and gripped tightly onto Connor, letting a heavy sleep take him.
Chapter 37

Chapter Notes

Sorry it's shoooort.

I'm *finally* finished with school. (Well. Mostly. I've got an exam in two weeks but that's it.) So I'm going to try and stick to a weekly schedule again.

Thank you, Levi, for the edit.

TW: Internalised Homophobia/biphobia, references to suicide.

There was no moment of peace when Evan woke up the next morning. No confusion, or relaxation, or pillow talk. Just pure, ice-cold panic.

He let go of Connor’s hand and sat up, holding his breath as he waited for Connor to wake up. He didn’t though, instead Connor just kept dozing. He actually looked calm, even cute.

Evan wasn’t calm, nor did he feel very cute. He felt like he always did, like the human embodiment of an implosion.

_The nurse will be here soon, _said the voice. _Get up._

Evan did, being careful not to wake Connor.

_The straps, _it hissed. _They’ll get suspicious if he’s not wearing them._

Evan bit his lip and fumbled with his shirt. _Connor will wake up, _he thought.

_But if you don’t, the nurse will find out and then you’re both screwed._

He clenched his jaw and drew in a deep breath through his teeth. His feet felt glued to the floor.

_Connor will hate you if you do. The nurses will hate you if you don’t, _said the voice.

The door clicked open behind him.

Thorns buried themselves into Evan’s arm as he whirled around. His mind was a blur of excuses, none of which made any sense.

“Oh,” the nurse said, giving a small smile. “You’re already up.”


The nurse shook his head. “Early bird catches the worm.” He leaned slightly to the side so he could see behind Evan. “Didn’t expect to see you up.”

Evan’s brows furrowed and he turned around again to see Connor sitting up, his arms stretched above his head in a heavy yawn.
“Hansen helped me up,” he said casually. “I needed the bathroom.”

“Mm-hm.” The nurse stepped forward a little, still with that smile on his face. “That’s nice of you, Evan. But I think it would be better for you to wait for me to get here next time. Unless you really can’t hold it. Better safe than sorry, right?”

“U-Um. Yeah. Sorry.”

“It’s all good. Breakfast in ten, don’t be late.” And with that, he left.

Evan let out a long sigh of relief. “S-sorry,” he said as Connor got to his feet.

Connor just grunted and rubbed his eyes. He didn’t look angry, but he didn’t look happy either. Evan studied his face, his stomach twisting with nerves.

“We…” Connor’s voice thought through his thoughts. “We shouldn’t tell anyone about….” he gestured vaguely between the two of them.

About what? Evan asked silently. About us? What was there even to tell? What were they? Were they dating? The thought made Evan’s heart skip a beat. “Yeah,” he said aloud.

“It would just make trouble.”

“D-Definitely.”

The two of them just stood there for a moment until Evan’s mouth opened into an awkward and uneasy smile. “T-This is really weird,” he said.

“Oh yeah.” Connor rubbed the back of his neck. “Really fucking weird.”

“Good weird?”

“Good weird.”

“B-But still weird.”

Connor nodded, paused. “I wasn’t lying before. I actually need the bathroom.”

Evan snorted. “Right. Sorry.”

---

Evan couldn’t help but be surprised at how normal everything felt.

He still ate the same food, in the same spot, with the same people. The only difference was that instead of sitting across from him, Connor got in early and took the Jared’s usual seat next to him.

“You’re in my seat, asshole,” Jared said when he arrived at their table.

Connor didn’t say anything, just pushed his eggs around his plate.

“Hey,” Jared kicked the leg of Connor’s chair. “You’re in my seat.”

“Finders, keepers,” Connor said, shoving a forkful of food into his mouth.

Evan winced and waited for Jared to say something, but instead the other boy just sighed and plonked himself down in the seat across from him and slammed his breakfast tray down on the table.
It would have probably been very melodramatic if only Jared had managed to not knock over his orange juice in the process.

On any other day once breakfast had ended Evan would have headed to class. It had become an almost automatic movement at this point. Eat. Go to class. Eat. Go to therapy. Eat. Go to bed. But now, he watched as Parchman walked—or rather, stalked—to the front of the cafeteria, his hands tucked neatly into the pockets of his suit pants.

He looked exactly the same as he had the day before. Too tall, and too bumpy, like he was a sculpture that hadn’t been cured properly.

“You’ll be starting testing today,” Parchman boomed. “Report to your requested rooms within the next ten minutes. Lateness will not be tolerated.” He paused, eyes scanning across the crowd of children. “Patients Four-Six-Five and Four-Six-Seven will stay here. I need a word.”

Evan’s stomach dropped like a stone. Snippets of his dream flashed before his eyes.


Out the corner of his vision, Evan saw Alana and Zoe share a look before glancing at Connor, then at him.

He wanted to scream.

Connor didn’t seem all that bothered, or if he was he was doing a very good job at hiding it. He just kept playing with his food.

Gradually, the cafeteria started to empty. Jared was the last to leave, making a big deal of scrubbing at the slightly sticky table with a paper napkin before he did.

Evan had expected Parchman to come over and sit with them, or at least stand by their table to talk. But he didn’t. Instead he just stayed at the front of the room, not saying anything and occasionally checking his watch.

“Are you two almost done?” he asked after a while, his sharp eyes glaring at them.

“Oh, Uh.” Evan’s chair scraped against the floor as he scrambled up. “Yeah. Sorry.”

Connor just kept on playing with his food.

Parchman’s eyes narrowed into thin slits. “Four-Six-Five,” he said, his voice low. “Stop wasting my time.”

Connor didn’t look up, but dropped his fork onto his plate with a loud clang. He got up, leaving his tray and cutlery where it was. “What is it?” he asked, hands in his pockets.

“I’d prefer not to yell it across the room.”

“Then why don’t you come over here?”

Evan felt thorns dig sharply into his arm. Quick as a flash he grabbed Connor’s wrist and gave it a quick tug, pulling him towards the front of the room.

Parchman let out a small huff, though Evan couldn’t tell if it was a laugh or just some bull-like display of pure anger. “Good to see at least one of you knows how to behave.”
Connor’s left eye flashed brown. “What do you want?” he asked, pulling his arm out of Evan’s hold.

Parchman’s mouth became a hard line. “Four-Two-Nine told me about your attempt,” he said bluntly, “and its...results.” He looked to Evan. “Because of the link you share we’ve decided you’ll both be graded as a set.”

“A set?” Evan echoed.

“Yes. We’ve only had a few cases of powers like yours. You should be honoured.” Parchman didn’t sound very enthusiastic. “That’s all.”

Connor crossed his arms. “That’s it?”

“Yes.”

“You made a huge fuss just for that?”

“If I remember correctly, Four-Six-Five, you were the one who refused to follow orders. Besides, I wouldn’t call this unimportant. We’re down one Patient because of your attempt, so we might as well work with what we have.”

Evan felt as though someone had shoved a torch against his stomach. He turned and quickly put his hand on Connor’s shoulder, smothering the rage that had exploded to life within his chest. “It’s okay,” Evan murmured softly, taking care not to allow a single stutter.

Parchman smiled. His smile was not unlike Connor’s, small and with only half his mouth. “I heard you’d managed to get yourself neutered, but I didn’t think it would be this effective.”

Connor’s fingers dug into his arms and he hugged himself tighter. “Is that it?” he said through gritted teeth.

“Yes. That’s all.” Parchman waved his hand. “You can go now.”

Evan forced himself to smiled, once again grabbing Connor’s arm and pulling him out into the hall.

The moment he let go of Connor, it was as though someone had sprung a trap. He swung his fists, hitting the hallway wall hard, cracking some of the plaster. He slammed his fist against it again and again. “Fuck. That. Asshole.” He said with each hit.

Evan just stood there, flinching with every loud bang! “The nurses are going to be--” he winced as Connor hit the wall again “--really mad.”

Connor drew his hands to his sides. Sage dusted his knuckles. “Fuck ‘em,” he said sharply before turning to head down the hall.

“W-Where are you going?” Evan called after him.

Connor said nothing. He just kept walking.

“W-We have to go to the--”

“Fuck the test!” Connor kept walking.

*He’s mad at you*, hissed the voice.

Even though Evan knew it was lying, the thought still made him hesitate. One foot frozen in a half-
step. He drew in a deep breath before taking one step forward, then another, he hurried down the hall after Connor.

“He’s just going to get madder if you don’t turn up,” he said, watching Connor jam his finger against the elevator button.

“Don’t care,” Connor said, hitting the button again. He looked up, watching the floor numbers start to slowly tick down.

“H-He--”

*There’s nothing you can do,* said the voice. *Just leave him. You’ve just going to make things worse. You always make things worse.*

“He wants to wind you up. H-He wanted to try and set you off.” Evan furrowed his brow. “Don’t let him get you worked up.”

Connor looked at him, his expression dark. “Do you think I *want* to be pissed off?!?” he asked. “You think I *want* to act like a goddamn freak.”

Evan’s stomach twisted itself into a tight knot, but he tried to focus on Connor. He pictured the raging fire burning away inside him in his mind’s eye. Imagined thick arms of flame bottletree leaves surrounding the flames, laying themselves on top of it. “N-No,” he said quickly. “I don’t. But...but I think Parchman does.”

Connor wrinkled his nose. “He’s an asshole.”

“He is.” Evan hesitated. “He’s like my dad.”

“At least your dad pretended to be nice.”

“Yeah...I guess....”

There was a small pause in which Connor let his hand fall away from the elevator button, his shoulders dropping in a long and heavy hiss of air between his teeth. His fingers found Evan’s, holding them tightly.

“What floor do we have to be on?” he asked and Evan gave a sigh of relief.

“It’s outside,” he replied, gesturing over his shoulder with his thumb. “You’re...not going back upstairs?”

“And get to see that dickhead’s smug face as I’m dragged outside again? Fat fucking chance, Hansen.” Connor ran a hand through his hair, catching on a few knots. “Outside. So we’ve got the physical shit first, great.” He turned and started to walk down the hall again as the elevator doors opened.

Evan hesitated a moment, wondering if his should try and worm his fingers out from Connor’s grasp. The other Patients would all be outside by now, but the staff would definitely still be nosing around. He expected Connor to let go, but he didn’t. Instead, he kept a firm, but still comfortable, grip and pulled him along.

“I think I know where it is,” Connor continued speaking. “Come on. I’ll show you.”

They kept walking past the cafeteria, the large double-doors leading inside still open. Out the corner
of his eye, Evan saw that Parchman was still there, one finger pressed his earpiece.

_He saw you._
Chapter 38

Chapter Notes


School is finished for the year! But I'm going to England for two months so my internet might be a little sketchy. Still. I'll update as much as I can.

Thank you, Levi for editing.

TW: Medical Procedures, Needles, Emotional Abuse, Internalised Homophobia, Prejudice

It had become a routine for their evenings now for Evan and Connor to just lay down together for a bit. Connor had his head on Evan’s chest, an open copy of *The Amazing Spider-Man #78: Night of the Prowler!* in hand. He’d been on the same page for a while now, rereading the same speech bubble over and over again.

“What’s wrong?” he asked suddenly.

“Huh?” Evan looked away from the ceiling to glance at Connor.

“I can hear your heart. You’re freaking out,” Connor explained, finally turning the page.

“I-I’m not,” Evan said quickly. “I’m fine.” Thorns dug into his wrist.

Connor raised an eyebrow. He put down the comic and sat up, swinging his legs over the side of Evan’s cot. “Seriously, Hansen.”

“I’m fine.”

“Bullshit.”

Evan looked up at the ceiling again. “I was just...thinking.”

“What?"?

“About?”

“What do you think?”

Connor sighed. “P.O.T.?" He twisted his lip as he said it.

“Y-Yeah.” In truth, Evan didn’t know why he was so worried, granted he never really did. So far the tests had proved kind of boring and consisted mostly on physical stuff. Height, weight, running speed, stamina and the like. Usually, his results would have been okay at best, but since his and Connor’s were put together as an average they balanced each other out quite well.

But for some reason, he couldn’t shake the unease and dread that had made its home in his stomach. Again and again, the thought prodded at his brain;

*He. Saw. You.*
He could picture it clear as day: Parchman calling them to the side again and asking what was going on, figuring it out. What would he do? Would he separate them? Possibly. Call them out for being freaks? Definitely. Tell everyone?

The idea made him feel physically sick. What if David found out? What if his mom found out? He could deal with his dad thinking he was a freak, but his mom?

Evan drew in a deep breath. “S-Sorry.”

“It’s fine. Hansen. Just...I dunno, try...” Connor rubbed the back of his neck. “Breathing deeply?”

“I am!”

He saw you. Both of you, hissed the voice at the back of his head. You’re fucked. It’s only a matter of time.

“Is it Parchman?”

Evan’s stomach twisted and he met Connor’s eye. Half brown. Half blue. “I thought you said you couldn’t read my mind.”

“I can’t. I’m just not stupid. That guy’s an asshole.” Connor wrinkled his nose.

Evan hesitated, racking his brain for something to change the subject. “W...why is he so...?”

“Why does he hate me?” Connor finished.

“I...I don’t think he hates you...”

“He hates everyone, Hansen. Period.” Connor closed the comic, resting it on his lap. “Everyone whose name begins with a number, at least.”

“Why does he work with Patients then?” Evan asked.

Connor shrugged. “You know those teachers who hate kids and only started teaching for the money?”

“There...there isn’t much money in teaching--”

“Which is why they hate kids! Anyway, I’m pretty sure he’s like that.” Connor’s eyes flicked up to the ceiling. “Doesn’t help that I kinda broke his nose.”

Evan’s eyes widened. “What??”

“My powers hadn’t Settled when they were doing testing last year but he was really fucking insistent that I take part. He just kept pushing me and I...snapped. They got me off him pretty quick, but his nose was smashed. So...yeah...”

Evan hesitated. “What happened next?”

“I woke up, like, a week later. The test was over by then, but apparently, Dr Sherman argued my case enough for me to not get sent the Basement. So.” He shrugged.

“Jesus...”

“You’re scared of me now, aren’t you?” Connor asked, peeking up at him.
Evan shook his head. “No...I’m more scared of Parchman now.”

Connor huffed a laugh. “You and everyone else.” Suddenly, he paused. Connor sat up. His gaze turned to the bedroom door. Nurses’ footsteps were pretty easy to recognise once you got the hang of it. While a majority of the Patients wore trainers, the nurses wore odd slippers to muffle their footsteps. When Evan had managed to finally pluck up enough courage to ask one of them why, they’d said it was to stop them from making loud noises when they ran, in case loud noises triggered any of the Patients.

This raised one, huge, question: why the hell would they have to run?

Connor jumped off the bed, grabbed his issue of *The Amazing Spider-Man #78* and plonked himself down on his own bed just in time for the nurse to open the door.

“Oh, great. You’re still awake.” He smiled, his voice just a little too chipper. “Agent Parchman wants you.

The two boys exchanged looks and Evan felt a large thorn dig into the area between his thumb and forefinger.

“It’s almost lights out.” Connor pointed out.

“He was very insistent. I need you both to follow me.”

---

As the elevator climbed upwards Evan tried to focus on controlling his breathing. What was so important that it couldn’t wait until morning?

*You’re screwed* hissed the voice. *They’re going to take you to the basement.*

Logically, Evan knew that wasn’t likely. For one, they were heading to the upper floors. But still, he couldn’t shake the deep-rooted fear that had nestled itself in his guts. He looked to Connor, hoping for some kind of comfort.

Connor’s face was contorted into a deep frown, his brows furrowed into tight wrinkles. He didn’t look nervous, per se. Evan couldn’t tell exactly what he was. His eyes were mostly brown, but that was to be expected, and he didn’t seem all that angry. Maybe, just curious? He wasn’t sure.

The elevator lurched for a moment, the cables screeching as they came to a lurching stop on the eleventh floor.

“You know what room, right?” The nurse asked Connor, who nodded.

“I’ve got a loose idea.” He stepped out of the elevator and Evan hurried out after him.

Down the hall, Evan saw Dr Sherman stood outside room 119. His shoulders were hunched over and his thumb was pressed against his lips as he chewed at his nail.

“Oh. You’re here,” he said, looking up. “Good. I’m sorry, I did tell him to wait until tomorrow but....” Dr Sherman laughed uneasily. “He doesn’t really listen to me...uh...” He shook his head. “This won’t take long. I don’t think it will take long, anyway...yeah, it won’t take long.”

Evan blinked dumbly. “Are....are you, alright?” he asked slowly.

“Hm? Yeah. Yeah. I’m fine. Testing’s always a busy time. Busy, busy.” Dr Sherman smiled,
gesturing to the door. “I told him to wait until tomorrow...but...” he repeated, slowly trailing off. He pulled open the door and stepped inside.

Evan looked to Connor, his brows raised in a silent question: *What’s wrong with him?*

Connor shrugged. *No idea.*

“You both took your time,” Parchman said once they stepped inside.

“We were sleeping,” Connor lied.

Parchman said nothing to that, just walked over to the window leading into the padded cell.

Connor kept talking. “We’ve already tested this bullshit. He can calm me down. Case closed. I’m going to bed.”

Thorns dug into Evan’s arm as he watched slowly Parchman turn back to them. He’d expected a scowl, something angry, but Parchman’s expression was smooth and unreadable.

“You’re not going anywhere,” he said bluntly. “And that’s not what we’re testing.” He slipped his hands into the pockets of his suit. A sly and barely noticeable smile tugging at the edge of his lip. “I want to see if you can calm him down.” He nodded to Evan.

“...H-huh?” Evan tried to ignore the thorns digging into his arm.

“From what I’ve read you share your powers, correct? You can both heal, you can both turn into monsters--”

“Two-eyed,” Dr Sherman corrected under his breath.

“We know that Patient Four-Six-Seven can stop one of your meltdowns, but we don’t know if you can stop the same thing from occurring in him. Do we, Four-Two-Nine?”

Dr Sherman put on a pasty smile and shook his head. “No, Sir.”

“We’ve got everything set up, so instead of arguing, Four-Six-Five, do as I say and get into place.”

Evan felt a twist of rage in his gut and Reached Out to calm Connor. He saw the other boy’s jaw tighten, his hands closed into loose fists.

“Fine,” Connor spat.

“Fine, what?”

Connor flinched, almost as though he’d been hit. He kept his mouth firmly shut and pushed past Parchman and into the padded cell.

Someone had set up two cots inside the room, complete with Graphene straps to keep them in place.

*Why bother with the padded cell?* Evan wondered as a nurse fixed him and Connor in place.

As the nurse left the room, Evan Reached Out again to get Connor’s attention and offered what he hoped was a reassuring smile.

“Okay,” Dr Sherman’s voice buzzed over the speakers. “So, this should be perfectly simple. We’re going to use a high-frequency to make you both go Two-eyed. Evan, I don’t want you to do
anything, okay? Don’t try and calm either Connor or yourself down. Connor, you remember what
Evan told you? Use visualisation and see if you can fight this off, okay?”

Something about the doctor’s voice made Evan’s stomach turn. While Sherman always sounded
somewhat chipper, now there was a slight to it. Something sharp and artificial.

“Got it,” Connor called out. “Can we get this over with?”

The speaker cut out for a moment and the familiar voice of Dr Sharp rang in Evan’s ears. “Starting
the signal in three, two, one.”

A harsh buzz pieced Evan’s ears like a needle. His vision seemed to twist and blur. The room shook
as the signal vibrated Evan’s skull. It was as though someone had lit off explosives inside his mind, a
whirlwind of fire frying his brain. His eyes stung, and Evan became aware on the very edge of his
mind that Connor was thrashing about in his bed beside him.

Don’t do anything, he told himself. Don’t do anything. It was like forcing himself not to breathe or
think: a reflex.

His skin was too tight, his muscles too thick, his teeth too sharp. Evan clenched his jaw, waiting for
his teeth to shatter under the pressure as his body twisted and bucked under his restraints.

Somehow, he was inside and outside of his own mind. Watching from over his shoulder and yet
trapped inside the casing of skin and fire. He knew he was screaming, but he didn’t know what. He
knew Connor was crying but he didn’t know why. He wanted nothing more than to jump up out of
bed, smash through the observation window and just make it stop.

“Come on, Connor.” He heard Dr Sherman say over the speaker. “Visualise. I know you can do it.”

I can’t! Evan heard a thought that was not his own. I can’t. I can’t. I can’t. I can’t! I can’t! I can’t!

Evan gave up.

He Reached Out, taking the full front of Connor’s Two-eyed rage and smothered it. The moment he
felt both their bodies relax, the signal cut off. The room went still once again and a wave of
exhaustion washed over him.

“That…” Evan tried to yell as loud as his voice would allow. “That was me…”

And he was dragged into the darkness of sleep.

When Evan awoke it was to a sharp pain in his arm. His eyelids felt heavy; almost as though they
trying to pull him back into unconsciousness.

“Give him another dose.”

The pain disappeared before being replaced by another prick on his other arm.

Evan’s eyes snapped open with a sudden jolt of energy, though it only lasted a moment before his
body became heavy again. A hand grabbed his shoulder and gave him a hard shake, knocking his
head limply back and forth, back and forth.

He just wanted to sleep.

“Is this really necessary?” A quiet, strained voice croaked out.
“Christ knows when they’ll wake up. We need this information before I leave.”

Something grabbed Evan by the scruff of his neck and gave him another shake.

Evan opened his eyes again and saw Parchman leaning over the table, holding Evan by his collar. His eyes narrowed.

“Listen to me,” he barked.

Evan blinked, trying to wake up properly. “I...yes...s-sorry.”

“Good.” Parchman let go and straightened up.

Behind him, Evan saw Dr Sherman pressed into the corner of the room with his arms crossed tightly across his chest. “We don’t have to do this now,” he muttered to himself.

Evan’s head started to nod again, but he managed to right himself and stay awake. He looked around, trying to figure out where he was. It looked like one of the visiting rooms: barely enough for a single desk and two chairs. To his right, a nurse had a metal tray with a set of syringes and scalpels laid across it.

He felt as though cotton wool had been shoved down his throat, a wad of anxiety making it difficult to breathe. “W-What’s going on? What...was that?”

“Adrenaline,” the nurse said bluntly.

Parchman cleared his throat. “You and Patient Four-Six-Five--”

“Connor,” Evan mumbled without thinking.

Parchman’s jaw tightened. “Patient Four-Six-Five have your connection because you healed him, correct?”

“I...”

Parchman snapped his fingers in front of Evan’s face. “Correct?”

“Y-Yes...”

Over Parchman’s shoulder, Dr Sherman pushed himself further into the corner.

“And you’re capable of healing others?” Parchman continued.

“I’ve... practiced it...before...” Evan’s voice slurred. “With Dr Peet.”

“But Four-Six-Five is the only person you’ve healed?”

“I...think so...”

“So, in theory, you’ll gain a connection with anyone you heal?”

“I...don’t know...”

Parchman nodded and turned in his chair, grabbing Dr Sherman by his wrist and pulled him over to the table. “Stop that, for Christ’s sake.” He reached over to the tray and picked up one of the scalpels, placing the blade against Sherman’s palm, drawing blood.
Dr Sherman propped his free hand against the table and looked away.

Parchman held Dr Sherman’s hand out to Evan. “Heal him.”

“This isn’t appropriate,” Sherman said under his breath.

“It’s dangerous for them to have a connection like that unregulated, given Six-Four-Five’s issue with control.” Parchman looked Evan in the eye. “Heal him,” he said again.

Thorns dug into Evan’s arm. “I—I don’t.” He just wanted to sleep. He wanted to go home.

Dr Sherman closed his eyes. “Sir. Please,” The colour drained from his face.

“Heal him!” Parchman snapped.

With shaking fingers, Evan reached out and took Dr Sherman’s hand. He imagined the sharp sting of hangnails peeling back at the tips of his fingers, feeling the warmth of healing energy start to pool under his skin. He took Dr Peet’s advice, visualising that he was poking the energy through his skin like a pencil through paper.

Sage covered the cut on Dr Sherman’s hand, before disappearing and leaving the skin healed.

Dr Sherman ripped his hand out of Parchman’s grip and retreated back to his corner. He pressed his back hard against the wall, his hand running feverishly over his brow.

It took all of Evan’s effort to stay up and awake, his head heavy in his hands. “C-can...I please...I’m so tired.”

Parchman seemed unphased. “Did it work?”

“I…” Evan Reached Out with a phantom arm, trying to get a hold of Dr Sherman, who’d started muttering to himself.

“I need to go upstairs. They need my help. I can feel it. Can I just leave? Please?” His voice was barely loud enough to hear.

Upstairs, the voice in the back of Evan’s head echoed. You’re in the Basement.

Evan’s heart skipped a beat and he watched as Dr Sherman flinched, his breaths becoming short and shallow gasps.

Still, Parchman took no notice.

“It didn’t work,” Evan said quietly.

Parchman’s head cocked to the side. “Why not?”

“I...don’t know…”

Sherman spoke up again. “Please. I really, really, need to leave.”

Parchman didn’t even look at him. “Get a grip. You’re not a child.”

The nurse at Evan’s side furrowed her brow. “Agent Parchman, Sir. I really think we should call it a night.”
“Not until we figure this out.” He snapped his fingers in front of Evan’s face again. “Was anything different this time?”

Evan tried to force his mouth to work. The air around him felt thin. His arms and legs hung like lead weights. Every inch of him just wanted to lay down and sleep. “I…Connor…”

“Speak up!” Parchman banged his fist against the table.

“Hewasdead!” Evan blurted out.

Silence.

After a long moment, Parchman spoke. “Dead?” he asked slowly.

Evan nodded. “He…” Monkshood started to bloom on the inside of his arm. “He o.ded…and he was choking and…his heart stopped…”

There was a thud as Dr Sherman’s legs gave out.

The nurse disappeared from Evan’s side, grabbing Dr Sherman by his shoulders and holding him up. His head hung limply, his chin on his chest, glasses skewed to one side.

Parchman couldn’t ignore him any longer. “What’s he done?” he snapped as the nurse lowered Dr Sherman to the floor and helped him into the recovery position.

“He’s fainted, Sir--”

“I can see that!”

Evan lay his head on the table. His arm throbbed with thorns and monkshood. Suddenly, the voices of the other two seemed very far away. He Reached Out until he found Connor a few floors below him and finally drifted off into a heavy sleep.
Hey, it's been a bit.

I'm in England right now, for those who don't know, which is why I haven't been able to update. I just got my computer working after, like, two months. Most of this chapter was written the old fashioned way, on paper balanced on my lap while I babysat so I can't really speak for the quality, I'm sorry in advance.

Thanks to Levi for helping to make something of this mess.

Thanks to you guys for putting up with that cliffhanger :P

It had practically become routine now; Open his eyes. Look up at the ceiling. No matter where Evan managed to fall asleep he always ended up in the same, damn room.

Gingerly, he rolled onto his side and pulled his knees up to his chest. His movements were slow—almost methodical—as he rubbed his eyes and drew in a long, shaking breath.

Evan didn’t move again for a long time.

“Hansen?” Connor’s voice, unusually soft, met his ears. “You awake?”

Evan said nothing.

“What happened?”

Nothing.

“Evan, come on.” There was a pause, followed by the ruffle of blankets and jolting straps. “I need you to help me up.”

Evan didn’t move.

He heard Connor sigh and shift in his bed. He waited for a stern and angry voice to snap at him. For it to tell him he was being stupid or childish. For someone to yank the sheets back and drag him out of bed.

But they didn’t. The room just stayed quiet and still.

And then, with janky, clockwork movements, Evan’s body started to move. He kicked off his quilt and crossed the distance between his and Connor’s twin beds in three short steps. His fingers fumbled with the clamps at the side of Connor’s cot and he peeled back the restraints and threw himself down, hiding his face against Connor’s chest.

“Woah, Jesus Christ! Watch it!” Connor wheezed as the air was knocked from his chest.

Evan’s mouth refused to work.
Cautiously, Connor wrapped his arms around Evan, holding him close-- if a little awkwardly.

“What did they do to you?” He asked under his breath.

Thorns gripped Evan’s arm, choked on all sides by a heavy thicket of Christmas roses.

“I told them you were dead,” he whispered. “He made me heal Dr Sherman...he wanted to see if we’d...link or something. B-but it didn’t work and I told them you’d died and I--” He cut himself off with a sob. “I shouldn’t have told them. I’m sorry. I—I’m so sorry. Please don’t be mad.”

Connor sat up, pushing Evan off him. Evan ducked his head down, averting Connor’s gaze.

He hates you now, said the voice. For real this time.

“Why would I be mad at you?”

Evan looked up

Connor sat in front of him, his brow furrowed into neat little lines. One eye blue, the other brown. “Why would I be mad?” he asked again. He sounded hurt, which somehow made it worse.

Evan sniffed and rubbed his nose on the back of his hand. “You didn’t want anyone to know.”

Connor scrunched up his face. “Yeah. No shit--”

Evan winced.

“--But!” Connor added quickly. “You didn’t want to. Parchman and Sherman made you, right?”

Evan nodded and Connor put his arm around him again, pulling him into a proper hug.

“Parchman did,” Evan corrected softly, his face hidden against Connor’s shoulder. “Dr Sherman...I-I think there’s something wrong with him.”

“He works here. No shit there’s something wrong with him.”

“He passed out.”

Connor pulled back from the hug. “Seriously?”

Evan nodded. “I don’t think he wanted to be there either.”

Connor’s shoulders slumped. “How long do you think we were out?”

Evan shrugged. “Long enough for Parchman to be gone?”

“Maybe.” Connor hesitated before leaning forward and pecking a kiss on Evan’s cheek. “If he’s still here, I’ll kill him.”

“Don’t joke about that.”

“Who says I’m joking?”

---

It wasn’t long before Evan and Connor needed to separate again and the nurse came in to check on them. Usually, after they’d gone Two-eyed, the nurse would bring them a plate of food. This time,
however, he decided to just take them straight to the cafeteria since they were “already halfway through breakfast.”

The cafeteria had a sense of unease to it, a thicket of thorns curling around Evan’s arm.

He heard Connor draw in a shallow breath beside him and looked up to see Parchman sat at the staff table. “Don’t,” Evan warned. “Please just sit down. May...maybe he’ll leave soon.”

“Yeah,” Connor hissed, his head bent down as the two of them headed to their usual table.

“They live!” Jared beamed when he saw them, his hands raised above his head. “Wonder of wonders, miracle of miracles!”

“Barely,” Connor scowled and threw his tray down onto the table.

Evan took a seat between Connor and Zoe, making sure to keep his arms close to his sides to avoid taking up too much room.

Jared. Alana. Zoe. If he just pretended Parchman wasn’t there and Will was in his place it almost felt like a regular meal.

“Where were you guys?” Alana asked. She leaned forward over the table, her back, somehow, still straight as a board. “You were here one minute and gone the next.”

Connor shoved a mouthful of eggs into his mouth. “Parchman wanted some special testing or some shit,” he said, speaking around his food. “How long were we out?”

Jared shrugged. “Like, two days.”

Connor slapped a hand to his face and groaned.

Evan just bit his tongue, feeling thorns digging themselves into his wrist. “I-Is that it?”

“Ya,” Jared nodded. “Not going to get out of this that easily.”

“If it helps,” Alana interrupted, flashing a sincere, but far too toothy smile. “I took some notes on what kind of tests we—”

“Literally no one gives a shit, Beck,” Connor deadpanned, earning himself a dirty look from Zoe.

“Oh…” Alana’s smile faltered. “Well…”

“Ignore him, Al,” Zoe said stiffly. “He’s being a dick.”

Now it was Connor’s turn to scowl.

Evan forced his lips into what he hoped looked like a kind and caring smile. “Thanks, Alana,” he said a little too enthusiastically.

It did its job though and Alana perked back up, her shoulders raised in a peacock-like triumph. “Thank you, Evan. I’ll give them to you when we get a minute.”

“Yeah...sounds great!” Evan pushed his food around his plate with his fork, all too aware that Parchman was watching their table. Out the corner of his eye, he met the agent’s gaze and a knot formed.
He knows about Connor. I bet everyone does by now. Everyone knows and that’ll make him freak out and it’ll be all your fault and he’ll hate you and--

“Am I interrupting?”

Evan’s breath caught in his throat. He looked up and found himself eye to eye with Dr Sherman. He swallowed quickly, forcing his tongue to start moving. “N-no. We’re good…you’re good.”

He almost looked sheepish with one hand in the pocket of his lab coat and the other pressed against the back of his neck. There was a bit more colour in his cheeks, but he still looked more than a little worse for wear.

Evan was also ninety per cent sure that Sherman was wearing his pyjamas under his lab coat.

“Good to see you both up,” Sherman continued.

“Could say the same thing about you, apparently,” Connor said without looking up from his food.

The corner of Dr Sherman’s mouth fell into a slight frown, but only for a moment. “I’m fine, Connor.”

Jared’s head cocked curiously to one side. “Did you get dressed in the dark or something?” He leaned back in his chair and pulled on the hem of Sherman’s lab coat, revealing the red, plaid sweatpants hidden behind the white fabric.

Sherman cleared his throat and took a quick step back. “When there’s a lot of people feeling the same emotion...It can get a bit overwhelming. Everyone’s a bit tense at the moment and…” another laugh “It took a toll. I’m supposed to be having a bit of a rest.” He flashed Evan a small smile. “I’m sorry if it freaked you out, by the way.”

Evan swallowed thickly and shook his head. “N-no. No, I was fine.”

Jared raised an eyebrow. “Sure you were, Acorn.”

Connor kicked him under the table. “Ow!”

“Don’t call him that, asshole!”

“It was a joke!”

“Jokes are meant to be funny.”

“Connor,” Dr Sherman sighed.

“What?!”

“Don’t kick people. And before I forget, I’ve moved your schedule around a bit.” Dr Sherman took a pen and notepad. He scribbled something down and folded it in half, avoiding Jared’s grabbing hands to give it to Connor. He quickly jotted down another note, but this time for Evan. “You too. There won’t be any changes until after the tests have finished, so you don’t have to worry.”

Too late, Evan thought glumly. “Okay…Thanks.”

Dr Sherman gave Evan’s Shoulder a pat, muttering a quick ‘goodbye’ before hurrying back to the
staff table. As he did his shoulders seemed to rise and tense with each step until he found his seat between Jacobi and Dr Peet where a plate of food was already waiting.

At meal times there usually wasn’t much difference between the Patients and the staff. Both had their own little clique: both gossiped and laughed and complained about the food.

Likewise, at that moment both sides were relatively quiet, making Evan all too aware that his table was the loudest.

There was a thickness to the air, one that made a lump clogged Evan’s throat.

The source of the tension was clear, though whether or not Parchman was actually aware of it was far more different to figure out. He just sat there eating his breakfast.

Evan tried to ignore him. Instead, he distracted himself by peeling open the note, making sure to turn away from Jared when he did.

*I’ve arranged for extra therapy sessions for you and Connor. What happened was wildly inappropriate and I’m very sorry.*

Evan crumpled the note quickly and stuffed it into his pocket.

—-

The Patients and staff filtered out of the cafeteria in clumps until only a few stragglers remained. Then, eventually, only Connor and Evan.

Connor set his knife and fork together on his plate and scrunched up his own letter. He threw it down onto his plate like a crumpled napkin.

“Aren’t...A-aren’t you going to read that?” Evan asked softly.

Connor shook his head. “Why bother?”

“B-because it’s important? It’s therapy.”

Connor rolled his eyes. “Fucking great.”

“It helps.”

“It’s bullshit, Hansen. I was fine before and I’m fine now.”

Evan opened his mouth, shut it again, frowned. “Clearly you weren’t.”

That earned him a dirty look. “Hansen. I’m fine, Okay? I promise.”

Evan fiddled with the hem of his shirt. “O...okay.”

Connor’s expression relaxed and the side of his mouth turning up into one of his little half-smiles. “Thanks.”

“Are you finished?” Parchman’s hard voice forced Connor’s face back into its usual scowl. “You’ll be late for testing.”

Connor leaned back in his chair, arms crossed. “We just woke up,” he said bluntly.
“And? You still need to take part.” Each of Parchman’s words was low and sharp, forming thorns on Evan’s wrist. “I’ve arranged for you both to complete what you missed out of hours.”

Connor’s brows narrowed and a brown smudge started to creep over his right eye. “But it’s your fault we missed them in the first place!”

Parchman looked to Evan. “Control your dog, Four-Six-Seven.”

Connor’s chair scraped back as he jumped to his feet. Quick as a flash, Evan grabbed his arm and pulled him back, Reaching out to cool the sudden fire raging through Connor’s stomach and chest.

Parchman didn’t even flinch. “Hurry up. You’re wasting my time.”

“Sherman gets to rest!” Connor pointed out, his voice dripping venom.

“He isn’t being tested.” Parchman nodded to the door. “Go.”

“Bastard,” Connor hissed once Parchman was out of earshot.

“He’s doing it on purpose,” Evan murmured. He looked around the hall and over his shoulder before taking Connor’s hand and giving it a light squeeze.

“No shit, Hansen.” Connor scowled but squeezed Evan’s hand back. There was a moment of silence before he spoke again, his voice softer this time. “We could just not go.”

“He’d find out.”

“Yeah. Well. Fuck him.” Connor ran a hand through his hair and gave it a small tug. “I hate this fucking place.”

“Me too.”

“I hate this fucking test.”

“Me too.”

Connor rubbed his temple. “One more year,” he said, less to Evan and more to himself.

“Huh?”

“One more year and they’re kicking me out…” Connor narrowed his eyes. “I thought you knew that?”

“You’re seventeen?” For some reason, Evan had just assumed Connor was the same age as him.

Connor shook his head. “I will be in two months, give or take.” He kicked the wall and the wall bit back, making him swear under his breath.

Thorns dug into Evan’s arm.

A year, or just a little over, and then Connor would just be gone. Graduated and transferred to god-knows-where. The thought made Evan want to puke.

Connor’s lip twisted. “I shouldn’t have said anything.”

“No! N-no...what? I’m fine!” Evan garbled, shaking his head and forcing a smile onto his lips.
“Means you’ll only have to deal with Parchman one more time after this, right? That’s great.”

He barely heard Connor’s reply over the sound of the voice at the back of his head.

_He’ll be gone. Then Jared and Alana and Zoe. You too, eventually. You’ll be like Will. _He could practically hear the voice laughing at him. Bitter chuckles reverberated around the inside of his skull. _Did you really think you could get away with ignoring it again? Just forget and pretend this shit isn’t going to happen? You fucking idiot!_

Evan was dimly aware that he was replying to something Connor had said, but his body was on autopilot. He felt like a robot, something trapped in its own mind like a cocoon.

He really didn’t want to think about a world without Connor.
Chapter 40

Chapter Notes

Sorry, this chapter is so short. I swear to God the next one will definitely be longer. You could call this the calm before the storm.

Thank you, Levi, for editing (and dealing with my aromantic-ass' attempt at writing fluff)

TW: None.

Luckily, the next few days didn’t give Evan much time to worry. Between the tests done in the day and the ones he had to catch up on with Connor, he barely had enough energy to eat dinner, let alone stress.

The night before the final day of testing he collapsed onto his bed at the first opportunity, his arm throbbing with thorns and red with poppies.

When he woke up, he’d expected to find the room dark, but the light was still on and Connor wasn’t even in his pyjamas yet. He was sat up in bed, a rather thick book spread across his lap.

“What time is it?” Evan mumbled, propping himself up on one elbow.

“Seven O’clock, you’ve been asleep three days,” Connor replied, turning a page.

“It has been an hour,” Lucky reported.

Connor shot Lucky a dirty look. “You ruined my joke!”

“It was not funny.”

Evan smiled a little. He sat up properly and rubbed sleep from his eyes. “Seriously, what time is it?”

“I told you! It’s seven.”

“At night?”

Connor nodded. He swung his legs over the side of his bed and sat up. “Good sleep?”

“Mm.” Evan looked lazily at the book. It was rare to see Connor with anything more than twenty pages, practically impossible to see him with a book without some kind of pictures. “What are you reading?” he asked.

“Huh?” Connor held up the book, waving it dismissively. It was a hardback, but one without a dust jacket on so the title was pretty much a mystery. “The Little Prince.”

“I-I thought it was shorter.”

“You’ve read it?” Connor asked, raising an eyebrow.
Evan shook his head. His arm prickled with thorns again.

No, the voice at the back of his head hissed. You just looked through his drawers and found it there like a fucking creep.

Evan swallowed hard. “I-I saw it in the library a few times though.”

“Oh. Yeah. Well.” Connor shrugged. “This copy’s bigger, I guess. Different editions, maybe?” He drummed his fingers against the hardcover.

Definitely too big to fit in his drawer.

Evan’s stomach twisted. “C-Can I see?”


A Dictionary of Flowers.

“I got curious, alright?” he scowled.

Evan’s mouth stayed open, his voice taking refuge at the back of his throat. “You...Y-you were curious?” he asked slowly.

Connor nodded.

“About my flowers?”

Another nod.

“...You could have just asked.”

“That’s fucking weird though.”

Evan hesitated. “Not really.”

“I’m basically asking you to teach me how to read your emotions.”

“Which is worse than looking up the meanings behind my back?” The sharpness of Evan’s tone surprised even him. “S-sorry,” he added quickly. “I didn’t...I didn’t mean that was a bad thing. I-I’m happy, it’s just I don’t think anyone’s really tried to figure them out before. Well, Dr Sherman kind of but I don’t know if that counts...” He trailed off, his fingers twisting the hem of his shirt. “I don’t...if you’d told me...”

Connor stayed quiet, a slight scowl still visible on his lips.

“Sorry.”

“Why the fuck are you sorry, Hansen?”

“B-Because you’re mad.”

“I’m mad at myself for being stupid.” He set the book back down on his bed. “I’m a fucking idiot.”

Evan sat down beside him. “You’re not.”

Connor shot him a withering look.
“You’re not!” He picked up the book and started leafing through the pages, though his eyes just glazed over the words. He paused, an idea sparking in his brain. “W-what time is it?” he asked.

Connor shrugged. “Seven-ish?”

“S-So we still have a while before lights out?” Evan stood up, abandoning the book. He offered his hand to Connor. “Can...can I show you something?”

Connor raised an eyebrow but took his hand.

---

The greenhouse was completely empty buy the time they reached the roof. Evan had expected it to be rowdy with the voices of various plants, but the place was silent. He guessed Lucky was the only really talkative one.

“Never been up here,” Connor said. He glanced around the small space, hands tucked neatly into his pockets.

“R-really? I have my power control lessons up here.”

“Makes sense, I guess. They probably thought I’d smash the walls or something.” He tapped his fist against one of the windows, the sound was eerily loud in the silence.

“Well. You’re not going to.” Evan reached over and took Connor’s hand, giving it a soft squeeze.

“Um, most of the plants are food and stuff, but they have a few flowers.” He reached for the hem of his shirt with his free hand. “I can tell you what they mean...if you want?”

The corner of Connor’s mouth lifted into a smile. “Sure. Beats reading a dumb book.” He pointed to a pot. “That’s the one that heals us, yeah?”

“Yeah, sage,” Evan answered without missing a beat. “It means wisdom and immortality, uh, hence the healing.”

“Doesn’t it keep evil away or some shit? We should use it on Parchman.”

Evan laughed a little. “O-only if you burn it. I-I don’t think it would want us to do that.”

“Damn.” Connor looked around again and pointed at another. “What’s that one?”

“Hyacinth.” Evan thought for a moment. “I think in general they mean playfulness, but the different colours mean different things. This one’s purple so it means sorrow.”

“How the hell do they get ‘sorrow’ from ‘playfulness? I thought their meanings were supposed to be romantic or something. That’s what the book said.”

Evan shrugged. “Most of them are, but it’s more about sending a message. When people gave bouquets they’d show how they were feeling through the arrangements of the plants. Different arrangements meant different things. There’s one flower that means ‘I hate you’ on its own and ‘I love you’ when put with another.”

“Don’t want to get that mixed up. ‘Have some flowers, I hate your guts.’” Connor shook his head, huffing a little laugh. He gestured to Evan’s arm. “What do those mean?”

Evan looked down and saw a small patch of Lady’s Mantle spreading slowly, but surely, along his forearm. He scanned his brain for a moment. “Comfort...relaxation I guess.”
Connor nodded. “So the little white ones mean you’re anxious, these ones mean you’re relaxed?”

“Yeah.”

“Noted.” He prodded at a white, rose-like flower on Evan’s arm. “And this one?”

Evan felt his face grow warm. “Um...that’s a gardenia. It’s from Asia I think...or Africa. One of the two...may...maybe both?”

“That’s not what I asked, Hansen.”

Evan muttered something under his breath.

“Huh?” Connor asked, slanting his head to one side.

“S-secret love,” Evan blurted out, looking down at his shoes.

Connor’s expression softened. “A badly kept one.” He pressed a soft kiss to Evan’s forehead.

Evan couldn’t help but smile.

Connor’s fingertips brushed gently against one of the vine’s wrapped around Evan’s arm. “What do those mean?”

Evan frowned, looking down at the sharp thorns. “As far as I know,” he said honestly. “They don’t mean anything.”

“They have to be there for a reason,” Connor pointed out. “Everything else is.”

“Yeah...but...” Evan sighed. “They’re just there. All the time. They...they get worse when I’m nervous, I guess?”

Connor hand his hand up Evan’s arm and winced, pulling away suddenly. “Ow!” He held up a finger, a long, sharp thorn sticking out of his skin.

“Oh my God I’m so sorry,” Evan blurted, taking several quick steps back. “I-I didn’t mean t-to hurt you.”

Connor shook his head and yanked the thorn out. A sudden burst of Sage bloomed over the wound before disappearing in the blink of an eye. “It’s my fault.” He said, shaking his hand. “Please, don’t freak out.”

“I-I’m not. I’m just sorry. I didn’t mean to hurt you,” Evan repeated.

“Hansen. I’m fine.”

“B-But I...I know how much they can hurt. A-and what about your powers? Are you okay?” He peered up at Connor’s eyes.

Connor’s shoulders slumped. “Hansen. It’s not your fault.”

Evan said nothing, just looked down at his shoes.

Connor hugged him close to his chest, just holding him for a moment.

It was a long silence before Evan spoke again. “I-I’m sorry.”
“Don’t be.” There was another silence. “No offence, but your powers are fucking weird.”

Evan furrowed his brow and looked up. “H-how?”

“Healing factor--what’s the other one called?”

“C-Chlorokinesis.”

“Right. Healing factor, Chlorokinesis, and an encyclopedic knowledge of flowers. How does that even happen?”

Evan blinked dumbly for a moment before a smile worked its way onto his lips. “T-To be fair, I had the cyclopedia before,” He said. “I like…liked gardening. A-and it’s no weirder than yours.”

“I’m the Hulk. That’s simple.”

“O-only cause you already knew about the Hulk. Getting super strength from being angry was new to me. I thought you were a werewolf or something,”

Connor snorted. “I fucking wish. And I can lend you more comics if you want to know more, I’ve got about twenty of them.”

“You have way more than just twenty comics.”

“Twenty Hulk ones. Or I could lend you others.” He started counting on his fingers. “Daredevil, X-Men, Quicksilver, Ant-man--”

“Ant-man?” Evan echoed.

“He’s cooler than he sounds, I promise, he’s great.” Connor put his arm around Evan’s waist, hugging him close. He seemed to hesitate for a moment, his lip twisting before his half-smile returned to his face. “This is a really dumb date.”

Evan’s heart skipped a beat. Was that what this was? A date? He hadn’t meant for it to be a date...Right. No shit it was a date. He’d taken Connor to a literal room of flowers, most of which spelt out ‘I love you’.

“Y-Yeah.” He nodded. “I think i-it’s as good as we’re gonna get, though. Here, I mean.”

Connor hummed a sour note in reply. “Where were you from, again?”

“New Jersey.”

Connor’s eyebrows shot up his forehead. “No shit?” He laughed. “We must’ve just missed each other. You know Autumn Smile Orchard?”

Evan’s mouth opened, but no sound came out.

Connor huffed a laugh. “I’ll take that as a yes.”

Evan forced his voice to start working again. “I worked there!” The words came out in a jumble. “I-It’s the one in the National Park, right? With the really bad apples.”

Another laugh and Connor nodded. “Small world,” he murmured. “Still. If we’d met in New Jersey, I’d take you there. We could find a clearing or something.”
“W-we could read comics.”

“Hell yeah.”

Evan bit his lip, thinking a second.

_Don’t say it._ Warned the voice. _It’s fucking weird. He’s going to fucking hate it. Shut up. Shut up. SHUT UP._

“M-maybe,” he said slowly, a lump heavy in his throat. “A-After P.O.T.’s finished we c-could...could do that. H-here, I mean.” He gestured to the space around them. “It’s not an orchard, but it’s close. A-and...and we could read comics are stuff.”

“I could sneak some food out the cafeteria. Shitty sandwiches and stuff, a right romantic picnic. That’s what people do on dates, right? I’ll make a list of the stuff you can eat.”

“Y-you don’t _have_ to.”

“Yeah. Yeah I do.” He pressed a light kiss to Evan’s cheek. “So, it’s set, right? After Parchman fuck’s off, we have a proper date, yeah?”

Evan leaned his head against Connor’s shoulder. “Mm-hm. Definitely.”

“It’s a date,” Connor said, wincing as he said it.

“Y-Yeah.” Evan gave Connor a reassuring squeeze. “It’s a date.”
Any excitement Evan had about a future date was squashed the moment Parchman caught his eye at breakfast the next morning.

“You two,” he barked, pointing at them from across the room. “Outside.”

Thorns prickled up Evan’s arm. He wanted to just grab Connor’s hand and run, but he didn’t. He just did as he was told, trailing behind Connor to meet Parchman in the hallway.

The agent stood over them, back straight, his arms neatly crossed. “Today’s test is a team activity—”

“Thought I wasn’t allowed to do those,” Connor said bluntly. “Something about me being a danger to their safety.”

Parchman’s eyes narrowed. “That was before. This is now.” He nodded to Evan. “Traditionally, Patient Observation Testing ends with a capture the flag tournament—”

Evan raised an eyebrow.

“—in order to test power control and tactical thinking. Naturally, due to Four-Six-Five’s blatant lack of control he wasn’t allowed to compete. This year you will both be put on the same team. I wanted to make this clear in case your partner thought he could skip out on today’s activities.” He shot Connor a warning glare before turning back to Evan. “Given that it’s his final year with us, we’re requiring him to use his powers during the—”

“What?!” Connor’s eyes widened. “Since when?!”

“Since now.” The corner of Parchman’s mouth twitched into a brief, but smug smile. “You’re in a situation where your powers can be safely monitored and tested, aren’t you?”

Connor clenched his jaw, his hands bawling into tight fists. “I can’t—”

“This isn’t a request, Four-Six-Five. It’s a requirement.” He turned his attention back to Evan. “It’ll be your responsibility to keep him under control, understand?”

Evan swallowed hard and nodded, taking a moment to calm the anger bubbling away in Connor’s chest. “Y-Yes. I do.”

“You do, what?”

“I understand...S-Sir.”
“Good.” Parchman dismissed them with a wave of his hand.

Jared looked up from his scrambled eggs, head cocked ever-so-slightly to the side. “Who does what?”

“None of your fucking business, Kleinman.”

“Oo, touchy!” Jared set down his knife and fork. “Woke up on the wrong side of the bed?”

Connor flipped him off.

Zoe rolled her eyes, not looking up from her cereal. “Are you okay?” she asked.

It took Evan a moment to realise she was asking him. “Y-Yeah. Yeah...I’m fine. Just. Um.” He gave a loud yawn--a little too loud, probably. “Tired. Y-You know how it is.”

Zoe hummed. “What did Parchman want?”

“To piss me off.” Connor speared a bit of cereal in half with his spoon.

Evan shook his head. “Just...Um...To tell us about the capture the flag thing...We’re both competing.”

Zoe’s eyebrows shot up her forehead. “What?!”

“Bags Connor on my team!” Jared called, waving a hand in the air. “What? He’s like a steamroller. Besides, I kind of want a chance at surviving, you know?”

Connor scowled. “Shut up.”

“Hey. I’m just being smart about this.”

“What part of ‘shut up’ don’t you get?”

Jared stuck out his tongue.

Zoe spoke up. “Are they sure? That doesn’t sound safe.”

Under the table, Evan put his hand on Connor’s knee. “H-He’s not going to lose control,” he pointed out, talking more to Connor than the others. “He can’t...not if I’m there.”

Jared’s face fell. “Okay. Someone else can have the dead weight then.”

Zoe flicked a spoonful of cereal at him. “Shut up.”

He put a hand to his chest and let out a gasp. “I’ve been shot!”

Connor rolled his eyes. “I can still kick your ass, Kleinman.”

Jared stopped clutching his wound; a sly smile creeping up the side of his mouth. A crackle of electricity made his hair stand on end. “Wanna bet?”

Zoe catapulted more cereal his way.

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The capture the flag court looked less like the set for an official government test and more like a
sports day. The Ward’s sports field was outlined along the edge with small plastic cones—though Evan had no idea what they’d do against a group of superpowered teens— with a small flag pole speared into the ground at each end.

“It all looked so normal that it gave Evan flashbacks to being picked last in gym.”

Luckily for him, the groups were already picked for them, though there seemed no rhyme or reason as to who was on what team. One would be made entirely of children, while another would be five sixteen-year-olds and one five-year-old.

*You’re going to get your ass kicked,* said a voice in the back of his head as he walked past a boy with the hair and muscles of a gorilla. The thought of those giant arms crushing him to death made his stomach turn.

He ended up on a team with Connor, Jared, Zoe and Alana, along with one of the boys he recognised from temple—the younger one. It occurred to Evan that he didn’t actually know this kid’s name, but considering that he’d had months to ask it now seemed a little too late.

“Hey Evan,” the boy waved at him. Evan could practically hear The Voice giggling in the back of his mind.

“Group huddle!” Jared called, saving him.

The only person to move was no-name. He stepped forward and put an arm around Jared’s shoulder, his hair sticking up suddenly like a wire brush.

“How about no?” Connor said, his arms crossed.

“Suit yourself, but Milo’s vice-team Captain.”

Milo. That was it.

Zoe raised an eyebrow. “Who says you’re team captain?”

“Who else would be?”

“Alana,” the rest of the team replied in unison.

To her credit, Alana didn’t seem surprised.

Jared rolled his eyes. “Love you guys too.”

A loud siren blared across the sports field, making Evan jump out of his skin.

Agent Parchman stood with a loudspeaker. “You’ll have ten minutes to plan tactics,” he barked. “Rules are as following: you cannot step outside the marked boundaries, you cannot use your powers on the flag itself and you cannot inflict harsh injury on any other Patient.” His eyes locked on Connor as he spoke. “Anyone who breaks these rules will be tranquilized and their team will be disqualified. Planning time starts now.” The speaker cut off with a harsh buzz.

“Okay!” Jared clapped his hands together. “My plan is to let Connor kill them all—ow!”

Connor punched his arm, hard. “That’ll get us disqualified, dick.”

“Yeah. But I’d pay good money to see you all drugged up and loopy.”
Connor rolled his eyes and looked to Alana. “Any ideas?”

Alana tapped a finger to her chin, humming softly. “Well. I’d need a catalogue of all your powers first.” She took a pen from behind her ear and a notebook from her pocket. Evan swore she could summon them into existence.

“Couldn’t you time travel?” Zoe asked. “Like, listen in on the other teams?”

Alana shook her head, still scribbling. “I can only travel at will for five minutes at a time. Besides, I doubt that any of the teams would have finished planning yet. I can’t go forward, only back.” She glanced up at Milo. “I’m very sorry,” she said with a smile, “I don’t think I’ve seen you use your power before.”

She asked it with such confidence. She didn’t stutter or um or ah; she asked it straight up.

Evan waited for Milo to get mad, but the other boy just smiled back. He snapped his fingers and a spark of embers hissed against his skin.

Alana’s eyes widened. “Pyrokinesis?”

“Oh. I don’t use it much.”

“Would you be able to make a short burst of light? Like a flash bang?”

“Uh.” Milo cocked his head to the side. “I could try.”

Alana nodded, noting something down in her book. “Okay. Pyrokinesis, Electrokinesis, Chlorokinesis, Time Travel, light manipulation…” she looked at Connor. “What’s the correct term for your power?”

“It says Anger Empowerment on my file.”

“Oh, Anger Empowerment. An interesting mix.”

“A useless mix,” Jared said matter-of-factly.

“I wouldn’t say that.” Alana turned to Evan. “Would you be able to have vines or something similar trip up the other team?”

“Uh…” Evan looked at his feet. “No. There aren’t really…vines in the ground around here.”

“What about roots?”

“I can try, but I don’t think they’d listen.”

Jared raised his hands in defeat. “Like I said, useless!”

“Our best bet is to use a flashbang,” Alana continued, ignoring him. “Milo and Zoe could take care of that while the rest of us focus on the flag.”

Connor shook his head. “What’s to stop us from getting blinded too?”

Alana’s lip twisted. “If we had a signal, we could make sure we’re all looking away.”

“And then everyone else would just figure out what we’re doing.”
“I’m in a team of pessimists,” Jared muttered.

Connor just shrugged. “And proud.”

Alana piped up. “What about you and Evan?”

“What about us?”

Alana looked up from her notebook. “Parchman said you had to use your powers, didn’t he?”

“I can’t just go Two-eyed on command, that’s not how it--ouch!” Connor flinched as Jared jabbed him in the ribs, a zap of electricity hissed from his fingertips. “What the fuck?!”

Jared looked at Evan. “Did it work?”

Connor slapped his hand away. “No, it fucking didn’t!”

“U-uh.” Evan felt a small spark of anger radiating through Connor’s chest. “A little.”

Jared grinned and rubbed his hands together. “Clear.”

“No!” Connor pointed a finger at him. “Don’t you fucking dare.”

Jared pulled his hands apart, arches of electricity stretched between his palms. “Come on, Murphy, take one for the team.”

Alana raised a hand. “Maybe we should move away from the other teams before trying this? I don’t want anyone to get hurt.”

“This is bullshit. I’m not trying anything.” Connor rubbed his temple. “I can’t hurt anyone.”

“We don’t technically need you to hurt anyone,” Alana said. “We need crowd control. If we can get you that little bit stronger and faster you could help make a perimeter. I doubt anyone would want to go near you when you’re like that, so it would make you perfect for making sure our flag is safe.”

Connor pressed the knuckles of one hand into his palm, pushing on joints that refused to crack. “I don’t want anyone to get hurt.”

“You’re not going to, right, Evan?”

Evan’s stomach twisted as Alana looked to him. “Um…” his lips felt gummed together.

_They’ll hate you if you say no_, hissed the voice. _You’re useless on your own. You both are. Practically powerless. If you say no you’ll come last and they’ll blame you. All your fault. It would be all your fault._

“W-Worse comes to it I have to calm you down, right?” Evan’s fingers made a grab for the hem of his shirt. “No…harm in trying.” He regretted the words the moment they left his mouth.

Connor’s expression shifted. His eyes—one blue, the other brown—narrowed into something dead between confusion and hurt. His knuckles finally cracked. “Fine. Whatever--but I’m not letting him shock me. I’ll sort it out on my own.”

Alana was practically beaming. “Perfect!” She made another note. “Okay. I think I’ve got something
sorted out.”

---

They didn’t actually jump into the fray once the allotted strategy time was finished. Instead Evan found him and his group herded into a sectioned-off patch of grass with the other Patients, each team separated by a collection of cones.

“No talking amongst yourselves,” Parchman barked over his loudspeaker. “Just watch. Team One and Two, you will go first, line up at either end of the field.”

There was a mumble as several Patients moved away from the group.

“Aren’t some people telepathic?” Connor muttered next to him

“Uh…” Evan looked over at Parchman, praying he couldn’t hear them. “I think so.”

“So this is bullshit then, they can still plan.”

Jared poked Connor’s arm. “Watch them! I don’t want to come last,” he hissed.

The first two teams seemed to have the same issue that Evan’s had: their powers didn’t really fit together. One team had a person who could spit acid, but given that he couldn’t hurt anyone it didn’t really do much. Another--according to Alana--had the power to absorb fire, but wasn’t up against a pyrokinetic.

Team Two won, but not because their powers were particularly fancy--just because they were fitter.

The following match was where things got interesting, mainly because it started with an explosion of light.

Evan blinked away black splotches just in time to see someone he dimly recognised from class scoop up the flag and start high-tailing it to the other end of the field.

“I told you! Flash bang!” Alana clapped her hands, earning herself a harsh Shhhh from Milo.

The girl who’d caused the flashbang was two thirds of the way down the field when she realised she was no longer holding the flag. She stopped dead in her tracks, staring dumbly at her empty hands.

Back at the opposite end of the field, a boy who Evan definitely did not recognized held both flags above his head.

Evan rubbed his eyes. “H-how?” he murmured.

“Joshua Garcia,” Alana whispered. “He….” she scrunched up her face. “It’s hard to explain. He’s not quite invisible, but he can make himself...unnoticed.” She pointed to a chunk of plastic sticking out from the bottom of his pant leg. “I remember he caused some trouble when he first arrived.”

Jared narrowed his eyes. “Never heard of him.”

“That’s kinda the point. We’ll have to keep an eye on him.” She took out her notebook again and started to scribble.

“Why?” Connor asked. “They’re just going to win.”

Evan couldn’t help but agree, at least until the next match.
He watched Joshua, waiting for him to disappear from view, but he didn’t. In fact, he didn’t move at all.

Connor’s brow furrowed. “What is he doing?”

“SHHHH!” Alana hushed him, flapping her hand wildly in his direction.

Joshua stood stone still in his starting position, his eyes stretched wide. A vein pulsed in his neck as he clenched his jaw, his skin turned a deadly shade of grey.

One of his teammates tapped his shoulder. Evan saw their mouths move, but whatever they said was drowned out by a stomach-churning scream.

The contestants froze as Joshua collapsed to his knees. He clawed at his scalp, gripping his hair and tugging handfuls. “No,” Joshua’s voice cracked, sending a sharp shiver down Evan’s spine. “No, no, no!” His cries became louder and louder, his words jumbling together into a single, pained sob.

Evan looked away. His eyes scanned over the rest of the contestants. Most had started moving again now, running either to comfort Joshua or to make a mad dash for the flag. On the opposite end of the field one stood unmoving in their starting position: a girl, only about eleven or so, blonde bob, glasses. Evan couldn’t make out her eyes from this distance, but he could guess where they were fixed. Hesitantly, he tapped Alana’s arm and pointed. “D-Do you...is she...”

Alana frowned and neat little lines creased up her forehead. “Miriam Glass,” she whispered.

“What’s her power?”

“I don’t kn--”

Jared cut her off. “You don’t know ?!”

“No. Do you?”

“No, but you’re the smart one. You’re supposed to know shit like this.”

Alana’s frown lessened a little at the word “smart”. She looked over at the adults, making sure they were watching the game and not her before she spoke again. “She doesn’t talk much, from what I can tell she’s been here a long time, but she never really...uses her powers. Do you even remember her competing last year?”

Jared, Zoe and Connor exchanged looks.

“No,” Zoe admitted. “But she must have been here.”

“Maybe she’s like Josh?” Jared suggested. “Invisible.”

Alana shook her head. “No. She’s doing something to Joshua, that much is obvious.”

“Four-Six-One,” a voice from the sidelines made Alana’s mouth snap shut. “If you don’t keep quiet your team will be disqualified, understand?”

---

Miriam Glass’ team won, no contest.
Evan’s team lined up at one side of the field, their flag hidden behind them.

“You sure you don’t want a hand?” Jared asked, flashing Connor a grin.

Connor rolled his eyes. “I can manage.”

Evan offered a small smile. It wasn’t much, but it was all he could offer at this point. At the very edge of his consciousness, he felt a small spark of anger start to burn. His stomach twisted.

It’s because of you.

He scanned the opposite team. Most of them were older than him, close to graduating, which didn’t bode well. He recognised a few: a girl with superspeed, a young pyrokinetic, a weedy-looking kid with sound manipulation, and a red-haired girl with superstrength.

Thorns dug into his arm and the fire beside him started to grow. Rather than smother it like he usually would, Evan pictured the leaves of saltbush encircling the fire. It wouldn’t be enough to put it out completely, but just enough so that it wouldn’t spread.

Out the corner of his eye he saw Connor roll his shoulders and neck, a shaky sigh fell from his lips.

From the side of the field a voice called. “Ready--”

Milo clapped his hands together and his skin glowed scarlet

“--set--”

Evan bit his lip, a hard lump forming in his throat

--go!”

Milo opened his hands and explosion of light and fire erupted into the air. It sent black spots dancing over Evan’s vision as Connor rushed forward, seemingly unphased by the burning heat. Evan blinked his eyes clear to see that everyone else had already started moving: Connor had reached the halfway point of the field his hands locked with the redhead with super strength. Sage grew around Connor’s knuckles as the girl gripped his hands, forcing him to take a step back.

Zoe had caught the kid with superspeed with a rope of light around her middle, her heels dug into the soft earth to try and stop her from making a mad dash for their flag.

Milo and Jared covered Alana with well-timed flashes of fire and lightning as she zigzagged her way down the field towards the enemy flag, the air around them thick with heat and humidity.

It was all too fast, made his head spin.

Get you ass in gear! The voice in the back of his head hissed. Stop standing around like a fucking idiot.

Evan took a deep breath and ran forward, focusing his gaze on Connor. Gently, he loosened the leaves’ grip on the fire in his gut, letting it burn a little brighter.

Connor’s jaw clenched and he took a slow step forward. The redhead’s fingers bent back painfully, causing her to yelp and pull back. Connor took the opportunity to shove his full weight against her, knocking her to the ground. He stumbled, but managed to keep upright as he ran forward.
“Sh-Shoot! Stop him!” someone yelled, their voice cut off as a ribbon of light wrapped around their mouth. Zoe yanked her arm, pulling them back onto their ass.

“Ha!” Jared punched the air. “You go girl!” His hair stuck out at all angles like a chimney brush with small sparks jumping off his skin into the air.

“Focus!” Alana screamed at him over her shoulder, only narrowly managing to dodge the grip of the kid with sound manipulation.

“On it!” Jared stamped his foot and the boy froze, his muscles locking up as electricity coursed through him.

The smell of burnt grass hit Evan’s senses.

_They’re gonna set the field on fire_, he thought. He’s started moving back towards his team’s own flag. He couldn’t really do much, but at least he could act as their last line of defense—not like they could hurt him anyway.

The redhead leapt to her feet and onto Connor’s back. She wrapped her arms around his neck, clinging to him like a monkey.

A sound—angry and animalistic—escaped Connor’s mouth and he turned violently in an attempt to throw her off.

She had guts, Evan could admit that. It took courage to pick a fight with Connor Murphy, especially when the only thing keeping him from going berserk was a useless piece of garbage.

Evan drew in a long, deep breath and let the fire roar for a moment, just enough for Connor to be able to throw her off.

She hit the ground with a sickening _crunch!_ And for a second everyone paused.

Evan looked to the staff. Dr Sherman had his thumb to his mouth, biting at his nail. Why weren’t they doing anything?

Agent Parchman waved his hand. “Continue.”

She wasn’t even up yet. The redhead lay there, breathing in short, sharp breaths.

“I said continue!” Parchman snapped.

Connor didn’t budge. He looked down, his head cocked ever so slightly to the side. He knelt down, his limbs moved like they were made of wood, janky and shaking as he held out his hand.

Evan’s heart skipped a beat and he smothered the fire in his chest.

The girl narrowed her brow, slowly took his hand and let Connor pull her up.

Connor’s lip quivered slightly as though he wanted to say something. He didn’t. Instead, he just dropped her hand and made a dash for the flag.

---

It was an easy win after that. The redhead may have been fine in Parchman’s eyes, but that didn’t stop her from running with a bit of a hunch.
“He’s such a dick,” Jared muttered once they were back in the stands. “How the fuck is that not a ‘harsh injury’? He fucking body-slammed her!” He gestured vaguely at Connor.

It was like a force field had sprung up around him, a perfect circle keeping the other kids away. He sat with his knees to his chest, hunched over and hugging himself close. His body still looked too big, like he’d been rolled flat and stretched out, shoulders hunched like a coiled spring.

Evan looked over at the redhead. She’d laid down on her stomach in the grass. Hesitantly, he scooted over to her. “A-Are you alright?” he murmured.

She turned her face to the side and looked up at him. “Yeah,” she murmured.

He glanced over at the staff to make sure they weren’t watching--he didn’t put it past Agent Parchman to call this cheating. He held out his hand and gently rested it on her back, summoning a warmth to his fingertips. The injury wasn’t actually that bad: some heavy bruising and a bit of a strain in the spinal ligaments. Definitely painful, but not as bad as it could have been.

Gingerly, the redhead sat up, touching her back. “Thanks.”

“No problem.” He smiled, trying to ignore the throbbing pain in the dead-centre of his skull. Patient headache, he thought glumly, rubbing his temple. He tried to summon the healing warmth to his brain, but all it did was make the pain worse--somehow. Like someone was twisting the halves of his brain apart.

He crawled back to his team, joining Connor in his forcefield. “Hey.”

Connor said nothing.

“Are...um...are you alright?”

Again, nothing. He just looked up, his lip quivering like before. Any words he wanted to say stuck in throat.

Evan’s shoulders slumped. He scooted a little closer--Not enough to draw attention, but enough to show he was there. He offered a reassuring smile. “It’s gonna be fine.”

---

By the time their next turn came around Evan was ninety-nine percent sure his head was going to explode. The pain had spread from the centre of his head to behind his eyes, making them water and twitch. Part of him knew that he could just go to one of the scrubs, just tell them, but another part knew that would just bring on the wrath of Parchman.

His vision blurred as Alana tugged them all into a group huddle.

“Miriam’s in this group.” She was only whispering, but each word was like a dagger stabbing into Evan’s frontal lobe. “This time round we’ve gotta focus on defense. Wear them down. Chances are they’re relying on her to do...whatever she does on people who run ahead. Wear them down.”

Evan tried to listen. He really did try. But he just wanted to climb into bed. Hide from the world. Hide from light. Hide from the ache.
As they walked to their starting position Connor put a hand on his shoulder, giving it what was supposed to be a reassuring squeeze. He still didn’t speak. Evan wasn’t entirely sure he could.

“Keep your eyes to the ground if you can,” Alana said as the countdown began.

“Ready!” The sound of the speaker crashed over Evan’s head, making him wince. Like someone had smashed him with a metal bat. “Set!” Smash! “Go!”

Everyone was moving. It was too loud. Pounding footsteps. The crackle of electricity. Voices screaming. Light flashing. Flames exploding.

Black spots splattered across Evan’s vision. His ears pounded. Head spun. His brain was splitting in two.

He rubbed his eyes with the heel of his palm, trying to blink away the blurring pain.

“Evan!”

He jumped and looked up.

Everything stopped. The sound was sucked from the air, the smudged colour of the world around him faded. For a brief moment all that existed were the eyes, hanging there like little blackholes draining everything away.

Miriam Glass stared at Evan.

Everything started again.

He was staring at Miriam glass.

He was falling.

_Why not? It’s not like you’re going to accomplish anything. Yeah, Evan Hansen, the guy who spends his free time scraping gum off seats and waiting for ducks because he has nothing else to do. No one’s going to remember you. No one’s going to care. You’re just going to end up getting in the way or fucking things up like an idiot. You’re a fucking idiot._

Falling.

_No one cares. Killing yourself would be a favour to everyone. You weigh them down. That’s why David left. That’s why he hit you. Cause you were stupid. Cause you stuttered and stressed and drove him up the fucking wall. It’s not normal. You’re not normal. You’re a sickness. A cancer. You bring everyone around you down. You kill them._

Falling.

_You’re the reason mom’s poor. You’re the reason dad left. You’re the reason you don’t have any friends. They all hate you. So why don’t you just jump and make the world a better place--_

“Evan!”

His eyes opened wide. At some point he had actually fallen. Grass tickled his cheek.

“Evan!”

It took him a moment to realise it was Dr Sherman that was yelling.
Slowly, Evan raised his head. He saw Connor, stock-still a little ways ahead. His body twitched and stretched, lips peeled back into a snarl. He felt a fire raging in his chest, burning him up.

Evan tried to Reach Out and his brain screamed at him to stop. All he could manage was a small moan of pain. His arms were dead. His legs refused to move. His head pulsed with a deep and searing pain.

He saw Miriam, stock still and staring.

Connor’s head was turned towards Miriam, though he managed not to meet her eyes. His hands balled into fists and he stepped forward. Evan closed his eyes.

He could hear screaming. Feet pounding. The ground slipped away from him as someone lifted him up.

“You’re alright.” Dr Sherman was holding him. He was running. “You’re alright.”

Evan tried to straighten up a little and glanced around at the scores of Patients and staff in motion. Some running away, some fighting the fleeing currents of people. Evan narrowed his eyes and craned his neck.

He saw Miriam on the ground. She didn’t seem hurt, just dazed, head turned to the Thing people were running to and from.

Connor, Evan realised. Connor was on top of someone, one hand clutched the collar of their suit, the other a fist slamming against their face. His knuckles were slick with blood, thumping again and again.

The face itself was barely recognisable beneath a twisted and bloody nose. The suit, however, made things clearer.

Evan tried to Reach Out one final time. He could taste his own blood as it dripped down from his nose to his lips.

He watched as hands grabbed at Connor, as a syringe was pressed into a neck. He kept watching until darkness took them both.
Chapter 42

Chapter Notes

So. Two things:

First, I've started a schedule. I'll be uploading a chapter of fanfic every week on Tuesday, alternating between this fic and my Sander Sides AU 'Have you seen this Man?'.

Second, this chapter gets dark. Remember back in chapter two when I said this fic would have a scene that was "the darkest thing I've ever written"? This is it. If you wanna give this chapter a skip, just shoot me a message on Tumblr and I'll write a summary.

Thanks to Maya-Zulf for editing

Trigger warnings:
Needles, medical procedures, vomit, anxiety attacks, and major character death.

Bright. Everything was bright.

Evan scrunched his eyes shut to block out the harshness of it. His brain still felt tender, throbbing like a heart in the centre of his skull.

He tried to roll over, but something held his arm in place. The sharp prick made his eyes snap open.

The buzzing LED lights of his bedroom glared down at him.

“He’s awake,” someone said by his ear.

“Sit him up.”

The two voices were like needles being stabbed into his head.

The voice keeping his arm in place gently put their hands on Evan’s shoulders and eased him up. A hazy figure sat beside Evan’s bed: an indistinct blob of black and white and blue.

The figure snapped their fingers in front of his face. “Focus,” it barked.

Evan swallowed hard to bring back moisture to his dry mouth. “Where’s Connor?” It was all he could think to say.

The figure tsked. “Not important.”

Evan blinked again and felt his stomach twist as Agent Parchman came into view. His face was covered with bruises, his nose crooked and his left eye was so swollen all he could do was squint.

“Where’s Connor?” he asked again.

“Transferred.” The word hung heavy in the air.
Bile burned in Evan’s throat. “No! N-no. He didn’t mean to...it was a mistake--I--”

Parchman raised a hand to silence him. “I warned you. He was your responsibility and you failed to keep him under control.”

_Your fault. It’s your fault._

“I did!” Evan’s voice cracked. “I couldn’t...Miriam...she…”

“We’re lucky Four-Five-Nine recovered.” Parchman’s tone was cold, practically clinical. “It would be a shame to lose a power like theirs.”

Evan snapped. He lunged forward, one hand outstretched to grab at Parchman’s collar. Images flashed in his mind, of Connor holding the agent down as he punched him again and again.

The nurse that held him up put an arm around his middle, yanking him back down onto the bed.

“Bring him back!” Evan found himself screaming. “Bring him back!”

Parchman didn’t even flinch. “He proved himself to be a danger. You know the rules and we’ve been making an exception of him for too long.” He wrinkled his nose a little and Evan saw his eye water with pain. “If it was up to me he would have been transferred a long time ago.”

Evan’s heart dropped like a stone. “H-He didn’t want to hurt anyone!”

“And yet he did.”

“Only...Only because you made him!” He froze. “You made him use his power.”

“I had to. He needed to be tested.”

“You wanted him to hurt someone! You...y-you, you wanted me to screw up!”

“Four-Six-Five, calm down or I will have you sedated.”

“You did it!”

Parchman’s jaw tightened. “Calm down,” he repeated. “I didn’t come here to be accused.” He grabbed Evan’s wrist so tightly it hurt. “I need you to heal me.”

For a moment, Evan just stared. Then, like an explosion, rage bloomed in his chest again. “I can’t,” the harshness of his own voice surprised him. Each word spat from his mouth like venom. “My head still hurts..”

“The doctors told me you’d had more than enough time to recuperate. You’re fine.” Parchman’s nails dug into Evan’s skin. “Heal me.”

Evan clenched his jaw and slowly summoned the healing warmth to his fingers, prodding through his skin like a pencil through paper. He watched as Parchman’s face was slowly covered in a thick coating of sage before it fell away to reveal his usual stern expression, now free of blood and bruises.

Parchman let Evan’s arm go and gingerly touched his own face. He frowned when he felt his nose and found it was still crooked, though no longer broken. “Good to see you’re still capable of taking orders,” he said as he got to his feet.
Evan kept his mouth shut.

“Leave him now.” Parchman waved a hand to the nurse before exiting the room without another word.

Evan stared down at his hands. The realisation crashed over him again like a wave.

*Connor’s gone. He’s in The Basement. He’s gone and it’s all your fault. You killed him like you killed Will. He’s probably already dead.*

No. He couldn’t be. Not yet.

Evan Reached Out, searching blindly for something to grab onto. He stretched his phantom limbs down, down, down as far as they could go. He felt something at the very edge of his conscious, something burning. Evan grabbed onto it and fell forward into darkness.

When his eyes opened again he was on his back, but also still sat on his bed in the infirmary. The room was too white, too small. Each of the four walls glared down at him, looming. Too clean. Too close. Too tall. Through Connor’s eyes, Evan watched the other start to thrash about, his body held down with thick Graphene straps.

“He’s set off again,” someone muttered.

Connor’s head turned and met the gaze of a man in scrubs, his hands crossed tightly across his chest. Evan recognised him as one of the older doctors at The Ward, though his name was lost to him.

The doctor ran a hand through his grey hair. “We really can’t give him anything?”

Another voice spoke up, this one female. “Nothing, it’ll interact with the final dose.”

The elderly doctor tsked. “We didn’t use to bother with all this. Quick and clean, that’s how it was supposed to be.”

“He’s a kid, Mike!”

*Killing him.* Evan’s stomach dropped. *They’re talking about killing him.*

Connor pulled against his restraints again, his gaze finally looking down so Evan could see his body properly. The bed had arm braces, forcing Connor’s arms away from his sides.

He bit his lip and felt his nails dig into his palms. He felt a prickle run down his arm as thick, spined thorns dug their way into his skin. “I’m sorry.” The words were barely a whisper. He didn’t even know if Connor could hear him.

He knew he should look away. Cut the link. But he couldn’t, even if Connor couldn’t hear him, at least he would know he wasn’t alone.

“Where is he?” The male voice--Mike--muttered.

“Probably dealing with Parchman,” the female voice replied.

“Still? You don’t think he’ll watch, do you?” Mike walked over to the bedside, his head slanted curiously to the side. “Wouldn’t put it past him.”

“I don’t think he’s got clearance.”
“Probably the only thing he hasn’t got clearance for.” Mike peered down at Connor and his gaze lurched forward, a pained snarl escaping from his lips. “Can’t wait to see how his brain works.”

Evan hugged himself tightly, hoping Connor could feel it somehow. A lump had formed in his throat, he couldn’t breathe.

_Don’t look away. This is your fault. Your fault. Your fault!_

A door out of Connor’s line of sight opened and Mike looked away.

“ Took you long enough,” he said.

“Sorry.”

A chill ran down Evan’s spine.

Dr Sherman’s face hung over Connor. He looked the same as he had when Parchman had forced Evan to heal him: pale, practically sickly. His quiff stuck up at a weird angle where he’d clearly been running his hands through his hair. In one hand he held a metal briefcase.

“It’s been a while since I filled out the paperwork,” Sherman continued, setting the case on a metal tray. The tone of his voice was low and clinical, as though he was simply going through the motions. “Not to mention I had Agent Parchman breathing down my neck.”

“Did he want to watch?” Mike asked.

Sherman hummed in response. There was a sharp _click_ as he unlatched the briefcase.

“Is he?”

“No.” Dr Sherman kept his head bent, watching his hands work. “I thought I’d give Connor some dignity.” He turned and for a moment his eyes met Connors. He froze and then, slowly, raised the corners of his mouth into a smile. “You’re okay.”

Evan didn’t know who he was talking to; himself, or Connor.

Dr Sherman took an IV bag out the briefcase and placed it gently on a metal table by Connor’s bed. “Can you get the stand, please?”

The woman nodded. “Yeah.”

Connor started to struggle again. Evan watched as his head flailed helplessly and his limbs writhed as he pressed his full strength against the Graphene.

The doctors didn’t seem phased. The woman wheeled a metal IV stand to his side and Dr Sherman got to work attaching the tubing. The liquid in the bag had a slight green tinge, just visible enough for Connor to watch it slowly travel down the tube.

“Ready,” Sherman muttered under his breath and Mike cleared a spot on Connor’s arm with an alcohol-soaked cloth.

Connor was completely still now. Somehow that made it worse.

Dr Sherman stood there with the needle, his hands hovering, frozen, above Connor’s arm. “It’ll hurt for a second,” he said. His voice was completely dull now. “Just a second.”
“He can’t understand you, you know?” Mike said. “Not when he’s Two-eyed.”

“Call it a precaution.” Dr Sherman eased the needle into Connor’s skin.

Evan heard a sharp hiss of breath and for a moment the world turned a warm black as Connor closed his eyes. His body gave a final, futile, jerk.

When his eyes opened again Connor’s sight was blurred and twisted, only coming into focus as the tears started to fall.

Dr Sherman leaned heavily against the table. His eyes scrunched shut, almost as though he was bracing for a blow that would never come.

Black splotches crowded Connor’s vision and a sob escaped Evan’s lips.


He blinked and found himself back in the infirmary, sat up in bed.

Connor was gone.

Evan Reached Out again but was just met with darkness each time. He tasted bile at the back of his mouth and scrambled to his feet. His legs were shaky but managed to carry him forward, through the hall to the closest bathroom.

Hot tears and vomit stained Evan’s cheeks as he leaned over the toilet bowl, trembling.

*It’s your fault,* said the voice. *Connor Murphy is dead and it’s all your fault.*
Chapter 43

Chapter Notes

It's a short one today, folks.
I'm glad you all seemed to have enjoyed the last chapter :D
Thank you to Levi for reading this over.
TW: Grief, Dissociation, Mild violence.

Connor’s half of the room was stripped bare by the time Evan arrived back at their room.

Gingerly, he approached Connor’s bed. There was no quilt, no sheets, no pillow, just a mattress.
Evan ran his hand over the surface, plucking idly at a loose thread. He pulled open Connor’s bedside drawer to find it empty. His nail polish, his notebooks, his toiletries, and hairbrush all gone. Even the little scraps of paper and junk he’d stuffed in there had disappeared.

Evan sat down on Connor’s mattress, not daring to look underneath. He didn’t have to, there was no reason to leave the comic books when they’d already taken everything else. What would they do with them? Give them away? Send them back to the Murphys so they had something to remember him by?

_Burn them._

Evan’s stomach twisted and he jumped to his feet. He scrambled to his own bedside table and ripped open the drawer, letting out a sigh of relief when he saw his copies of _The Amazing Spider-man #1, #2 and #16_ neatly stacked at the bottom.

“Where’s the Connor Murphy?”

Evan’s heart jumped to his throat. He’d almost forgotten about Lucky.

“Um.” The words stuck in his throat. Lucky wouldn’t understand, they barely understood why humans cried. “He’s…” Evan swallowed at a lump in his throat. _Dead. He’s dead. Dr Sherman killed him and it was my fault. “H-He’s been transferred.”_

“Transferred?” Lucky echoed. “To where?”

“Somewhere else.”

“Is that why they took everything?”

Evan nodded, hugging the comics to his chest.

“I will miss him,” Lucky declared after a moment’s silence. “He gave me water.”

Evan hummed and climbed onto Connor’s mattress. He curled up, the stiff pages seeping cold into his shirt. Tears welled in his eyes again and he drew in a sharp, shaking breath. Every time he thought those words, _Connor Murphy is Dead_ they hit him fresh, running sharply down his spine.
like an electric shock and echoing around his head again and again.

He closed his eyes.

*Think of anything else,* he told himself. But what else was there?

He tried to think of home, of his tiny bedroom back in New Jersey. But Connor had lived in New Jersey. He lived close enough to know about the orchard, to have been there. For all Evan knew, he could have been one of the people in Candy and Scott’s groups, learning weird facts about the trees and the family that planted them. They could have passed each other on the street, sat next to each other on the bus, bumped into each other any number of times and never even knew.

Evan scrunched up his face.

*Don’t think of home.*

He tried to think of his mom. She’d be finishing up her paralegal course soon, maybe she already had? Maybe she was organising documents for a case right now? Drafting pleadings, talking to lawyers, making something of herself. But Connor’s dad had been a lawyer and Connor was supposed to be one, like his dad and his dad and his dad before him.

Besides, Heidi and Cynthia were friends—or at least mutual-support-group-members. Would Cynthia post about Connor being transferred? Did she even know yet? Would they even bother telling her? Zoe would, at some point.

*Don’t think of mom.*

So, he thought of Jared. But Jared had been friends with Will. William Dean, the guy who killed Connor the first time around. The guy who’d been dragged kicking as screaming to The Basement knowing he’d failed and he was the one about to die. Evan saw Will strapped down to the same bed as Connor, pulling against the same restraints and repeating again and again that Connor was going to kill someone someday.

Will had gotten his wish, just a few months too late.

Evan buried his face against his pillow, his jaw clenched hard. He just had to stop thinking. Just stop thinking. Just. Stop. Thinking.

He started to count in his head. Fast at first, before eventually slowing to a crawl.

*One, two, three, four.*

People always said to count sheep to fall asleep. You didn’t have to worry about unwanted thoughts when you were asleep.

*Five, six, seven, eight.*

He kept counting, murmuring the numbers numbly until, like a curtain falling, he fell asleep.

---

Time went funny after that.

When Connor was alive time would pass by so quickly that Evan would lose track, now it flipped between long crawling periods of consciousness and brief slinkings into sleep.
Evan didn’t bother with classes or therapy. He wouldn’t have bothered moving at all if the overly peppy nurse hadn’t made it his life mission to get him out of bed each morning and down to breakfast.

Conversations with the others were just a blur. He knew Alana, Zoe and Jared were talking to him, and he knew that he was talking back, but what he heard and said never really seemed to stick.

This was life now, he realised: sleep and food and conversations that didn’t matter. A little under two years of this and then he’d be deployed somewhere for a lifetime of working for people who didn’t care about him, who could dispose of him the moment he did something wrong, the moment they decided he was too much effort.

He might as well do nothing while he still could, curled up on an empty mattress.

It was a good plan, at least for the first little while.

Someone was knocking at his bedroom door.

“Kid?” Jacobi didn’t bother waiting for him to answer. He took a step into the room and his shoulders slumped when he saw Evan. He lay on his side with his knees to his chest. “Come on. Doc gave you a bit of time to yourself, but you gotta go sometime.”

Evan looked up at him. He swallowed hard. “I’m tired,” he said.

“You can handle an hour. Get up, come on.” Jacobi held out a hand for him.

There was a pause. “You...you're not gonna let me stay, are you?”

“Nope.”

Evan sighed and took Jacobi’s hand, letting the other man pull him to his feet. He followed Jacobi down the hall to the elevator, his stomach twisted into a tight knot.

Therapy. What did they even expect him to say? What could they even do?

Jacobi pushed the button for the ground floor before fumbling in his pockets. He pulled out a packet of gum and popped one into his mouth, holding out another for Evan. “Here,” he said.

“Um. T-Thanks.” He took it cautiously, folding the strip with his fingers before popping it into his mouth.

“No problem.” Jacobi’s voice seemed off somehow, softer.

The elevator crawled down.

Jacobi cleared his throat. “Look...Kid,” he scratched the back of his neck. “Let yourself be angry. It helps, like, it really does.”

Evan said nothing, just chewed his gum, his eyes on his shoes.

“Cause, like, it’s not fair and it fucking sucks, yeah? If anyone says otherwise they’re lying through their goddamn teeth. And don’t you dare let the do that ‘all in God’s plan’ B.S. Punch ‘em if they do.”

Evan looked up. He didn’t have to ask.
“My brother was a Patient. Got sent here when I was...God, I must have been eight? I got a lot of that stuff from people who thought they knew what it was like.”

He swallowed his gum. “I-I’m sorry.”

“Don’t be. It happened a long time ago.” The doors pinged open and Jacobi gestured for Evan to leave. “Doc really wants to talk to you. Just go get it over with.”

---

Dr Sherman smiled when Evan opened the door. “Hey,” his voice jumped, far too chipper. “Long time no see, huh?”

Evan’s heart thudded in his chest.

He hadn’t actually seen Dr Sherman since…

Since he killed Connor. Since you just sat there and watched.

Monkshood bloomed from his skin.

Dr Sherman’s expression faltered, a flash of confusion darting across his face as Evan sat down.

“How you feeling?” he asked.

“You know how I’m feeling.” Evan was shocked by how dry his voice sounded.

“I know, son, but it helps to hear your end of things.”

“Don’t call me son.”

Dr Sherman’s eye twitched. “Okay, Evan. I know you’re upset, I’m just trying to help. You and Connor have a very strong connection and I can see why being separate would be tough on both of you.”

Evan could barely believe what he was hearing. “S-Separate?” he echoed. “He’s _dead._” The word hurt. It was the first time he’d actually spoken it aloud.

Dr Sherman _chuckled._ “Evan, that rumour has been around since I arrived. It’s just a rumour, ask anyone who works here and they’ll tell you that. He’s been transferred to a facility better equipped for helping him.”

Anger boiled in Evan’s stomach. _How can you lie? I saw you do it!_ He wanted to scream. _I watched you. You smiled at him!_

“Then where is he?” he asked. “You keep saying he’s been transferred, but you don’t say where? Th-there aren’t other Wards.”

The chuckle ran dry. “I can’t...that’s classified, Evan.”

“Because he’s dead. O-otherwise, why would you take him to the basement? You have the p-p-padded rooms, right? So why don’t you just keep him in there and move him?”

“Evan—”

“You’d really tra-transfer him to the same place as Will? After what he did?” The words wouldn’t
stop. The clogged up his throat, falling from his mouth in an endless stream. “You killed them both and I-lied, I know you do. I can’t feel him anymore. I know he’s gone!”

Dr Sherman’s shoulders slumped. “Evan.” There was a harshness to the word. He placed down his clipboard and stood up, moving to Evan’s chair. He knelt down in front of him so they were practically eye-to-eye. “Look at me. I am not lying to you,” his voice was low and deadly serious. “I promise, Connor isn’t dead.” His expression didn’t change, he didn’t look away or stutter. Cold. Clinical.

The kind of voice he’d used when he told Connor it would only hurt for a moment. The same kind of expression he’d used when he called for the IV stand so he could flood poison into his veins and let him die.

Fire exploded in Evan’s chest and his hand seemed to move at its own accord. A loud thud! hung in the air as Sherman’s glasses were knocked from his face.

Evan’s knuckles stung.

Sherman went quiet as a large, red mark slowly formed across his cheek. “Right.” He got to his feet and went over to collect his glasses. His face seemed weirdly naked without them, his large eyes now small and stern. He held them close to his face, inspecting them. The left lens was cracked.

And then, he smiled and Evan’s blood ran cold. “I think we should cut the session short today, yeah?”
As he walked through the halls Evan felt as though someone was bearing down on his shoulders. A thick, heavy, weight like a blanket, wrapped around him, strangling him. His knuckles itched and he kept clenching and unclenching his hands.

For a moment he wondered, with a slight thrill, if he was going Two-eyed. It made him stop dead in his tracks, his heart thudding in his chest.

No, said the voice. No, you’re just angry.

Good.

He hugged himself tightly, noticing the way his jaw tensed, the way the fire radiated out from his chest and up the back of his neck, the way his knuckles stung where he’d hit Dr Sherman.

The image flashed before his eyes: The doctor’s face close to his. Liar. The image shifted and he saw Connor again, pinning Agent Parchman to the ground as he punched his face black and blue.

A cold realisation seeped into his bones.

You hurt a doctor, the voice at the back of his head murmured. You proved you’re a danger.

His stomach twisted into a hard knot. Evan turned his head to look over his shoulder, glancing around the empty hallway. Everyone was either in class or therapy. There’d be no one around to watch if he got dragged down to The Basement.

No one will know about Connor. Not really. No one knows what you saw.

Evan broke into a run, stumbling slightly as he fished around in his pocket for his phone card. His fingers brushed against the cool metal surface of the panic button. He froze and took it out, letting it rest in his palm. Then, in one fluid movement, he threw it to the ground and ran.

He didn’t stop running until he found a phone, which, admittedly, didn’t take long.

His hands shook as he scanned the card and punched in the number.

“All calls are recorded for your safety,” the tinney, robot voice told him. He didn’t care. Let them hear.

The phone buzzed. Once. Twice… he held his breath, waiting, praying for an answer.

“Sorry, I can’t come to the phone right now, please leave a message and I’ll get back to you when I
“Shit,” his hissed under his breath and tried again. Still no luck.

Evan slammed his fist against the side of the phone. “Come on!” he snapped. A bead of sweat ran down his temple. “Please. Please. Please.” He tried again, this time using her mobile number.

It rang once, twice, three times--

“Who’s this? I’m at work, I can’t really talk long.”

That was all he needed. Just like that Evan started to cry. He tried to speak, but the words just turned to mush in his mouth.


“They…” He wiped his nose on the back of his hand. “T-they killed him. They killed Connor.”

The other end went silent.

“Evan, honey, you’re breaking up. Try and speak slowly. Deep breaths, okay? I’m here.”

He clenched his jaw. “They killed him!” He yelled down the phone. “They killed him. Connor’s gone and they killed him and they killed Will and they’re probably going to kill me too!”

Another pause.

“Evan, I think there’s something wrong with my phone. I can’t hear you.”

He punched the phone again.

Of course, they’d have a way to block what he was saying. Of course.

*So you don’t go spilling all their dirty secrets.*

He drew in a shaky breath. There had to be some way, there had to be something he could do to let her know. Anything.

Evan felt a hand grab his shoulder.

He whirled round and came face to face with Jacobi.

Jacobi didn’t let go of his shoulder. “Tell her there are issues with the phone line and hang up kid,” he said sternly.

Evan just stayed frozen.

“Ev?” Heidi’s voice buzzed in his ear. “Evan, are you there?”

He sniffed. “Um. Um. Yeah, y-yeah. I’m here... I’m just...” he looked Jacobi in the eye. “I’m just feeling homesick. S-sorry. I just... they’re having issues with the phones and... yeah... sorry.”

Heidi’s tone softened. “It’s alright, sweetie. How about you call me when the phones are working again and we’ll talk it out? Don’t worry about the time, call my mobile and I promise I’ll answer.”

“Um...”
Jacobi tapped his wrist.

“Yeah. Yeah, I’ll call you when...I’ll call you then.”

“Okay, honey. Talk to you later, alright?”

“Yeah...talk to you later.”

He kept listening to the dial tone for a moment before putting the phone back on the receiver. “Are...” he had to force the words from his mouth. “Are you going to...am I in...”

“Trouble? A bit. Yeah.” Jacobi scratched the back of his neck. “I didn’t think you’d actually punch anyone, jesus.” He let out a long sigh. “I get your upset, Kid. Like I said, you’re allowed to be angry, but you gotta be careful about this shit.”

Evan looked down at his feet.

Jacobi held out his hand. “Give it to me, Kid.”

Evan’s grip on his phone card tightened, the plastic edges cutting into his palm.

“You’ll get it back eventually. You can either give it to me now or have some big shot doctor try and take it later, choice is yours.”

“I...” Evan hesitated. “I’ve got to call my mom again.”

“You’ll get it back eventually,” he repeated, wiggling his fingers. “Come on.”

Evan met his eye again. The corners of Jacobi’s mouth had dropped into a slight frown, brows narrowed.

Evan dropped the card into his hand.

---

Back in bed. That was the routine now. Bed, eat, bed, eat. Evan knew that he must have spent some time sleeping, though they were often short and dreamless bursts.

Sleep and food and conversations that didn’t matter.

The medication they gave him changed shape and colour and made his brain feel soft, but he didn’t really care. Even if he did, Evan rationalised, he wouldn’t be able to do something about it. He could try to figure out how Will had managed to skip his doses, but he’d probably just screw that up.

Sleep and food and conversations that didn’t matter.

Life rolled past until someone decided to knock at his door again.

Evan waited for them to barge in, but he just heard another knock.

Slowly, he sat up. “Uh. Come in?”

The peppy nurse stuck his head in. “Hey!” Just his voice alone was enough to make Evan wince. “Up and at-em!”

He’d already eaten breakfast and it was nowhere near lunch. “What is it?” Evan asked, rubbing his
eyes with the heels of his palms.

“Not sure, Dr Sherman wants you—”

“I’m not doing therapy,” his voice felt cold.

“He’s not working today, kiddo. It’ll take ten minutes tops.”

Evan wrinkled his nose and got to his feet. “Fine.”

He’d expected the nurse to lead him to Dr Sherman’s office on the first floor, but instead, the elevator screeched upwards, painfully climbing up and up until they reached the tenth floor.

Evan trailed behind the nurse, watching his shoes as they walked to the final room at the very end of the hallway. The nurse offered him a smile and nodded towards the door.

“You promise this isn’t going to take long?” Evan asked.

“Not if you don’t want to.”

“That’s not what you said earlier.”

“You’ve gotten better at talking back to people.” The nurse gave him a thumbs up. “Good progress.”

Evan sighed and pushed open the door, stepping inside.

He couldn’t move.

Heidi gave her son a big grin and jumped to her feet. “Hi, Evan!” Before he could even process what was happening, she’d wrapped her arms around him and pulled him into a bone-crushing hug. After a long moment, she pulled back, holding him at an arm’s length. “Look at you! You’ve gotten so big!”

Evan forced his mouth to start working again. “Y-you’re...you’re supposed to be...” there was no way his mom would be able to buy a plane ticket from New Jersey to Arizona, let alone the bus ride to the middle of nowhere.

“Your doctor called me,” she explained. “He said there was an issue with your phone card or something and that you couldn’t do it yourself--”

And you believed him?

“--Cynthia and her husband offered to help me get here.”

Evan felt his stomach twist. “T-they’re here?”

She nodded. “Me and Cynthia have been going to yoga together, she suggested it when I told her what had happened.” She paused suddenly, shaking her head. “That doesn’t matter now, come sit down.”

She moved the chairs so they sat side by side and settled down beside him. The whole time she kept up that same wide smile, the kind that made lines crinkle around the edges of her eyes.

She looked smaller, a little older too and she’d let her hair grow out more. She was different, but she was still undoubtedly Heidi Hansen.
Tears pricked Evan’s eyes.

“Hey, hey, what’s the matter?” Heidi asked.

He wanted to scream it again. Just blurt it all out and tell her everything.

The clock on the wall ticked.

They were listening.

What would they do if he did tell her? There was no way to block him out or cut him off, no when they were face to face. He could whisper, maybe then they wouldn’t hear and she’d be able to get the message to someone or…

No, the voice at the back of his head hissed. No. You know what will happen. They’ll burst in and take you to The Basement. She’ll probably be arrested. They’d have a protocol or a plan, they aren’t stupid.

They’d put a tissue box on the desk and Evan reached for one with a shaking hand. “Connor...um...” He twisted the tissue around his fingers. “Did...did Cynthia tell you?”

“Tell me what? They’re meeting with him today.”

They don’t know. They haven’t even told his parents.

He was going to be sick.

“Um...he...they did this b-big test thing a while ago and...” He attacked someone. “He...he got transferred.”

“Transferred?” Heidi echoed.

He felt like he was reciting from a script, the words stale in his mouth. “Yeah. Transferred to...I don’t really know where...” he trailed off. “They really didn’t tell Cynthia?”

Heidi’s smile fell and Evan watched her expression shift.

He’d seen that look on her face only once in his life: back when his elementary school had a big fundraiser and Justine Par’s mom had shaken the collection tin at them and muttered something about those kinds of people being stingy.

Heidi Hansen, as a rule, was not an angry person, but Evan could see the rage burning behind her eyes.

“No,” her voice raised a little as she spoke. “No, I don’t think they did. How long ago was it?”

Evan felt like his voice was trying to climb back down his throat. “A while ago.” He got the tissue in half. “It was...really sudden. Spur of the moment...” he got quieter and quieter with each word.

Heidi pulled him into another hug. “Hey, it’s okay, Evan.”

No. No, it’s not. It’s really, really not.

Evan hid his face against her shoulder. “S-sorry.”
“You have nothing to be sorry about,” she murmured, rubbing small circles against his back. “That’s what’s been bothering you, isn’t it?”

He just nodded. Evan knew this was something he couldn’t actually explain. He’d never told her he was bisexual or that he and Connor had been dating—he hadn’t felt the need to—but now the words stuck in his teeth and jumbled together into a sob.

“Bastards,” Heidi muttered under her breath. “They’re supposed to help you kids and they pull stuff like this.”

“It’s…it’s fine, mom.”

Liar.

“No, no, it’s not fine.”

You’ve just made her angry. Dragged her into your bullshit. She’s gonna have to sit on this now. Forever.

“I’m overreacting.” Evan pulled back and dabbed at his cheek with the crumbled remains of the tissue. Heidi handed him another.

“You’re not,” she told him. “I’d be doing the same thing if I was in your shoes.”

The conversation kind of petered out after that. For a long few moments the two of them just sat there. Poppies and daffodils coated his arm and he couldn’t quite remember what they meant.

Someone started yelling in the hallway, breaking through the thick air of silence.

“W-what’s going on?” he asked.

“I’m not sure.” Heidi gave his shoulder a squeeze and stood up, opening the door and peeking out. Evan watched as her face turned white. “Oh, God!” she bolted into the hall a moment’s hesitation. Evan felt his heart skip a beat, his chair scraping as he clambered after her.

He stepped out to find Jacobi and another security guard holding a grey-haired man back by his shoulders. The peppy nurse held himself up against the wall, one hand pressed against his nose. Evan could see blood seeping through the nurse’s fingers.

“Sir, if you don’t at least try to control yourself we’ll be forced to press charges,” Jacobi barked. The grey-haired man took no notice, trying to force himself out of their grip. “I’m not leaving until I’ve spoken to whoever’s in charge, do you understand? Get off me, for God’s sake.”

Heidi rushed over. “Larry, what’s going on?” gingerly, she held out her hands. “I’m a nurse too, let me take a look.”

“They won’t tell me where Connor is,” he snapped, trying to pull himself free again. “He’s my son, I have a right to know where he is”

Larry. This man was Connor’s father.

He glanced around. A few of the other doors along the hallway had opened up, other Patients and their parents taking a peek at the shitshow unfolding before them.
The nurse shook his head at Heidi. “I’m fine.” He straightened up. “Sir, this is government property and we’re well within our rights to ask you to leave.”

“Not until I see my son!”

“I’m afraid that’s not possible, sir.”

Out the corner of his eye Evan could see into another one of the rooms. Zoe Murphy stood beside a woman--Cynthia, he guessed. Cynthia had a hand to her mouth, a frightfully empty look to her eyes.

“Then tell me where he is! He’s my son!” Larry snapped again.

“I’m afraid that’s classified, Sir.” The nurse had that dull tone to his voice. Cold, clinical. It made the hair on the back of Evan’s neck stand on end. “Jacobi and Simmons are going to escort you downstairs. If you don’t leave peacefully we will be forced to press charges, understand?”

Larry’s mouth opened and closed but no words came out. Eventually, he grit his teeth. “Can I at least talk to my daughter?”

“Briefly,” the nurse nodded.

Jacobi and Simmons let him go. Larry shot them both a hard scowl.

For a split second, Larry and Evan met each other’s eyes.

The relation to Connor was pretty obvious now that he knew what to look for: same hard-lined face, same narrowed glare.

He couldn’t help but wonder if this was where Connor got his temper
Chapter 45

Chapter Notes

Sorry this one is a bit short!
Thank you to Levi for editing.
TW: Reference to drugs.

Evan was pretty sure he was dead. It was the only logical conclusion he could come to for why he felt so…

His brain was thick as sludge, thoughts slipping away before he could even get a hold of them. If it wasn’t for the fact that he could feel the slow thud of his pulse when he put his fingers to his neck, he would have thought he’d become a zombie.

“Evan?” Zoe snapped her fingers in front of his face. The sound was just enough to pull him back to reality, at least for a moment.

“How?”

“You look like you’re going to faint, are you okay?”

Evan pressed the back of his hand to his cheeks. His skin felt cool and clammy with a thin layer of sweat. “Um.” He forced the corners of his mouth into a smile. “Yeah. Sorry.”

Zoe narrowed her eyes, her face drawn close to his. She didn’t look too well, either. Dark circles hung limply below her eyes. “Are you sure?”

Evan barely heard her through the fog, but he nodded all the same. The fuzz wrapped around him like a warm and weighted blanket, dragging him down, down, down into nothing.

Zoe and Alana were talking. Jared too.

Then they were in class, the questions on the board warped and blurred.

Then they were at lunch, some kind of sandwich tasteless and heavy on his tongue.

Then he was in bed, limbs heavy and numb.

How long had it been since the P.O.T.s?


No...something with a T. Thursday. Yes, that was why he was on the roof.

The fog in his brain came and went like a tide.

Evan drew in a deep breath and looked down at his arm. Poppies and Daffodils. He tried to push his consciousness above the waves, but no matter how hard he tried he couldn’t find their meaning.
He curled his toes, feeling them grip the soles of his shoes.

*Focus.*

For a moment he felt the sting of a thorn on his arm and then the haze crashed over him again, dragging him under as everything became numb.

“Mr Hansen?”

Evan blinked dumbly. Had Dr Peet always been there?

She waved a hand in front of his face. “Mr Hansen, are you alright?”

He raised his head above the haze. “Yeah.” His own voice sounded so far away. “Sorry.”

Dr Peet’s lip twisted and her head cocked curiously to one side. “Are you sure?” her eyes flicked to the flowers on his arm.

Evan managed a nod. “Yeah.

Dr Peet hummed sharply and raised a hand. “Follow my finger,” she told him before moving it around.

He did.

She hummed again. The sound was short and sour as she let her hand fall back to her side. “You’re not concussed,” she said plainly, her eyes narrowed. She gestured, waiting for Evan to nod before she took his head in her hands, turning it this way and that. “Your pupils are heavily dilated...oh...No...” she murmured to herself. “No.” She stepped back from him and cleared her throat. “Mr Hansen, tell me what you’re feeling right now.”

“Huh?”

“What emotions are you feeling right now. Tell me.”

“Um...” Evan looked down at his arm. The thorn from before had gone now. There were no vines or christmas roses, just poppies and daffodils with limp stems and petals. “I...don’t know.”

Dr Peet drew in a sharp breath through her nose. “Bastard,” she hissed.

“Huh?”

“Not you...just....” She ran a hand through her thick hair, pushing the black locks away from her face. “What the hell is he thinking?!?”

Angry. Evan Realised. She was angry and despite everything everyone had ever said about Dr Peet, he’d never actually seen her mad before.

Peet shook her head. “Come with me,” she said.

“Where?” Evan asked.

“Your room. You need to rest.”

He didn’t argue. He let Dr Peet lead him by the hand down the stairs and back to his room. He crawled into bed, not even bothering to change into his pyjamas.
Sleep came quicker than he expected. He must have been tired.

The next thing he was awake again, his face squished against his pillow. His clothes felt uncomfortable, sticky with sweat and unwashed. His covers were too hot, too heavy, but he couldn’t bring himself to move.

“What the hell were you thinking?!” He heard Dr Peet hiss.

There was a long silence.

“Answer the question, for christ’s sake!”

“He was upset.”

Evan tensed at the sound of Dr Sherman’s voice. He turned his head a little, just enough to see the two doctors out the corner of his eye.

Dr Peet looked rigid, her hands balled into tight fists by her sides.

“No shit he’s upset!” She was whispering, but somehow the words sounded louder than a plane crash. “It would be concerning if he wasn’t.”

Dr Sherman just shook his head. “You don’t understand--”

“Oh, don’t I?”

“No, Peet, you don’t. You can’t...he’s upset.”

“Most of the people in this building are upset, we don’t drug them all numb, do we?”

“No...but--”

“Did you even ask him first? Or at least tell him what they did?”

Dr Sherman said nothing. He looked like a child who’d just been caught by his parents.

“Jesus Christ, Christopher!”

“You don’t understand,” Dr Sherman said quickly.

“Then explain--and don’t you dare try telling me he’s upset again. Don’t you...fucking dare.”

“But he’s...he...” Dr Sherman’s footsteps rattled around Evan’s head as he started to pace. “He’s more than upset, Peet. He’s...He’s grieving. He’s grieving and he’s going to end up doing something stupid. I can’t lose another Patient--”

“Bullshit.”

“What?”

“Bullshit,” Peet repeated. “You know full well he’s not going to do anything, just look at him!”

Evan snapped his eyes shut and tried to relax his face.

“He will! I’ve got the bruises to prove it. He’s angry, Peet. He’s grieving and he’s angry and that never goes well with Patients--you know that!”
“Anger is a natural part of grief. It’ll pass.”

Evan turned his head a little, his eyes cracking open just enough to see Sherman shaking his head.

“It’s not, believe me, I know what that feels like.” His skin was still pink where Evan had punched him. “This is...anger when you’re grieving, it’s general..wide. You’re angry at the world, at God or fate, you’re angry at the concept of death. Evan is specific, Peet.”

A razor sharp laugh escaped Peet’s lips. “Oh. I get it.”

Dr Sherman tensed. “Get what?”

“He’s mad at you, isn’t he?”

Dr Sherman clenched his jaw.

“That’s why he hit you. He’s not mad Connor’s gone. He’s mad at you and you couldn’t take it so you drugged him to make it go away--”

“No--”

“Don’t try to lie to me, Christopher. We both know that doesn’t work.”

Dr Sherman looked down, his lip quivering. “You don’t understand.”

“I understand perfectly.”

“No! You don’t, okay? You don’t understand because you can’t feel it. You don’t know what it’s like to have to look at a person every day and know that they hate you more than anything. To actually know. And I can’t have that, Peet. I can’t--”

Unconsciousness dragged Evan back into the dark.

Just like that, there was nothing.

And then--

Dr Sherman was sat on the edge of Connor’s bed, his head in his hands. From this distance, Evan could see that the doctor’s knuckles were white here he was pulling at his hair.

Peet’s voice washed over him. “You realise I’m going to have to report this, right?”

Dr Sherman’s face contorted into a look of pure terror. “No! No, Peet. Don’t. They’ll transfer me.”

Serves you right, the voice at the back of Evan’s head murmured. Even that voice sounded hazy, a soft murmur. Serves you right.

And again, he was asleep.

This time when he woke up Evan didn’t feel as heavy. He managed to sit up. He pressed one gingerly against his head as though that would be enough to stop the whole world from spinning.

Dr Sherman was gone, but Peet still sat on the edge of Connor’s bed. “Careful.” She put out a hand to stop him.
“What happened?” Evan asked, sinking back down onto his pillow. The room kept spinning.

Dr Peet hesitated. “There were some changes to your medication,” she said slowly. “We’re switching you back to Zoloft, we just have to wait for this one to get out of your system first.”

Evan closed his eyes. Dr Sherman had changed his meds...drugged him. “What were they?” he asked quietly.

For a moment there was silence.

“It was a medication created specifically for Patients,” Peet said finally. “Empaths specifically...it creates a state of emotional numbness.” Evan heard her sigh. “It’s supposed to be used every once in a while to stop them from getting overwhelmed, not every day.” The mattress rustled as she adjusted herself, moving closer to him. “I’ve arranged for you to be transferred to my care as well, you’ll be joining my patients for group therapy. We’re going to have to move your time table around a bit, but that shouldn’t pose too much of a challenge. You should have swapped GPs after...you should have swapped a while ago. All this...I’m sorry you had to deal with it, Mr Hansen.”

Evan felt his lip quiver.

“You’re not allowed to say sorry, remember?” he murmured. “No sorrys.”

Dr Peet paused, a small chuckle escaping from her lips. “Right. How could I forget?”
“Jesus, Acorn. You sleep like the dead.”

Evan screwed his eyes shut and buried his face against his pillow. Peet’s first order of business was to move Evan to a shared one. Something about him isolating himself, which he supposed was true.

Jared yanked at Evan’s blanket.

Her second order of business was to tell Jared to make sure he stayed out of his room for at least two hours a day. Jared, however, had managed to translate this to ‘be a general nuisance.’ Usually, he just opted to drive Evan out of their room through sheer force of chit-chat and bad puns.

“Wakie, wakie, eggs and no bacey.” He gave the blankets another hard tug, ripping them out of Evan’s grip. He stood there at the end of Evan’s bed with a cheeky grin that took up at least half his face, the balled up mess of fabric tucked under one arm.

The staff had already turned the AC on, meaning that laying there without a blanket felt something akin to trying to sleep in a snowstorm.

Evan groaned and sat up. “Happy?”

Jared just kept grinning and tossed Evan’s blankets to the other side of the room. “Very--don’t look at me like that, you love me really.” He swiped up some clean clothes from his wardrobe and disappeared into the bathroom, leaving Evan alone and waiting for time to go funny again.

Whatever medication Dr Sherman had been giving Evan still hadn’t worn off. Even though he’d been off them for a good week or so, time still felt odd: switching wildly between the speed of light and think sludge. It felt as though he simple teleported from one moment to another.

The world he viewed as he trailed behind Jared to the cafeteria still felt a little too soft around the edges, like someone had smeared everything with a thick layer of sponge, making it easy for everything and everyone to just...fade: Jared’s jokes, Zoe and Alana’s small talk, the faces of those waiting in line for their food.

And then, just like that--

--a thicket of thorns and monkshood dug into Evan’s arm and his spoon dropped into his cereal with a splash. He swore under his breath and made a mad grab for some paper towels to scrub at a spatter of milk that had sprayed the front of his shirt.

The world had shifted into focus again, just enough for the all-too-familiar face of Miriam Glass to
come into view. She wore the same thick goggles as Will, the kind that reflected Evan’s pale face back at him. He looked tired.

Miriam Glass’ mouth moved, but no words reached Evan’s ears.

“How?” he stammered out.

Miriam Glass bit her lip before trying again. “Can...can I sit with you?”

The milk turned sour in his stomach. “Uh...uh...” he glanced around the table, everyone had gone silent—even Jared—almost as though they were waiting for something.

For you, idiot.

A small smudge of blood started seeping through the sleeve of his hoodie.

You can’t say no, said the voice at the back of his head. She’s a kid. Everyone will think you’re a dick!

But she killed Connor.

You think other people are gonna care about that?

He drew in a deep breath and forced a smile to his lips. “S-sure.” The word hung heavy in the thick air.

For a solid moment, Miriam Glass didn’t budge. She just stood there, her tray of coco pops and toast gripped tightly between her white-knuckled fingers. Slowly, almost robotically, she set the tray down beside Evan. The scrape of her chair made him wince as she sat down.

Nobody moved as she spooned a mouthful of cereal, her head bent so her entire face hovered over the bowl, her short, blonde hair surrounding her like a curtain.

Jared was the one to break the ice, a smile stretching across his cheeks. “Did you hear they’re putting on The Dark Crystal today? Do they want to traumatise us all again?” He said, a bit too loudly. His words sounded sour, his smile a little too wide to be comforting.

Evan waited for Zoe or Alana to say something but the rest of the table remained silent. A thick lump of anxiety clogged up his throat, making it hard to breathe and even harder to talk.

“Um...” his lips remained parted as his brain wracked itself for something, anything to say. He glanced to Miriam. She had one arm wrapped around the bowl as though she was expecting someone to try and rip it away from her.

Why are you here?! He screamed silently. Go away!

“Are you okay, Evan?” Zoe asked.

“Yes.” He forced the word from his throat, it came out croaked and hoarse.

“Are you sure?” Her eyes flicked down to his arm; to the blood seeping through his sleeve, to his hand gripping his spoon like a weapon.

He clenched his jaw in reply.

“Um...” Miriam Glass whispered into her cereal. “Um...” her words came slow and Evan couldn’t help the pang of sympathy anxiety that twisted his stomach. “I’m sorry!” Just like that, the
floodgates opened. “I’m so, so, sorry...I didn’t mean...I don’t mean to...I didn’t think he was going to do anything, but the agent told me I had to use my powers! I’m sorry, I’m sorry. I’m sorry!”

Evan let her babble. The lump was back, a tight knot of all the words he wished he could say.

Barely aware of what he was doing, Evan stood up. As he did, Miriam Glass raised her head. Her age hit him then. She was a kid, more so than the rest of them. She should be outside, at school, with her parents.

Anywhere but here.

He swallowed the lump and nodded to the cafeteria door, waiting for her to shakily get to her feet.

Neither of them said a word until one of the security guards raised a hand to stop them. “No one can leave for another ten minutes,” she told them flatly.

Miriam Glass looked up at Evan, her eyes practically begging him to speak.

“Miriam’s not feeling very well,” he said. “She asked if I could take her back upstairs, I’ll be right back. I promise.”

The security guard narrowed her eyes, lowering herself so she and Miriam Glass were practically nose to nose. “You do look a bit peaky,” she muttered, her head slanted ever-so-slightly to one side. “Be quick...you don’t look too great either.”

Evan forced his lips into a smile and headed out into the hallway. Rather than take the elevator, he pushed open the door to The Ward’s stairwell. It would give them more time to talk, he decided.

He waited for the door to slam shut, the sound echoing up the walls of the stairwell. “Did he really force you to use your powers?” he asked as they started to climb.

Miriam Glass nodded and Evan saw tears starting to fall from behind her goggles. “I don’t...I don’t like using it. I didn’t want to, but he said I had to.”

“He?”

“The agent. He said I had to...other...otherwise I’d be in really big trouble.

That made him stop dead in his tracks. “He told me and Connor that as well, something about needing to see them for data.”

Miriam Glass nodded. “Yeah,” she sniffled a little, rubbing a line of snot on the cuff of her sleeve. “He said that to me too. I’d get in trouble,” she repeated.

Evan’s hands balled into tight fists by his sides. “Do you know if he told anyone else.”

She shook her head. “I don’t...I don’t ta-ta-talk--” she hiccupsed her way through a sob.

Evan wasn’t prepared for this. He couldn’t calm himself down on the best of days, let alone calm down some random kid he didn’t know. For a moment he considered running back downstairs to get Dr Peet, but as he went to take a step back Miriam Glass reached out and grabbed him by his sleeve with a deathly-tight grip.

His heart leapt into his mouth as she looked up at him and Evan saw his reflection in the lens of her goggles again, the only thing protecting him from her eyes. It took all of his self-control not to swat her hand away.
“I’m sorry!” her voice cracked. “I’m sorry!”

Evan felt his shoulders slump. “It’s alright,” he said, choking down his fear.

The two of them sat down, side by side, on one of the steps and Evan couldn’t help but relax when Miriam Glass let go of his sleeve. He watched as she hugged her knees close to her chest, her face buried against them.

He knew that he should do something to comfort her, hug her or something, but he also knew that also wasn’t always the best idea with Patients. Especially ones that could do...whatever the hell she could.

So, they just sat there.

After awhile Evan let his eyes wander and tilted his head back to look up at the circling snake of stairs reaching up and up through The Ward. Each landing had a meche net stretched between them to stop people from jumping. Evan shivered, imagining the body of some kid free-falling down, down, down to the floor below. The Ward was definitely higher than his tree had been, way taller than twenty, thirty or even forty feet. Just for a second, the memory grabbed him and he felt his stomach get left behind as his body tumbled limply through the air.

He shook the thought from his head.

“Do…” he hesitated, letting his question hang off the tip of his tongue.

Don’t, hissed the voice at the back of his head. Don’t you fucking dare

“Can I ask you something?”

Miriam Glass didn’t move.

“You...you don’t have to answer if you don’t want to.”

Slowly, Miriam Glass moved her head in what Evan hoped was a nod.

“What did you do to me? At the capture the flag, I mean.”

Miriam Glass hugged herself into a tight ball.

“You don’t have to answer, not if you don’t want to,” he repeated.

The silence made Evan’s stomach turn.

“No…” she whispered softly.

“No?”

She finally looked up at Evan. “I...I didn’t think it would make him...” her lip warbled. “I make people upset...scared....If they look in my eyes they go back to when they were most scared....their trauma...I can’t stop it. I hate it. I didn’t mean to...to...to...”

Gingerly, Evan put his arm around her and pulled her into a loose hug. She felt fragile like she’d shatter into a million pieces if he hugged her too tight.

“I’m sorry,” she whispered again. “I didn’t mean to hurt you.”
“I know.”

“I’m sorry your friend got taken away.”

Evan’s heart sank. “It’s not your fault...Parchman...he set it up, I’m sure of it.” I should have been better, he added wordlessly. I should have stayed in control. “You didn’t know what you were doing.”

She didn’t seem as scary now, not with her hands clapped to her mouth, not with tears slipping past her goggles and down her cheeks.

Miriam...She really was just a kid.
Nighttimes had always been particularly dangerous for Evan, even when he was a kid. They were the times when there was nothing to do but think. They were the times to hear hushed arguments between David and his mother. The times when the mistakes of the day would run through his head again and again like a tidal wave. The times where he panicked.

The times when he’d look up the symptoms of an overdose.

Now that the effects of Sherman’s medication barely gripped his brain he found that he kind of missed them, just a little. After all, a headful of nothing was better than a tsunami of, well, everything.

It didn't help that Jared was a snorer.

Evan rolled over to face away from him, pulling his pillow over his ears. He was surprised he hadn't been able to hear it through the walls.

*If Will could deal with it, so can you*, said the voice at the back of his head.

Evan buried himself deep under his covers. His knees cuddled close to his chest as he listened to the loud, deep snores. His eyes itched with deep, heavy tiredness and he buried his face into the covers to escape the slice of light that peeked out from the gap under the doorway.

An image floated sleepily in front of his mind's eye: his face reflected back at him from a pair of dark lens.

*Maybe it's a curse*, muttered the voice. *You're doomed to make people with glasses hate you.*

But Miriam didn't hate him, at least he didn't think she did. If she had she wouldn't have apologised.

*She just felt guilty. She doesn't actually care about you, not really.*

Can you feel guilty about someone you don’t care about?

Evan clenched his jaw and rolled over onto his stomach. The image in his head shifted. Now he saw Miriam Glass, her eyes locked with his. It made his stomach turn and bile burn the back of his throat. He saw Connor again, one hand holding Agent Parchman down as the other slammed against his face, the wet *thwack* of a fist against bloodied flesh echoing in his ears.

It had all been part of his big plan. Miriam Glass, Connor...he couldn't help but wonder if any of the
other Patients had been on it—if they'd been pulled to one side and told with hushed voices to make sure they used their powers.

_You're being self-centred_, the voice told him. _He probably actually needed to get data or whatever. Connor was just collateral damage._

Maybe it was right.

He closed his eyes. This time the face he saw was Agent Parchman's, black and blue and broken. He saw the way his jaw tightened as Evan screamed that he did it, he did it, _he did it!_

That expression...was it anger at being found out? Or, was it anger at being accused?

Evan opened his eyes again and stared into the thick darkness of his covers.

_Does it matter what his intentions were? You were the one who did what he said. You were the one who couldn't keep it together. You're the reason Connor's dead._

_I had to_, Evan thought. He felt warm blood start to bubble against his skin as thorns gripped his arm.

Really, what choice did he have?

What would have happened had he not used his powers? Would Parchman have just sent them both to The Basement? Ignoring orders seemed like a pretty uncontrollable threat to him.

He rolled over and went back to hugging his legs, his knees pushed right up under his chin.

What choice did he have? What kind of bullshit was that? Choice. When did he ever actually have a fucking choice?

He felt small Peonies bloom between the crook of his elbow. Their petals tickled his skin.

Another image floated in front of his eyes. This time, it was of home, of him and his mother sat side by side on the couch.

He had been supposed to go back to school four days ago, but so far Heidi was sticking to the story that he'd caught some horrible bug on the last day of summer.

It amazed him, really, to watch her lie: The way she'd smiled and laughed as she reassured the school secretary that, yes, she was sure he wasn't faking. After all, she was a nurse and it was pretty hard to fake a fever. Hundred-and-two-degrees! Can you believe it?

It didn't stop her from going to work though. Maybe she figured that both of them being absent was too much of a risk? Maybe she just didn’t want to look at the freak her son had become?

She'd returned from her first day at work with several rolls of gauze bandages.

"Tell me if it's too tight," she'd told him as she wrapped layer after layer over the garden of Christmas roses, thorns and Begonias on his arm. "If anyone asks, just say you broke your arm."

The 'cast' (if you could really call it that) looked more than a little lumpy and shifted as the plants beneath it grew and shrunk. It looked like shit, but there was no way in hell he was going to tell her that. Besides, it wasn't as though anyone would be seeing him any time soon. Right?

He'd ended up spending most of the days he had alone, curled up on the living room couch with the
curtains drawn and the TV on mute with closed captions as though that silence would save him should anyone knock on the Hansen’s front door.

Evan’s heart had jumped to his mouth at any and all sounds, from cars driving past, to birds chirping and even his own mother's footsteps as she returned home from work.

Despite her son’s clear anxiety—or maybe because of it—Heidi still greeted him as though nothing was wrong, with her usual smile and chipper "I'm home" before joining him on the couch. She never told him to unmute the TV, but still, he did.

Evan had never been entirely sure if his mother acted this way in some futile attempt at keeping him calm, or out of simple denial that anything was wrong. He hadn't brought it up. There wasn't any real need. Besides, they'd both known it was only a matter of time until someone found them out.

It had taken four days.

There hadn't been any fanfare. No SWAT teams bashing down their door, no police officers, just the two of them sat on their couch in front of the television.

Heidi had fallen asleep the moment she'd sat down, leaving Evan to flip through channel after channel to his heart's content. The screen flicked from some reality show, to cartoons, to some dumb action flick, none of which could really hold his attention. At least, not until the documentary.

It took a moment for him to figure out exactly what the presenter was talking about. She stood in front of a warehouse with such a forlorn look on her face that it made Evan pause, his finger poised over the 'next channel' button.

"The first group of officers waited for the second to block off the back entrance before they approached the front door," the presenter explained, walking across the lawn. She stepped over the threshold, revealing the decrepit, graffiti-ridden insides.

"From here they split off into two groups, the second of which ran into Michael Noble as he exited the basement--"

Evan couldn't hear the rest over the blood roaring in his ears, not that he needed to. Anyone who'd sat through a middle school history class could recite the rest of this particular raid--the largest of its kind--by heart.

The SWAT team ran into Michael Noble just as he reached the top step. He'd been going to see what was going on. Bad move. He tried to tackle the agent closest to him. The agent fired his gun and Michael Noble had died instantly. Down the stairs. Into the basement where three children sat. They were huddled into the corner as though that would be enough to hide them.

Evan watched as the presenter shook his head, muttered something about a car crash, about how rare families with multiple Patients were, about the needless loss of life, about how it could have all been avoided--

Evan sat up, kicking off his duvet as he did. His pyjamas stuck to him like a second skin. Jared was still snoring.

Choice. He'd lied to himself back then. He’d told himself again and again as he walked through the dark streets to the hospital, his arm still wrapped in a thick and itching layer of gauze, that it was his choice to go, his choice, his choice. It was his choice. Besides? What other choice did he have? All Patients got found out eventually. No matter how hard they hid they always get found out.
His fingers dug into the garden of Petunia and Mock oranges sprouting from his skin. He felt thorns prick at his fingers as he pulled them up by their roots, feeling the plants dissolve as fresh buds took their place.

Choice.

He pulled another handful.

What kind of bullshit was that?

And another.

What other choice did he have?

He ripped them up like hangnails.

He never had a choice.

Like weeds.

Not since he fell. Not since he failed to die. From that moment everything was set out: he’d go to The Ward, they’d give him some job, and that was it. Their terms. Their choice.

Evan’s arms fell limply to his side. He felt hot tears and snot stain his face.

If you’d done it right, the voice said, Connor would still be alive.

Connor.

He drew in a deep breath and closed his eyes before Reaching Out. He felt his phantom arms stretch out and out and out, feeling blindly for something, anything, to grab onto. He Reached down, down, down, until he felt the familiar spike of pain in the dead centre of his head that told him he’d reached his limit.

Give up, it seemed to tell him. You know there's no point.

His brain was all over the place. He needed to sleep.

But still, he pushed forward.

He scrunched up his face and kept Reaching Out, ignoring the jabbing pain in his skull. It felt as though he was slamming himself against a wall, just as it had when he’d brought Connor back to life.

He kept pushing and pushing until finally, something snapped.

He felt loose like his arms were running away from him. It only lasted a moment before he once again felt the familiar spike of pain.

This time, however, something was different.

He felt, at the very edge of his consciousness, his fingers brush against something cold.

Evan's heart skipped a beat.

He Let Go, taking a deep breath.

What the hell was that?
After a moment of silence, Evan slowly slipped out of bed, carefully so as to not wake Jared. Honestly, Evan couldn't help but wonder how Jared hadn't woken up yet.

He sat down on the cold floor, legs crossed, and Reached Out again. He felt a rush in his stomach as his reach extended out of its original boundaries once again and moved down, down. He pictured the rooms below him, near-identical copies of one another. Down, down, through bedroom after bedroom and office after office until he felt a pang of pain again. He stretched his fingers, feeling them brush once again against something so cold it burned.

Tiny snowdrops bloomed against his skin as he tried to get a grip on whatever was below him, but his fingers refused to find purchase.

*Probably a morgue*, the voice muttered. They have to keep the bodies somewhere.

Evan tasted bile. He imagined a grid of freezing-cold vaults like those he’d seen on TV, each one containing some Patient's corpse. He imagined one for Connor. One for Will.

He shook his head and laid down on his stomach, as though that would somehow help him reach. Again, he felt his fingers brush against something cold. He pushed them a little further, ignoring the scent of blood filling his nostrils until, finally, he grabbed on--

--and fell forward into nothingness.
It took Evan a moment to realise that his eyes were, in fact, open. He sat—or lay, he wasn't too sure—there and tried to look up. He couldn't see anything. He tried to touch his face but nothing moved. He felt like he was spinning, but couldn't be too sure.

No movement. No body. No *anything*.

Just a long droning buzz.

He stayed like this for a very long time without thinking. It wasn't until he actually tried to close his eyes and realised that he couldn't that he started to worry.

No. Worry wasn't the right word. He wasn't scared per se. He didn't feel any thorns on his arm, or that telltale twist in his gut. His thoughts weren't racing—if anything they were trailing and thick like molasses.

No, he didn't worry, he decided, he just noticed.

He noticed that when he breathed he couldn't feel his chest expanding. That when he moved his mouth no sound came out. That even if he wanted to check his pulse he had no hand to move, nor a neck to touch.

It wasn't darkness, he decided. It was more than that, it was simply nothing. An absence of anything.

He noticed, not with worry or fear or even curiosity, that he was probably dead.

*Huh*, he thought, and that was that. Dying was more matter-of-fact than he'd been expecting.

How had it even happened? He tried to remember, though that proved a little harder than he'd expected. He'd been in his room, he remembered that much, if only dimly. Jared had been there...why had Jared been there?

*Curiouser and curiouser*. The thought should have made him laugh, or at the very least do that weird half-snort half-breath thing, but he didn't. In truth, he wasn't all that fussed about it. Not really.

He remembered, very distantly, someone telling him...was it a teacher, maybe? Or Heidi? No, it was his Grandma...or his grandpa? One of the two...one of the four. They'd been dying. They'd been dying and he, too young to be nervous had asked them if they were scared.
What had their answer been? Were they here now? Was he alone?

Connor must be here somewhere, he realised, and he tried to open his mouth to call his name, but no sound came out.

He was probably somewhere. He was probably alright.

Evan knew in his heart of hearts that he should probably be looking for him, but The Nothing was actually quite comfortable, if a bit cold. It was close without being overbearing, not unlike a weighted blanket.

Though he knew there was no actual point, Evan closed his eyes, drew in a deep breath and untensed his shoulders.

He relaxed and let himself expand and disappear into The Nothing.

And then the hospital lights were blinding him and he could feel the hard floor beneath him and his back was arching and a hard gasp was scratching his dry throat raw.

Jared had his hands pressed down on Evan's chest, his thick gloves abandoned on the floor beside him. "Jesus Christ!" he pulled his hands away, eyes wide even without his glasses.

Evan bolted upright, clutching at his chest. His heart hammered a mile a minute and there was the distinct smell of burning hair hanging in the air. He sucked in another deep breath.

"Jesus Christ!" Jared repeated. He held his head in his hands, his fingers combed through his hair. "What the fuck was that?!!"

Evan's brain shuddered into gear. "I fell...I fell out of bed." The words came out too quickly and jumbled together into a mangled mess of sound. "I...yeah...I fell out of bed." He could smell the remnants of a nose bleed clinging to his upper lip.

"Bullshit!" Jared snapped.

Evan got shakily to his feet. He rubbed his arms and found them shaking and thick with gooseflesh. Everything was too close: the walls, the ceiling, even his clothes all seemed to bear down on him. It was sharp where The Nothing had been soft--too hot, too heavy.

Jared grabbed his shoulders and Evan yelped as another jolt of electricity surged through his body.

He let go quickly, scooping his gloves off the floor. "Answer my question!" It was weird seeing Jared like this, all wide-eyed and pale with a brow slick with a thin layer of sweat. He looked like a completely different person.

Evan pushed past him. His limbs felt heavy as lead as his feet dragged along the floor.

"I..." his voice caught in his throat. "I told you. I told you, I fell out of bed." He scratched at the blood on his lip, peeled it away like a scab. His head hurt, a shape, needling pain nestled in the direct centre of his brain.

"Yeah, and I call bullshit."

Evan heard the voice at the back of his head loud and clear. Get out. Get the hell out. You died and he knows it. You fucking died. Evan pushed through it and worked his way to the bathroom. He didn't bother to close the door, headed straight to the sink to cup the warm water between his palms.
It felt scalding against his icy skin.

Jared followed after him. "You need to tell the doctors."

Evan splashed his face. "Why?"

"Why?" Jared actually managed a laugh. Where Evan's own had been hollow, his was sharp and sour. "Where do you want me to start? You've spent the last, what? two months? Walking around like a zombie, Peet's practically put me on fucking suicide watch and I just woke up to you passed out and you have the audacity to ask me why?!"

Each word was a needle driven into the deepest recesses of Evan's skull. Pain pulsed in his sockets. He rubbed his temple and caught his reflection's eye

_God, you really do look like shit._

He splashed his face again, trying to scrub whatever reminded of The Nothing from his skin. "I didn't mean to scare you. I'm sorry."

"This isn't about you scaring me, I don't get scared."

Evan thought about calling his bluff but decided against it. Instead, he reached for his toothbrush, grasping for something, anything that meant he had an excuse to not talk. Tentatively, he checked his reflection again-- took in his pasty face.

_You look like a corpse. Appropriate._

"I'm getting Peet--"

"No!" He whirled around, dropping the toothbrush in the sink. "No...No...I mean...I'm fine. You're overreacting, seriously." Smile, keep eye contact. He can't know, he can't know.


Evan's heart skipped a beat. "What?" But Jared had already started walking away. He hurried after him. "I don't need a doctor, really, seriously, I'm fine. Please, just leave it. I promise I'm okay." He was practically begging.

Jared shook his head again. "Yeah. And I'm king of France." He sat on the edge of his unmade bed. His legs were clearly shaking, though Evan knew he'd never admit that. "I get that you're freaked out 'cause of Murphy, right, I really do--"

Something sparked in Evan's chest. "No. No, you don't!" The words came out before he had a chance to stop them; ice-cold and laced thick with venom. Evan clapped his hands to his mouth, almost as though he was trying to force the words back into his mouth.

Jared's mouth hung open as the gears twisted in his brain. "Fuck you, Evan." He stood up. "No really, fuck you."

"I'm sorry--"

"Whose bed are you sleeping in right now?"

The question caught Evan off guard. "I--"

"Whose bed are you fucking sleeping in right now?!"
Evan shrank back. "Will's. I'm sorry. I didn't mean...I meant...I'm sorry...I" I died. I died and you probably saved my life and Connor's dead and Will's dead too and I'm really really sorry. I'm so sorry! He begged his mouth to move, begged the words to fall into place, but he was paralysed and all that came out was another weak and stuttered "sorry."

He waited for Jared to reply, inspected his face for any shift, any hidden message that might tell him he hadn't royally fucked everything up. Again.

Nothing happened. Instead, Jared, almost automatically, got to his feet, collected his clean clothes and disappeared into the bathroom, slamming the door shut behind him.
Chapter 49

Chapter Notes

Thanks to Rise-again-2001 for helping me with the edit and for kind of inspiring the plot of this chapter.

TW: Anxiety and references to death.

Evan rubbed his neck. He had a crick where he'd been sleeping on it funny. He was back to sleeping on a bed of towels in the bathroom and he'd forgotten just how uncomfortable it was.

Jared hadn't forced him in there per se. It was like how he no longer forced Evan to get out of bed in the morning or to leave the room each day. He didn't force him to do anything anymore, he didn't have to. The times Evan caught him glaring did that for him.

Evan had taken to keeping out of the way during the mornings as well. He made sure he was up and dressed and showered before the nurses had a chance to start their daily wake up call. That way he could bolt to the cafeteria and not have to deal with Jared’s scowl. He didn't even bother sitting with the others when they ate either, it would have made things too awkward.

Besides, Evan reasoned to himself. He was the one who fucked up, not Jared. He was the one who died. He deserved to be cut off and banished. He deserved that tiny table crammed into the corner of the cafeteria, the one that creaked and shook like it was about to tip over, the one Connor had been sitting at when he'd first arrived.

He deserved to be alone. Well. Not alone. Not really.

On the second day of his isolation, someone had pulled out the chair across from him. It had startled him a bit and when Evan looked up he saw Miriam Glass sat there with her Cocoa Pebbles. She had her head hung over the bowl as though someone was going to snatch it away from her. She didn't smile or say hi, just ate. So Evan didn't say anything either. He just nodded and went back to chipping away at his toast.

He'd kind of hoped she'd stick around afterwards, but she'd always disappear as soon as mealtime ended. It made sense, he guessed.

She's pitying you, the voice at the back of his head told him each time he watched her return her tray and hurry off into the halls. Evan couldn't help but agree.

And so a fresh routine began. It was much the same as the old one--get up, eat, go to class, eat, go to therapy, read, eat, bed--but somehow even more lonely.

Secretly, Evan had assumed this isolation wasn't going to last too long. A week or two at most, and then Jared would crack a joke or do something to let him know that it was okay for him to come back. But it had been about a month now and there was no sign of anything like that happening. Sometimes, Evan found himself wondering if he'd be better off in The Nothing. I, if he should just Reach Out and let himself die again. At least then he wouldn't have to deal with...whatever the hell
this was.

After another meal with Miriam, Evan crammed himself into the back corner of the library with a copy of The Little Prince spread out on his lap. The words weren't sticking in his brain, but there was a kind of satisfaction in turning the pages.

"Hey."

He didn't look up, he didn't need to. He could recognize Zoe Murphy's voice from a mile away.

"Um." His voice croaked a little as he spoke. "I think Alana's in the non-fiction--"

"Yeah. I know." Zoe sat down next to him, her legs crossed. "She's in the 1940s."

"Why?"

Zoe shrugged. She looked tired, her eyes lined with thick dark circles. "You know isolating yourself isn't helping anything, right?"

Now it was Evan's turn to shrug.

She drew in a deep breath. "This fucking sucks!" She slammed a fist against one of the shelves, wincing. "Fuck!"

Automatically, Evan reached out a hand to heal her, only to have her jerk away.

"I'm fine. Jesus." She rubbed her knuckles against her palm.

Well done. Add her to the list of people who hate you.

Evan felt Christmas roses bloom against his skin. He waited for Zoe to keep talking, to give him some idea of what she wanted from him. Yet, she just remained quiet, propped up against a shelf of children's picture books.

He swallowed thickly. "So...Um...how are you?" It was the best thing he could muster up.

"Shitty. What else is new?"

Evan didn't know if he was supposed to laugh or not. "I'm sorry."

"Not your fault."

It is though, isn't it? murmured the voice at the back of his head. It really is and you both know it.

"Yeah. Um. I guess." Evan closed the book, not bothering to mark the page.

Zoe peered down at the cover over his shoulder. "Connor liked that."

"Oh yeah?" Evan asked like he didn't already know.

"Yeah. When we were in, like, grade five we all had a page in the yearbook and he made a list of his top ten favorite books." She tapped the cover. "That was his favorite."

Evan hadn't known that. "It was?"

"Yeah." She laughed, though there was no humor to it. "He did it cause his teacher told him off for reading comics in class. She said he should try reading actual books instead of just looking at
pictures. Like, fuck you, I read." She took the book from him, staring down at the cover.

"Sounds like Connor."

"Yeah. I'm pretty sure he ran exclusively off spite."

"Do you remember any of the other books?"

The question made Zoe pause. "No. I don't, just The Little Prince. He stole my copy, I remember that, cause our grandma got it for my birthday. He was a shithead cause I got presents and he didn't. I guess that's what siblings do, though. Fight and stuff. Do you have any brother or...?"

Evan's stomach twisted. "No." The answer came a little too quickly. "Well..." he picked at the vines curling around his wrist. "I have a stepbrother and apparently I have a half-sister...but I never actually met them. They're my dad's kids."

"Your parents are separated?"

Evan blinked dumbly. "Yeah. Didn't Connor tell you?"

"You think Connor told you anything?"

"I mean...he's your brother."

Zoe twisted her lip and leaned forward so their faces were barely a few inches apart, studying him. "Definitely an only child," she said decidedly and flopped back against the shelf.

"Um...sorry."

"It's fine, but for reference siblings only ever actually get along on TV."

"I...I don't...is that true?"

"Definitely an only child."

Just like that, the conversation fizzled out and she went back to The Little Prince. She seemed to be reading far more intently than Evan had been, spending minutes on a single page. Evan didn't dare move for a while, but picking at plants could only stave off boredom for so long. He ended up fetching the first remotely plant-related book he could find from the non-fiction section, stepping over Alana on the way.

It turned out to be an encyclopedia on the Canadian wildflowers. He didn't understand how a book like that had found its way to a hospital in the middle of the Arizona desert, but it proved more absorbing than The Little Prince and pretty soon he found himself completely lost in fields of buttercups and fairy bells.

Some much so that he barely noticed when Zoe snapped The Little Prince shut and dropped it to the floor with a thud.

"No wonder he was depressed."

"Huh?" Evan looked up from a page on the various types of bedstraw.

"He kills himself. The Prince."

"Oh." A lump stuck in Evan's throat. "I never actually read it...Um...I'm sorry, I should have known
or warned you or something."
"You didn't know."
"You say that a lot."
"Yeah...Dr. Peet says it's one of my problem areas."
"She's right."
Evan bit his lip, holding in another sorry.
"But. Yeah," Zoe continued. "The prince gets the snake to bite him and he dies. That's how he escapes the desert. The snake bites him and he dies and the body goes missing so I'm pretty sure the snake ate that too."
"...God."
"Yeah. Kid's book." She flicked at the hard-backed cover like it was some kind of bug. "I'm kind of glad he stole it."

There was a heavy pause. It rested on Evan's shoulders, weighing him down.
"D-Did he ever...Did Connor ever talk to you about his comics?" he asked.
"Not really," Zoe shrugged. "I'd read them sometimes. I'd sneak into his room and grab a couple from the bottom of his pile. I wanted to see what all the fuss was about, but I never really got it. They just seemed kind of dumb." Her voice felt hollow.
"I'm sorry."
"Stop it."
"S-" Evan cut himself off, his eyes and jaw clamped tightly shut.

He heard Zoe move, her jeans rustling against the carpeted floor. "You wanna say it, don't you?" she asked and he opened his eyes to see her toeing off one of her sneakers.
"A bit," he admitted. He kind of hoped saying so would make her laugh, but her face remained stoic, dull.

She held her shoe in her lap for a moment and glanced around to make sure the two of them were completely alone before reaching inside.

"Mom snuck this out of dad's wallet," she murmured and took out a small photograph. It showed two small figures, a toddler and a baby wrapped up in a tight cocoon of blankets. The toddler looked down at the baby with a look of pure awe, his mouth curled into a familiar crooked smile. "I dunno if the doctors would let me keep it...so..." Zoe went quiet and for a time Evan felt as though Zoe had forgotten his existence altogether. It was just her and the photograph.

Then, just like that, she looked up. "Can I say something bad? Like, terrible? And you can't go blabbing to Jared or Alana or any of the doctors."

That caught Evan off guard. "Um. Y-yeah, yeah of course."
Evan saw tears brimming in her eyes. He froze, unsure of what she wanted him to do or say.

“But I still don’t forgive him,” she continued, her words and heavy and thick as molasses, “and I’m pissed he died and I’m pissed we even activated in the first place.” A single tear ran down her cheek.

Evan swallowed hard. “I-I think he’d be pissed too.”

“Yeah, no shit.” She wiped her eyes on the back of her hands. “You know what's worse? Like. What makes it...hurt?” She didn't wait for Evan to respond. He wasn't even sure if she was really talking to him, or just airing her grievances. "Despite everything...he was getting better again. Like. I was so fucking close to..." she trailed off, her eyes locked to the photograph once again. "He wasn't...good, but he was getting better."

Evan scratched at the patch of Zinnias that had sprouted along his forearm. He tried thinking of something to say, something that would stop her crying. He could tell her that he knew for a fact Connor was safe, that he was comfortable in The Nothing, but that would mean telling her that he knew with utter certainty that he was dead. And then she'd start asking questions and he'd tell her about Sherman and Parchman and the room hundreds upon hundreds of feet below them that was set aside special just in case any of them needed to die.

Marigolds wrapped themselves around the Zinnias, choking them until they wilted into nothing.

Evan wanted to throw up.

He hadn't told anyone what he'd seen, not Peet, not Jared, not even Lucky. The only person he'd even come close to telling was Heidi and...

He flinched as Zoe tucked the photograph back into her shoe.

_Say something!_ the voice screamed over the heavy thud of his own pulse in his ears.

"Zoe," the word jumped out of his mouth before he had a chance to stop it.

"What?" She asked as she pulled her shoe back on.

Evan bit his lip. "I'm sorry."
Evan lay on his stomach, a comic book spread out on the bed in front of him. He peered down at the pages in an attempt at making out the words, but the letters kept twisting around, squirming like maggots across the paper. Unreadable. Even the pictures didn't seem right: they seemed fuzzy and nonsensical. Solid bricks of colours with little to no detail. He knew it was an Iron Man comic, but that was really all he could grasp.

A buzz loomed over him, loud and constant. It was the kind of sound that drilled into your skull, rattled your teeth and turned your eyeballs to jelly. Experimentally, Evan covered his ears with his hands, but the buzzing continued unperturbed. It was going to give him a headache at this rate. Or maybe a cold? Someone had turned the AC so high, he was surprised his teeth weren't chattering.

It didn't help that he could hear his parents arguing downstairs. You'd think they'd be more aware of the fact that he could hear them given how much of a fuss they made about his music being too loud. They must know he could hear them, they just couldn't be bothered to keep their voices down. Selfish bastards.

He abandoned his comic on the bed and got to his feet. He kicked a pile of clothes to one side to give him just enough room to lay down, one ear to the floor. He really needed to clean up at some point, or at least try and organise the place. If he was honest with himself, it was getting a bit annoying wading through pile after pile of crap when he was getting ready in the morning. Maybe then his mom would get off his case, or maybe she’d just find something else wrong with him.

He couldn't quite make out what his parents were arguing about. Like the words in the comic, they twisted just out of reach of his understanding. The buzzing had somehow grown louder, so much so that it swallowed up anything that tried to speak over it.

Evan stuck his fingers in his ears which, again, accomplished absolutely nothing whatsoever. It was starting to piss him off.

"Shut up," he hissed and rolled over so that he had his face smooshed against the ground. "Shut up, shut up."

It wasn't like it mattered really. He could guess what they were arguing about: it was him. It was always him. Something he'd done, something he wasn't doing. No matter what, he could never find a way into their good graces. It always managed to blow up in his face, make him look stupid, make it look like everything was his fault, make it look like he was the bad guy.
His face was starting to hurt. Was it? No. Yes?

With a gruff sigh, Evan rolled over onto his back to find himself face to face with a child. They couldn't have been older than six at most and something about them looked oddly familiar. The child's sharp, almost wax-like face hung over Evan's, framed with a thick outline of short, brown hair. It was the eyes that really caught Evan's attention though: mostly blue with a slice of brown in the left iris. There was nothing behind them, just soulless husks.

And then it all clicked into place: the room, the comic, the fighting parents down below, none of it was actually his. It wasn't even his body, not really. He was dreaming.

He felt his dream-body's head slant to one side. The child--Connor--did the same, peering back down at him curiously.

Slowly, Evan got to his feet, never once taking his eyes off Connor. He looked wide-eyed and scared. Trapped between a rock and a hard place.

Evan had been here before, he knew what would happen next. It was kind of hard to forget.

Evan's dream-body held out his hand, fingers outstretched. He watched, completely frozen as the child-Connor took his hand. His fingertips were cold as ice as he drew Evan's hand to his lips and bit it, hard. It didn't hurt, but Evan felt his dream-body tense; coiled like a spring and ready to attack.

He knew what would happen next, just the thought made him feel sick to his stomach.

"It's a dream" he said to himself. "It's a dream, I can do whatever I want." Evan forced his jaw to clench with concentration, his toes curled to grip at the floor beneath his feet and— just as his hands moved to grab the child by the neck— Evan threw himself backwards into an abyss.

The room went black and for a brief moment Evan wondered, with a sickening dread, if he'd somehow managed to accidentally fling himself back into The Nothing. But then he hit something solid, but soft with small tendrils that tickled at the back of his neck.

His arm felt numb and above him, stark against a crisp blue sky, he saw the looming arms of a twenty (maybe forty? Maybe fifty?)foot oak tree. The buzzing still rung in his ears.

"An orchard." He raised his head. He wasn't alone.

Someone stood with their back to him, silhouetted against the shocking blue sky. Evan cocked his head to one side. Had he managed to take the child-Connor with him?

Evan was standing. He couldn't remember getting up. He moved forward, his neck craned a little in an attempt at seeing the figure's face. They were too tall to be the child, too thin as well. They had their hands stretched out in front of them, squeezing at the air like they were searching for something.

"What are you doing?" Evan asked.

The figure tensed, hands frozen. He turned his head, looking at Evan over his shoulder.
"They're gone," said Connor and he let his hands drop to his sides. "This isn't fair."

"What isn't fair?"

"You're here. It's not fair. I hate it when you're here, it's a fucking pain."

Evan felt himself smile. "You know what else isn't fair?"

"What?"

"You're dead."

Connor looked back down at his hands and chuckled. "Am I? I hadn't noticed."

Without thinking, Evan wrapped his arms around him, burying his face against the crook of his neck. Dream-Connor's skin was cold as ice, just like the child had been. It was enough to make Evan shiver. He didn't feel real. He was too loose, like television static made human.

He wanted to wake up. It wasn't fair for his own brain to make him suffer like this. For it to wave what could have been in his face. He gripped Connor's hoodie between his fingers. It felt fuzzy, like the words in the comic book. Cold and unreal, a forgery. "It's not fair," he repeated.

Connor rubbed slow circles against his back. "It's not fair," he repeated, his voice a million miles away.

"I'm sorry I couldn't help you," Evan continued. "I'm sorry you're dead. I'm sorry we didn't get to go on our date. I'm so, so, so--"

Connor wasn't hugging him anymore. He was several steps away and Evan's hands were by his sides, tucked neatly into his pockets. This dream definitely wasn't fair.

The dream-Connor blinked for a moment. "I don't think I'm dead," he said.

That actually managed to make Evan laugh: a single, pained laugh that turned into a sob midway up his throat. "Why not?"

"Because you're here," said dream-Connor. He scuffed his feet against the earth; it left no mark. "Because there's something."

Evan's breath caught in his throat. "Say that again."

Dream-Connor narrowed his eyes. "Because there's something," he repeated and Evan's heart swelled.

"I don't think I'm dreaming," he said, a smile stretching across his lips. "And I don't think you're dead."

End Notes

Flower meanings are taken from: Here, Here, Here, Here, Here, and here

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