Of Love And Friendship

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Summary

Basically an ongoing polyamory fic for The Losers’ Club in which their connection is more than just friendship based. There is a lot of smut in this (including threesomes and more) with plenty of fluff, humour, drama and badassery thrown in.

I do take requests for ships/headcanons etc so if you have a need for something unusual please don’t hesitate to comment or go to my tumblr page losersclubarepoly and drop me a message xxx
Chapter 1

He was awoken from a restless sleep as the cab went too fast over a speedbump and his head clunked against the window where he had been resting in the back seat. It took him a while to get his bearings and for a horrifying minute he had completely forgotten where he was. Had he been dreaming? That’s right. He was dreaming about…well, he couldn’t quite remember. Something about a very large bird but its feet weren’t talons, they were human hands, rotten and covered with seeping bandages and it had had a human voice and had said his name. No. That wasn’t right either. He was sure the dream had seemed very real at the time but it was fading from his memory as fast as if his head bumping the window had physically knocked it out of him.

“You okay back there, son?”

Eddie startled from the sudden sound of the cabbie’s voice and shifted in his seat, the last of the nightmare fading from his memory as if he’d never dreamed at all.

“Y-yeah. Just dozed off for a second is all.”

His voice came out much raspier than he had intended and he cleared his throat while the driver chuckled.

“Ah, to be young and carefree,” he mused, his eyes meeting Eddie’s in the rear-view mirror briefly, before settling back on the road.

Eddie felt a little bit offended by it but he kept his mouth shut. He wasn’t young, at least not as far as he was concerned. Twenty was plenty old, Eddie thought as he looked at his vague reflection in the window. No longer the pale, skinny eleven year old who used to get picked last in gym class. Well, still quite pale and skinny. He let that thought slip out of his mind as quickly as the dream had.

“Here we are.”

The cabbie spoke suddenly again and for a split second Eddie was sure that his voice had been different, deep and growling and unpleasant yet…familiar. A glance at the very normal-looking man in the drivers’ seat calmed his nerves, although at that same moment something seemed to draw his eyes to the window opposite him in the back seat.

What he saw sent a strange jolt of electricity through his entire body that he was sure he couldn’t have simply imagined. A large, green road sign outlined in white and rusted with age at the edges. ‘WELCOME TO DERRY’

Eddie thought it sounded almost taunting but he couldn’t put his finger on why. His chest started to feel a little tight and his throat ached and he suddenly wondered when was the last time he had felt the need to use his inhaler. ‘A long time ago’, he thought, ‘years, even.’ He had brought it along anyway. just in case. It was currently out of his reach in the trunk of the taxi, stashed safely in his suitcase.

Derry.
He didn’t realise that he’d said it out loud until the taxi driver replied.

“Yep. So, you here to see family, or what?”

“I…I don’t know…”

That was the truth. Eddie had suddenly come to the horrible realisation that he had absolutely no idea what he was doing here. In all honesty, it had been an impulse that had led him to come here. He just felt that it was where he needed to be right now. He knew it was where he had grown up as a child, he remembered the house in which he and his mother had lived, he remembered going to school, but there was something else…wasn’t there?

‘Eight years’, he suddenly thought. 'It’s been eight years since I last saw this place'

“You don’t know? So…just a random vacation then? Did you close your eyes and point at a map?”

“Something like that.” Eddie said quietly, dreamily, as he stared at the buildings passing by.

The rest of the taxi ride was a blur to Eddie. He felt as if he was floating through Derry rather than sitting in the back of a cab. Some of it looked familiar to him, other roads they passed looked completely alien, as if it had all changed too much to be recognisable, or maybe he had just forgotten what it looked like. He wasn’t sure. When the cab finally stopped he felt as if he awoke out of another dream. His head was fuzzy. It wasn’t a pleasant feeling and Eddie found himself suddenly wondering if maybe he was getting sick, like when a fever makes you delirious, although getting out of the cab and feeling cool air on his face perked him up.

He paid the driver and collected his bag from the trunk, paying no mind as it pulled away from the sidewalk. He was busy staring at the monumental Derry Townhouse which loomed in front of him like some kind of monster.

Monster?

Why did he feel so uneasy?

He tried to take a deep breath, realised he couldn’t and pulled his inhaler from the front pocket of his case, shoving it between his lips and taking a quick breath of the sterile-tasting air it released. He felt the tight knot in his chest begin to loosen immediately but, remembering what his mother would say even now with him full grown, tucked it into the back pocket of his jeans just in case, making his way into the lobby.

It was late and the lobby was empty aside from a single female receptionist who was serving another customer. Eddie paid no attention to them at first, settling onto the edge of a chair arm to wait his turn. The room was silent aside from the quiet conversation of the other two people. The man she was serving sounded young, about his age, Eddie thought as he looked at the large, ornamental light fixture hanging from the ceiling. It looked too heavy to be held up by a single chain, Eddie found himself musing. He had a sudden vision of it snapping and coming crashing down on top of him heavily, killing him in a gory mess.

“Can I help you, sir?”

He looked over to the reception desk where the woman had called him from. She was young and pretty and Eddie wondered if he had maybe known her back then. Maybe she was even in his class. He couldn’t put a name to her face, though, even as he got closer. The other gentleman was still there, fumbling with his wallet and as Eddie approached he dropped it onto the ground, scattering some cards with it. Eddie left his suitcase to help, crouching to pick up the cards and the wallet
before the man could do it himself. He noticed that the man’s shoes were very clean, *immaculate*, even and it reminded Eddie of someone but he didn’t know who.

The jolt of electricity he had felt earlier when he saw the sign now shot through him again, however, as he looked up ready to stand, the wallet and cards held just in front of him but not enough for the man to reach. He had started a sentence, hadn’t he?

“Here you g-“

His words caught in his throat in the same way his breath did as he looked at the man’s face. It was a relatively handsome face framed with dirty blonde hair, curly and somewhat unruly. Eyes that didn’t match the youthful complexion, eyes that had seen more than they should, eyes that looked troubled stared back into Eddie’s own. He was much older now but Eddie knew that those eyes were, *unmistakably*, the eyes of his old friend Stanley Uris.

“E-Eddie?” Stan asked tentatively.

His voice was much deeper, but still pleasant to the ears. Stan’s voice had always been pleasant, Eddie suddenly remembered.

Eddie’s response was to stand suddenly and throw his arms around him in a tight hug. The wallet and cards scattered on the floor once again but it seemed like neither of them noticed or cared. Stan seemed shocked at first but it was only a brief time before Eddie felt Stan’s arms against his own back, pulling him closer. He felt much lighter now, like something had been lifted from his chest and shoulders and he found himself breathing in deeply. It was like the first proper breath he had taken in a long time but he didn’t know why and he could feel that his cheeks were wet and realised that he was crying. The arms around him tightened.

“Y-you’re nearly as tall as me…” Stan whispered suddenly and Eddie thought that he might be crying, too.

He was right, though. Eddie had always been the runt of the litter, he remembered that much, but now standing this close to Stan he found that he could rest his chin comfortably against Stan’s shoulder with only the slightest up tilt of his heels.

They stayed that way for what felt like a very long time and Eddie didn’t really want to let go. He was scared that if he did then Stan would disappear, just like the dream he had in the cab on the way here and it occurred to him that maybe he had only just remembered Stan upon seeing him. Did he actually know him at all before that? Eddie didn’t know. He could see the receptionist giving them a very odd look from behind Stan’s back, though, and he reluctantly pulled away just as Stan clearly had the same idea.

He saw Stan wiping his cheeks with the sleeve of his cream sweater and he did the same with his palm, taking hold of his luggage again as he made his way over to check in with the receptionist who, thankfully, didn’t ask any questions. He saw Stan crouch to pick up his wallet out of the corner of his eye and became aware that he had been watching him. In all honesty he was scared that this wasn’t real at all and that he was still asleep in the back of the cab. Any second now they would hit another speedbump and he would crack his head against the window and-

“Sir?”

Eddie snapped his attention back to the receptionist and handed over his card quickly.

“Yes. Sorry, miss.”
He glanced at Stan again over his shoulder as she was busy with the card and found that Stan seemed to be waiting for him. He felt a wave of relief wash over him. Maybe Stan would know why he had come here. If Stan was staying in a hotel too and he was also just checking in then wasn’t it a weird coincidence that they both arrived in Derry at around the same time? After eight years why had they both suddenly decided to come back here? After Eddie finished checking in they both went to sit in Stan’s room to talk. To catch up. It turns out that Stan had just as much of a clue as Eddie did as to why he was there. He, too, had come on a sudden impulse. They agreed that they both just felt like they had to be here. Neither could explain it fully and although seeing Stan had been like a breath of fresh air, Eddie felt uneasy. He could tell that Stan did, too but neither said a word about it and Eddie found himself unable to sleep later that night as he lay in the dark in his own hotel room, a tightness in his chest that was unrelated to his asthma but all too familiar.

He stared at the blank ceiling for a long while before turning his cheek against the pillow to look at the door. Stan’s room, oddly but thankfully, was just across the hall from Eddie’s and he wondered now if Stan was still awake, lying in the pitch blackness just like himself. He equally wondered if Stan would mind if Eddie went to stay in his room with him; he didn’t know why but there was a strange feeling of fear that he couldn’t quite shake and lying here alone in an empty hotel room wasn’t helping.

Neither was the sudden noise from somewhere below where he was lying; an eerie, creaking, clicking sound like old pipes, only too loud for only him to have heard. He sat bolt upright in bed, listening intently now but there was only silence. Surely someone else would be going to see what that was? But there was nothing. No doors opening as guests stuck their curious heads out into the corridor, no footfalls, no voices. Nothing.

He screamed aloud when Stanley suddenly burst into his room, wearing only a hotel bathrobe with his hair dripping and his skin damp, and over to the bed and for a second Eddie thought he was going to get into it with him but he simply stood beside it.

“Did you hear that too?” Eddie whispered and he saw Stan nod his head, tucking his hands under his armpits and licking away a droplet of water which had run out of his hair and down his cheek to his lips.

“Yeah. I was taking a shower and the water suddenly stopped. Must be some kind of power failure.”

Eddie nodded as if he was agreeing but deep down he felt like that wasn’t right. His stomach felt in a knot and his chest was tight. He glanced briefly at his inhaler on the bedside table but couldn’t bring himself to physically reach out and use it. If he did that then Stan would know something was wrong. They stayed in utter silence for a while, both listening for a sign that someone was turning the water back on, but minutes passed…ten…twenty…thirty…

Stan was sitting on the edge of the bed now and Eddie was really struggling to breathe normally. He was fighting the urge to gasp, to reach out and grab his medicine, to do something, anything…

Stanley reached across him to get the inhaler and practically forced it into his mouth without saying a word. Eddie took it gratefully and pressed the trigger a couple of times, each time taking a big gulp of the stuff. His hands were shaking and Stan only watched him with concern.

“Th…thanks…Stan- “, Eddie gasped out as he placed it back on the nightstand, “Ho-how did you know?”

“…My chest…” Stan said, motioning to himself, “I felt…almost like I couldn’t breathe…but I knew it wasn’t really me. I…don’t know how to explain it.”
Stan looked as confused as Eddie felt but they were both shocked out of discussing it any further by another loud sound from somewhere downstairs, this time like a firecracker going off. Eddie had turned on the bedside light while they had been sitting together and in the same instance as the noise, the bulb blew out, shattering into tiny, frail shards of glass next to Eddie’s inhaler and blanketing them in darkness again. They both screamed and Eddie felt Stan’s damp hair briefly touch his cheek as he clambered across the bed to get closer to Eddie, now practically sitting in his lap as they both stared at the lamp.

It was Eddie who finally broke the silence.

“We should go and ask someone what’s going on.”

His voice came out barely even a whisper and he was thankful of their close proximity.

“Are you sure that’s a good idea, Eds?”

Eddie wondered if Stan had ever called him Eds before. That was Richie’s thing, wasn’t it?

‘Oh, god’, he thought, ‘Richie. I just remembered Richie.’

He could hear Richie’s voice now: ‘How could you forget this beautiful face, Eds? I’m hurt.’ And then he’d do his stupid British Gentleman voice and nobody would laugh. Bill would say ‘Beep-beep, Richie’ because that was about the only thing he could get out without stuttering and everyone would laugh, then, because it was Big Bill and-

“Eddie?”

Stan’s voice came suddenly from close by and he broke out of his inner friend theatre to look at Stan’s face, his eyes scanning him with what seemed like concern.

“Y-yeah. I mean, what do you wanna do? Sit here in the dark all night staring at the door?”

Stan looked quite shocked by Eddie’s confidence and Eddie felt very pleased with himself. It gave him a boost enough to climb past Stanley and off the bed, tugging up the waistband of his slacks in a sort of ‘let’s do this’ and Stanley found himself suddenly holding back a grin.

“Okay. But if there’s something down there you owe me.”

They both had an idea of what that something might be but neither said anything further on the matter. Stanley adjusted his robe as he stood, tightening the belt around his midriff before following Eddie to the still-open door.

“Why isn’t anyone else awake?” he whispered close to Eddie’s ear as they both leaned out into the corridor.


“Maybe they’re just…waiting to see what happens, like we were?”

“Or maybe they’re all dead.”

Eddie snapped his neck around to shoot a dirty look back at Stanley so fast he nearly head-butted him right in the chin.

“Don’t say stuff like that!”
Their eyes met for a moment and Stanley decided to keep his mouth shut on whatever else he had to say on that topic. Eddie thought he could see something in Stan’s eyes that hadn’t been there before but he couldn’t put his finger on it.

“Sorry.”

“Okay let’s...let’s just go.”

Eddie seemed to find his confidence again as he led the way out into the dark hall and towards the stairwell. The two of them were jumping at every little sound the old building made and once, when the wind moved the wooden structure of the building and it creaked loudly, Stan swore that Eddie reached for his hand.

Not that he would’ve minded. He was pretty scared himself.

They took the stairs very slowly, descending into what seemed like even darker darkness, if that was at all possible. This both of them would agree on the next day.

“Excuse me? Is anyone there?” Eddie said loudly after clearing his throat as they approached the ground floor.

Their eyes, pupils blown wide, scanned the dark lobby for any sign of life. There was no response to this or the second time Eddie called and they were both starting to feel very uneasy. Eddie wished he had brought his inhaler. Stanley wished he had at least put on some socks.

“Hello?!” Stanley joined him this time, placing his palms flat against the wood surface of the reception desk to lean over the top of it, as if he expected someone to be crouching there, hiding. Or worse.

Nothing.

What he did notice was an open door in the corner, one of those that opens with an electronic keycard, the sort you wouldn’t leave wide like that for anyone to just waltz on in. Stan thought he had never seen anything less inviting but Eddie was making his way around the desk and towards that very door.

Before Stan had a chance to even suggest they go back upstairs to the room, Eddie had disappeared into the black.

‘He’s a lot braver than we all thought’, Stan mused as he rounded the desk himself and approached the doorway, only to stop in his tracks as he looked into it. He had expected to see a room. An office, perhaps but what he actually saw were a set of stairs, leading down into further darkness. Eddie was nowhere to be seen and Stan had to hold onto the doorframe to steady himself in the wake of the fright that overcame him.

“Eddie?!” He called down into the black, knowing that his voice sounded on the verge of desperate but too frightened to care.

He called again but there was still no response and he swore aloud before he called a third time and began to descend the stairs. His eyes had already adjusted to the dark but this was something else and he had to run his hand along the wall, to feel his way down, wondering why he felt bare stone under his hand. Some kind of cellar?

“Eddie?”
He called again for his friend but his voice came out much weaker now and he could hear that his breath was shaking. “Listen, Eddie, if this is some kind of a joke then it’s not funny. I don’t…I don’t feel good I just wanna go back upstairs.”

As he reached the bottom of the stairs his foot suddenly plunged into cold water and he flinched back so hard he fell, scraping one of his wrists on the stone steps.

Stone?

Why did this feel so wrong?

He was sure that the stairs didn’t look or feel like stone a minute ago.

He lay there for a while, sprawled on the steps and rubbing at his wrist with his thumb. Now that he thought about it he could hear the soft splash of water droplets and there was an odd smell. Something…something like old drains…like a sewer…

No. Dear god please no.

He was almost too frightened to sit up, let alone stand and explore further and here in the darkness, fumbling blindly, alone and cold and scared he felt as if he was eleven years old again.

The steady splashing sound of footsteps in shallow water was what led him to pull himself to his feet and he squinted into the darkness hopefully.

“Eddie?!?”

His voice was more desperate now.

He stepped further out into the unknown and suddenly he had no wall to guide him and the blackness was all-consuming, overwhelming. He could feel his hands shaking.

“EDDIE?!?”

The room was enormous, it must have been, for try as he might he could not find a single wall to hold onto, the steps seemed so far back, lost in the dark and he wondered if he would ever get out of here. Then there was that splashing again, closer now and he swivelled to face where he thought it had come from, holding his hands out in front of himself like he was blindfolded.

“E-Eddie…is that you?”

His voice was failing him in his fright and he couldn’t even scream as the footsteps seemed to be approaching him, growing faster and faster until whatever or whoever it was seemed to be running at him. He was reminded, horribly, of the woman from the painting attacking him in the sewers as a child and he was sure that this must be her again coming back to finish him off.

He shrunk back against cold stone; the room now was preventing him from backing away from his attacker, or so it seemed. He was sitting in water two inches deep and it soaked into his robe but he barely noticed. The footsteps were loud now, right in front of him but he still could see nothing and he suddenly found his voice as a cold, wet hand reached out and clamped around his bare wrist.

“HELP ME! HELP! Please! PLEASE!”

He was sobbing, now, hysterical as he cowered against the wall but still the hand around his wrist did not relent and he imagined it pulling, tearing his arm away just like Bill’s little brother and then
ripping into the rest of him while he was still alive and bleeding out. He squeezed his eyes shut, waiting for the inevitable.

“Stan! Stan it’s me!”

Eddie’s voice came from just in front of him and the hand on his wrist suddenly felt warm and dry but it was a trick. He knew it was a trick, just a trick and he continued to sob and scream, keeping his eyes firmly shut.

“Y-YOU’RE NOT EDDIE! Eddie’s not here HE LEFT ME! H-he left me JUST like the last time!”

He felt the hand around his wrist shift down his arm and although he tried to shake it off, although he lashed out with his free hand and connected with something the grip of the thing didn’t falter. Was IT getting stronger or was he getting weaker?

“Stan…Stan, it’s okay.”

“NO! No it’s NOT okay! Nothing is EVER okay nothing has ever BEEN okay! Everyone always l-leaves me and it’s going to kill me it’s never going to s-stop until it does!”

They didn’t speak again but Stan felt the release of his arm and then hands on his face, either side of it.

He was nearly completely snapped out of his hysteria, then, as he felt something soft touch his cheek, then his jaw, then his forehead and he realised that someone was kissing him over and over.

Soft, fleeting kisses covered every inch of his face one after the other and then he heard Eddie’s voice in between the kisses.

“No. I wouldn’t leave you. I would never leave you. None of us would. I didn’t leave you.”

And then…

“I love you. We all love you. I love you,” over and over and over again and if nothing it had brought him back to reality. He basked in it for a while, feeling somewhere between relieved and disbelieving. If he dared to open his eyes he was sure that he would see the face of the monster he had so often had nightmares about.

The gentle pressure of a kiss to one of his closed eyelids reassured him otherwise.

“I love you.”

Warm hands tentatively raked through his curls as there was another kiss to the centre of his forehead.

“Please don’t think that I would ever leave you like that.”

He felt his breath coming steady now as they kissed both of his tear-stained cheeks in turn.

“I love you.”

The sewer stench was gone and now he could smell…toothpaste…

‘Eddie brushes his teeth even more than I do’

…and a faint clean, antiseptic smell that was unmistakably Eddie.
A chaste kiss to the tip of his nose, now and it was so ridiculous that in any other circumstance he would have laughed and pushed him away.

“I would never leave you.”

He felt the last of the worry melt out of his shoulders and was about to open his eyes when the lips that had been lavishing affection all over his face touched his own.

It was brief and very gentle but firm all the same, another silent ‘I love you’ and Stan was shocked to find that it didn’t feel weird at all.

He opened his eyes to look at his friend’s face, all concern and love and Stan wondered when the last time was that he felt this important.

“There was something here,” Stan said quietly, surprising himself with how calm his voice sounded.

Eddie only nodded and the eye contact between the two said it all. They had both remembered something from their childhood that they had wanted to forget.

Something they had both chalked down to nightmares until this very moment.

Something they and all of their friends could find no fitting name for other than ‘IT’.
Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

Another Loser comes back to Derry and brings back some memories for Eddie. Stan is plagued once again by nightmares.

The two young men shared a bed that night after the whole experience. Stan especially was too shaken to stay on his own and a few times in the night Eddie was woken by him shifting restlessly in his sleep, his eyes wide as saucers and pinned to Stan until he saw him relax again.

The next morning when Eddie awoke Stan was already gone. Unbeknownst to Eddie, Stan was up nearly three hours earlier when the sun was just rising and since then had showered, brushed his teeth, dressed, fixed his mess of hair and gone downstairs to the dining room for breakfast.

After pulling on his own clothes, brushing his teeth twice and flossing Eddie followed him down to the lobby. It was strange to see people behind the reception desk and hear the soft chatter coming from the dining area after the night before when it had seemed deserted.

He saw Stan as he entered the breakfast room and was making his way over to the table when he noticed that Stan wasn’t alone.

‘Another trick?’

Eddie’s mind immediately said to him but as he approached the two he saw Stan turn to him with a strange, cheery look on his face. It was the kind of smile someone might have when they’re waiting for someone to get the punchline of a joke. Eddie was sure that there wasn’t anything about this for him to get until the other man looked his way. Eddie noticed first that he was incredibly handsome, with piercing blue eyes and dark hair that in the early morning light from a nearby window, had shimmering red tones.

“Eddie,” the man said softly and smiled and Eddie briefly wondered how this man knew his name but the thought promptly left his head as he remembered something…

…remembered lying on the floor of Bill Denbrough’s bedroom in early afternoon as the sun shone through the window and created a warm rectangle of light around the two of them. Music was playing, he forgot what song but they were both singing along loudly –and badly- and when Bill would stutter on certain words Eddie would stutter too so he didn’t feel embarrassed, and they would both end in hysterics but Eddie would try to be quiet and listen because nothing had ever sounded more beautiful to him than Bill’s laughter…

…remembered his legs swinging over the kitchen table in the Denbroughs’ kitchen-diner as Bill cleaned nasty scrapes on Eddie’s knees and there was piano music from the lounge. Bill was always so gentle, so full of genuine concern for his small friend and Eddie remembered how his ears and cheeks had burned when Bill placed a soft kiss to one of his bloodied knees ‘like he probably does with Georgie’ and smiled up at him and Eddie could have died happy right there looking into those blue, blue eyes…

…remembered sitting with Bill in his back yard in the summer when crickets chirped in the long
grass and George Denbrough played with a toy train nearby. He remembered listening quietly as
Bill read out a speech they had to prepare for English class, and the pain he felt in his chest when
Bill would stutter so badly that he couldn’t continue and he saw the desperation in his eyes. Then
Georgie would come and run his train over the pages and look up at Bill with a smile like the Sun
and Eddie would watch Bill’s whole world light up…

…and before he knew it he had thrown himself into Bill Denbrough’s arms before the other man
even had a chance to stand. Bill was holding him so tight any bad feelings from the night before
completely melted away and Eddie found himself both sobbing and laughing against Bill’s
shoulder.

“If forgot you, Bill!”

Eddie wailed into the taller man’s shirt as Stan watched them silently, his long fingers stroking the
rim of a porcelain tea cup. He was smiling.

“Ifh-forgot you too.”

Bill’s voice was soft against his ear and it only made Eddie cry harder. Stan was beginning to look
uncomfortable with the attention that they were drawing from some of the other customers and
they all decided that it would be best to get out of the Townhouse for a while.

It was one of the best days of Eddie’s life.

They walked around what felt like the whole town, reminiscing on their days as a group of reckless
pre-teens and visiting each of their old homes. They avoided The Barrens for reasons the three of
them couldn’t understand but it felt like a trip for another time. Bill treated the two of them to a
meal at one of their favourite diners and they were all happy to find it was exactly as they
remembered.

They strolled back to the hotel just as the first signs of nightfall streaked the Derry skyline and
there was a faint chill in the air.

Stan and Eddie had almost completely forgotten their horrifying encounter the night before as they
sat in Bill’s room that evening. Stan had fallen asleep on the bed, a mess of curls covering his eyes,
his long legs resting across Eddie’s lap and the other two tried not to wake him as they talked for
what seemed like hours with Bill in an armchair pulled up close so they could speak quietly.

Bill had also come back to Derry after feeling a kind of strange pull towards the town. The two of
them wondered aloud if the others from their youth may turn up at some point, too. Eddie really
hoped that they would. He could only remember pieces but something he knew for sure was a
warm feeling he had in his chest whenever he thought about the friends he used to have.

‘We must have all been close,’ Eddie found himself thinking on more than one occasion and,
judging by his reunions with both Stan and Bill, he assumed that it must be the case.

“Do you remember anyone else?” He asked Bill hopefully, his voice a whisper as Stan muttered in
his sleep and rolled over. Eddie shifted to accommodate his legs in this new position.

“Ruh-Richie…” Bill said with a short smile, “I remember Richie.”

Eddie nodded. He remembered something about Richie, too. He could hear his voice in his head if
he thought hard, could remember his mannerisms and his terrible jokes and skits. Although he
couldn’t put a face to it yet. A thought suddenly occurred to him.
“You still stutter.”

“Nuh-no. It started again when I g-got here. I haven’t st-stuh-stuttered like this in six years.”

Eddie thought about it for a while and about the fact that he hadn’t had to use his inhaler until he got here, too. He opened his mouth to speak again but their attention was drawn away from the conversation as Stan started to shift in his sleep again and he nearly kicked Eddie in the stomach he awoke so fast.

He shot upright, letting out a short scream that made Eddie jump and the two of them watched him with concern as he shakily pushed his hair out of his eyes, breathing hard.

“Stan are you-“ Eddie barely got out the question when Stan jumped up and bolted for the bathroom, slamming the door closed. They could hear him retching and vomiting and Eddie immediately tensed up as they both watched the bathroom door.

Bill stood and went over only when the bathroom went silent, rapping on the door lightly with his knuckles.

“Stan?”

There was no response aside from the sound of the toilet flushing.

“Stuh-Stan are you okay?” There was still no response but more retching and then what sounded like crying.

Eddie was becoming more and more uncomfortable as his fear of becoming ill seemed to suddenly hit him full-force. His eyes were fixed on Bill’s fingers on the door handle. ‘If he opens that,’ Eddie thought, ‘if he opens that then I’m going to get sick because Stan’s sick. Stan’s sick and I’m going to get it, too, and what if it’s something bad and I end up in hospital? What if there are complications? What if I die?’

Bill knocked on the door gently again and as he was turning the handle he saw Eddie leave out of the corner of his eye, muttering something to himself about germs. He didn’t stop him.

“Stan?” His voice was soft as he entered the bathroom to find Stan slouched on the floor in front of the toilet, sobbing into the bowl.

Bill entering the room seemed to make it worse and he saw Stan visibly tense up.

“G-go away Bill. I’m fine just go away.”

“I’m not g-going anywhere so you might as well just tuh-tell me what’s wrong.”

“Nothing’s wrong, I’m fine I just…had a bad dream…”

He contradicted himself by vomiting again into the toilet, clutching the edges of the porcelain so tightly that Bill could see his knuckles were white, although he seemed to be mostly dry-heaving and Bill concluded that it was probably a result of panic.

Bill didn’t say anything more, quietly shutting the bathroom door and making his way across to sit beside him. He felt Stan’s shoulders tense as he placed a reassuring hand on his back.

After a short while Stan flushed the toilet again, wiping underneath his eyes with shaking fingers and it was heartbreaking for Bill to watch but he knew that if he pushed too far that Stan would
reject his comforting, so he simply sat with him in silence for a long while, listening to the half-sobs and heavy breathing which kept catching in the Jewish boy's throat as he tried to compose himself in front of his friend.

Stan was determined to ignore Bill's attempts at comforting. He hated being seen like this, vulnerable and weak but he was quickly losing control over his fear and coming back to Derry seemed to have triggered it more than ever. The bathroom floor was cold and Bill's palm was warm and he was confused and angry and frustrated.

"Yuh-you don't have to t-tell me anything," Bill said, incredibly softly, "But I'm n-not going anywhere."

It took a while for him to convince Stan to move away from the toilet to where they sat together against the bathroom wall - Stan had spent a good while cleaning around the toilet with some tissue even though there was nothing there - and Stan couldn't stand Bill watching him constantly. He had never felt more vulnerable than he did in that moment and it scared him just as much as his nightmare.

"You're not al-alone," Bill's voice cut through the silence that had fallen over them as they sat together and Stan looked at him questioningly.

“What?”

“Y-you're not the only one who's ah-afraid. We've all suh-seen things and heard things. You don’t have to go th-through it alone.”

“You don’t have to say that just to make me feel better.”

Stan’s hair fell into his eyes again as he looked at Bill but before he could brush it away himself Bill reached up to push the curls aside. The contact was gone as soon as it had appeared and Stan couldn't help but feel its loss. Just as he started to venture into that train of thought, however, he realised that Bill was holding his hand.

“It takes a l-lot of effort for me to speak, so I duh-don’t say anything I don’t mean.”

Bill smiled at him brightly and Stan couldn’t help but chuckle at the thought, and soon they were both laughing and for a second Stan couldn’t remember why he had been crying. Bill’s thumb was tracing soft patterns against his palm and it felt nice. Looking into Bill’s blue eyes made his chest feel warm in a way he hadn't felt before and he found himself tightening his grip as if he was afraid that Bill was going to let go.

“I won’t let a-anything happen to you. We can beat this together, like last time. Only this time feels different…I can’t un-understand it fully, but…I feel something…between you and me…and Eh-Eddie.”

Stan nodded in understanding, still lost in the pools of Bill’s cerulean gaze.

“It’s l-like we’re stronger this time…more…”

“Connected.”

Stan finished his sentence for him and Bill smiled softly. His fingers and thumb had traced their way up to Stan’s wrist and forearm and suddenly they stopped. Stan felt his heart stop, too. He knew exactly what had caught Bill’s attention without even having to look. Bill did look, though, down at Stan’s arm where he had pushed the sleeve of his shirt away, at the thin, horizontal scars
just below the crease of his elbow.

Stan was too mortified to even pull away from Bill’s grip. He was watching Bill’s face silently, his chest feeling like it was crushing his lungs.

‘Please say something, Bill,’ he screamed inside his head, but Bill said nothing and Stan thought that this was worse than his nightmares, worse than the thing that had been about to attack him in the cellar before Eddie came, worse even than IT because he was sure he saw the light die in those blue eyes.

Seconds went by, minutes, hours for all Stan knew as he inwardly screamed, watching in horror as Bill’s eyes traced the scars. He felt that he would surely suffocate from the silence.

And then...Bill traced one of the scars with his fingertip, softly as if he was afraid that the old wound might reopen if he pressed too hard, then another, and another, each one in turn as if he was counting them. Then, once he had finished, he gently pulled Stan’s sleeve down to cover the scars, sliding his palm back into Stan’s and linking their fingers together so tightly it almost hurt.

Stan understood exactly what was being said, and he felt the same kind of calm relief that he had felt when Eddie had kissed him and said ‘I love you’.

And, when Bill gave his hand another squeeze and he had to look away and smile into his own palm, he would swear that he heard the monster cry out in pain.
Bill stayed awake into the early hours of the morning after that. Stan had fallen asleep in Bill’s room, exhausted and red-eyed but peaceful. Bill couldn’t bear to wake him, so he sat by the bed with a notebook in his lap. Bill loved to write, especially horror stories. He was usually inspired by his own nightmares; they were so vivid it was easy for him to pick up a pen as soon as he awoke to write down the details. He thought that maybe one day he might try and turn them into a novel. He did his own illustrations, too, as he found it helped his writing to have a visual aid. The back of his notebook was filled with rough sketches of monsters, rows of sharp teeth, huge, bulging eyes and then…beautiful pencil drawings of faces—a short-haired girl with freckles and lovely, expressive eyes, a dark-haired boy with broken glasses and a wicked grin—both of whom Bill had also seen in his dreams sometimes. He didn’t know why but he always smiled when he looked at those drawings. The very last page of the notebook, however, was filled with huge, cursive writing: the phrase ‘He thrusts his fists against the posts, and still insists he sees the ghosts’.

And so here he sat in the half-light of the night in the old Derry Townhouse, a pencil in one hand as he scribbled down some thoughts onto the page. Bill’s handwriting was excessively neat and his dream descriptions were always ultra-detailed, the pages filled with thoughts and memories that Bill would never have been able to verbally express due to his stutter. Even as his speech became more fluid as he grew and the stammer died down and became a distant memory, Bill was always a man of few words and he still instinctively swallowed hard sometimes before starting to speak, a coping-mechanism he had developed as a child when he found it relaxed his throat and helped him to start a sentence without stuttering.

‘It’ was all he had written on the page before being distracted by Stan making a noise in his sleep that was halfway between a snore and a sigh. He stared at the other man’s face for a while, studying his relaxed features and the wispy strands of hair falling across his cheek. Bill thought that everything about him looked soft…delicate, even. Beautiful.

He was struck with inspiration and turned to the back of his book to a fresh page, using the lightest strokes of his pencil to sketch. Bill had never thought himself especially good at drawing but others had complimented his realism on more than one occasion. He remembered drawing a picture of his mother once and seeing some semblance of love in her eyes when she had told him how gorgeous it was and asked to keep it. His chest had flooded with warmth the next day when he saw it neatly placed on her dresser next to a photograph of Georgie.

He smiled softly at the thought as he continued his drawing. Thankfully, Stan was in deep and he didn’t move once while Bill sketched his entire sleeping frame over two pages. He had never seen Stan look this peaceful and he spent a lot of time trying to capture the expression on his face just right. His hair was tough to draw but Bill soldiered through it patiently, giving each curled strand the same amount of attention and a lot of light pressure with the very tip of the pencil, which he had to sharpen frequently. By the time he finished his drawing he had grown very fond of Stan’s hair.

He turned back to his writing afterwards, stopping on the page where he had written a single word: ‘It’. It must have been the start of a sentence but for the life of him he couldn’t recall what the rest of it was going to be and he stared at the word long and hard, feeling unsettled. He pressed his pencil against the page beside the word as if that might help him to remember but still nothing came and he continued to watch the two letters tensely, as if he was afraid they were going to jump
off the page and attack him.

A sharp, sudden noise from the bathroom caused him to snap the end of his pencil against the paper and he sat completely still and silent as he looked at the dark crack in the slightly open bathroom door.

‘Something must have just fallen over,’ he said to himself as he placed his notebook on the end of the bed carefully and stood, ‘It’s probably nothing.’

Bill being Bill, he bravely pushed the bathroom door open as soon as he arrived in front of it, blue eyes which looked almost grey in the dark scanning the empty bathroom. He avoided looking at his reflection in the mirror, though, and the thought scared him as his eyes passed over it and he saw the outline of his own body, just a dark shape briefly looking back at him. In response to the fear he reached up and tugged the light pull quickly, staring down his reflection as he stepped into the room and closed the door behind himself so as not to wake his sleeping friend.

‘He thrusts his fists against the posts…’ he thought as he stepped close to the mirror, glancing around the bathroom for anything that might have made the earlier sound.

‘…and still insists…’ he turned on the tap to cup his hands under the cold water, bending over the counter to splash some of it onto his face.

He didn’t get to finish his inner monologue as when he stood to look in the mirror again his mind went blank and his body numb. Unlike Eddie and Stan, Bill didn’t scream when he was scared and he simply stared in horror at the red balloon which was now floating just behind him in the mirror. He briefly thought of shouting for Stan but couldn’t bear the thought of putting him through anything else so he stayed silent, deciding that he would deal with this on his own, whatever it was. He swallowed hard, his Adam’s apple bobbing as he watched himself in the mirror.

“Yuh-you’re not ruh-real,” he said quietly to the balloon, although he knew who he was actually talking to, “This isn’t r-ruh…ruh…real…”

He turned around fast as the balloon started to slowly float towards him, its string trailing along the bathroom floor like some ghostly tail.

‘This isn’t real this isn’t real this isn’t real’

He tried to back away but the curve of his spine hit the edge of the counter and he clasped his sweaty palms against it.

‘He thrusts his fists against the posts and still insists he sees the ghosts’

The sentence came easily in his head but as soon as he started to speak it out loud his throat closed up and he couldn’t even get past the word ‘fists’. Over and over and over he tried until he gave up as the balloon closed in on him.

“You’re n-not r…you’re not ruh-real!”

The bathroom door flew open and Bill saw Stan’s wide eyes as he saw the balloon, too, large and red and somehow menacing, floating inches from Bill’s face. Bill was about to tell him not to come any closer when the balloon burst right in his face, splattering him and a lot of the bathroom with what he was horrified to discover was thick, fresh blood. It was warm and Bill fought off the urge to gag as he felt it dripping from his lips. The remains of the balloon were lying in a glistening pool of it on the floor tiles.
“Oh god!” Bill heard Stan’s voice as he reappeared in the doorway and observed the gory scene. Bill stayed exactly where he was, aware that if he moved there would be a Bill-shaped clean space against the mirror, wall and counter.

“Okay just…just don’t close your mouth and just…stay there I’m coming in.”

Bill had no intention of moving anyway, OR closing his mouth for that matter. He had been about to speak when the balloon popped and he could taste the stuff on his tongue, salty and metallic. Luckily he had a strong stomach. He was just thankful that the loud sound had caused him to flinch and close his eyes.

“Oh my god oh my god oh my god…”

Bill watched silently and unmoving as Stan carefully came into the room, clearly trying to avoid touching any of the bloody surfaces. Thankfully, his long legs allowed him to step over the pool on the floor, although when he reached the other side he touched the counter by accident and left a clean streak in the blood when his hand slipped and he nearly fell before Bill reached out and grabbed the top of his arm, leaving a red handprint on his t-shirt. He stood straight and grabbed a towel from the wall, turning it over to the clean side and using it to wipe the blood from Bill’s face as best he could but he was too slow and meticulous and Bill had to give in and turn around to spit blood into the sink. He fumbled with the faucet for a while, his bloody hands slipping off again and again before Stan finally helped him and turned it using the edge of the towel. Bill leaned into the sink to let the water run into his mouth and over his face until it eventually ran clear, before doing the same with his hands and arms.

Neither of them even noticed the soft thud as the door to Bill’s room opened before they heard a scream and Eddie was standing in the doorway where Stan had been minutes earlier.

“Oh my god guys what the fuck happened?! Is that blood?! Oh my god is that fucking blood?!”

He gagged a couple of times, very theatrically and then turned back to them both as Stan spoke.

“You have to help us clean this up,” he said, matter-of-factly.

“You want me to come in there?”

“Yes. Now is not the time to be afraid of blood!”

“Do you know how many diseases are transmitted-“

“No, and I don’t care! Get in here and help me!”

While the two were arguing, Bill was stripping off his clothes and the two of them paused to watch his naked form walk past them before he was hidden by the shower curtain and they heard the shower start.

“Eddie.”

“Okay, okay! I’m coming in just don’t…don’t touch me you have blood all over your hands…”

By the time Bill had cleaned himself thoroughly enough and stepped out of the shower the bathroom was nearly spotless. Stan was kneeling by the counter, scrubbing in between the floor tiles with the very edge of a washcloth with his nose so close to it in concentration that it looked comical. Eddie handed Bill the one clean towel that they had left in the room –Bill noticed a pile of bloodied ones in the corner- and sighed.
“This is the last time I clean blood out of a bathroom. I swear.”

Stan looked up at the two and after a short silence they all burst into peals of laughter, and the air felt much lighter and Bill forgot the taste of the blood and Stan forgot his nightmare and Eddie forgot his fear of germs.

Nobody from the hotel asked any questions about the huge pile of damp towels in the corner of the bathroom the next day, nor the fact that the three men exited the same room the next morning.
Chapter 4

Until that evening the rest of the day was uneventful in the best way. The three young men spent another day out in Derry, trawling through antique shops and delighting in seeing the old toys and board games from their childhoods. Eddie and Bill taunted Stan about how much of a sore loser he always used to be –to be fair he barely ever lost at anything, especially not when strategy was involved- and he simply shrugged it off with an ‘I don’t even care’ attitude and a smug look that was refreshing to them both.

They dared Bill to go into the house on Neibolt, which of course he did, but he came out when he started to feel like he was being watched -he got no further than the entrance hall- and the three of them quickly made their way back into the town centre where it felt safer. None of them had remembered Neibolt yet but it still had an unsettling air about it even if you didn’t know what resided there.

They bought ice creams and sat in the park next to Derry Middle School. It was closed and the car park was empty but there was something strangely comforting about its presence and for a while they all sat in silence, memories of school bells and trading cards and playground games in their minds. Eddie pushed Bill on one of the swings so hard that he fell off onto the tarmac, laughing, and they both lay down next to him, one on either side.

“Did you ever think that wuh-we’d be here again?” Bill spoke into the silence as three pairs of eyes watched the clouds.

“On the ground?”

Eddie had folded his coat underneath his head and seemed less comfortable than the other two with lying somewhere so dirty. He seemed reluctant to touch the floor and had his hands folded neatly against his stomach.

“No, in Derry you g-guh-goon.”

Stan chuckled at this and spoke before Eddie could protest or clap back at Bill.

“It sounds strange but I never thought about this place at all.”

“Me neither.” Eddie responded. Bill simply shook his head and they lapsed into contemplative silence again.

The sun felt very nice on his face, Bill thought, and he found himself sure that he could fall asleep right here underneath the swing set, next to two of his best friends. He turned his head to the left to look at Eddie, tiny, fragile, sickly Eddie Kaspbrak, now a man of twenty years and nearly as tall as Bill and Stan. He couldn't help but feel a soft sense of pride at the young man Eddie had grown to be. Bill could see the edge of Eddie’s aspirator sticking out of his jeans pocket and it made him smile.

Eddie saw him watching and his heart skipped a beat at Bill’s smile. He flashed one back instantly and for a few beautiful seconds he and Bill simply looked into each other’s eyes and Eddie was reminded of the first time he met Stuttering Bill Denbrough. Bill was tall and fearless and so sure of everything he did and Eddie, aside from being in total awe as a scrawny child who needed an inhaler at all times, was sure he had fallen in love just a little bit.

Eddie’s breath caught in his chest as he was positive that Bill’s gaze dropped briefly to his own
lips, but then he looked away and back up at the sky and the moment was gone and Eddie’s head was reeling as he stared at the side of Bill’s face.

‘What a ridiculous thought’

He turned his own attention back to the clouds, too, trying to distract himself from the sound of his heartbeat and his aching lungs by pretending that he could see shapes in them.

Bill looked at Stan, then, to his right. In the sun his hair looked like some kind of angelic golden halo against the black tarmac and his hazel eyes were almost glowing. Bill found himself wishing that he had his notebook and pencil handy. He drew Stan with his eyes instead, examining every detail of his face and then tracing the long lines of his neck down to his shoulders. That was as far as he could go from this position, thankfully—if he strayed any further he was sure he’d go crazy—and when he looked back up Stan’s eyes caught his own. Bill swallowed hard as if he was about to speak. The eye contact between them was different than it had been with Eddie, intense, and this time it was Bill’s chest which felt tight.

‘Don’t look at me like that,’ he found himself thinking, ‘If you do I’ll lose my mind.’

They both jumped suddenly at the hiss of Eddie’s inhaler as he sucked a lungful of medicine before uttering a tiny ‘Sorry’ and the three of them broke into stitches.

They were kicked out of the playground after that by a policeman who none of them recognised and the magic of their childhood memories died away a little.

It was late afternoon when they finally strolled back towards the Townhouse, Bill between the two and one step in front as if he had subconsciously taken back the role of their de facto leader. They walked across The Kissing Bridge, examining some of the names carved into the wood but the only one they recognised was something about Greta Bowie and Eddie Corcoran. Seeing Eddie’s name was unsettling after what had happened to him and they all stood in solemn silence for a while as they looked out over The Barrens.

It was eerily quiet. Once upon a time, The Barrens was a safe haven for Bill and his group of friends and seeing it like this would have filled them with relief. Bill had lost count of the number of times they had hidden down there from Henry Bowers and his lackeys.

‘They had some kind of den, didn’t they? What was it? A treehouse? No. That wasn’t right.’

Eddie stepped forward to lean against the wooden railing and the other two followed. Bill noticed that he was holding his inhaler loosely in one hand.

“Yuh…you okay, Eddie?”

Eddie glanced at Bill and gave a small nod. Past Bill he could see Stan looking at him with equal concern.

“Yeah.”

His voice was small and it was unconvincing but the other two boys looked away again. Eddie had always hated being the centre of attention when it came to things like his asthma, probably because he was afraid it made him look weak. Bill still found himself watching Eddie out of the corner of his eye.

His attention was drawn away from Eddie when Stan started tapping his shoulder and pulling on his left arm.
“Hey g-guys do you…do you see that?”

They followed his pointing finger out into a cluster of trees on the slope and Bill’s blood froze. It was difficult to see at first but, reaching around one of the trees, the rest of whatever it was attached to hidden from sight, was a pale, dirty hand. It would have looked human were it not for the elongated fingers and the way the skin was stretched taught over the bones as if there was no muscle there at all.

“We should go. Bill.” Stan whispered, close to him and tugging at his arm pleadingly, but Bill’s attention was focused entirely on the hand.

He could hear Eddie saying ‘What the fuck?’ over and over again from nearby.

Bill’s attention piqued when the hand started to move, sliding slowly around the tree and disappearing behind it with the rest of whatever it was. He almost considered going down there to see what it was when suddenly his arm was yanked rather fiercely and Stan screamed next to him. It took him a while to register what was happening until he saw Stan being pulled to the floor and the hand, coming from underneath the bridge this time, wrapped firm around his ankle. Thankfully Stan had been holding onto Bill, his white fingers now tight and desperate around Bill’s sleeve and Bill had to grip the railing to stop himself from being pulled down, too. Whatever this thing was, it was strong.

Everything then happened so fast that Bill almost couldn’t keep up. He was grasping at Stan’s arm with both hands, trying to pull him away from the thing attached to his ankle. Stan was screaming bloody murder, shrieking curse words that Bill had never heard him use before along with garbled sentences in which Bill could only make out his own name and the word ‘help’. The hand around Stan’s ankle had seemingly sharp claws and it had ripped through the leg of his jeans. Bill could see fresh blood soaking the denim there.

And then Eddie was screaming too and Bill looked over just in time to see something he would never forget. A creature, humanoid in shape but almost skeletal and about as tall as a 6 foot man. It had no genitals, no ears, nose, eyes or hair but a large, gaping hole in its face which was filled with sharp, rotating teeth, like some kind of nightmarish cement mixer. It was currently clinging to the edge of the bridge with its clawed feet, its hands gripping at Eddie, one caught in the front of his t-shirt and the other around his neck. Bill could see rivulets of blood running down into the collar of Eddie’s shirt. It was trying to pull him over the railing and down into the Barrens.

Bill had never before felt the kind of panic he felt at that moment. Still he held Stan but Stan’s hand had left Bill’s arm and he was scrabbling desperately at the thing’s fingers, which had travelled up to just below his knee. His jeans were tattered and bloody on that side as the thing repeatedly grasped at him from below the bridge. Bill was pulling with all of the strength he could muster but it held fast and it was all he could do to stop it from taking him.

“BILL! HELP ME!”

Bill had never in his life heard Eddie scream like that, it was piercing, and it hurt deep in his chest as he watched his best friend clutch desperately at his neck and then at the railing, leaving smears of his own blood across the dark wood. Bill couldn’t reach him from here, he couldn’t, but if he went to help Eddie he would have to leave Stan, Stan who was now in tears and clutching at Bill’s sleeve again with a bloody hand.

“EDDIE!”

Bill was crying now, too, he could feel his cheeks were wet and his sight was temporarily blurred
with tears. Any second now Eddie was going to lose his grip and get dragged out of his sight forever, into the sewers and Bill could only watch helplessly.

Just then, however, there was a loud *crack* as someone else came out of Bill’s peripheral vision and swung a broken piece of wood, one of the struts from the bridge which had names carved up its length, right into the creature’s face with enormous brute force. It was clearly as shocked as Bill and it immediately lost its grip on Eddie, leaving red welts around his throat as its claws slipped off his skin and it tumbled down into The Barrens.

In that same instance, the clawed hand around Stan’s leg disappeared, Bill hauled him to his feet quickly and Stan clung to him for dear life, sobbing against the side of his face. Bill watched over Stan’s shoulder as Eddie’s mysterious saviour dropped his weapon with a sharp *thunk*.

“Holy *FUCK* was that a rush.”

He reached up to push strands of dark hair out of his pale face, adjusting the wire frames which sat on the bridge of his nose and Bill recognised him immediately, even before he spoke again.

“So, you guys having some good chucks, or what?”
Chapter 5

Richie Tozier

‘That’s Richie motherfucking Tozier,’ Bill thought as he stared at their no-longer-mysterious saviour.

It was Richie, alright, right down to his slightly oversized and very awful Hawaiian shirt and his slightly oversized but not as awful glasses. He had a number of mismatched rings on one hand and a beaded bracelet dangling from the other wrist.

‘Richie never did seem to care much in the way of fashion.’

Eddie was still clinging to the edge of the wooden bridge, inconsolable in his fright. He was shaking more than Bill had ever seen in his life and for Eddie that sure was saying something. The collar of his shirt was soaked red and there were smears of it across his neck all the way up to his chin where he had tried to free himself of the monster’s grip.

Bill was still quite shaken himself and if it hadn’t been for Stan holding tight to him he might have had some sort of breakdown of his own. The thought of losing Eddie had scared him far more than the creatures did. Stan’s sobbing, soft now against Bill’s neck, was the only thing stopping him from running to Eddie.

“Jeez, was it something I said?” Richie piped up suddenly, “You all look like-“

He was cut short as Eddie turned around and crumpled against him, not just sobbing but wailing into the front of Richie’s shirt and Richie caught him in his arms before he collapsed to the floor.

“Eddie…Eds, seriously, it’s okay…”

“He…he can’t breathe!” Stan said suddenly from Bill’s shoulder and Bill saw it, too. Eddie’s wailing was not just out of fear. His face was pale and his lips looked a little blue and Richie sat him down on the ground immediately as Bill moved away from Stan to come over. Even Stan limped as fast as he could to get to them and the three of them crouched beside him.

Eddie’s crying was going quiet, now, and that scared the three of them more than anything. Richie was right in front of his face, shaking his shoulders gently and patting his cheek.

“Eddie…Eddie look at me. Eddie.”

He was holding Eddie’s face now but his eyes looked out-of-focus as if he was gazing straight through Richie rather than at him. Bill’s hand was on Eddie’s arm, rubbing and patting him as if he could somehow get his attention while Stan scrambled around looking for Eddie’s aspirator.

“Where’s his inhaler? He had it with him, I know he did!”

“It was in his pocket!” Bill checked both of Eddie’s pockets as quickly as he could but there was nothing there and with a horrifying realisation he looked at the edge of the bridge where Eddie had been wrestling with the creature. There was no inhaler there and Bill quickly stood to lean over the railing.

There it was. Eddie’s inhaler, a small, blue, L-shaped piece of plastic in the grass just metres below him. Bill instantly began to climb over the edge, flipping his long legs across it one after the other.
“Richie don’t let him fall asleep! Stan!”

Stan looked up and quickly made his way to Bill. He knew exactly what Bill wanted him to do without him having to say it. He crouched against the railing, reaching an arm through it just as Bill climbed down the other side, using Stan’s hand as a hold to slowly lower himself to the grass. In the past Bill would never have been able to make the drop but as an adult it was relatively easy.

“Eddie! Eddie you listen to me, okay? No, no don’t close your eyes. You listen to me. That’s it. Guys, hurry up, I’m losing him!”

Richie’s voice spurred Bill on faster and he practically swiped the thing from the ground as he was climbing back up. When he got to the top, Stan tried to haul him back over but he simply thrust the inhaler into Stan’s hand.

“Get to Eddie.”

Stan dropped to the ground again beside Richie and Eddie but Eddie’s eyes were closed and he seemed unresponsive. Even placing the inhaler between his lips at this point wasn’t going to do any good. Richie leaned close to Eddie’s face, listening carefully and as Bill approached them he heard the words he had been dreading.

“Guys, he’s not breathing.”

The other two seemed to freeze briefly but Richie practically screamed at them, now.

“Guys he’s not breathing!”

Bill was the fastest to react and he pulled off his jacket as quick as he could, folding it behind Eddie.

“Lay him down.”

Richie did as he was told, his eyes shifting frantically back and forth between Bill and Eddie but Bill seemed calm, now and in control and he placed his palms against Eddie’s chest, looking at Richie and motioning his eyes towards Eddie’s face.

Richie was scared, sure, he was absolutely terrified but something about Bill’s confident eyes struck him and he nodded, tilting Eddie’s head back as carefully as he could and pinching his nose. He had never done CPR on anyone before but he’d taken the classes just like everyone else. In all honesty it was one of the only classes he’d paid proper attention to and it was all in preparation for this, his worst nightmare, that Eddie’s asthma might one day do this to him. He never thought he would actually have to do it.

Time was running out, though, and Richie realised that he didn’t have time to contemplate this scenario. He pulled gently on Eddie’s bottom lip, frightened by the blue colour of it, to open his mouth before leaning down to press his own warm lips against Eddie’s cold ones.

All of the jokes he would make when this was over and Eddie was fine flashed through his mind at once. Oh, how they would all laugh, Eddie too and everything would be okay, just fine and dandy. It wasn’t until he had waited for Bill to finish the chest compressions and leaned down to breathe into Eddie’s mouth again that he realised he was crying. He pulled back again as Bill continued to press on Eddie’s chest and everything seemed to be going in slow motion. He took off his glasses and threw them aside carelessly when they started to fog up. Another breath, and another but Eddie was still unresponsive and the sight of Stan crying as he knelt beside Bill was too much for Richie to handle. It was getting too real.
“WAKE UP!”

He screamed in Eddie’s face, holding his cheeks and leaving red smears there, too, from the wounds on his neck. Stan let out a choked sob at this and Bill was about to move to push Richie away when Eddie’s eyes snapped open and he reached out to grasp at the front of Richie’s shirt. He took what should have been a deep breath but it was broken and Richie reached for Eddie’s inhaler, pushing it between his lips and pressing the trigger for him as he watched him take another breath through his brimming tears.

They stayed that way for a while, the three kneeling boys silent as Richie pressed the trigger again for Eddie to take another breath. This was repeated twice again before Eddie weakly pushed at Richie’s hand and the inhaler was removed from between his lips, although Bill noticed that Richie kept a tight hold on it. There was a line of spit on Eddie’s chin which had come out with the plastic aspirator but Richie wiped it away with his palm and leaned down to hug him tightly.

Waiting patiently for Eddie to speak, Bill reached a comforting arm around Stan’s shoulders, giving him a reassuring squeeze. He wanted to do the same with Richie but could only place a hand on his back from this position so he settled for that. His eyes were still fixed on Eddie.

“R…Richie you’re…crushing me…”

Eddie’s face was still pale and he looked a little dazed, but he was okay, and Richie only held him tighter, fake theatrical sobs mixing with his real tears. If he hadn’t been so shaken, Eddie was sure that Richie would have been doing one of his annoying voices this very second.

“Seriously, Rich, give him some space,” Bill finally said softly when Richie didn’t move and he gave the back of Richie’s shirt a little tug. Richie took the hint and moved away but his eyes were fixed on Eddie. He opened his mouth to speak, changed his mind and patted Eddie on the cheek before going to pick up his glasses.

Bill and Stan helped Eddie to sit up, both of them crowding him like concerned parents around a child taking its first steps after he stood up. Richie watched from nearby, still clutching Eddie’s inhaler in a bloody palm. He looked pale.

They walked back slowly to the Townhouse after that, Bill carrying Eddie on his back – Richie had offered but Bill was adamant that he be the one- and Richie with his arm slung around Stan’s waist, helping him to walk. Eddie had protested at first but he was now fast asleep against Bill’s back and Bill was more thankful than he had ever been to feel Eddie’s soft breaths against the side of his neck.

When they reached the Townhouse things got a little more difficult. They couldn’t very well waltz in looking like they did and expect no reaction from anyone. Luckily it was getting late and the only person in view was the receptionist who had been there when Eddie and Stan arrived. Richie left Bill outside with the two injured parties and moved inside to work his charm on the poor woman as the others slipped past. Bill didn’t want to know exactly what Richie said that distracted her but it worked and he was grateful.

They stopped at Stan’s room, which happened to be the first one they reached. It hadn’t actually been slept in since Stan arrived, with him first sharing a bed with Eddie and then with Bill and Eddie, although Bill was certain it would have been just as clean and tidy if Stan had been sleeping here.

Richie helped Stan to sit down on the bed first and Bill saw Stan wince in pain as he did. Eddie woke up as Bill put him down, too. He looked mentally and physically exhausted and Bill felt bad
“Okay wuh-we need some s-supplies. Like some bandages or something.”

“My bag,” Eddie said croakily after a while before clearing his throat, “Someone go get my bag.”

Richie made towards the door and Eddie added, “Straight across the hall. Not my suitcase but the brown leather bag,” throwing a room key to Richie, who nodded and left, strangely, without saying a word. Bill made a note of it and decided he’d talk to him later to see if he was okay.

Stan was already examining Eddie’s neck from where he sat beside him on the bed, clearly less concerned about his own injuries.

“There’s a lot of blood but it’s not as bad as it looks,” he said reassuringly to Eddie, who was grimacing and holding his hands close to Stan’s as if readying to push him away.

Bill stood and watched them for a short while. He felt rather exhausted himself, but he quickly pulled himself together and went over to sit at the other side of Eddie.

“I wanna get out of this,” Eddie said suddenly, motioning to his blood-stained t-shirt, which was sticking to him where the blood was congealing around his collar, “It feels so gross.”

Stan nodded softly and he and Bill carefully helped him out of the dirty article of clothing, holding it away from his neck wounds where they could to avoid hurting him. Bill threw it onto the floor once they were done and Eddie seemed relieved to be away from it.

“That was…really scary back there,” Stan said suddenly and they both looked at him. His eyes were red from crying and his shoulders looked heavy.

“I don’t know what I would’ve done if you’d…” he continued but had to stop himself as his eyes brimmed with tears. Eddie’s bottom lip trembled and Bill’s throat felt tight.

Richie broke the silence—and ruined the moment—by returning to the room with a large, brown, leather messenger bag slung over one shoulder, looking at them all with raised eyebrows as he bent one knee to kick the door closed without looking back.

“Beep-beep, Richie,” Eddie said in a ‘this isn’t the time’ kind of tone as he motioned for Richie to bring the bag to him.

“I can open a bag, Eds. And, surprise surprise, I know what bandages look like.”

Richie dropped the bag in front of the three seated boys, crouching to unzip it and push it open.

“Jesus, Dr K, did you just upend the drug store and tip it into this bag?”

“Sure ya do,” Richie smirked, lifting out a full-size bottle of baby lotion and holding it up to Eddie, winking, “Do you have dirty magazines hidden in here, too?” He started rifling through the bag again as Eddie snatched the bottle out of his hand and put it aside, “Personally I like to use pictures of your mom.”

“Dude, that’s fucking disgusting. Just get me some rubbing alcohol and some gauze and I’ll do this for him.
myself.”

Eddie held out his hand but Richie ignored him and took out the items for himself, standing.

“If you don’t start being nicer to me I’ll clean Stan up first and leave you to sit there in your own crusty blood.”

Stan didn’t get a chance to protest as they continued their bickering.

“That’s my stuff that you’re using!”

“Yeah but I know what I’m doing.”

Richie approached Eddie despite his protests and the fact that he was currently holding his arms out to stop him from getting any closer.

“Hold his arms, nurse! We’ve got ourselves a live one!” Richie said in Bill’s direction but Bill had clearly had enough and he took the stuff away from Richie instead, using it to gently clean the claw marks on Eddie’s neck without so much as a sideways glance at Richie.

Eddie squirmed a little but he seemed quite stoic in all as Bill cleaned him up, wiping away the blood from his face and chest, too. Eddie was quite embarrassed by this but he pretended not to be. *Bill would hopefully put the red in his cheeks down to exhaustion,* Eddie thought.

In the meantime Stan was left with Richie’s help instead and he seemed a lot less enthusiastic about having Richie touching him than Eddie was about Bill. The shouts of *get away from me* and *I can do that myself* were quite distracting as Bill tried to concentrate on delicately placing bandages around Eddie’s neck. Once he was done he made Richie swap places with him so that he could tend to Stan himself.

“I’m nuh-not gonna hurt you I j-just wanna take a look,” Bill said from where he was crouching in front of Stan, looking up into his eyes. Stan only nodded compliantly as Bill set Stan’s foot against his own knee to remove his shoe. It had obviously been perfectly clean and polished but now was smeared with drops of drying blood. Bill set it aside carefully.

The worst of the damage was around Stan’s ankle, where the thing had been gripping and pulling him and Bill thought that it looked very painful indeed, but Stan didn’t complain once, not even when Bill removed his blood-soaked sock and rolled up the leg of his jeans to get a better look at it. The damage extended further than that, though, and Bill was struck with the thought that he wouldn’t be able to tend to it like this.

“I…I can’t…”

Stan frowned.

“I can’t see it all luh-like this. Y-your jeans…” Bill tried his best to show him that he couldn’t push the leg of his jeans up any further, “You need to…t-take-“

“You need to take your pants off,” Richie said, ‘helpfully’, leaning across Eddie to look at Stan, “I think that’s what our stuttering friend here is trying to say.”

Stan looked at Eddie but Eddie only shrugged like *I don’t know why you’re looking at me. He’s right*, before standing from the bed.

“I’m gonna go get some sleep anyways. Goodnight, you guys.”
He swiped his blood-soiled shirt from the floor before he left, smiling sleepily at Bill’s soft ‘Goodnight Eddie’

“Call us if you need anything!” Richie shouted after him as he left the room, briefly looking at Bill and Stan before shooting them a peace sign and leaving, too.

“Thanks for the help, Ruh-Richie!” Bill called sarcastically as the door swung shut behind their bespectacled friend and he heard Stan chuckle.

“Well, he hasn’t changed a bit.”

“You goh-got that right.”

A silence fell over the room as Bill took the medical supplies from the bed and began to clean the wounds on Stan’s ankle. Some of them were still bleeding a little and Bill had to put pressure over them to stop it. A few times he heard Stan hiss an intake of breath but he kept perfectly still. Bill wound some bandages around Stan’s ankle carefully and tied it off.

“Did you…think he was gonna die?” Stan said suddenly as Bill was cleaning some cuts further up on his calf and Bill stopped what he was doing briefly to look up at him.

“Y-yeah,” Bill replied, much more quietly than he intended and the room went silent again. He didn’t really want to talk about how he had felt. It was too horrible.

Bill cleaned up as much of the blood as he could but once again the rolled up denim stopped him. He could see tears in the material and blood stains a little above Stan’s knee and he knew they needed to be cleaned, too but there was no way he was getting to them while Stan was still wearing the jeans.

“I…I can do the rest myself.”

Bill looked up once again, blue eyes meeting hazel ones briefly and he passed the items to Stan.

“Sh-sure.”

His eyes followed Stan as he stood and retreated to the bathroom, limping a little as the weight on his leg irritated the injuries. The sharp sound of the lock made Bill’s heart jump and he didn’t quite know why. He stayed on the floor listening for a while without understanding it before he stood to clean up the blood stained pieces of gauze which littered the bed. Stan would hate it if his room was messy.

He glanced at the closed bathroom door again before exiting onto the corridor. To his surprise, Richie was standing just a short way down, leaning against the wall and Bill approached him with a smile.

“Hey there Billy boy,” Richie said with a grin, but it was lacklustre and Bill felt uneasy.

“Yuh-you okay, Rich?”

Richie looked at him incredulously as Bill joined him against the wall. They looked like two naughty children standing outside the principal’s office and Richie thought of the time he had convinced Bill to help him fill Henry Bowers’ locker with leftovers from the cafeteria. ‘Well, to be fair, Henry shouldn’t have broken the lock by punching it that one time, then they wouldn’t have been able to get in. He was asking for it, really.’
Richie wasn’t okay. He wasn’t okay at all. For one, he had come back to this craphole to discover his friends being attacked by monsters, again, and that had brought up all kinds of stuff he didn’t want to think about and then Eddie…

…what if he hadn’t been there and the monster got him? Heck, even when Richie was there Eddie nearly croaked…and Richie had never been more terrified. He would have blamed himself, of course.

He wouldn’t let Bill know that he wasn’t okay, though. Of course not. Richie was always the one to provide the chucks and he wanted to keep it that way. As it turned out he didn’t need to say anything at all, as Bill suddenly turned from the wall and planted himself against Richie in a sort of awkward hug.

Richie really liked hugs if he was honest. He would never admit it to one of the other losers but there was something so comforting and it was one of the only times Richie didn’t feel the need to talk. Not feeling the need to talk was a relief to Richie. He couldn’t stop it sometimes.

He reached his arms around Bill, smiling to himself when he realised that he could comfortably hold onto his own wrist against Bill’s back. Either Bill hadn’t grown much broader or Richie’s arms had grown a lot longer and either thought was pretty funny.

“You s-smell like cigarettes,” Bill mumbled against Richie’s shoulder and Richie shushed him and reached up to pat his head.

“Don’t ruin the moment.”

Bill sighed and held onto him tighter. He always felt a little lighter around Richie, like he could relinquish some of the responsibility of being the group’s leader. Not that Bill didn’t think the others were strong, but Richie had relentless optimism that Bill had always found comforting. He thought that he could tell Richie anything, even embarrassing stuff, and he’d take it seriously –after laughing his ass off first, of course-.

“I better go and see if Stan’s okay.”

“Cool beans,” Richie let go of Bill and they moved apart, “Tell him to relax a little, will ya? If he clutches any harder his kids are gonna feel it.”

“Beep-beep, Richie.”

“Sweet dreams, Big Bill.”
Chapter 6

Chapter Summary

Okay so I know it says slow burn and all but I just couldn't help myself with this one.  
PS - There will definitely be Reddie, too, so don't be disappointed just yet :)

The next day the earliest to rise was Stan. Primarily it was due to the pain in his leg; his ankle in particular had been gripping all night and he had slipped in and out of a restless sleep on more than one occasion. Aside from that it seemed like his body clock just would not allow him to sleep past nine.

He had shifted as carefully as he could into a seated position on the edge of the bed, wincing as he swung his legs out from under the blanket –even through the bandages it was sensitive- to examine his injured leg. Bill had done an excellent job patching him up, he had to admit and he wasn’t even sure he could have done it neater himself. The bandages were stained with faint red patches now, though, drying to brown, and he could see bruising blossoming out from beneath the white strips. He tilted his ankle a little to either side and it brought a dull pain which wasn’t too bad. Reaching down to unfasten the knot Bill had made and unwind the strapping from himself he thought of Bill’s careful hands. Beautiful, gentle Bill, who had knelt before him and cleaned away the blood like it was nothing, so calm and collected. It made Stan’s heart flutter but he forced the thought away as he stood, dropping the soiled bandages into the waste paper basket and heading to the bathroom to start his morning routine.

Eddie knocked on the door just as Stan was stepping out of the shower; he heard his voice come through asking to be let in. He got dressed before he answered –just in case Richie was there, too, and had any smart ideas about ripping his towel off him-, well, part-dressed at least. It was far too painful to put trousers on and he hadn’t even re-bandaged his wounds yet. He kept the towel around his waist even over his underwear.

It turns out that Eddie had just left his bag of medicine in Stan’s room the night before, so Stan let him in. Eddie looked a lot better than he did yesterday, although the bandages around his neck were looking a little worse for wear just like Stan’s had been. He looked as if he was still wearing the clothes he slept in and his feet were bare. His hair was sticking up at odd angles and Stan thought he looked quite sweet.

“Did you shower?” Eddie asked Stan as he crouched to take some plastic pill containers out of the bag.

Stan thought it was a strange question. Of course he showered, he had been covered in blood the day before, and he showered every morning.

“Yeah,” he answered, warily.

“With those wounds on your leg? Didn’t it hurt with the water...?” Eddie mimed the situation with his hands, looking scandalised.

Stan nodded curtly.
“It wasn’t that bad.”

“Savage,” Eddie said quietly and they both chuckled as Stan watched Eddie pop one pill after another, seven in total. Eddie saw him watching and quickly chimed in that they were mostly vitamins. Stan was sure that there was evidence to suggest that taking that many vitamins wouldn’t really do anything but he kept his mouth shut. Someone else might say the same to him about ironing his undergarments.

Stan perched himself on the edge of the bed as he watched Eddie spray something onto his tongue, take another, tiny pill and put drops into both of his eyes.

‘He took all of those pills without any water,’ Stan mused, ‘He’s the savage one.’

“Do you want me to wrap that up for you?” Eddie pointed towards Stan’s ankle from where he was crouching beside the leather bag.

“Um, yeah…I was gonna do it myself, but…”

“Don’t worry, Stanley. I am practically a doctor,” Eddie chuckled, approaching him with some fresh bandages, “I could probably perform minor surgery at this point.”

Stanley wasn’t sure about that, but he’d definitely be happy for Eddie to patch him up. Eddie wasn’t as gentle as Bill, but he was practised and still very careful. He had Stan’s ankle wrapped tightly before Stan even had a chance to observe what he was doing and, instead of tying it like Bill had, he fastened it neatly with a safety pin. It looked much more professional than what Bill had done.

“It looks really clean,” Eddie said once he had finished, “It should heal nicely.”

Stan smiled gratefully down at him as there was a knock at the door and Richie came in without being invited.

“Top o’ the mornin’ to ye, laddies!” He said in his Irish Cop voice. He had gotten much better at it now but Stan still hated it. Eddie groaned, as Richie sat so heavily beside Stan on the bed he nearly knocked him off it. He leaned on Stan’s shoulder to peer down at Eddie through his glasses, holding them at the very end of his nose, “Looks good, Doctor K, I think he’ll live!”

“Not if he has to keep listening to you,” Eddie said smartly as he tidied away his things and zipped up the bag and Richie’s eyes went wide.

“YOWZA! Eddie Spaghetti gets off a good one!” He leapt off the bed to clasp Eddie’s hand in both of his own and shake it enthusiastically before Eddie yanked it out of his grip and wiped it on his nightshirt.

“Why are your hands so clammy? It’s fucking gross.”

“That’s not what your mom was saying last night. She happens to like my clammy hands.”

Eddie ignored him as he lifted the bag onto his shoulder, although he gave him a very nasty side-eye as he left the room. Richie followed him like an overly-attached puppy and Stan could hear them bickering out in the hall even through the closed door.

‘I guess some things never change,’ he thought, and smiled.

Once Bill finally awoke –Richie barging into his room, ripping open the curtains and threatening
to kiss him if he didn’t open his eyes did the trick nicely—, they spent the rest of the morning in Stan’s room. He still couldn’t bring himself to put on any trousers so the others very kindly agreed to stay with him. That is, he didn’t ask them to and he would have been just as happy to sit on his own reading one of the books he had brought, but they all came to his room nonetheless. He did pull out a book eventually, though; sitting there watching Richie’s re-enactment of how he had heroically saved their lives yesterday, complete with his own little additions was not exactly what he would call entertaining.

“And then Eddie was going to die! He couldn’t breathe but I swooped in and gave him the kiss of life!” Richie said from where he was standing on Stan’s bed. He was wearing a slightly less hideous Hawaiian shirt today but it was open and he was sporting a t-shirt underneath that said ‘FBI: Female Breast Inspector’. They all thought that was much worse.

“It was like Eddie was Snow White and I was Prince Charming,” he continued and Eddie simply watched him scornfully from where he was sitting on the floor next to Bill. Bill wasn’t listening to Richie, either. He was drawing in his journal, trying to capture what he thought the creature had looked like, deep in concentration. Eddie had glanced over at it a couple of times and shuddered. ‘Why was Bill so good at drawing realistic stuff?’

Richie saw Eddie’s eyes on Bill’s drawing and clearly felt left out as he jumped down from the bed to flop himself down across both of them. Bill didn’t react but Eddie protested loudly.

“Richie! Watch what you’re doing!” He reached underneath Richie to dig his aspirator out of his pocket, holding it protectively, “I only have one back up!”

He clearly realised what he had said and he tried to keep a serious face for a while before they both broke up laughing at how ridiculous it was. Bill chuckled without looking up from his drawing. Stan was too buried in his book, even when Richie started tickling Eddie and he was squealing as they rolled around on the floor, Eddie weakly trying to push him away as Richie got him under his shirt on his bare stomach. Eddie had always been painfully ticklish and they all knew it. Richie was the only one who ever acted on it, though.

“You wouldn’t think we were ad-adults,” Bill said aloud to the room, although he looked amused and Eddie felt relief wash over him as Richie moved in on Bill instead. Eddie hated being tickled and Richie damn well knew he did. Why did he have to be so insufferable? He lay on the floor for a while with tears running down the sides of his face to the carpet, tugging his t-shirt back down. He heard Bill protesting as Richie took away his notebook and tried to start tickling him, too.

Bill wasn’t having any of Richie’s messing around today, though, and Eddie sat up to see Richie on the ground with Bill on top of him, holding his glasses out of reach.

“Give me my b-book back,” Bill said with his eyebrows raised, holding Richie down with the hand that wasn’t gripping the spectacles.

“Is that you, Bill?!” Richie squinted overdramatically at him and Bill laughed softly. Eddie laughed, too.

“Say something so I can follow your voice!” Richie continued, patting Bill’s chest in various places as if he was blind. Bill was still laughing until Richie hit him straight between the legs, a little too roughly and Bill doubled over onto his side, dropping Richie’s glasses. Richie scrambled to pick them up and place them back on his nose while Bill was down, before crouching over Bill and shaking his shoulders dramatically.
“Stay with me, Billy!”

Bill only gasped out a weak ‘man down’ and Richie was sure that he hadn’t hit him that hard and that Bill was obviously playing along. He sat up immediately when he saw Richie opening the journal and thumbing through it.

“Richie, give that b-back. It’s private I d-duh-don’t want you reading it.”

“Why not, Billy? What naughty stuff have you been writing in here?” Richie’s eyes scanned one of the pages for a while behind his lenses.

“Richie…”

“You know what? This is actually really good, Bill.”

Bill felt himself relax a little as Richie continued to read but he stayed ready to grab it back from him when he was done. His worst fear was realised when he saw Richie flip to the drawings at the back.

“Hey! That’s me!” Richie said delightedly, holding it up for Eddie to see, too. Even Stan looked up from his book to glance at it.

“Ruh-Richie…” Bill’s tone was serious, now, but Richie was deaf to it and he continued to leaf through the drawings. Bill saw him stop and examine two pages in particular, feeling his heart in his throat. Richie glanced up at Bill briefly and then back at the paper and for a second Bill thought he was going to let it go.

No such luck.

“Hey, have you guys seen that movie Titanic?” Richie piped up, “That’s what this reminds me of. Hey, Stan, you’re not hiding any large, valuable jewels from us, are you? ‘Cause I could really use the money if you are.”

Stan looked up from his book again and Richie held it up to show him. Bill knew exactly what it was and he didn’t know why he was embarrassed about it but he was sure that this was what dying felt like. He couldn’t even look at them as Stan’s eyes examined the drawing carefully and even Eddie went to take a look at it. His small ‘hey, Bill, that’s really good’ didn’t even register with Bill at this point.

He knew that it was good.

That wasn’t what they’d be focusing on.

That wasn’t what Stan would think.

Bill felt like he might throw up as Stan put his own book down to take the journal from Richie’s hands and look at it more closely.

Eddie stood up and stretched in a way that was so fake it only added to Bill’s embarrassment.

“Hey, guys, I forgot that I need to…”

“Yeah, me too,” Richie said loudly as he stood to join Eddie, “I have to go and…clean my glasses…”

“Yeah and I need to…help him clean his glasses...”
They both made a swift exit, Richie glancing at Bill in a ‘woops’ kind of way as he left and Bill imagined himself standing and slamming Richie against the wall to punch the shit out of him. He would never do that, of course.

The room was painfully silent once they left and Bill vaguely wondered if it was physically possible to die of shame. He looked over at Stan, whose eyes were still fixed on the pencil sketch of his own sleeping form. Stan knew that Bill was probably embarrassed but it was a gorgeous drawing. It was like Bill had perfectly captured a moment in time without using a camera.

“I…I’m s-ss-sorry. I sh-shouldn’t have-“

“It’s beautiful,” Stan cut him off without looking up.

“I know,” Bill replied, far too quickly and immediately felt his cheeks get hot.

‘Why the hell did he just say that?’

He immediately got up from the floor to take the notebook from Stan’s hands and snapped it closed.

“I…I’ll see yuh-you later S-Stan.”

He made for the door but Stan stood from the bed.

“Bill. Wait.”

Bill turned to look at him but found that he couldn’t meet his eyes. He wanted to say something else but the words were stuck in his throat like molasses. He didn’t need to, though, as Stan came over and stood right in front of him.

“Thank you, Bill.”

Bill wasn’t sure what he was thanking him for.

Stan leaned towards him and Bill’s heart raced as he felt a soft kiss on his cheek. He closed his eyes. He could smell Stan’s shampoo and the warm breath against his jaw was intoxicating. He wanted to grip the front of Stan’s shirt in his fingers, hold him close and kiss his cheek, too, and his jaw, his neck…anywhere he could reach, really. The feeling was so overwhelming that as Stan pulled away Bill couldn’t help himself and he followed him, barely having time to register Stan’s eyes widen in surprise before he had pressed their lips together.

‘Oh, man, if Richie could see this,’ was his first thought but his mind was wiped when he felt Stan’s long fingers slide up the nape of his neck and tangle into his hair and he realised that Stan was kissing him back.

Bill had kissed people before, of course, and plenty more besides but it was nothing like this. Bill actually felt lightheaded as their lips softly collided over and over and he actually wondered why he had never thought of kissing Stan before. Kissing Stanley Uris now seemed like the logical thing for him to be doing at all times.

“You’re a really good kisser,” Bill whispered as their lips parted briefly and he realised that the words had come easily to him with no urge to stutter at all, as if he’d somehow taken the words from Stan’s mouth instead of his own. Stan replied by pressing that mouth against Bill’s again, that beautiful mouth, and Bill’s knees felt weak. He held onto Stan’s waist to steady himself, gripping his fingers into the fabric of his shirt like he had so wanted to do earlier and feeling grounded. His
head still felt light and fuzzy, like he was floating…

…no…

…like he was flying.

When they eventually broke apart for good Bill’s lips were pink and swollen and his blue eyes were hazy and Stan thought that this is a sight he’d like to see every day. The kiss had come as a shock to him but it certainly wasn’t unwelcome. Stan knew that now and he suddenly felt like somewhere deep down he’d always wanted to kiss Bill. They stood in silence for a while, feeling each other’s breath until there was a loud bang on the door behind Bill and Richie’s voice came through.

“Hey, do you guys wanna go get something to eat?!”

They had both been visibly startled by the sound but had maintained eye contact and Bill laughed first, followed by Stan and Bill had never seen or heard anything so glorious.

“W…we’ll be ruh-right there!” Bill called back, stuttering again now and they both chuckled again as if there was a secret joke between the two of them.

Bill’s hands were still on Stan’s waist.

Stan had never felt stronger.
Chapter 7

They went out to eat after Stan had picked out the loosest pair of trousers he brought with him and pulled them on so slowly and carefully that Richie threatened to do it for him on more than one occasion. Bill had left the room, too, of course and he stood in the corridor with his other two friends to wait. Richie was banging on the door repeatedly and even Eddie was shouting advice to Stan through it but Bill stayed silent, lost in thought.

When Stan eventually emerged, looking neater and more calm and put together than ever, Richie grasped his shoulders dramatically and pretended to cry.

“I thought we’d lost you forever.”

“Shut up, Richie,” Stan and Bill said in unison. Their eyes met briefly and they shared a soft smile before Bill had to look away.

“Seconded,” Eddie added and pulled on the back of Richie’s garish, yellow bomber jacket to drag him away from Stan and towards the staircase.

They went to a new restaurant which wasn’t there when they were kids. It had replaced something else that used to be in the exact same spot but none of them could remember what it was. Now, it was a classic American burger joint with a neon sign out front that said ‘DERRY BURGER’ in red and blue. Bill and Richie fought for the same seat at the booth but Richie won and Bill ended up sitting exactly where he didn’t want to be, directly opposite Stan. Eddie didn’t seem too pleased about this arrangement, either; Richie’s legs were much longer than they used to be and he clearly didn’t care about invading Eddie’s own leg space under the table.

“So…” Richie looked around at the three other men after the waitress had walked out of earshot from taking their order. He leaned low on the table, whispering like someone doing a shady deal, “…does anyone have a plan?”

“About what?” Eddie was cleaning the table in front of himself with a wipe he took out of his bag. He did Stan’s space, too and Stan leaned back to watch, pointing out spots that Eddie had missed.

“The monster?”

Bill looked over at this comment. He had been staring at his own clasped hands since they sat down, not daring to look up in case he caught Stan’s eyes. What would he do or say if that happened? He didn’t know. Did he actually kiss Stan or did he just imagine it?

“Hey, keep your voice down,” Eddie warned. He was using some kind of antibacterial stuff on his hands, now, and it smelled strongly of alcohol.

“I’m just saying,” Richie continued, “Last time we went into that thing’s lair and we kicked its butt. I assume we’re gonna do the same again, right?” He looked at Bill for backup.

“W-well…last time it w-“

“Screw last time, that thing nearly killed Eddie!”

“Keep your voice down, Rich,” Eddie repeated, but there was a softness to it, now, and he was looking at Richie with what Bill could only describe as fondness.
“No,” Richie looked irritated, now, “We all promised.” He sat back and folded his arms and the group went silent as the waitress came over with a tray and placed a drink in front of each of them. They all avoided eye contact with Richie as this was happening, before, as she left the table again, Stan said, “He’s right.”

Richie looked at Stan with mild shock, they all did but Stan sat forward, rubbing his palms across his thighs briefly before lifting his hands to slide his fingers around the coffee cup on the table in front of him.

“We did all promise…that if it came back, we would, too…and that we’d kill it.”

His eyes were fixed on the black liquid in front of him as he said it.

“But…there’s only four of us…’” Eddie said quietly, the uncertainty clear in his voice. He picked the lemon slice out of his tea to place it on the edge of the saucer and Richie’s eyes followed it behind his glasses.

“S-Stan’s right,” Bill said suddenly, decidedly and they fell silent as all eyes turned to him. Stan looked particularly enamoured, “We obviously came back here for a ruh-reason. It wasn’t just to…hang out and eat burgers. We’ve all sss-seen something already. Maybe…maybe we’re stronger than we w-were before but maybe…maybe it is, too. We need to come up with s-something.”

He took a sip of his coffee and they all looked at their own drinks thoughtfully. Richie stirred his milkshake with a spoon and some strawberry froth ran down the side of the tall glass.

“Well…if we’re really gonna do it, then…we need to try and remember where it lives,” Eddie took a drink of his tea, “Because I can’t. I know we’ve been there before, but…I can’t.”

They all nodded in agreement and seemed to raise their cups to drink at the same time. Richie broke the silence after a while, blurting out the words as if he was holding them back but lost his control over them.

“I dare you to eat this!” He picked up the lemon slice from in front of Eddie and held it up to him. It was only a thin piece, you could almost see through it but Bill winced at the thought. Eddie only stared at him blankly and it seemed like the serious conversation was over.

“Why would I do that?”

“Because it’s a dare?”

“I’m not eating a raw lemon slice.”

“Will you eat it if I cook it?”

“No.”

“What about you, Big Bill? You never used to say no to a dare.”

Bill shook his head and chuckled, taking another gulp of coffee.

“No, Richie.”

“Why not?”

“I have sensitive taste buds.”
“There’s nothing sensitive about you, Bill, I’ve seen you eat whole chilli peppers and barely cry at all.”

The conversation continued like this for a good while, until, to everyone’s surprise, Stan took the lemon slice from Richie’s hand and ate it himself, whole and without wincing once. He stuck out his tongue after to prove that it was gone before smugly sipping his black coffee as the others only watched him in horror. Eddie looked scandalised. Richie looked impressed. They all got laughing so hard after that that they couldn’t stop and the waitress looked at them strangely as she brought them their food.

Richie laughed into his milkshake and ended up with a foamy moustache which cracked them all up again after she walked away. Even Stan couldn’t look up as he was eating as whenever any of them caught each other’s eyes they started laughing again.

Richie had ordered a huge burger and got ketchup on his shirt and in his hair while he was eating it. Eddie wiped at his shirt like an overbearing mother and tutted at him while Bill cleaned Richie’s hair with a napkin and Stan watched them fondly. Richie seemed pleased with the attention.

Before they left Bill sat and watched Stan finish his drink as Richie and Eddie argued playfully all the way to the door. Bill had never liked black coffee, personally, he thought as Stan took the last mouthful, so why, when he thought about the bitter taste of it now, did his mouth water a little?

Later that evening they had the run of the hotel. The Derry Townhouse wasn’t exactly a popular tourist destination at the best of times, neither was Derry itself, and after a businesswoman checked out earlier that morning they were the only four guests staying there. They took this opportunity to explore the townhouse –well, the parts that they were allowed to-. They had to stop Richie from going into any door that said ‘STAFF ONLY’.

The room that usually was set up with tables for breakfast and dinner was now an empty hall with the seats stacked up against the edges. The dark wood floor, visible to them for the first time since they arrived, was scuffed and scraped from the pull and drag of table and chair legs but it still had a sort of rustic charm to it. There was an old piano in the corner of the room which must have been used for functions and events, but it had a thin layer of dust atop it –which Richie immediately drew a crude picture in-. Bill wiped it away with his sleeve, feeling a little offended. It reminded him of the piano his mother used to play in the parlour before Georgie died. That one, too, had sat dusty and untouched and forgotten in the end but Bill’s earliest and fondest memories had all involved the instrument.

“Do you thuh-think it still works?” Bill asked, more wondering aloud to himself than asking anyone in particular. He lifted the lid from the keys but before he could touch one to test it out, Eddie’s voice cut through the silence of the room like an echo.

“Stan knows how to play.”

Stan shook his head, looking embarrassed as all eyes turned on him but Eddie pressed on.

“He does. And he’s really good, too.”

All eyes turned to Stan again. He seemed very reluctant and he muttered something about it just being a hobby but he fell quiet as Bill spoke.

“W-will you play something for us?” Bill’s eyes looked so sincere and expectant that Stan was sure he had heard ‘for me’ and not ‘for us’ and he found that he couldn’t bring himself to say no. Who would it hurt, anyway, to play them one song?
He made his way over to the piano where Bill was and Richie and Eddie followed him curiously. Stan felt his heart skip a beat when Bill dusted off the piano stool with his hand and gestured for Stan to sit, and when he did Bill was close, nearly leaning over him to watch.

In truth, Stan adored the piano. His parents had made him start lessons when he was only six or seven and he had hated it at first but, over time he realised how much discipline it took to make it sound good and he became obsessed with never getting a single key wrong. He had practiced every single day in the end, first mastering all of the Jewish hymns off by heart –his father had been so proud- and then branching off into popular piano pieces. It had been easy, with Stan’s hyperlogical mind, to learn how to read music.

The three of his friends watched silently for Stan to start playing something. Richie was ready to make fun of him for not being very good. Eddie had talked him up just now and Richie was damned if he wouldn’t be hard to impress. The expression was wiped off his face, however, when Stan did start playing. It started off slow, but the acoustics in the room were phenomenal and he didn’t hit a single wrong note as he played. All three of them were stunned into complete silence as they listened and Bill sat beside him to watch his fingers move gracefully along the keys. Stan felt his shoulders tense up as Bill’s arm brushed against his own but he kept playing.

Bill felt like he didn’t take a breath the whole time Stan was playing. He was struck by the sudden memory of his mother, who had studied at a music school, playing something similarly breath taking as Bill listened in awe as a child. His mother had been a god-like figure in his eyes then. He was equally struck by the sheer beauty of the person creating the same feeling in him, now.

Stan could feel Bill’s eyes on him, feel all of their eyes on him, but he never skipped a beat. It seemed to take no effort at all and there was something almost statuesque about him now that he was seated in front of this instrument with his flawless command over it. Bill was intoxicated.

When the piece ended and Stan’s fingers stopped, Richie uttered a loud ‘HOLY FUCK’ into the now silent room and they all, aside from Bill, burst into raucous laughter –Stan’s laughter was far more nervous than raucous-. Bill was still staring at the side of Stan’s face like he was seeing him for the first time and Bill was sure that if Richie and Eddie hadn’t been there, he would have caught Stan’s lips in another intense kiss that would have left them both breathless. The thought sent heat to areas of his body that he didn’t want it to go to, though, so he shook that thought away as quickly as it had come.

“C-can you puh-play something else?” His voice came out much quieter than he intended but Stan looked him in the eyes briefly and Bill was sure that he seemed pleased to be asked.

“…Sure.”

“Play something less depressing this time!” Richie chimed in and Stan swallowed whatever sharp reply he had to that comment, focusing on the piano keys and starting to play something else. This time it was more upbeat but still a beautiful piece and, despite Bill’s protests, Richie pulled him off the piano stool and away from Stan to dance with him. Eddie watched them, both amused and embarrassed. He chuckled through his fingers.

“Richie…”

But Richie was taking absolutely no notice of Eddie whatsoever. He was too busy dragging Bill around the room in a bad impression of a waltz or…something. Richie’s hand was on Bill’s waist and his other was clasped in Bill’s hand rather awkwardly.

“Stop being such a spoilsport,” Richie said after the third time Bill tried to switch their roles and
move Richie’s hand from his hip. He didn’t seem too bothered to be dancing with Richie but they had been fighting over who got to lead the whole way around, Eddie could hear it.

“Why do I have to be the woman?”

“Because I asked you to dance, William.”

Richie was using his British Gentleman voice on Bill, now, and Eddie couldn’t help but smile.

“Don’t call me that.”

“But that’s your name, good sir.”

“You know I hate that.”

“Okay, Big Bill,” Richie said in a feminine voice, putting extra emphasis on the ‘Big’ and moving Bill’s hand onto his waist instead, “Take me for a spin, daddy.”

“Why do you have to make everything weird?”

Bill was laughing now, but he took control anyway now that Richie had given up, leading him around the makeshift ballroom with a lot of clumsy footwork.

“Jeez, Bill, you’re a worse dancer than Eddie’s mom. When I did this with her she nailed it.”

“I heard that! And it’s not funny!”

Richie glanced over at Eddie before looking back at Bill and they both laughed. When they came to a stop as the song ended Richie leaned in and tried to kiss Bill but he pushed his face away so that Richie got him on the cheek by his ear instead.

“Bill, you tease. I bet you would have let Eddie or Stan kiss you.”

“That’s because they don’t have h-herpes.”

Richie’s face lit up the way it did whenever someone took his bait and he laughed hysterically.

“YES! Stuttering Bill gets off a good one! The score is evening up, now, folks! Stay tuned!”

Stan shook his head from over at the piano, but he was smiling. Richie bounced over and leaned across the top of the piano like some kind of singing dame in an old western.

“Play it again, Stanny,” he said in a southern drawl. He ducked off the top of the piano as Stan swiped to push him, but he started to play another tune nonetheless. If anything, they all thought he seemed pleased to be over there providing the theme music to their antics rather than being a part of it.

Richie sauntered over to Eddie as Stan started to play and bowed very theatrically before him, holding out his hand.

“May I have this dance, ma’am.”

Bill was certain that Eddie was about to smartly decline the offer but he wasn’t given a choice as Richie grabbed him just like he did with Bill. Eddie was twice as reluctant, however, and he nearly got away before Richie gripped at his waist and pulled him close against his body, linking their fingers together tightly.
“Dance with me, Eds.”

His voice was quiet, like he didn’t want Bill or Stan to hear and it stopped Eddie’s train of thought.

Eddie only stared up at him for a while and allowed Richie to lead him around like he had with Bill, but more smoothly. Bill and Richie had looked ridiculous together, all arms and legs and fighting over who was going to lead. Richie and Eddie, however, moved around the floor like Richie actually knew what he was doing as Eddie was stunned into contemplative silence. Bill actually thought they looked quite suited.

The hand on Eddie’s waist was burning through the fabric of his shirt. Richie’s hands were always hot and clammy and Eddie usually hated it but he couldn’t draw his attention away from the heat of it and it almost scared him. The hand in Eddie’s was too hot and clammy, and Eddie didn’t like it, but… didn’t their fingers fit strangely well together?

Richie’s body was hot, too, where he had pressed them together but Eddie’s mind went a little fuzzy when he thought about that, so he stopped.

Richie’s new glasses are nicer than the ones he used to have, he thought instead and remembered how they had all made fun of them, Richie included, and their uncanny likeness to the thickness and shape of the bottom of Coca Cola bottles. These ones weren’t like that at all; silver wire frames outlined thin lenses behind which Richie’s eyes looked normal-sized –his old ones had always given him a strange, cartoon-like appearance-. There was a smattering of freckles across the bridge of his nose beneath them. Richie used to be covered in freckles but they seemed to have faded with age. Eddie felt a little bit sad about it.

Eddie’s own face had gone the opposite way. His skin used to be clear but with a lot of time spent outside in the sun he had developed a sprinkling of pigmentation across his cheeks and the tip of his nose. To Richie he looked cuter than ever.

“You’re unusually quiet,” Richie said suddenly, breaking Eddie out of his thoughts, “Are you okay, Eds?”

“Don’t…call me that.”

“What was that? That was weak. At least give me something to work with.”

“I’m fine. I’m just a little tired, is all.”

Stan seemed to finish the song at that exact moment and they both stopped. Richie’s palm was now resting on the small of Eddie’s back and their hands were still clasped together. They stood like that for so long that Eddie was sure Stan and Bill must be watching them and wondering what the hell was going on, but he couldn’t seem to bring himself to pull away, like Richie’s deep, brown eyes were holding him in place.

“You’re next, Stan the Man!”

Eddie jumped as Richie suddenly spoke loudly and then pulled away from him to move on to Stan. He felt very cold all of a sudden.

“Wh…you can’t dance with me if I have to play the music.”

Stan seemed to be holding on to the piano stool, as if he was afraid that Richie was going to pull him away from it.
“Bill can play.”

“I c-can’t play the piano.” Bill had been standing against the wall watching Richie and Eddie and now he moved over to where they all were.

“Sure you can. You used to play it sometimes when we were kids.”

“Yeah…when we were k-kids.”

“Get in there and show us what you got, Billy.”

Richie forced Bill into the seat beside Stan, holding onto his shoulders to keep him down.

“N-no Ruh-Richie I can’t…”

“You can play a little. Just something simple.”

Bill sighed and stared hard at the piano keys as if they would somehow start playing for him. He could remember a few simple tunes that his mother had taught him when he was a child, but, they would be downright embarrassing after the skill that Stan had just shown.

“I…I think I can re-remember something…”

He started to play, very slowly, a tune that he used to practice over and over after his mother showed it to him. It was the only one he could play all of the way through.

“Hey, that’s not bad at all, Billy,” Richie smiled and patted him on the shoulder.

The praise seemed to throw him, though, and the next key that Bill hit was completely off. He cringed outwardly as the bum note reverberated through the empty room.

“S-s-sorry.”

“Um, I think it’s…it’s like this…” Stan said quietly from beside him, and he took Bill’s hand gently in his own to move it across the keys and into the right place. Bill pressed his fingers down in that spot and, lo and behold, it was the exact note he’d been looking for. He smiled nervously at Stan but before Stan could reply in any kind of way he was dragged out of his seat by Richie.

And so Bill played his tune all of the way through, badly, occasionally hitting a bad note before quickly finding the right one and Eddie watched him closely, clearly impressed in spite of the dreadful sounds that Bill was sometimes producing as when it was right it sounded pretty good. Richie danced with Stan now, with Stan taking the lead this time due to the height difference. He must have had some idea of how to dance as it ended with him instructing Richie and telling him off when he did something he shouldn’t. Stan was so poised and elegant, even trying to dance with Richie Tozier and Bill hit more and more of the wrong keys as he couldn’t stop looking over at them. Thankfully, Eddie didn’t seem to notice.

When Bill finished playing he realised that they had stopped and were standing near him. Eddie started clapping first, then Richie and Stan, too. Richie ruffled Bill’s hair playfully and Stan sat down beside him. The room was getting dark, now.

None of them seemed able to stop smiling.
Bill realised when he awoke early the next morning that his stay at the Derry Townhouse was going to be over soon. He had only booked the room for a week and that meant he had three nights left before he had to leave. Extending his stay in the room occurred to him, but he was using money he had saved up from his job working in a bookstore and it would quickly run out if he wasn’t careful. His parents weren’t exactly poor, but, he would just die if he had to ask them for money. Plus, they didn’t actually know that he’d come back to Derry and he wanted to keep it that way.

He lay in his hotel bed thinking about this for a long time, glancing at the clock beside the bed. Half past five in the morning.

‘That’s far too early to get up’, Bill thought. He rolled over and went back to sleep.

Down the corridor from Bill’s room, not long after that, Eddie Kaspbrak had a rude awakening. This came in the form of Richie Tozier banging on his door and demanding to be let in. Eddie told him to go away but, when this didn’t have the desired effect he picked himself up to go and unfasten the latch.

Richie immediately pushed his way into the room, nearly knocking Eddie onto his ass in the process. Eddie sleepily closed the door behind him and rested his forehead against it.

Was this really happening right now?

“Richie, what the fuck? It’s five thirty in the fucking morning.”

“I had a bad dream,” Richie said, matter-of-factly, like that was a good reason for him waking Eddie up this early. Eddie watched from the door as Richie got into warm spot in the bed that he himself had just vacated. He wasn’t wearing his glasses and his feet were bare.

“Are you kidding me?”

“C’mon, Eds, don’t be like that. I just don’t wanna sleep alone, now, okay?”

Eddie watched Richie pull the blankets over himself and sighed heavily before going to get back into the bed himself. The cold side of the bed that he had to get into was nowhere near as satisfying as his earlier patch had been, the space Richie was now happily snuggled into.

“Okay, fine, but if you snore or fart or start talking to me then this agreement is over, you hear me?”

“…I can’t promise the first two. Or the last thing.”

“Then be prepared to make the trip back to your own room. You’re a grown ass man, Richie, you should be able to have a bad dream and sleep by yourself.”

“That’s harsh, Eds. You know that for us, a bad dream is not just a bad dream.”

Eddie thought about this for a while and decided that it was true. He had had countless nightmares himself and they had all seemed so real.

“Just…don’t take up too much of the bed.”
“I won’t.”

Blissful silence fell over the room for a while and Eddie felt himself drifting off to sleep again before…

“So, yesterday, when—“

“Richie, shut the fuck up.”

“Sorry. But seriously, did—“

“If you don’t shut your mouth, I swear to god.”

Richie said nothing then, but Eddie felt the bed shift and when he opened his eyes to see what Richie was doing, he was right in front of him. It made him jump a little bit.

“Richie, what the fuck…”

“I was cold.”

Richie’s eyes were pure black in the dark of the room and Eddie thought that it was strange to see him without his glasses like this. He’d seen Richie without them plenty of times before but not like this, not this close where he could take a good look at his eyes without the lenses in front. Eddie expected Richie to go back to sleep but he didn’t and he wondered if he should close his own eyes now, or…

…but he didn’t, either and they continued to stare at each other silently in the dark. This would have been awkward with anyone else and by now Eddie would have caved and rolled away to go to sleep but…but it was Richie and it wasn’t awkward at all. He could hear Richie’s steady breathing and it made him feel calm but it drew his attention to slightly parted lips and then he couldn’t look away. He knew that Richie could see where he was looking but he couldn’t look away.

“…Eddie?”

He watched Richie’s lips form the syllables of his own name, felt Richie’s breath against him before he knew what was happening and then those lips were moving closer and they were pressed against him, against the corner of his mouth.

Eddie’s mind went into overdrive.

He felt the kiss against the edge of his lips more than he’d felt anything in his whole life, he was sure of it. Forget breaking an arm or being clawed in the neck by a monster, forget asthma attacks and panic and anxiety, this right here was a stronger feeling than any of those things. Or that’s what he thought until Richie had finished testing the water and kissed him properly.

Properly, like, mouth-on-mouth, chest-to-chest and Richie’s hand was on Eddie’s waist like it had been earlier that day when they danced only this time it had found bare skin beneath Eddie’s sweatshirt kind of properly. Eddie put his hands against Richie’s shoulders to try and push him away, at least that’s what he thought he must be doing but he…pulled him closer?

That doesn’t sound like him at all.

This was Richie Tozier, Eddie’s annoying-as-hell best friend from childhood who had made his life misery with jokes about his mom and constantly teased him about his germ phobia. The same Richie Tozier who was just a skinny little loser with Coke bottle glasses and those ridiculous
Hawaiian shirts.

That same Richie Tozier, now a slightly-less-skinny and kind of tall loser with his glasses off was now kissing Eddie like he’d never been kissed before and Eddie was helpless to stop it. There was a soft noise as their lips broke apart and Eddie opened his eyes to look at Richie’s blown pupils.

“…Did you just kiss me?”

Eddie whispered the only thing that came to his mind at that moment and he saw Richie’s lips part at the feeling of his own breath against them. He swallowed hard. Richie didn’t reply.

“Oh, so now you stop talking? The one time I actually ask you something and-“

Eddie’s whining was cut off as Richie kissed him again, catching his mouth open this time and Eddie wanted to slap him but he thought he might wait a little bit first…just to see where it goes.

He almost did lash out when he felt Richie’s tongue in his mouth, a million thoughts about bacteria and saliva and kiss-transmitted diseases ran through his mind but…Richie’s hand was on the back of his neck, now, his thumb tracing circles beneath Eddie’s ear and it…it felt nice and Eddie didn’t want that to stop. It felt so nice that Eddie forgot why he had cared about Richie’s tongue in the first place and sighed against him. Richie must have brushed his teeth before bed because he tasted like peppermint and Eddie thought that it wasn’t so bad.

Allowing it to continue was, on Eddie’s part, a bad idea as Richie’s mouth was clearly not the only thing he was liable to run off. His hands wandered across Eddie’s body before Eddie could even get used to the fact that Richie was touching him in an intimate way like this. Thankfully, Richie was respectful enough and he didn’t let his hands get any lower than Eddie’s waist. Eddie wasn’t sure how he would have reacted to that, anyway.

He let Richie assault his mouth for a good while, not having to participate much in the act himself, which he was grateful for. He wasn’t sure if he was a good kisser or not and he didn’t want Richie commenting on it later –which he most definitely would-.

Just as he was getting used to it –even getting a little hot, although he’d die before he admit that-, he felt Richie’s body move on top of his own and it was almost too much for him. Richie’s body was hot, just like it had been when it was touching him earlier and he realised that it must just be Richie’s default temperature. Eddie couldn’t decide whether that made him more appealing or more annoying.

“…You…you’re making me…too hot…” Eddie managed to mumble against Richie’s lips but Richie clearly took this as a challenge and instead of moving off him he seemed to press against him harder, full body coverage and Eddie both wanted to get away from the heat and push closer to him to search for more of it.

He was kissed again, deeply and still with a lot of tongue and Eddie felt himself growing used to the feeling once more. He had kissed people before but never had someone’s tongue touched his own –because the idea was kind of gross-. Richie seemed to like it, though, seemed to like it a lot; Eddie could feel a certain part of Richie pressing against his thigh and he was simultaneously freaked out by it and turned on himself.

More freaked out than the alternative, Eddie broke the kiss again, hoping to end the session there but Richie clearly had other plans and Eddie only had time to see Richie’s blown pupils for a second before he had leaned in to plant his wet lips onto Eddie’s neck.
Eddie was sure he had never felt anything better as Richie kissed and sucked at the skin below his ear and he fought hard to keep his breathing steady, fists clenched in the shoulders of Richie’s t-shirt.

_He had been about to stop this, hadn’t he?_

But now his body was disagreeing with that course of action, _big time_. He even had to bite his own lip as he felt what he was sure was Richie’s _teeth_ on his neck in the same spot. He was beginning to sweat, now and Richie’s hot body on top of him, nearly between his thighs felt suffocating.

“R…Richie…”

He had meant it to sound final but it came out shaky and breathless and he groaned low in his throat when he felt Richie suck harder on his neck in response to hearing his name. _He was sure as hell going to have a bruise there tomorrow._

The thought that Richie was currently making a bruise on him stirred a dangerous heat low in his abdomen, but it also made him angry and he finally found the strength to grip at Richie’s hair and pull him away.

“Stop it,” he said in a sharp whisper, trying desperately not to be swayed by the hungry look in Richie’s eyes and his heavy breaths, “_Go and take a cold shower, you jerk._”

He didn’t know how he had expected Richie to react to being cut off like this but Richie didn’t take it any further, respectful of Eddie’s wishes. He chuckled against Eddie’s lips.

“I knew it. I always knew it.”

“Knew what, asshole?”

“That you were going to be a tease, Eds. I always imagined it like this.”

“Yeah, well, _stop_ imagining me at all.”

“I can’t do that, Eds.”

“Stop _calling_ me that you fucking jerk and get off of me.”

“Why? I like it here.”

“You’re making me all…sweaty and gross and I don’t want your dick poking into me anymore.”

Richie laughed out loud.

“So you _did_ want it at some point?”

“You know what I mean, asshole. Get your sweaty-“

Richie planted a damp kiss on Eddie’s cheek and moved off him before he could finish his sentence.

“Go and take a fucking shower,” Eddie continued as Richie climbed off the bed.

“Why? So you can stay here alone and masturbate while thinking about me?”

“Richie, get the _fuck_ out of my room!”
Richie made his way over to the door, looking more smug than Eddie had ever seen on his stupid face before.

“Thanks for taking my mind off my bad dream!” Richie crooned as he left the room and Eddie sat up in bed, equally seething with anger and wondering if he had just imagined all of that or not.

Judging by certain parts of his body, he guessed not.

He rubbed at the wet spot on his neck where Richie’s lips had been. It was kind of sore.

Boy was Richie fucking Tozier going to be sorry tomorrow if there was a bruise there.
Chapter 9

The next day Richie seemed to be acting like nothing had happened between them at all, to the point where Eddie even started to wonder if it had actually been a dream. He was sure it wasn’t, the small, dark bruise on Eddie’s throat the next day had been proof of that but Richie had remained his usual annoying self. He hadn’t even asked to see his handiwork, which, thankfully was easily hidden by the bandages that were already on Eddie’s neck. He didn’t really need them anymore as the wounds were healing nicely enough but they were great for hiding hickeys, Eddie had discovered.

The four of them had decided to take a trip down to The Barrens today. Aside from Bill they were all reluctant about this but they had come to the agreement that it might help to jog their memories somewhat. It was cold and there was a light layer of frost on the ground but they had all wrapped up, Stan in an expensive-looking and pristine, grey duffel coat, Bill in a navy blue parka with a fur trim on the hood, Richie in the ugliest, blue and cream varsity jacket they had ever seen complete with patches he’d obviously added himself and Eddie sporting a bright red insulated vest over the top of a thick sweater –he was the only one in a scarf and hat-.

It was eerily quiet down in The Barrens and they could hear the frosted grass crunching underfoot as they walked. None of them were sure exactly where they were going or what they were hoping to achieve with this trip, but on a couple of occasions one of them had recognised something. Bill was sure they’d had a clubhouse down here somewhere but he couldn’t remember where. Eddie had agreed with him fervently that it was some sort of treehouse but so far they’d had no luck with that.

Surely a treehouse would be easier to spot than this, Eddie thought as he kicked at a pile of leaves and they scattered and crumbled. They had split up to search; Bill had gone with Richie so Eddie and Stan were left to themselves. Eddie hadn’t really minded this. Stan was the most sensible of the four and he sure as hell hadn’t wanted to be left alone with Richie –he would avoid that awkward conversation for as long as he could-.

“Maybe…maybe it wasn’t a treehouse,” Stan said into the silence of the trees. He was looking up at the patches of sky through the naked branches, “We’d have seen it by now.”

“Yeah. I think you’re right, but…if it wasn’t a treehouse then what?”

“I remember it being really dark in there. Maybe it’s like…a cave or something…”

“A cave? Are there any caves around here?”

“I don’t know.”

“Didn’t we build a dam?”

Stan looked over at Eddie for a while before a smile tugged at his lips. He had his hands tucked into his pockets and the tip of his nose looked a little pink.

“Yeah, I think we did. You, me, Bill and Richie…and…I think there was someone else, too…”

“Yeah, there was. He helped us to build the dam. No…he told us how to do it…his name was…Tom or Jim or something.”
“Ben,” Stan said with certainty, looking pleased, “His name was Ben.”

Eddie smiled then, too, and he nodded.

“Ben.”

Bill and Richie had been searching on the other side of the Kenduskaeg but they had had just as much luck as Eddie and Stan and Richie was becoming increasingly annoying the more bored he got with the whole thing. Bill was so intent on finding this secret clubhouse they’d had, finding something, that by this point he’d begun to completely block out Richie’s antics including Richie throwing a clod of dirt at his back at one point.

Bill and Richie had been best friends for as long as Bill could remember and he knew that this happened when Richie started to lose interest in something. Bill didn’t dislike him for it. Richie just couldn’t help it like he just couldn’t help his incessant talking, his voices and his inappropriate comments. He could be very funny at times and Bill loved him in spite of it all.

“Oh, can I just say that I feel like we’re not actually gonna find anything?” Richie said as he and Bill made their way into a thick patch of trees, “I mean, I like wandering around in the middle of nowhere just as much as the next guy, but none of this is ringing any bells and I’m losing feeling in my fingers.”

“I ruh-really feel like we’re gonna find something, Rich.”

“Yeah, something like a stick or a rock or some dead leaves, maybe. Not like a secret clubhouse that may or may not exist. I mean, we were twelve years old. Maybe it was like…an imaginary den. You know what kids are like.”

“Richie, please, just t-trust me, okay?”

Bill obviously wasn’t going to stop moving no matter how much Richie protested and Richie sighed and continued to drag his heels behind him.

“You know I trust you, Bill, but we could be searching these woods for hours and not find anything. How do we know it’s even still there? Maybe…maybe it got knocked down in a storm or some kids took it apart or…maybe we didn’t build it very good and it just…fell down.”

“No.”

Richie waited for an explanation but Bill said no more about it. He walked into Bill’s back when his friend suddenly stopped in front of him and Richie nearly got a mouthful of Bill’s hair.

“Jeez, Bill, what the fuck?”

“Did you h-hear that?”

Richie went silent for a brief moment, dark eyes scanning the surrounding area but all he could see were trees and all he could hear was…nothing.

“Hear what?”

“Shh!”

Richie listened again but still…nothing…and he looked at the back of Bill’s head with bemusement. He would have told Bill to clean his fucking ears out or something but Bill was
holding up a warning palm in Richie’s direction as if ready to cover his mouth if he spoke again.

After a moment of intense silence that made Richie’s skin itch so bad he shifted from one foot to the other restlessly like he needed to take a piss, Bill finally seemed to relax and lower his hand.

“I thought I huh-heard something.”

“I heard something, too, Bill. It was the sound of you completely overreacting to something.”

Bill looked back at Richie for that comment but he only smiled and broke into a chuckle.

“Ss-sorry. Guess I got c-carried away.”

“Yeah, well, not every single thing you hear is gonna be something that wants to hurt us. I mean, maybe like six or seven times out of ten…maybe eight.”

They both laughed at that and Bill seemed to relax a little, which made Richie feel better. They continued on through the thick trees and now the witty banter was flying back and forth and Richie was in his element. Bill was a very, very smart guy, good with words even if he stuttered them and he was one of the people Richie liked to tease the most because if you could get him going he was quick and seriously funny. At least Richie thought so.

“Do yuh-y-you think Eddie and S-Stan have found anything yet?”

“Nope. They’re probably sitting together somewhere crying because one of them accidentally touched a tree and now he thinks he’s gonna get germs and die.”

“Richie, that’s m…mean,” Bill said, but he laughed anyway.

“Richie, you have to wash your hands after every time you go to the bathroom. You just touched your food with the same hands that were holding your dick,” Richie whined in an awful but sort-of-accurate impression of Eddie’s voice and Bill laughed again.

“Yeah, okay but he h-hhas a point. That’s pretty g-gross, Rich.”

Richie snorted some phlegm up from the back of his throat and spat onto the ground nearby in a very careless display, shrugging his shoulders.

“What’s gross about normal bodily functions? Why is everyone so uptight? I’ve seen you do some pretty disgusting stuff, too, Denbrough and that’s saying something c-“

Bill had stopped Richie again suddenly, this time with a hand against his chest and this time Richie saw why. Only a few feet away from where they were standing, starkly contrasted against a patch of frost on a pale Birch tree, was a bloody handprint. The finger ends of it were long streaks as if the hand it belonged to had been scrambling for purchase against the wood and had lost its battle. They both surveyed the surrounding area carefully from where they stood but there was nothing else.

Richie nearly pulled Bill back when he started to go towards it but he decided instead to pluck up his own courage and follow him there. Up closer Richie could see that it was real blood. He had been hoping against hope that there was a chance it was just a weird prank or that it was something as innocent as red paint but no. That shit was real, all right.

He grabbed Bill’s wrist when he made to touch the handprint, looking him dangerously in the eye and shaking his head.
“Bill, let’s just go. Let’s find Stan and Eddie and go back to the townhouse. What do you say?”

His voice was much quieter than it usually came out and he hoped that maybe Bill would see that he was afraid and listen to him. Bill, of course, was unfazed by the situation and only looked confidently back into Richie’s eyes. Richie was scared of that blue sometimes.

“What if this is a sign? Maybe we’re getting close to finding something and it wants to stop us.”

“Okay. Great. Then consider me stopped, Bill. I don’t care that much about finding this stupid treehouse or…or whatever it is. This is ridiculous.”

“You can go back if you want, Richie.”

“No, Bill, please…”

“I’m gonna go anyway so…”

Richie dropped Bill’s wrist and watched him helplessly as Bill continued on past the tree with the blood. He turned to look over his shoulder briefly, wondering if he should just leave and find the other two, but then he looked back at Bill, marching on ahead as if he wasn’t frightened by anything at all.

“GOD DAMN IT, BILL!”

He sprinted the short distance to catch up with him, walking at his side, now instead of lagging behind. Bill turned to smile at him almost smugly in an ‘I knew you’d come with me’ kind of way and it made Richie mad.

They came across another print not too far from the first. This one was lower on the tree, close to the base and Bill crouched to examine it.

“Looks like they were dragged across the ground.”

“Great. That’s beautiful. Those are the exact words I hoped to hear coming out of your mouth.”

Richie was standing a short distance behind Bill, holding his hands under his arms and looking around nervously. His teeth were chattering a little, but it was more out of fright than cold.

God damn Bill Denbrough. Why did he always have to be so brave?

Bill was shocked out of saying anything else to Richie on the subject as a loud, animal sound cut through the cold air. Richie was sure it had sounded like a growl and it made his blood go cold. It was loud enough to be close by and Bill stood as Richie came towards him and they ended up back-to-back.

“You heard that, right?”

“Yes, I heard that, Bill. I fucking heard that. HOLY FUCK.”

Bill felt Richie’s back press against him firmly and he turned to see what looked like an enormous, black dog. It would have easily towered over both of them had it stood on its hind legs, all pure muscle covered with fur that was matted with blood and other things he didn’t want to think about. Its eyes were a bright, menacing yellow and its teeth, which were bared against them, were long enough that Bill was sure one of them could go right through his arm or maybe even his leg. It was
crouched low against the forest floor, its tail down between its back legs and its ears flattened against its head, both clear signs of anger and aggression.

“Okay j-just don’t move…”

“Yeah, because I was planning on going over there and giving it a firm handshake! ‘Hi there, scary giant dog thing, my name’s Richie Tozier. How’s it going, pal? Maybe we could go and get some coffee or something and…”

Bill clasped his hand firmly over Richie’s mouth as the dog snarled low and seemed to start circling them. He vaguely heard Richie whimper against his palm as they turned to watch it. Bill felt like he hadn’t blinked the whole time.

The dog was still crouched low and Bill knew that if it decided to attack, it would use its bent back legs like springs and be on them before they could so much as draw breath. The creature was only a couple of metres away from where they stood, a tree pressed against Bill’s back and Richie pressed against his front.

It growled again, quietly this time and Bill had the horrible sense that this was like the calm before the storm. Any second this beast was going to lunge at them and tear them to pieces. Richie would get the brunt of it and that scared Bill more than anything. He hated the fact that Richie was standing in front of him like some kind of human shield, even if it was unintentional and he was trying to figure out how he could somehow switch their positions or get Richie out of the way before this thing attacked.

Time was running out. The hulking beast was scraping its fat paws along the ground, scattering dead leaves and Bill knew he didn’t have the luxury of time anymore. As quick as he could, he rounded the tree, dragging Richie with him and as he expected the dog thundered towards them in a split second, catching the bark of the tree in its claws instead. There was a thunderous roar from just behind them and Bill grabbed at Richie as he began to move his legs as fast as he could.

“RUN!” He screamed at Richie but he clearly didn’t need any encouraging and Bill let go of Richie’s sleeve as they sprinted alongside one another, ducking between the trees to try and throw off their pursuer.

Bill was sure he had never run so fast in his life. His breath was coming in shallow gasps and his heart was beating loud in his ears. Richie was ahead of him now and Bill felt a wave of relief at this realisation but he could hear the thud of heavy paws thundering along behind him and this realisation was far less welcome.

He thought of splitting up from Richie, running in a different direction and leading it away from him but then what if it went after Richie instead? What if it went after Richie and Bill had run somewhere else and he couldn’t find him again? Surely he would be killed and Bill couldn’t have lived with himself.

So he followed Richie, close on his heels, listening intently to every single sound behind him, every snap of a branch and every thunderous footfall, desperately trying to measure how close he was to being slaughtered. There was another ear-splitting roar close at his back and Bill barely had time to register that the creature had readied itself to attack again until he was knocked to the ground. It was like being hit by a small vehicle and Bill was horribly reminded of the accident that had caused his stutter as a child. He didn’t remember much of it but he was sure that this was what it had felt like.

Huge claws tore into his coat and through the shirt he was wearing underneath, grazing the skin of
his back but thankfully it seemed like his thick parka had prevented it from doing the damage it really wanted to. There were tufts of the coat’s stuffing spilling out of the long rips in the fabric and Bill quickly fought to get his arms out of the sleeves as the dog’s paws seemed to be caught in the material. He rolled out from underneath the monster just in time for it to swipe at him again, leaving his coat behind in its grip. Richie had stopped and was screaming at him to run from a short distance away and he did, scrambling to his feet as fast as he could. There were three very distinct claw marks in the back of his shirt, ringed with blood. The shallow cuts were stinging every time Bill took a stride and the muscles in his back moved.

Richie had seen Bill get to his feet and started to run again, too, knowing that Bill was on his tail but so was the hound. It seemed to be aiming for Richie this time, as if it thought that he might be easier prey. It surged forward again when it got close enough to him, trapping him against a tree just as he turned to face his attacker. Bill heard him scream and frantically searched for some kind of a weapon.

The beast took a swipe at Richie’s face and he moved just in time. It still caught him, though, knocking his glasses off his face and lacerating his cheek and he cried out again, kicking out at its stomach with both legs. It seemed irritated by this, at most. It was more irritated when Bill came at its blind side and swung a heavy branch right at its skull. There was a satisfying crack as Bill screamed ‘LET HIM GO’ but Richie quickly realised that the sound was the branch breaking in two. The hellish canine was dazed by it, though, and Richie ducked out from underneath one of its legs just as Bill grabbed a hold of his hand and they started running again. Richie inwardly cringed as he heard the familiar crunch of glass and knew that he had just stood on his own spectacles. He didn’t have time to go back for them anyway.

They ran for what felt like a mile, at least, clutched at by sharp branches and once Bill tripped on a thick patch of roots and fell. Richie dragged him to his feet without missing a beat, still gripping his hand like his life depended on it and they kept running. It wasn’t until they came to a clearing in the trees that they realised that their pursuer seemed to have lost them, although they could still hear it somewhere close by. That growl was unmistakable.

“W…we need to…find S-Stan and Eh-Eddie…” Bill spluttered, clutching at his side as they finally stopped running. Richie was similarly winded and doubled over. He was sweating and he removed his varsity jacket to tie it about his waist instead. Everything around him was a blur. If Bill hadn’t been with him he surely would have run headlong into a tree by now. He couldn’t get out any words but he nodded. He could feel blood drying on the side of his face.

Bill grabbed Richie’s hand again, reacting ahead of time, as there was another roar which was much closer this time. It must be on their scent, Bill thought as he started to pull Richie away from the sound, tugging at him to try and encourage him to run but the thought was unpleasant to both of them. That was, until Bill’s foot hit something springy and he froze.

“I-it’s not a treehouse!” He hissed to Richie but before Richie could reply, bemused as he was, Bill had pushed him aside to grasp at the ground, lifting up what looked like a trapdoor. That was when it hit Richie, too.

‘Holy shit. It wasn’t a treehouse,’ he remembered suddenly, ‘it was underground.’

Bill ushered Richie inside the den as quickly as he could. He could hear that thing closing in with its monstrous speed and he only just had time to jump into the trapdoor himself and slam it closed above their heads before they heard a roar directly above them. Fresh earth sprinkled down onto their upturned faces as the creature searched for them in the clearing.

They both dropped to the ground as the wood of the trapdoor lid creaked under an enormous paw
and Bill pulled Richie close to him against the wall of the clubhouse. Their eyes were wide in the
dark and glued to the trapdoor. It went quiet for a while but shortly after the beast wandered over
their heads again. This time the wooden trapdoor buckled under the weight and there was an
audible crack. Bill heard Richie curse under his breath and slid a hand over his mouth again.

With bated breath the two men listened to the hideous thing paw at the ground and pace back and
forth, like it knew that they were here but couldn’t figure out where. It felt like hours and Bill’s
back ached where it was pressed against the wall with Richie’s added weight against him but he
didn’t dare move an inch. They stayed still and silent even after it sounded like it had moved on.
Bill could practically feel his blood pumping through his veins.

He slowly removed his palm from Richie’s lips after a while but they continued to stare at the
space above them in the quiet until a deep, shaky breath from Richie broke the silence. He turned
to look Bill directly in the eyes. It was dark but they had been down here for so long that Bill had
got used to it and he could even make out the cut on Richie’s pale cheek. Dark curls were sticking
to his skin with sweat and his eyes looked wild.

“Y…you…saved my life…” he practically sighed the words and before Bill could respond, Richie’s
lips were pressing against his cheeks over and over, enthusiastically and not all unwelcome as the
reality of the situation finally hit Bill like a brick wall. The adrenaline was still coursing through
him, which is probably why, when Richie’s mouth hit his own, seemingly by accident, he kissed
him back without thinking.

Richie must have been in a similar state because he pressed himself into it immediately when he
felt Bill kiss him. It was a battle of dominance after that. Bill’s fingers pulled at Richie’s sweaty
hair as tongues and teeth collided. Richie was pinning Bill against the wall deliberately, now and
Bill winced as the cuts on his back scraped against the bare wood but he didn’t care. *He was still
alive.* The thought swam in his head over and over and it made him feel powerful.

He tugged at Richie’s hair a little too hard but Richie seemed to like it and he felt Richie bite into
his lip and found that he liked *that,* too. Both of them were still breathing hard from their marathon
chase but it was only adding to Bill’s rush to feel Richie’s hot breath against his lips and cheek
every time they parted. He lifted a hand to Richie’s face and felt his thumb touch something wet as
it slid through the blood on his cheek, leaving a smear which he couldn’t see now in the low light
but would become visible to them later on.

They barely broke for breath as the kiss intensified and neither of them seemed to want to give an
inch of control to the other in their adrenaline-fuelled states. Richie felt Bill’s eager tongue slide
across his top lip once when they parted for air and it drove him crazy.

*Damn, Bill. Those blue eyes were dangerous.*

*He would be sure to add that to his own kissing repertoire.*

Richie tried to take control back after that. He dragged at Bill’s already swollen lips with his teeth
and pressed him against the wall as firmly as he could, but Richie’s excitement peaked when their
lips broke apart and Bill’s heavy breath was on his throat, hot and damp and promising. Bill placed
an achingly slow kiss there. His lips were wet from heavy making out and it felt *fucking* amazing.
Richie didn’t think he could take much more of this. He was thoroughly disappointed, however,
when he felt Bill start to laugh against his neck, his auburn hair tickling Richie’s chin.

But then Richie started to laugh, too, unable to contain himself in the utter absurdity of the
situation. He was sitting in Bill’s lap, at this point but Bill didn’t push him away. He wrapped his
arms around Richie instead, hugging him tightly as they continued to snicker. Richie slid his arms
around Bill’s shoulders and held him against his chest.

“That was…so fucking scary…” Richie managed to get out between bursts of laughter.

“I didn’t think I was that bad at k-kissing,” Bill replied and they both cracked up even more. It felt a little bit like hysteria in the wake of their near-death experience.

They both froze in each other’s arms as there were footfalls above them again and silence filled the clubhouse once again before the trapdoor was wrenched open and they squinted up into the daylight to see Stan and Eddie. Stan was holding the door and Eddie was crouching next to it, peering inside at the two filthy, bleeding men clinging to one another.

“What the fuck happened to you two?!”
Despite Bill and Richie’s brief encounter with death, finding the clubhouse felt to all four of the men like a small victory. They sat inside it and talked for what felt like hours as Richie told Stan and Eddie the tale of their chase, how the dog had first attacked Bill and then himself, how Bill had saved Richie’s life and then just as it was coming back for more they stumbled upon their secret den from almost ten years prior and hid inside. Bill sat back and quietly allowed him to tell it all, majorly relieved that Richie left out the heavy make out session from the end of the story.

Stan and Eddie listened intently through the whole thing, examining Bill’s back and Richie’s cheek during the parts of the telling which were relevant to their injuries. Eddie seemed particularly concerned about Richie’s cheek, which was still bleeding.

“You need to be more careful, Richie, and stop touching it. You’ve smeared it all over your face.”

Richie glanced over at Bill, who quickly but discreetly wiped Richie’s blood off his thumb and a section of his palm and onto his own t-shirt. Stan was more observant than that, though.

“Did you kiss Richie?”

Bill pretended to look scandalised as suddenly all eyes in the room turned on him.

“W…what? Kiss Richie? Are y-you serious why…why would I do that?”

“There’s blood on your lips,” Eddie helpfully added and Bill frantically wiped it away with his wrist.

“Yeah, so what?” Richie chuckled, “He kissed me on the cheek, so what? We had a near-death experience and we were happy that we survived. I would kiss any of you guys in the same situation.”

“Maybe next time…kiss the cheek that isn’t bleeding,” Eddie grimaced and Bill chuckled.

“Y-yeah…yeah, of course. That was…s-stupid…”

They left soon after that when Eddie claimed that the dust was making his eyes itch. Richie found an old, crumpled packet of cigarettes in the den just as they exited and he smoked one as they walked home—much to Eddie’s disgust—, although he pitched it after the first couple of drags claiming that it tasted ‘mouldy and old’ and had to smoke one of his own to take the taste away. Bill took one, too and Richie lit it for him. They both put them out after seeing Eddie use his inhaler.

That evening they ordered Chinese food rather than going out anywhere and ate it in Bill’s room. Eddie brought his bag of pharmaceuticals so they could patch them up and he had to clean Richie’s cheek while he was eating because he wouldn’t wait. He flinched a lot and made so much fuss that Eddie had to grip his chin while he did it to stop him from moving away and had to ignore Richie poking at him frequently with a pair of chopsticks. Thankfully Richie had had a spare pair of glasses in his bag and was now sporting a rather trendy black pair.
Bill made far less of a scene despite his injuries being much worse. He sat straddling a chair and leaning on the backrest of it as Eddie and Stan peeled his shirt off him carefully to reveal the large claw marks through his skin. As they gently cleaned off the blood, Richie repeatedly made kissy faces at Bill and winked at him from across the room and Bill couldn’t stop sniggering but it took his mind off the pain.

Eddie instructed as Stan bandaged Bill’s back and feeling Stan’s fingers touching his bare skin really made Bill wish that Eddie had decided to do it himself. Every time Stan pressed down some of the tape that was holding it in place he smoothed it down the length of Bill’s back very slowly and every single time he did it Bill was gripping onto the chair so tight he thought that Richie was going to notice. It was like torture.

Once they were finally done Bill was relieved to pull on a clean t-shirt and distract himself with his fried noodles, which he ate with a fork –Bill had never been able to master chopsticks-. Richie was stabbing into the bottom of his cardboard container with a single chopstick.

“You know, we should actually do something fun tonight,” he said through a mouthful of food and Eddie pulled a face.

“Like what? We’re stuck in this hotel.”

“I don’t know, like…go out to a bar…”

Eddie shook his head.

“…get some beers and go back down to the clubhouse…”

Another disapproving head shake. There was even a little ‘Mm-mm’ to go with it this time.

“…or we could go down to the quarry and LET ME FINISH!” he shouted as Eddie shook his head again before even hearing the rest, “We could go swimming. In the quarry.” He shovelled some more rice into his mouth and sat back smugly, like he’d just thought of the best idea ever and there was no way that anyone was going to say no to it.

“No,” Stan said from the table where he was sitting with his own Chinese food container placed neatly in front of him on top of a napkin.

Richie’s face dropped.

“Are you serious?” Stan continued, placing his chopsticks down carefully, exactly symmetrical to the box, “You want to go swimming in the quarry while it’s dark out after all of the stuff that has happened to us recently? After you and Bill got attacked literally like two hours ago?”

Richie nodded along to the whole of this.

“Yeah? Listen, guys, I know that all of this stuff is scary, but…we can’t just stop going outside because something might happen. I mean, something happened to you guys in this hotel, right? And to Bill, too, with the balloon and the blood?” He raised his eyebrows at them all before continuing, “If we’re not safe in here either then why shouldn’t we at least try and have some fun?”

“Bill can’t go in the water,” Eddie cut in, “He has open wounds and so do you. Do you know how dirty that water is?”

“The water’s not dirty, Eds. The reason people say quarries are dangerous is because the water’s really cold. We just…won’t stay in for too long. Plus, it isn’t that deep. We could probably walk all
the way across now.”

Eddie ate a piece of broccoli as he was contemplating this. He still looked unsure. Richie looked at Bill for backup.

“I…I’ll go,” Bill said and Eddie sighed in defeat. Nobody ever said no to Bill.

So they ended up standing on top of the cliff face, looking down into the water later that evening. It was already dark and the lake was just an enormous, black hole from up there. There was still a chill in the air and Eddie was very determined to try and get them to change their minds but Richie looked excited and Bill didn’t seem to want to back down, either.

“Are you seriously gonna jump in there right now?” Eddie asked quietly, peering down into the dark water below.

“Absolutely,” Richie replied, although he, too was looking a little unsure of it now he’d seen exactly what they’d be jumping into. They all looked at Bill when he kicked off his shoes and started to undress down to his underwear.

“Jesus fuck, Bill,” was all Eddie could get out at the thought that someone was actually willing to jump in there in the dark like this. Bill only smiled and stepped towards the edge. From what he remembered, the deepest part was just after the drop. He remembered taking the leap a couple of times as a child and feeling the rush of air and of adrenaline just before you hit the surface of the water.

Richie started to take off his clothes, too, clearly not wanting to be outdone when this was his idea, although once he stepped next to Bill he looked down again into the water with a soft ‘Fuck’. Bill seemed to take this as a challenge.

“Pussies,” he said, before diving headfirst off the edge of the cliff face. Eddie screamed and Richie swore loudly. They all moved to the edge just in time to see him hit the water smoothly at the bottom and go under.

“Holy shit he’s nuts,” Eddie said breathlessly, “He’s absolutely fucking crazy.”

“Yeah, he is!” Richie chuckled, leaning over and shouting down to Bill, who had broken the surface, now and was treading water, “BILL DENBROUGH YOU CRAZY MOTHERFUCKER!”

They could faintly hear Bill laughing.

Richie jumped, too, although a lot less gracefully than Bill had. He hit the water with a significant splash.

Eddie watched them for a while before looking at Stan beside him.

“Stan if you jump and leave me up here alone I swear to god.”

Stan chuckled slightly and shrugged, taking off his own shoes as Eddie watched him in horror.

“I won’t jump without you, okay?”

Eddie nodded and quickly shed his own clothing to catch up with Stan, leaving his in a crumpled mess with Bill and Richie’s beside Stan’s neat pile. They stood at the edge together.

“I…I don’t think I can do this, Stan.”
He didn’t have a choice, though, as before saying anything in reply or even letting Eddie know what he was about to do, Stan grabbed Eddie’s hand in his own and pulled him off the edge as he jumped. Eddie barely had time to get his bearings before he was plunging into the freezing cold water below. He spluttered as his head broke the surface and he saw Stan, Richie and Bill nearby.

“STAN, YOU PIECE OF SHIT I COULD HAVE Died!”

“It’s just water, Eddie!”

“IT’S SO FUCKING COLD WHAT THE FUCK?!”

“I told you it was gonna be cold,” Richie said as he swam over to Eddie, “You gotta swim to stay warm.”

And so they swam, and it did feel a little warmer but Eddie’s teeth still chattered and he was unconvinced. Stan and Bill had moved to shallow water to check that Bill’s bandages hadn’t come loose and Richie was clearly having the time of his life, repeatedly climbing out onto a rock to dive back into the water. Eddie thought he was just as crazy as Bill.

Richie was in his element. This was exactly what he liked, doing something that they probably shouldn’t be with nobody here to bother them. The water was cold, sure but Eddie was being totally overdramatic, as usual. Richie climbed out of the water again and went a little further along the edge. There was a higher piece of rock here that he’d been eyeing up for a while that would make a much better diving board than the one he’d already been using.

He scaled it easily, pulling himself up onto the very top where there was a section of flat, smooth stone. He stayed up there for a while, watching the sky and enjoying the cold night air. There wasn’t a sound. It was like everything was utterly still.

Smiling to himself, he took a deep breath and dived off the top of the rock, hitting the water smoothly just as Bill had done and barely making ripples. It was pitch black underneath but it didn’t scare Richie. He had seen this through the day and there were nothing but turtles and the occasional small fish down there.

He surfaced to find Stan standing directly in front of him and nearly fell back into the water out of shock. Jesus Christ, Stan was a fast swimmer. He hadn’t even seen him come over. He chuckled and wiped some dark strands of hair out of his eyes, rubbing his hands across his face.

“Jeez, Stan, way to give a guy a fucking heart attack.”

“Why don’t you just knock it off, Richie?”

Stan’s expression was colder than usual and it made Richie pause.

“W…knock what off?”

“This whole thing you’ve got going. This…persona. You like everyone to think that you’re the tough guy who doesn’t care about anything but it’s getting old.”

“Stan, what are you-“

“Shut up, Richie, for once in your life. Just shut up.”

“Fine,” Richie mumbled, feeling a little put out. He swam away from Stan, then. Clearly he was in a bad mood and Richie didn’t want to get in the way of that. He saw Bill nearby and went to join
him, feeling a sense of relief.

“Hey, Bill, I think Stan’s having his period or something. Did one of you guys do something to piss him off?”

Bill turned to look at him with the same cold expression Stan had had. The exact same one.

“You’re not funny, Richie.”

Richie paused, wiping some more water out of his face.

“Okay…”

“You’re not funny. You’re just annoying. Leave me alone.”

Richie felt his throat go a little tight and he swallowed hard to try and relieve it.

“What did I do to you guys?”

“I just don’t want you near me, okay? Just go away. Go and bother someone else for once in your fucking life because I can’t deal with it anymore. I’m done pretending.”

“…P…pretending what?”

“Pretending that I like you.”

Richie’s blood went colder than the water surrounding him. He forced a chuckle, placing a hand against Bill’s shoulder but it was knocked away too roughly by Bill.

“Bill, this isn’t funny, okay? Please stop.”

“Yeah, it’s about as funny as you are,” Bill replied coldly, “It’s not a joke. We’re done looking after you. Go and bother someone else. I mean, that is, if you can find another group of people who will put up with you and pretend to be your friends for as long as we did.”

“Bill-”

“You’re not funny, Richie. You’re annoying as fuck and none of us can wait to get away from you. It’s such a fucking relief when we get to hang out together when you’re not there.”

Richie still didn’t know if this was a joke or not, but it was starting to hurt nonetheless and Bill’s serious expression was scaring him. He turned away to go and find Eddie, hearing Bill say, as he swam away, “Good fucking riddance.”

It physically hurt him to realise that Bill didn’t stutter once during the whole encounter.

‘It must be true, in that case’, he thought, feeling sick.

He found Eddie eventually, glancing around to make sure that Bill and Stan weren’t nearby before approaching him. To Richie’s horror, Eddie turned and gave him a look that turned his stomach.

“Oh, it’s you,” he said blankly, not even trying to hide his displeasure at this revelation. Richie stopped close to him, looking into Eddie’s eyes but Eddie turned his gaze away from him with what seemed like disgust.

“Eds…seriously, you have to tell me what’s going on? Why is everyone acting so weird with me?”
“Don’t…fucking call me that,” Eddie shuddered and held his arms across his chest, “It makes me feel disgusting.”

“W-what?”

“Stop using cute little nicknames with me. I don’t know what you think is happening here but I can assure you that it’s not.”

“E…Eddie…”

“Just…just leave me alone. I feel uncomfortable just being near you.”

Richie could feel tears stinging in his eyes, now. How could all three of them have acted the same way towards him like this? If it was a practical joke that they were all a part of then it was a pretty horrible one. He forced a chuckle, putting his arm around Eddie’s shoulders and leaning in to kiss Eddie’s cheek and in that moment Eddie slapped him hard across the face and shoved him away so hard he nearly fell back.

“I said don’t fucking touch me!” He wiped at his cheek where Richie’s lips had barely touched him, a look of pure disgust on his face.

“Fucking stop it, okay?!” Richie finally snapped. He was shaking a little and not just from the cold, “I don’t know what kind of a joke this is but you guys are taking it too far!”

“It’s not a joke! I just don’t want you near me, you fucking weirdo! I HATE YOU!”

Richie’s mouth opened to form a reply but the words had hit him harder than being slapped. He could faintly feel his cheek stinging but this was worse. He managed a small ‘Eddie’ before he was suddenly hit roughly in the back of the head like someone had punched him.

He fell face first into the water but before he could stand to assess the situation he realised with absolute terror that someone was holding him under. He could just make out Eddie’s vague shape in the murk.

‘Why was he just standing there watching?’

His hands collided with someone else’s as he struggled to free himself from the person’s grip but they only pushed him under deeper, until he could see nothing but black and his wide eyes stung in the frigid water. He kicked out, managing to hit something and briefly broke the surface as they faltered.

He saw, horrifyingly, that it was Bill’s face looking back at him, Bill’s hands holding his shoulders in a vice grip. Stan was standing beside Bill with a blank expression and Richie tried to reach out to him but Stan didn’t move. Hands covered Richie’s eyes from behind and the last thing he heard before he went under again was the faint beep of Eddie’s watch alarm and his own voice, begging, shouting Bill’s name before the water filled his mouth and ears.

There were three pairs of hands holding him down, now and he struggled weakly against his best friends. He screamed but no sound came out, just a torrent of bubbles and he vaguely had time to think that he’d just wasted all of his oxygen before his head started to feel fuzzy.

‘This is it.’
‘I’m going to drown.’

Through the water, he heard a soft voice in his ear.

“We all float down here.”

Then he realised that the hands were gone and that he was, indeed, floating just beneath the surface of the water.

He was sure for a minute that he was dead.

And then he felt a hand around his upper arm, a strong, tight grip and he couldn’t fight it anymore but he was being pulled, not pushed under. An arm came around his chest just as his head broke the surface of the water and he didn’t notice that he couldn’t breathe until someone was hitting him firmly on his back between his shoulder blades and he coughed hard, feeling water come up his throat and out of his mouth. So much water. He didn’t think he’d even swallowed any.

There was that faint beeping again, Eddie’s watch, as he felt wet palms either side of his face and he opened his eyes to see a rather blurry Eddie Kaspbrak. Eddie was speaking, Richie could see his mouth moving but nothing seemed to be coming out. Something moved on his left and he turned to see Stan and realised that it was Stan’s arm around his chest. Stan was speaking to him, too, but it was all faint noises to Richie. Someone was rubbing his back and he coughed up some more water onto Eddie’s bare chest. He felt Stan brace him and someone’s palm on the back of his neck and then he was breathing again, hard and fast and his vision seemed to straighten somewhat. He could hear faint voices, now but he suddenly felt too exhausted to care what they were saying.

“So…sorry…” he half-whispered, half-mumbled when he felt that he was basically putting all of his weight onto Stan, now but he felt fingers in his hair and heard Stan tell him to shut up. He was watching Eddie, now and he seemed to be talking to someone behind Richie but Richie didn’t have the energy to lift his head from Stan’s chest, let alone turn to see who it was. Then there were hands on his back and he was moved away from Stan and he was vaguely aware that he was being picked up, not just on someone’s back but full-on bridal style, carry me over the threshold and Richie saw that it was Bill and he wanted to make a joke but he didn’t have the energy to speak. He still chuckled, though, at how stupid it was.

Bill carried him out of the water easily enough but then set him down onto dry land and then Stan was at the other side of him again to take some of the weight.

“I…I can…I can walk, you guys…” Richie croaked out, taking a few steps to prove it but they still stayed on either side of him, Bill linking his arm through one of Richie’s and Stan with a firm hand against his back for whenever he seemed like he was going to fall. Richie thought it felt a little bit like being drunk. He could hear Eddie close behind them.

By the time they reached where they left their clothes all four of them were shivering and looking a little blue in the lips but Bill picked the first item of clothing he came to and slung it around Richie’s shoulders. Richie was sure that it was Stan’s shirt and he nearly took it off but Stan only helped him to pull it on and fastened it for him as the others got dressed. Richie tried to dress
himself but his fingers were too cold and wouldn’t do what he wanted and he ended up being
dressed by the three of them like some kind of child. He was very amused when he couldn’t work
the button on his jeans and Bill had to do it for him, and when he saw Stan reluctantly pulling
Richie’s shirt onto himself with a vague air of disgust. It didn’t suit him at all.

When they got back to the Townhouse he was forced into a hot shower while the others waited
outside and dressed into dry clothes. He fell asleep almost as soon as he came out and flopped,
exhausted, onto the bed.

None of them asked him what had happened but when he awoke early the next morning he was
greeted by Stan’s golden curls next to his face on the pillow and Eddie’s soft breath against his
shoulder on the other side. Bill was sleeping at the other side of Stan, his arm hanging off the edge
of the bed close to the floor, where his journal was lying open with a pencil on top of the pages.
There was a beautiful sketch of the quarry with four faint figures swimming next to one another.
The drawing wasn’t finished but Richie could see that Bill had started to draw dark hair on one of
the tiny pencil people and he smiled.

He stretched and snuggled into Eddie and Stan to go back to sleep.

Chapter End Notes

I've just re-read this and realised that it might be a little bit confusing but don't worry it
will all be explained at the beginning of the next chapter x
Richie awoke before the rest of them again that same morning. He sat up as carefully as he could, not wanting to disrupt Eddie, who was still sleeping close to him. Stan had moved away from Richie and closer to Bill. The first signs of morning were starting to peek through the curtains and Richie stared at the thin strip of sunlight for a long while, resting his arms against his knees. Now he had woken up he was too hot with all of the other bodies in the bed.

‘Better than being cold and dead’, he thought solemnly as his mind strayed back to the previous night. He remembered the feeling of the cold water entering his mouth, down his throat, in his lungs. Panic. Fear. Distress. Worst of all, though, was the pain he had felt in his chest when he had seen Bill’s eyes, emotionless and cold as he forced Richie under the water.

Richie knew that it hadn’t been real, that it was all down to IT but he still couldn’t forget the look that Bill had given him, that Stan had given him as he stood by and watched, that Eddie had given him as he screamed ‘I HATE YOU’.

How could he explain that to them now?

How could he tell them that one of his biggest fears was being rejected by them?

He ran a hand through his sleep-messy hair, sticking it up even further but not knowing or caring as he looked down at the dreaming Eddie Kaspbrak on his left. He watched Eddie’s face, peaceful and soft and listened to his breaths. He was tempted to lie down there and let the quiet sound of Eddie’s breathing send him back to sleep but all he kept hearing was Eddie’s voice saying ‘I hate you’ over and over and over and he had to look away and cover his eyes in frustration.

Rubbing his hands roughly over his face he forced the thought away with one of his voices, quietly mumbling to himself in a half decent but definitely offensive Spanish accent into the silence of the morning. He picked at his cuticles and bit at his nails, counted the beads on his bracelet, counted the freckles on Eddie’s nose and cheeks but still he heard it.

I HATE YOU.

You’re so fucking annoying.

I HATE YOU.

You’re not funny.

I HATE YOU.
Shut up.

_I HATE YOU._

Leave me alone.

_I HATE YOU._

He felt tears sting in his eyes and the back of his nose but before he could get up and retreat to the bathroom he was already crying and he couldn’t stop it. He tried desperately to stay quiet, pressing a palm over his mouth to suppress sobs as his shoulders shook and tears streaked his pale face. He forced most of it down until there were no sounds but still droplets continued to run down his cheeks and drip onto his folded arms.

‘Don’t fucking let them see you cry,’ he thought as he finally gave up and made to go to the bathroom but just as he was moving to crawl off the bed he felt a firm hand on his arm and looked over to see Stan sitting up. He didn’t speak but the concerned look in his eyes only made Richie cry harder and shake his head in a way that said ‘please don’t ask me what’s wrong’.

Stan didn’t seem like he was going to pry anyway, although he shuffled closer to Richie and rubbed a hand across his back soothingly as Richie almost started to sob again in reaction to the sympathy. He placed both palms over his face to hide the tears, feeling pathetic and stupid but Stan only pressed closer to his side and rubbed his hand across the back of Richie’s neck instead. Richie was shocked to feel, just occasionally, Stan’s fingers in his hair, twisting strands of it gently and brushing through it to fix it into a little bit less of a tangle. It was nice. Richie had always hated his own hair and his friends frequently made fun of how unruly it was, which Richie didn’t mind, but to have someone gently touching it, especially someone like Stan who was always pristine and perfect and not immediately pulling their hand away made Richie feel warm in his chest.

Richie cried for what felt like the longest time in his life as Stan continued to softly play with his hair or rub at his shoulder or his back, saying nothing but Richie felt calmed by his mere presence and eventually the tears stopped. Unless he was afraid, Stan usually had a calm and totally put-together aura about him that Richie was always jealous of and which rubbed off on others. Richie wiped at his face roughly with his palms, feeling embarrassed but Stan took one of his hands and pulled it away.

He held it for a while as Richie watched him, red eyed and with wild hair, looking like a complete hot mess and Stan grinned at the sight, pulling Richie with him as he climbed past a sleeping Bill and off the bed. He dragged Richie into the bathroom and closed the door softly behind them as Richie perched himself on the edge of the bathtub, feeling strangely drained. He was sure that he had never cried that much before. Desperately, he hoped that Stan wasn’t about to grill him about why he was crying.

Stan still said nothing about it, though and he simply filled the sink with cool water and wet a washcloth in it, seating himself beside Richie on the tub to gently dab at his heated cheeks. It felt really nice and Richie wondered how Stan had thought to do this, but it made him feel a lot better.
after his marathon crying fest.

“…You can’t tell Eddie or Bill that I was crying,” Richie said as Stan pushed Richie’s hair back to place the cold cloth against his forehead. Stan chuckled softly and Richie was sure that he was going to make fun of him.

“Why would I do that?”

Stan held the washcloth against the back of Richie’s neck briefly and it eased some of the tension in his head.

“Because I always make fun of you…” Richie replied quietly. Saying it out loud made him feel like shit but Stan half-smiled and Richie saw what he thought might be fondness in his eyes.

“Not about serious stuff like this. Would you make fun of me for crying?”

“Well, that’s tough, Stan because you cry all of the time.”

Stan shot him a deadly look.

“I do not cry all of the time.”

Richie raised his eyebrows and looked away slowly.

“Okay.”

“There’s nothing wrong with being sensitive, Richie,” Stan said defensively then and he stopped dabbing at Richie with the cloth.

“No, I know there’s not.” Richie looked back at him and chuckled. “You wear your emotions on the outside and that’s probably way healthier than what I do.”

Stan watched him warily as if he was sure that Richie was going to say ‘psyche!’ and say something really mean instead. He didn’t.

“Listen, Stan, I know I always make jokes and say…sort of mean stuff about you but you know that I love you, right?”

He saw Stan’s expression turn much softer and although he clearly tried not to, a smile tugged at the corners of his lips. Richie smiled, too and nudged him with his shoulder. Stan was holding the washcloth in both hands in his lap and Richie’s nudge unbalanced him and he nearly fell off the edge of the bathtub. They both laughed at this, Richie loudly and Stan trying to hold it back.

“Richie, stop…”

“I love you, Stanny,” Richie cooed, resting his head against the slightly taller man’s shoulder and fluttering his eyelashes up at him expectantly as Stan watched him and shook his head, although he still looked like he was trying hard not to grin.

“Stop it.”

“You’re supposed to say, ‘I love you, too, Richie’.”

“No,” Stan chuckled as Richie linked their arms together and held one of his hands.

“I love you, too, Richie,”” Richie was doing a bad impression of Stan’s voice, now and it actually
made him laugh loudly.

Richie, being the resident joker of the group, was very observant when it came to laughter and he knew each of their little quirks by heart.

Bill’s laughter was soft and deep and soothing and definitely not rare; Bill was the one who laughed most often at Richie’s jokes but Richie always knew that it was genuine because of the crinkles at the corners of his eyes. When Big Bill laughed at one of your jokes you felt a sense of pride deep in your chest and it didn’t matter if anyone else laughed after that or not. Richie loved that Bill laughed at all of his jokes. Bill’s laughter was, Richie thought, the soundtrack to all of Richie’s stand-up comedy.

Eddie… Eddie was a tough nut to crack as he so often disapproved of Richie’s ideas of good chucks but when he found something that tickled him – and sometimes actually being tickled was the only thing - then, then it was difficult to get him to stop. Eddie’s laughter was infectious, too, so if something made Eddie laugh then it would get to all of them, eventually. He was the kind of person to laugh until his stomach hurt and he cried and Richie loved every second of it. He always had to use his inhaler afterwards, though.

Stan’s laughter was so rare that it was like finding a nugget of gold. He usually tried to conceal it with a hand or a book or a scarf, like he thought that laughing was something embarrassing or dirty but Richie knew that when Stan laughed it made everyone feel good. When Stan the Man was laughing then you knew it was a really good joke, like gold standard and Richie always took a mental note of those ones. The Stanley Uris approved humour. When Stan laughed his features looked all-the-more handsome and his curls bounced and it was beautiful.

Richie laughed with him, now as he felt that familiar warmth in his chest from a Stanley Uris worthy joke and he beamed from cheek-to-cheek when Stan shot an ‘I love you, too, Richie’ as he stood to empty the sink. Richie watched him, still grinning madly, wring out the cloth and place it neatly against the edge of the porcelain to dry. He stood to rest his chin against Stan’s shoulder so he could see himself in the bathroom mirror. His eyes were still bloodshot but he didn’t care.

“Okay now give me a kiss.”

He puckered his lips at Stan’s reflection in the mirror and Stan shook his head, chuckling.

“Not a chance, Richie.”

“C’mon, Stanny, just one little kiss. I won’t try and tongue you, I promise.”

“No! I don’t trust you.”

“My breath doesn’t even smell that bad.”

“I beg to differ.”

“Okay then just a little one on the cheek.”

Richie tapped his index finger there, looking expectant but Stan raised his eyebrows and moved away.

“I’m going back to my room to take a shower.”

“Wow. Rude. I didn’t even touch you.”
“Just being near you makes me feel unclean.”

“YOWZA.”

“Stop it.”

“Stan the Man gets off a good one.”

“No he doesn’t.”

“Stan the Man is—”

“Stop calling me that.”

“Stanley the Manley.”

“I hate you.”

Richie chuckled as Stan was leaving the bathroom, although he stopped laughing when Stan, faster than Richie could process it and react, leaned in to peck him lightly on the cheek on his way out.

Later that day they had a very serious discussion about their current financial situations. Bill had brought up the fact that they were all wasting money on separate rooms when they had only spent one night all sleeping in them since they had arrived. This was agreed by all and they decided that the solution, if they wanted to continue staying in Derry to find out why they had been brought there, was to share rooms and incidentally share the cost.

Stan had outright refused to share a room with Richie, who they all knew was the messiest of the four. Thankfully, Richie had refused to share a room with Stan, too, saying that he didn’t have time to ‘organise all of his socks and clean the bathroom every time he used it’. As such, much to Eddie’s disgust, he was stuck with Richie and Bill and Stan were left to be roommates. Stan was rather happy with this conclusion although if he was honest, Eddie would have been his first choice. He didn’t say that, though. Bill was clean _enough_ and Stan was sure that he would be easy to pick up after even if he did make a mess.

Although, when Bill first brought his stuff to Stan’s room, Stan’s throat went dry when he saw the size of Bill’s suitcase and how disorganised it was and he actually felt a little faint when Bill took some art supplies out of his other bag to place them onto the desk and he noticed that _none_ of the pencils were the same length and some of them _weren’t even sharp_. A few of them even had faint teeth marks in the wood where Bill had chewed on them mid thought.

He pushed those thoughts aside, knowing that he’d spend some time later fixing as much of it as he could before he could actually sleep. Plus, he was sure that Bill actually looked a little guilty about it. He could see that Stan’s room was absolutely pristine and his suitcase was tucked neatly next to the wardrobe, standing up exactly perpendicular to the walls. Stan’s clothes were hanging colour-coded and crease-free and Bill felt bad about hanging his own next to them.

“Sh…should I do this a certain w-way?” He asked as he placed a plaid shirt on a clothes hanger, looking over at Stanley who was watching him intently. Stan seemed surprised, but pleased, to be asked and over the next thirty minutes or so they organised Bill’s clothes together until Stan seemed comfortable with their placement.

“Sh…should I do this a certain w-way?” He asked as he placed a plaid shirt on a clothes hanger, looking over at Stanley who was watching him intently. Stan seemed surprised, but pleased, to be asked and over the next thirty minutes or so they organised Bill’s clothes together until Stan seemed comfortable with their placement.

Stan organised Bill’s art supplies on the desk while Bill took a shower, sharpening all of the pencils that were blunt until the graphite points were the same length, before lining them up neatly beside the notebook. He took a peek inside it while he was waiting, reading a few of the entries before
flipping to the back to once again marvel at the pencil sketch of himself.

‘Bill really drew that’, he thought, trying to imagine Bill’s eyes, intense and blue and focused on him but he closed the notebook sharply as he heard the shower stop, placing it back onto the desk.

He thought about the kiss, too. Bill had kissed him and held his hands on his waist and Stan had found out what it felt like to run his hands through Bill’s striking auburn hair. Bill’s hair had felt like silk between his fingers and his lips had been soft and warm just like Stan had always imagined. He felt heat rising to his cheeks at the memory. It seemed so unreal now.

The sound of Bill unlocking the bathroom door startled him a little and he quickly grabbed for his own washbag which he’d left on the end of the bed earlier. He was waiting for Bill to leave the bathroom so he could start his own bedtime routine and now he was even more eager to do so because it meant he could avoid Bill for a little while and pull his thoughts together.

Bill didn’t expect him to be standing right outside, though and his bare chest bumped Stan’s clothed one as he walked out of the bathroom wearing some sweatpants, straight into Stan. Bill’s hair was damp and there was a towel hanging around his shoulders and Stan desperately tried to focus on those two things rather than looking at the rather lean torso just south of that view.

“S-s-sorry,” Bill chuckled nervously, suddenly feeling somewhat self-conscious. He knew that Stan, among all of the others, had seen him without a shirt before—probably even without more—but it felt different, now and he was pretty sure that Stan was avoiding looking at him.

Stan didn’t reply but he shook his head a little and rounded Bill to get into the bathroom, pulling the door closed. Bill could hear him brushing his teeth and wondered why he had felt the need for privacy while he did it but it was probably just one of Stan’s many quirks. He smiled a little to himself as he used the towel around his neck to dry the ends of his hair some more, hanging it neatly to dry over the back of a chair and hoping that Stan wouldn’t mind its placement.

Later on the tension between them eased as they sat together in comfortable silence, Stan on the bed with a book, the cover of which read ‘Alexander Wilson: The Scot Who Founded American Ornithology’. There was a drawing underneath the title of four ducks on a pond, all of which had different colours and markings but to Bill they were just ducks. Stan probably knew the latin names of all of them.

Bill was sitting at the desk finishing his drawing of the quarry. The soft scratch of his pencil sounded quite soothing to Stanley and he briefly felt grateful that he’d ended up sharing his room with Bill. Eddie was much cleaner and had a better understanding of Stan’s need for orderliness but he could be rather shrill sometimes. Bill was quiet and careful and didn’t say much unless he absolutely needed to and Stan had found that sitting with Bill was just as pleasant as sitting on his own, only he had company.

He glanced over the top of his book and across the room at Bill’s back. Stan noticed that Bill had pulled on a t-shirt while he was in the bathroom and he felt a little guilty about it and, though he wouldn’t admit it even to himself, a little disappointed. His eyes followed the back of Bill’s neck up to his hair, which was messy now that it had dried but it somehow looked perfect like that and it annoyed Stan. How could something that wasn’t neat look like it was supposed to be like that? His fingers twitched against the open book and he felt the overwhelming urge to cross the room to Bill and run them through the mess of dark, auburn strands. He wondered if Bill would like it, what his reaction would be, how his hair would feel just washed and slightly damp and cool.

His heart fluttered in his chest when Bill turned around as if he could feel eyes on him, glancing over his shoulder towards Stan and smiling. His arm was resting on the back of the chair and Stan
could see, even from here, the soft grey smudges on his fingertips from the pencil.

“Yuh-y-you okay?”

Stan nodded faster than he intended and he was sure it looked rather weird but he gave up on trying to pretend that nothing was on his mind when Bill’s azure eyes fixed on his. He marked his place in the book by making a perfect fold in the top corner of the page before closing it and placing it on the nightstand.

“I…um…”

He lost his train of thought as Bill stood from the desk and came over to sit beside him on the bed. There was soft concern on his face and before Stan could speak again Bill took over.

“If it’s about this…” he gently lifted Stan’s hand to look at the thin scars on his forearm before gazing back into his eyes, “You d-don’t have to explain anything tuh-to me.”

“It’s not about that.”

Bill kept hold of Stan’s hand and Stan fought to try and ignore Bill’s thumb softly stroking his wrist.

“It’s about the other day…when you…”

“K-kissed you?”

Stan had been avoiding Bill’s gaze but their eyes met again, now. Stan took a deep breath.

“I didn’t…mind it.”

“You didn’t m-mind it?” Bill chuckled, raising his eyebrows and Stan felt embarrassed but he laughed softly, too.

“I mean of course I didn’t mind it I don’t know why I said that, it was good…it was really good…actually I can’t stop thinking about it and for a minute I was starting to wonder if it really happened or…or if I just imagined it or something because…why would you kiss me, Bill? I don’t know why you would kiss me…”

“C-can I kiss you again?”

The question would usually have stopped Stan in his tracks but feeling Bill’s hand in his own was only making him want more contact and he blurted out a ‘yes’ faster than he ever had in his life. Bill was eager, too, and before Stan even had time to register the speed of his own response Bill had leaned in and kissed him. He smelled clean and Stan was instantly drawn in by it.

This time, without a disruption from Richie the kiss continued for much longer and Stan gratefully ran his fingers through Bill’s hair. Again, Bill had kissed him first and this knowledge was what gave Stan the confidence to do it. He felt Bill smile into the kiss and whisper against his lips.

“Y-you really like touching my hair, huh?”

Stan shut him up by closing the gap between their mouths again. Stan had kissed a few people before but Bill was by far the best and he wanted to enjoy as much of it as he could. Bill was just the right mix of soft and passionate, one second placing a gentle peck on Stan’s lips and the next catching his mouth open in a slow, intense kiss that left him drawing a heavy breath once they
finally parted. Bill’s hand had settled on Stan’s waist and there were small smudges of graphite on the white material of his t-shirt there from his fingers. Stan didn’t notice at the time and he’s not sure he would have cared so much if he did.

He didn’t realize that Bill was gradually putting his weight upon him until the back of his head hit the headboard and for a second it seemed like Bill hesitated but Stan tugged at the front of Bill’s sleep shirt to pull him closer and for a short while their eyes met again as their bodies touched. Bill’s hands were either side of Stan’s chest, buried in the soft hotel pillow and trapping him but Stan was shocked at how relaxed he felt.

He saw Bill’s eyes scanning his face and watched as they traced his neck and collar and he felt a little bit exposed and, for a second he wished it were the other way around and Bill was pinned beneath him like this. Bill slowly leaned in again to bless him with another deliciously soft and teasing kiss and Stan threaded his fingers into Bill’s hair to prevent him from pulling away this time, silently urging Bill to kiss him again and feeling pleased when it worked.

The room was silent after that aside from the occasional soft, wet sound of parting lips, something that and the fact that he was producing those sounds with Stanley Uris. He was glad that he wouldn’t have to speak any time soon as he was positive that after this kiss was over he’d be lucky to string two words together without stuttering madly.

Being a writer, Bill’s mind was swimming with words he’d use to describe the kiss if he was writing about it. ‘Languid’ was one that stood out to him. It was the complete opposite of his kiss with Richie, which had been a sexually-charged battle for dominance. This was slow and almost teasing and Bill felt like he wanted to, and could, savour every blissful second of it. He wanted to taste the inside of Stan’s mouth, too, properly with his tongue but was afraid to push it. So he settled for his lips instead, licking at the corner of his mouth and even sneakily biting his top lip when he felt the sudden urge. Stan didn’t seem to mind.

Stan let one of Bill’s hands wander down his chest and his stomach between them and even felt an odd sense of relief when his t-shirt was rucked up above his navel and Bill’s fingers were touching his bare skin. Bill was careful and gentle and he had the curiosity of an artist, tracing lines into Stan’s abdomen with the tips of his fingers but thankfully Stan wasn’t ticklish and he found that it felt rather good. It felt nice to be touched by Bill like this and he gripped at the back of Bill’s neck and arched his spine when he felt a palm squeeze at his waist.

It must have been an involuntary reaction to being touched in a sensitive area but Bill was sure he had never known anything sexier than feeling Stan’s body lift from the bed and press against his own. He parted from the kiss reluctantly, glancing down at the place where their bodies touched, at Stan’s smooth, flat stomach just visible below the hem of his white t-shirt where Bill had pulled it up and he wanted his lips to be on it.

…”Don’t leave any marks,” Stan quietly ordered as Bill leaned in to kiss at his neck and Bill nodded briefly. He was a little disappointed; the pale expanse of skin was just begging to be covered with bruises but he respected Stan’s wishes and made sure to be gentle.

He slowly kissed his way down to Stan’s collar, rewarded with only soft gasps that were barely audible and he longed to hear something more than that from him. Without moving his lips from Stan’s skin he nonchalantly guided his t-shirt up off the rest of his torso, wondering if he was pushing it too far as he dipped to kiss at his chest instead.

Stan seemed a little lost in it and feeling Bill’s hair against his bare skin, along with those soft lips was distracting him from the fact that Bill was gradually moving lower. Bill worked on his stomach for so long that he completely forgot that he might have other intentions being down there.
Bill seemed keen to explore every mark on Stan's skin with his eyes, every soft curve of his waist or hips with his fingers and with his tongue like he was trying to memorise it. Stan felt, in his rather blissful state, that he didn’t have the energy to stop him.

Feeling a cold spot where Bill’s mouth had just been and then nothing else, he opened his eyes to see Bill hovering over him again. His pupils were wide, his irises just a thin ring of blue around the edge and there was a definite redness high in his cheeks. Stan felt a familiar heat low in his abdomen and suddenly wished that they were under the blankets. Bill’s gaze was holding him in place.

And then Bill’s head dipped again and the kisses on Stan’s body felt hotter, now, like the meaning behind them had changed. Before, Bill was exploring and testing and appreciating but now it was almost possessive. Stan’s skin felt damp everywhere Bill’s lips had been and it left tingling spots all over him. He threaded his fingers into Bill’s hair again, trying to ground his thoughts there as his body leaned into Bill’s touch over and over again involuntarily. He could hear his breath in his ears as Bill’s lips softly grazed the skin just above the waistband of his sweats and he wondered if he should stop him now, or…

‘Stop him now,’ a voice inside his mind said firmly as he felt Bill’s hand slide beneath the waistband and his underwear didn’t feel like anywhere near enough of a barrier and the pleasure ran through his nerves like hot water. He briefly sensed Bill’s eyes on him, curious to see if he’d pushed it too far but Stan didn’t care. Those blue eyes could linger all they wanted as long as Bill’s hand continued to wreck him like this.

And wreck him he did. Stan’s toes curled and his heels dug into the bed and his fingers twisted in the sheets. He was vaguely aware that he might need to change into clean underwear after this but the feeling of Bill’s hot breath against his neck wiped that thought out of his mind almost as soon as it came. Bill’s hair tickled his jaw as he kissed at him over and over and if he glanced down he could see Bill’s hand working beneath his sweatpants and it was too much. He had been in sexual situations before but it was Bill’s hand this time, Bill’s lips on his skin, Bill’s soft breathing against the shell of his ear and it was even better than he had imagined sometimes when he allowed his mind to wander.

He could feel himself getting close already but damn if he was going to go down that easily, when Bill had only touched him through fabric and he managed to mutter out the word ‘stop’. Bill did stop, of course and Stan felt him lean over to look at his face with concern.

“W-what’s wrong? Did I d-do something wrong? Does it not feel good?”

Stan’s eyes searched Bill’s face for a brief moment and he felt suddenly that the power switched between them. Bill didn’t know that he had been undoing him so easily. He had no idea that Stan had been using all of his willpower not to make a sound just then.

“No it was…it was good…”

Stan pushed the top half of his body off the bed, watching as Bill immediately moved to allow him to do so and he was suddenly aware of a vague sense of power. Bill hadn’t left a mark because Stan told him not to. Bill had stopped because Stan told him to.

“D-do you wanna stop? We can suh-stop…” Bill sounded a little disappointed but it was still a genuine question.

But Stan didn’t want to stop.
He placed another gentle kiss to Bill’s lips before sliding an arm around his waist to suddenly spin him and drop him onto the bed. Bill’s wide eyes as he felt Stan’s body against him made Stan feel strangely excited and he bowed his head to kiss him again. Bill couldn’t believe his luck. He had been making out with Stanley Uris for a good forty minutes now, he’d touched his bare skin and kissed it all over and he was pretty pleased with the fact that he, Bill Denbrough, had caused the obvious arousal which was now dangerously close to his own. If he moved his hips just a little he was pretty sure it’d feel really good for both of them. Thankfully, he didn’t need to as Stan was clearly thinking the same thing and Bill nearly swore out loud when Stan pushed the lower half of his body against his. It caused some hellishly good friction even with the multiple layers of clothing between them.

“P-please do that again.”

Stan’s throat went dry as Bill’s eyes caught his and he was sure that his very last shred of self-control was resting on whatever Bill did next. What Bill did next, Stan was dazed to find, was to slide his hands around Stan’s bare waist beneath his t-shirt and grip at his back to pull him down again. Stan took the hint and did his part, too, rubbing them together just in the right place and this time Bill really did swear out loud, although he struggled to get it out. Stan thought it was somehow sexier that way.

Eventually they settled into a rhythm and Stan was pleased but shocked to discover that Bill was surprisingly vocal throughout the whole thing. He wasn’t that way inclined himself, never really feeling the need to cry out or anything like that but hearing Bill make those sorts of sounds was driving him crazy. Although there was a lot more stuttering and cursing involved.

Towards the end Bill’s hair was sticking to his cheeks and Stan was certain that his own was probably heading in a similar direction although he didn’t care. All he could focus on in that moment was Bill and his hazy blue eyes and the fingers digging into his hips and Bill, once, stuttering his name on a heavy outward breath. The sight of it nearly pushed him over the edge but Bill still came first; Stan felt his hips rut against his own and heard the low noise in his throat. It didn’t take Stan long after seeing that.

They lay there for a while after and it was only then that Stan realised that Bill’s thighs were clamped against his waist and he thought, strangely, that Bill was freakishly strong. He didn’t take long to recover, either and after a few heavy breaths and a long, contented sigh he reached up to run his fingers through Stan’s hair lazily.

“Stan the Man,” he chuckled before Stan pushed his hand away, trying not to find it amusing and failing.

“S-seriously…where the fuck did that come from?” Bill continued but Stan dipped in to kiss him again and it shut him up nicely. He ran his fingers through Bill’s sweaty hair and pushed it back off his face as they broke apart, chuckling at the way it was sticking up against the pillow.

“Can you release me from your death grip now? I feel like we’re wrestling.”

“W-well maybe we are,” Bill chuckled, before adding, “I would win.”

“Are you kidding? You just let me walk all over you.”

“That I d-did,” Bill nodded, pursing his lips, “And I would do it again. Ten out of ten. I would r-recommend you to a friend.”

“Which one?”
“Ruh-Richie?”

“Nope.”

“Eddie?”

“Maybe.”

They both laughed and Bill’s eyes lit up as he watched Stan. He seemed perfectly comfortable in this position although Stan didn’t know how he could be.

“Okay you have to let me go, because I need to take a shower or I can’t sleep.”

“Can I c-come?”

“Too soon. I’m not that comfortable with you yet.”

Yet.

Bill chuckled and released Stan so he could get off the bed to go and take yet another shower. He noticed that he didn’t lock the door this time and Bill smiled to himself like an idiot at the thought. He didn’t go in, anyway, but he cleaned himself up and changed into some fresh underwear with the belief that Stan really wouldn’t let him sleep in the same bed if he didn’t. He fixed his hair, too, picking up Stan’s book when he sat back on the bed. He tried reading the first page of it but there were too many words he didn’t know the meaning of so he put it down again. Stan really was smart.

He smiled at that thought, too.

When Stan came back, clean and fresh and smelling amazing Bill was in his element to get to sleep beside him. He had somehow thought of Stan as someone who wasn’t touchy-feely and would probably like space in his sleep. The latter was true especially but because it was Bill, Stan allowed it for that night at least.

They fell asleep close, Bill tracing patterns against Stan’s palm with his fingers, sharing the occasional kiss and looking into each other’s eyes fondly. Bill stuttered out a soft ‘Goodnight, Stan’ and Stan replied with a ‘Goodnight, Bill’ that sounded like he might have been smiling when he said it.

Neither of them had ever slept better.
Thankfully when Richie and Eddie arrived in their room the next morning, Stan and Bill had separated themselves. Stan had awoken with Bill’s arms wrapped around his waist and his head tucked under one of his arms, wondering how he had managed to sleep the whole night through with someone clamped against him. He managed to peel him off without waking him, mentally taking note of the fact that Bill was an extremely heavy sleeper.

When Eddie came to their room first, Bill was sitting on the bed alone, writing in his journal. Eddie had practically barged in in a fit of rage and Bill had tried to understand, still half asleep, what he was complaining about, loudly and waving around a washbag.

“And he…he knows that I have asthma but he still sprays like a half a fucking can of deodorant right next to me while I’m…while I’m getting dressed and I was like choking and I had to use my inhaler but clearly Richie’s sweaty pits are more important than me having a fucking asthma attack and dying. I bet that stuff’s like poisonous or something if you inhale too much of it. You know what? I can already feel that I have this tickle…in my throat like it’s in my lungs already like I can feel it there.”

He said all of this without taking a breath and Bill watched him and nodded and pretended to look shocked but Eddie easily saw through it.

“Where’s Stan?” Eddie asked irritably, clearly thinking he’d get more sympathy there.

“He’s c-cleaning the bathroom.”

“Right,” Eddie paused as he was heading that way, “Aren’t you gonna help him?”

“I t-tried,” Bill replied quickly before adding, with a short, sharp smile, “I was d-doing it wrong.”

Eddie chuckled at this. The door of the bathroom was slightly ajar and Eddie went inside and disappeared behind it. Bill couldn’t see them but he heard Eddie telling Stan exactly the same story all over again, practically word-for-word and just as quickly. Stan seemed about as interested as Bill and there were only short replies of ‘U-huh’ and the various sounds of disapproval that Stan seemed to reserve for Richie-related conversations. He heard Eddie start brushing his teeth, still talking as he did so.

Richie entered the room not long after that. Bill was going to have to tell them to start knocking before they came in, he thought as Richie came and flopped himself onto the bed across Bill’s bare legs.

“Morning, Lover Boy,” Richie chuckled and Bill immediately tensed up, looking at Richie over the top of his journal.

*How the heck did Richie know about him and Stan?*

“W-what?”

“What, did you forget already? I thought what we had was special, Bill.” He stroked his index finger teasingly across Bill’s thigh but Bill swatted his hand away, relieved.

He hadn’t really thought much about his kiss with Richie since it happened.
“I d-didn’t forget, dumbass. You know it didn’t muh-mean anything.”

“Bill, how could you…how could you say that?” Richie placed a hand against his chest and pretended to look hurt but he stopped when he saw Bill’s expression and chuckled, “It was sorta hot thought, right?”

Bill thought about it for a second and then shrugged, nodding as a smile twitched at the corner of his lips. He stopped as Stan came out of the bathroom, quickly looking back at his journal and tapping the pencil against the page.

“Bill, can you please not drop your clothes on the floor when you take a shower? They’re always covered in pencil shavings and sometimes paint and it gets on the tiles.”

“Y-yes, dear,” Bill replied without looking up from his notebook and Richie sniggered. Stan shot them both a dirty look.

“Just because Richie’s here doesn’t mean you can-“

“I was k-kidding,” Bill smiled over at him, twirling the pencil between his fingers, “I’ll s-stop dropping my clothes on the floor.”

There was a moment of eye contact between them which Richie observed with interest, before Stan looked away with a ‘Right. Okay. Thank you.’ He carried on his business, straightening the chair at the desk, removing Bill’s used towel from the back of it and taking it into the bathroom. While he was in there Richie looked at Bill and made a whip noise, doing the motion with his hand and Bill flipped him the bird.

“At least Stan didn’t go to your room to g-get away from me.”

“Speaking of which,” Richie chuckled as he slapped Bill’s thigh and climbed off the bed, following Stan into the bathroom “Hey, Eddie, I used your toothbrush this morning because I couldn’t find mine. Hope that’s okay!”

Bill heard Eddie making retching noises before shooting off another tirade of exasperated babble.

“Oh my god. Oh my god. Why the fuck would you use my fucking toothbrush, Richie?! Do you know how many bacteria can live on toothbrushes and I always wash mine I always make sure it’s clean and I have more than one toothbrush for that specific reason you degenerate piece of trash. Don’t just put my stuff in your mouth without asking me first!”

“Don’t be silly, Eds, I would totally ask you if I wanted to put your stuff in my mouth.”

Stan and Eddie walked out of the bathroom at the same time, both with the same expression and Eddie with his hands in the air in mock surrender.

“I’m done. Stan, you can share with Richie. I want Bill.”

“Are you kidding me? I’m not sharing with Richie.”

“Fine,” Eddie looked at Bill, now, “Bill, you share with Richie.”

Stan looked at Bill, too, and Bill wasn’t sure what he wanted him to do even after trying to read Stan’s eyes.

“M-me? Share with Richie?”
Eddie nodded his head enthusiastically but Stan mouthed ‘no’ and Bill looked first at Eddie, then at Stan, saw him mouthing ‘no’ again and shook his head.

“N-no.”

Eddie shot a glare at Stan.

“Stop trying to influence him! Bill, listen, you can handle Richie better than either of us,” he said, turning down the volume of his voice about as far as it would go and perching himself on the edge of the bed beside Bill, “You know that it’s the truth. Me and Stan are-“

“Stan and I,” Stan interrupted briefly but Eddie ignored him and carried on.

“We’re just not suited to share close quarters with someone like Richie, but you, Bill…you…are so…nice and kind that you don’t care if Richie is messy and gross and disgusting and-“

“Woah, woah, woah…” Richie came out of the bathroom, looking scandalised, “Richie is hurt. I didn’t hear the first part of this conversation but why are you all out here trash talking me?”

Stan watched him with vague displeasure and suspicion, clearly very protective over his freshly-cleaned bathroom.

“What were you doing in there?”

“I was lying before. I didn’t use Eddie’s toothbrush,” Richie chuckled, “But I did just use yours.”

“I don’t leave my toothbrush in the bathroom.”

Richie paused and then looked to Bill.

“Bill, I just used your toothbrush.”

Bill looked at Richie briefly. He looked a little grossed out but then shrugged.

“See!” Eddie shrieked, standing again and raising his hands, “Bill, you have to take him! Please.”

Richie looked horrified.

“You’re arguing over who has to share a room with me?!?”

“No!” Bill replied before anyone else could, “I wanna sh-share a room with you, Rich.”

He stood from the bed, dropping his notebook and putting an arm around Richie’s shoulders, looking defiantly at Stan and Eddie with his eyebrows raised. He pointed at them both accusingly with his pencil.

“Either of you w-would be lucky to share a room with Richie.”

Richie perked up and put his arm around Bill, too, looking smug.

“I see what you’re getting at here, Bill, but um…you’re wrong,” Eddie said shortly, “Take him. Please. You’ll be lucky to last one night.”

Richie was about to speak but Bill held up a finger to his lips to cut in.

“Deal. I’ll share with Ruh-Richie for tonight. I-if I do it you have to…help Stan clean our
bathroom so I don’t have to.”

“You didn’t help me anyway,” Stan folded his arms, looking irritated, but everyone ignored him.

“Deal,” Eddie said quickly, finally, reaching out to shake Bill’s hand enthusiastically. He had a look on his face that said ‘you don’t know what you’re letting yourself in for’.

Richie looked thoroughly amused, now, and he wiggled his eyebrows at Bill suggestively, gripping at his waist where his arm was around him.

“You and me, Billy. You and me.”

Bill chuckled and pushed him off to go and get dressed as Eddie went back to his room and Stan kicked Richie out of theirs, struggling with him for a while but overpowering him eventually to push him out of the door.

They took another walk through Derry that day, trying once again to spur someone’s memory as to why they might be there. Other than the monster they’d fought as children still seemingly lurking somewhere, of course. It seemed now like they’d wordlessly agreed that they should do something about it, although none of them had offered any suggestions about where to start.

Richie had been clinging to Bill all morning since they’d become temporary roommates. Bill didn’t mind Richie’s company as much as everyone else seemed to, though, and even frequently being pulled about so Richie could show him things didn’t seem to bother him. Eddie was relieved to walk quietly beside Stan.

“Bill, if you wanna draw me while I’m sleeping, by the way, I’m totally okay with it. I just want you to know that,” Richie chuckled as he lit a cigarette held between his teeth. Eddie and Stan had seen this and moved further away from the two.

“I’ve seen it and I’m pretty sure he doesn’t wanna draw that!” Eddie piped up from behind Stan and Richie shot him a look. Stan looked amused.

“I’ll d-draw you if you want me to, Rich,” Bill smiled as he watched Richie take a drag of his cigarette and Richie clapped Bill on the back, looking pleased.

“Thanks, Big Bill. You’ve always got my back. At least I have some good friends!”

Eddie looked over again and shrugged theatrically with a wide-eyed expression and mouthed ‘I don’t care’ as Richie fumed and dragged on his cigarette so hard that he nearly choked on it and Bill had to smack him on the back hard. Although it made them all laugh, at least, even Richie.

Stan stopped them all when they reached Derry library because he had finished all of his books and wanted to borrow some more. Eddie agreed that he was cold and wanted to go inside. Richie had lit another Marlboro so the three of them left him standing on the sidewalk.

The library was just as Bill remembered it inside. He hadn’t spent as much time here as he would’ve liked to as a child, but he’d been here on more than one occasion with his mother and father or with one of his friends. There was a familiar, comforting smell in the air. Eddie followed Stan to the non-fiction section and watched him glance through all of the bird books. He seemed to have read most of them and although Eddie pretended to be interested he wondered how Stan could possibly have sat through all of that willingly.

Bill was browsing the horror novels at the other side of the room and Eddie gratefully ventured across to him instead, leaving Stan to his encyclopaedias. He picked a book off the shelf and
flipped through it briefly but there was a lot of blood and gore and violence and he slipped it back onto the shelf again with a grimace. Bill was seemingly engrossed in something very similar.

“How can you read this stuff, Bill?” he whispered, looking at a very obvious line of dust on one of the nearby shelves and shuddering as he thought of how much of it was people’s dead skin cells.

“I think th-these ones convey people’s feelings buh-better than any other genre. Fear is so different to any other e-em-emotion and…p-people react to it in unique ways but it’s still raw and-“

“Okay. Yeah.” Eddie cut him off before he could continue, stuffing his hands into his pockets and flinching as someone coughed and it echoed around the silence of the library. Bill looked up at him and closed his book.

“D-do you wanna leave?”

“Yeah. It’s like germ city in here.”

“O-okay,” Bill slid the book back into its space on the shelf, “Let’s go and find Stan.”

When they turned around to look for him, however, he was gone. In fact, everyone was gone. There wasn’t a single person in this section of the library. Bill thought that he was sure there had been people there when they came in but now it was empty. Even the square desk in the centre of the room where the librarian had been quietly stacking books as they entered, was devoid of human activity. Neither of them said anything about it but they exchanged a look that said it all, although Bill thought that maybe it was just their minds being overactive in the wake of everything else that had happened to them. Everyone else probably just moved onto other parts of the library and it was just a coincidence. It was strange, though, for Stan to be looking at something other than the books about birds.

They searched the whole library, however, in the next ten minutes and they both started to feel gradually more and more uneasy as they found not a single person. It was eerily silent and Bill noticed, with some concern, that there were open books at some of the tables where he knew that people had been sitting earlier. He thought about going outside to get Richie, maybe Stan was with him but he couldn’t bring himself to leave with the possibility of Stan still being in here somewhere.

“Stan!” Bill shouted into the silence and it made Eddie cringe briefly but there was no reply, not from Stan or from anyone else.

They exchanged another glance and Bill noticed that Eddie was starting to look a little frightened. He rubbed at Eddie’s arm a little, opening his mouth to speak but at that precise moment there was an almighty crack…

…Bill saw bookshelves fly up past him as the floor beneath the two of them gave way and they fell into what seemed like a cellar. He heard Eddie scream and felt dust and debris land in his hair. Heavier pieces rained down on his back and he was sure that he would be buried completely but it eventually stopped.

“E-Eddie!” He tried to shout but his voice croaked and he found himself inhaling the dust which hung thick in the air. He couldn’t see a thing. When he tried to move it hurt and at first he briefly panicked that he was stuck but after another try he realised that he could lift his body. Pieces of stone fell from his back and shoulders as he did so. He could faintly hear Eddie coughing from somewhere near him.
“Eddie!” He cried out again, louder this time but he could still feel the brick dust on his tongue, “Eddie, are y-you okay?!”

“I’m okay!” Eddie’s reply was close but the air was still thick with particles and it was dark down here. Bill squinted around but couldn’t see him, couldn’t see anything, really.

“I’m…I’m coming to get you, Eddie! Just stay w-where you are!”

“Okay!”

Bill stood to dust himself off briefly and noticed that the air was starting to clear. He wondered how far they had fallen and looked up, expecting to see a hole of some sort but…there was nothing but a completely intact ceiling above him. His instant reaction to this should have been fright or maybe panic but Bill felt overwhelmingly angry instead. He swore under his breath and glanced around the room again, seeing Eddie nearby and making his way to him quickly.

Eddie, like Bill, was covered in a layer of dust that made his dark hair look prematurely grey and covered his clothes and skin. He didn’t seem to be hurt but he was wheezing on inward breaths and as Bill watched he took out his inhaler and used it three times in a row.

Bill knew that he had to get Eddie out into fresh air somehow.

“The…the ceiling…” Eddie breathed as he continued to struggle with the dust in the air and Bill nodded in understanding.

“Wuh-we have to get out of here somehow.”

Now that the dust had cleared, Bill saw that they were in what looked like an enormous, stone cellar. The room seemed to have been carved out of the ground itself and seemed to extend further than he could see in the dark. He didn’t press Eddie to go anywhere until he had used his inhaler for a fourth time and he saw him tuck it back into his pocket.

The room seemed to get narrower and narrower as they walked and what little light they had seemed to be fading the further that they walked. Eddie was clearly uneasy and Bill could feel him getting closer and closer to his side as they continued. The room seemed to go on forever and the width of it was now such that it was starting to feel a little claustrophobic, even to Bill, who wasn’t really afraid of much.

“This isn’t happening,” Eddie whispered in a rasp at Bill’s side. He reached out to press his hands against the wall, as if it might not be real, but his palm touched cold, bare stone and it felt real enough, “Bill, what do we do?”

Bill’s pupils were blown wide in the dark and Eddie saw him searching for an answer, feeling around the walls, which were now so close that the two couldn’t stray far from each other at all. Bill was unpleasantly surprised when he reached up and realised that the ceiling, too was sloping down as they walked and he could now touch it with the very tips of his fingers. He didn’t let Eddie in on this revelation.

“W-we have to keep going,” he said surely, hoping that to Eddie he sounded confident.

And so they did, and the space got narrower and narrower until Eddie was pressed at his side and then, until they had to walk in single file and Bill could just hear Eddie’s small voice behind him in the dark, saying ‘oh my god’ over and over like he always seemed to when he was panicking. Bill pressed on despite this, feeling the ceiling getting lower and lower until it touched the top of his head and he had to bend his knees and crouch to get through. Eddie muttered something about the
ceiling not long after and Bill knew that it had reached him, too.

*What could they do but keep going?*

*Surely this was just a trick.*

Bill only felt some semblance of panic when they were actually forced to crawl, the ceiling had come down so low. The space seemed to have stopped narrowing but it was only just large enough for Bill to fit through; he could feel the walls grazing his shoulders every time he moved. Eddie’s hand was fisted in the back of his jacket.

The dark was now impenetrable. Bill could see nothing at all, not even the walls pressing in on either side of him or the small passageway in front. He had no idea what he was getting the both of them into and that was the only thing that scared him, the thought that he might actually be leading Eddie straight into some sort of danger. It was highly likely.

He suddenly wondered what he would do if he got stuck here. How would he go back with Eddie behind him? But if he couldn’t move forward and Eddie couldn’t move back then what would happen? *Would they become trapped down here in the dark?*

Just as the horrific thought crossed his mind, Bill felt his shoulders come free and reached up above him to find that the ceiling was no longer close. He stood slowly, feeling around him in the dark warily. He still could see nothing at all but the small tunnel seemed to have ended, at least. He reached out behind him as he felt Eddie fumbling against his back and somehow helped him to his feet.

*“Where are we?”* Eddie whispered from close behind him. He could still feel Eddie pulling at the back of his jacket as he held to him.

*“I don’t know. Just stay close to me.”*

Bill took a few tentative steps forward in the pitch black, hearing Eddie’s shuffling footsteps close behind. He was still wheezing and a couple of times Bill was concerned to hear him struggle to catch his next breath.

A few more steps and Bill could hear something else... someone else... breathing. It was close by and he reached behind him for Eddie’s hand, detaching it from the material of his own coat to hold it in his own tightly. If they had to run he was going to make sure that Eddie was at his side.

Bill was trying to avoid where he thought the breathing was coming from as he tiptoed through the dark with no idea where he was going, dragging Eddie along with him but for all he tried he felt his shoulder collide with something soft.

*“H...Hello?”*

The voice made Bill jump and even hearing that it was a human voice he still felt uneasy. He didn’t recognise it at all. It wasn’t Stan or Richie. *Why would someone else be down here?* Bill could smell cologne that he knew didn’t belong to Stan or Richie, either.

*“H-hello? Who’s there?”* Whoever the voice belonged to sounded uneasy, afraid, even and it calmed Bill’s nerves a little.

*“B... Bill Denbrough,”* he replied quietly, unsure of why he was telling this mysterious man his name.
“Holy shit. Bill?”

Bill felt Eddie’s grip tighten on his hand as the man continued to speak. He then felt him relax again upon hearing the words. Bill felt a wave of both relief and shock wash over him all at once.

“Bill, it’s me…it’s Ben. Ben Hanscom.”
Chapter 13

Chapter Summary

This is a short one but I'm working on chapter 14 already and it's probably going to be a lot longer than this. :)

Bill didn’t even have time to reply to hearing this himself as Eddie practically screeched beside him. In the silence it was rather terrifying.

“BEN!”

“E-Eddie? Is that Eddie Kaspbrak?”

“Yes! Oh my god how did you know?!”

“Just a wild guess,” they heard Ben chuckle, “Nah. I can hear your breathing. Do you still have asthma? Man, that sucks.”

“Tell me about it.”

There was a loud hiss as Eddie used his inhaler and Bill felt Ben jump a little against his shoulder at the sound. Eddie was about to speak again but Bill shook at his hand to stop him.

“Guys…this is gr-great and all, but…we’re still t-trapped down here…”

“Yeah…”

Bill felt Ben move closer to him and he nearly tripped on one of Bill’s feet but Bill gripped at him, catching some sort of clothing between his fingers and holding him up. The smell of cologne was sort of overpowering now and Bill briefly wondered if Ben had just taken a bath in the stuff.

“I was in the library and…and I saw Stan Uris. At least, I’m sure it was him.”

“He’s with us,” Eddie cut in briefly.

“…Well, he was leaving and I was gonna go after him but…then the floor just collapsed under me…and…I’m sure there’s something down here, guys…” he was whispering now, “I keep hearing something…it…” he paused, “It.”

“It,” Bill and Eddie said at the same time, as in agreement with Ben and Bill felt something strange pass between the three of them...some sort of energy. He’d felt it once before, when they were children and they made the blood oath. He remembered that he had felt something pass through his body, then, as they held each other’s bleeding hands. He knew that they had all felt it. He and Richie had been the last to clasp their palms together and that very moment was when it happened, right when Richie’s skin had touched his own.

“We n-need to get to Richie and Stan,” Bill said with certainty, “We’ll be suh-safe if we’re all together.”
As if hearing Bill’s words and knowing that he was right, that they would be safer together, there was a high-pitched scream from somewhere in the room. It was ear-splitting and something about it was inhuman, animalistic, even and Eddie almost matched it as he yelled out in terror close to Bill’s ear. Eddie’s fright spurred Bill into action and he realised that he didn’t have time to think. He grabbed at Ben, too, on his other side, somehow managing to clasp their hands like his and Eddie’s before he was running, dragging the two men with him.

It was relatively stifling down here in the dark and Bill's hands were sweaty, especially in Eddie's which he had been holding so tight for a long time now and his grip on them both was becoming much more difficult. His hand was frequently slipping out of Eddie's completely and he had to grasp at him over and over to find him again each time in the dark.

Running into the pitch black was a risk, they all knew it but despite this they were soon all running so fast, hell-bent on getting away from whatever it was down here that they had to split apart. Bill felt Ben sprint ahead as soon as their fingers unlocked and Bill was worried that Eddie, with his shorter legs and his asthma, wouldn’t be able to keep up with them but Eddie matched Bill’s pace rather effortlessly, even while wasting his breath to scream profanities into the dark behind them.

There was a light somewhere in the distance. It was small but Bill could see it ahead like a beacon and after a short while he could see Ben’s outline, thundering along ahead of them like some kind of fucking professional athlete. No longer a chubby pre-teen, Ben was now a rather tall and well-built man and Bill felt a little awestruck as he watched the muscles working in Ben's back. He could see Eddie beside him, too, panting and gasping for breath but never slowing his pace.

Bill was sure they were going to make it. The light was growing brighter and brighter and he could see that it was coming through a crack in the stone wall. It didn't make sense; he knew they were underground but none of this made sense and he just wanted to get out of here. If they could just break through…

…but there was something wet on the ground and one of Bill’s feet came out from under him and he slipped, feeling a raw pain down the length of his arm as it grazed the stone. His face hit it, too and he felt his right cheekbone crack against the floor, the pain travelling behind his eye and into his head briefly. For a second he thought he might have been knocked out, everything was black and silent and he felt like he was floating.

Then he heard Eddie screaming his name and two sets of footsteps, coming back towards him as he lifted the side of his face from the ground to look back and see that he had slipped in a glistening pool of blood. There were streaks through it where he’d fallen and he could feel it between his fingers and soaking into one side of his jeans. Before he could be horrified about that, though, he heard another monstrous scream from behind him and scrambled to turn around. He was still sitting on the floor when he saw what looked like the…darkness…closing in on him, as if it was following them rather than some monster. Only now it was closer he could hear that it wasn’t just one scream, but a hellish cacophony coming from inside the black, like its previous victims were crying to get out. It was enveloping everything in the room, even the walls themselves and Bill knew that if it reached him, he would disappear into it, too. He backed away, quick as he could, as it got closer and closer and the wailing was deafening and he thrust his hands over his ears. It was close, now and he released the sides of his head to continue retreating, scuffing his palms in his desperation and dragging a line of blood across the ground in his wake but the cloud of darkness covered one of his sneakers like a blanket.

There was an immediate, searing pain in his foot and his ankle and he clutched at his leg to try and pull himself free but it was as if something, maybe the darkness itself, was holding onto him, and it was still approaching. The further it got up his leg the greater the pain got. It felt like someone was
cutting into him over and over with a fine razor blade, hacking at him everywhere it could reach. He choked out a pained scream as he reached into the dark to grasp at his ankle and felt it slice through his palm and his fingers, ripping his hand back just as it reached his wrist and he felt a sharp sting there, too.

And then suddenly, just as he was about to tell Ben and Eddie to go, to leave him behind and get out, Eddie was beside him and Bill looked to him and suddenly...

...lost his voice.

Eddie’s dark eyes were wild, striking against their whites and against the dirt blanketing his skin and hair as he stared straight into the darkness with an almost primal look. He screamed viciously at it to leave Bill alone. He was gripping at Bill’s shoulder and it was so tight that Bill wondered if he might have bruises there tomorrow. Even Ben had stopped on his way to help Bill, stunned as Eddie continued to shriek angrily at the invisible attacker, telling it, clearly, ‘get the fuck away from him or I’ll kill you’, his voice reverberating off the stone walls and ceiling. There were tears in his eyes but it was anger, not fright that Bill could see and Bill couldn’t draw his gaze away from Eddie long enough even to see that the darkness was slowly receding away from his cut up leg like some frightened animal.

As it gradually withdrew, Eddie stepped in front of Bill, over him so that Bill was staring, awestruck, at his back instead from where he was lying on the ground. From this angle he looked about six feet tall. He watched Eddie reach to pick up a piece of rock from the ground and throw it roughly into the dark, again screaming at it to ‘FUCK OFF’ and it was so raw and visceral that Bill was certain it must be hurting his throat. He threw rock after rock into it, at it, screaming bloody murder, until it had receded so far that he could no longer reach it with his aim. Bill could see that Eddie’s hands were shaking as they fell to his sides and he dropped the last piece of rock he’d picked up. It clattered against the ground noisily close to Bill’s thigh but even that sharp sound couldn’t attract Bill's attention away from his savior.

Eddie watched like some kind of savage guard dog until the darkness was gone and they could see the room, bare stone walls and all. It was only then that he turned to look down at Bill and Bill swallowed hard as he looked into Eddie’s fierce eyes, his chest heaving as he breathed heavily through his anger and just for a second his teeth were bared, like they must have been as he faced the thing down.

Beautiful.

He would love to draw this Eddie.

But Eddie’s expression changed in a split second as he looked down at his shocked friend and the moment was gone and he fell onto his knees in Bill’s lap, wrapping his arms tightly around him and sobbing. Bill held his injured hand away from Eddie’s back but gratefully clamped his other arm around him, feeling the adrenaline drain out of them both as Ben crouched beside them and then threw his arms all the way around both Bill and Eddie.

The bottom half of Bill’s leg was stinging more than anything he’d ever felt and there was blood dripping freely from his palm and fingers.

But as he breathed in the strong scent of Ben’s cologne and buried his face into Eddie’s soft, dusty hair…

…he didn’t care.
Chapter 14

Chapter Summary

Finally the friends with benefits tag comes into play. Woops. If you don't like Bill/Richie then you might want to skip this chapter altogether :)

It felt like an awfully long time until they eventually broke apart. Eddie was still crying when they did but Bill was certain there was still anger in his features, too. Bill found that he couldn’t stop looking at him, even as they both helped him to his feet. Ben’s arm was around Bill’s waist, strong and firm but as soon as Bill was standing on his own he lunged at Eddie, grasping the shocked man’s face in both of his hands and crushing their lips together in a bruising kiss. A single drop of blood ran from beneath Bill’s palm and down Eddie’s cheek and neck, leaving a small, red blossom as it soaked into the collar of his t-shirt.

Eddie’s eyes were wide as Bill pulled away, still holding his face.

“Y-you…you saved me, Eddie…” Bill breathed out, his own eyes matching the size of Eddie’s as they stared at one another, “You s-saved my life.”

Eddie found that he could only shake his head in response. He felt both light-headed and, at the same time, like he could think more clearly than ever before. There was a tickle against his jaw as more of Bill’s blood ran down his face and he really needed to use his inhaler but he was trapped, both physically, between Bill’s bloody palms and mentally unable to pull his gaze away from Bill’s heavenly blue eyes.

Ben was the one to break the tension in the room with a soft chuckle and a small ‘hey, I helped a little bit,’ and Bill laughed and released Eddie, leaving a very obvious red handprint against his freckled cheek. He turned and grabbed Ben, too, kissing him just as roughly, although it was only on the cheek and Eddie couldn’t help the smile that tugged at his lips. Lips that finally knew what it was like to be kissed by Bill Denbrough.

They were all strangely gleeful as they broke through the pile of rubble that seemed to be blocking their escape. Ben was faster than Bill and Eddie as he expertly shucked piles of rocks aside like it all weighed nothing. Eddie seemed to have suddenly lost all of his strength and Bill could only use one hand. He was still leaving smears of blood everywhere he touched. Eddie still hadn’t wiped his cheek.

When they eventually stumbled through into the daylight, Ben and Eddie going first and then turning back to help Bill with his injured leg, they could see Stan and Richie standing together nearby on the same sidewalk they’d left to enter the library. It was as if they’d just come out through the front doors of the library and sure enough, when they turned back to face the building, there were the frosted glass double doors, with a large sign above reading ‘Derry Public Library’.

Richie saw them first, Bill and Eddie covered in a rather gruesome mix of grey dust and blood and he immediately dropped the cigarette he was holding, leaving it to burn out against the concrete as he ran to them. Stan quickly followed him when he noticed.

“Holy FUCK! Are you okay?!”
Richie ran to Eddie first, clearly thinking that the blood on his cheek might be from a wound but Eddie batted him away as he used his inhaler.

“I…it’s Bill’s. Not mine.”

Richie turned to Bill, then, as Stan reached him, too and they held him up between them. Bill looked pale and tired in the daylight and his hand and his leg were both still bleeding quite badly. He left a smear of it against Richie’s neck as he held onto him. Ben was hovering next to Eddie, clearly feeling a little overwhelmed at seeing them all again but Richie quickly caught on as he looked over at Eddie again.

“…Ben? Holy shit, Ben, is that you?!”

Ben was thin now, not just thin but well-built and tall. His dark-blond hair was messy and dusty like Bill and Eddie’s but his skin was healthy and sun-kissed, like he spent a lot of time outside. His eyes, however, were what gave him away. Ben had always had soft, friendly, expressive eyes. Those same eyes were on the man who stood before them now.

“Richie,” Ben smiled, wide and unashamed and they all felt better for seeing it. Even Bill, who seemed like he was in a lot of discomfort, smiled back at him. Ben and Stan gave each other an understanding nod. They would save the reunion stuff for later. Bill was their priority now.

They sneaked into the Derry Townhouse again, only this time Ben distracted the receptionist as he was checking into a room anyway. Apparently she couldn’t see the dust covering his hair and clothes, nor the blood on his collar or his sleeve where Bill had touched him. They seemed to be having a very pleasant conversation and they were all sure that she was flirting with him. Richie didn’t blame her. Ben was hot.

Eddie and Richie’s room was the one they gathered in this time. It was the obvious choice considering the plethora of medical supplies stashed there. Bill was much more co-operative than Stan had been and he allowed them to take off his trousers to get a closer look at his leg. Richie hissed when he saw it and Stan looked pale. There were hair-fine cuts over pretty much every inch of skin below his calf, thin but deep and Bill had to look away as Eddie cleaned him up because he started to feel a little bit queasy. He was trying his best not to get blood on the sheets but thankfully Stan noticed and sat beside him to clean his hand, too. His palm and fingers were damaged in the same way as his ankle, and still bleeding but Stan stayed calm as he wrapped bandages around his hand. The cuts on his palm were the worst and the ones on his fingers stopped bleeding after being cleaned. It still looked pretty gross, as Richie helpfully pointed out.

Richie cleaned the blood off Eddie’s face, too, despite Eddie’s protests that he could do it himself. *Stan thought that Eddie actually seemed quite pleased to have Richie’s attention but he would never say that to him.*

Ben hugged all four of them tightly, one after the other, before going to his own room to clean up and get some sleep. They had agreed to meet up the next morning for breakfast so they could talk properly. Eddie left next, reminding Bill that he’d agreed to share with Richie for tonight. He and Stan both warned Richie to keep an eye on Bill and to let them know if anything happened. Richie shooed them out of the door rather irritably, adamant that he could take care of Bill better than either of them, although he still gave Eddie a brief kiss on the cheek as he said goodnight. Eddie was even more shocked by this than Bill and Stan and he mumbled an embarrassed ‘Goodnight, Richie’ before nearly walking into Stan as he went, flustered, to their room. Stan followed him after giving Bill a brief hug to say goodnight and warning Richie again to look after him.

Richie kicked the door closed very dramatically behind Stan, looking at Bill with his eyebrows...
“Can you believe them?” he motioned to the door with his thumb, “As if I’m incapable of looking after someone?”

Bill chuckled from where he sat on the bed.

“So, I guess I’ll just sleep in this,” he motioned to his blood-stained t-shirt but before Richie could answer to perhaps offer something to him there was a soft knock at the door and Stan reappeared with a neatly folded pile of clean clothes. Bill’s clothes.

Richie smiled widely at Bill once Stan was gone again.

“Wow.”

Bill was about to tell him to shut up but his stutter quickly prevented him from even getting out one word and although Richie could see it he talked over him anyway.

“Do you, Bill Denbrough, take Stan Uris to be your lawfully wedded wife?”

Bill stood up and started walking towards the bathroom as Richie was saying this, trying to look unamused and failing. He was humming The Wedding March as Bill closed the bathroom door in his face so he could take a shower.

Taking a shower was difficult, however, when you had bandages up one leg and on the opposite hand and painful, uncovered, open wounds on your fingers. Bill struggled to wash his hair one-handed and with one leg practically sticking out of the shower so that it didn’t get under the water but there was no way in Hell he was going to ask Richie to help him. He eventually managed to get himself scrubbed clean of the blood and dust –the water ran a horrible murky red for a while when he first stepped in- and stepped out to tie a towel around his waist.

Richie didn’t take a shower but once Bill exited the bathroom he noticed that he’d at least cleaned the blood from his neck which Bill had accidentally smeared there earlier and changed into some fresh clothes to sleep in.

Bill had to ask Richie for help with dressing himself –he couldn’t do it one-handed- and Richie was surprisingly mature about it. He waited patiently for Bill to struggle his underwear on, at least, before assisting him with the rest and then drying his hair for him with the towel –this Bill hadn’t asked for but it was kind of nice to have Richie doing something so…sweet-.

Richie threw the towel carelessly into the bathroom after as Bill dropped graciously into the bed, only half under the sheets but too tired to care.

“Hey, I thought you were gonna draw me,” Richie chuckled as he slid under the blanket next to Bill and Bill chuckled at the ceiling without opening his eyes.

“I d-didn’t bring my notebook.”

“I can go and get it for you.”

“I’m n-not gonna draw you, Richie. I can’t even open my eyes right now.”

Richie pouted a little but Bill didn’t see it, although he felt Richie sort of…snuggle against him and it made him laugh again. He could feel Richie’s hair tickling his cheek.
“I hope you don’t mind this, Bill. I like to cuddle.”

“G-go for it.”

Bill chuckled as he felt Richie’s arm around his stomach.

“Roll over. I wanna be the big spoon.”

“I’m n-not spooning with you.”

“Why not? Eddie does.”

“Is it by ch-choice?”

“Debatable. I would say yes.”

“Why do I ha-ave to be the little spoon?

“Fine. We can switch it up. Go ‘head.”

“I’m too c-comfortable like this.”

Bill still hadn’t opened his eyes but he could feel Richie watching him. He felt the bed move and there was a clicking sound as Richie turned off the bedside light. He returned to Bill’s side after, though and there was warm breath on his cheek as Richie continued to talk.

“See, this isn’t so bad, right? I’m easy to sleep with. I don’t even care that you sleep with socks on, Bill. I mean, it’s weird but I’m very accommodating.”

“My feet are a-always cold.”

“Yeah, I know. Eddie sleeps with socks on, too, but he said that’s because he doesn’t want them touching hotel sheets where other people’s feet have been.”

There was silence for a while and Bill actually felt quite comfortable even with Richie’s hot body pressed against his side, although his leg was still throbbing a bit and he was trying to keep his injured hand out from under the sheets.

“Bill, are you still awake?”

“Yeah. It’s been like two minutes.”

He felt Richie’s fingers touch him as he lifted his bandaged hand but couldn’t be bothered to open his eyes to see what he was doing.

“Man, this looks pretty bad, Bill. I’m not gonna lie.”

“It d-doesn’t feel too good, either.”

“You just can’t help putting your fucking hand into stuff that you shouldn’t, can you?”

Bill chuckled at this, remembering George’s photo album from when they were children. He and Richie had seen it together, the moving picture of old Derry and Bill had reached into the photograph and come out with cuts up and down his fingers, just like this. Richie was the one who had bandaged him up after.
“I…it was cutting up m-my leg, I had to do something.”

“Is this your dominant hand?”

“No. I’m a-ambidextrous, remember?”

“Is this your masturbating hand?”

Bill yanked his palm out of Richie’s grip.

“I’ll take that as a yes,” Richie chuckled and Bill could *hear* the smirk in the tone of his voice, “Aw, damn, Bill. That’s too bad.”

“Sh-shut it, Richie.”

“Okay, okay. I’m sorry,” Richie said quietly as Bill shifted into a more comfortable position and settled there to try and go to sleep, “Like, I’m genuinely sorry for you. I don’t know how you’re gonna cope.”

“Uh, m-maybe because I can control myself like a normal person,” Bill shot back at him, opening his eyes now and looking at Richie in the dark. He was still wearing his glasses and Bill reached over to pick them off his nose, chuckling, “You’re st-still wearing your glasses, dipshit.”

Richie smiled as he watched Bill gently fold his glasses and place them on the nightstand. Bill settled down again.

“Bill?”

“…Yes, Richie?”

“Would you kiss me again?”

Bill didn’t open his eyes again. He sighed a little and opened his mouth a few times to speak.

“I…I don’t know…p-probably…I mean it was sort of a…huh-heat of the moment thing, but…y-yeah…I think so…”

He waited for Richie to reply but the room had gone silent again. He could still feel Richie’s breath against the side of his face and he hoped that he was just going to go to sleep, but then… Richie moved and Bill felt lips against his own, slow and soft and some of Richie’s hair tickled his jaw.

“I d-didn’t think you meant right now…” Bill whispered against him as he pulled away but he kept his eyes shut, knowing that Richie would go in for another kiss, which he did. This one was more firm and Bill felt Richie’s teeth pull *just a little* at his bottom lip. It made him shudder slightly, involuntarily but he knew that Richie felt it as the kiss deepened and then Richie’s tongue was in Bill’s mouth for the second time only now he was actually thinking straight and it was a good kiss.

If he told Richie that he was a good kisser he would never hear the end of it, though, so he stayed silent and simply enjoyed it, relaxing back into the soft hotel pillow as Richie lavished affection on his mouth. He still felt tired but it was kind of nice, even if he wasn’t participating in it much himself and he didn’t mind when his lips were no longer the target and Richie was giving his neck some attention, too.

Bill really liked having his neck kissed, if he was honest and Richie was doing a hell of a good job.
He knew how to use his tongue, at least, drawing it across all of the most sensitive areas like just below Bill’s ear and on the front against his throat, beneath his chin so he had to tilt his head back to accommodate him. He was aware that this might be going a little bit too far from the boundaries of a normal friendship but part of him really didn’t care. He felt like he was listening to the part that didn’t care a lot recently.

He chuckled as Richie licked a ticklish line up underneath his chin, and he pushed at his chest but Richie only came in for another kiss, grinning against him smugly.

“Are you gonna make me do everything myself?”

“Y-you’re the one who kissed me.”

“Well, I did tell those guys that I would take care of you.”

“Th-this isn’t what they meant.”

Bill laughed out loud as Richie ducked to put his head underneath Bill’s t-shirt and Richie’s curls tickled his stomach. He could feel Richie kissing him around his navel, although purposefully softly as if he was trying to make him laugh and Bill pushed at the lump under his t-shirt that was Richie’s head.

“R-Richie, stop it! You know I’m t...t-ticklish!”

“Hey, you still have that little mole next to your belly button.”

“Richie! G-get out of there!”

Richie flipped the t-shirt off the top of his head and looked up at Bill with a playful grin. His dark hair was sticking up at all angles, now and Bill couldn’t help but run his fingers through it. Richie’s smile fell when he did, though and he crawled up the length of Bill’s body to kiss him again. Now they were adults, Richie was slightly taller than Bill and Bill felt a little bit suffocated with Richie’s whole body on top of him. If he’d had more strength and hadn’t been injured, Bill would have flipped them over and pinned Richie beneath him instead. For now, though, he settled with it, letting Richie lick at the inside of his mouth and bite at his lips.

He relaxed into it again after a while, despite having Richie’s full weight on top of him and he ran his fingers through the dense curls again, surprised at how soft Richie’s hair actually was. He could feel his heart beating quite rapidly in his own chest now as he got a little lost in the moment. Richie’s hand wandered down the centre of Bill’s stomach, creasing his t-shirt as it went before sliding beneath the sheets pooled at Bill’s waist and between his thighs.

Bill wanted to stop him, to warn Richie to keep his hands at above-waist level but couldn’t bring himself to do it. He was already aroused from the kisses, particularly the ones Richie had placed on his stomach despite the playful nature of it, and Richie’s hands were quite large and it felt really, really good.

Richie didn’t stop even to see if Bill was okay with it, just continued to kiss him deeply as if he was creating a distraction from what his hand was doing. He was pleased that it seemed to be working and Bill didn’t even stop him when his hand worked its way inside the two layers of clothing that were blocking it and he was actually touching bare flesh. He didn’t hesitate and there was nothing tentative about it at all, exactly as Richie was with everything else.

Bill knew that if he thought about it too hard, the fact that he was actually receiving a handjob from one of his close friends, Richie Tozier, no less, that he’d stop this immediately, so he tried to
focus on Richie’s lips and tongue instead against his mouth. But the more he tried not to think about it the more his attention was drawn to the heat and the amazing friction that Richie’s hand was causing and he had to break away from the lips to gasp out. Richie moved in on his neck again when his head was back against the pillow, biting at him this time and causing a very noticeable hickey on the left side of his throat.

Richie hadn’t thought about this at all. He had suddenly had the urge to do this to Bill so he’d just rolled with it and, thankfully, Bill hadn’t stopped him. He knew what he was doing, he’d had enough practice on himself to be an expert by now and he was sure that someone else’s dick was no different. The only thing that was different was that he was getting to watch Bill gasp and swear and stutter and it was fucking hot.

Bill could feel Richie’s eyes on the side of his face as he pressed the occasional wet kiss against his jaw or his neck but, fuck, he didn’t care. Richie knew what he was doing with his hand and Bill was pretty sure he had never gotten this close this fast. If he opened his eyes to see Richie’s hand beneath the sheets that would be it, so he kept them squeezed shut as tightly as he could. He didn’t even open them when he felt Richie’s hot breath against his cheek close to his ear.

“Bill, if you come in my hand this means we’re friends for life,” he chuckled and the heat was too much and although it had been sort of a funny thing to say, Bill found that Richie whispering something so dirty in his ear only intensified the whole situation and he felt himself reaching up and tangling his fingers into Richie’s hair before he could stop himself and heard himself pleading breathlessly.

Richie obviously wasn’t one to say no to a request like that and graciously sped up his hand as Bill clutched at his mess of hair and stuttered out a ‘f-fuck, Richie’, that even made Richie stop and think for a second. Bill was really fucking hot like this, Richie thought, all sweaty and hazy-eyed and grasping at Richie’s hair and shoulder and stuttering out his name.

His throat went sort of dry when he felt Bill come into his hand and watched his back arch off the bed just slightly. The sound that he made was favorably erotic and Richie wished that he could have recorded it so he could play it back whenever he wanted -probably in totally inappropriate situations-. He was panting against Richie’s shoulder, now and Richie chuckled but Bill pulled at his hair irritably.

“Woah. That was hot,” Richie said loudly as he removed his hand from Bill’s underwear, holding it away from the sheets nonchalantly.

Bill was covering his face with his hands.

“C’mon, Bill, don’t be embarrassed. It wasn’t that fast.”

“Beep-beep, Richie.”

Richie chuckled and to his surprise, Bill did, too, into his cupped hands. Richie watched him fondly.

“Do you feel better now?”

“I m-mean I felt good anyway, so…”

“Well, you can’t say I never do anything nice for you.”

“…Th-that’s not exactly something you should do f-for your friends, Rich…”
“Oh, I’m sorry, Bill. I forgot you wrote the book on friendship.”

They both laughed again but Bill slowly moved his hands from his face to look at Richie.

“P-please go and wash your hands.”

“I don’t know, Bill, I kind of wanna keep this as a trophy. Maybe I’ll show the other guys in the morning.”

Richie laughed and winced as Bill kicked him in the shin, climbing out of the bed to go and clean his hands in the bathroom as Bill quickly adjusted himself, sighing and resting back against the pillow. He had been embarrassed about it at first but he had to admit that he felt pretty fucking relaxed right now.

He was asleep when Richie came back from the bathroom and Richie admired the sight of a sleeping Bill for a while after he got back into the bed, chuckling softly and reaching over to push Bill’s bangs out of his eyes before lying down to sleep himself.

He would definitely be bringing this up the next time Bill annoyed him.
Chapter 15

Chapter Summary

The Stozier chapter that nobody asked for. Another short one but bear with me I'm writing more as we speak x

Eddie was suitably irritated the next morning when he realised that Bill had shared a room with Richie for the whole night without a complaint. Although he noticed the bruise on Bill’s neck with some horror.

“Is that a hickey?! Richie, did you give Bill a hickey?!”

Stan and Ben looked equally shocked from across the breakfast table as Bill held a palm against his throat and sipped at his orange juice.

“Yeah, so what?” Richie chuckled, picking up a piece of bacon with his fingers and waving it around while he talked, “I would give a hickey to any of you guys. That one’s my work, too.” He motioned with his bacon to a fading bruise on Eddie’s neck of a similar size to Bill’s and Eddie slapped his hand across it, his freckled cheeks turning a very nice shade of pink.

“You have a problem, Richie,” Ben chuckled through a mouthful of bran cereal but Richie only waggled his tongue at him with a ‘You’re next, Haystack’ and a playful wink. Stan rolled his eyes and sipped on his black coffee.

“Besides, I gave him more than just a hickey,” Richie continued as Bill choked on his juice and it splashed up into his face and up his nose. Ben had to reach across the table to pat him on the back as he wiped at himself with a paper napkin. Eddie looked like he was disgusted but didn’t fully understand the implication, he was just disgusted anyway. Ben didn’t seem to care but Stan was staring into his coffee and holding onto the mug so tightly that they were worried it was going to break between his fingers.

“R-Richie, can we not…do this at the breakfast table?”

“What? Why not? Who cares?” Richie bit the end off his bacon and chewed on it while he was talking, “We’re just close. I would do anything for you guys. Literally.”

Stan stood from the table, then, placing down the napkin that had been folded neatly in his lap. The table shook a little from his sudden movement and some of the coffee, which he had barely touched, spilled out over the side of the cup. He watched the stain on the tablecloth for a while, looking uncomfortable. Eddie saw him scratching at his wrist irritably before he walked away with all of their eyes following him.

They all turned to Richie, then. Ben ate some more cereal, clearly trying to stay out of it as much as possible, although he still kept glancing at Richie. Eddie looked furious and Bill looked like he was going to jump out of his seat any minute and strangle Richie. He did stand, and Richie looked a little worried but he simply followed Stan out of the room without saying anything.

“Go,” Eddie said to Richie without looking up after Bill was gone. He had been eating some
whole-wheat toast and he wiped his hands on a napkin, “Go after them and fix it.”

Richie looked a little irritated but he knew that he wouldn’t win this argument with Eddie so he put the rest of his bacon down on the plate, wiping his fingers on his ripped jeans and standing from the table with an ‘excuse me, ladies’ which made Eddie bite at his lip to stop himself from saying something. Following the direction Stan and Bill had taken, Richie made his way out into the foyer and then upstairs to the rooms, finding Bill standing outside one of them –his and Stan’s-. Bill was holding onto the door handle but it was obviously locked. He gave Richie a dangerously mad look as he approached.

“S-Stan, please let me in. I just w-wan… I just w-“

“Let us explain ourselves,” Richie cut in, noticing that Bill couldn’t finish what he wanted to say. Bill glanced at him briefly but it wasn’t anger anymore and Richie felt a sense of relief.

There was a moment of silence where the two of them stood and stared at the door, listening for any sign of movement or for Stan to reply. There was a click as the door unlocked and Bill had been turning the handle repeatedly and he and Richie more or less fell inside. Stan was making his way to sit down in a chair over at the desk by the window, clearly giving them the cold shoulder.

“P-please don’t be mad.”

There was no reply to this, Stan didn’t even look away from the window and Bill went over to sit on the edge of the bed. Stan only seemed to mind when Richie joined them over at the desk, taking the other seat. His leather boots squeaked against one of the chair legs and the sound cut into the awkward silence but none of them laughed.

“I know that you like Bill,” Richie said suddenly and although Stan still didn’t look at them they could see his shoulders tense up. His fingertips were hovering close to his wrist like he desperately wanted to scratch at the skin there as he often did when he was anxious. Bill’s chest hurt and he wanted to reach over and hold Stan’s hands in his own.

“And Bill likes you,” Richie continued, resting an arm against the wooden desk top and fidgeting with one of his rings with his thumb as he watched the side of Stan’s face, “And I like you.”

Stan looked up at this, meeting Richie’s eyes as if he was testing to see if it was a joke. Richie didn’t avoid his gaze at all but a smile tugged at the corner of his lips. He had shifted his hand on the desk to meet Stan’s but he only touched him with the very tips of his fingers. Stan flinched a little at the contact, clearly wound pretty tight but he let Richie touch his palm, still watching him curiously. Bill sat silently next to them.

“I really like you, Stanley, and Bill and Eddie and Ben,” Richie’s voice was soft now and Bill found that he couldn’t help but look at him too. Richie was still fidgeting, only now he was doing it with Stan’s fingers instead of the ring, linking them with his own and taking off his own bracelets to place them on Stan’s wrist to play with the beads and knots of string. This seemed to be helping Stan’s urge to scratch at himself, too as he was so focused on what Richie was doing.

“I…” Richie hesitated for a brief moment, opening his mouth and then closing it again, shaking his head with a chuckle. Bill was sure for a second that he was going to say ‘I love you’.

Stan seemed to have had the same thought and his expression had softened.

“I feel…like we all have a strong connection…to each other. I don’t know how to explain it. I feel it with all of you guys. It’s weird, but…right now it just feels right, like…we’re all supposed to be
Richie was clearly struggling to explain himself but Bill knew exactly what he meant. Since they’d come back to Derry he’d never felt so close to anyone before, and he felt it with all of them. When he’d seen Ben yesterday it felt like they’d never been apart.

“I did kiss Bill,” Richie said suddenly, “More than once…and we did more than that, too, but…it didn’t feel weird, like it maybe should have.” He looked to Bill for back up and Bill nodded slightly in agreement.

“Y-yeah.”

“I kissed Eddie,” Richie blurted out then, “We haven’t talked about it, but…that wasn’t weird either.”

Bill chuckled slightly and nodded.

“I k-kissed Eddie, too. I mean, not like…probably n-not like you kissed him, but…”

They shared a knowing smile and then both looked back to Stan. He was still staring at Richie, and Bill thought that if anything he looked slightly annoyed, although he still hadn’t moved his hand away from Richie’s and was now sporting the majority of Richie’s bracelets on a single wrist.

“It’s not weird,” Richie said again as he looked Stan in the eyes, “You know it isn’t.”

“I don’t know anything,” Stan said shortly, but his voice was quiet and he still didn’t turn away.

“I’ll prove it.”

Stan watched somewhat warily as Richie scooted his chair closer until Richie’s knees, bare through the rips in his jeans, were touching his. His ringed fingers were now resting against Stan’s wrist. Bill could hear his own heartbeat in his ears but he couldn’t look away from them, not even when Richie leaned in to press his lips against Stan’s. He was much more tentative than he’d been with Eddie or Bill, but then Stan was a flight risk and they all knew it. If Richie stepped one toe out of line he was done. Bill watched with bated breath as Richie leaned in closer to get a better angle and he was perched on the very edge of his chair.

Stan didn’t really seem to be participating but he didn’t stop him, either. Richie was still being very gentle and Bill thought that their lips looked soft together and that he would quite like to kiss them both but he kept those thoughts to himself. He also thought that Richie was probably pushing his luck when saw him reach up to gently press at Stan’s bottom lip with his thumb...

...or not, since Stan actually opened his mouth to kiss him back, slow and deep and Bill felt like he stopped breathing at that point. Then, Richie’s fingers were in Stan’s hair, his rings peaking through the soft curls and he was gripping the arm of Stan’s chair with the other; Bill could hear it creaking as Richie put more of his weight towards Stan. Stan was holding onto Richie, too, firmly at the back of his neck.

The magic was broken shortly after that as Stan let go of Richie and pulled his lips away, wiping at his mouth and looking scandalised.

“I didn’t say you could put your tongue in my mouth, Richie!”

Richie chuckled and flopped back into his chair, resting one of his feet close to Stan’s knees. He
looked rather satisfied.

“Hey, that’s just my play style.”

“Yeah, well, this game is over now.”

Bill breathed out suddenly and they both looked over at him. Richie laughed and even Stan looked a little bit amused.

“You okay over there, Big Bill?” Richie crooned as Stan took Richie’s bracelets off one by one and handed them back to him. Richie shoved them back onto his wrist carelessly.

“Y-yeah…just…”

“Sorry if we caused you some discomfort. Although I have to say that my man Stanley here is a good kisser so I can’t be blamed if it happens again.”

“It’s not happening again,” Stan said curtly but there was still a hint of amusement in both his face and his voice. Richie clearly sensed this, too and he smirked across at him as he played with his rings.

“Stop looking at me like that, Richie.”

“What are you gonna do if I don’t?”

“We’re not doing this right now.”

“But we are doing this right now. I’ve had a taste, Stanley and now I want more.” Richie jumped out of his seat and tried to get into Stan’s lap and Bill could’ve sworn that he heard Stan giggle as they fought playfully but surely that couldn’t be right. Stan was stronger than Richie though and he managed to hold him off, bending a knee to push him away with a polished shoe.

“Get away from me, you degenerate.”

“Wow. Rude,” Richie chuckled and made for Bill instead, catching him in a rough hug and pulling him to his feet to try and pick him up with an ‘at least Bill loves me’. He failed miserably at this, barely getting Bill’s feet off the ground and both Bill and Stan laughed.

“W-wow,” Bill said in a very sarcastic tone.

“Jesus Christ, Bill! How much do you weigh?!”

“I’m just t-tall! And I had a big breakfast!”

“That’s true,” Richie huffed as he put him down, “You eat like a fucking horse.”

“He does,” Stan agreed, looking at Bill fondly and Bill smiled back at him for a while before Richie finally blurted out ‘oh my god get a room’ and they all laughed, although Bill did go over to give Stan a kiss, feeling that there obviously wasn’t a problem with doing it in front of Richie, now.

Stan smiled as Bill pulled away, looking into his eyes for a while and then standing to look at Richie.

“Ten. Richie was, like…a four…maybe four point five,” he said as he straightened his sweater and Richie looked horrified.
“A four?! You’re giving me a fucking four?! And Bill gets a ten?!”

Stan quickly left the room to re-join Ben and Eddie at the breakfast table as Richie shouted after him.

“Get your Jew ass back here, Stanley Uris! I’ll give you a ten!”

But Stan was already out of earshot.
Chapter 16

Chapter Summary

There is some very explicit Reddie in this chapter so if that’s not your cup of tea then you might want to wait for chapter 17.

They spent the entire day with Ben after breakfast. After talking at the breakfast table for so long that they were nearly kicked out by the staff who came to clear away, they went to Bill and Stan’s room because Ben wanted to look at Bill’s drawings. The rest of their day was taken up sitting in there, playing cards—which Richie had brought in his bag-, although since Bill, Richie and Ben were the only ones who knew how to play Poker, they settled for a Blackjack tournament which ended up turning very serious when Richie kept winning and Eddie swore that he was cheating. In the end, Bill and Ben had to separate them before there was a fight –Stan was encouraging them-. They ordered another takeaway to the room, pizza this time and Richie went out to buy some beers, coming back with a case of 18, the majority of which he and Ben drank between the two of them.

The deck of cards lay forgotten on the carpet nearby as they sat in a sort of circle on the floor –although Stan had tidied them into a neat pile-. Ben was currently leafing through the pages of Bill’s notebook, clearly reading every word he’d written and Bill felt a little bit nervous. He knew that Ben was an avid reader, at least he had been when they were children and to have a real book fan looking at his material was something he hadn’t experienced until now. He knew that Stan read, too, but he’d never asked to see it.

Ben seemed to be hanging on every word, though and a few times he looked up from the paper to catch Bill’s eye with a genuinely excited expression on his face and Bill felt pure joy. Richie was currently shotgunning another beer, something which he’d been doing all night whenever the conversation stopped interesting him. One of his rings had rather sharp spikes running around the edges of it and he’d been using it to pierce the bottom of the cans. Eddie was watching this with vague disgust. He was still on his first can and had ignored, on more than one occasion, Richie’s chants of ‘CHUG, CHUG, CHUG’ as he took a sip from it. He was doing this to pretty much everyone.

“Woah, these are going down fast,” Richie gasped out as he finished the entire can through the hole he’d made without taking a single breath, throwing the empty shell into the trashcan like he was making a killer shot with a basketball.

“Yeah, because you’re drinking it like it’s fucking water,” Eddie said as he watched Richie take the last can from the box and pop it open one-handed, “How many of those have you had?”

“Not enough,” Richie chuckled as he took a swig, before Ben reached over and took it from him to down some of it, handing it back to him half-empty and chuckling.

“Now you don’t have to worry, Eddie. I took care of some of it for you.”

Eddie chuckled a little at this.

“Ben, you’re just as bad. I think you’ve actually had even more than Richie has,” Stan pointed out and Ben just shrugged with a brief ‘I’m a big guy’. None of them said anything more about it,
although it was a little concerning that he wasn’t suffering from any sort of effects despite how much he’d drunk, perhaps a testament to how much he usually had.

Richie held his can by its top and swirled around what Ben had left him, chuckling.

“Jeez, Haystack, way to leave me nothing but your backwash.”

“Well, why not? You seem to have swapped saliva with everyone else in this room.”

“Yowza. This ‘ere boy still got some fight left in ‘im,” Richie sniggered, but he nodded, “Are you jealous? I’m open all hours if you want some, big guy.”

“I think I’ll stick to the beer,” Ben smirked, downing some more of his last can.

“Richie’s saliva never touched me,” Stan added suddenly, looking at Eddie for back up but Eddie only looked away and sipped his own drink. Richie watched him with some amusement. The freckles on Eddie’s cheeks were standing out with a slight pink tinge behind them and it caught Richie’s breath in his chest very briefly.

“My saliva can touch you if you want, Stanley,” he chuckled after dragging his eyes away from Eddie. They all laughed at Stanley’s ‘I’m good, thanks’.

“Why is everyone so mean to me?” Richie whined, pretending to be upset, “I am hilarious and adorable.”

“That’s up for debate,” Stan said shortly as he put his empty can into the trash. None of them had even seen him finish it.

“Okay,” Richie chuckled, reclining across the carpet to rest on his elbow, “Debate class is now in session. Topic: is Richie hilarious and adorable? Go.”

“No,” they all said, quickly and in unison and Richie’s mouth opened wide in mock-horror. He was about to speak but then Eddie started laughing, giggling, really and they all looked at him. Eddie’s laughter was usually infectious and it wasn’t long before Ben was laughing, too, then Bill and Richie and even Stan. It took quite a while for them to all stop laughing, thanks to the effects of the alcohol they’d all consumed and the fact that whenever it started to die down they would hear Eddie still going and it would set them all off again.

By the time they all eventually quieted, Eddie was lying on his side clutching his stomach with tears in the corners of his eyes, whimpering quietly whenever he looked at anyone. He had to actually cover his face to calm himself down. Richie thought it was the cutest thing he’d ever seen and even Stan was looking at him rather fondly.

“Okay nobody look at me,” Eddie mumbled into his hands after a while as he sat up to use his inhaler and all of them, aside from Richie, co-operated and looked elsewhere.

At just past one in the morning Stan decided that enough was enough and kicked them all out so he and Bill could go to sleep. Ben went willingly, lifting his hand with a cheery ‘Goodnight, guys’. Richie and Eddie were not so accommodating. Richie was being his usual self but Eddie was plied with alcohol and still seemed to be in a very giggly mood.

“You’re s-such a lightweight, Eddie,” Bill chuckled, trying to pry Eddie away from himself as he clung to him, muttering about how much he loved Bill and that he wanted to sleep next to him and not Richie.
Richie wasn’t offended by this, watching from the door and looking rather amused. He was messing around, too, a little earlier but he was now being prevented from coming any further back into the room by a very unamused looking Stan.

“Go to bed, Richie,” Stan ordered with folded arms, but he knew that Richie wasn’t going to go anywhere without Eddie and it was a lost cause.

“I know, I love you t-too, Eddie…” He could hear Bill saying behind him, “B-but you need to go to bed and get some sleep.”

Eddie eventually released Bill and left when Richie piped up with a ‘Come on, Eds, let’s go’ and he obviously couldn’t resist arguing against the nickname.

“Don’t call me that, Richie! You know I hate that!”

Stan and Bill could still hear this going on in the hallway after the door was closed.

“You can sleep out here tonight, Richie!” Eddie shouted but he was giggling and Richie put a finger to his lips, looking amused.

“Jesus, Eddie, you’re gonna wake up the whole fucking hotel.”

Eddie copied Richie and put a finger against his own lips, smiling behind it with a small ‘woops’. It still came out pretty loud and Richie shook his head, laughing.

“Do you even have a volume control?”


“Eddie, you had, like…two fucking beers…”

“Well, I’m sorry I’m not a fucking alcoholic like some people!”

They hurried inside their own room when they heard Stan opening the door again, probably to shout at them, then dropped back against the door side-by-side, trying to hide their laughter. Richie slapped his hand over Eddie’s mouth when Eddie bellowed out a ‘SORRY, STAN’. Eddie’s breath was hot against his palm as he giggled.

“Shhh!”

Richie put his finger to his lips again as Eddie watched him, wide-eyed in the dark. He drew his hand away as Eddie seemed to calm down, although their eyes were still locked and Richie couldn’t have looked away if he’d wanted to. They stayed against the door for what felt like hours, Richie’s shoulder pressed against the wood as they listened to each other’s breath. Eddie seemed to have sobered somewhat and Richie’s eyes followed the shape in Eddie’s throat as he swallowed hard.

Subconsciously, they were moving closer and closer to each other against the door and Richie only realised this when Eddie’s shoulder bumped his own and he had to stop. He saw Eddie’s gaze drop to his own lips like it had the last time they kissed and his throat felt dry. The air in the room had changed.

“W…we should get ready for…bed…” Eddie whispered but he didn’t move and his eyes were still glued to Richie’s lips.
“Kiss me,” Richie said suddenly, thinking that it might break the tension in the room somewhat but Eddie wasn’t shocked by it. He sighed in what sounded like relief, as if he was waiting for Richie to say those exact words, before lunging towards him and catching him in a kiss that was already open-mouthed.

Richie gripped at Eddie as soon as he crashed against him, pinning him against the door in one swift movement and to his surprise Eddie groaned into it. It sent heat straight to Richie’s groin. They were all hands and tongues and hot breaths after that and Richie was exhilarated. He’d have to get Eddie a little bit drunk more often if this was the result.

He nearly lost his shit when Eddie pushed him back to pin him against the dresser and he had to grip at the edges of it as it dug into the base of his spine. Eddie clearly had no qualms about causing Richie this discomfort and he continued to press against him until Richie forcefully flipped them, although Eddie definitely thought that...fuck...this was way better when Richie grasped his hips and lifted him up on top of the cabinet like he weighed nothing at all. They were both relatively breathless when their lips collided again after that. Eddie parted them briefly to remove Richie’s glasses when they were getting in the way and Richie didn’t even look to see where they landed when Eddie flung them across the room somewhere. His attention was solely saved for Eddie’s lips, now and he leaned back in to bite at them hungrily until Eddie opened his mouth for Richie’s tongue.

Eddie felt so hot now that it was suffocating and he was pretty sure he’d never felt this turned on in his life. At least that’s what he thought until Richie gripped at his waist and thighs to drag him closer, right to the edge of the dresser top, until Eddie had to spread his legs apart to accommodate Richie’s body between them. Richie was radiating heat against him and Eddie pulled at the shoulders of Richie’s shirt to get it off him, dropping it carelessly to the floor at their feet and he was a little bit irritated at the fact that Richie always wore more than one layer until he’d struggled with his t-shirt and relieved him of that, too.

He had to stop himself, in his fevered state, so that he could drag his lips away from Richie’s and admire his bare torso. He’d seen it before but never in a situation like this and he ran his hands over Richie’s rather broad shoulders, holding him away as Richie tried to and lean in and kiss him again. When Eddie continued to hold him back, Richie only dived in on his neck instead and Eddie got a little dizzy when he felt Richie sucking on his neck to leave mark after mark on him. This time he didn’t care, it felt so good and he moved in to attempt one on Richie’s neck, too, feeling Richie tense beneath him.

Richie’s lips detached from Eddie’s skin as he focused on the feeling of Eddie’s lips on him, now, getting a little lost in the euphoria of it. Eddie had no fucking idea what he was doing, he’d never left a hickey on anyone before but by the time he was done he’d left a satisfying bruise against Richie’s neck, just visible beneath his hair. Richie had gasped and groaned against Eddie’s shoulder all the way through it.

“Jesus fuck, Eds...”

Eddie was about to reply with a ‘don’t call me Eds’ but Richie caught his lips again as he was speaking and he sighed into it, grasping at the bare skin of Richie’s back and marvelling at its heat. His fingernails grazed it at one point, accidentally, and it caused Richie to shove him back with a groan, scrambling to relieve Eddie of his shirt, too. Eddie felt a shiver run through him as Richie slung an arm around his waist and pulled them back together, their bare skin touched and he felt Richie’s stomach against his own. Richie’s raised body temperature, in this situation, was more than welcome and Eddie couldn’t help but press his thighs against him just a little as they melted back into another messy kiss.
Just as he was getting used to Richie’s heat against him, Richie pulled away to trail kisses down Eddie’s chest. They were sort of wet and sloppy but Eddie couldn’t really force himself to care about how much of Richie’s saliva he was getting covered in as Richie’s tongue lapped over one of his hardened nipples and he briefly dropped his head back against the wall with a sharp gasp. He knew exactly where Richie was heading but he was so hard now that it was hurting and if Richie was going to give him some sort of relief then he wanted to let him get to it.

As he suspected, Richie’s messy kisses continued down to his abdomen and he bit at his lip when Richie briefly stood straight to unfasten his belt. Their eyes met briefly as Richie popped the button on Eddie’s trousers and slid the zip down but Eddie simply watched as Richie tugged the article of clothing off him completely and he heard the fabric hit the floor at Richie’s feet.

Richie gave a lingering look to Eddie as if to say ‘this is your last chance to stop me’, but Eddie knew that he wanted whatever Richie was about to do to him and he said nothing. He felt like Richie should have said something smart at this point but he only ducked back in to place some more teasing kisses low against Eddie’s abdomen, ringed fingers tugging the waistband of his underwear gradually lower and lower on his hips as his mouth followed. Eddie wanted to look away from the rest but he found that he couldn’t and he simply watched as Richie pulled his own erection free from the fabric. He didn’t have time to register the feeling of Richie’s fingers there, though, as Richie only seemed to think about it for a second before it was in his mouth.

Eddie’s head hit the wall again and he gasped out a rather loud ‘holy fuck’ as Richie’s hot, wet mouth went down on him and he was sure that if there was such a thing as seeing stars then this was it. He grasped his fingers into Richie’s thick, dark curls and he didn’t realise that he’d closed his eyes until he noticed that he could only feel Richie’s head moving beneath his hand and not see it. He didn’t want to see it, though. If he did he’d probably come right now and that would be really fucking embarrassing.

Richie didn’t seem to mind that Eddie was pulling on his hair quite roughly. If anything it encouraged him to go faster and Eddie swore out loud when Richie groaned from the back of his throat, once, when Eddie tugged his hair particularly hard and it caused a low vibration around him.

“Richie I…I’m gonna come,” Eddie breathed out as he felt Richie’s teeth lightly graze him but Richie only looked up at him and pulled his mouth away slowly. His lips were a little pink.

“No you’re not,” he chuckled a little although it sounded breathless and his eyes were…out of focus. Eddie realised now that he’d thrown Richie’s glasses somewhere and that he probably couldn’t see him properly from where he was crouched on the floor but he sort of liked the idea that he might be blurry to Richie in this situation.

Eddie moaned out loud when Richie stuck out his tongue to draw it up the underside of his shaft. He was pulling at Richie's hair so hard now that he was actually worried he might be hurting him. He was so…

“Rich…Richie I’m so close...”

He was close to begging now and Richie clearly knew it but he was thrown off by Eddie calling him ‘Rich’ in that fucking voice and he wished that Eddie hadn’t pitched his glasses so he could see the expression on his face to match it. He settled for taking Eddie back into his mouth, relishing in the ‘oh my god Richie yes’ that escaped from Eddie’s lips.

Eddie squirmed against the dresser and dragged his nails at the wood and breathed heavy as
Richie’s head bobbed between his thighs. He was pretty sure he’d never felt anything as good as this and he never would again. He couldn’t help but moan and gasp out Richie’s name over and over as he felt himself nearing the edge. Richie’s hair was tickling the insides of his thighs and the sensation only served to remind him that it was Richie Tozier’s head there and Richie Tozier’s mouth currently working him over.

He felt one of Richie’s hands gripping at his thigh and opened his eyes just enough to see the ringed fingers and bitten nails digging into his skin and the black hair falling against his stomach as Richie took him deeper and that was it. He came, hard, into Richie’s mouth and released his grip on Richie’s hair to grasp weakly at the edge of the dresser instead, whining out a ‘fuck’. He felt Richie gag a little but he didn’t move, although he seemed to be pinning Eddie down, now, to stop him from lifting his hips.

Richie kept him in until he was finished, only pulling away with a rather satisfying pop when he was sure that Eddie was done. He fumbled around on the carpet for his glasses straight away, shoving them onto his face. He was satisfied enough with what he saw. Eddie’s lips were bitten raw in some places and his skin was damp with a sheen of sweat. His eyes were closed but the freckles on his cheeks were prominent, now in the red behind them. His hair was messed up from where he’d been writhing against the wall.

Richie was shocked into silence for the first time in his life and he stood slowly to lean over and kiss Eddie. He wasn’t even pushed away and told that he was gross so he knew that Eddie must have really been riding the good waves.

Eddie felt absolutely fucking amazing and he kissed Richie back eagerly, ignoring the strange taste in his mouth that wasn’t all that pleasant. He pulled away from it as soon as he could, though, looking into Richie’s eyes so close that the frame of Richie’s glasses was touching the bridge of his own nose. He would have made a comment now about how disgusting Richie was but he could feel Richie’s arousal pressing into his thigh and he felt a little bit guilty.

“That was…the hottest thing I’ve ever witnessed or done in my life. Lord, I can die happy now,” Richie chuckled, placing his hands together in mock prayer and glancing at the ceiling. Eddie drew his attention back by reaching down between them to squeeze at the hard bulge in Richie’s jeans and it worked favourably enough, although Richie held Eddie’s hand in place.

“Don’t start something you don’t wanna finish, Eds.”

Eddie felt a little annoyed by this, clearly not one to back down from a challenge and he reached his other hand down, too, to unfasten Richie’s belt and jeans without breaking eye contact with him. Richie moved his own hand aside and Eddie saw him bite at his lip as he slid his palm inside Richie’s jeans and over his underwear. Eddie could feel a warm, damp spot in the fabric and he backtracked to touch it with his thumb.

“Ah, fuck…”

He felt Richie’s breath against his face as he pressed over that spot again and rubbed at it a little, enjoying the way it made the taller man crumble just slightly but he decided to give him some relief when Richie leaned against him. His thighs were still either side of him and he squeezed them against Richie’s waist, crossing his legs together against his back as he manoeuvred his hand inside Richie’s underwear to slide his fingers around the hot flesh. He forced away his own nerves as he slowly started to pump his hand up and down, feeling Richie’s breath against his shoulder, now, more unsteady and Eddie tightened his legs around him almost protectively.

“Fuck, Eddie, please go faster…I’m dying here…”
Eddie took the request gladly, feeling a little flushed at hearing Richie breathe out his name in such a sexual way and he moved his hand faster. It was a little bit difficult with the confines of Richie’s jeans but it seemed to be doing it for him anyway and he reached his free hand up to tangle his fingers into Richie’s hair as he both heard and felt him moan against his neck. It almost stirred his own arousal again but thankfully he was still too exhausted.

They were both a little overwhelmed, then, as Eddie squeezed his hand tighter and he felt something overcome him briefly as he held Richie against him, whispering ‘come on’ against his neck over and over but it came out almost sounding like a command and Richie’s gasps and moans, although quiet, became a little desperate. Eddie only worked him harder with each sound that came from him and it wasn’t long then until he felt Richie tense and his hips jerked against his own and there was something thick and wet running between Eddie’s fingers. Richie let out a loud, lusty sigh then and Eddie had to brace them both against the dresser as he felt Richie’s body go sort of weak against him.

He sat there for a while, on top of the dresser with Richie clamped in between his legs and his sweaty dark hair in between his fingers. Eddie’s throat was damp where Richie was breathing heavy against him but he couldn’t have cared less and he only held him tighter.

“…You’re gonna have to carry me to the bed…” Richie mumbled eventually and Eddie chuckled, knowing full well that he probably could if he tried but he still said ‘no’.

They shared another sloppy kiss when Richie finally got the strength to lift his head but Eddie stopped him this time and ordered him to go and brush his teeth. Richie wasn’t allowed to kiss him again until he did.

Once they had both cleaned up and they were lying together in the bed, both feeling adequately satisfied and relaxed, Eddie found that he couldn’t take his eyes off Richie. He was sort of in awe at how natural the whole thing had felt between them.

“You wanna go again or something?” Richie chuckled eventually from where his cheek was buried against the pillow with dark curls around him. He was still wearing all of his rings and bracelets, although he’d remembered to take off his glasses this time.

“I don’t think I could move if I wanted to,” Eddie replied and they both giggled rather drunkenly but it wasn’t the alcohol this time.

Eddie fell asleep facing Richie for once, watching him in the dark long after Richie had passed out himself and he decided that Richie looked rather…*beautiful*…when he was sleeping.

And he decided that maybe sleeping beside Richie Tozier wasn’t so bad after all.
Chapter 17

Chapter Summary

Just a little bit of fluff for a small break :) 

The next morning Eddie woke well before Richie did, like usual. He was sort of pleased when he opened his eyes to find Richie’s face close to his own, their heads sharing the same pillow. Richie was flat out, which was normal for him. Eddie thought that Richie would probably sleep through being murdered.

Eddie didn’t move away, instead taking some time to watch Richie’s sleeping face. There were dark strands of curly hair falling over his eyes and just brushing his nose, where pale skin highlighted the faded freckles from his youth. Eddie had always thought that Richie’s lips looked strangely soft and...kissable. Inviting, even. They looked even more so to him now and his cheeks heated as he remembered what those lips had been doing to him the night before. It didn’t seem real now.

He watched silently as Richie shifted in his sleep, burying his face into the pillow so that less of it was visible, particularly beneath his hair. Eddie wanted to reach over, to push the curls out of Richie’s eyes, to wind strands of it around his fingers, to maybe tidy it up a bit but he didn’t dare. He could imagine Richie’s smug look now if he woke up to Eddie petting him like some kind of soft animal.

One of Richie’s hands was close to Eddie’s above the sheets, all tangled bracelets and mismatched rings. Eddie saw that Richie’s nails looked to have once been painted black but they were bitten right down to the quick and there were only small flakes of polish left here and there. His skin was flecked with tiny scars that looked like they might be from cigarette ash burns. Eddie knew that if he turned Richie’s hand he would see the scar running across the centre of his palm that matched his own.

He twitched his fingers, feather light against Richie’s and then down to the back of his hand, examining his jewellery. On his index finger was a chunky, silver ring lined with small spikes which looked like it might have some weight to it. His ring finger was adorned with what looked like a black, jelly bracelet that had been wound around until it was the right width. It was a little too tight and there were red welts visible around its edges. There was a ring on his pinky finger, too and Eddie felt his heart skip a beat when he looked at it. It was a little, plastic, gold ring stamped with tiny lettering which read ‘Captain Midnight’. It was too small to even fit properly on Richie’s pinky, although he’d pushed it down as far as it would go, just above his knuckle. Eddie recognised it immediately. It was the same ring he had used to wear on his own pinky finger after he found it in a cereal box as a child. He rarely took it off. Eddie had presumed it to be lost and yet here it was, nearly ten years later, on the finger of an adult Richie Tozier.

Eddie felt his eyes well up a little as he watched Richie’s face. The dumb piece of shit had kept it all this time? Why?

‘So he wouldn’t forget you, of course,’ a small voice said in the back of his mind but Eddie shooed it away. That was a ridiculous thought.
But it made him look at Richie differently. Suddenly his area of the bed felt cold and he wanted to be against Richie’s body heat, wrapped around him. He wanted to touch those soft lips and kiss them. He wanted to put his face into those curls and breathe in Richie’s familiar scent, even if it was old cigarette smoke and cheap cologne. It was Richie.

He shifted closer, feeling strangely comfortable in the soft heat of Richie’s breath. Richie’s eyes still weren’t visible, even closed and Eddie wanted to see his whole face but his mess of hair was in the way. Reaching up, gently and slowly as if he was performing some kind of operation, Eddie used his pointer finger to brush the curls to the side. Richie’s dark eyelashes flinched and Eddie froze but it was a false alarm and Richie only breathed out a heavy, contented sigh in his sleep which caused Eddie’s lips to twitch into a smile. He could see the mark he’d left on Richie’s neck, blotchy and purple, just below his hairline and felt strangely proud.

Strangely, Eddie was overcome with a sudden protectiveness and he brushed Richie’s hair off his face properly and touched his cheek, thinking now that he probably wasn’t going to wake from such light contact. His skin was warm and smooth and Eddie caressed it with his fingertips down to pink lips and lingered there for a second. Why had Eddie never realised that Richie was so…soft?

There was breath against Eddie’s palm suddenly as Richie murmured against it.

“Are you gonna kiss me, or what?”

Eddie drew his hand away like he’d been burned, although when Richie’s eyes didn’t open he did lean in to press his lips against him. He’d been wanting to, anyway.

This kiss was gentle and pleasant and Eddie melted against him as Richie’s arm slid around to pull him closer. They hadn’t properly dressed last night and with both still in their underwear, Eddie was rewarded with Richie’s warm, bare skin against him. This time it wasn’t a shock but it was welcome, even with Richie’s long legs tangled against his own.

“Good morning,” Richie breathed with a smile before they’d even broken apart properly. His eyes opened, now and Eddie looked closely at the dark brown rings around pupils that were still wide from sleep, feeling a little…if he could ever comprehend it…lovestruck.

“Morning,” Eddie muttered in quick reply. Richie was now running his fingers through Eddie’s hair, across his scalp and it was making him lose his train of thought. He had never thought of Richie as an affectionate person but here he was, all sleepy-eyed and messy-haired, rubbing the back of Eddie’s neck and looking at him like he was the last thing he was ever going to see.

Richie kissed him again and again, each one soft and fleeting, more like he was caressing Eddie’s lips with his own and Eddie leaned in to him as Richie’s arms slid around his waist, tight and safe and warm and he couldn’t believe that this was the same Richie Tozier he’d fought with just two days before when Richie had woken him up by putting a dirty sock on his face.

He felt a little bit irritated when he thought about it, pulling away from the kisses but Richie’s arms were still holding him in place.

“Okay that’s enough,” Eddie murmured, “I have to go and take my medication.”

“No ya don’t,” Richie chuckled, removing an arm from around him to lift Eddie’s wrist and examine the face of the black watch around it. Eddie had kept something similar throughout his whole life so far to remind him when to take specific medicines –there were a lot-, “It’s only…seven fifty two. We have…eight whole minutes…”
Eddie was both irritated and pleasantly surprised that Richie somehow knew the time his alarm would go off. Richie let go of Eddie’s wrist and pulled him close again.

“Hmm…I wonder what we could do in eight minutes…”

Eddie saw Richie coming in for another kiss, potentially a less innocent one this time and he turned his head so that Richie’s lips hit his cheek instead. Richie didn’t seem to mind this and he kissed along Eddie’s jaw to his neck, latching himself on there and Eddie squirmed a little. The multiple bruises Richie had already given him were sore and sensitive.

“Richie, we’re not doing this right now.”

“Yes we are,” Richie mumbled against Eddie’s neck between kisses. He felt Richie’s hand sliding down between them to try and palm at Eddie’s crotch but Eddie grabbed his wrist.

“Richie, stop…”

Eddie was trying to be annoyed but Richie’s hair was tickling him under the chin and the ‘stop’ came out more like a giggle than anything. Richie chuckled, too and Eddie briefly noted to never wake Richie up this early again if it meant he’d be so annoying.

“It just doesn’t sound like you mean it, Eds.”

Richie’s tongue snaked up to Eddie’s ear and, to Eddie’s slight horror, he felt both of Richie’s hands plant right on his ass cheeks and squeeze. His immediate reaction was to grasp at Richie’s arms to drag them away, struggling with him for a while before he eventually rolled him away. Although it didn’t have the desired effect and Eddie, still in Richie’s grip, was pulled on top of him.

“Wow, okay, Eddie. I mean, if you want to do it like this I’m not gonna stop you,” Richie smirked as Eddie sat up to try and climb out of Richie’s lap while Richie held a tight grip on his thighs. He was a little flustered, now.

“Get your fucking hands off me,” Eddie ordered, pushing against Richie’s chest. When this had no effect, he punched him hard in the stomach, clambering off the bed as Richie released his grip and doubled over onto his side, winded. Eddie was definitely strong when he wanted to be. Richie had found this out on more than one occasion.

“Eds…”

Eddie flipped him the bird over his shoulder as he went into the bathroom to get washed up, although he was smiling the whole way.

It wasn’t until Eddie was cleaned and dressed himself that the real drama began. Much to his disgust he had noticed that Richie had pulled on the same clothes he had been wearing the night before, after picking them up from the bedroom floor where they’d been left in a crumpled heap. What’s more, he was certain, now he thought about it, that he’d seen Richie wearing that t-shirt a few days before.

“Aren’t you gonna change your clothes?” he asked accusingly from the bathroom doorway. There was a red and white plastic capsule held between his teeth, which he promptly swallowed with a glass of water.

Richie didn’t say anything but he looked at Eddie with a questioning, raised eyebrow as if he was thinking ‘why would I do such a thing?’
“I saw you wearing that shirt, like, three days ago,” Eddie pointed out as Richie sat to pull on his boots, tucking the laces into the sides rather than tying them.

“So?” Richie shrugged, turning to sniff his own shoulder, “It still smells fine.”

Eddie grimaced and took the last two of his pills, taking the glass of water back into the bathroom to empty it out before returning with a serious look on his face.

“Richie, you can’t wear that again. It’s gross.”

Eddie went to where Richie had dropped his bag in the corner of the room. It wasn’t really large enough, Eddie thought, to fit the amount of clothes that Richie probably should have brought with him on this trip. When he unzipped the top to look inside, he realised that this was true. The bag wasn’t even full and its only contents were a pair of faded black jeans with a hole in the pocket, a couple of old t-shirts, three hideous, short-sleeved shirts with large, garish, graphic prints, a grey hooded sweatshirt with an unrecognisable, peeling logo on its front, a few pairs of socks, some dirty underwear, two cigarette lighters, an empty, crumpled packet of Marlboro menthol cigarettes and an array of random items of jewellery which looked like they had been dropped as a handful into the bag. There were three condoms in one of the open inside pockets and an empty condom wrapper but Eddie didn’t want to think about those so he zipped it back up.

“Have you been wearing the same fucking jeans since we got here?” Eddie asked as he turned to Richie, who had been calmly watching him rummage through his things from where he was still sitting on the bed.

“Yeah,” Richie shrugged, picking at the frayed edges around one of the holes on his knees nonchalantly, “They’re still good.”

“Yeah, maybe for a fucking homeless person,” Eddie shuddered. He hadn’t thought about that in a long time. He lifted the other pair of jeans out of the bag and held them up, “At least change into these ones.”

“For the record, I’ve already worn those, too,” Richie said as he pointed to them.

Eddie dropped them back into the bag with a sigh.

“You only brought one extra pair of pants?”

Richie didn’t reply to this, only raising his eyebrows in a ‘yeah, so?’ kind of way.

“Where are you keeping your wallet?” Eddie asked as he turned back to look through the jumbled bag again.

Richie stood from the bed and patted one of his back pockets, pulling out a credit card briefly and a few crumpled notes before stuffing them back in.

“Okay…how are you washing your face? Did you not bring any toiletries?”

“I’ll show you how. It’s easy,” Richie said sarcastically, going into the bathroom before Eddie could stop him and Eddie heard him turn on the tap and splash some water around. When he returned the ends of his hair were slightly damp, “Voila.”

Thankfully, Eddie knew that Richie’s toothbrush was in the bathroom and he’d seen him brush his teeth, or he might have questioned that, too.
“Fine,” Eddie sighed, “But you can’t keep wearing…that.” He motioned to Richie’s ensemble and Richie looked a little bit offended.

“These are my best clothes.”

“No it’s not what you’re wearing that’s the problem. At least not right now. It’s the fact that you’re gonna start smelling like B.O. and I don’t wanna be around you when that happens. Plus, we have to share a fucking room and a bed and I’m not sleeping next to your gross, sweaty ass when your clothes are covered in bacteria and dead skin cells and hair and stuff that’s just been sitting there growing and fucking…multiplying and…it’s just gross, okay? Please change your clothes.”

Richie had raised his hands in mock surrender about half way through this lecture.

“Okay. Jesus fucking Christ, Eds. I get it. I’ll change. Give me some of your clothes.”

“…My clothes aren’t gonna fit you, dickface.”

“Well, then I guess we’re back to square one,” Richie said rather triumphantly, looking pleased. 

_Eddie wasn’t having that._

They were knocking on Bill and Stan’s door not two minutes later. Well, _Eddie_ was, Richie had been reluctantly dragged along with him, complaining bitterly and threatening to go and share Ben’s room instead.

Bill answered the door, greeting them both with a dazzling smile and letting them straight inside with a soft ‘G-good morning, guys.’

“Richie needs to borrow some clothes from someone,” Eddie said the instant he had returned Bill’s ‘Good Morning’ and stepped into the room. Bill closed the door behind them.

“Where’s Stan?” Richie asked, opening the closet doors and sticking his head inside, “Stan?!”

He laughed and closed the doors again when he saw Eddie and Bill giving him less-than-amused looks.

“I’m kidding!”

“He went to get some more t-towels. Richie, you can borrow some of my c-clothes if you want,” Bill said from where he was now tidying away some pencils on the desk, brushing shavings into a trashcan with the edge of his hand. Eddie perched himself in the chair next to him.

“No offense, Bill, but I don’t think your pants are gonna fit Richie. He’s like a fucking gazelle.”

“Beautiful and graceful, he means, of course,” Richie chuckled, lounging across the end of the bed languidly. His legs were sticking quite far off, “And I would love to get into your pants again, Bill, but I don’t think Eddie would appreciate being a witness to that.”

“No, he wouldn’t,” Eddie sighed, “So it’ll have to be Stan’s clothes, then. You and Stan are about the same height, right?”

“I think so. I mean I think he’s even taller than me. He’s like…overcompensating for something,” Richie said as he chewed at his nails, chuckling.

“No, h-he’s not,” Bill said briefly –and quietly–, raising his eyebrows as he walked over to the closet. Stan’s suitcase was stashed neatly inside it and he opened the doors to drag it out, carefully,
“We should w-wait until he gets back, though. He doesn’t like people touching his stuff.”

“Are you sure about that Bill? Because it sounds to me like you already have,” Richie smirked, but Bill ignored him and looked at Eddie.

“H-he should be back soon.”

As if on cue, the door opened and Stan came in, carrying four freshly cleaned and folded towels in his arms. He looked at them all rather suspiciously as he walked by, Richie in particular, who gave him a sexy pose on the bed and greeted him with a sultry ‘hey, baby’. Stan didn’t react to it.

“What are you doing with my case?” Stan asked Bill as he placed the towels neatly onto a shelf high up in the closet.

“R-Richie needs to borrow some cuh-clothes but my stuff probably won’t fit.”

Stan sighed at this, glancing over at Richie, who waggled his eyebrows.

“Ugh, fine.”

Stan took the suitcase away from Bill to place it neatly against the floor and open it up. As expected of him, the items inside were folded so perfectly it looked like some kind of display at a travel agent. Not only that, but everything seemed to be colour-coordinated. Richie rolled off the bed onto his feet to come over and examine it and Stan looked absolutely panic-stricken when he started to rifle through it. Bill had to come over and move Richie away as Stan carefully re-organised every single item, sorting through them himself as Richie rolled his eyes obnoxiously.

“Okay. Here.” Stan held out a folded pile of clothes to him, watching Richie’s hands as he took it and seeming a little bit uncomfortable about it. The clothes were pristine and Richie’s nails looked dirty with what was probably tobacco stains.

Richie undressed in front of them all, handing the items he took off to Stan when he wouldn’t let him drop them on the floor or any other surface. Stan folded them for him, although he was holding them very gingerly like he thought he might be contracting some kind of disease from the fabric.

After redressing into what Stan had given him, beige slacks with a belt and a navy blue button-up shirt with three-quarter sleeves which didn’t have a single crease, Richie went to look in the bathroom mirror and balked. Stan’s shoes wouldn’t fit him so much to everyone’s dismay he had to keep his dirty boots. Thankfully, it didn’t look too bad.

“Oh my god I look like someone’s dad.”

“Nobody’s dad would have hair like that,” Eddie helpfully commented as the other three joined him in the bathroom to observe, “Seriously, dude, get a haircut.”

Eddie chuckled when Richie gave him a scathing look.

“When was the last time you washed your hair?” Stan added, standing behind Richie to peer at the top of his head.

“Or brushed it?” Eddie said with folded arms as he leaned against the wall.

“Guys don’t brush their hair.”
Stan caught Richie’s eyes in the mirror and the look on his face made all of them laugh.

“Please tell me that was a joke.”

Bill had already taken a comb from the top of the counter beside the sink where there were a few toiletries that obviously weren’t Stan’s as they weren’t placed neatly enough. He stood next to Stan to drag the comb through Richie’s hair, as carefully as he could. Richie still complained, a lot, that it was hurting and that this is why he didn’t brush his hair and that he hated Bill until Stan eventually took the comb and did it himself. Somehow when Stan was doing it, Richie didn’t complain and Stan just muttered something about there being a technique for curly hair that Bill obviously didn’t know.

“Is that moisturiser?” Richie said suddenly, as Stan was delicately combing the last sections of dark hair with Eddie watching.

“Y-yeah,” Bill chuckled, shrugging and tucking his hands into his trouser pockets, “So what?”

“Bill…please don’t do this to me. I thought we were the only men left here. Now I just have Ben.”

He winced as Stan tugged at his hair on purpose with the comb and Bill and Eddie laughed.

“What do you even do with it?”

“It’s in the name, Richie,” Eddie said with an eye roll, “You moisturise with it.”

“My f-face,” Bill chuckled, patting one of his own cheeks briefly and winking at Richie in the mirror, “Baby soft.”

“Okay, let me out of here,” Richie said decidedly when Stan was placing the comb back with Bill’s things –after picking Richie’s hair out of it-. He pushed past Eddie to get out of the bathroom as Bill laughed.

Eddie seemed to be quite pleased with the new fresh and smartly-dressed Richie. He walked beside him as they went to Ben’s room to get him, and sat beside him purposely at the breakfast table. Richie’s new look seemed to be the talk of the morning and now, as Ben obviously needed to shave and was sporting very casual clothes, for once he wasn’t the scruffiest-looking one there.

As usual, Bill ate more than anyone else, even Richie and they marvelled once again at how he could possibly stay so slim. Ben seemed to be much more careful about what he ate as an adult and was having some kind of raisin and nut and seed combination –Richie argued that it wasn’t real cereal–, Eddie was healthy as usual with a bowl of fresh fruit, although he did steal some of Bill and Richie’s breakfasts and Stan had exactly the same as he did every morning, buttered toast cut into perfect triangles and a cup of black coffee.

They were going to explore Derry again today with Ben and somehow his presence made them all feel more confident about it. Bill thought that he wouldn’t even mind going down into The Barrens again with Ben there.

Something was starting to change. Something in the air that none of them could explain but could all feel. Something that felt familiar.

Something like hope.
Chapter 18

The thought of this strange feeling of hope was still on Bill’s mind as they strolled through Derry town centre and past the various stores, most of which had changed since their childhoods. Although there was another feeling that he couldn’t quite shake off. He felt a sort of uneasy anticipation that was making him tense up every time anyone spoke. Bill wasn’t the sort to let things get to him and the feeling was new and strange and he didn’t like it.

He was unsure of whether or not the others could feel this, too. Stan was quiet as usual, Eddie and Richie walked side-by-side, engaging in their normal back-and-forth banter –Richie kept trying to hold Eddie’s hand and Eddie was having none of it- and Ben simply seemed excited to be back in Derry. It was quite cute, actually, the way his eyes lit up whenever he saw something he recognised.

He was particularly enthusiastic about the library and much to Richie’s dismay they had to go inside with him to allow him to browse for some new books. He came out of there with a stack of about five books, carrying them contentedly in his arms as they continued their tour.

Richie was horrified again when Ben spotted an entirely new bookstore which seemed to have two floors and various rooms for different genres. They tried to convince him that he already had enough books but he was already inside and it was a lost cause. Eddie stayed outside with Richie when he refused to go in, although he kept his distance from him as Richie lit a cigarette.

Stan went straight to the bird books, just like usual and Bill browsed the horror section as Ben basically scoured the entire store. There didn’t seem to be something that he wouldn’t read. Stan was pleased to find that this store was much cleaner than the library had been and he ran his finger along the neatly lined up spines of some large encyclopaedias. It was a complete set and they all fit together perfectly on the shelf and the sight of it made him feel very content. There was gentle music playing from some kind of sound system throughout the store. He felt that he quite liked this shop.

“Stan.”

He heard Bill’s voice from somewhere behind him and turned to find that he wasn’t there, feeling a little confused. He rounded the bookcase to the other side, assuming that Bill must be there but there was nobody. Shaking his head a little at his own mind playing tricks on him, he continued to browse through the shelves, picking out a small but thick book about bird-watching that seemed to have almost every species inside it, listed by country of origin. There were blank spaces in the margin for the owner to mark which birds they had ‘collected’.

He placed it carefully back onto the shelf when he heard Bill’s voice again calling his name, a little louder this time but he still couldn’t find him when he looked.

“Bill?”

“Over here.”

Stan looked towards the next room, where the voice seemed to have come from. He stepped through the open archway and inside. This room was smaller and seemed to contain books that weren’t really suitable for children. Horror fiction books in one corner, Mills and Boon-type
novellas in another which was labelled ‘Erotica’ with a warning and a sign which showed a large number eighteen. Bill definitely wasn’t in here, either, although there was a guy browsing the aforementioned adult section with a nervous look about him and Stan quickly swept past to the next room which contained dictionaries and language and travel books. This room, too, was empty.

He was about to turn around and make his way back to the front of the store when he suddenly noticed something. On one of the shelves, directly in his line of sight, was a large book which stuck out from the rest. On its spine, in large, gold letters, it read ‘Stanley Uris’. He blinked hard a few times before stepping towards the mysterious book, afraid of what he was about to find but unable to stop his curiosity. His mind was screaming at him to ignore it and turn back but…it looked so out of place and the gold letters were glistening at him beckoningly and he reached out his fingers to take it from the shelf.

There was nothing on the cover of the book, just a blank, black space and he knew that whatever it was trying to tell him was probably inside. His heart pounded in his chest as he flipped open the cover to the first page.

Blank.

So was the second.

And the third.

He ran his fingertips across the pages, feeling annoyed at himself for falling for something so stupid but…then there was a sudden drop of water, right onto the page as if it came from nowhere and as he watched, it turned red and bled out as it soaked into the paper. Then there was another drop…and another…like soft rain on the pages, each one turning the colour of blood as it hit the paper and although he looked up he couldn’t see where the water was coming from. He looked back down at the book. The pages were now swimming with red and it was leaking out onto his hands and wrists, dribbling down the sides of his arms and soaking into his shirt cuffs. He watched in horror as the wet pages turned, then, faster and faster until it suddenly stopped on the very last page, upon which was a small, silver object. A razor blade, stuck to the paper with a small piece of tape. Underneath it, written messily in red ink, it said ‘AND THEN THERE WERE SIX’.

The book fell to the floor with a loud thud as he dropped it, rubbing at the red on his hands but it wouldn’t come off and his shirt sleeves were stained and his hands were shaking. He didn’t know what it had meant…but something about it scared him to his very core.

“H...hel..p...”

He looked up as he heard a crackling voice, seemingly coming from one of the speakers close to the ceiling which had, seconds before been playing soft, classical music. The voice continued to speak and he couldn’t quite make out the words, like a bad connection through a phone. It was breaking in and out of focus and he instinctively moved closer to try and make out their words.

“H..elp...me...”

Stan stumbled back, wide eyed, as he realised with utter terror that it was his own voice he could hear. There was something else, too…

“Please. Please. Please.”

He shook his head in disbelief but there was no doubt now in his mind that he was hearing himself. The voice was thick as if the words were being spoken through tears. As it came more into focus
he realised that the other sound was…running water…like a sink…or a bathtub.

“Help me. I can’t…I can’t do it…help me…”

The sound was clear, now, amplified through the entire sound system of the store and he was sure that everyone else must be able to hear it, too. His heart felt like it was going to break out of his chest.

“I just want it to stop…”

He backed away from the speaker, now, holding his hands against his ears but it only seemed to get louder when he did, like it was coming from inside his own head.

“…Just let me die…”

He screamed, then, shaking his head and trying to run from the room but…there was…smoke? There was black smoke filling the next room, pouring in past him and he was sure that it wasn’t real but when he breathed in it stung and he coughed. His eyes watered as he stumbled blindly through it anyway, feeling the panic rising in him as he realised that he could feel heat, too.

A fire?

“BILL?! BEN?!”

He screamed their names as loud as he could but the smoke came into his airways as he took another deep breath and he felt like he was choking. He turned in every direction, seeing nothing but thick smoke and then…bright orange…burning…something was on fire and it was close. He had the sudden, horrific thought of all of the millions of books in this building, dry, easy kindling which would go up in flames fast.

He shouted for them again but his voice came out weaker and he was starting to feel a little light-headed. He pulled off his coat as it started to get much too warm, covering his mouth and nose briefly with it but it was too thick and he couldn’t breathe through the material so he dropped it instead, fumbling blindly through the haze and only seeming to find tall bookshelves blocking his path.

Panic was all that he could find, now. The room was getting hotter by the second and he could now hear a faint crackling and spitting as wood and paper caught ablaze. His eyes stung and there was a faint pounding in his head and he knew that he had to get out of here as soon as he could.

He screamed for help, still fumbling around as bookcases that seemed to come out of nowhere blocked his path. He was sure that there hadn’t been this many before. It was a trap, he knew it was, and he’d walked right into it. How stupid, that this was how he was going to die.

“STAN!” He heard Bill’s voice clearly now, through the heavy air and this time he knew it wasn’t a trick. Bill was trapped in here, too.

“BILL, HELP ME! I…I can’t see I can’t…I can’t breathe!”

“WHERE ARE YOU?!”

“I d…I don’t know!”

He was sobbing, now. He could feel the tears streaking his heated cheeks. His palms were sweating as he tried to push a fallen bookcase out of his path. He could hear wood popping and
cracking all around him as the store seemed to be collapsing piece by piece.

“I CAN SEE THE DOOR! JUST COME TOWARDS MY VOICE! STAN, IT’S OKAY! YOU CAN DO THIS!”

Stan tried to reply but it just came out as a half-sob, half-shout and it didn’t make any sense. He climbed over the fallen bookcase. Everything was getting brighter in the flames but darker in the smoke and his eyes were stinging so badly that he could barely open them, now. His head was throbbing and he felt like he was going to vomit.

Another bookcase came crashing down in front of him again and he could see the one next to it about to topple. He was right in its path. He let out another choked sob as he continued to listen to Bill’s voice, shouting encouragements at him and telling him that it was going to be okay. He didn’t stutter on a single word. His vision was starting to deteriorate rapidly, now and whenever he took a step he was struck with such bad vertigo that he felt like he would collapse. The bookcase was about to fall right onto him and when it did, he would be trapped beneath it. That would be the end of Stanley Uris. He was about to die in a fire in a bookstore in Derry. He took a deep breath, coughing and spluttering before he could speak again. Bill’s voice was barely audible over the crackling flames.

“…BILL!” He struggled to speak and it came out sounding unlike his own voice but it was loud enough, “BILL…I…I LOVE YOU! I LOVE YOU!”

He was crying through it and he heard Bill’s voice stop. There was a brief silence between them before Bill screamed out a ‘STAN, NO’, but the bookcase collapsed on top of him just as everything went black.
Outside the bookstore, Eddie and Richie watched the building go up in flames. The fire had started so suddenly that neither of them had a chance to do a thing about it. One minute they were arguing about the dangers of smoking –Eddie knew he was winning when Richie pitched the death stick into the road angrily- and the next they had both stumbled back in reaction to the heat of the sudden roaring fire engulfing the store. For a brief, horrifying second, Richie had checked to see where his still-lit, half-smoked cigarette had actually landed, as if it could have possibly started a fire so quickly and so large.

Richie had already prevented Eddie from entering the fast-collapsing building more than once and he was now holding him back from behind with Eddie shrieking and sobbing and clutching so desperately at Richie’s arms to try to free himself that he was leaving scratches on his skin. The smoke was thick, even out here in the fresh air and Eddie was already rasping on inward breaths; his panic was only making it worse and Richie was damned if he was going to let him even attempt some sort of impossible rescue mission. Richie was sure that he would go in himself if it weren’t for Eddie but then there would be no-one to stop Eddie from following him straight into the death trap.

―LET GO OF ME!‖ Eddie screamed, high-pitched through his tears as he fought to try and reach the door but Eddie was weakened in his emotional state and he dragged Eddie away from the side of the building just as one of the store windows blew out from the heat. Richie spun them as quick as he could to shield Eddie, feeling the intense heat on his back as flames licked the sides of the jagged window frame and tried to spread out into the street. He felt shards of glass hit him; one nicked the back of his head even through his thick mess of hair and another cut open his arm just beneath his elbow where he had rolled up the sleeves of his jacket. Eddie was still screaming, although it was quickly turning to broken sobs as he found it harder to breathe.

Back inside, Bill was struggling through the smoke, hysterically calling Stan’s name. He had heard his voice briefly, heard the panic in it until he had suddenly gone quiet. Bill had heard something crash to the ground and that was when he stopped hearing Stan and it had made his breath stop in his chest.

‘I LOVE YOU’

He had heard Stan say those words. He hadn’t had time to say them back and that was what terrified him the most.

What if he never got to?

He forced that thought aside as he continued to stumble over debris. Pieces of splintered wood and books upon books with their pages spilling out covered the ground. Bill could see the flames close to him. It was as if every single wall was on fire, surrounding him in some kind of hellish trap. He didn’t care about that, though, as he fought his way towards where he thought Stan’s voice had been coming from. The bookstore seemed so much larger now and no matter how far he thought he’d gone he still felt like he was in the same small room. The fire, though…the fire was definitely closing in…and fast. He had discarded his coat long ago as the temperature rose and he felt like he was suffocating but now it was gone he felt unprotected. His skin was damp and his clothes and hair were sticking to him but an extra layer of fabric might have given him some sort of barrier between the flames and his bare skin. He forced that thought aside, too, feeling himself getting dizzy in the heat as he continued to search desperately for Stan.
Stan was sure that he was dead. He was sure this time. Everything had gone black and silent but…
in the back of his mind…he was sure that he could still feel it…the fire…getting closer and closer
to his skin. But he couldn’t feel anything else. Surely that meant that he was dead…or at least
dying? Although…once or twice, the silence crackled in and out…and he heard shouting…
screaming. His mind barely registered these sounds, let alone put a face to the voices or
constructed a scenario out of them.

And then he had the oddest sensation that he was flying. His whole body felt light, like he weighed
nothing at all. Maybe not flying…maybe…floating…being carried by a soft current in slow-
flowing water. It was a pleasant feeling.

But it didn’t last long and suddenly he felt heat again…intense and uncomfortable and
enveloping…and he could feel his body again and it ached. Everything about him ached but he
couldn’t move. His head…oh, his head throbbed like nothing he had ever felt in his life and it
made his stomach turn and he vomited…at least he thought he might have and for a second he
wondered if he might choke, lying on his back like this but something turned his head to the side…
or maybe he did it himself…he wasn’t sure.

And then he realised that he could open his eyes…just a touch…but…all he saw was bright…
bright…harsh…bright and dull at the same time…smoke…he was looking through thick smoke…
and it burned his throat whenever he breathed but maybe that was the vomit…his chin felt sticky…
all of him felt sticky…unbearable heat and he wanted to close his eyes and float again in the soft
current…

…but suddenly there was a face…a man’s face…he was handsome and his skin was dark…
glowing gold almost in the brightness…and Stan thought that he might know that face but…maybe
he’s just delusional…and the man was saying his name, he watched lips form the right shapes for
it but nothing reached his ears…

‘Maybe this man is an angel’, he thought briefly, before everything went dark again.

Eddie and Richie were awestruck when they watched Mike Hanlon carrying Stan’s seemingly
lifeless body out of the burning building towards them. He was unmistakeable to them, then, as one
of the last pieces missing from their world and Richie found himself crying, too just at the sight of
him. They raced towards him after as he placed Stan’s body on the sidewalk, setting him down as
easily as if he was carrying a small child. Stan was dead, at least that’s the way it looked to them.
But Eddie jolted into action despite this, dropping to his knees beside him to make some quick
observations. He was pale, deathly pale, unresponsive. Eddie noted the black smudges around his
nose and mouth as clear signs of smoke inhalation. Hoping that he’d simply passed out from the
heat, Eddie opened his eyes gently as Mike and Richie knelt at the other side of Stan. Eddie felt his
own chest grow tighter still as he noted Stan’s dilated pupils, closing his eyes again quickly so he
didn’t have to see it. Mike helped as Eddie immediately started CPR, with Richie watching and
Eddie could see Richie’s hands shaking out of the corner of his eye.

He knew that Richie was going to get up before he even did it. He was going to go into the
building now that Eddie was occupied with Stan to try and get Bill and Ben. Eddie felt sick when
he thought about them still being in there and right now he only had room in his mind for the
thought that, despite their attempts, Stan was still completely unresponsive. Mike’s hands touched
Eddie’s briefly as he pressed them against Stan’s chest and the contact made Eddie start to cry
again.

“You can’t die…” he said aloud, his voice thick and wavering as he leaned down to press his lips
against Stan’s. Eddie would be happy for his own breath to die in his chest this very second if it
meant that Stan could take it instead. He saw his own tears fall onto Stan’s soot-stained cheeks as he pulled away and this time Mike had to take over. Eddie felt like the world around him was turning into a blur. His chest hurt so fucking bad and he couldn’t stop crying but he didn’t want to. He would spend the rest of his life crying, now. He swore he would. He would cry until there were no tears left in the world for anyone else and whatever higher power was out there would regret taking Stan away from him.

Eddie almost didn’t register Ben, dropping to his knees beside him to help Mike in Eddie’s place. Ben was crying, too, and taking deep, heaving breaths in the fresh air. He took over from Mike and Eddie saw, in his haze of tears, Mike taking what looked like a cell phone out of his pocket, dial a number and lift it to his ear. His lips moved and Eddie knew that he was talking to someone but it was white noise.

And then, as Eddie turned his head to the quickly crumbling building that was once a bookstore, he saw Bill fly out of the door and crash into Richie, who seemed to have been waiting for him. And Richie was holding him back and Eddie heard something…something he’d never heard before in his life…in all of his years…and he knew that it was Bill screaming…screaming and crying and he was trying to speak but Eddie could see that no words would come out of his mouth and he seemed to collapse into Richie and for a second Eddie thought that he might have fainted.

And then there were sirens and flashing lights and Eddie was dragged away from Stan. He saw the same thing happen to Ben and Mike and then there were paramedics all around Stan and he was blocked from Eddie’s view. Eddie barely registered Ben’s arms wrapping tightly around him until he was pulled against a warm chest and he started to sob again, hard. Ben was crying against the top of Eddie’s head, into his hair.

Eddie felt like he was dying, too.

He knew that they all felt it.

He heard the sound of a defibrillator. He’d know it anywhere after spending so much of his life in hospitals in A&E. He heard it louder than anything else, louder than Mike’s voice, warm and deep and comforting as he stood with Ben and himself, louder even than Bill’s piercing sobs as Richie kept him standing.

One hit.

Electricity.

Eddie felt it in his own chest and he jumped.

Ben’s fingers dug into Eddie’s back.

Mike’s voice stopped.

Another hit.
Eddie gasped.

Ben did, too.

He saw Mike clutch at his heart.

One more hit and then…

…Eddie’s chest felt light and he heard…felt…all six of them take a deep breath at the same time. He started crying again, only this time he felt…overwhelming relief…

And he looked over…just in time…to see Stan open his eyes.
Chapter 20

Richie hadn’t registered much of it, either.

He remembered feeling, when he saw Mike carrying Stan’s pale, limp body, like someone had grasped his heart in both of their hands and squeezed. It was painful, so painful, more painful than anything Richie had ever felt in his life. His mind had gone numb, then, but he still remembered seeing Eddie…beautiful, grief-stricken Eddie whose face was streaked with heavy tears…as he and Mike tried desperately to resuscitate their best friend. He remembered hearing Ben break through the door next to him, gasping and wheezing but when Richie tried to grab him, to comfort him Ben only pushed him aside to go and help Mike. He could see the soot in Ben’s hair just as he could see it stark against the corners of Stan’s blue lips, even from here.

And he remembered Bill. Richie didn’t know when he had known that Bill was about to emerge from the burning building but some part of him just sensed it and he lay in wait, knowing that he had to try, however he could, to keep Bill away from Stan and the others. Bill would be in no fit state to help. He knew that much. He remembered feeling Bill collide with his own chest as he moved to block him, remembered hearing Bill’s screaming loud in his ear and how it made him want to scream, too, remembered the sensation of Bill shaking in his arms as he collapsed against him. He felt Bill’s grief as well as his own and it was too much and he wanted to cry out, too, wanted to break down but fuck, Bill needed him now more than Bill had ever needed him before. Bill was hot against him, hot and damp with sweat but seemingly weakened and Richie had held him tight and took most if not all of Bill’s weight as he sobbed, each sound breaking Richie’s heart a little bit more.

When Stan was taken away from them in the ambulance, sirens blaring, Bill was inconsolable. And suddenly they were all around him, then, trying to comfort him even through their own sorrow. But then Bill had seen Eddie crying and heard his choked whimpering as he tried to catch his breath and he’d moved away from Richie’s chest to stand and take Eddie firmly into his own arms. Ben took Eddie’s inhaler out of his pocket and helped him to use it as Bill stroked at his back, still crying against Eddie’s shoulder. Richie watched, feeling all of his energy drain out of him suddenly until he, too, was pulled against someone and he realised that it was Mike. Richie sobbed, then, too as Mike cradled him and held strong fingers in his hair and a warm voice told him in his ear that it would be okay.

None of them spoke as they collected their things from the Townhouse later on. Mike had told them to come and stay with him at his parents’ farm house. Mike’s father had died of cancer when Mike was just seventeen and his mother had been grieving too much to stay in the house. She had moved to live with her sister two years later and Mike had determinedly stayed behind to look after the farm, knowing that it was what his father would have wanted. Although he reassured them that he visited his mother regularly and that they were still very close.

Bill wept again, silently, as he collected Stan’s suitcase as well as his own from their shared room. He wanted to open it and take something out, perhaps a shirt, to sit and hold it and breathe in Stan’s scent to comfort himself but he thought better of it. Stan wouldn’t be pleased if Bill messed up his neatly-packed suitcase. So he dragged it downstairs with his own as Mike calmly checked all of them out of the Townhouse—the rest of them were still unable to string much of a sentence together- and he even carried Stan’s suitcase when he saw Bill struggling.

They took a taxi up to the farm; Mike had a car but that day he’d walked into Derry to visit the bookstore. That evening none of them spoke much at all through dinner—Mike had prepared
everything with some help from Ben and Eddie as Richie and Bill smoked out on the front porch. Both of their hands were shaking but this was normal. Richie’s ADHD was what usually caused this for him but his mind was shot way out of whack and it took four whole cigarettes to calm him rather than the usual couple of drags on just the one. Bill’s hands shook when he was nervous, something that he put down to the same part of his brain that caused his stutter. Usually he’d stuff them into his pockets to avoid anyone else seeing this but now, as he sat beside Richie in the dim porch light he couldn’t care less. Bill only had one cigarette and Richie knew that Bill only smoked sometimes when they were together as more of a social thing. Right now, though, it was more to try and calm himself down.

“Stan’s gonna be pissed if he smells that on you,” Richie said vaguely, speaking out into the empty fields rather than directly at Bill, “You know he hates it when any of us smoke.”

Bill didn’t reply to this but he flicked some ash from the end of his cigarette onto the makeshift gravel driveway at their feet. Richie saw him take a glance at the cigarette as if he was thinking about throwing that in the same direction but he lifted it to his lips and took another drag. At one point, Ben came out to take one, too, smoking it standing up and leaning against one of the wooden beams that held part of the structure of the porch. He looked tired and weary and much older than he was. He patted them both on the shoulder before he went back inside and Richie nodded to him in appreciation.

“Did you f-f-feel it?” Bill said suddenly once Ben was gone and Richie looked at him, “I f-felt…c-cold and…numb like…like I wuh-was dead…”

Richie bowed his head in a slight nod.

“Yeah. I felt him…” he touched the centre of his chest with his thumb with the hand holding the cigarette, “…I felt his heart…start again…”

Bill nodded this time and quickly took another, last drag before he dropped the butt onto the ground and snuffed it out with his shoe.

“I think that puh-part of us w-would have died, too…” Bill said finally, decidedly, as he stood to make his way inside to eat.

The dinner table was so quiet that it made Richie’s very nerves itch and he had to hold himself back from cracking an inappropriate joke or belting out a song or making a loud sound on more than one occasion. Nobody seemed in the mood for that right now and Eddie didn’t even scold him for the noise he was making as he repeatedly bounced his leg and his heel tapped against the wooden floor.

Richie noticed that Bill barely touched his food.

Later that evening Richie lay awake in the living room on his makeshift bed on the couch. Every time he closed his eyes he could see it all again, Stan’s pale face, Eddie’s eyes, red from crying, the pain in Ben’s features, Mike’s hands leaving black soot-stains against Stan’s pale shirt. He could hear Bill’s screams and feel the weight of him in his arms. And so he lay with his eyes open instead, listening to the soft sound of a clock ticking – he didn’t know where it was coming from-. A few times he heard someone pacing around upstairs, feet creaking against wooden floorboards. There were four bedrooms in the house: a master bedroom, two spare rooms with double beds and one with a single and since there were five of them, Richie had offered to sleep on the couch. The pacing was coming from directly above him which he knew was the room with the single bed and the one that Bill had taken and he thought about going up there to see if he was okay. He knew he wasn’t, of course, but every time he was about to get up the pacing would stop and the house
would go silent again.

He listened to the steady tick of the second hand again, coming from a clock that he couldn’t see in
the dark until he felt himself starting to drift off into sleep. Then there was another creak from
above and he jolted. The pacer had started again, only this time he heard them go towards the stairs
and start making their way down. The light came on in the kitchen with a soft click and Richie
could hear them opening drawers in there but...perhaps they had just come down to get a glass of
water or something...only...he heard them in the hallway and noted the heavy sound of the key
turning in the front door.

*Why would someone be going outside at this hour?*

Richie sat upright, pooling the blankets around his legs and as he looked out of the window he saw
Bill crossing the driveway, fully dressed and carrying a bag over his shoulder. He immediately
jumped to his feet. Richie was still in his clothes –Stan’s clothes-, too and he pulled on his boots
which, thankfully, he’d left nearby before bursting out of the front door and after Bill.

“Bill, what the fuck are you doing?! It’s the middle of the night!”

Bill didn’t turn around and Richie noticed that he sped up somewhat.

“J-just go back to b-bed, Richie!”

“Like HELL! Where the fuck are you going?!”

“To the B-B-Barrens!” Bill spat out as Richie caught up to him at a run. He shrugged Richie’s
hand off his shoulder as soon as it touched him, “I’m g-gonna kill that fucking thing!”

“Don’t be so fucking stupid! You CAN’T go down there on your own!”

“Watch me!” Bill shouted, shooting Richie a look briefly and Richie saw the fierceness in his eyes.
He still wasn’t stopping and Richie grabbed at his arm but Bill shook him off roughly.

Mike, Eddie and Ben had come out of the house, now, obviously having heard the shouting match.
Eddie was sprinting across the lawn towards them in his sleep clothes, barefoot in the cold grass.
Mike and Ben were close behind him. They caught up to Richie and Bill just as Bill had turned and
squared up against Richie in reaction to Richie grabbing him again.

“You’re not going down there, Bill!” Richie screamed, not backing down. He was taller than Bill,
now, although not by much and in sheer presence Bill still towered over him, like he did with them
all. Eddie tried to grab at Bill’s hand but Bill shook him off, too, although more gently.

“So you e-expect me to just sit here and pretend nothing happened?! While Stan is lying in a
fucking hospital bed?! HE COULD HAVE DIED! Would you have wanted to kill it then?! Huh?!”
He raised his eyebrows at Richie, stepping closer and closer to him and watching Richie
instinctively back away, “I’m not sitting on my ass while that thing waits down there in the fucking
sewer...m-mocking me!”

“NOBODY’S MOCKING YOU! Bill, you need to get some fucking sleep and chill the fuck out!
Stan is okay! He’s-”

“No he’s NOT OKAY! This fucking thing keeps going after Stan, again and again! Don’t fucking
pretend like you haven’t noticed but it’s like it’s...like it’s trying to pick him off! I’m NOT letting
that happen!”
“IT’S GOING AFTER ALL OF US! THIS ISN’T JUST ABOUT STAN!”

Richie knew that he’d made a mistake as soon as he said it but it was too late. Bill’s fist collided with his face, knocking his glasses off into the wet grass and he felt a sharp sting on his cheekbone right where Bill’s knuckle caught him. He immediately tried to throw himself at Bill, catching him with a fist, too, right on his lip just as Eddie grabbed him and dragged him away.

Bill had turned his head away but when he looked back they saw that his bottom lip was bust open and was bleeding. He touched his fingers to it briefly before picking up his bag, which he’d dropped when Richie punched him, slinging it back over his shoulder and turning to walk away again.

This time Mike went forward and caught him by the shoulder and he tried to shrug him off, too but it didn’t work. They saw Mike speaking to him, close and quiet but from here couldn’t make out what he was saying. Eddie was certain that Bill had started to cry again and he saw him nod quickly before they turned around and Mike led him back into the house with an arm around him. They all followed silently. Richie’s cheek was bruised and he looked particularly put out. Neither him nor Bill said anything or even looked at one another for the rest of the night.

He found it even more difficult to sleep than he had before.

The first time they visited Stan in the hospital he wasn’t awake. There were tubes in his nose, feeding him oxygen and a saline drip attached to his arm and he looked worse than they’d ever seen him, pale and fragile and weak. Eddie held one of Stan’s hands in his own while Richie sat on the edge of the bed and had a one-sided conversation with him as if he was awake. Ben had brought him a book from the library and he left it on the nightstand, placed as neatly as he could. Bill paced up and down the room with his hands in his pockets, seeming to only look at Stan’s frail form once or twice during the hour they were there. As they were leaving, Mike brushed Stan’s hair back from his forehead and placed a firm kiss there.

When Stan finally awoke he felt, again, like he might have died. His whole body ached, his head in particular and whenever he tried to take a deep breath it felt like someone had filled his lungs with tiny shards of glass. His vision was a little blurry at first but it cleared up in time. He knew that he’d been in a fire…that Mike had saved him…he remembered seeing Mike’s face briefly…he remembered waking up again to people he didn’t know and hearing people screaming and shouting and crying but he hadn’t been able to see where it was coming from. He knew, somehow, that Bill and Ben had got out of the fire safely. He didn’t know how he knew this. It was more like a feeling.

He thought of his friends, then, as he took another painful breath and lifted himself up slightly against the pillows. He wondered if they knew he was here and if they’d been to see him. Then he saw, to his brief horror, that there was a balloon floating beside his hospital bed and for a minute he struggled with the blanket, readying himself to flee or fight or whatever he had to do. But then he noticed that the balloon was shaped like a bird, and that the shiny, helium-filled thing was being held down with one of Richie’s heavy rings, tied to the end of the string and lying against the floor tiles like a tiny, silver anchor. And he noticed the book on the nightstand. There was a paper note atop it which read ‘From Ben. Get Well Soon’ with a tiny, wonky heart drawn beneath it. He removed the note to look at the title of the book.

‘Bright Wings: An Illustrated Anthology of Poems About Birds’

He laughed a little to himself when he saw it, although he felt tears welling in the corners of his eyes, too and he wished all of his friends were here with him, now.
Stan waited, patiently but uncomfortably for the next visiting hours to arrive. He had been taken off the oxygen, now, but there was a mask nearby that he could use if he started to feel short of breath. He’d been given a lot of painkillers and was feeling a little woozy but super relaxed.

When visiting hours came around he saw Ben first, saw the way his eyes lit up when he saw Stan sitting upright in the bed with his eyes open. Ben came in to give him a tight hug and Stan took it gladly, feeling the comfort of it despite the fact that Ben’s cheek was a little rough against his own as if he hadn’t bothered to shave. As soon as Ben let him go, Eddie was waiting straight behind him and he threw himself at Stan even harder, burying his face into his neck and refusing to let go to the point where Richie had to give Stan a hug with Eddie still there, now sandwiched between them. Eddie’s hair smelled very good. Mike gave Stan a firm hug, too and Stan felt his eyes prickle with tears again at seeing his friend after so long. He muttered a ‘thank you’ into Mike’s shoulder and Mike only held him tighter, telling him ‘don’t be so stupid’ and Stan felt comfortable against him. Safe.

He saw Bill entering the room as Mike pulled away to sit with the others. Bill must have been talking to someone out in the corridor, perhaps not expecting Stan to be awake but as he looked at him and their eyes met he stopped. There was a tense moment of silence and Stan noted that Bill’s eyes looked red and his hair was a mess and he suddenly felt like the strong one, like he was well and Bill should be the one lying here in the hospital bed. He held out one of his hands to beckon him over as Bill staggered towards him and more or less collapsed against him on the bed, crying against his neck and Stan slid his arms around him and pulled him closer as the rest of them watched in relief.

It took a while for Bill to stop crying but Stan held him tightly the whole time as Bill ended up sitting on the bed with him, practically in his lap. He had been a little shocked by Bill’s reaction and had only seen him cry twice before in his life and that made him want to comfort him all the more. He ran his fingers through Bill’s auburn hair to neaten it up as Bill continued to cling to him. Although his sobs had died down he seemed reluctant to pull away. Stan didn’t mind.

“He’s been like that for two whole days now,” Richie said suddenly with a smile and raised eyebrows, “Please do something.”

Stan chuckled at this, wrapping his arms around Bill again and rubbing at his back. He felt much better than he had before and he was quite sure that he could fall asleep like this, with Bill’s warm body leaning against him and his hair tickling his cheek. He rested his head against the top of Bill’s, breathing him in but he clearly took too deep a breath and it hurt and caused him to go into a coughing fit. Bill pulled away instantly as Stan reached over to the oxygen mask to hold it against his face and they all watched him until it was over and he dropped it again. Bill reached to pour him some water and he took it gratefully, clearing his throat when he was done.

“S…sorry.”

“Hey, leave the st-stuttering to me,” Bill chuckled as he took the plastic cup from Stan’s hand to place it back where it had been.

“He can’t even say the word ‘stuttering’ without stuttering,” Richie sniggered and they all laughed, including Bill as he was shooting Richie a crude gesture with his middle finger.

Stan took some more oxygen while he was still laughing. He seemed very giggly in general and kept laughing at all of Richie’s jokes and touching Bill’s hair as he sat with him on the bed.

“How many painkillers did they give you, exactly?” Eddie asked as Stan ran his fingers through Bill’s hair for the fifth time and touched his cheek softly. Bill looked like he was loving every
“Just the right amount, clearly,” Richie added, chuckling and Stan laughed, too, coughing into his palm again and wiping at his lips as Bill got him some more water.

“You mean ‘number’,” Ben said to Richie, “Number. Not amount.”

Richie looked at him, affronted and folded his arms across his chest.

“Oh, are you taking Stan’s place now that he’s all high on morphine or something?”

“No. I just…like it when people use words properly…” Ben chuckled, shrugging his shoulders.

“You damn book nerds are gonna kill me,” Richie sighed, but he was smiling when Mike reached over to ruffle his hair.

When a nurse came in to kick them out of the room because they’d stayed too long they each embraced Stan again. Mike kissed him on the forehead, like he had done before when he was still asleep and Stan leaned into it, smiling. He chuckled when Richie hugged him, whispering ‘get me some of whatever you’re having’ into his ear before he pulled away and winking. Eddie and Ben both kissed him on the cheek and Bill gave him such a long kiss on the mouth that he had to breathe in some more oxygen afterwards and they all laughed again. Richie dragged Bill out of the room by the back of his jacket as he wouldn’t stop waving to him and blowing him kisses and mouthing ‘I love you’ and by the time their voices had disappeared down the corridor and off the ward Stan was beaming and he couldn’t stop.

The pain in his chest was still there but now it was mixed with a soft, warm feeling and he picked up the poetry book from the nightstand and held it against him briefly before opening the cover to find a folded up note inside which he was sure hadn’t been there before. He picked it out of the book carefully, unfolding it to find a tiny, handwritten poem which was scrawled in what he recognised immediately as Bill’s handwriting.

‘He thrusts his fists against the posts
And still insists he sees the ghosts
But every time that he’s with you
The sky it seems a brighter blue
And when he looks into your eyes
He knows he feels, with some surprise
That all is well, and all is good
His words come out just like they should
The ghosts aren’t real, he’s not afraid
The posts they have long since decayed
When his palms shake he thinks of yours
Of birds, of books, piano scores
His hand fits yours just like a glove

That’s how he knows that he’s in love’

He read the poem over and over and over until the words blurred together but it didn’t matter because he had them memorised, now and he repeated it in his head until he started to cry but he was laughing, too.

Folding the tiny piece of paper back up as neatly as he could, he pressed it inside the middle pages of the book, hidden away, making a mental note of the page number it was on so he could find it later.

He tried to read the book itself but all of the poems inside seemed dull, now and lifeless and he was sure that nothing he ever came across could compare to what Bill had written. Bill Denbrough the writer. He thought about Bill staying up late into the night with a pen in his hand and concentration on his face as he scribbled it out. He wondered how many versions of this there had been before he got to this one, or if there had been any at all. He thought about Bill. Beautiful, sweet, caring, strong Bill with eyes bluer than the summer sky.

And he smiled again to himself as he placed the book of poems back on the nightstand and settled down to go to sleep.
Chapter 21

Stan was allowed to leave the hospital two days later. His friends came to visit him at every opportunity –three times a day- and they stayed longer than they were really allowed every single time. Mike, Bill and Eddie came to pick him up when he was finally released, leaving Ben and Richie back at the farm as there wasn’t enough space in Mike’s car for all of them.

Eager to get out of the hospital, Stan was already sitting on the edge of the bed when the three came into his room. He was still wearing the ugly green hospital pyjamas that he’d been given to wear and looked none too happy about it. He perked up when Bill leaned down to kiss him on the cheek and Eddie and Mike both gave him a quick hug.

“Okay, someone please tell me that you brought me some clothes,” he said as Bill set about collecting Stan’s things from the room and packing them into a bag.

Eddie handed him a pile of neatly folded clothes that he’d obviously brought himself.

“I picked them out for you,” Eddie chuckled and helped Stan to stand from the bed when he wobbled a little at first. He let go of Eddie quickly when he realised that he was leaning on him, though, clearly adamant to do everything himself as he went into the small bathroom to get dressed.

Bill smiled to himself when the folded piece of paper with his own poem fell out of the centre of the book as he picked it up to pack it away. It was folded differently to how he’d done it when he placed it in there, more neatly and he picked the small piece of paper up from the floor, holding it carefully in his own palm.

When Stan came out of the bathroom, dressed in his own clothes again and looking more like himself than they’d seen him in days, he sighed pleasantly, looking in a mirror next to the bed to tidy his curls with his fingers.

“So, none of you guys thought to bring a comb or anything, huh?”

“You look gorgeous as usual, Stanley,” Eddie chuckled from where he was sitting on the bed watching him, “I might even go as far as to say angelic.”

Stan looked at Eddie in the mirror and shook his head, although he looked pleased all the same.

“He always looks good,” Mike added as he sat beside Eddie while Bill packed the rest of Stan’s things and zipped up the bag, “It’s sort of annoying, actually.”

“Oh, shoot,” Eddie bit at his lip and looked at him apologetically.

“You had one j-job, Eddie,” Bill teased, taking off his own jacket and passing it to Stan but Stan shook his head and refused to take it.

“No. Bill, it’s cold out there.”

“Exactly. Y-you need it more than me.”

Stan tried to decline him once again but Bill came over and put the jacket onto Stan himself, pulling
it onto his arms and then standing close to him to fasten the zip.

“I d-don’t want you to be cold,” he said softly as his eyes met Stan’s and they smiled at each other. Eddie watched them both fondly as Stan tried to move Bill’s hands away to fasten it himself but Bill only held onto him and Stan noticed that there were spots of ink on Bill’s fingers and he looked up into his eyes again. They stayed that way until Mike finally broke them up with a chuckle and an ‘Okay, c’mon, guys. I don’t wanna be here all day’.

Bill still had the poem in his hand and before they pulled apart he showed it to Stan with a soft ‘D-don’t forget this’, reaching between them to push it into Stan’s pocket with his fingers and smiling, giving him a light peck on the lips. Stan was a little bit lovestruck as he climbed into the back of Mike’s car next to Eddie afterwards, although he had taken note of the fact that Bill’s jacket smelled a little like cigarette smoke and he wasn’t too pleased about it.

When they reached the farm, Ben and Richie were waiting for them out on the porch. Richie was smoking a cigarette but he quickly stubbed it out –on one of the wooden posts, much to Mike’s dismay- and they made their way down to the car. Richie opened the door for Stan and helped him out and noticed that Bill was suddenly standing right beside him, as if he’d had that exact thought and had jumped out extra fast to come and do the same.

Stan argued that he didn’t need help to stand and that he was okay but Richie pulled him into a tight hug and he only sighed and softly smiled into it, wrapping his arms around Richie’s shoulders. When he pulled away he noticed that Richie lifted his glasses to wipe at his eyes and Bill pushed his shoulder.

“Richie you p-p-pussy,” he chuckled as Richie hit his chest with a ‘fuck you, Bill’.

Eddie watched them warily. It was the first time they’d really spoken since their fight.

Stan hugged Ben next and Ben lifted him off his feet a little as Stan tried not to laugh, although he had to put him down when he seemed to struggle with his breath and they all gathered around him with concerned looks on their faces. Eddie shooed them all away with a scowl and took out his inhaler to let Stan use it. Thankfully, it helped and Stan breathed out a ‘thanks’ as he handed it back to Eddie. He looked a little annoyed with himself for needing it in the first place.

Eddie stayed with Stan a lot in the days following, always keeping his inhaler handy. Stan never said anything when his chest got tight and uncomfortable and Eddie completely understood the feeling. Thankfully, he could see it in the taller man’s features and knew instinctively when he needed to use it. They had all been helping Mike around the farm in return for allowing them to stay there and Stan had refused to be left out of it. Usually, Mike gave Stan the job of feeding the animals as he seemed to be good with them and to be able to get them to do what he wanted. Even Mike hadn’t mastered that yet. Richie had jokingly started calling Stan ‘Snow White’.

“Is this what it’s like all the time for you?” Stan asked Eddie one day as he threw some seeds into the chicken coop. Eddie was wearing a pair of Mike’s wellies which were far too large for him, grimacing whenever he stood in anything vaguely poop-looking and shuddering when he had to touch the old wooden fences and gates. He had a bottle of hand sanitiser stuffed into his pocket and was using it at regular intervals.

“What do you mean?” Eddie picked the tiniest handful of seeds out of the bucket that Stan was carrying under his arm and threw them over the fence at one of the hens, bawking when it landed in some chicken poop and the animal hungrily pecked it up anyway.

“I mean this…not being able to catch your breath and…feeling…weak and stupid.”
“Yeah,” Eddie said quietly as they looked at each other, “It’s always like that. But I’m not weak just because I have asthma,” he added as they strolled back towards the house through the long grass.

Stan smiled at him and lowered the bucket of feed to start carrying it by the metal handle instead.

“I don’t think you’re weak, Eddie.”

“I used to do gymnastics,” Eddie added suddenly and Stan raised an eyebrow with a vaguely impressed ‘oh, yeah?’

“Yeah. Watch this.” Eddie rubbed his hands together briefly as Stan stopped beside him, before he toppled forward to place his hands against the ground in a perfectly balanced hand stand. Stan hung the handle of the bucket over his arm so he could clap as Eddie flipped his legs over his head rather gracefully to stand up again, bowing theatrically.

“Woah. Head rush. I haven’t done that in a while,” he chuckled.


“Wow. High praise,” Eddie chuckled. He seemed very pleased with the proud look on Stan’s face and it spurred him on, “Okay, watch this.”

It turned out that those definitely were famous last words, though. Eddie took a run up into a cartwheel and then a perfectly timed back flip and Stan was extremely impressed until Eddie, while trying to stick the landing, tripped over a rock hidden in the grass and fell right onto his face. He dropped the bucket to run to him.

“Eddie?! Are you okay?!”

Eddie winced as he used Stan’s sleeve to pull himself upright, wincing and putting most of his weight onto him.

“Ow. Ow. Ow. I think I broke my ankle. Oh fuck. This is bad, Stanley.”

Stan held onto him as he tried to stand on his right foot again but swore loudly, followed by some dramatic fake sobbing that was hiding real pain.

“Um…okay, okay…just…hold onto me. It’s probably not broken. You probably just sprained it.”

Eddie whined the whole time as Stan led him inside the barn, which was nearby, and sat him down on a thick bale of hay.

“It’s not just a sprain, Stanley, this is definitely broken like I can feel the bones crunching oh my god…”

Stan stayed calm as he knelt in front of Eddie to pull off one of his boots, placing it to the side.

“Maybe if you hadn’t tried to do that in shoes that were like three times your size it would have helped,” Stan scolded, but he chuckled as he leaned to examine Eddie’s ankle, “It doesn’t look broken to me.”

“No it’s definitely broken,” Eddie insisted, nodding and wincing as Stan gently touched it with his fingers, “It hurts so bad I’m gonna throw up.”

“No you’re not. If you throw up on me I will never speak to you again.”
“Okay…okay…” Eddie breathed in and out theatrically as if he was in labour, “Just stop touching it!”

“I have to touch it to check if it’s broken!”

Eddie grimaced and looked away, squeezing his eyes shut as Stan placed his palm against the sole of his foot, holding onto his ankle and moving it gently. He opened one eye shortly after, though, to look down at him.

“Hey, that actually doesn’t hurt so bad.”

“If it was broken you wouldn’t be able to move it like this, either,” Stan chuckled and shook his head. Some of his curls fell into his eyes and Eddie watched him tuck them back behind his ear.

“It still hurts…”

“Of course it does,” Stan gently pressed his fingers against Eddie’s calf, “But it’s just a sprain.”

Eddie winced again and gripped at Stan’s shoulder when he moved his ankle again to get a closer look, just to make sure he couldn’t see anything that looked like a break. The fingers on his shoulder tightened as Stan’s hair fell in front of his eyes again and tickled Eddie’s bare knee just below his denim shorts and he was about to tuck it back again when he noticed how it was making Eddie shift in his seat and he smiled a little to himself.

“You know…maybe it is broken,” Stan said plainly, “I’ll have to get a better look.”

He pulled off Eddie’s sock, too, dropping it inside the discarded Wellington boot and running his fingertips and thumbs across Eddie’s foot and his ankle. Eddie had gone quiet, now. He stayed silent as Stan’s gentle fingers explored his calf, too, wondering how that could possibly indicate a broken ankle but he caught on as Stan reached his knee and two of his fingers slipped just beneath the leg of his shorts.

Stan was sniggering when Eddie smacked him around the head jokingly and he placed a tender kiss against the inside of Eddie’s knee before pulling away.

“Stan, you fucking jerk,” Eddie whined, but he was laughing, too.

“You were getting so into it,” Stan teased, although he stopped laughing when Eddie grabbed his face from where he was still crouched on the floor and pulled him up to kiss him on the mouth. There was a familiar taste that Stan now recognised as the medicine in Eddie’s inhaler and he didn’t completely hate it, leaning up between Eddie’s legs with Eddie’s fingers tangled in his hair in a grip that was too strong for such a small person.

Eddie was the one to pull away, too. Stan saw him as he slowly opened his eyes and they both giggled in their close proximity. Eddie’s hands were still on the sides of Stan’s face and in his hair and it felt kind of nice. From here he could count the freckles on Eddie’s cheeks and he did. Thirty nine. Thirty nine little dark spots splattered across his face just beneath deep, expressive, brown eyes. There were a couple of freckles on the lower half of Eddie’s face, too and Stan’s attention was drawn to a tiny one just above the left corner of his lips. It annoyed Stan a little bit, that there was this one mark on his skin that was separate from the rest and he reached up to wipe at it with his thumb as if he could somehow get rid of it. Eddie’s lips parted at the sensation and Stan watched it curiously, thinking that, wow, Eddie’s breath really does always smell of peppermint toothpaste. As he closed his own lips around Eddie’s again he vaguely wondered if he tasted minty, too.
Stan’s hair was soft between Eddie’s fingers, different to the way that Richie’s curls were soft but nice all the same, silky and smooth where Richie’s was messy and sort of fluffy. Stan’s lips were different to Richie’s, too. Richie’s lips were chapped and a little rough sometimes but Stan’s felt comfortable against his and it was almost like his lips were touching satin, especially when he felt Stan’s tongue, too and the kiss got a little wet. He gripped at Stan’s shoulders at one point and he was firm, solid, even and Eddie’s heart fluttered embarrassingly when he thought about how the rest of Stan’s body must feel, how it might feel pressed on top of his own. He sighed when their lips broke apart and Stan briefly pressed a kiss to Eddie’s jaw and he tilted his head back. Stan observed this and did it again, his eyes honing in on a bruise that was already there. It was messy and he knew it was from Richie and he didn’t know why but he felt a little bit competitive. In the heat of the moment he left his own mark, just beneath it, neater and smaller but darker and Eddie squirmed through it against him and gasped and Stan thought that he sort of liked Eddie’s fingers gripping at his back.

When he eventually pulled away from him they were both a little breathless and they looked at each other and burst into soft laughter again as Eddie complained about having another bruise on his neck and Stan felt secretly proud of it.

Later on, when they made their way back to the house and everyone was making a fuss over Eddie and his ankle, nobody noticed the extra mark on Eddie’s neck or the fact that Stan’s lips were slightly swollen and they shared a few secret looks between them, smiling whenever they caught each other’s eye.

Eddie let Stan take his inhaler to bed with him that night even though he no longer had a spare.
Chapter 22

That evening felt like the first time they’d been able to fully appreciate simply being in each other’s company as a group. They sat in the front room of the farm house, a crackling fire lighting the walls in warm, glowing tones and filling the room with comfortable heat.

Stan was sitting on the floor where Mike had covered the hardwood in various cushions and throws to make it comfortable. He was currently pouring over the poetry book from Ben, seemingly about half way through it and once or twice he would take out a pencil and write something inside its pages. Bill assumed, from where he sat on the couch, observing this, that he was simply making notes or doing some kind of strange organisational thing that none of them would understand. Stan didn’t even seem distracted from it by Mike’s hands rubbing into his shoulders from where he sat behind him in an armchair. Occasionally, Mike would rest his chin against the top of Stan’s head to see what he was doing, although he frequently went back to his own reading material, which was a large, old history book with a hard cover and looked to Richie like the most boring thing he’d ever seen in his life.

Richie was occupied with a selection of comic books he had picked up that day in town from a thrift store and he was currently lazily flipping through one from where he was lying, stomach down on the floor in a pile of cushions just in front of the fireplace. A few times the silence in the room was broken with an amused snort from his direction and he was turning the pages quite noisily but for Richie, he was being rather quiet and subdued.

“Guys, this is really boring. Like, I’m so bored right now,” Eddie piped up suddenly from where he was sitting across Bill’s lap with his feet resting on Ben, who was at the other side of the couch. Both Bill and Ben were occupied with books of their own. Out of the people in the room, only Bill looked up at this comment but that was partly due to the fact that he’d been resting his book on Eddie’s knees and he had moved.

“Only boring people get bored,” Stan replied without lifting his head and Mike sniggered softly as he turned the page of his own book.

“Why don’t you read a book? I’ve got plenty. You can borrow one of mine,” Ben said, more helpful than Stan but Eddie still grimaced like he didn’t like that idea at all.

“No thanks, Ben. I didn’t say I wanted to be more bored. I might actually die.”

“Good. Maybe then we could read in peace,” Stan said bluntly, although he glanced up at Eddie from his book and smiled playfully. Bill chuckled softly and Eddie shifted his knees suddenly so that Bill’s book fell onto the floor.

“E-Eddie!”

Eddie laughed and reached to pick it up again and hand it back to him, although he still complained about Bill stuttering his name. He was the only one it seemed to really bother.

“N-now I’ve lost the page I was on!” Bill complained, flipping through the book to try and find it again.

“Don’t make him angry. You won’t like him when he’s angry,” Mike chuckled and even Bill had to smile in reaction to it with a soft ‘sh-shut up’.
“That was him angry?” Ben asked, looking up from his book. He seemed amused with this, too.

“No,” Eddie shook his head, laughing, “If you’ve never seen Bill really angry then you’re in for a ride. It’s like that Mr Heckle thing.”

“The what?”

“You know, the one with the scientist who has like… two personalities or something?”

“You mean Dr Jeckyll and Mr Hyde?” Ben chuckled, raising his eyebrows at Eddie as Eddie shrugged.

“Yeah. That.”

“I d-don’t get angry,” Bill said, more softly than ever as if to prove his point as he rested his book against Eddie’s knees again carefully. He’d clearly found the right page again.

“But that’s not because we don’t try,” Eddie chuckled, wrapping his arms around Bill’s shoulders and kissing the top of his head as Bill gave a contented smile and let out a soft sound from his throat that was almost a laugh.

“Guys,” Stan said suddenly, with a quiet voice that made them all pause and they all looked in his direction but he nodded them towards Richie instead.

Richie’s head had fallen so low that it was now resting against the pages of the comic book which looked as if it was stuck to his cheek. His eyes were closed and as they all gazed at his sleeping form he produced a soft snore.

“We should do stuff to him,” Eddie said immediately as he slowly climbed out of Bill’s lap but Bill grabbed at his wrist.

“N-no.”

“But that’s what he’d do to us,” Eddie whispered, raising his eyebrows at Bill until he let go of his sleeve.

He tiptoed around Richie to crouch on the floor beside him, watching his sleeping face but... he looked so soft and comfortable and peaceful that Eddie couldn’t bring himself to do anything but look at him. Stan put his book down carefully and came over to the two, helping Eddie to gently lift Richie’s face and unstick the comic book pages from it. They were both trying hard not to laugh as they did this, though; there was some ink from the page imprinted onto Richie’s cheek, a faint but still-readable speech bubble with bold, black letters that said ‘YOWZA’. Mike laughed, too, as he saw it when he approached them to cover Richie with a blanket.

Soon, they were all crowded around a sleeping Richie Tozier, admiring how quiet he was and how relaxed he looked and Bill even left to get a camera from his bag so that he could take a photograph of him as the rest of them watched. Eddie was the most smitten with it, lying on the floor beside him to watch his face from close up and even Stan briefly stroked Richie’s hair back from his eyes with his fingers so it wasn’t covering him.

“H-he looks so cute,” Bill whispered as he sat beside them and pulled a cushion into his lap to lean on.

“You know what? That looks pretty comfy,” Ben chuckled, lying down at the other side of Richie and pulling the blanket over himself, too, “Yep. This is good. I can dig this.”
They all froze as Richie rolled over onto his side in his sleep and his nose brushed against Eddie, whose eyes were like saucers at that point but Ben only rolled with him and clamped against his back with an ‘aw’, fitting his arms around both Richie and Eddie.

“Guys, Richie is so warm, like…seriously…”

Eddie only laughed softly as Ben nuzzled his face into Richie’s hair, somehow still not waking him. Then again, they all knew that Richie could fall asleep at the drop of a hat, anywhere and at any time and when he did it wasn’t easy to disturb him.

“So…you guys are sleeping here, then?” Stan asked as Bill joined the huddle against Eddie’s back, kissing his neck softly and making him giggle out a ‘stop’ and Mike shrugged and moved some more of the padding around on the floor to make more space.

“Yes. Yes, we are,” Ben said confidently, reaching out to hold Stan’s wrist and pull him down, too, to lie between himself and Mike. As soon as Stan hit the floor Mike was throwing a blanket over the two of them as Bill tugged one up over Eddie and himself until they were all wrapped up and pressed so close together that it looked like some kind of strange, six-headed blanket monster.

The fire was already burning out but the flames still danced in the ashes and splinters. Eddie seemed the only one to really notice it.

“Is someone gonna put out the fire because you do know that nearly forty percent of household fires are caused by unattended flames like candles and-”

Mike reached out to take an iron poker from nearby before Eddie could finish his sentence, sticking it into the fireplace to push the still burning pieces of wood apart and into the ash to extinguish the last of the flames.

“I’ll watch it until it goes out,” he said when he saw Eddie looking at him, giving him a reassuring smile as he turned onto his stomach to prop himself up on his elbows, “I got you.”

Eddie looked at Mike then as he had never looked at him before, in the dim, receding light of the fire as the orange glow warmed his cheeks and enhanced the brown of his eyes. Eddie had noticed dimples at the corners of his mouth when he had smiled and his gaze, too, had told Eddie that he would be safe as long as Mike was here. He shot him a pleased grin back, feeling warm in his chest as much as he was warm in Bill’s arms with Richie against his front and he closed his eyes as he felt Bill’s head nudge against the crook of his neck.

He reached out to hold one of Richie’s hands underneath the blankets before he fell asleep.

Bill awoke the next morning earlier than the rest, at least that’s what he thought until he realised that Stan was missing as he fondly observed the pile of limbs next to him. It was usual for Stan to be up before the rest of them, even Mike, who rose just after dawn to start work on the farm. Thankfully, since Stan was an early bird anyway, he was usually the one to give all of the animals their morning feed and it took a lot of the burden away from Mike.

Stan’s poetry book was still lying neatly in the armchair where he’d left it the night before and Bill realised with some curiosity that there was a small sliver of paper, a slightly different shade of white to the pages of the book itself, sticking out by just a corner from the middle of the book. At first he thought that it must be his own poem, the one that he’d purposely left for Stan to find and he gently slid it out of the book to see.

It was folded neatly in half with a perfect crease and Bill gently flipped it open as he perched
himself on the arm of the chair but it wasn’t his own handwriting. This was written in Stan’s flawlessly beautiful cursive, in the dark, thin lines that you only get from a well-sharpened pencil. He briefly glanced over at the others in the room to check that they were still asleep, feeling like he was doing something he really shouldn’t but he had to know what Stan had been writing. Richie let out another soft snore and Bill knew he was in the clear. He turned his attention back to the page, eyes scanning each elegantly pencilled word slowly.

‘His eyes are a tropical blue sky
Bright and perfect
I want to get lost in it forever
The gentle waves that crash against the shore are his voice
Soft and soothing
When the waves break and stutter on the white sand
And the ocean draws back in shame
I follow it with my feet
For those sounds are more beautiful still
The midday summer sun is his smile
Radiant and lovely
Its heat burns into my very core
The breeze which rustles the leaves on the trees is his laughter
Sweet and melodic
I want to catch it in my hands
Play it over and over like a song
Until I can no longer hear anything else
I want to stare directly into that sun
And if I lose my sight forever I won’t be sad
For his smile will be the last thing I see
But most of all I want to live in the blue of that sky
Blue that has depths greater than any ocean
That is both the calm before the storm and the searing heat at the centre of a flame
I have never given much thought to the color blue but now
His eyes are my favorite color’
Bill’s breath caught in his chest about half way through reading the poem and he didn’t feel like he got it back until he was done, until he’d read it twice, three times, four…he lost count of how many times he read it but no amount of times seemed to be enough for what he was feeling. He folded it up carefully, placing it back inside the book where he thought it had been before but his mind was racing.

He went into the kitchen, expecting Stan to be there but when he wasn’t he thought of his morning routine of feeding the animals and made for the front door, still barefoot and wearing his pyjamas but feeling like he couldn’t care less how potentially cold it was outside. He tried to remember which of the farm animals Stan went to first and the order from there; he’d helped him once but now that memory was a blur and he stumbled outside onto the porch anyway. Thankfully, he didn’t have far to look.

There was Stan, sitting not far from the house in the grass, the early morning sun catching his curls just right, looking completely serene as he watched a tiny bird which was perched on the wooden fence. Bill couldn’t help himself. He didn’t want to scare the bird away while Stan was observing it but he felt like the distance between them was suddenly too much and he sprinted across the cool grass towards him. The bird saw him coming before Stan did, fluttering its delicate little wings and disappearing with a sharp tweet. Before Stan could try and figure out what had spooked it, Bill was diving onto him, knocking him into the grass and smothering his face with kisses while Stan laughed and tried to push him off.

“Bill! What are you doing?! You scared the crap out of me!”

“I l-love you,” Bill said suddenly, shocking them both and holding himself above Stan to look at his face. He felt the sharp breath that Stan let out in his astonishment, watched his pupils dilate and the soft pink hue form high in his cheeks and Bill thought that Heaven must be real. It must be real because the person beneath him, with the perfect blonde curls splayed out against the grass and the pale complexion and the hazel eyes which looked, in the sun, like some kind of precious Amber couldn’t possibly be human.

He watched Stan’s eyelashes flutter as if he was going to blink but couldn’t bring himself to break their gaze and he reached up with one of his hands to gently touch one of the old scars on the side of Stan’s face with light fingertips.

“I l-love you,” he said again, with more certainty this time, after forcing his stutter back down into his throat by swallowing hard. He saw the way Stan’s breath caught and felt himself mimicking it. For a while they stared at each other in silence, their chests rising and falling together where they were pressed close.

“I love you, too,” Stan breathed out, against Bill’s lips which were now closer to his own and they both laughed softly before their mouths were pressed together in a deep kiss. Bill felt himself relax into it immediately. There was a bitter taste of black coffee on Stan’s tongue as it briefly swept over the parting of Bill’s lips and Bill was about to open them, hoping that Stan would explore his mouth but a sharp knock at the window broke them apart. They both looked over to see Richie standing next to Ben, both with stupid grins on their faces. Eddie and Mike were at the still open front door, looking equally amused.

“On my front lawn?” Mike asked, laughing and shaking his head as Bill carefully picked some pieces of grass out of Stan’s hair and stood to help him up, chuckling.

“To be fair, I was just watching a bird and Bill threw himself at me, so…”

“You didn’t look like you were complaining!” Richie shouted through the window.
Much to the chagrin of certain members of the group, Mike dubbed the rest of that day a cleaning day. He made it very clear to them all that if they were to be sharing his home free of charge then they would have to pay their way somehow. Helping out with the manual labour on the farm had been one thing but Mike told them all that he liked to keep a clean home and that it was hard to do it all on his own.

Mike cleaned the kitchen with Richie’s ‘help’. He had chosen Richie to help him on purpose so that he could supervise him properly and make sure that he was actually helping. Eddie was given the job of the upstairs bathroom, the one with a bathtub and Ben tidied the bedrooms and swept the floors through the house. Stan cleaned the downstairs bathroom, the one with a shower, with a little help from Bill, who had finished whatever he was doing with the living room. Stan wasn’t sure that he’d actually done much considering the short time it took him but he didn’t question it.

Stan asked Bill to clean the inside of the shower, glancing over at him often from where he was scrubbing the edges of the faucets around the sink with a toothbrush. Bill wasn’t the most experienced in this area and it was clear by the streaks he was leaving on the glass of the shower cubicle which were setting Stan’s teeth on edge. Eventually he gave in and came over to clean the opposite side of the glass.

“Bill, you’re leaving residue all over the glass.”

“R-really?”

“Uh, yes, can you not see it?”

Bill squinted at the shower screen dramatically as if he couldn’t see it.

“N-no…you’re gonna huh-have to point.”

“Okay first of all there’s a huge smear right there,” Stan pointed, chuckling as Bill polished it away, “…Good enough.”

“Why don’t you c-c-come in here and do it if you’re so great?” Bill sniggered, pressing his finger against the glass to purposely leave a fingerprint, which Stan honed in on immediately.

“Bill!”

“Wuh-woops.”

Bill smeared his finger across the glass again, clearly amused by Stan’s reaction.

“Wipe that off,” Stan ordered, pointing at him with the rag in his hand but Bill only smirked a little and wiped his whole hand down it. It made an awful, loud squeaking sound which actually made Stan wince and he clenched and unclenched his fist a few times in front of his mouth, “Bill, don’t make me come in there.”

“W-what if I want you to come in here,” Bill teased, and it came out sounding much sexier than he’d expected it to. Stan’s reaction was priceless; he opened his mouth as if he was about to speak, twice, before shaking his head and pushing open the shower door to squeeze inside next to Bill. There was a definite tension in the air and Bill leaned in to kiss him as soon as he could but Stan held him away.

“Clean off those marks,” he ordered, again, folding his arms with a raised eyebrow, “If you do it well enough I might let you kiss me.”
Bill looked a little affronted but he played along, wiping away the smears that he’d left as carefully as he could while Stan surveyed. He made him redo it three times before he was satisfied and he let Bill come in for a kiss. They moved together smoothly, Bill’s hands played in Stan’s hair and Bill found the familiar strong taste of coffee again as the kiss got more heated and Stan’s tongue entered his parted lips. He actually felt a little weak in the knees when the tip of Stan’s tongue ran over the sensitive roof of his mouth but he gave as good as he got, sucking and biting at Stan’s bottom lip. It wasn’t something he’d ever done before but it worked well enough and it made Stan shove him up against the tiled wall to kiss him harder. He tried to start unbuttoning Stan’s shirt but as soon as his fingers reached the first one his hands were pushed away and Stan moved out of the kiss.

“You didn't finish the job I gave you,” he said, rather smugly, as Bill’s eyes followed his lips desperately.

“W-w-what?”

“The glass. It’s not clean yet. You only did the top half of it.”

“A-are you serious? Because I c-c-can’t tell.”

“I’m serious, Bill.”

Bill watched in slight shock as Stan stepped back away from his body and motioned to the glass door.

“Y-y-you want muh-me to cl-clean the door…right n-now?”

“Stuttering more isn’t going to make me feel sorry for you and change my mind. I gave you one job and you didn’t even finish it.”

“I’m n-not doing it on pu-hurpose. You’re m-making me nervous!”

“Good. Clean it.”

Bill shook his head briefly as if he couldn’t believe what was happening, but he went along with it and crouched low to polish the bottom half of the screen, feeling immensely anxious with Stan’s eyes watching his every move.

“Are your hands shaking?” Stan asked and Bill could hear the soft tone of amusement in his voice without having to look at him.

“I am r-really confused right now.”

Stan chuckled softly as he watched Bill finish removing the last of the marks from the glass. He stood again once he was done, dropping the rag onto the floor of the shower and trying to lean up the short distance to Stan’s lips but Stan held him by his shoulders.

“B-but I finished it…” Bill said quietly, pathetically, even.

“You also got grass in my hair this morning.”

“Th-that was an accident.”

“And you scared away that Eastern Kingbird.”

“I don’t even know w-what that is. And I’m so-s-sorry.”
Stan smiled a little at this and let Bill get closer, although he only allowed a brief brush of their lips, holding him back from anything more. It was tough to do so with Bill looking so desperate and so close that Stan could feel his hot breath.

“Do you really wanna kiss me that bad?” Stan whispered, revelling in the way that Bill’s fingers were clenching and unclenching in the front of his own shirt.

“St-Stan I swear to g-god if you don’t kiss me…”

“What? What are you gonna do?” Stan asked playfully, watching Bill’s eyes flicker up to his own and then back down to his lips.

He allowed Bill to back him against the wall, feeling his hands reach for the top button of his shirt again. This time he didn’t stop him and by the time their lips were connected again Bill’s clothed chest was pressed up against Stan’s bare skin. The kiss got more and more heated until suddenly Bill was leaving a mark on Stan’s collarbone and Stan’s fingers were tight in Bill’s hair and he was struggling to steady his breathing as Bill’s mouth moved lower and lower until he was on his knees on the shower floor. He felt Bill bite at one of his hips and let out a surprised gasp but it turned him on so much that he wanted to claim Bill’s lips again. He grabbed at Bill’s collar to pull him to his feet, all the while mumbling about wanting to kiss him and Bill only allowed it and nodded quickly as he connected their lips again.

He shoved Bill hard up against the adjoining wall and Bill groaned as the shower controls dug into his back but he didn’t break the kiss. One of Stan’s knees was pressed between Bill’s legs and he could feel him hard against his thigh, hear the noises he was making from the back of his throat that were almost moans every time Stan moved against him, even unintentionally but even that didn’t seem to be enough to distract him from the discomfort and he reached behind himself to try and give some relief from the object pressing into his back. His hand scrambled against it as Stan licked into his mouth and in his desperation he accidentally turned on the shower.

Freezing cold water immediately doused the pair of them, causing them to split apart as Stan backed away from the flow. Bill wasn’t long behind him, pressing himself against Stan and shrieking as the icy liquid coursed down his back.

“Turn it off!” Stan shouted, laughing as Bill scrambled to try and stop the shower while avoiding getting directly underneath it. By the time he eventually managed to end it they were both soaked to the skin and shivering but in fits of laughter.

Bill ran his fingers through Stan’s wet hair and leaned up to kiss him again sweetly and they were both giggling against each other’s lips, now.

By the time they left the bathroom, still dripping, Mike was standing outside the room with folded arms.

“Finish cleaning the bathroom, did you?” he asked sarcastically as they avoided each other’s eye while trying to hold back laughter.

Mike started cleaning the downstairs bathroom himself after that day.
Chapter 23

Chapter Summary

This chapter goes from 1 to 100 real quick, so if you're not into polyamory or smut then turn back now. Don't say I didn't warn you. For those of you who asked for more smut, please continue :)

Also, there is a moment where it switches from past to present tense which I hope isn't too jarring. If people really don't like it I can switch back.

Thank you x

The following morning, Mike got up earlier than the rest of them, without saying a word and left to go into town. They noticed that his car was missing from the driveway while they were having breakfast. None of them were concerned about it; Mike often went out into town to pick things up and he was the one to buy the groceries, after all. Although he did usually take someone with him to help.

“I asked him to pick me up some more books from the library. Maybe that’s what he’s doing,” Ben said over the top of a steaming mug of coffee. His hair was a mess and there was stubble on his jaw. Stan was sitting beside him, fully dressed and perfectly put together as if he hadn’t slept at all, reading a newspaper. The contrast between the two of them made Ben look even more untidy and Stan look even more the opposite.

Stan picked up Ben’s coffee by mistake as he was absorbed in his reading but Ben stopped him just before it reached his lips, taking it away and replacing it with Stan’s own drink. Stan glanced at it briefly and muttered a ‘thanks’, seeming a little bit amused.

“How can you drink it like that?” Eddie grimaced at the black liquid in Stan’s mug as he took a sip.

“I’m Lactose intolerant,” Stan stated plainly as he rested his mug back against the table and Ben patted him on the back, chuckling and showing Eddie that his own coffee looked considerably milky.

“It would not have been pretty,” Stan continued dryly without looking up from his news article and Bill chuckled softly from where he was standing at the counter holding a glass of orange juice. He was still in his pyjamas, too, like Ben and Eddie. Richie was still in bed.

“You can’t even eat chocolate,” Ben said sadly, “That’s so awful.”

“Not if you’ve never really had it. I don’t know what I’m missing.”

Richie entered the room –and the conversation- looking even messier than Ben and Bill. His hair was sticking up at odd angles, fluffier and bigger than ever and Ben laughed when he saw him. Eddie gave Richie a very brief kiss on the cheek as Richie leaned against the back of his chair and slid his arms around him to rest his chin on Eddie’s shoulder.
“He had ice cream once while we were at a fun fair together and projectile vomited all over me and this other guy while we were waiting in line for something. It was hilarious.”

“Oh, yeah…” Bill chuckled, sipping his juice and looking off into the corner of the room like he, too, was remembering this incident, “And he was so embarrassed that he c-cried.”

Stan lowered his newspaper to look Bill in the eye.

“It wasn’t funny.”

“It w-was a little bit funny. I mean…not when I was…c-cleaning vomit off Richie in the bathroom, but…after that.”

“My Captain America t-shirt was never the same after that.”

“I didn’t do it on purpose!”

“Some of it got in my hair…” Richie continued, looking at Stan.

“Well, maybe you shouldn’t have been standing right in front of me when I told you that I didn’t feel good.”

“Oh, I’m sorry for being a good friend and checking to see if you were okay!”

“Well, I wasn’t,” Stan chuckled a little, then, “Clearly. I don’t remember much but I’m pretty sure I threw up, like…four or five times after that.”

“You did,” Bill nodded, “And we spent most of the day in a t-t-toilet cubicle while everyone else was having fun on the rides.”

“Once again: NOT ON PURPOSE.”

“We were actually scared. Like, we thought we were gonna have to call an ambulance or something,” Richie chuckled sort of nervously, “And Bill threw up, too, at one point.”

“J-just a little!” Bill added quickly, “I’m not blaming you! I think it was just…the s-sound.”

“And Bill usually has a strong stomach,” Richie sniggered, “It was pretty fucking gross.”

“You’re pretty fucking gross,” Stan said irritable, lifting his newspaper again as Eddie laughed and Richie went WILD.

“OH MY GOD GUYS STAN JUST SAID A FUCKING CURSE WORD! You guys all heard that, too, right?”

“Shut up, Richie,” Stan said from behind the newspaper.

Richie gave Eddie a hard, wet kiss on the cheek which Eddie squirmed away from, going a little pink. He rounded on Bill next, dancing around him to get to one of the cupboards as Bill watched him and moved aside, chuckling.

“So where’s our dark-skinned prince this morning?” Richie asked to the room as he poured some cereal into a bowl, picking out some pieces to eat them dry as he leaned against the counter next to Bill.

“Please don’t call him that. It makes me uncomfortable,” Eddie muttered from over at the table.
“It’s a compliment! Mike is gorgeous!” Richie chuckled, looking at Bill for backup as he threw some more brightly coloured pieces of cereal into his open mouth.

“Well, y-yeah,” Bill nodded, shrugging.

“Mike’s a hunk,” Ben agreed as he finished his own breakfast and Stan folded his newspaper neatly and stood from the table with an exasperated ‘oy’ which set them all into hysterics.

They set about doing some chores around the farm after that. Stan went to feed and check on the animals, as per usual as Richie, Bill and Ben mucked them out – Eddie wouldn’t touch any sort of animal faeces and he frequently complained and spouted out facts about bacteria and diseases if they made him help, so it was easier and faster not to-.

They were almost finished as Mike’s car pulled into the driveway and all of them immediately stopped. There was a strange feeling in the air, thick and heavy, like how it gets before thunder and lightning and none of them could explain it but suddenly all of their attention was on Mike’s car. Richie even dropped his shovel and leapt the fence to run over, the others following close behind him, throwing off work gloves and pushing back sweaty hair as they went. Mike got out of the driver’s side to meet them, grinning like some kind of mad person as the door around the other side of the car opened, too.

“I brought you guys back a surprise,” Mike chuckled, beaming and stepping aside just as they saw a peek of red hair and then Beverly Marsh was running around the vehicle to get to them. She got to Eddie first, slamming into him so hard it looked like it might have hurt both of them but he gripped at her anyway and she was a little taller than him and she buried her face into his hair, laughing and crying at the same time. She kissed him gently on the lips before she let go and Eddie watched her move away with wide eyes, like he was witnessing an angel for the first time.

The rest of them were speechless watching this scene. Ben was crying, too, covering his mouth and nose with shaking, cupped hands and Beverly saw him and ran to him next, kissing him deeply and passionately and clutching at his back desperately, like she couldn’t get him close enough. She seemed reluctant to move away from him and they spent a good couple of minutes with their eyes closed and their foreheads pressed together as they both sobbed, whispering ‘I love you’ over and over again through choked tears.

Eventually she pulled away out of necessity to see the others. Stan was next and she reached up to hold his face in shaking palms and then he was crying, too, as she ran her fingers through his hair and they collapsed together in a tight embrace. She kissed at his neck and then reached up to his lips, too, fingertips still caressing his jaw. They were both smiling when she pulled away.

She didn’t have to go to Richie, next, as he was on her before she’d had a chance to move away from Stan and she laughed and kissed him all over his face, leaving lip marks on the lenses of his glasses before she lifted them off his face to catch his mouth instead. Her hair was long, the very ends of it almost reaching her waist and Richie tangled his fingers into it against her back to pull her closer. She placed Richie’s glasses on top of her own head as they broke apart but he didn’t seem to care.

He watched her go to Bill, who looked stunned, his bright eyes intense as she touched his face like she had done with Stan. Beverly’s own eyes were a piercing, icy blue and Bill couldn’t believe he had forgotten them so easily. She leaned into Bill more gently than she had with the others and their kiss was slow and intimate and almost breathtaking to watch.

As she was about to move away from him, though, the others were already gathering around them. Ben pressed himself against Beverly’s back, burying his face into her beautiful red curls as she
giggled and slid an arm around Eddie, who was at her side. Richie joined against the other side as Stan and Mike covered the outside of the huddle and suddenly all seven of them were trapped in a warm embrace. Bill felt like he was complete for the first time in so long, like they were seven parts of a whole person and Beverly had been the missing piece. Standing like this, all of them so close together, sharing breath and each other’s scents and feeling the warmth Bill knew that this was where he was supposed to be.

They stayed up into the early hours of the next morning, sitting around the heat of the fireplace once more only this time it felt so much more special. Beverly seemed to be alternating who she was sitting with, as if she couldn’t get enough of any of them. At one point, she was lying across four of them, her head in Ben’s lap as he played with strands of her hair and they gazed into each other’s eyes. Mike and Richie were sitting beside Ben, taking most of her weight. She frequently reached up to touch Richie’s hair or Mike’s face, seeming smitten. The bottom half of her legs were on Eddie, who was curled into Richie’s side looking very content. Beverly had even managed to persuade him to give her a foot rub more than once.

Bill watched this picture from the armchair, where he was sitting, quite happily, squished against Stan and he wished that he could draw the five of them like that, capture Beverly’s smile just right, Ben’s lovestruck gaze upon her, Mike’s head – at one point- resting against Richie’s shoulder like he’d never been more relaxed, and Richie and Eddie… Richie’s hand dangling loosely over Eddie’s shoulder, Eddie’s fingers reaching up every so often to intertwine with his, the way Eddie looked at Richie whenever Richie’s attention was elsewhere, the same way he’d looked at Bev, like he was seeing an angel. Bill wanted to capture all of it.

Later that night, as he lay in bed in his single room he felt quite alone. Mike had the master bedroom, as usual and Bill considered going to share with him but he didn’t want to disturb him if he was already asleep. Stan and Eddie were sharing one of the double rooms and Ben and Bev the other. Richie had been left with the couch again but he never seemed to care. He could fall asleep anywhere.

He felt content, sure, but there was something missing. He longed for some contact from someone more than he’d ever experienced before; he even thought about sneaking downstairs to share the couch with Richie, at least then he could be pressed up against his heat, even if he did sometimes snore and talk in his sleep.

Just as he was seriously thinking about this idea, though, he was overcome with fatigue and his shoulders felt heavy. He’d just stay here, he thought. It was comfortable enough. He had the oddest sensation of sinking into the bed, into the mattress itself but it was warm and soft and pleasant and before he knew it he was falling into a deep sleep.

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It isn’t long before Bill realises that he’s dreaming. He’s in a dark room, not the one he fell asleep in but something else. It’s empty and there’s nothing in this room but for some reason he doesn’t feel afraid. He can hear his own steady breathing, perhaps his sleeping tempo and it’s quite calming, to see nothing and to hear nothing but slow inward and outward breaths.

Things change soon after that when he sees another person in the dark and he realises that it’s Mike. Neither of them speak as Mike gets closer to him but he realises that he can hear Mike’s breath, too and the sound of it is even more comforting than his own. He isn’t even startled when Mike presses his lips onto his own and they’re suddenly sharing a rather heated kiss. Bill thinks that he wants this. He wants this more than anything he’s ever wanted. Mike’s hands are on his
waist and Bill isn’t alarmed to realise that they are both completely undressed, bare skin against bare skin, Mike’s broad chest against him and it feels good.

Mike’s firm hands wander, exploring what feels like the entirety of Bill’s body as he melts into an insanely good kiss. His lips are plump and soft and he knows what he’s doing and Bill wonders at the back of his mind if this is what it would really be like to kiss Mike. Soon, Mike’s tongue is in his mouth and it’s hot but the inside of Mike’s mouth is hotter and Bill wants it all over him. He is vaguely aware that he can taste cinnamon and that he knows Mike always has a fruit tea before bed which he adds it to but he knows that he couldn’t pick up such a detail in a dream, so he pushes that thought aside and enjoys the heat between them.

He’s being pushed backwards and he falls down onto something soft, maybe a bed, but it barely registers as Mike crawls over him and their naked bodies are pressed together in entirety and that tongue is inside his mouth again. He arches up into it, feeling Mike’s palms slide around his waist and underneath his back, short nails and calloused fingers from manual labour grazing his skin. Everything about Mike is passion, from the gentle but firm way he pulls Bill’s body against his own to the tongue exploring every part of Bill’s mouth in detail, lapping at his own tongue and from the soft glide of teeth on his bottom lip. He knows that it could be rough, if he wanted it to be; the power is there, just beneath the surface and Bill feels the anticipation in his bones.

And then their lips break apart, more teeth against his mouth and he feels heady as Mike trails a smooth, wet line of kisses down his neck and onto his chest. He can feel himself mentally begging him to go lower but the talented mouth latches onto one of his nipples instead and he’s arching again and being held by those strong hands and his head goes back in a gasp.

The fingers tighten on his hips again and teeth pull at his skin and he feels soft hair tickling his chest and he looks up to see that Mike is gone and it’s Ben, now. He doesn’t question it as Ben comes up to meet him in a kiss, messier and less experienced than the ones with Mike but hot and good all the same and he relishes in the fact that he has some longer hair to grip his fingers into. Ben’s hands explore, just like Mike’s did and he grips at Bill’s stomach and hips and thighs, fingers digging into him. Bill is so wound up now that he stutters out a breathy ‘yes’ when Ben’s lips start to move lower on him than Mike’s did, heading past his navel. Normally, Bill doesn’t stutter in his dreams but this thought doesn’t cross his mind. He feels teeth bite at his hips over and over and wonders if Ben is really this sexually aggressive or if his own mind is conjuring this.

He twists his fingers into what feels like sheets behind him as Ben reaches the place he really wanted him to go, right between his legs with no hesitation and he feels heat all around him, intense and wet and it feels so good that he’s worried he’s going to wake up any second and it will all be over.

But he doesn’t wake up and it continues until he feels like he can’t stand it any longer and by the time he looks down and sees ringed fingers gripping his waist and Richie’s dark hair, he’s begging, helplessly. A mouth takes him in deeper, just as he thinks Richie would do if this was real and his head hits the bed again but it’s so fucking good that he can’t even make a noise. He feels Richie’s hands on his thighs, feels his fingers digging into him, feels an eager tongue lapping at him inside a mouth that is deliciously hot.

And then the hands slide away from his thighs and up onto his waist and stomach and they’re smaller and softer and he looks down to see delicate fingers and long, red hair falling onto his skin and he thinks that if he has to take any more of this he’s going to go insane…and he kind of wants to...

In a brief flicker of his eyelids, as he’s watching Beverly’s wet, pink lips around him and striking
eyes hidden just beneath pretty eyelashes, suddenly it’s Eddie and it feels inexperienced and teeth catch him a couple of times, just slightly but it sends pleasure shivering through his spine and he reaches down now to tangle his fingers into Eddie’s soft, dark hair. It earns a soft moan on Eddie’s part that vibrates around him and he feels so, so close but it’s like he just can’t quite reach the edge, even when Eddie’s lips pull away and he’s teasing him with his tongue and deep brown eyes are looking up into his own and it’s the sexiest thing he’s ever seen in his life.

He gets lost in his own mind again as Eddie crawls his way up his body so they can share a kiss and Bill thinks of where Eddie’s mouth has just been and the idea of it drives him even madder. There’s heat around him again but it’s tight this time, insanely tight and Bill has never felt anything like it and he realises with some bliss that he must be inside Eddie. He feels Eddie’s hips against his own and he knows that he’s right from the press of Eddie’s thighs against his own waist. His hands are shaking as those hips start to move and Eddie is making soft noises into his mouth and he knows that this isn’t really how it goes but it’s a dream, of course, and he grips at him in encouragement.

Bill knows that he’s never felt anything like this, this tight, hot pleasure as Eddie’s hips stutter against his own in soft little movements that are gradually becoming more and more frantic. He can’t quite believe what’s happening when Eddie breaks their kiss to moan his name out loud and it turns him on so much that he can’t breathe and all he can do is stare at Eddie, gasping and whining above him. His fingers are digging into Eddie’s skin so hard that if this was real he knows he’d have bruises there the next day.

…it still doesn’t happen. There are lips against his neck, now and he knows that it’s Beverly again. He can feel long hair ticking his shoulders, dripping down his sweaty chest like sheets of cool silk but those hips are still moving on his own. The heat is still there, not as tight but wet, so wet and she’s pressed tight against him, rolling in slow, teasing circles, gliding against him. He feels breath against his jaw and his name is said again, whispered this time in Beverly’s voice, sweet but dripping with lust and he thinks that this is it. He’s gone crazy already in this stupid dream fantasy. And then Beverly disappears just as soon as she appeared and he feels cool against his front.

He wonders if the dream is over, if that was it but then, just as he’s about to open his eyes, someone is tugging at his legs and he looks to see Richie again and he opens Bill’s thighs and leans down over him. Bill gets lost in a hot, messy kiss as Richie’s curls touch his cheeks and hands grope at him hungrily and he wonders how this dream is going to end, if it ever does but then he feels something else…another type of heat but this time it’s inside him and he feels Richie’s hips press against his own and knows exactly what it is.

It’s still a dream, he knows that it would hurt otherwise but here in his imagination it just feels good, hot and good. It feels a little bit like he’s being stretched but there’s no pain and he thinks he likes it, no, he knows he likes it when Richie’s hips hit his own again and pleasure spirals through him, through his insides. He feels himself gripping at Richie’s shoulders, pulling him closer and urging him on even though he doesn’t really know what he’s asking for. But he definitely gets it, whatever it is, and soon it’s so much quicker than before and so intense that he feels like this is
definitely the point where he’s going to wake up. He kind of wishes that he could, because the pleasure of Richie’s hips rutting against his own, pressing inside him is almost too much to bear. He’s clawing at Richie’s back, now, with his nails, earning soft groans and low sounds from the back of Richie’s throat. Before long it’s almost aggressive, the way Richie is slamming into him but he knows it’s a dream and that he can take it and he feels like it’s getting him so much closer to where he needs to be. He thinks, briefly, as Richie bites at his lips, that this is as close to the word ‘fucking’ as he could ever describe to anyone.

Just as he’s getting used to the harsh rhythm and his hands are in Richie’s hair and he’s gasping and almost moaning against his shoulder, it becomes slower and the hips against his are broader and there are no more dark curls to grip onto. He feels hands lift his hips off the bed and it’s much deeper now, like this and he opens his eyes briefly to run his eyes down a toned back with dark skin. Mike’s hands roam the length of his body as they rock together smoothly and Bill actually finds himself moaning, low and soft, as if it’s being drawn from him involuntarily.

When he closes his eyes for another second, it’s Ben, and he sees a hand beside his head, fingers gripping at fabric and mimicking the movement of the one still on his waist. Ben is much sweeter than the others and his body presses against Bill’s now like he’s worried that he’s going to break him but Bill encourages him, leads him.

He feels completely blissful. He doesn’t care what’s going to happen next, as long as he can continue to feel this pleasure that seems to course through his entire body like electricity. It feels more intense, now, like he’s getting closer to something…

…and then there are lips on his neck, below his ear and the hands holding his hips squeeze at him slowly and he sighs out in the pleasure of it as a firm body continues to rock against his own. It could still be Mike or Ben, but then he feels soft hair against his cheek, curls like silk and he knows exactly who it is. He’s lost in it again, the sensation that his very nerves are on fire but it feels good, it feels fucking amazing and he presses his thighs against a waist, urging them silently to continue, to go faster, to do something that will drive him closer to the edge.

A mouth touches his own, tender and sweet and a tongue laps at him and he tastes black coffee and chases it, finding the source and sinking into it like he’s never wanted to be anywhere else. A stomach slides against his own, driving the lower half of his body up from the bed slightly and he has to open his eyes, has to know. He breaks the kiss to do so; hips rock him into the bed and that insane heat drives further into his core just as he sees Stan’s hazel eyes and it’s overwhelming and he can’t catch his breath. He wants to make a sound, to moan, to gasp, anything but his voice has been stolen away and all he can do is drop his head back as Stan’s body, hot against his own, drives him deeper and deeper into the mattress and he’s sure he’s never felt pleasure like it.

If he could stop to think he would wonder how a dream could possibly be this vivid. He would wonder how he can vaguely smell the clean scent of Stan’s shampoo, how he can feel the sweat on his own skin, and Stan’s as they slide together, how, when Stan’s fingers slide into his, he can feel the old scar across Stan’s palm and his attention is drawn there briefly; he knows that’s the hand with his own scar to match, and the place where they touch seems to burn.

But he can’t think straight anymore so these things go mostly unnoticed. All he can think about is how Stan’s honey-coloured eyes seem to be undoing him even more than the sex itself. And he can’t look away from that gaze even if he tries to. He realises in that moment how much power this man truly holds over him, over his mind and his heart. His dream couldn’t have ended any other way but this.

And he wishes now that it wouldn’t end because he’s sure that he could stay here forever, trapped
in this loop of unimaginable pleasure where he can’t seem to find release. He has never felt so close to all of them as he does here in this fantasy. At the same time, he wishes that it was real because he knows that it would end so much better.

He can still feel the electricity in his veins like it’s burning to get out, like it’s connecting his body to Stan’s, like it’s passing between them and it’s so overwhelming that he doesn’t realise he’s speaking until he hears his own voice. He’s begging, now, stuttering almost to the point of it being incomprehensible; it rolls out on every outward breath like he can’t control it but Stan catches the words in his mouth as their lips close together. The pleasure at the point where their hips connect is unbearable, now and Bill feels like he might die like this. But, god, would it be a good way to go…

He doesn’t realise that he’s awake until he hears the familiar sound of crickets chirping in the long grass of the fields outside his bedroom window. It’s still dark out and he stares at the ceiling for what feels like hours, trying to comprehend the dream. It’s fresh in his memory, vivid and he kicks the sheets off himself lazily when he realises that his shirt is sticking to him. The cool air hits his skin immediately; it’s cold outside but it feels good on his heated body and he runs fingers through his hair to push sweaty bangs out of his eyes, sighing.

The dream is still fresh, alright. The memory of pleasure is still there, tingling all over his skin and in the ends of his fingers almost like it was real. There is a noticeable tent in his shorts but he ignores it for now and continues to stare at the ceiling. The inside of his mouth tastes faintly bitter, faintly sweet like cinnamon and he swallows hard. There goes his imagination running wild again.

He tries to remember when the last time was that he was this hard but he can’t. It’s almost painful, not quite but whenever his fingers slide close to any part where he’s particularly sensitive he feels it again, just tipping into discomfort but in the best way. It doesn’t take a lot; a few long strokes, he thinks about the dream again, about Richie’s mouth, Beverly’s hair tickling his skin, Ben’s teeth, Mike’s hands, Eddie’s voice, Stan’s eyes…

…and he comes so hard that he has to clamp his own sweaty palm over his mouth to stop the desperate sound that tries to escape. The walls are thin in this house and the room where Eddie and Stan are sleeping is right next door to his own. He struggles to steady his breathing as he comes down from his high and he keeps his hand firmly against his lips just in case, until he’s sure he’s finished.

He climbs out of bed after, setting off for the upstairs bathroom so he can clean himself up properly. Wiping himself with tissues was enough when he was a teen and lazy and hormonal but now he likes to wash his hands. The thought of the alternative is pretty gross to him now.

Opening his door, he realises that the bathroom light is already on. There’s a soft glow around the edges of the door, which is slightly ajar and he makes his way there slowly, bare feet creaking against the wooden floorboards. When he pushes the door open, it’s only Eddie, taking some pills with a glass of water. He looks a little bit dishevelled and Bill has to ignore his own mind when it kindly brings back the image of the Eddie in his dream. He hopes that the bathroom light is dim
enough to hide the flush in his cheeks at the thought.

“E-Eddie…”

Eddie nods as he’s drinking his water. He seems to be avoiding Bill’s eye when he finishes the glass to place it on the counter.

“What are you doing up so late?”

“What are y-you doing up so late?”

There’s a taught silence between them that Bill is sure he imagines. Eddie taps at the glass again with a single word ‘pills’ and then squeezes past Bill’s form in the doorway to get out of the bathroom. As he passes, Bill is sure that Eddie looks a little bit sweaty, too. The ends of his hair are sticking against his cheeks just so and his neck seems a bit red and patchy. He seems uncomfortable when his chest brushes against Bill’s and he even reaches up as if to push him away. Bill thinks, as he watches Eddie disappear into the room next to his own, that he probably imagined that, too.

He cleans himself up quickly, nervous about seeing anyone else who might potentially get up to use the bathroom or hear him and wake up, before returning to his room to go back to sleep.

The rest of his night is dreamless.
Chapter 24

The following morning is equally uncomfortable and in more ways than one. Bill wakes up with a strange ache in his whole body, the kind you get after vigorous exercise the day before. His thighs in particular feel sore and he rubs at them as he sits in bed. There’s a deep ache low down in his back, too, but it’s not bad and he almost wonders if he imagines that one. It only seemed to flare when he pushed himself into sitting, anyway, and then slowly faded out.

Bill’s first awkward encounter that day is with Stan as he’s making his way to the bathroom to brush his teeth. Unluckily, Stan is heading in the same direction and they end up in there together. It’s not unusual for two or more of them to brush their teeth beside each other without a care but this time it’s different.

Stan is still in the clothes he slept in and his hair is messy, something that’s a rare sight as he mostly gets up earlier than them all and has cleaned himself up by the time they see him. Bill tries not to focus on the sight of a sort of soft, sleepy-looking Stan Uris. While the rest of them seem to sleep in sweats or shorts and t-shirts—with the exception of Richie, who sleeps in his underwear unless it’s really cold-, Stan usually sports matching pyjama sets in muted colours, often in silk and Bill, at least, thinks it’s the cutest thing ever. He’s wearing something that fits that description now, a button up shirt and pants in a pale, duck egg blue. The top buttons of his shirt are undone and Bill is struggling not to look at the peek of smooth collarbone that is showing there as he scrubs at his top teeth with a toothbrush.

Stan is insanely careful when he brushes his teeth and it always takes him at least ten minutes to go through his whole dental hygiene routine—it’s not quite as extreme as Eddie’s but still overboard in Bill’s opinion- and Bill has to slow himself down, partly because he’s worried that Stan is going to judge him for how long he spent doing it and never want to kiss him again and partly because he wants to stick around to see if the tension he’s feeling is really in his imagination or not.

As Bill cups his hands under the flow of water to rinse out his mouth, Stan is brushing his teeth for the second time. Bill has only ever seen Eddie do this and he’s sure that Stan made this addition to his routine just so he wouldn’t have to talk to him. So Bill waits, pretending to tidy his hair in the mirror for what feels like way too long until he eventually sees Stan spit toothpaste into the sink again out of the corner of his eye.

“G-g-good muh-morning,” Bill ventures, inwardly cringing at the bad delivery of it. His stutter is always worse when he first wakes up, like his brain has yet to adjust to speech. He catches Stan’s eyes in the mirror for a split second before Stan looks away.

“Good morning.”

It’s flat and kind of dismissing and Bill knows that this is as much as he’s going to get out of him when Stan starts flossing his teeth, so he leaves.

He bumps into Beverly in the hallway. She’s wearing a black t-shirt with a band logo which looks old and much too baggy and Bill recognises it as one of Richie’s. She doesn’t seem to be wearing anything underneath it and he feels flustered at the thought. Her long hair is tied in a loose plait over one shoulder.

“Morning, sleepyhead,” she chuckles, ruffling Bill’s hair and pinching one of his cheeks fondly and Bill smiles. There is no weird tension with Beverly at all and Bill thinks that maybe Stan is just a little bit grumpy this morning and maybe last night Eddie was tired.
“G-good morning, Bev.”

She passes him to get to the bathroom just as Stan is leaving it and they get stuck in a weird dance as they both try and step out of each other’s way. Eventually, Stan lifts her to spin them and switch their positions and she giggles and woops and kicks her bare feet a little, looking a bit flustered. Her t-shirt rides up a little under Stan’s palms and Bill is relieved to see, as he goes back to his own room to dress, a brief peek of white panties.

The breakfast table is even worse. Bill ends up sitting directly opposite Eddie and Stan and neither of them seem able to look him in the eye. Stan has buried himself in a newspaper, as usual, and Eddie puts another spoonful of cereal into his mouth every time Bill tries to speak to him so he doesn’t have to reply. Only Mike seems to be his regular, cheery self and he shoots Bill a ‘good morning’ as soon as he enters the room, along with a dazzling Mike brand smile.

Ben seems uncomfortable, too, when he enters the kitchen not long after. Bill was hoping that he’d help to break some of the tension but after greeting them all rather vaguely he only sits quietly with his coffee. It’s strange for him to skip breakfast but he doesn’t eat anything at all and occupies himself with reading the back of Stan’s newspaper.

Richie and Beverly are the ones to finally lighten the mood. Beverly is still wearing the shirt she slept in, only having tugged on a pair of jeans and some socks but she’s totally rocking the look anyway. She’s that rare kind of beautiful where everything else, even when unflattering, only emphasises her natural allure. Richie, on the other hand, is still not dressed and he emerges from the living room –his sleeping quarters- like some kind of creature leaving its lair, with his mop of hair partly covering his eyes and a blanket wrapped around his shoulders like a cape. He has bags under his eyes.

Beverly greets Ben first, perching in his lap to take a sip of his coffee as he watches her like he’s been blessed by some kind of goddess. She kisses him, then, with a fond ‘good morning’, raking thin, feminine fingers through his hair and Bill sees him smile against her lips and it’s awfully sweet.

There’s an almost exact contrast to this at the other side of the table as Richie swoops in to nuzzle at Eddie’s cheek and wraps his blanket around both of them. Eddie swats him away and complains that Richie is making him too hot and that he smells. Stan agrees with the latter aloud from behind his newspaper and Bill has to, as well. Richie’s clothes are starting to develop that definite unwashed scent and on this particular morning he has a vague sweaty aroma about him.

“Richie, as the man of this house I am telling you to take a shower,” Mike chuckles from where he’s washing some dishes in the sink, “It’s for all of us, no…for the good of mankind.” Nobody argues with Mike stating that he’s the man of the house.

“And wash your fucking clothes, you pleb,” Beverly adds helpfully from where she’s still sitting in Ben’s lap with her arms draped about his neck. She and Richie both laugh at this and Richie dances across the room to attack her with his blanket, too, completely enveloping Ben, face and all as he drapes it around Beverly’s frame to give her a hug.

“Ohay I wasn’t gonna agree with you guys but it kind of stinks in here,” Ben’s muffled voice comes from underneath the sheet and Richie only laughs again.

“Take it all in, Benny. This is what a man smells like.”

He tightens the blanket around Ben’s head to crush him right into his own chest, close to one of his armpits until Ben is struggling to get free. All they can see are writhing lumps underneath the
fabric until his head finally pokes out through a gap and he takes a deep, overly dramatic breath. His face is a little bit red and his hair has gone fluffy with static and both Bev and Richie chuckle and kiss at his cheeks. He holds Richie away and leans into Beverly’s chest to try and protect himself.

“Richie! I thought I was gonna die in there! It’s like if a men’s locker room and a garbage dump had a baby…and the baby comes out smoking an old, stale cigarette and wearing cheap men’s cologne.”

“You manage to capture images so beautifully, my love,” Beverly fake swoons, as Richie ducks his head into the blanket himself to sniff at one of his own pits. There are tufts of dark hair still sticking up next to Beverly’s face. He pops up again shortly after with a shrug.

“I’ve smelled worse.”

Eddie has a harrowed look on his face that seems to say ‘It’s true. He has’.

Richie loses his makeshift cape onto the kitchen floor at Ben and Beverly’s feet as he goes to get himself some breakfast. He’s naked aside from some grey boxer shorts with pineapples on them and a pair of socks, and Mike leans away when Richie’s bare chest gets pressed into his face as he reaches for a top cupboard.

“Richie…dude.”

He’s holding his tea aside but laughing despite this as Richie ignores him and continues his search. It comes to an abrupt end when Richie realises that his favourite cereal is gone and he sits down at the table all business-like next to Bill, folding his hands like he’s conducting a job interview and clearing his throat.

“Okay, so…it has come to my attention that someone…I’m not naming any names…has been eating my cereal.”

“Your cereal? I’m sorry but who pays the bills—”

Richie ignores Mike’s interjection and clears his throat again, more loudly this time and raises his fist in front of his mouth for emphasis.

“My cereal…is very special to me. I am not a morning person—”

“You’re not a person, period,” Stan adds as he folds his newspaper neatly onto the next page.

“I like to have…excuse me, Stanley, have to have my sugar boost before I start my day. All work and no cereal makes Richie a dull boy and all that. If I can’t eat my cereal…then the rest of my day is ruined, so, thank you for ruining my day, Bill.”

“Wh-…h-how do you know it wuh-was me?!”

“Exhibit ‘A’,” Richie says loudly, talking over him and motioning to an empty bowl on the table in front of Bill. There are dregs of milk in the bottom, “Or did you just have a bowl of milk for breakfast? Like a cat?”

“It w-was granola!”

“Oh please! I’ve never seen you eat granola and we’ve been friends since kindergarten!”
“Just because you’ve n-never suh-seen me do something doesn’t mean that I don’t!”

“Admit that you ate the last of my Captain Crunch, Bill, and this will all be over!”

“B-but I didn’t! Stan! Eddie! You saw me eat s-some granola, right?!”

Eddie shrugs quickly with an innocent look on his face and Stan shakes his head with a short ‘I was reading the news’.

“I ate it,” Beverly says suddenly and they all go quiet. Richie looks destroyed, and he puts a hand to his chest.

“…Bev?”

“I got hungry in the middle of the night.”

“You came down here in the middle of the night? To eat my cereal?”

“Yeah. I mean…I tried not to wake you…I even left the light off.”

“Well, I was awake anyways,” Richie chuckles, shrugging a little.

“You were?”

“Yeah but I was busy.”

“Busy doing what?” Beverly says before she can think, before realisation dawns and she laughs and grimaces at the same time, “Ew! Richie! I was down here!”

“Time waits for no man, Bev. If you have the urge you gotta go with it.”

“That’s fucking gross,” Eddie mumbles in the background as Stan sighs and buries himself deeper into his paper.

“Okay don’t act like you guys all don’t do it.”

“D-do we have to talk about it over br-breakfast, though?” Bill chuckles.

“Yeah, Bill,” Richie says suddenly, turning to face him in his chair, “Yeah, we do, because on this particular night the reason I was doing it was because I had a dirty dream about you,” he raises his eyebrows as if to punctuate this revelation, “And I’m not even sorry.”

It doesn’t get the response he hoped, however, as the entire room goes silent and Stan even lowers his reading material against the table top. Mike looks like he’s deep in thought. Ben looks like he’s come to a realisation that he didn’t want to have. Eddie looks like he’s going to have a panic attack. Bill looks like Richie just slapped him right across the face.

Beverly, on the other hand, looks like she’s just received the greatest gift anyone’s ever given her.

“OH MY GOD. No fucking way.”

They all look in her direction now. Eddie looks like he’s going to vomit.

“I had a dream about Bill, too!” she squeals, clapping her hands to her face as Richie’s jaw drops in surprise and amusement and he scoots his chair closer to where she and Ben are sitting. Bill swallows hard and stares at the table.
“You had a dream about Bill, too? A sex dream?” Richie is getting louder and louder by the second, “I’m betting it was pretty different to mine, though.”

“We had sex,” Beverly nods, looking over in Bill’s direction but he doesn’t meet her eye and is still looking at his empty cereal bowl in vague horror, “It was hot.”

Bill chuckles, then, and it startles Eddie.

“O-okay, so…y-y-you guys both had a dream about me,” he shrugs his shoulders a little, “It d-doesn’t matter, right?”

“I had a dream about you, too,” Mike adds from where he’s still standing over at the counter. He doesn’t seem as bothered by it as Eddie, Stan and Ben clearly are.

“A sex dream?” Richie asks, and Mike nods slowly, sipping his tea. Bill rests his elbows against the table, linking his fingers and pressing his mouth against the backs of them.

“So…three of us…had sex dreams about Bill last night?” Beverly chuckles, looking down at Ben, “What did you dream about?”

“Um…w-” Ben’s face has gone red again and he isn’t looking at anyone.

“Oh my god,” Beverly covers her face again with her hands and looks at Richie. They are both clearly amused by this turn of events as Richie looks equally happy with this revelation.

All eyes turn to Stan and Eddie, then. Bill is watching them both warily, like he doesn’t know if he wants to hear it or not.

“Okay we can’t be held accountable for something that’s just a dream, right? I mean weird shit happens all of the time in dreams and that doesn’t mean anything. They’re just dreams…like your mind is just sorting through shit and puts random pieces together and…and it doesn’t mean that you…you want…those things…” Eddie rambles suddenly and Richie lets out a loud ‘HA!’

“I didn’t have a dream about Bill,” Stan says, somewhat irritably, although it’s directed towards Richie more than anyone else, “So there ends that theory.”

Bill can’t help but feel a little bit disappointed. Then again, he had the same dream as they all did, and he knows that Stan is lying. He doesn’t say anything.

“Why would all of us have a sex dream about Bill except Stan?” Richie asks to the room, looking from one person to another, “I would have thought that it would be the other way around.”

Stan folds his newspaper away neatly at this comment, placing it onto the table and pushing out his chair to stand.

“Well, Richie, maybe some of us are just better at controlling ourselves than others.”

He leaves the room with a sharp turn of his heel and Bill can’t help thinking that Stan always seems to have a flair for the dramatics.

He also can’t help thinking that he absolutely loves it.
Chapter 25

The rest of that day is just as awkward. Bill spends a lot of it by himself as Eddie, Stan and Ben still don’t seem to want to talk to him. He sort of understands them; he was a little bit uncomfortable about the dream, too but he can’t help feeling like they’re blowing it out of proportion somewhat. It was just a dream, after all, whether they all had the same one or not.

Richie, Bev and Mike, on the other hand, talk to Bill when they see him like nothing has happened at all between them and it’s nice and he’s grateful for it. He spends a lot of his day in the fields with Mike, helping him with the chores that nobody else seems to want to do. Now Beverly is here, though, she gets her hands dirty just as much as the rest of them, if not more. She doesn’t let them give her any concessions because of her gender and Bill truly admires her for it. None of them really think about the fact that Beverly is a woman unless it’s directly brought up in conversation – although it rarely is- and her friendship with all of them is no different to the ones they have with each other. She really is just ‘one of the guys’.

That evening, the awkward silence at the dinner table gets too much to bear. Richie taps his foot and bites at his nails and cracks joke after joke that only Mike and Beverly seem to laugh at, Eddie barely touches his food and on a few occasions the silence is broken by the hissing sound of his inhaler, Ben reads a book at the table to try and separate himself from any sort of conversation and Stan sits his usual stoic, poised self, barely venturing any comments at all unless someone speaks directly to him. It makes Bill feel anxious and a little bit angry at them all.

“Okay, guys, this is stupid,” Richie finally says loudly to the group as he puts down his fork sharply and it clatters against his plate, “So, we all had a sex dream about Bill. So fucking what? Don’t try and tell me that none of you have ever thought about him in that way before. And even if you haven’t, who fucking cares? We’re best friends, right? It should be funny! We should be laughing about it and making jokes and at least fucking talking to each other because it’s driving me crazy!”

Beverly laughs with a loud ‘AMEN’ and claps her hands above her head and Mike raises his eyebrows in a ‘finally, someone said it’ kind of way as he eats some more homemade pie –made by himself, of course as he rarely lets the others help in the kitchen-.

Eddie clears his throat and scoots his chair closer to the table, placing his inhaler down beside his plate. It’s a relief to see, as for the rest of the meal he’s been clinging to it like it contains his life source.

Bill finds the courage to say what he’s been thinking, now, too.

“B-besides, it was j-j-just a dream, right? I d-don’t care about it and I huh-had a dream about all of you, so…” he shrugs, as Richie chokes on his soda.

“You had a dream about ALL of us?!”

Bill chuckles nervously but then nods.

“Y-yeah. I did.”

“Awesome,” Richie looks impressed and sort of strangely proud and it makes Bill feel much better about it, “But it wasn’t just a dream, Bill.”

Bill looks at Richie, then, as he’s about to swallow another mouthful of pie.
“…Yes it w-was…” he says with his mouth still full. The rest of them are looking at Richie with the same horrified expressions.

“Okay,” Richie chuckles, kicking his chair out to stand from the table, “If it was just a dream, then explain this, Bill.”

Richie turns so that his back is to the group of people seated at the table and hikes his t-shirt up underneath his arms. Beverly half-laughes, half-gasps and covers her mouth with her hands and Bill has to swallow his pie before he chokes. There are red scratches up and down the top half of Richie’s back and across his shoulders that looks like they were made by fingernails. He tugs his shirt back down when they’ve all taken it in and returns to his chair, looking smugly at Bill.

“Th-that doesn’t…prove anything…you could have d-done that to yourself…”

“But I didn’t, did I, Billy? You made these marks, and you know that you did.”

Beverly is laughing uncontrollably behind her cupped hands.

“And I saw you rubbing your back earlier, Bill,” Richie continues, his smile growing by the second, “Feeling a little bit sore this morning?”

Bill can’t help but chuckle a little bit at this, too.

“W-…I mean, I did a lot of work on the f-farm yesterday…”

“Lying on your back?”

Beverly is in stitches, now.

“Okay, s-so maybe…I’m feeling a little bit…d-delicate…”

Mike starts laughing as well at this, in his deep, warm voice and Ben looks like he’s struggling not to crack a smile.

“A little bit delicate?” Richie guffaws, “After what I did to you?”

“Ex-exactly!” Bill laughs, “I know it w-was just a dream, Richie, but you c-could have hurt me!”

Richie scoffs and scoops some mashed potatoes into his mouth, speaking through it.

“I rocked your world, Denbrough.”

“Hey, I rocked his world, too,” Beverly chuckles, raising her hand, “Speaking for all of the ladies in the room.”

She looks at Bill questioningly with raised eyebrows and he nods in agreement, chuckling.

“Y-yeah, I mean, i-it was good. It was all good.”

“But who was the best?” Richie asks, and all eyes in the room suddenly turn to Bill. Even those who seemed uncomfortable with the situation now seem curious about his answer.

Bill chews at his bottom lip a little as he thinks, before shaking his head and laughing.

“N-no. I’m not answering that.”
“But now you have to,” Richie states, looking around the table for support and earning a few nods.

“Yeah. I mean, we all know who it was but it would be nice to hear you say it,” Stan says suddenly. He has a glass of wine with his meal and he picks it up to take a sip. Bill looks at him with an amused expression.

“I th-thought you didn’t have a d-d-dream about me.”

“Of course I didn’t,” Stan takes another sip of his Sauvignon Blanc.

“Yeah, me neither,” Eddie says sarcastically and they all laugh. Stan nearly spits out his wine. Bill looks at Eddie, then, and they make eye contact for the first time that day and it feels like a weight is lifted from his chest.

“I’m sorry, you guys. I know I was being stupid,” Eddie continues, still looking at Bill, “You’re my best friend, Bill. So what? So we both…had a dream where we…”

He can’t seem to find an appropriate word but the rest of the table is very helpful.

“Made love?” Mike suggests.

“Consummated your relationship?” Ben questions.

“Bumped uglies?” Richie ventures.

“Fucked?” Beverly chuckles and high fives Richie and they waggle their fingers together like some annoying comedy duo.

“Why can’t any of you just say ‘had sex’?” Stan says with an exasperated look on his face. Eddie sniggers, “But it was more like…what Beverly said…”

He and Bill share a brief look across the table and Bill is the one to look embarrassed, this time as the rest of the Losers shout out a ‘WOO’ in unison and Eddie almost looks a little bit smug.

“I never knew you had it in you, Eds,” Richie chuckles, patting him roughly on the shoulder and Eddie raises his eyebrows at him with a ‘yeah, well, I do’.

“You still didn’t answer the question, Bill,” Mike cuts in as Richie is about to say something else and they all look at Bill again.

“W-what question?”

“Which one of us was the best?” Mike chuckles, taking a sip of his own glass of wine.

“Th-this is a trick question, right? B-because whoever I pick, everyone else is g-gonna get mad.”

“We won’t get mad,” Mike smiles wide in his usual dashing way and Bill can’t help but smile back, “Right, guys?”

They all nod except Richie and Stan. They are, after all, two of the most competitive of the group and this is something neither of them will accept losing at, Stan because Bill is involved and Richie because he is a sore loser with absolutely everything. Once, when they were twelve, Richie badly lost a game of Monopoly –they all ganged up to bankrupt him- and wouldn’t speak to the rest of them for three whole days.
“Uh…o-okay…” Bill clasps his hands together against the table in front of his plate, glancing around at each of the other people sitting at the table in turn as if he’s adding it all up in his head, “It w-was all ruh-really good so whoever I say, I don’t want e-everyone else to feel bad…but…” he takes another quick look around the room, “…I’m gonna have t-to say Eddie.”

The room erupts into a cacophony, a mix of laughter, whistling and shouts of disagreement. Eddie goes bright pink in the cheeks and can’t look at Bill at first.

“What the fuck, Bill?!?” Richie complains even through his laughter, “Please, explain yourself.”

“Well, like I already said, it was all amazing but…not many people have Eddie’s…energy…”

Eddie is covering his mouth, now, hiding a rather obvious smirk behind it but he still looks embarrassed. Mike is howling and Beverly is looking at Eddie, both shocked and impressed as Richie pounds on the table with his palms over and over again.

“Eddie, you’ve been holding back on us you little sex god!” Richie shouts over the rest of the noise and Eddie covers the rest of his face, too with an exasperated ‘RICHIE!’

Bill only chuckles as he watches Eddie from across the table, although he mouths a ‘sorry’ when Eddie finally uncovers his face and they meet each other’s gaze.

“Well, it could have been worse,” Stan chuckles through another sip of his wine, “You could’ve said Richie.”

“Hey, I was awesome, okay!?” Richie stands up to point across at Stan. It would have looked aggressive had they both not been laughing, “Bill couldn’t get enough of me!”

“Hey, d-don’t bring me into this!”

“What do you mean ‘don’t bring me into this’?” Ben chuckles, “Like you weren’t involved in this at all.”

“Hey, j-just because you all ha-had wet dreams about me. I can’t help b-being irresistible.”

“That’s true,” Richie nods, “And it was a wet dream indeed. At least it was after I woke up,” he makes a crude hand gesture and clicks his tongue against the corner of his mouth and Eddie covers his mouth with an ‘oh my god’ as the rest of them laugh.

“Don’t pretend you all didn’t get yourselves off afterwards,” Richie continues, raising his eyebrows at them all.

“I was sleeping next to Stan, so…” Eddie begins but Richie shrugs his shoulders and gives him a ‘so?’ expression, “That’s even better. You guys could’ve helped each other out.”

Stan takes such a long sip of his wine that he drinks all of it and has to pour himself another glass. Eddie is staring at Richie and shaking his head slowly.

“That should be our new secret handshake,” Richie chuckles, “Except with Beverly it’s less of a handshake and more of a…gesture…” he motions with two of his fingers and Beverly laughs and nods at him with a wink. Ben looks about as embarrassed as Eddie does.

The lively atmosphere continues well into the evening after this and it seems like the awkwardness from before is finally gone. Plenty of jokes fly, Bill gives them snippets of detail about the dream as each of them were only aware of the parts where they were involved and Richie hilariously tries
to act them all out with Bill, which results in the two of them lying in the middle of the floor of the living room after Richie has chased him, with Bill laughing so hard he’s crying, curled up in a ball as Richie tries to get on top of him. Richie had previously tried to persuade each person to demonstrate their own parts of the dream but only Beverly and Stan—who had had one too many glasses of wine at this point—were willing to take part.

When Bill goes up to bed that night he’s satisfied and filled with that comfortably tired feeling you get from laughing hard for a long time. He parts from Richie with a firm hug at the bottom of the stairs—most of them do, as Richie is still left sleeping on the couch—and then brushes his teeth next to Eddie and Stan. It’s not uncomfortable in the slightest this time, although they do have to try and avoid eye contact with each other in the mirror as they keep giggling when they do. Stan in particular is in quite a playful mood, as he often is after he’s consumed alcohol and he ends up with foamy toothpaste all down the front of his shirt which Bill wipes off for him while Eddie takes his night time pills. Mike and Beverly join them at one point, Beverly telling them that Ben is already asleep and they all sneak back to her room to take a brief peek at him and gush about how cute he is when he’s sleeping, before retiring to their own rooms. Stan and Eddie are still roommates and Eddie has to practically drag Stan inside the bedroom when he won’t stop saying goodnight to Bill and kissing him and touching his face. Bill would have been more than happy for it to continue.

Bill is comfortable in bed that night and he feels like he’s going to sleep well. He can vaguely hear Eddie and Stan talking next door and the muffled sounds of their voices is comforting. He smiles to himself at one point when he recognises Eddie’s laughter coming through the wall and it gives him a light, fluttery feeling in his chest.

He curls into the sheets and buries his face into the soft pillow, feeling completely content for the first time in a while.

Bill dreams vividly again that night. It takes him a while to realise that he’s actually asleep and at first he thinks he’s woken up in the farmhouse. It’s dark and silent but he’s still comfy and although he feels quite thirsty he doesn’t want to have to get up. He does, though, eventually, climbing out into the cold from underneath the blankets to feel his bare feet touch the wooden floor. He thinks about Stan and Eddie being next door as he leaves his room onto the hallway, wondering if they’re asleep and if they’re dreaming or not.

There’s not a single sound at first and it’s almost eerily silent. Uncomfortably silent. Bill thinks then that something isn’t right with this. He can’t even hear the crickets outside or the occasional sheep or cow or goat, nor the distant creak of a mattress as someone turns in their sleep.

But then a sound does reach his ears; it’s the soft hum of the light in the bathroom and it seems like only now does he realise that it’s on. Just like the other night, he can see the rectangular outline of dim yellow around the edges of the wooden door. He thinks that it must be Eddie again, taking some pills or drinking some water as he often does—Eddie hates having a dry mouth—but for some reason he knows that it isn’t and it makes him uneasy. The thin strip of light around the door is almost menacing as it beckons him to look inside. His chest feels a little tight but he pads slowly towards the room across the hallway, pressing his palm flat against the wood and giving it a push.

What greets him inside is something that he hopes he will never have to see again. The bathtub is filled with water, past the brim to the point of lapping over the edges onto the aged tiles. The steam from the hot water has filled the room, condensing against the mirror and fogging it over and as Bill opens the door it streams out into the cold hallway. Beverly is lying in the tub, submerged aside from her head above chin-level and a thin, pale, freckled arm hanging limply over the side, where droplets of water gather on her fingertips before splashing to the ground. Her hair is wet, as if she’s been under the water entirely at one point and her eyes are closed. Bill would have thought
that maybe she’d just fallen asleep in the bath were it not for the horrible feeling he has.

He calls her name briefly and it comes out weak and shaky. He knows that she won’t reply but he tries anyway, still talking to her as he nears where she is lying in the water. He crouches beside the tub when she doesn’t reply, reaching out to touch her hand and then her face as he gently shakes her. She is completely unresponsive and limp in his hands and were it not for him lifting her head she would have slid completely under the water.

“Beverly!” he tries again, reaching one of his arms into the water to slide it around her small waist and lift her to a sitting position as he pats at her cheek. As he holds her chin, her mouth falls open and some water dribbles out across her lips and he panics, shouting her name over and over but it’s all fruitless. He feels her pulse and there’s nothing.

And that’s the point when he loses it, screaming to the rest of the house desperately, the word ‘HELP’ over and over again but there’s no rush of footsteps or doors slamming open like he expects and the silence is terrifying. He’s crying, now; through his blur of tears he sees that Beverly’s lips are already blue, her skin pallid, framed by flaming red hair that hangs dripping against her pale cheeks and he continues to cry out for someone to help him, to call an ambulance, to do something but he is greeted again with that deadly silence.

He is about to try and lift her out of the tub, perhaps to start mouth-to-mouth or something as he knows he can’t do it from here but that’s when he sees the writing on the mirror, written in the condensation with a finger.

‘ONE’

That’s all it says, but it makes Bill’s blood go cold and he fears the meaning behind it. The letters still drip as if it was written only seconds ago, while he was still in the room. He removes his arm slowly from the water and his sleeve is dripping onto the tiles as he stares at the single word on the glass.

‘What have you done?’ he thinks, and he wants to scream it out loud but he gets to his feet instead. He doesn’t want to leave Beverly, especially not like this, naked and soaking wet but he fears the silence in the rest of the house and he has to know.

“I…I’ll c-come back for you, Bev…” he says in a quiet, shaking voice and he looks at her pale face one last time before leaving the room. It physically hurts him to do it.

He quickly makes his way to Eddie and Stan’s room, next, thinking that he’s just going to barge straight in but as his hand reaches the doorknob he freezes up. He doesn’t know why but he can’t seem to bring himself to open the door and he has to use two hands, both shaking, to eventually get the job done.

The room is dark; he can see the moonlight through the drawn curtains but he recognises the two shapes in there and he falls back against the wall as if he’s been pushed, dropping onto the floor and covering his mouth. One of them is Ben, lying on the rug nearby in a slowly spreading pool of his own blood. It’s coming from an open wound on his head which looks to have been done with a heavy object, although there’s no weapon nearby. The red pool on the rug has soaked into the fabric, probably through it, Bill thinks as he swallows the bile rising in his throat.

Eddie is on the bed. Bill sees him as he staggers past Ben after forcing himself to his feet. He could have sat there and cried forever but he knows that this isn’t the end of this nightmare. That he has to continue. Eddie is still half underneath the sheets, tangled into them slightly like he has been struggling and Bill sees why immediately; there are bruises around Eddie’s throat that look like
they have been caused by someone’s fingers. His eyes are still open and Bill lets out a choked sob at the sight of them, large and wide but unseeing, now.

“Eddie…” Bill croaks, almost inaudibly as his legs give way and he falls to his knees at the bedside, sobbing into the quilts. He looks up again at Eddie’s lifeless form through his tears and notices, with absolute horror, that the adjoining pillow case is stained with what looks like blood, a single word.

‘TWO’

Bill leaves the room quickly after that, passing Ben again and seeing what he didn’t see before, a ‘THREE’, also written in blood, probably Ben’s, against the wooden floorboards and he feels panicked, now. It feels almost like a countdown.

He checks Mike’s room, too, but there’s nothing, although the door is wide open like someone has already bust it open. He knows that he has to go downstairs, now, that whatever he’s looking for – and he hopes that he’s wrong- is going to be there but he can’t seem to make his legs move. Just like with the door handle, he is frozen stiff, with his hand resting on the wall as he stares down into the darkness.

“M-Mike! Stan! Richie!”

There is no reply and he feels himself crying again as he leans his weight against the wall. He whispers ‘please don’t do this’ over and over again to whoever can hear him, perhaps the one who has done this to him, to his friends but there is only silence as a reply.

He must go down.

So he takes the steps as slowly as he can, knowing that each one is bringing him closer to inevitable heartbreak and horror and pain. The front door is open wide and he stops and stares at it for a while, at the patch of grass he can see from here on the stairs and he thinks about running out into the night without stopping to look, across the lawn to the front gate and beyond, maybe flagging down a passing car and having someone else search the house for whatever else he is about to see.

But he can’t do that.

He descends the rest of the stairs just as slowly as the first, noticing the bright kitchen light as soon as he reaches the bottom floor but he doesn’t dare to look inside. There are smears of what looks like fresh blood leading between the living room and the kitchen across the floor, and a vivid handprint against one of the walls. One of the potted plants in the hall is smashed in pieces on the ground, spreading dark soil and shards of blue glass and now that he’s closer he sees that the front door has been broken open rather than unlocked. There’s a noticeable chunk of it missing where the lock was, splintered and hanging apart.

Feeling faint, he rounds the corner into the kitchen and sobs as he sees a pair of legs on the ground, sticking out from behind the table. The legs are bare aside from a pair of white socks which are patterned with smiling yellow faces and stained with streaks of blood. He has to stop before he looks at the rest, shaking his head into thin air as he draws in shuddering breaths. One of the chairs has been knocked over and there are streaks of blood everywhere, on the counter tops, the table, on the walls and even on some of the cupboard handles as if someone who was bleeding has touched every surface. Bill nearly gags when he thinks about it.

“R-Richie?” he calls weakly across the table, swearing out loud and gripping his hands in his own
hair in frustration when there’s no reply.

He crosses the kitchen slowly, bit by bit the scene is revealed to him and he feels like he’s going to vomit. Richie is lying on the kitchen floor in a glistening lake of blood. It’s running out of his neck, from which protrudes a fairly sized kitchen knife. His glasses are lying nearby with the lenses shattered and one of the arms bent out of shape. His knuckles, Bill notices, are bruised and there’s a cut on one of his palms. Worse still, the handle of the knife has a single word carved into it. ‘FOUR’ Bill has to run to the sink, retching into it but nothing comes out and he screams into it instead. He’s still crying but nothing is coming out, now, like his tears have run dry. He still sobs and wails and whimpers, his hands clutching the edges of the porcelain.

It’s then that he notices the blood. There are smears of it across the white sink where his hands have touched it and briefly he thinks that he must be bleeding, too, but he checks his palms and there’s blood, a lot of it; it’s running down his wrists and forearms, smeared across his skin but there are no wounds. There’s a very noticeable handprint of it on one of his sleeves and when he looks down, it’s all across the front of his shirt, too, droplets and smears and blotches of the stuff. He doesn’t remember touching any of it but in his devastation he supposes that it’s possible.

He can’t look at Richie again, he can’t, and he stands at the sink for what feels like forever, although he doesn’t bother to wash his hands.

‘This is not real’, he thinks to himself over and over again.

‘It’s just a dream’

But it seems so vivid that he feels as if it were real. If he rubs his fingers together he can feel the slightly oily consistency of the blood as it starts to congeal. He feels physically sick to his stomach and his head hurts from crying. His throat is raw from screaming.

He takes a deep, shaky breath before he turns around to crouch next to Richie’s body. It hurts, deep in his heart and his soul, it hurts and he swallows another scream but fresh tears come, now, just when he thought they couldn’t. Even in a dream, seeing his friends like this…seeing Richie like this is too much.

The blood pooling on the kitchen floor is still spreading and Bill has to swallow hard to fight another wave of nausea when he thinks about how much of it is actually inside the human body. How much of Richie’s blood is currently leaking out onto the cold tiles, running into the grooves between them and then re-joining like a gruesome puzzle.

Bill stays there for quite a while, resting his head against Richie’s chest as if he might be able to hear a heartbeat if he tries hard enough, but like the house it’s silent and he weeps softly against him, reaching out to hold one of his cold hands.

“Just k-kill me, too…” he whispers after a while into the silence. Richie’s t-shirt is wet beneath his cheek from the tears, “Please…”

But nothing happens. The house continues to stay silent, the second hand on the kitchen clock continues to tick slowly and Richie’s blood continues to run out across the tiles. It’s soaked into the knees of Bill’s sweats, now and it feels warm. He leans to place a gentle kiss against Richie’s lips, which are cold, before he stands.

He explores the rest of the house in a sort of trance. There are tears still silently running down his cheeks, he can’t stop them now but he doesn’t feel it anymore. He doesn’t bother turning on any of the other lights. But there’s nothing else here, just a few broken pieces of furniture like there was a
scuffle.

So he decides to go outside now. He feels like he’s shaking all over but at the same time feels like he’s frozen still. His body feels simultaneously too hot and too cold and everything just feels wrong. The cool night air hits his skin but he doesn’t even register it. He drops to his knees on the porch when he sees the scene outside.

Mike is lying not too far away against the grass, unmoving, face down and Bill doesn’t even need to get closer to know that he’s dead. There’s a wooden baseball bat not too far from one of Mike’s hands, like he was using it to defend himself when he was killed. Bill can’t really see it from here but he knows what the word is that seems to be carved down its length.

‘FIVE’

Further away, against the gravel driveway, is another body. Bill can’t stand but he stares at the shape of it in the dark for a long time. He recognises the pyjamas they’re wearing as Stan’s but he can’t bring himself to go and look closer.

“Don’t do this…” he whispers into the night, “Please don’t do this…”

He starts to cry again, as if the effort of speaking brought him back to reality and suddenly he’s sobbing loudly and he practically crawls down the steps and across the grass to where Mike is. He rests his forehead against Mike’s back, wailing into the fabric of his t-shirt and clutching at him.

“M-Mike…help me…p-please!”

It gets too much soon after and he has to do it. He stands shakily, wobbling on unsteady feet and then he’s running to where Stan is and he’s right it’s Stan, it’s Stan, it is Stan and he can’t even fall. His legs feel like they want to give way but he just stands there, silent and looking around everywhere and clutching at his own hair. His chest is rising and falling so rapidly that he thinks he might pass out soon and he hopes that he does.

And then it finally comes, a blood-curdling, heart-wrenching scream, ripped from his already raw throat and he didn’t even know that he could produce such a sound but he does; he screams until he can’t scream anymore because he’s probably damaged his voice box and that’s when he drops to the gravel, letting it rip into his delicate palms as he scrambles to lift Stan’s head into his own lap.

There are red welts across his neck, thin, intricate patterns gouged into his skin, almost bleeding from a silver chain he wears around his throat which carries the Star of David, like he’s been choked, strangled to death with it. There are nail marks on his skin, too, like he’s clawed at himself in a desperate attempt to get free and that hurts Bill even more. There are some darker gravel stones arranged nearby to spell the word ‘SIX’ but Bill doesn’t notice them.

He feels like he’s going to die.

He wants to.

“KILL ME!” he screams and it comes out weak and crackling but he doesn’t care, “KILL ME YOU F**CKING COWARD!”

He runs his thumbs along Stan’s pale cheeks as gently as if he’s touching a porcelain doll. He still looks beautiful, even like this and it makes Bill cry harder. He barely registers the roar of sirens as a number of police cars pull up in the driveway behind him and suddenly the dark night is lit up with the on/off flash of blue lights. He hears the car doors open, hears people shouting and he’s still staring at Stan’s face as he’s grabbed from behind and ripped away from him.
Someone pushes him against the ground nearby and his face is shoved against the gravel and it scrapes his cheek and cuts into him but he doesn’t feel the pain. There’s cold steel on his wrists and he knows he’s been put into handcuffs but he can’t understand why. He didn’t do anything.

He’s pulled onto his knees, then and it’s all a blur. He watches policemen, five, maybe six of them, enter the farmhouse after looking at Stan and Mike’s bodies. They have their guns raised and some of them are talking into radios. They reappear after a while and then there are paramedics or something similar and they enter the house, too, with what look to Bill like stretchers.

His friends’ corpses are removed from the house one by one and he watches them all silently as they’re packed into ambulances, feeling like one of them might as well be him. He sees an arm hanging out from under one of the white sheets they’ve used to cover them, an arm wearing Eddie’s watch on the wrist. The next sheet after that has long red hair peeking out from underneath it. Two of the white sheets are soaked in blood and Bill knows that it’s Ben and Richie. He feels completely numb.

There’s a police officer still holding his shoulder from behind; he can feel strong fingers gripping at him. He wants to tell them that he didn’t do it, that he would never, that he loves them all and he’d rather kill himself than hurt any of them in the slightest but no words will come. That’s when he looks to his left and sees the holster on the policeman’s waist. A 9mm handgun is tucked into the leather there, and upon the handle, carved and inlaid with gold, the word ‘SEVEN’.

But he can’t reach the gun. He’s still in cuffs and even if he wasn’t, he’s not sure that his timing is good enough for the officer to not simply grab him or put him into some kind of a hold as soon as he makes a move. He wants it. He wants the gun. He knows he could do it. He knows he would find it easy, now, to place the cold barrel against his own temple and press the trigger.

_He could._

But he can’t reach it.

And that is the worst torture of all.

Just as he’s about to wake up from the nightmare, he feels himself drifting and he looks up again at the farmhouse, just in time to see, in one of the upstairs windows, his own bedroom, a clown with red hair and a painted white face, waving at him slowly with a gloved hand.

He jolts awake so fast that his head is spinning and he almost screams out loud. His heart rate feels like it’s going at more than a hundred beats per minute and the sheets are sticking to him. He doesn’t kick them off, like the other night, because this time the dark in the room feels threatening and he’s too scared to move. At least until he gets his bearings.

It isn’t until he realises that his cheeks are wet with tears and that he’s _really_ been crying while he was asleep that he climbs out of bed, as quick as he can to leave the room. He goes to the bathroom first, but the light is off and there’s nobody in there and he feels a tiny bit better. It’s not enough, though, and he makes his way to Stan and Eddie’s room next, bursting in without worrying about waking them.

Stan is awake as soon as he hears the door open, sitting bolt upright in bed and squinting into the dark and Eddie isn’t long after, although he doesn’t sit, just props himself up onto his elbows with his messy hair and a soft ‘Bill?’

And then Bill is sobbing loudly, unable to speak or move as Stan jumps out of the bed to run to him and pull him into his arms and Eddie sits up, looking concerned. Bill cries against Stan’s chest,
gripping at him with shaking hands. He sees Stan’s necklace, hanging outside of his shirt after it swung loose from his leaping out of the bed and he is so visibly distressed by it and mumbling that he wants Stan to take it off that Stan actually does it, without question, although he keeps it in his palm with the chain wrapped around his wrist as he holds his arms around Bill again.

He leads Bill over to the bed as he continues to cry, and sits him between himself and Eddie so that Eddie can comfort him, too. Eddie is unquestioning, as well, and he rubs at Bill’s back and pushes his bangs out of his eyes and holds his hand with an ‘it’s okay’.

They are still trying to calm him down when Mike, Ben and Beverly appear in the doorway not long after the whole scene begins, clearly having heard the doors or Bill crying. Beverly comes straight in and climbs onto the bed with them to sit in front of Bill. Her hair is coming loose from the plait she normally has it in to sleep and she looks a little bit confused but she gives him a tight hug anyway, stroking the back of his neck and rocking him almost like a mother would do with her child. Ben climbs onto the bed, too, when he sees Beverly do it and he strokes Bill’s hair briefly, watching him with unconcealed concern. Mike comes to perch on the edge of the bed beside them with a ‘what’s wrong?’ but Eddie and Stan both shake their heads and shrug their shoulders.

It goes on for a while like this, with Mike offering Bill things like tissues and glasses of water and blankets and Beverly dabbing at his face with said tissues. Stan holds the glass of water for Bill and hands it to him whenever he stops crying long enough to take a sip as Eddie puts a blanket around his shoulders and rubs at him and Ben leans close and talks to him soothingly to try and calm him down. Eventually, when he’s relaxed enough to talk, Bill only asks for someone to go and get Richie and then starts crying again. He can’t seem to stop.

Mike immediately jumps into action, coming back only a few seconds later trailing a very sleepy and dishevelled looking Richie behind him who only just seems to be putting on his glasses. Although he must have told Richie what was going on as when he gets into the room he goes straight to sit with the others on the bed on his knees, at the other side of Beverly, pushing Bill’s hair out of his face and patting him a little.

“Hey, what’s up, Big Bill? You gonna tell us why you’re crying or do we have to guess?”

Bill is so relieved to see Richie alive and okay that he cries more and reaches out for him and Richie immediately pulls Bill against him in a tight hug. Eddie adjusts Richie’s glasses for him over Bill’s shoulder when they go a little bit askew as Richie’s arms are both around Bill and he doesn’t have a spare hand to use. Richie mouths a ‘thanks’ to Eddie and they share a brief smile.

“I…I h-had a d-dream where…y-y-you all…died…” Bill says after a long silence in Richie’s arms and he feels Richie hold him tighter at the revelation.

“We’re not dead, Bill. We’re all right here with you,” Richie says in reply, softly and Bill can only nod for fear that if he speaks again he’ll start crying all over.

“We’re not going anywhere,” Ben adds, joining the hug just as Beverly chuckles and does the same thing and the three of them squish Bill between them.

“You can’t get rid of us that easy,” Mike chuckles, rubbing at Bill’s back briefly before hugging him, too, with an arm around Richie. Stan leans in to brush Bill’s hair with his fingers and kisses his temple.

“We all love you, Bill. We would never leave you,” Eddie finally adds to this, joining the group hug with Stan and he nuzzles against Bill’s back.
This gets a seal of approval and soon there are additions of ‘I love you, Bill’, from every member of the group in turn, each signed with a kiss against his cheek or forehead or neck or shoulder, wherever they can reach him best.

That night, they all fall asleep in the same bed, curled up against one another. The bed isn’t quite big enough but Eddie sleeps lying more or less on top of Mike and they are all pressed tightly together. Bill is in the middle of this and although he feels too hot he couldn’t care less, because he falls asleep after looking into Stan’s eyes, with Richie singing softly into his ear, and although it’s bad because he’s doing it in an accent and there are a few amused ‘shut ups’ from other people in the bed Bill finds that it sends him off quite nicely.
The following morning when he wakes, Bill is pressed so tightly against Stan that his face is buried in his hair. He likes it, though; it smells good and it’s extremely soft but he has to move away because he wants to look at Stan’s sleeping face. He can still feel Richie against his back, feel the messy curls tickling the back of his neck and Richie’s long legs are tangled with his own and Stan’s as if he’s trying to take up as much space as possible.

Stan’s eyes open as if he senses Bill watching him but he doesn’t seem to care. He smiles softly and Bill feels one of Stan’s hands slide around his waist and onto his back, between him and Richie in a sort of half-hug. The back of his hand is against Richie’s stomach.

“Stan, are you touching me up?” Richie mumbles sleepily against Bill’s shoulder and Bill and Stan both chuckle. Stan doesn’t retrieve his hand until Richie tries to push it into the front of his own boxers and Bill is sniggering as Stan looks irritably at them both. Richie is now grinning at Stan over Bill’s shoulder.

“Screw you, Richie,” Stan mutters quietly but he regains his amused expression when Richie starts to kiss at Bill’s neck and Bill is giggling against the pillow and weakly trying to push his head away.

“S-stop it, Rich! You know I’m t-ticklish!” Bill hisses, trying to be quiet so as not to wake the others in the bed but Richie only continues to nuzzle at his neck with his mop of hair, planting kisses all over his jaw and looking smug. Bill leans into it after a little while, giving up trying to get away from him—he’s pressed so tightly between him and Stan that he can’t anyway—when Richie’s kisses become less playful and more slow and affectionate.

“Could you guys stop? This is making me uncomfortable.” Stan says but Richie looks up and leans over Bill to do the same thing to Stan, who reacts in the same way and tries to push him away at first but then becomes a sort of giggly mess and lets him continue. Richie seems to have that effect on everyone. Bill watches them fondly with a sleepy smile.

“I can’t help myself, guys. You two are both so pretty,” Richie mumbles against Stan’s neck and Stan buries his face into the pillow when Bill agrees with a soft ‘Stan is pretty’. Stan seems especially embarrassed when Mike agrees with this statement from behind him. Mike still has his eyes closed but he’s clearly not asleep and he grins when they all look over at him. Eddie is lying sleeping against Mike’s chest, tucked so far beneath the sheets that only his head and shoulders are visible and Richie leaves Stan alone for a minute to take this sight in, crawling over Bill and Stan to get to Eddie.

He plants himself against Eddie’s back, sandwiching him between himself and Mike and Mike chuckles and complains about being crushed but he doesn’t really seem to mind. Richie kisses at the back of Eddie’s neck over and over until he wakes up, looking dazed.

“…What’s going on?”

Bill and Stan both chuckle from where they’re lying. Stan has now turned around so he can look at Eddie, too, and Bill has his chin resting against Stan’s shoulder.

“I’m not a doctor but here is my diagnosis,” Mike chuckles as he opens his eyes to look at Eddie,
“You have a rare type of parasite that has attached itself to you and will gradually drain your life force…”

Richie looks offended but he seems to feel a little bit better when Mike leans up to give him a kiss on the cheek with an ‘I’m kidding’. Eddie doesn’t seem pleased about this and he whines about how heavy Richie is and that he’s too hot.

“We’re all too hot, Eds. That’s because there are seven people in this bed that’s made for only two.”

“Yeah but all of us don’t have your giant lanky body pressed against their fucking back.”

“But they wish that they did,” Richie chuckles, “Especially Bill. I can see it in his eyes. He wants some more of this.”

He is looking at Bill as he says this and Bill chuckles and shakes his head slowly.

“I’m g-good, thanks.”

“You heard him,” Eddie says as he rests his cheek back against Mike’s broad chest and yawns, “He’s g-good.”

“Are you m-making fun of me, Eddie?” Bill says, looking amused at Eddie mocking his stutter but Eddie only pulls the sheets tighter around himself –and Richie-, snuggling in to go back to sleep and with that and his soft, fluffy-looking hair he looks far too cute for Bill to be mad at him.

For a while the room seems to go quiet again as all of them drift off a little; even Stan seems to take a little nap, wrapped in Bill’s arms and Richie is definitely asleep as he snores a bit into Eddie’s shoulder. Mike somehow falls back to sleep even with Richie and Eddie’s combined weight on top of him.

The next person who wakes up is Beverly. She was sleeping on Mike’s other side, crushed against Ben and she sits up slowly to look around at the rest of them, her boys, smiling serenely as she strokes Ben’s hair and leans to kiss his forehead. She does the same with Mike, Eddie and Richie, before climbing across the bodies to get to Bill and Stan and somehow managing to squeeze in between them under the sheets. Bill doesn’t wake but Stan seems semi-conscious and he moves for Beverly to get in and she’s ecstatic when he cuddles against her like he was with Bill and she gets wrapped in his arms.

They sleep again for another hour or so in this new configuration before Ben realises that Beverly is no longer next to him. He doesn’t have to be upset for long, though, as Richie wakes, too and notices that Ben is basically on his own and he moves from Eddie’s back to press in against Ben instead, hooking their legs together and resting an arm around Ben’s shoulders to play with his hair lazily. Ben seems quite content with this. He’s not Bev, but Richie is so warm and he can be very comforting and affectionate when he wants to.

Stan decides to get up not long after that, clearly not able to stand staying in bed for so long but it wakes all of them up and every single one of them tries to prevent his escape. Beverly holds onto him first, clamped against his front and he laughs and hugs her but eventually he manages to pry her away. As he’s climbing out from under the sheets, Bill and Mike grab at his legs and pull him back and then Richie gets on him and starts tickling him. This doesn’t work, though, as Stan isn’t ticklish and he gets rid of Richie pretty easily and finally gets off the bed, fixing his shirt as it was crumpled from Eddie and Ben gripping at it and he leaves the room to loud protests from the whole group.
“I need to use the bathroom!” he shouts from the hall and they can hear the laughter in his voice.

“You don’t need to go, Stan! You can use Eddie’s water bottle!” Richie shouts back to him, grabbing a plastic bottle from the nightstand but Eddie snatches it away from him with a grimace.

Stan doesn’t reply to this but they hear the bathroom door click shut.

“Stan, you have to come back, okay?!” Richie continues as Eddie sips some water from the bottle but Bill holds Richie’s shoulder and puts his finger to his lips briefly.

“H-he doesn’t like it if you t-talk to him when he’s peeing.”

“I know that,” Richie chuckles, “He was my best friend first, remember?”

“And yet you continue to annoy him,” Eddie cuts in and he gives Richie a dirty look while he takes another sip from his bottle but his expression quickly changes when Richie looks at him and he has to stop drinking because he’s laughing.

“It’s my job in this group,” Richie states, pressing a hand against his chest, “Who would annoy you all if I didn’t do it myself?”

“That’s true,” Mike chuckles and reaches over to ruffle Richie’s hair affectionately but Eddie bats his hand away and screws the top onto his water bottle.

“He already looks like something that washed up on a fucking beach. Don’t make it worse.”

Richie would have looked offended were it not for Beverly crawling to sit in his lap and hug him and kiss him and run her fingers through his hair affectionately.

“Stop being so mean. Richie’s hair is beautiful, you guys. It’s part of his charm.”

Richie chuckles and wraps his arms around her frame. She is wearing another one of his t-shirts to bed, although thanks to Mike and Stan, who took everyone’s clothes to the dry-cleaners a couple of days previous, it’s a fresh one.

“I mean, it’s not gorgeous like this,” he says as he tugs Beverly’s hair out of its plait and it falls just to her waist and he brushes his hands through it gently, “Long hair on girls is so fucking sexy.”

Beverly bites at her lip playfully and rests her arms across Richie’s shoulders.

“Why, Richie Tozier, are you flirting with me?”

Richie looks amused as he snaps Beverly’s hair tie onto his own wrist with the accumulation of bracelets that are already there, before he leans in to kiss her slowly. She reciprocates for a while and then pulls away with an excited squeal.

“I just kissed Richie!”

“Congratulations,” Eddie says sarcastically, but he goes a little bit giggly, too, when Beverly leans over from Richie’s lap to hold his cheeks and kiss him, as well. She then follows this pattern around the rest of the room, grabbing Bill first and then Mike and finally, Ben, who seems the most smitten of them all.

Mike gets up shortly after when they realise that Stan isn’t coming back any time soon and it turns out that he was brushing his teeth and washing his face with no intention whatsoever of returning to the group. Ben follows, returning to his and Bev’s room to get dressed and after a while, Beverly
sighs and goes after him. They hear her running down the hallway and then her and Ben’s laughter as she jumps on him. Eddie goes to take his morning pills not long after that and for a while it’s just Bill and Richie and Richie attempts to get Bill to go back to sleep with him, tangling them together and Bill seems more than happy to comply with this. Although Stan comes back to break them apart and he hits one of Bill’s thighs and tells him to get dressed and come and help him to feed the animals as Richie whines and rolls himself up in the sheets. Bill does as he’s told and goes to his own bedroom.

Richie stays in the room as Stan is getting dressed and then Eddie comes back to dress, too. By this point, Richie is tucked right under the sheets so that only the top of his head is visible and he’s clearly asleep again. Eddie doesn’t bother him but Stan looks disapproving and he rips the curtains open and tugs the sheets away from Richie, who groans and curls himself up into the foetal position in the middle of the bed.

“Get up, Richie,” Stan orders as he fluffs the pillows and neatens them and Eddie watches them as he’s fastening his belt with a ‘good luck’.

Richie doesn’t reply to this so Stan grabs one of his ankles and starts dragging him off the end of the bed. There’s a lot of shouting and complaining and struggling until Richie ends up on the floor – Stan is insanely strong when he wants to be - and Stan makes the rest of the bed before he can get back into it.

“Richie, you’re gonna help me feed the animals. You never do any work around here.”

Richie groans loudly but he stands to go and get his own clothes from where he’s been keeping them in Bill’s room.

Later on, he’s forced to trail behind Bill and Stan as they make the rounds to all of the animal enclosures with the different types of feed. Bill is helping voluntarily and is clearly trying to impress Stan as he is practically running around and carrying everything and doing everything that Stan tells him to and basically, in Richie’s opinion, being a total suck ass.

“Give this to the chickens,” Stan says as he hands Richie a bucket of what looks like seeds and pieces of corn and Richie sighs and trudges unhappily over to the chicken coop as Bill and Stan climb into the enclosure where there are two large horses to go and feed them, too.

Stan is clearly keeping his eyes on Richie, though, and he shouts at him when he tries to simply tip the entire contents of the bucket onto the ground.

“Put some into the feed trough and then sprinkle a little bit onto the ground! A LITTLE BIT!”

Richie gives him a vaguely dirty look which he’s sure that Stan can’t see from here before tipping some of the seed mixture into a small, metal container which has only dregs at the bottom. He fills it up much more than Stan usually would, just to annoy him, before crouching to throw some seeds down as all of the hens crowd around his feet.

“Here you go, guys,” he says lazily, but he perks up a little when some of the seeds drop onto his boots and the chickens peck it off hungrily. He hand feeds some of them, tickling one of them under its chin with his finger and chuckling. All of Mike’s animals are unusually friendly and unafraid of humans, probably because Mike has always been so kind to them.

Stan and Bill are a great team, as usual and they manage to feed the rest of the livestock themselves while Richie is still playing with the chickens. Stan doesn’t seem angry about this, like spending some time alone with Bill has perked him up and he only thanks Richie for helping as the
three of them stroll back to the barn to put the animal food away in the storage.

Later that day, the sun comes out and it’s much warmer than it has been in the past few days and they all spend time outside together. Mike sits on the front porch with Ben and Eddie while Richie and Beverly take a walk together towards the stream nearby and smoke cigarettes.

Bill and Stan are spending their time very happily in each other’s company and they take a picnic out into one of the fields to bird watch together. Bill has never done it before but it thrills him to see the way Stan’s eyes light up whenever he sees something new as they lie together on a blanket in the grass. Stan points out the various birds to Bill and explains the subtle differences that tell them apart and Bill listens contently, although really he is focused on the way the rays of sunlight hit Stan’s curls and the little dimples he gets in his cheeks when he really smiles.

“You’re so beautiful,” Bill says quietly into the silence as he watches the side of Stan’s face and it comes out of nowhere and Stan doesn’t expect it and he turns his head to look at Bill almost blankly, like he doesn’t know how to reply. He opens his mouth a couple of times but can’t seem to think of an appropriate response, and he’s grateful when Bill closes the small distance between them to kiss him so that he doesn’t have to.

They kiss for a long time, slow and lazy and Bill threads his fingers into Stan’s hair and they smile against each other’s lips. Bill makes a soft, contented noise from the back of his throat when Stan encourages him to open his mouth and slips his tongue inside but it’s not heated, just playful and comfortable and easy.

“I love kissing you,” Bill chuckles against Stan’s lips at one point when they briefly part and Stan smiles, too when he adds, “I could lie here and kiss you forever.”

Their lips are connected again shortly after and Bill thinks that Stan must agree with him. He slides one of his arms around Stan’s waist and they both snigger into the kiss a little bit when Bill tucks his hand into the back pocket of Stan’s jeans. It becomes much more playful, then, almost teasing and Stan tucks his own hand into Bill’s belt and Bill licks at the tip of Stan’s tongue and the edge of his lips and then at his jaw and neck as Stan chuckles and pulls him closer.

It goes a little silent after that, though, as Bill continues to kiss slowly at Stan’s throat and he feels him tense up a bit. They’re nowhere near the house but they’re still out in the open. That thought is wiped from Stan’s mind as Bill draws his tongue up the length of his neck. Bill has rolled on top of him, now, and his body is warm and pleasantly heavy.

“Can I leave a mark this time?” Bill whispers against him and Stan nods, almost too quickly, in reply. He feels his own breath stutter in his chest when Bill starts to suck a bruise into his neck just underneath his ear and he’s sort of silently willing himself not to get aroused by it, especially when Bill’s palm is against his waist and sliding, bit by bit, underneath his shirt. It doesn’t work.

Bill’s lips disconnect from Stan’s neck with a very satisfying wet sound and Bill chuckles and rubs at it with his fingers a little and it’s sore but Stan really wishes that he would do it again and leave another mark on him just like it. He tries to stay still underneath him, hoping that Bill won’t notice how turned on he is but it’s fruitless and he feels it the instant he shifts his body even slightly. Stan knows that he’s felt it because Bill’s eyes go a little bit wide and he stops moving. He doesn’t know why but he feels the need to explain himself and opens his mouth to do so but Bill stops him with a soft chuckle against the side of his face.

“I’ll take care of it for you,” he whispers into Stan’s neck and Stan is sure that he will, because he feels Bill’s hand sliding down between them and it’s just about to reach his belt when they are broken apart as a large amount of icy water is suddenly dumped right over their heads. There’s the
sound of laughter coming from various people, the loudest of which is definitely Richie. Thankfully, the freezing cold water and the presence of the other five people who are now standing over them gets rid of Stan’s problem pretty fast and his arousal is replaced gradually with anger as he looks up to see Richie and Beverly holding empty buckets and Mike with a hose. Eddie and Ben are there, too, and not holding anything but they are laughing just as hard as the others.

“Stop canoodling in my field!” Mike chuckles and he’s about to turn on the hose when Bill jumps to his feet, shaking his wet sleeves and pushing his hair out of his face. “Mike! N-no!”

Richie is in absolute hysterics, doubled over and clutching his stomach but he quickly drops his bucket and stands up straight when Stan gets up, too, looking absolutely furious. Richie has seen that expression so many times that he knows exactly what will happen if he steps one more toe out of line but he can’t help himself.

“Man overboard!” he chuckles sort of nervously, before setting off at a run as Stan lunges after him and then he’s running, too, and Richie is screaming and sprinting as fast as he can as the rest of the Losers, including Bill, laugh and watch them gradually get further and further away. It’s like watching a cheetah about to catch a baby giraffe that’s been separated from the herd.

“It wasn’t just me!” Richie shrieks as he continues to flee. Stan is right behind him, being much more agile and a little bit taller and there’s no reply from him and that scares Richie even more. They run so far that the farmhouse starts to look incredibly small and Richie wonders how he didn’t know that the land Mike owns is so vast. Nearby, there’s even what seems to be the edge of a lake, peeking through some trees.

Unfortunately for Richie, years of smoking and no exercise have shrunk his lung capacity and even as Stan is about to reach him he has to suddenly stop to catch his breath. He holds out a hand, panting and wheezing at Stan and holding his hands in a ‘T’ shape to indicate that he wants a timeout but Stan hits him anyway and knocks him to the ground. The grass is long here and it hides them both completely when they’re down there as Richie struggles and Stan picks up handfuls of grass and dry dirt and tries to rub it into his face.

They roll around in the grass for quite a while and eventually even Stan is laughing at the smears of dirt he’s managed to leave across Richie’s cheeks and on the tip of his nose and even on the lenses of his glasses. There’s a lot of grass in his hair.

“Time…t-time!” Richie coughs eventually and Stan releases his grip a little, although he’s still pinning him down with his body weight. Richie seems to be struggling to take a proper breath and Stan looks a little bit concerned. “…Are you okay?”

“Y-yeah I just…I just need a minute…”

“You really need to stop smoking, Rich. I’m serious.”

Richie takes a few more heavy breaths before composing himself and clearing his throat. “I’m fine. See?”

“Are you sure?”

“Yeah. Continue. I was enjoying myself, I swear. Keep…rubbing dirt in my face…”
Stan chuckles at this and picks some blades of grass carefully out of Richie’s curls, brushing his fingers through his hair to tidy it.

“Are we having a moment?” Richie sniggers, “We’re totally having a moment, here.”

Stan removes his hand from Richie’s hair to rest his palm against the ground beside him where it was before. He looks amused.

“I think this is the part where you kiss me,” Richie continues, following Stan with his eyes when he turns his head to look away, although he can still see him smiling, “C’mon, Stanley, give me a smooch. Bring those lips down here.”

Stan chuckles and looks at him again. Their eyes meet, and Stan leans down slowly to close the gap between them, but just as their lips are about to touch he picks up another handful of dirt and smears it right across Richie’s mouth. Richie spits and shakes his head but he’s laughing all the same and the playful fight continues as Richie rolls them to get on top of Stan and tries to do the same to him. Unfortunately for Richie, Stan is still stronger and clearly less afraid of hurting him and he easily gets Richie pinned again without having a single smudge of dirt on himself and he holds Richie’s wrists against the ground this time. They are both out of breath, now, and there’s a damp patch on the front of Richie’s t-shirt where Stan’s still-wet body is against him. And that’s when Stan notices something.

“…Are you…are you hard right now?”

Richie looks at him innocently and raises his eyebrows like he didn’t understand the question.

“What?”

“Richie, you have a boner. An erection. I don’t know how I could be any clearer about what I’m saying to you right now.”

“Yes. Yes, I do,” Richie chuckles, “But that is hardly my fault when you’re lying all over me and holding me down like this.”

“This isn’t a sexual thing.”

“Don’t ruin it.”

“I’m telling you that it’s not a sexual thing.”

“Oh, you are about to see something really impressive, Stanley.”

“If you rub yourself off on me, I’m never speaking to you again.”

“Then let go of my hands so I can do it myself. Actually, just one is fine.”

“I’m not gonna let you masturbate right under me!”

“Why not? We’re best friends. I would let you do it.”

“Okay, I’m just gonna leave.”
“No. It’ll be faster if you stay right there.”

“Richie!” Stan is laughing, now, “Stop! Can’t you just ignore it?"

“I could…but I call that a wasted opportunity. I never just ignore it.”

“Never?”

“Never. Now let go of one of my hands so I can get this over with.”

“I’m not letting you touch yourself in front of me.”

“Okay, then I have a better idea. You touch me. That will be even faster.”

“What?”

Stan looks almost amused, at this point.

“I can see that you’re thinking about it. If it helps to convince you, you could make a challenge out of it.”

“…Richie, I’m not-”

“I bet you could do it faster than I can.”

There’s a silence, then, and the consideration is clear on Stan’s face. He never backs down from a challenge and Richie knows it. He can see him working it over in his mind and he feels Stan’s fingers twitch against his own wrists briefly.

“I mean, you’re…always really good at everything, so…” Richie continues, more softly as he watches the expression on Stan’s face.

“That’s true,” Stan says, and he chuckles and nods.

“And it’s not weird because we’re best friends, so really it’s just like-”

“Stop talking,” Stan orders then and the look in his eyes makes Richie go silent. He would have mimed zipping his lips were it not for the fact that Stan still has hold of his wrists. He sees Stan’s eyes scanning him for a while, feels his fingers moving as if he’s considering letting him go, before the grip on one of Richie’s arms loosens and then is released and Stan holds up a finger in front of Richie’s face between them, “One condition. You don’t tell anyone about this.”

“Fine.”

“Not even Beverly.”

“…Okay. Sure.”

“Swear it.”

“I swear I won’t tell Beverly.”

“Or anyone else.

“Or anyone else,” Richie repeats. He looks a little bit excited, now. And he definitely has a reason to. Stan doesn’t waste any time with what might be considered foreplay in this scenario and he
slides his hand down, avoiding Richie’s chest and stomach completely and going straight between his legs to grip at the hard bulge in his jeans.

“Oh shit-” Richie breathes out, but as soon as the words leave his mouth his other wrist is released and Stan’s palm is tight over his lips and there’s a warning look in his eyes.

“Another condition,” he says lowly, kneading his palm against Richie’s crotch as he speaks and earning a soft groan from behind his hand, “Don’t make any noise.”

Richie’s eyes widen at this in an ‘are you kidding me?’ kind of way but Stan’s hand feels really good and he knows that it will stop if he doesn’t comply, so he nods along. It’s quite a challenge, staying quiet while Stan rubs him through his jeans and then unfastens them to do it through his boxers instead but Stan is still covering his mouth with his other hand and it muffles any of the small noises that he does make enough that Stan doesn’t hear them.

His eyes follow Stan’s hand as it retreats, then, and Stan licks at his palm, sees Richie watching him and then spits into it and Richie groans out some words that definitely sound like ‘Oh, come on’ from behind Stan’s other hand. He knows that there’s no way he can stay silent through what’s going to happen next, and he’s absolutely right. When Stan’s palm slides inside his shorts, this time and he feels fingers slick with saliva wrap around him and start pulling his head hits the grass and his eyes squeeze shut and there’s a muffled but very obvious moan from his throat. Stan looks at him warningly but there’s a glint in his eyes that definitely makes it seem like he’s pleased with the reaction and he continues to watch Richie’s face as he tightens his grip.

“I said no noise,” Stan warns, his face closer and voice lower and Richie shifts under his weight. Stan doesn’t look when he sees Richie’s arm move out of the corner of his eye but he feels the grip on his own sleeve and the hot breath against his palm and he can’t help but feel a little bit exhilarated. There’s another sound, this time it’s deeper and not as loud but Stan is quite sure that Richie isn’t even trying to hold back. He presses his palm harder against Richie’s lips and digs the tips of his fingers into his cheek and jaw just a little bit.

“No noise,” he repeats, more firmly, and Richie’s eyes open to meet his own this time, searching and questioning but very much blown with lust. He doesn’t make a sound this time, even when Stan speeds up the movement of his hand. Stan can’t see what he’s doing but he can tell by the heat and the way that Richie is pushing against him that he’s close.

He can feel Richie’s chest rising and falling rapidly against his own and Richie’s legs knocking against him as he shifts his feet on the ground, as if he can’t possibly stay still in the wake of his impending climax. He mumbles something against Stan’s palm and after some quick thought Stan moves it away so he can hear whatever Richie is trying to communicate. He takes a few deep breaths before finally speaking. It seems to take a lot of effort for him to talk normally while Stan’s hand is still working on him.

“You might wanna…move your shirt…”

Stan looks down briefly as if he doesn’t know what Richie is talking about but then meets his eyes again with a casual ‘I’ll make sure it all goes on you’ and this seems to be an answer that pleases Richie because he nods quickly and focuses his attention on what he can see of Stan’s hand between them, breathing out a rather lusty ‘oh, fuck’.

“Just make sure you warn me,” Stan adds, clearly with good timing, as Richie reaches to grip at his wrist, briefly stuffs his own fist into his mouth to muffle a desperate moan and nearly kicks Stan with one of his heavy boots as he knocks one of his thighs into his waist.
“I’m gonna come-” he says breathily and Stan watches his head drop back against the grass again as he slows his hand enough to make sure that, even though Richie ruts his hips a bit when it happens, all of it goes on Richie’s t-shirt and Stan’s fingers –although he wipes those on Richie, too, when he’s done-.  

Richie seems quite blissful afterwards, although a bit sweaty and out of breath and it’s a while before he lifts his head again to look at the sticky mess down his front. Thankfully, Stan took the time to carefully fasten his jeans again for him.  

“Holy shit, Stan. That was one of the best handjobs I’ve ever had.”  

“I know,” Stan chuckles, standing to pull Richie to his feet but making sure to stay a short distance from him so he doesn’t transfer anything onto himself.  

“And that’s saying something because I give them to myself, like, twice a day.”  

“Oh, I didn’t need to know that.”  

“Sharing is caring, Stanley.”  

They go to the lake so that Richie can wash his shirt in it but after a while of him scooping water onto his front he just jumps right into the water as Stan watches him irritably, when he gets caught in the splash.  

“Richie!”  

It falls on deaf ears, as Richie still hasn’t surfaced and Stan folds his arms across his chest, watching the water for any ripples. A few seconds pass and he rolls his eyes. A minute, maybe, and he moves closer to the edge to look for him, but the water isn’t clear enough for him to see Richie’s shape. He gets a little bit edgy, then, moving from his left to right foot continually and rubbing at his arms. There’s still no sign of Richie and it’s completely silent.  

“RICHIE!”  

His voice carries across the lake, echoing in the trees and he sees the distant silhouettes of birds flying away, startled by the sudden noise. There’s nothing else, no movement, no sound, no nothing and he starts to wonder if maybe Richie has come into some trouble. Maybe he’s been caught in a plant? There are plenty of fresh water species that are long enough to tangle around an ankle or a wrist and prevent someone from returning to the surface.  

And then a worse thought hits him.  

IT.  

Without a second thought, he dives head first into the lake, and it’s murky and dark but he keeps his eyes open anyway, squinting desperately for a sign of his friend. His heart is starting to race, now, especially when he feels one of his hands connect with something soft, like fabric and he knows that it’s Richie and he drags him to the surface.  

He takes a deep breath as he breaches the fresh air, shaking Richie’s shoulders and pushing his wet hair out of his face. There’s water collecting behind the lenses of his glasses and Stan takes them off and drops them onto the grass at the water’s edge.  

“Richie! Richie, can you hear me?!”
The panic is evident in his voice and he shakes him again, more vigorously, patting his cheeks and then his back, thinking that maybe he’s swallowed water. But nothing happens and Richie remains unresponsive. Just as Stan is almost in tears and about to drag Richie out of the lake to start CPR, Richie just straight up starts to laugh. And he opens his eyes and Stan just stares at him blankly for a good minute, before finally catching on and hitting him roughly upside the head.

“Richie are you fucking serious?! I thought you were drowning you absolute piece of shit! Why the fuck would you do that?! I nearly had a fucking heart attack I thought that I was gonna have to resuscitate you I was scared OUT OF MY MIND!”

And Richie just watches him as he continues his –very expletive-filled- rant, right in Richie’s face and he looks so utterly furious that Richie can’t even say anything, especially not considering the fact that Stan is repeatedly hitting him on various parts of his body, quite hard, and he doesn’t want to make him angry enough to hit him any harder. Stan climbs out of the water after a while, still ranting as they walk back to the farm with Richie trailing quite a way behind Stan, although Stan frequently turns around to make sure that Richie is still listening to his lecture.

The others are still having a water fight when they get back, and every single one of them is soaked to the skin. Beverly's hair is loose and sopping wet, sticking to every part of her that it touches. Bill now has control over the hose and he is absolutely pummelling everyone else with it as they shriek and run from him. He especially seems to be aiming for Eddie, because he screams the loudest and swears a lot and it’s quite hilarious.

All eyes watch as Stan and Richie pass to get to the house, with Stan storming in front of Richie and yelling at him all the way, before he slams the front door right in Richie’s face and nearly breaks his glasses.

Richie stares at the door for a while before he looks over at his other friends and mimes hanging himself with a noose and Eddie only stops running as Bill turns off the hose.

“…What did you do?”
Chapter 27

Chapter Summary

Another smutty one, so if you don't like it then please don't read.
You have been warned. x

It’s a long time before Richie actually attempts to confront Stan properly to apologize. Richie has to eat his evening meal in the living room while everyone else is at the table that night because Stan refuses to sit with him. The next morning, when Richie comes in for breakfast, Stan casually folds up his newspaper, like he does every day, only much faster and more determined, before dropping it onto the table and walking out, straight past Richie without giving him so much as a sideways glance. He almost, almost knocks into him as he passes but Richie steps out of the way just in time.

The other Losers stay out of it as much as they can. Stan and Richie get into stupid fights quite often and they assume that this is just another one of those times. When Richie actually tells them why Stan won’t talk to him, though, there’s a different reaction. Eddie smacks him upside the head, just like Stan did only harder, with a shrill ‘why the fuck would you do that, you idiot?!’

Bill pretends to be focused on his toast so that he doesn’t have to get involved, although eventually, after all of the others in the room, especially Bev and Eddie, have given Richie another mammoth lecture about how he needs to think about other people’s feelings before he acts sometimes, eyes turn to Bill for confirmation. He is still the leader of their group, volunteered or not.

“Bill, would you please tell him that he needs to apologise?” Eddie says rather loudly as Bill looks from him to Richie to the others in the room and then back again and nibbles at another piece of toast.

“Y-you need to apologise, Richie,” Bill says, and it sounds a little bit fake and Eddie rolls his eyes with an exasperated ‘Bill’ before Bill finally puts down his breakfast and wipes his hands on his jeans. He looks serious, now, and he sighs a little.

“Richie, you should apologise to Stan,” he says firmly, without stuttering and Richie shovels some more cereal into his mouth, avoiding his gaze, “Look at me, Richie.” Bill continues, and Richie does, “Leave your breakfast, go after Stan and apologise to him like you mean it.”

“But I didn’t-”

“Go. Now.”

“It was just a joke! He took it way too-”

“I’m not asking.”

Bill stands from the table and takes the few steps to get to Richie, taking the bowl of cereal and the spoon out of his hands and holding it out of his reach when he tries to get it back. Richie stands, too, then and the others look a little bit worried, like they might soon have to intervene in a physical fight. Richie is about to speak again but before he can, Bill cuts him off with a vaguely threatening look.
“Did I fucking stutter?”

And Richie doesn’t know how to reply, because under any other circumstance he would have laughed at hearing Bill say those words. But he didn’t stutter, not once, and if Richie knows anything it’s not to mess with Bill Denbrough when he stops stuttering and gets that look on his face. So Richie sighs and kicks his chair out of the way like a teenager who’s just been told to clean their room or they’ll be grounded, and he goes to look for Stan.

He doesn’t need to look far. Stan is sitting outside on the front porch, perched on part of the wooden railing. He is doing something with a small bird feeder which is hanging there, but Richie can’t see what from here. He’s sure that Stan will leave as soon as he sees him, anyway, so he goes over to climb up next to him. Stan doesn’t leave, although he stops what he’s doing to give Richie a particularly dirty look, and that’s saying something coming from the King of Sass himself, Stanley Uris.

“Okay, I know you don’t wanna talk to me but I’m just gonna say what I need to say and then I’ll go.”

Stan doesn’t reply, but Richie can see his white knuckles as he grips at the railing beside his own thigh, and it’s not only to keep himself upright. He is looking off into the distance, now, with an unreadable expression.

“I’m sorry,” Richie begins, hoping that the blunt apology might get Stan to look at him, but it doesn’t, “I shouldn’t have done…what I did. It was really stupid…I didn’t think that you’d take it so seriously, I just-”

“That’s not a fucking apology!” Stan snaps, then, cutting over Richie’s less-than-heartfelt speech. Stan’s breath is shaking a little bit and Richie can’t understand why he’s so riled up about it, “Richie, I thought that you were dead!”

Stan looks at Richie, now. There’s a flush high in his cheekbones and a tremble in his lip and Richie knows them both well. Stan doesn’t get truly angry very often, but when he does, it’s like he doesn’t know how to handle such strong emotion and he can’t cope, “You know what kind of a situation we’re in, here! You know that something is out there…and that it wants to hurt us…”

Stan’s eyes are brimmed with tears, now, but when Richie reaches over to place a hand on his shoulder he pushes it away angrily and Richie sees his Adam’s apple bob as he swallows hard.

“You don’t get to play jokes like that! Because it could have been real! You’re my best friend, Richie! We’ve been best friends since we were kids! Did you think that I wouldn’t care about losing you?! I can’t think of anything…more horrible…”

He is openly weeping, now and is struggling to speak through the thickness of it.

“…I love you, Richie! You’re a fucking idiot and you never listen to me and you do stupid stuff all the time…and you’re so annoying…” he’s practically sobbing, and Richie is just watching him like he’s been slapped in the face, “…but I love you! I can’t…imagine being alive without you…so for you to make a joke like that…”

Richie tries to comfort him again but Stan swats his hand away. He is shaking, and taking deep, broken breaths through his sobs. He wipes at his face in frustration with his palm and it seems like the fact that he’s crying is just making him angrier, because now he’s embarrassed, too.

“What did you think I would do?!” he asks, then, shouting the question right in Richie’s face and
Richie flinches and opens his mouth to reply but Stan continues to yell at him without waiting for it, “You’re so selfish! Everything is always about YOU! It’s always ‘everyone look at Richie’ because he can’t stand for people to be ignoring him for more than a couple of seconds!”

He clearly hits a nerve, because Richie starts shouting, too, at this point.

“YOU KNOW THAT’S NOT TRUE!”

“BUT IT IS! YOU CAN’T STAND FOR PEOPLE NOT TO BE GIVING YOU ATTENTION! THAT’S WHY YOU DO STUPID STUFF, SO PEOPLE WILL THINK YOU’RE FUNNY AND THEY’LL LIKE YOU!”

Richie gets down from the railing as Stan does, and he follows him out onto the front lawn.

“SO ARE YOU SAYING THAT PEOPLE DON’T LIKE ME?!”

“NO! BUT YOU’RE OBVIOUSLY SCARED FOR THEM NOT TO! AND YOU’RE SO ABSORBED IN YOURSELF THAT YOU DON’T CARE ABOUT WHOSE FEELINGS YOU HURT ALONG THE WAY!”

“I DIDN’T WANNA HURT YOUR FEELINGS, STAN! I DIDN’T DO IT ON PURPOSE!”

“Well maybe you should think before you act!”

“You know that sometimes I can’t!”

The rest of the Losers have left the house, now, and are standing on the porch, watching the shouting match. Stan is still in tears, and every time he speaks it’s punctuated with choked sobs and heaving breaths. Richie looks like he is close to crying, too.

“JUST DON’T INVOLVE ME IN YOUR STUPID GAMES ANYMORE! I’M DONE!”

“You’re done?!”

“I hate you!” Stan screams then, so loud that his throat sounds raw but it seems to shock him as much as it shocks Richie and the others. Bill takes a step forward but Mike grabs his hand to stop him. There’s an awful, stretched out silence, then, aside from Stan’s quiet, shaky sobbing.

“You…you hate me?” Richie says after a while, and his voice sounds thick. Mike grabs Eddie, too, when he tries to go to Richie. Stan doesn’t say anything but he presses his hands against his face and weeps into them. A single tear makes its way down Richie’s cheek but he quickly, irritably wipes it away. Beverly looks like she is going to cry, too. They are worried that it is going to end like this, and Richie looks like he’s going to leave if Stan doesn’t say anything else soon. Thankfully, just as Richie is turning around Stan sobs out a ‘NO’ and Richie stops.

“No… I don’t… I don’t hate you…”

And then before anyone else can say anything, Stan has taken long strides across the space between them to crash into him in a hug. None of the rest of them can hear what he’s saying from up on the porch, but he is shaking his head over and over as he talks into Richie’s ear and they see Richie’s arms slide tight around Stan’s waist to grip at the back of his shirt, and Stan is wiping at his eyes and his mouth over Richie’s shoulder and Richie briefly buries his face hard into Stan’s neck.

They stay in each other’s arms like that for quite a while, and the others leave them alone to it until
eventually, Beverly leaps down the short set of porch steps and runs towards them, crashing against them both just as Stan did with Richie. Both of their arms go around her immediately as they draw her into it and she is kissing both of their cheeks and wiping at Stan’s face and telling them both how silly they are. Eddie goes after her when he sees this, squeezing himself in next to Beverly against Richie, who still seems to be crying into Stan’s shoulder. Eddie strokes at his hair and leans in to whisper into his ear as Mike appears, too, and then he’s holding Stan’s red cheeks in his palms and kissing his forehead and wiping his thumbs underneath his eyes and it seems to cheer Stan up a lot. Ben and Bill join them last and Ben snuggles himself in against Stan’s back, chuckling when Stan’s arm reaches back and he pulls him into the group hug properly with a hand in Ben’s hair. Bill rubs at both of their backs and tells them that they’re idiots and chuckles when they both lean against him and he gets his arms around their shoulders to pull them closer. Richie is still crying a little bit, against the crook of Bill’s neck, now and Stan is sniffling and trying desperately to make himself look more presentable. With Big Bill here, too, the circle is complete and they all get as close as they can to each other. For a while they just stand there, listening to each other’s breathing and the occasional sniff coming from Stan or Richie.

Mike is the one to finally break the group hug and he ruffles Richie’s hair and pats Stan on the back and tells them to come and help him feed the animals. They get the chores done quickly after that. Beverly is especially enthusiastic when Mike lets her do some of the heavy lifting. He tells them all about an idea he’s been toying with to clear out the barn and turn it into a sort of clubhouse and they don’t even need to vote as it’s unanimous. The barn is quite a nice space and it’s only really used for storage, as most of the animals have their own shelters for the winter anyway.

So they spend the rest of the day in there, sweeping and scrubbing and rearranging to make more space. Stan organises the animal feed into different barrels and lines them up neatly – alphabetically- in one corner of the barn for easy access. He even labels them with some white paint that he finds. There’s a platform high up near the barn ceiling which is only accessible by ladder and Bill gets up there with Mike to clear it out. Ben helps them to devise a sort of pulley system so they can lower things down to the ground and, with seven people it doesn’t take long before there’s a nice, open space up there.

They call it a day after that but the work on the barn continues well into the following week. Beverly insists that they all paint murals on the walls of the barn to decorate it, so they travel into town and return armed with paint cans and brushes and tarp and they spend a whole day on it and end up covered in various colours.

Beverly paints flowers in every space she can find, in an array of colours, some large and some tiny, hidden in cracks in the wall but she tells them all that it has to be perfect and that they have to make it theirs. A few of the boys end up with flowers painted on their cheeks and arms, too. Richie gets a black rose on his wrist –which he asks for- and tells them all that one day he’s going to get it permanently tattooed there to remind him of Bev. She is absolutely delighted with this and kisses him hard on the mouth –her fingertips leave red, blue and black smears on his cheeks but he doesn’t care-. Eddie ends up with cute little pink and baby blue flowers all across his forehead like a crown and Richie calls him ‘The Flower Prince’ whenever he refers to him for the rest of the day. Eddie tells him to shut up, especially when it catches on and the rest of them start doing it, too, but he secretly likes it.

Stan paints birds, of course, and he’s quite good but he spends far too long on details and getting his depictions absolutely perfect and it takes him a long time. After a while, Bill kneels beside him to help, and he’s insanely good at painting and does whatever Stan tells him to and, by the time they’re finished, there are beautiful birds flying across every wall and Bill is covered in paint. They all think that he seems happier this way. He is certainly happy when Stan wipes at his face
with a cloth, cleaning a spot of white paint off the tip of his nose, and then leans in to rub their
noses together and give him a chaste kiss as Richie makes vomiting noises nearby.

Ben helps Mike to paint an enormous sign across the back wall that says ‘THE LOSERS’.
When they’re done with it, they all proudly watch Eddie put a large, red ‘V’ across the ‘S’.
Richie spends hours writing out each of their names underneath it as neatly as he can, in colours and styles that
suit the person who the name belongs to. He paints Eddie’s name first, in a bright red in bold
lettering. Much to Eddie’s dismay, he paints an enormous heart around it once he’s done. Beverly’s
is in green, the colour of her favourite dress and the writing is pretty and Beverly loves it. Richie
puts Ben’s name next to Beverly’s, like he knows they would want, and it’s a deep, rich blue.
Mike’s name is written in sharp yellow, and Beverly draws a little sunflower beside it as Mike
laughs. Richie does Stan’s name as neatly and carefully as he can, in a pale blue that looks like the
colour of the sky and Stan watches him closely as he does it but he seems pleased with the final
result. Richie writes his own name, then, in large, black letters, his own handwriting, and
underlines it like he’s signing an autograph. Lastly, as the rest of them crowd around him to watch,
Richie paints ‘BILL’ in huge, silver letters, a little way above the other names, as Bill chuckles
fondly.

Ben has the idea for them all to leave handprints, too, so Richie paints all of their palms with their
respective colours, one by one. It’s strangely reminiscent of the blood pact they made as children,
and as they all press their painted handprints into the wall next to their own names, at the same
time, there’s a sort of energy in the room that makes them all go silent.

Bill doesn’t see Richie do this, but the next day when he goes back to look at the mural, there’s
another name near to his own, in small, gold letters, around which someone else has painted a
delicate set of white wings.

‘Georgie’

And he smiles through his tears, then, as the others join him in the barn and he feels hands on his
shoulders and in his hair and on his back, and lips place firm kisses on his cheeks and temples and
he doesn’t know who they belong to but he’s never felt so loved.

The barn starts to look more and more homely, then, in the following days. Once the paint has
dried they move the bales of hay back inside and arrange them almost like seats. Beverly covers
the upper section of the barn in soft throws and pillows and hangs fairy lights in every corner she
can. It looks a little bit garish, in Stan’s opinion, but he seems pacified when she adds in a small
bookcase and hangs a pair of binoculars right next to one of the small windows, where there’s a
stack of cushions and blankets shaped like a seat, which she dedicates the ‘Bird Watching Corner’.
She makes Bill paint a sign above it for this exact reason, in neat, curly font, in the same pale blue
that Richie used for Stan’s name.

At one point, the rest of the Losers steal the ladders while Bill is up there on his own as a prank
and leave him up there for a few hours while they eat dinner. Although eventually, when they hear
him singing an off-key rendition of ‘Only Love Can Break Your Heart’ loudly to himself, Mike
takes pity on him and goes to let him down. The rest of them follow, if only to tease him a little bit
more. He’s sitting right on the edge when they come in, with his legs dangling over it.

“I’m j-just gonna jump, so…if I g-g-get hurt it’s all your fault,” he says with a shrug and Richie,
Stan and Ben seem ready to catch him just in case he’s actually reckless enough to do it –which is
highly likely- as Mike gets the ladder.

“Stop being such a drama queen,” Mike chuckles but Beverly takes offense to this before Bill does.
“Um, excuse me, but I think we have to change that to ‘drama king’ because you guys are all way more dramatic than me.”

“Point taken,” Mike nods as he looks back up at Bill, “Okay, drama king, don’t jump. I’m not picking anyone else up from the hospital.”

“It’s not even th-that high…” Bill says, unconvincingly. They all start shouting at him simultaneously, at once as he tries to start lowering himself off the edge, so he stops.

“Use the fucking ladder!” Stan shouts, exasperated, with his hands in his hair briefly before he takes the ladder from Mike to set it back in its place. Everyone gets a little bit giddy when Stan swears and there’s a ripple of laughter this time, too.

“I c-can probably jump this, it’s f-f-”

“Bill, just do as you’re told!” Stan interrupts, standing at the bottom of the ladder with his hands planted against his hips. He raises his eyebrows at Bill expectantly when he doesn’t move.

“O-okay I’m…I’m c-coming down…”

Richie sniggers and leans over to Eddie with a ‘Bill is so whipped’ and Eddie laughs and agrees as Beverly rolls her eyes at the irony of it.

Richie spends most of his time up there, blasting music loudly and reading comic books and he even sleeps up there quite often, considering the fact that it’s actually a comfortable change from Mike’s couch—and much more spacious- and the rest of the Losers leave him to it. Richie doodles on the walls in there, too, with the leftover paint. It looks great, now that the mural is gradually becoming fuller and fuller, although Mike does briefly object when he notices the words ‘FUCK’ and ‘BULLSHIT’ and other words in between painted in black in various gaps. He asks Beverly to cover up some of the more colourful words with flowers, but she refuses.

When the barn is finally complete, it looks absolutely fantastic. The first night, they all sleep in there together, tangled into the soft mess of blankets and cushions—and each other-. Stan and Ben watch the stars through the window in ‘Bird Watching Corner’ and Mike makes them all hot cocoa. The pulley system that Ben devised has evolved now into a sort of dumb waiter for ferrying food and drinks up to people and they all end in fits of laughter when Richie pulls it up—none too gently- as they all cheer him on and makes bets as to how much will be left to actually drink and, by the time it reaches the top, there’s a lake of hot chocolate on the tray and most of the mugs are only half full. They play board games into the early hours of the next morning, before they turn off the lights and Bill tells them all scary stories—he’s worryingly good at making them up-. Eddie refuses to sleep near the window afterwards and someone has to give him a reassuring hug every time there’s a noise.

None of them have ever felt happier than they do that night.

The amount of time they all spend in the clubhouse afterwards almost renders the actual farmhouse obsolete. Stan does all of his birdwatching in there, now, as the window is just at the right height, especially with the binoculars, and the bookcase means he can have easy access to his journal to mark his sightings down. Ben likes it, too, as it’s a quiet, comfortable area for him to read in. Bill draws on the walls a lot, as there’s still plenty of space left. There are depictions of all of his friends in various spots which they gradually find over the course of time. The one of Stan is particularly beautiful and detailed, with birds flying around him, silhouetted against the Star of David. It’s actually a work of art; he’s managed to capture the colour of Stan’s eyes perfectly and the curls in his hair look almost real. They have a pretty heated make out session pressed into a pile
of cushions as the rest of the Losers are out in town when Stan first sees it and he leaves an actual trail of love bites down the length of Bill’s neck which the rest of them make fun of the next day, but Bill makes sure they’re visible and practically wears them like medals.

The painting of Richie is almost hidden by a bale of hay, but when Richie finds it he’s overjoyed. It’s been done in a sort of comic book style, and there’s a speech bubble which Bill has drawn around the ‘FUCK’ that Richie already doodled there himself. There’s a cigarette tucked behind painted Richie’s ear, hidden in his curls.

Ben’s depiction is next to the bookcase when they find it, exactly where he would want to be and, scrawled behind him on the wall as a sort of background, ‘The bird that would soar above the plain of tradition and prejudice must have strong wings’, a line from Ben’s favourite book of all time ‘The Hitchhiker’s Guide to The Galaxy’.

Mike is on the wall next to one of the windows, the one through which the sun shines when it rises of a morning. There’s a painting of a sun behind him, too, making him stand out all the more and it’s one of the first things your eyes are drawn to when you enter the barn. He is, of course, smiling in his likeness and Bill has managed to capture it so well that every time someone looks at it, they feel the need to smile back.

There is a beautiful painting of Beverly, too. Her hair is a fiery red, through which he has painted tiny highlights of gold so that it shimmers when the light hits it, and it’s loose and wild and her eyes are the brightest and he has detailed each lash and each freckle on her cheek like he knows them well. She has a cigarette tucked behind her ear, too, on the opposite side to Richie, like a little testament to their close friendship. Beverly cries when she sees it for the first time because in the drawing she doesn’t just look beautiful, she looks powerful.

The painting of Eddie is laughing and his hair is a mess and there’s a sparkle in his eyes. Eddie feels warm in his chest when he sees it because he knows that this must be how Bill thinks of him, among all of the people who think of him as small and weak and fragile; Bill just sees his best friend. And there are no depictions of pills or band aids or anything of the sort, it’s just Eddie, because he doesn’t need those things to be Eddie.

Bill doesn’t paint himself. They wait and wait for him to do it, and every time they go into the barn they search for a hidden self-portrait, but there’s nothing. Until eventually they decide to do it themselves. Richie draws the basic shape of it as he’s pretty good at doodling, even with unsteady hands that shake sometimes, and then they all add their own bits to it. Stan spends all of his time painting Bill’s eyes, and he mixes about seven shades of blue before he’s finally happy with it. Beverly does his hair, because she loved how Bill did hers, and she adds delicate strands of gold to his, too. Ben draws a bike behind him in silver, and it’s pretty crude but it looks fantastic anyway. Mike makes them draw it so he’s smiling and insists that they add in the dimples he gets in his cheeks, while Richie and Eddie draw a huge speech bubble together and Richie writes ‘He thrusts his fists against the posts, and still insists he sees the ghosts’, minus the stutter, although he adds in a little ‘F-f-fuck’ at the bottom of it while they all laugh. When Bill finally sees it he loves it and he laughs so hard that he cries, while Mike points out his dimples and they all poke at his cheeks as he rolls around on the floor of the barn.

And when Richie finds an old acoustic guitar while he’s rummaging around the farmhouse one day out of boredom, they sit around a small campfire on the ground level of the barn, with bottles of beer and blankets and Richie plays the guitar and he’s really good and everyone is shocked. He plays an acoustic version of ‘Forever Young’ and sings to each of them individually as he does. His voice is a little bit gravelly thanks to his smoking habit but that just makes it sound even better. And when he gets to the chorus they all belt it out, in perfect unison.
‘Forever young, I wanna be forever young

Do you really wanna live forever?

Forever

And ever’

When the song is over, they are all giddy and they stay up late, until the fire in the pit is just embers. Beverly leaves first, claiming that she’s cold and Ben goes with her. Mike leaves shortly after with Eddie when Eddie tells them that he needs to take his pills. Surprisingly, he gives Richie a kiss on the cheek, at the corner of his lips with a small ‘Goodnight, Richie’ and a smile before he goes and Stan and Bill watch Richie as he beams and goes a little bit red.

They put on the radio after that, and Richie turns it up quite loud and they hope that the others can’t hear it from the house while they’re trying to sleep. There are no protests so it doesn’t seem like they can. And Richie dances to basically every song, with a cigarette in one hand and a bottle of Budweiser in the other and Stan and Bill just watch him and talk at first, but then Richie pulls them up to dance, too. Stan has had a few drinks and gets straight into it and Bill dances anyway.

Richie gives Bill his half-finished cigarette and he takes a few puffs of it before Stan takes it out of his hand. They think he’s going to drop it into the floor and snuff it out but he lifts it to his lips and takes a drag and they both look a little bit impressed when he casually blows out the smoke. He only does take one drag, though, before he actually flings it out of the open barn doors.

It all gets a little bit hazy after that, as they consume more alcohol and Richie lights another Marlboro and the barn gets sort of smoky. They stop dancing but leave the music blasting as they climb to sit in the rafters together. Richie lies on his back, continually passing a cigarette to Bill and sometimes Stan, and he attempts to kick off his boots to get comfortable, struggling with them for a while before Bill eventually chuckles and leans down to yank them off his feet for him.

“I don’t think I’ve ever felt this relaxed,” Richie says after they have lapsed into a comfortable silence for a while.

“Me neither,” Bill chuckles softly. He looks at Stan on his left, smiling as he reaches down to slide their palms together and link their fingers. He does the same with Richie, too, having to reach further for his hand since he’s lying down but Richie lets him do it anyway and Bill plays with Richie’s rings with his thumb.

“I love you guys,” Stan says after a while and they both look at him and laugh.

“How much have you had to drink?” Richie asks, looking amused with his eyebrows raised as he stubs out his cigarette on the wall and pitches it out of an open window.

“No, I’m serious,” Stan smiles, resting his head back against the wall, “You’re my best friends.”

Bill tightens his grip on Stan’s hand and Richie chuckles, resting his free hand behind his head.

“I love you guys, too. I mean, I know that I’m a jerk sometimes and…that I make stupid jokes and talk way too much, but…the fact that all of you put up with me-

He looks in Bill and Stan’s direction again and realises, with a little bit of annoyance, that they’re currently making out and therefore not listening to him at all.

“Oh, that’s fine,” he says, loudly and sarcastically, “I’m just telling you guys about my feelings but
please continue to suck face and ignore me completely.”

This doesn’t stop them. In fact, they are gradually leaning closer and closer to Richie and eventually, Bill is pushed on top of him as Stan continues to attack his mouth.

“Woah…okay…I just wanna let you guys know that I didn’t pay for a ticket, but I’m not complaining…”

Richie’s fingers are still entwined with Bill’s but Bill pulls away from it to get his hand in Stan’s hair instead, and they’re right across Richie’s lap now and he is watching them with almost disbelief but mostly amusement.

“…This is turning me on a little bit, so…”

He says this loudly as if to make a point but the game is clearly on as soon as Stan’s eyes flicker to meet Richie’s and he mutters a brief ‘good’ against Bill’s lips and he sounds a little bit breathless and Richie just mouths ‘holy shit’ to himself when Stan looks away again.

It’s only when Stan pulls Bill away from Richie’s lap and they’re both on their knees, still locked in a heated kiss, and Richie sits up against the wall just in time to see Stan tugging Bill’s jacket off him that he realises that he’s serious. He briefly wonders if Stan actually has had too much to drink, but the thought is wiped away when Bill is pushed against him again, between his thighs with Bill’s back against his chest and Stan moves in to kiss him and they’re so close now that Richie can see their tongues briefly whenever they part.

“Holy shit,” he repeats, out loud this time, although they are clearly involving him in it of their own free will. When he reaches up to touch Stan’s cheek, and his thumb briefly gets between their lips and ends up wet because they don’t pull away from it, and he feels someone bite him but he doesn’t know which of them it was, he decides to include himself a little more and he leans in to latch his own lips onto Bill’s neck. Bill sighs into Stan’s mouth and drags at his hair. Richie isn’t sure that they really meant to involve him until he sucks at a sensitive spot behind Bill’s ear and he feels a hand in his own hair, then, too, Bill’s hand. He can hear Bill’s heavy breaths now and notices that Stan has left his lips and is attacking Bill’s neck at the opposite side. Richie doesn’t want to be outdone, so he bites down a little bit and he feels smug when Bill arches his back and there’s a noticeable hitch in his breath.

After that it’s almost like a competition to see who can leave the darkest bruise, and Bill squirms and gasps through it and tugs at Richie’s hair and grips at Stan’s shoulder. He’s too hot between them and he’s getting hard already. One of Richie’s hands is against his waist and his thumb is rubbing rough little circles right into his hip and it’s driving him crazy.

“S-stop, you’re h-hurting me…” he breathes out after a while and they don’t know who he’s talking to but they both pull away immediately. Richie is sure that he must have won, but then he sees Stan’s masterpiece at the other side, which looks like if he had continued he might actually have broken the skin a little at some point.

“Sorry,” Stan murmurs as he presses another kiss to Bill’s lips but Richie breaks them apart by holding Bill’s chin and turning him so he can kiss him, too. Bill seems more than okay with this and he melts into it a little bit as Richie licks into his mouth like he’s trying to taste whatever of Stan is lingering there. Out of the corner of his eye, Richie sees Stan discard his own jacket and fold it to place it with Bill’s.

It continues this way for a while; Bill kisses Richie, and then kisses Stan again, and then Richie kisses Stan and so on and so forth. At one point, all three of them are involved and it gets a little bit
messy. Richie loses his outer layer of clothing at some point during this session, although it’s difficult for him to peel his jacket off while he’s pressed between the wall and Bill’s body –but he does manage eventually.

Richie works his way underneath Bill’s shirt gradually, earning no protests but the occasional soft gasp into his or Stan’s mouth and as soon as he can he gets both hands under there at the same time, and he relishes in the soft groan he manages to pull from Bill when he rubs at both of his nipples with his thumbs.

“Th-this is not f-fair…” Bill mutters breathily when Stan goes for his belt, too, and his hips are pulled up as he slides it out of the loops.

“Yeah, you’re right. We should have asked Eddie and the others if they wanted to join,” Richie chuckles.

“N-no. I mean that y-you guys are, like, ganging up on me.”

“We can gang up on Richie instead, if you want,” Stan says as he smirks and leans in to nuzzle and kiss at Bill’s neck. Bill winces a little whenever Stan’s lips hit the bruises that are already there, but he laughs at the thought and they seem to be seriously considering it when Richie has an idea.

“Okay, why don’t we make this into a competition?”

They both stop to look at him.

“Like…whoever can hold out the longest is the winner?”

Stan and Bill look at each other for a moment, and then back at Richie before they seem to come to an agreement. It seems like a great idea, particularly to Stan, who is certain that he’ll easily win this game. But, it turns out that he couldn’t be more wrong. Both Bill and Richie were clearly thinking that Stan would be their main competition and it isn’t long before –with a bit of a struggle—he is pinned between them, instead.

Richie holds onto Stan’s arms, pinning them so he can’t stop Bill from unfastening his shirt. Bill only gets a few of the buttons undone before Stan kicks him in the ribs, and although he complains and tells him that it hurt, he continues. He climbs into Stan’s lap this time so he can’t kick him as he works on the rest of the buttons, and it’s a good move, because Stan seems quite distracted being pinned down by Bill’s hips like this.

“You guys are the worst,” he mutters under his breath, but he goes quiet when Bill leans down to trail kisses across his bare chest and Richie sucks at his neck like some kind of vampire. Bill pays a lot of attention to Stan’s nipples, mostly because Richie is telling him to and Stan is caught between irritation and arousal when Bill starts to move lower, working a couple of pale marks into the skin around his navel.

“Lost your voice, there, Stan the Man?” Richie chuckles from next to his ear and Stan only swallows hard, somehow managing to make the simple action look like a silent ‘Fuck you’. Bill unfastens Stan’s belt, once again at Richie’s request; if anything he looks a little bit nervous, but he pops the button, too, and pulls down the zip without being told. Stan is watching him with an unreadable expression.

Bill chews at his bottom lip a little bit as he lifts Stan’s hips to tug his trousers down off his hips and even Richie has gone silent, now. The room feels heavy as they both watch Bill dip his head to run a long, wet line just above the waistband of Stan’s underwear with his tongue and even though
it’s not happening to him, it’s one of the sexiest things Richie has ever seen, especially when Stan’s hips keen into it ever so slightly.

“Just t-tell me if you w-want me to stop,” Bill says quietly as he looks up at Stan, then, and he’s about to say something else when Richie cuts in.

“No. Bill, of course he’s gonna tell you to stop because he doesn’t wanna lose!”

Stan gives Richie daggers as Bill seems to consider this, before he chuckles with a ‘r-right’, and before Stan can try and stop him he has gone in with his tongue again, this time over the top of the fabric of Stan’s boxers. There’s a noticeable bulge there and thanks to the fact that Stan keeps all of his white clothes perfectly white, they are almost a little bit see-through when they get wet.

Richie is the one to react, with a breathy ‘holy shit’ as Stan clutches at one of Richie’s arms. Stan keeps his mouth pressed firmly shut, and there’s not so much as a whimper from him, but he certainly looks as if he’s struggling.

There’s still no sound from him as Bill continues to work on him with his tongue and the fabric is significantly wetter and the flesh underneath is significantly harder. He’s even somehow managing to control his breathing.

“Fuck, Stan, how are you doing this?” Richie chuckles, but he sounds more impressed than amused, “If I was watching Bill go down on me like that I would have jizzed already.”

Bill laughs with his tongue still pressed against the fabric, and he looks up at them briefly before retracting it.

“Bill, you’re gonna have to try harder than that,” Richie says bluntly, “He’s gonna break, soon, I can feel it.”

“Shut up, Richie,” Stan replies irritably, although he looks a little bit smug, too, “Why don’t we just move on and-”

“Lose the boxers,” Richie says to Bill, nodding towards Stan’s underwear and Bill clearly likes the idea because he agrees with a ‘y-yes’. Stan tries to break out of Richie’s grip but Bill has already shifted his underwear down off his hips to meet the waistband of his trousers. There’s a taut silence in the room, then, and Bill looks a little bit flustered. Richie chuckles and raises his eyebrows, looking impressed.

“Clearly Stan the Man was a fitting nickname, even if we didn’t know it back then.”

“Richie, I swear-”

“Okay, okay, I’m sorry. I’ll stop. I’m just trying to fill the silence.”

Bill still hasn’t said anything, but he looks dubious, now, about what he was going to be doing down there.

“Bill, you don’t have to-”

“Yes. Yes, you do. I would do it for you but if I let go of him he’s gonna punch me in the face,” Richie chuckles, “C’mon, Bill.”

Bill shakes his head a little as if he’s coming out of a trance, and for a second they’re both sure he’s going to tell them that he doesn’t want to do it. Stan looks like he’s going to die of embarrassment.
That is, until Bill leans in to use his tongue like he was before, clearly deciding that it’s not much different as the fabric was only thin anyway. Richie chuckles when he feels Stan’s fingers dig into his arm again and he rests his chin against Stan’s shoulder to watch.

“Keep going;” he encourages, smirking to himself when Stan whines from his throat right next to him, like he’s really finding it difficult to keep quiet, now. Bill hears it, too, and it spurs him on and he eagerly follows Richie’s orders as he tells him what to do with his tongue and where to lick. Richie is pretty sure that Stan’s nails are going to break his skin at this point, but he doesn’t care, especially not when he sees Bill take it into his mouth properly and Stan looks like he’s trying so hard not to make a noise that he might cry.

He grips at Stan’s jaw when he closes his eyes, whispering against his cheek.

“Open your eyes, Stan.”

Stan shakes his head a little and his throat moves as he swallows another moan.

“What’s the matter?” Richie continues. He reaches down to run his fingers through Bill’s hair a little, silently encouraging him to take it in deeper and watching Stan’s eyelids flutter briefly when he does, “If you look at him are you gonna come?”

This draws a groan from him and he is scrambling a bit at Richie’s arm, now, leaving faint nail marks there.

“D-don’t…”

A smirks twitches at the corner of Richie’s lips and he licks at Stan’s neck over his pulse point, tugging at his earlobe with his teeth and he feels him shudder. Bill seems to be doing a pretty good job with absolutely no experience whatsoever and Stan’s lips part as if he can’t bear to hold them closed anymore. His breath is coming short and shaky, now.

“It’s okay if you’ve imagined this before,” Richie says lowly, “Bill dropping to his knees in front of you…” Stan lets out a heavy breath that is almost a moan, “…he’s probably eager to do some stuff good with his mouth, huh?”

“Bill,” Stan gasps out, throwing Richie off course a little, “Stop.”

Bill pulls his mouth away immediately, clearly worried that he might have done something wrong. His jaw is aching a little bit but overall it didn’t feel too bad, and, judging by the way Stan’s curls are sticking to his forehead just a bit, and how fast his chest is rising and falling, he was making Stan feel good and if that’s the case he wants to keep going. He’s about to speak, to ask him what’s wrong but Richie cuts in.

“No. Bill, keep going.”

Stan shakes his head but Richie covers Stan’s mouth with his palm, just like he did to him the day by the lake. He reaches down to Bill with his free hand and thumbs at his bottom lip.

“Bill…open your mouth…”

Bill looks a bit hesitant, but he meets Stan’s eyes and he looks sort of wrecked, and he decides that he definitely wants to be the one to finish him off. If he could get him to say his name, that would be even better, he thinks as he allows Richie to pull his mouth open. Richie’s hand slides onto Bill’s jaw as he guides him back down. He gets his hand on the back of Bill’s neck, then, to get him to take it deeper, deeper than he did before and he does it without gagging and Richie feels
Stan’s head rolls back against his shoulder and sees him biting down hard on his lip. A sound almost like a whimper escapes him, then.

“Oh, fuck…” Richie breathes as he watches Bill’s head slowly bobbing up and down and he’s hard, too, against Stan’s back. If he pressed a little bit harder against him he could get a bit of good friction, but this is a competition so he keeps his hips away.

Stan is watching Bill, now, too. His breath is hot against Richie’s palm and his eyes are lidded and Richie is pretty sure that he’s going to come soon, and wonders if he should warn Bill since Stan can’t. He moves his palm away from Stan’s lips instead, and Stan lets out a shaky breath. If Richie didn’t know any better, he’d say that it looked as if Stan had forgotten about the competition completely. He’s right, and Stan reaches down shortly after to fist his own hand into Bill’s hair.

“Are you gonna come?” Richie whispers against Stan’s ear and he nods with a shaky ‘y-yeah’ and thankfully Richie has the foresight to move Stan’s hand so he can yank at Bill’s hair and pull him away—it didn’t seem like Stan was going to—so he doesn’t get it right down the throat. Some of it does hit his cheek and his chin, but he doesn’t even notice because Stan arches his back and moans out loud and it’s the most heavenly sound he’s ever heard. Richie is watching him, too, with his mouth hanging a little way open.

“…I feel like I just came,” Richie chuckles weakly as Bill wipes his face with the hem of his t-shirt before crawling over Stan’s body to catch him in a hot, open-mouthed kiss. Stan gets his fingers into Bill’s hair straight away but they’re pressing Richie into the wall and the added weight of Bill’s body isn’t helping his situation any.

“…As hot as this is, can you get off me? I’m seriously gonna jizz right in my pants if you rub against me one more time,” he spits out and they both chuckle into each other’s mouths a little bit. Bill pulls away so that Stan can sort himself out and fasten his trousers. He moves away from them, then, and Richie looks at Bill and Bill looks at Richie.

“You’re going down, Denbrough,” Richie chuckles, and he pounces at Bill and pins him to the floor against a pile of cushions, but Bill is expecting it and he wrestles Richie onto his back instead and gets on top of him, holding him between his thighs.

“Y-you wish,” he smirks, pushing his bangs back out of his eyes with his fingers. His lips are quite pink and still wet.

“You’re pretty confident for someone who just had semen all over their face.”

Stan rolls his eyes from where he’s fastening his shirt, but he looks a tiny bit pleased.

“And y-you’re pretty confident for someone who said they were gonna c-come any second.”

“If you stutter the word ‘come’, it isn’t sexy anymore.”

Bill grinds his hips down slow and hard into Richie’s and Richie swears loudly and groans.

“Fuck, I’m so close,” he chuckles breathlessly and Bill looks amused.

“W-what were you saying?”

“You know what? I don’t care anymore,” Richie sighs, dropping his arms next to his head and watching Bill, “Just get me off.”

“What?” Bill laughs, “Where’s the f-fighting talk?”
Richie reaches up lazily to smack Bill’s thigh.

“C’mon, move your hips.”

“I th-thought you didn’t want, and I quote ‘to jizz r-right in your pants’.”

“Well, I’ve changed my mind. Watching you suck Stan’s dick was too much for me.”

“It was t-too much for me, too,” Bill sniggers and Stan crawls over to sit beside them, looking unamused.

“So is that it? You double team me and now suddenly the game is over? Now I’ve lost?”

“No it’s n-not o-over. I’m gonna win.”

“You’re not gonna win just fucking sitting there,” Richie smirks, “My boner is slowly dying.”

“No it’s n-not. I’m sitting right on it.”

“Exactly. So if you could just...” Richie reaches up to hold Bill’s hips and pushes up against him a little, guiding Bill to rock into him. Bill sucks in a breath and Richie looks amused, “So, I’m not the only one who’s close, huh?”

“This is boring me,” Stan says suddenly, flipping his leg over Richie behind Bill to push at Bill’s hips, “C’mon.”

“W-what?”

“Move your hips,” Stan says flatly. He is pressed against Bill’s back and he rolls up his shirt sleeves neatly, before placing his hands on Bill’s waist. Richie is watching them both expectantly. Bill seems a lot more confident now that Stan is so close to him and he starts to roll his hips against Richie’s slowly.

“Keep going,” Richie moans, and he lifts his hands to rest against Bill’s thighs. After a short while he starts to grind his own hips up to match Bill’s rhythm and it increases the friction between them. Bill is kind of stuck, as every time he moves forward he rubs against Richie and every time he moves back his hips hit Stan’s, and it’s working him up quite a lot.

Stan kisses at Bill’s neck for a while, gripping his waist and sliding his t-shirt up. Richie immediately gets his hands onto Bill’s bare stomach and drags his short nails across his skin, leaving little raised bumps across him as he shivers.

“Richie’s belt,” Stan says, motioning for Bill to unfasten it before he reaches down to undo the button and zip on Bill’s jeans. Bill finds it hard to function when he feels Stan’s hand slip in to palm at him through his boxers. He’s so hard already that it hurts. But he does as he’s told and works on Richie’s belt with shaking fingers. He manages to get it out of the loops and drop it to the side out of the way, but he has to stop to slide his hand over the back of Stan’s, trying to get him to press down harder.

“S-Stan, please-”

Richie unfastens his own jeans as he watches Bill moaning soft curses on top of him and clutching at Stan’s arm with his eyebrows knitted together in pleasure. Bill’s hips are rocking against his own soon after that, and Stan moves his hand out of the way. Now that both of their jeans are unfastened, there are gaps for them to rub together in just the right place. Stan slides Bill’s top off
over his head and drops it next to them and Bill gets his own hands underneath Richie’s, onto his bare skin as he continues to grind them together.

“Fuck, Bill, go faster-” Richie groans and Bill leans forward a little, resting his palms flat either side of Richie’s head. At this angle, their bodies are pressed more firmly together and the friction is so good, but still not good enough and Richie grasps at Bill’s hips and slides his jeans and underwear down as far as they’ll go with him sitting down. It gets more of their bare skin touching, at the very least, and Bill works Richie’s t-shirt up under his arms, too, for good measure.

Richie starts moving his own hips again, too, in a similar rhythm to the one they had before and Stan’s body is still right behind Bill’s and he keeps hitting back against him and for some reason that is turning him on the most. Thankfully, Stan isn’t hard anymore, because Bill thinks that if he was he might have come just from feeling it pressed against his ass.

“Jesus fuck, Bill, I wanna come…just…just move a little…” Richie shifts his hips beneath Bill’s to get into a better position, “…there…oh, fuck-” He tucks his thumb into the front of his underwear, and Bill’s, too, tugging it down just a little so that the next time they rub together there’s a little bit of exposed, hot, flesh, sliding together right in the most sensitive place.

Bill is unexpectedly vocal, and he moans more or less every time they grind together now and it’s often accompanied by unintelligible stuttering as he grasps at the sheets either side of Richie. Richie has his hands on Bill’s hips, guiding him but his grip is sort of rough and it’s driving Bill insane.

“Bill, this might not be what you wanna hear, but Jesus Christ I wish I was fucking you right now like this.”

Bill swallows another moan but Richie ruts up against him and it knocks it out of him anyway and there’s sweat starting to gather where their bare stomachs are touching. He drops his head against Stan’s cheek when he feels him lean in to press against his back. And then, unexpectedly, Stan is whispering in his ear, low so Richie can’t hear it.

“This might not help, either, but I wish I was, too.”

Bill feels Stan’s hands grip at him, too, and he ruts his own hips against Bill’s from behind, harder than Richie did and it draws the loudest moan out of Bill yet as he comes right across Richie’s stomach, panting hard. Richie follows shortly after, also over his own stomach as Bill jerks and grinds against him. He lets his hands fall from Bill’s thighs and drops his head back heavily against some pillows, sighing lustfully.

They stay in silence for a while as Bill and Richie collect themselves, before Richie chuckles with an ‘I won’ and he and Stan high-five past Bill.

“F-fuck you both,” Bill says breathlessly as he slides off Richie to drop into the blankets beside him instead and they both watch him and laugh.

Once they’re all cleaned up and re-dressed –sort of- they fall asleep in the barn, tangled into a number of blankets. Stan is the one with all of the blankets, really, as he’s the one who’s always cold in bed. Richie and Bill snuggle either side of him to keep him warm, and he doesn’t really like sleeping close to people but he can’t complain.

These people are different.
Stan is awoken twice during the middle of that night. The first time it’s because Richie is wrapped around his back like some kind of large, gangly octopus, and there’s a very noticeable boner pressing against him. He can practically feel it between his ass cheeks. If there’s one thing that Stanley Uris hates, it’s having someone cuddling him while he’s trying to sleep, and Richie is hot and a little bit sweaty, to boot.

Bill is still sleeping at Stan’s front, not too far away and he doesn’t want to wake him, so he tries to whisper to Richie at first, nudging him a little with his elbow. Richie doesn’t stir, but he nuzzles his face into the back of Stan’s neck with a soft noise and presses harder against him, almost like a grind.

“Richie!” Stan hisses again, still trying to be quiet, but he gives him a sharp jab in the ribs this time for good measure.

Richie lifts his head this time, with a sleepy ‘what time is it?’ It’s dark and silent in the barn now, as Stan was the only one with sense enough to switch off the lights and the radio after Richie and Bill had already fallen asleep—it would have killed him if he didn’t-.

“I don’t know,” Stan whispers irritably, “But if you press your dick into my ass one more time I’m gonna throw you down the ladders.”

“I can’t help it,” Richie whispers back, “I gotta press it somewhere.”

“Well go and press it against Bill!”

“He’s asleep!”

“So was I until you started dry-humping me!”

“But I’m cold!”

“You’re not cold, Richie, your hands are clammy!”

“My hands are always clammy, that’s just-”

“G-guys, please sh-sh-shut up.”

They both look towards Bill as he speaks. His eyes are still closed.

“Sorry, Bill. But Stan is being really selfish right now.”

“I’m not being selfish! I was trying to sleep and you started grinding your dick into me!”

“Well, if you’d just ignored it and let me continue then we wouldn’t be having this argument right now because I could have taken care of the problem.”

“I’m not letting you use me to get yourself off!”

Bill still hasn’t opened his eyes but he’s clearly listening to them argue as he chuckles softly.

“Bill, please tell Stanley that he’s being unreasonable.”
“No. Bill, please tell Richard to control himself.”

Before Bill can reply, Richie is speaking again.

“Bill, you would let me do it, right?”

“…I…I d-don’t think so,” Bill chuckles.

“C’mon, Bill, help a guy out, here.”

Bill groans and buries his face into the pillows, but they can see him smiling.

“C-can’t you just…ignore it?” he says into the pillow, his voice muffled.

“Bill, we’ve been through this before. Wasted opportunity, remember? Your body is never wrong.”

“Th-then get yourself off w-without involving me or Stan.”

“Well…yeah, but…”

Stan is still prying Richie off and he moves away from him when he’s successful, but then Richie is climbing across him to get to Bill, clearly hoping that he’s going to be the one to break.

“Fine. You guys do whatever you want. I’m going back to sleep,” Stan says bluntly, as he rolls over to face away from them.

Richie snuggles himself in beside Bill instead, draping an arm around his waist as Bill drops his face into the pillow again.

“Bill, c’mon, buddy. Help your best friend out.”

“Y-you’re not my best friend. Eddie’s m-my best friend.”

Richie pretends to look hurt but then he chuckles.

“Would you help Eddie out if he had a problem like this?”

“H-he would never ask me to.”

“But I’m your friend, too, and I’m asking.”

“F-for what? What are y-you asking for?”

“I want the treatment that Stan was having last night.”

Bill lifts his face from the pillow again to look at Richie and he chuckles a little.

“…W…what?”
“C’mon, Bill. I will owe you such a big favour but I swear I will pay you back however you want.”

“You want me t-to…” Bill motions to the lower half of Richie’s body, “…w-with my…my mouth?”

Richie nods and raises his eyebrows like ‘yeah’. He waits and watches Bill while he seems to be thinking quite hard about it. Bill opens and closes his mouth a few times like he’s going to speak, but doesn’t. The expression on his face is like he’s trying to figure out a difficult math question in his head. Richie knows he’s going to get what he wants when Bill’s face drops again and he sighs into the pillow.

“I can tell that you really want to,” Richie chuckles and Bill kicks him in the shin under the sheets. He pushes himself up a few seconds later, sweeping his sleep-mussed hair back briefly before looking down at Richie, who looks expectant. They laugh for a little while every time they meet each other’s eyes because it’s so ridiculous but then Bill clearly gets his courage and climbs onto Richie. He moves his face away when Richie tries to kiss him, sniggering.

“No, w-we didn’t agree to a-anything else.”

Richie looks quite amused by this anyway as he watches Bill shuffling down his body underneath the blankets, until he disappears completely. He’s a little bit worried that Bill is just playing him, and that any second he’s going to punch him in the nuts or laugh and say ‘Just kidding!’ and go back to sleep. But he feels hot breath low on his abdomen, and then a tongue and lips and he slides his legs further apart so that Bill can get between them. He glances over at Stan’s back briefly, thinking that he’s probably already asleep again.

Bill doesn’t give Richie any of the teasing that he did with Stan, though, maybe because he wants to just get this over with and Richie doesn’t even have the time to register the feeling of Bill’s fingers tugging at the waistband of his boxers –which are all that he’s sleeping in- before there’s a wet heat around him and he sucks his bottom lip in between his teeth to chew at it. If he makes too much noise, Stan will definitely wake up and probably be pissed again.

He really wants to reach down and get his fingers tangled into Bill’s hair but any unnecessary movement might also wake Stan. If he’s telling the absolute truth, what he’d really like to do is to move the sheets away completely so he can watch Bill suck him off. He doesn’t know how Bill can possibly be so good at it with this only being his second time but somehow he’s using just the right pressure and his tongue is lapping at just the right places and Richie is sure that this is the best blowjob he’s received so far in his life.

It’s so good, in fact, that it becomes tough for Richie to stay silent through it and he has to reach down underneath the blankets to get his fingers in Bill’s hair just to try and distract himself from the need to swear or moan or talk, especially to talk because he really wants to tell Bill how fucking good it is. But he keeps his mouth shut, pressing his lips together hard to muffle a groan. It vibrates through his chest instead, low and reedy and he’s too lost in ecstasy to notice that Stan has woken up and is looking at them over his shoulder.

All that’s really visible is the top of Richie’s bare chest and Bill’s vague shape underneath the sheets, although it’s obvious what’s happening, especially with the blissful and almost dazed look on Richie’s face.

“Are you serious right-” Stan begins as he sits up to face them properly, but he loses his train of thought when Richie reaches out with his free hand to fist it in the front of Stan’s shirt, as if he desperately needs something else to hold onto and his head drops back into the pillows.
“Oh my _fuck_-…w-why didn’t you tell me that…that Bill was so good with his mouth?”

Stan almost looks a little bit smug about it and he shakes his head briefly and shrugs his shoulders.

“Well, maybe because I didn’t know _either_?”

“HOLY _FUCK_” Richie moans, looking down at the shape of Bill’s head moving under the blanket, “Bill, I don’t know what the _fuck_ it is that you’re doing but please don’t _fucking_ stop…”

His voice is breathy and needy and Stan smirks a little as he watches him, shifting closer so that Richie can get a proper hold on him, which he does, yanking on the front of Stan’s shirt and resting his cheek against his shoulder. Richie is really sweating, now, his hair is sticking to his face and it’s lucky that he takes his glasses off to sleep because Stan’s pretty sure that they’d be steaming up right now.

“Bill… _Bill_…please-” Whatever Richie was going to say gets caught and he moans into Stan’s neck, breathing heavily against him, “Bill, _can I_…can I come in your mouth?”

Stan looks at Richie briefly, as if he can’t quite believe that he just asked that out loud, but then he looks down at the lump in the sheets as if he’s waiting to hear the reply just as much as Richie is. There’s a wet sound in the silence as Bill’s lips come off Richie’s dick, and then his voice, muffled and sort of breathless.

“O-only if I… _d-don’t have to swallow it_…”

“No… _no_ you don’t have to swallow it,” Richie says with a contented sigh. It’s obvious when Bill’s mouth is on him again, because he shudders with a shaky ‘_fuck_’ and his eyes flicker closed. Stan pushes the sheets down away from Richie’s body, partly because he’s concerned about the sweat getting onto them and partly because he really wants to see Bill. When they get low enough, pooled at Richie’s stomach, Bill grabs them and throws them off himself because they’re getting in the way. He’s definitely in the sex-hair category now, having been mussed by the blanket and his lips are wet and shiny with saliva. There’s a slight redness to his cheeks which seems to be from being underneath the hot blankets rather than embarrassment.

Richie swears loudly again when he sees Bill’s lips wrapped around him and now he has a visual aid to go along with the sensations. He isn’t as big as Stan and Bill can take it deeper, almost all the way and that seems to be exactly what he’s doing as Richie yanks so hard at Stan’s shirt that he rips the two top buttons off completely and they drop into the sheets. His loud groaning and cursing covers up whatever protest Stan was about to make about it.

Bill looks up at them and there’s a vague sense that he’s amused by it, and Stan stops his ranting when he meets Bill’s eyes by accident and then he can’t look away. Bill clearly does something, then, whether he’s sucking harder or doing something else with his tongue that Stan can’t see but it’s clearly driving Richie crazy and his hand leaves Stan’s now-crumpled shirt to grasp at the pillow behind his head and he’s muttering all sorts of things, curse words and encouragements and Bill’s name but Stan and Bill are still looking at each other. And Stan reaches down to touch Bill’s cheek with the backs of his fingers and then runs his thumb across Bill’s bottom lip as he lifts his head and releases Richie from his mouth again. They keep eye-contact as Stan slides his thumb between Bill’s slightly-swollen lips and across his tongue and Richie lifts his head to see why he’s suddenly being left with blue balls to watch Bill sucking on Stan’s thumb. He’s about to protest until Stan’s wet thumb rubs across the tip of his dick and Bill’s tongue is there, too and there’s a lot of saliva and Richie has to stop looking because he feels light-headed when Stan guides him back into Bill’s mouth.
“Seriously guys I’m gonna come so hard,” he breathes out and Stan looks amused and Richie flinches when Bill chuckles and grips at his hair again with a whiny and drawn out ‘Bill’.

“If you don’t wanna swallow it then stop deep-throating him,” Stan says, rather casually, to Bill and Richie looks like he’s going to have a heart attack just from hearing those words come out of Stan’s mouth. Bill chuckles again but thankfully he pulls his mouth back just in time for Richie to come and only a tiny bit of it hits the back of his throat. He does move away rather quickly after that, though, to spit into his palm hastily with a grimace.

“Oh my g-god that’s gross.”

Richie is just lying there like he can’t even move his arms, looking like a hot mess, with his chest heaving. Bill spits into his palm again and Richie looks up at him when he hears him gagging.

“Seriously?”

“Some of it went d-d-down my throat!”

“Then swallow it!”

They both watch as Bill swallows, gags a little bit again and shudders, although he looks at them with a little ‘I-I’m okay’ afterwards and they all start laughing. Richie runs his fingers through his sweat-soaked hair and pushes it back against the pillow away from his forehead.

“I feel like…I just ascended onto a higher plain of existence than everyone else…”

Bill chuckles, although he goes over to the window at ‘Bird Watching Corner’ to spit out of it while Stan watches him with distain.

“Not out of my window!”

“But some of it is s-still there I c-can taste it!”

Stan rolls his eyes and gets a bottle of water that he brought up with him, going over to lean out of the window with Bill and rinse his hand for him, before handing him the bottle so he can drink some of it. But he washes it around his mouth and spits it out again.

“BILL!”

Stan tries to snatch the bottle back from him but Bill follows it with his mouth to drink some of it, this time and they’re both laughing as they fight over it and it splashes up into Bill’s face. He wipes it off nonchalantly, chuckling as they go to sit back next to Richie, who is flat out asleep already.

“L-lets at least give him s-some dignity,” Bill snickers as he pulls Richie’s boxers back up for him and covers him with the blanket.

“That was the hottest thing I’ve ever seen,” Stan suddenly says out loud and Bill looks at him, amused.

“W-what I just…put a blanket on him…”

“You know what I mean. Except the part where you…spat everywhere and nearly vomited.”

“It was p-pretty gross,” Bill chuckles, nodding.

They sit and look at each other in the silence for quite a while, and both of them can vaguely feel
the tension until, just as Stan drops his water bottle and is about to make a move, Bill has thrown himself at him and pressed him down into the sheets to crash their lips together. Everything happens pretty fast after that. Richie is absolutely flat out and there’s no way he’s waking up, which is lucky, because they don’t exactly try to stay quiet. Firstly, Stan rolls them so that he can get between Bill’s thighs and rocks him into the sheets and their lips meet over and over between breathy moans. They’re both insanely aroused from what just happened anyway and Bill grips at Stan’s back and presses his thighs against him and groans his name as Stan gasps against his neck.

Then, just as they are both about as worked up as they can get, Bill flips them to get Stan on his back instead and grinds between his thighs and cards his fingers through his hair against his scalp and bites at his neck and it all starts to get a little bit rough. Stan pulls at Bill’s hair and Bill bites him harder and practically rips the rest of the buttons on Stan’s shirt getting it off him. It gets tugged to his elbows before he gives up on it and works on Stan’s trousers instead. This time he takes them off him completely, and then they both help to remove Bill’s jeans. It’s a little bit chilly in the barn but they’re soon pressed against each other again in just their underwear and they’ve never been this close to having their naked bodies touching.

And somehow Richie sleeps through it all as Bill’s hips rock hard into Stan’s and Stan moves back against him and they’re both moaning, rather unconstrainedly, into each other’s mouths. Stan moans Bill’s name right against his lips and it’s the hottest thing Bill has ever heard and all he can picture is having Stan on his back like this while they’re alone, and naked, and he’s inside him and Stan’s thighs are pressed against his waist so desperately and saying his name exactly like he just did.

And he wants it more than anything. In fact, he’d be just as happy for Stan to be on top of him like this. He just wants Stan. And he thinks about what Stan said to him last night, when he was behind him and holding onto his hips so hard and he shudders and bites at Stan’s lips, and then at his jaw and his neck and grinds into him harder and Stan is breathing his name over and over as he gets close and Bill can’t even think straight anymore.

“F-fuck, I want you so bad,” he breathes out then, unable to stop it and he feels Stan’s fingers grip at his back.

“…You have me…”

“N-no…I w-want…to fuck you…I w-want you to fuck me I want…t-to feel you inside me I just want you…”

And Stan is looking into his eyes now and he’s whispering all of these things against Stan’s lips, between kisses.

“J-just tell me…that you want that, t-too…”

Stan doesn’t reply but he nods his head and Bill can see his eyes getting heavy and feel his hips pressing so desperately into his own. Stan’s fingers grip at Bill’s hair like he’s holding him in place, like the eye contact between them is turning him on more than anything else and Bill feels suddenly excited that he’s about to see Stan’s face up close when he comes. He knows that he’s going to come, too, any second, it’s burning dangerously close in his abdomen but he’s trying to hold it back for as long as he can.

But Stan lets go first, right when Bill grinds them together particularly hard. He feels Stan’s thighs press against his waist, feels the buck of hips that nearly sends him over the edge, too as Stan blesses his ears with another moan and, although his eyelids flutter, he keeps them open to watch Bill when he comes, too, not long after. Bill isn’t as self-aware and he can’t keep his eyes open
because it feels so good that it’s overwhelming, but there’s a beautiful flush in his cheeks and the soft noise that comes from his lips draws Stan’s gaze there instead, and he kisses him like he might be able to taste it.

They fall asleep like that later, with Bill lying against Stan’s chest and Stan’s arms wrapped around him tightly, and Stan doesn’t even break them apart to clean himself up, because he’s found something that matters so much more to him than stupid impulses.

The second time Stan awakes, it’s because Bill is shaking him and calling his name and he squints into the dark and looks at Bill’s face. There’s slight panic there and it frightens him and he sits up immediately.

“What? What’s wrong?”

“I…I th-think I heard something…” Bill says, and they both stay silent for a while. Bill’s hand is still on Stan’s shoulder. Richie is sleeping soundly beside them, completely hidden in his hair.

And that’s when Stan hears it, too. A soft thud, and then another.

“But then there’s another sound, the sound of shattering glass, and it’s loud and then someone is screaming, too, and it’s coming from the farmhouse. Richie jolts awake then, too, and they’re all sitting and listening. There’s another scream, and another and they all scramble to their feet and Bill uses the rope from the pulley to slide down to the ground floor of the barn rather than taking the ladder. Stan uses the ladder, but he’s scaling it fast and he reaches the ground not long after Bill. None of them bother to get dressed.

There’s another scream, then, louder and more terrible than the others and it’s Eddie. It’s definitely Eddie’s voice and Richie freezes at the top of the ladders. They all freeze. And thankfully Stan and Bill are already on the ground because Richie just straight up jumps from the platform. They catch him just before he hits the ground and then they’re all running, out into the fields, in the dark and cold of the night, towards the house. None of them have ever run so fast in their lives.

Bill breaks the door down when they reach the house, and he runs into Beverly, who is at the bottom of the stairs. Her hair is loose and she’s sobbing hysterically and Ben is trying to comfort her but he looks shaken, too. Mike runs down the stairs shortly after, taking them two or three at a time. His eyes are wide and there’s blood on his hands and cuts on his forearms.

“What’s Eddie?!” Richie screams, and then he’s pushing past Mike and Beverly before anyone can reply to ascend the stairs. He’s going so fast that he trips and ends up practically on all fours, but he uses his hands, too, to get him upstairs and then he’s running to Eddie’s room. Bill and Stan follow close behind him.

Eddie’s door is already open but Eddie isn’t inside. Although the window is smashed and there are smears of blood on the jagged edges of it. They all run to the window, Richie at the front to look out, but there’s nothing there aside from the broken pieces of glass lying in the grass a few metres below from the bust window.

Richie storms straight back out of the room, disappearing down the hallway and going into every room, screaming Eddie’s name at the top of his lungs. They can still hear Beverly crying downstairs. And then Richie is going back down, and he’s yelling at them all.

“WHERE THE FUCK IS EDDIE?!”
And Beverly starts crying harder as Stan and Bill stand on the stairs and watch. Mike is pacing and shaking.

“It took him!” he shouts back at Richie, and Richie looks for a second like he is going to punch Mike, but he hits the wall instead, so hard that the plaster breaks and everyone goes silent, even Beverly, “I tried to stop it but…but I couldn’t!”

“We’re going to get him,” Bill says then, from the stairs, and even Richie looks up at him, although he’s breathing so hard that they can all hear it. Nobody says anything but they don’t need to. It’s not up for negotiation, especially not now Bill has said it.

They all pull on some clothes as quickly as they can while Richie paces up and down the lawn, biting at his nails. He has dressed faster than all of them, shoving on some jeans and an old t-shirt and his boots —without any socks-. Beverly is clearly worried about Richie and she doesn’t bother to go upstairs to get her own clothes, but pulls on some of Richie’s, tucking the shirt into the waistband of the jeans so it’s not swamping her and putting a belt on as tightly as she can. Thankfully she keeps some boots downstairs by the front door and she yanks those on, too, before leaving to pace with Richie, trying to calm him down.

Silently, they all pile into Mike’s car. Bill gets in the front with Mike, while the other four cram into the back. Richie gets in last, and he shakes his leg and taps his fingers against the window and bites his nails the whole time. Stan sits next to him, because Ben looks a little bit uncomfortable and Beverly couldn’t stop him if he tried to do something stupid like jump out of the car while it’s moving. None of them bother putting on seatbelts.

The car journey is silent as Mike takes all of the turns and they know exactly where they’re heading. There’s no question about it, when they pull up in Neibolt Street and Richie practically breaks the car door off its hinges getting out so fast. He disappears inside the house before any of them can stop him, and even with Beverly shouting his name after him he doesn’t reappear. They can hear him inside yelling Eddie’s name.

The rest of them wait for Bill to lead them inside the house, and it’s just as dingy and murky and nasty as they all remember it. Beverly clutches her hand to her chest briefly and Ben rubs her shoulder reassuringly. They can still hear Richie up ahead, calling Eddie’s name more and more desperately. There’s no response, of course. They all know that he’s not actually in the house, and that wherever he’s been taken it’s much darker and damper.

Descending the stairs into the cellar makes Bill feel strangely nauseous. He still leads the group, and Richie is waiting at the bottom, at the edge of the old well that’s there, shouting Eddie’s name into it over and over and over. He moves aside when Bill goes over, though, and lets him look into it, too. It’s completely pitch black and there’s the familiar scent wafting up from its depths that Bill remembers all too well, the smell of old, rotting garbage, of decay, of damp and dark and something inherently evil. It both turns his stomach and makes the hairs on the back of his neck stand up.

“How do we get down there?” Ben asks tentatively as he appears at Bill’s side, “I mean…last time we had a rope…”

“We fucking climb, then!” Richie shouts, looking at everyone in the group one by one, with his eyes wide, “Why the fuck are we just standing around like-”

And then Bill has grabbed Richie by his collar and pinned him against a nearby wall, and he presses him against it, looking right into his eyes.
“Richie, I know that you’re upset and that you’re angry and you’re worried about Eddie, we all are!” he hisses, “But acting the way you’re acting right now isn’t gonna get us anywhere! We have to stay calm, because if we don’t we’re just making that thing’s job so much easier!”

Richie grips at Bill’s wrist with both of his hands, glaring daggers at him. His breath is coming in sharp little bursts.

“Do you understand me, Richie?” Bill asks then, raising his eyebrows and following Richie’s eyes when he looks away from him, “Richie?”

Richie struggles for a little while in Bill’s grip, but his breathing seems to even out and he nods. Bill lets him go and holds his hand on the back of Richie’s head briefly, dropping it to his shoulder to pat him there before they go to stand at the well with the others.

“I can see the rope!” Beverly says suddenly, pointing into the well and they all look down. She’s right, the rope that they used as children to climb down into the sewers through this well is still there, hanging over a loose stone that sticks out from the wall. It still looks sturdy enough.

“…One of us needs to climb down and get it…” Stan says, uncertainly. He looks uncomfortable.

“I’ll go,” Bill says immediately and they all look at him, but nobody says anything or argues, because they know that it has to be Bill. It always has to be Bill. They all look down into the well again, and, for some unknown reason, they each reach out to hold the hand of the person standing next to them. The scar on Bill’s palm burns where it touches Beverly’s hand, and he looks at Beverly and he knows that she feels it, too. He looks to his other side, then, at his left hand, which is empty and it feels cold and he clenches his fist. He knows that Eddie’s hand should be there. He looks up again, round at the circle, and he meets the eyes of the other five people, one at a time. And then, without a single stutter, he speaks.

“Let’s go and get our Loser back.”
Chapter 29

The rest of the group hold their breath as Bill swings a leg over to sit on the edge of the stone well. Stan looks particularly pale, and he reaches out suddenly to grab Bill’s shoulder with an ‘I’ll go’ which shocks them all. They all look at him, then.

“It…it’s my fault that Eddie’s gone,” he says, a little bit shakily as if he’s struggling not to cry, “I was sharing a room with him and I should’ve been there but…but I wasn’t and…if I’d been there then maybe I could’ve stopped it…”

Bill shakes his head the whole time that Stan is speaking and he reaches out to him but Stan moves away, as if he doesn’t think he deserves the comfort.

“What if something has happened to him what if…what if he’s hurt or…or-”

Mike takes Stan to one side before he can continue, away from the others and he holds both of Stan’s hands in his own.

“Listen to me,” he says calmly, following Stan’s eyes with his own so he can’t look away from him, “I was actually there. I saw him getting dragged through the window. I got there as fast as I could and I tried to stop it and I still couldn’t do anything. You being there or not…probably wouldn’t have made a difference. It’s not your fault.”

Stan still can’t seem to meet his eyes properly, and there are visible tears brimming there, but he nods and holds onto Mike’s hands tighter.

“But what we can do is find him now…and protect him…and take him home,” Mike continues, in a tone and with an expression that makes it sound completely believable.

“Y-yeah…” Stan says, and his voice quivers again just slightly but he takes a deep breath and looks Mike properly in the eyes, now.

“It’s gonna be okay,” Mike says firmly, releasing Stan’s hands to reach onto the back of his neck and pull him in until their foreheads touch, “We got this. That thing ain’t got nothing on us.”

Stan looks dubious but he smiles a little bit, and Mike squeezes the back of his neck reassuringly before he pulls away and they go back to the well. Bill is still sitting on the edge of it, now with both of his legs on the inside. He glances at Mike and Stan, giving them both a nod briefly. He clearly had the foresight to bring a torch because he’s holding one now, and he lifts it to hold it in his mouth as he turns carefully to start climbing down. They all lean over the edge of the well instantly around him, as if readying to try and catch him if he slips. Richie bends right over it to reach an arm down and Bill holds onto Richie’s hand briefly to use it for some stability as he climbs lower.

It’s a long and painfully slow process, as the well is a bit damp and all of the handholds are slippery so Bill is being extra careful. Richie is clearly anxious and he has bitten one of his nails down so far that there’s blood in his cuticles, and he keeps shifting from one foot to the other and pacing. At one point, Bill loses his grip on a jutting piece of stone and one of his hands briefly slides off. Richie immediately climbs over the edge of the well, with Mike and Ben holding his shoulders to stop him from going any further and thankfully, Bill gets a hold on something else rather quickly. He looks a little bit shaken, though.
When he reaches the rope, he makes sure to climb inside the opening to the sewers first so that he has some solid ground to throw it up from. Richie is still seated on the well’s edge and he catches the rope the first go, then Mike and Ben haul him back over so he can reach up to tie it in place, giving it a tug.

They all descend into the darkness one by one, and Bill waits for them and helps them inside the tunnel as soon as they reach him. He has taken the torch out of his mouth and placed it on the ground, pointing into the well to try and give them some light.

Richie climbs down last; Mike volunteered but Richie wouldn’t let him, and Ben and Bill reach out to grab him and drag him inside with the rest. It’s insanely dark inside, more so than they remember it and Bill’s torch barely penetrates it as he leads the group at an almost crawl. When they were children this was much easier but now that they’re all adults it’s more of a squeeze and Bill can feel the cold, damp walls brushing against his shoulders.

Thankfully, they drop into a larger tunnel quite soon after they enter the sewer, into filthy water that covers their ankles and Richie briefly thinks of how much Eddie might be complaining about this if he were here and it makes him angrier and he storms off ahead, splashing and shouting Eddie’s name again as the others hastily follow after him, not wanting to get split up.

Stan seems to be much more afraid than the rest of them, and he jumps at every little sound and once, when Ben is close to him and brushes his shoulder in the dark, he almost cries out. Mike stays at the back of the group, as Bill heads it following Richie. Ben is close behind Bill, and he looks nervous, too. None of them have spoken apart from Richie’s incessant calling of Eddie’s name and the atmosphere is tense. When some stagnant water drips from the ceiling and hits Stan’s shoulder and splashes onto his cheek, he flinches and backs against the wall; he’s clearly hit his peak level of tolerance for the situation and he covers his face until Beverly goes to him and pries his shaking hands away, and she links their fingers together tightly. She doesn’t speak, but she gives him a look that says exactly what she means to convey, that he is safe as long as she is here, that they are all safe as long as they are together. She walks beside him as they continue, keeping their fingers firmly entwined and where their palms touch feels warm and Stan almost feels like Beverly’s confidence is transferring onto him somehow, as strange as it sounds. He can sense the power she holds and he almost feels calmed in the wake of it.

They walk for what feels like hours. The darkness and silence make it all the more confusing, as if they’re being desensitised to the concept of time. The steady drip of putrid water from the curved walls and ceiling becomes almost like a rhythm that is playing over and over again on repeat, the circular shape of the tunnel ahead plays tricks on their eyes and sometimes looks to be getting narrower as they advance, the steady splashing of their footsteps seems too loud sometimes, like there are more of them than there should be.

Richie’s voice is starting to weaken from shouting Eddie’s name so many times but he keeps going, relentlessly, and sometimes it sounds like a quiet croak and sometimes it’s tinged with desperation and it’s so loud that it bounces off the rounded walls. He doesn’t slow his steps, not once, and they are sure that he must be tiring by now, they all are, but they’re driven on by a silent understanding that they will walk down here in the dark forever if that’s what it takes because there are supposed to be SEVEN of them and nothing less will do. Nothing less is acceptable.

After a while, Bill starts to shout Eddie’s name, too. And he stutters, A LOT, almost as if he’s thinking that if he does it enough that Eddie will come to them so he can lecture Bill on how much he hates him stuttering his name. And Bill wants nothing more than to hear Eddie telling him that right now. And Bill’s voice stirs something in them all so that soon after they are all shouting Eddie’s name, sometimes in unison and sometimes one after the other like an echo.
It feels like they are lost. Nobody says anything about it but they all remember that Eddie is their navigator, that it was Eddie who told them where to go in the tunnels last time. Eddie was never wrong about that and they all remember. But it’s not just a memory, it’s like an ache, deep in Bill’s chest and he knows without having to say it out loud that they can all feel it just the same. Like there is an empty space inside them somewhere. Like there is a space that can only be filled by Eddie.

Just as they are all tiring, and Richie has dropped back to the rest of the group, unable to keep up his monstrous pace any longer, and they are all cold and damp and starting to lose hope, the tunnel breaks off into a large room. They don’t recognise it but it just feels like the right way to go and this time Bill goes first, although he holds Richie’s hand to keep him close. It’s darker here, now that they’re deeper into the labyrinth and Bill’s torch isn’t having much of an effect at all. If anything it seems to be getting weaker like it’s running out of batteries. He’s holding Richie’s hand so tightly that Richie’s rings are digging into his skin and it hurts but there’s no way he’s letting go. As they enter the room, Richie feels someone grab his other hand. He doesn’t look, by instinct he knows that the hand belongs to Beverly and he holds her tight, too. She’s wearing even more rings than Richie is and it makes the hand-holding very uncomfortable and they can barely link their fingers but they do it anyway. She still has Stan in her other hand and he is holding onto Ben, whose hand is clasped in Mike’s as he brings up the rear.

And Bill drops his torch into the water with a heavy splash because he suddenly feels as if he doesn’t need it, like it might just slow him down. He doesn’t know why he feels that, it’s just an impulse but he does it anyway and he feels his way along the wall. The torch wasn’t helping much anyway and it’s not that much different.

Just after he hears the torch hitting the water, almost like it triggered something, there’s an agonising scream, Eddie’s voice. None of them can see much at all but they all immediately start to run, as one, without releasing their grip on each other’s hands. Bill doesn’t know why but he feels like they need to keep holding on, even if it’s slowing them down somewhat. And they do, until Eddie screams again and Richie’s grip is yanked out of Bill’s as he sprints ahead, knocking into Bill’s shoulder as he goes.

“RICHIE!” Bill calls after him, “RICHIE, NO!”

Almost all at once, as soon as Bill feels the last of Richie’s fingers detach from his own, there’s an ear-splitting, feral shriek from somewhere in the darkness and Bill feels something heavy hit him like he’s been lunged at. He hears Beverly yelling his name as he plunges into the water and it splashes over his shoulders and soaks his back and some of it briefly goes in his mouth and he chokes and spits it out. He doesn’t have time to worry about that, though, as there’s something on top of him that he can’t really see and it’s growling and making hellish noises that he can’t even describe and there’s pain as it claws at him, at his neck and chest and face. He reacts fast, hitting it with closed fists and pushing as hard as he can and kicking out with his feet and then it’s off him. It’s off him and he scrambles to his feet and he’s running again. He can’t see where the others are but there’s screaming and shouting around him and he can’t even tell where it’s coming from. There’s a stinging pain in his neck and on his chest and his cheek feels bruised but he pushes those senses aside to try and get towards people’s voices.

Briefly, he runs straight into a wall, putting his palms up just in time to protect his face, but it still hurts and he’s a little bit dazed. He can hear a lot of splashing but there’s no way of telling who or what is causing it. And then he hears Eddie, not just screaming this time but speaking.

“HELP! HELP!”
He runs towards where he thinks the sound is coming from, tripping over something briefly and falling face first into the water. He chokes again and coughs and spits it out but he clambers to his feet and keeps running.

“EDDIE!”

“BILL! BILL HELP ME!”

It’s pitch black and he can’t see a thing but he races towards Eddie’s voice, skimming walls with his shoulders and occasionally knocking into them so hard that he feels the pain skitter through his nerves. He has no idea where he’s going.

“EDDIE! I’M COMING! JUST STAY WHERE YOU ARE!”

“PLEASE!”

And he suddenly runs out into a large, open room and he can see a little bit and he squints around, looking for Eddie. His breath is coming so hard that every time he inhales it burns his lungs, and one of his arms feels a little bit numb from hitting solid concrete but those sensations are secondary concerns to him.

“EDDIE?!?”

“BILL! BILL, OVER HERE!”

He sounds so close now that Bill is sure he should be able to see him, but no matter where he looks there isn’t anyone there. There’s nothing but an empty room filled with ankle-deep sewer water. And Bill is so focused on looking for Eddie that he doesn’t see the movement in the water at his feet until it’s too late. A white, gloved hand, dirtied in the filthy water, reaches out to grab his ankle and just as the thought that he was being lured into a trap crosses his mind, he is yanked down, down into water that seconds ago was only ankle-deep but now it swallows him completely. He feels it cover the top of his head and everything is dark, so dark and he can’t see and his eyes sting so badly that he has to close them.

He kicks out, tries to release the grip on his leg but it holds fast and somehow he is still being dragged, pulled through icy cold water, deeper and deeper down. And for the first time in his life, Bill Denbrough is truly terrified. He’s felt sadness before, grief and anger and regret and guilt…but not this…and it’s all-consuming and he wants to scream but if he opens his mouth he will swallow water and it will enter his lungs…and he will die.

His lungs burn, they burn because he didn’t even have time to take a deep breath before he went under and it hurts more than anything he’s ever felt. It doesn’t just hurt in his chest, it hurts in his head, too and in his throat and it almost feels like it’s spreading through his body. He feels cold, incredibly cold, and his fingertips start to tingle, and he thinks that this is it. He’s going to drown. He’s going to die.

This is what it feels like to die.

“Billy…”

The voice is faint and familiar and it feels…warm. The voice of a child.

“Billy…wake up…”

As soon as he opens his eyes to see Mike leaning close over his face, he forgets that he ever heard
the voice at all. He can feel Mike’s hands pressing on his chest and he wants to take a breath but when he tries he can’t and it hurts so bad and he panics and starts coughing. When he does, Mike rolls him onto his side, and he feels water come up his throat and out of his mouth. He feels a little bit like he needs to vomit, too, and then he does. Mike’s hand rubs and pats at his back.

“Good. Get it all out.”

Mike’s voice still sounds a little bit muffled as he continues to cough and retch and spit out water and bile and his tongue feels and tastes absolutely fucking disgusting. He thinks about what’s in the water that he swallowed and vomits again and Mike is holding him and pushing his wet hair out of his eyes and saying ‘I got you’ over and over again. His throat stings like crazy and his stomach hurts from all of the sudden heaving and when he’s done he has to stop to catch his breath like he’s been winded. There are tears in his eyes.

“W-w-where…Eddie…” he can’t speak properly; his lungs are still hurting and he feels incredibly weakened but Mike gets what he’s trying to say.

“I don’t know. I got separated from the rest of the group when those things attacked us…and I heard Eddie shouting for help so I came this way…and…when I got here you were lying face down in the water on the ground.”

“It w-wa-was a trap…Eddie…Eddie’s n-not here…”

Bill retches again briefly but he only coughs up some more water and wipes at his lips with a shaking hand, before slowly pushing himself onto his knees. He starts to try and stand and Mike helps him to his feet.

“Easy. Take it easy.”

“…I’m…f-fine…we have t-t-t-to find E-Eddie…”

“Yeah. Just don’t push yourself. We can’t lose you, too.”

Bill’s chin feels sticky and he wipes at it absent-mindedly, blinking some water out of his eyes as Mike holds onto his hand to lead him in the dark. He feels uncomfortable like this, with someone else walking into potential danger before him but whenever he tries to switch their positions Mike tugs him back.

They run into Stan and Ben after a short while. Stan is screaming and crying, they can hear it, and they can hear Ben telling him that it’s going to be okay and trying to calm him down. Mike fumbles around before he gets to them and reaches for Stan’s hand, which frightens him even more as he can’t see them and he screams louder and tries to pull his hand out of Mike’s grip until Mike shouts ‘It’s me! Stan, it’s me!’ and he tugs him closer to give him a brief hug.

“Where is everyone else?” Ben asks Mike. Bill is about to speak to let them know that he is there, too, but Mike beats him to it.

“Bill’s with me. I don’t know where Bev and Richie are…we got split up. Are you two okay?”

“Yeah…we’re good…I think,” Ben says quietly and they all look to where Stan is.

“…I’m okay,” his voice comes out barely as a whisper.

“You’re being real brave, Stan,” Mike says, then, and he gives Stan’s hand a squeeze, “Let’s keep going, okay?”
They can vaguely see Stan nod his head and hear him take a shaky breath with a small ‘okay’, and it gives them the sign they needed to continue forward. Ben holds onto Stan’s other hand and Bill leads them again, this time.

“N-n-nobody let go th-this time,” his voice comes out sounding raw, almost unlike his own, and his throat hurts, “We’ll be okay i-if w-w-we stick together.”

So they walk again for what feels like hours, listening to the steady splash of their own footsteps. Bill is tired, so tired and he feels achy and a bit sick but he continues to head the group without a single complaint. Adrenaline is keeping him going now. It isn’t long before they hear another scream, Eddie’s voice again and they follow it but Bill is wary this time. He could easily be leading them into another trap. When they come out into another large room, this one the biggest yet, circular in shape with a high ceiling, they realise that it’s not. There’s a source of light coming from somewhere, or perhaps their eyes have adjusted but it’s easier to see in this room.

And there it is.

*The clown.*

*IT.*

They stop in their tracks when it comes into their view, each of them in turn and Bill feels something wash over him, something extremely unpleasant, like the feeling when you almost miss a step but your foot catches it just before you fall and your heart feels like it leaps into your throat. He knew that it was here somewhere, *he knew*, but seeing it for real again after all of this time is almost overwhelming.

And it’s just as horrifying as he remembers, maybe more so. Its suit is more faded, now, dirtier, and pieces of it seem to be falling apart. One of the orange pompoms is missing from the front of its suit and another is hanging by a thread. Its ruffled sleeves and collar are frayed and aged and stained. But that somehow makes it seem all the more frightening, as if it’s been waiting down here for them this whole time, slowly decaying.

And there is Eddie.

He’s on the ground at the clown’s feet, with one of its hands fisted in his hair as he struggles and squirms in the water and kicks out. It’s holding him up just enough that it must be pulling and hurting him because he’s frequently grasping at its arm and at its fingers to try and get it to let go. It looks as if it might have been dragging him, as his legs are splayed out on the ground in front of him and he’s on his back. He’s still wearing his pyjamas and they are greyed and sticking to him with the weight of the water that’s soaked into the fabric. His feet are bare.

He starts crying harder when he sees them, hiccupping loud sobs that make it sound like he can’t catch his breath and Bill takes another step forward but Mike stops him quickly. The clown seemed to tighten its grip on Eddie’s hair as if readying to yank him away from them the second that Bill moved. Its yellow eyes follow them as if it’s waiting for them to make another move.

“LEAVE HIM ALONE!” Ben screams suddenly, and Stan can feel him shaking with anger, but then it seems to hit them all, as well, as if the feeling is transferring through their palms and Bill is finding it difficult not to just break his grip and make his way over there to pummel that thing with his bare fists.

“LEAVE HIM ALONE!” the clown mocks, with a dreadful chuckle and they all take a step forward, now.
Eddie cries harder as it drags him, by his hair, to his feet in reaction to their movement and it gets a hand under his chin, then, with his frame basically tucked under one of its long arms. He is still clutching at it with his nails, pulling and trying to fight but it’s having no effect.

But then it’s blindsided, they all are, as Richie and Beverly appear from an adjoining tunnel, sprinting as fast as their legs can move and splashing water all around. Beverly’s hair is no longer tied back and it’s streaming down her back as she runs and one of the lenses of Richie’s glasses is cracked.

“GET YOUR HANDS OFF HIM YOU MOTHERFUCKER!” Richie screams as he collides with the beast at full speed, and Eddie is knocked out of its grip to the ground with a heavy splash. Beverly gets there quickly, too, and she yanks Eddie to his feet and pushes him behind her back protectively.

And that’s all the incentive that they need. Bill releases Mike’s hand and belts toward the creature, too, which Richie is currently punching and kicking and, just as it gets a grip on Richie’s throat, Bill hits it, too, from the other side. Mike and Ben are there shortly after, and they all lay into it as best they can with no weapons. It’s not doing much besides shocking it but it gives Beverly and Stan time to drag Eddie away from the thing. He’s shaking heavily and rasping and struggling to breathe.

Beverly leaves Eddie with Stan to rip a nearby pipe away from the wall, with her bare hands. She plants her foot against the concrete to do it, and the pipe is rusty and it comes free the fourth time she yanks at it. Once she has it in her grip, she’s in the fray with the others, only she manages to do some real damage as she repeatedly swings the heavy metal rod into every part of its body she can reach without hitting one of her friends. She’s swinging it so hard that she screams every time she does it and it’s almost scary to watch. Bill has to duck once or twice as it flies just over his head.

At one point, the clown knocks them all back with a swing of one of its large arms. They are sure that it should seem smaller to them now that they’re adults, but it feels the same size, almost as if the memory of it towering over them as children is what’s giving it its power. Richie is knocked to the ground but he rolls to take the impact better and he’s back on his feet again without missing a beat, just as the clown lunges towards Stan and Eddie. Stan sees it coming and he’s obviously afraid but he stands in front of Eddie protectively, closing his eyes for the inevitable impact.

It never reaches him, though, as the others have jumped into action again. Richie is on its back with his arms around its throat, as the rest of them drag at its suit in various places to hold it away. Beverly continues to hit it with her pipe, right in the middle of its back, repeatedly and ferociously and eventually it seems to hurt it and it turns away from Stan and Eddie again to confront her. But Ben has found an old piece of metal, too, and it’s thicker and heavier and there are large rivets running up its length, rusting. He smashes it right into the clown’s face as soon as it turns around to get to Beverly and it does some considerable damage. There’s no blood, but its jaw shifts completely to the left like it’s been dislocated and then hangs sort of loose in a gruesome display as its huge tongue rolls out and they can see rows and rows of pointed teeth. Its large, yellow eyes seem to glow in the dark as it looks around at them all, like it’s considering which of them to attack next, but Ben and Beverly react first and they both swing at it at the same time, either side of its head. There’s a stomach-churning crunching sound as its skull cracks and its eyes bulge out of the sockets and Beverly drops her pipe as it stumbles towards her. It doesn’t get far, Richie is pulling on the back of its suit, right at the neck like he’s holding back a disobedient dog. It scrambles at Beverly for a while but she’s just out of its reach and the fingertips of its white gloves barely graze her.

And then, the strangest thing they’ve seen so far. Its arms suddenly drop to its sides and its head
lolls as if it’s dead. Richie lets go, and it drops to the ground like an enormous ragdoll, and then disappears right into the water with a splash, leaving only a single orange pompom floating on the surface. They kick around with their feet to look for it, but it’s gone.

Ben and Beverly throw themselves together in a tight embrace as Ben drops his own weapon and they’re both shaking, as the others go to Eddie and Stan. Eddie is sitting against the wall, gasping and clutching at his chest as Stan holds onto his shoulders and tries to talk to him. It doesn’t seem like he’s listening.

Richie drops to his knees beside them with a soft ‘Eddie’ and Eddie glances at him briefly. There are tears streaming down his cheeks and his face looks quite red and he reaches out for Richie until Richie takes his hand. He presses Eddie’s palm flat against his own chest as they all watch, holding it there.

“Just copy me, okay?” he says calmly, taking an exaggerated, slow, deep breath and Eddie’s eyes follow him and he tries to do it, too, but he struggles and seems to panic more. Richie stays focused anyway, despite Eddie’s obvious hysteria and he presses both of his hands over Eddie’s on his chest.

“Eddie. Just look at me…just look at me. Don’t think about anything else, okay? Focus on your palm.”

And Eddie nods, weakly, as Richie continues to guide him.

“Try and copy me. Just keep trying, you’ll get it. I’m gonna stay right here until you do.”

Everyone else watches silently as Eddie nods quickly again, and his breathing, albeit gradually, becomes slower and slower.

“Good. That’s good. Keep going.”

Richie’s eyes are locked onto Eddie’s as he continues to take deep breaths to show Eddie what to do, to try and get him to match the rhythm, and they must have done this before because Eddie seems to be slowly slipping out of his panic.

“You’re doing so good, Eds.”

“Don’t….don’t…”

“Don’t call you that? Yeah, I know,” Richie chuckles fondly, stroking the back of Eddie’s hand with his fingers. Stan is sitting against the wall with Eddie, now, although he doesn’t touch him again because crowding him would be the worst thing to do.

“A…are y-you okay, Eddie?” Bill asks, then, softly, “D-did it hurt you?”

Eddie glances up at Bill, and something about his face seems to calm him even more and he shakes his head gently.

“…No…I’m…I’m okay…”

Once Eddie seems to be breathing normally again, Richie holds his hand to pull him into a tight hug and Eddie grips at the back of Richie’s shirt and buries his face into him. They stay that way for a long time, neither of them wanting to let go, before eventually they separate and Eddie wipes under his eyes determinedly. He looks exhausted, like he needs to sleep for about three days.
“Let’s get the fuck out of here.”
It’s a tough job to find their way out of the maze of tunnels. They feel like they came so far to get to this particular room, but Eddie is with them now and just like they all remember, he somehow knows exactly which route to take to get them back to the well. They hold hands in a line while making their way through, as it’s still pitch black and there’s the ever-lingering threat of the clown making another appearance. Eddie leads the group this time, closely followed by Richie, then Bill, Stan, Bev, Ben and Mike. Ben has picked up the piece of metal he was using to attack the clown and is carrying it with him, now, in his free hand.

When they reach the well to climb back up, Bill struggles a little bit, and it surprises them all because he’s usually the most determined of them all to perform any sort of task. Although he does bat Richie’s hand away when he tries to help him with an ‘I c-c-can do it’ as he lifts himself back out into the house. They exit into fading daylight, and the horrifying realisation that they’ve literally been down there for almost a whole day.

Bill doesn’t seem to be himself at all and they all notice it. He looks a bit pale and he’s even quieter than usual. In truth, he feels quite awful; his whole body is aching and he feels strangely hot and cold at the same time. That and he’s getting some painful stomach cramps which make him wonder how much of the gross water he actually swallowed, and what kind of an effect it might be having on his insides. But, Bill being Bill, he brushes off any attempt of the other Losers to ask him if he’s okay and he simply shrugs it off, muttering that he just feels a bit tired. He does ask to sit in the front of the car, though, as he doesn’t think he can face squashing into the back with so many people – Eddie has to sit on Richie’s lap-, and Mike drives slowly and seems to be paying close attention to how quiet he is. A few times he gets worried and asks Bill if he wants him to pull over but Bill just waves his hand at him without saying anything.

When they reach the farm again and Mike pulls into the driveway, Bill is the first to get out, and he goes to bed straight after taking a quick shower. Stan offers to share Mike’s room so that Eddie can sleep next to Richie, and he, too, goes to bed as soon as he’s cleaned himself of the sewer smell. Mike follows him not long after. Ben and Beverly stay up for a little while, and Beverly runs a hot bath for Eddie. Richie is sure that she and Ben get into the downstairs shower together after that, but he doesn’t say anything and he waits for them to go to bed, too.

He heads for the downstairs shower, too, now that it’s finally free of people, although he sits on the closed lid of the toilet for quite a while without making any moves to start undressing or anything of the sort. It feels oddly cold in here, and silent now that everyone else is asleep, and he looks at the ceiling and thinks about Eddie sitting in his nice warm bath which Beverly added all sorts of nice smelling things to –Richie doesn’t know or care what they’re called-. He’s a little bit jealous, for a brief moment, but then he thinks about the fact that Eddie is sitting up there alone.

So he heads back upstairs and goes to the bathroom door. There’s a faint glow coming from around its edges, warm and inviting and he can faintly hear the soft ripple of water as Eddie moves. He raps his knuckles against the wood lightly before pushing the door straight open and going inside.

Eddie is sitting in the middle of the tub; it’s a rather large, old-style bathtub and he looks a little bit swamped in it. He doesn’t look up when Richie enters, as if he knew it was him anyway. If anything, he looks a little bit spaced out, sitting with his knees pulled up to his chest and staring at the bubbles around him. Richie doesn’t know this, but Eddie has spent the past ten minutes since he got into the water desperately scrubbing the entirety of his body clean, as if he feels like he can’t
get rid of the sewer stench. He has washed his hands so much that they’re a little bit sore. Richie watches him for a little while before closing the door softly, and it’s that sound that finally draws Eddie’s attention.

“Y’okay, Eds?”

Eddie doesn’t reply at first, and that’s Richie’s first concern, that Eddie doesn’t take the bait and cuss him out for using the nickname that he supposedly hates so much, but he shrugs his shoulders a little and looks back at the water with a quiet ‘I guess’.

“What do you mean ‘you guess’? You’re either okay or you ain’t,” Richie says, briefly slipping into a southern accent before reigning it in as he goes over to crouch by the tub, resting his arms across it and settling his chin on top.

“I’m okay,” Eddie says, but it’s flat and unconvincing.

Richie watches him for a while, silently, from behind his cracked glasses. He knows that he should probably take them off, since he can only see through one half of them now, but then he wouldn’t be able to pick up little details like the sparse freckles on Eddie’s shoulders, and the damp ends of his hair against his cheeks and the back of his neck, and the light shine that the steam is leaving on the tip of his nose and across his forehead. He makes a decision, then, and he briefly dips the tips of his fingers into the water next to Eddie’s right arm, watching the ripples it makes.

“Can I get in?”

And this seems to be the first thing that has properly grabbed Eddie’s attention since Richie entered the room, because he looks at him like he’s just asked him a difficult question. He stays silent for a while, looking like he’s working it over in his mind, before he shrugs his shoulders a little again.

“…Sure.”

He doesn’t look at Richie as he undresses beside the tub, although there’s a definite tension in his shoulders, now, and in his neck, as if he’s struggling not to. And when Richie steps naked into the water in front of him he glances away until he’s sitting and covered by the bubbles. It’s awkward; the tub seemed a lot bigger when it was just Eddie in it by himself but Richie is tall and takes up a lot of space and Eddie has to move right back against his side so that Richie’s legs don’t touch his own too much.

“Are you sure you’re okay?” Richie asks again. His glasses have steamed up in the heat and he doesn’t seem like he’s going to take them off himself, and eventually it annoys Eddie enough that he reaches over to lift them off Richie’s face. He looks at the cracked lens as if he’s only just noticed it now that they’re off Richie.

“…What happened to your glasses?”

“I ran into a wall,” Richie says casually, watching Eddie to see if this will tickle him or not, and smiling when Eddie chuckles and reaches out of the bath to place them carefully on the closed toilet seat. He looks back at Richie with a grin.

“You ran into a wall?”

“Yep.”

“I’m surprised it’s only your glasses that are broken.”
“I know. Luckily, my giant front teeth didn’t get knocked out. It’s one thing to look like Bucky Beaver but imagine if I had a huge gap there?” he laughs, tapping his top middle teeth with a finger.

“You don’t have giant teeth anymore, Rich,” Eddie chuckles, “You grew into ‘em.”

“Thank our lord and saviour, Jesus Christ,” Richie sniggers, putting his hands together as if he’s praying, “I mean, I can stand the glasses but who gets both?”

“You don’t have anything to worry about. Trust me.”

“Are you saying that you find me attractive?”

“…I’m not saying that I don’t.”

They both laugh for a while, before it dies down and Eddie goes quiet and pensive again. And Richie doesn’t like it; he doesn’t like it at all.

“Hey, Eddie?”

“…Yeah?”

“Will you wash my hair?”

And Eddie laughs a bit at first, as if he thinks he’s joking, but then he quickly realises that he isn’t and he looks at Richie’s hair questioningly.

“Seriously?”

“Yeah. I’ll wash yours, too, if you want.”

“I’m not sure I trust you with that kind of responsibility,” Eddie chuckles and Richie jabs him in the forearm with his finger where Eddie’s arm is on the edge of the tub. He’s still wearing all of his rings, as well as a number of bracelets and a necklace, even while in the bath. Eddie sighs, then.

“Okay. Then get your head under the water. I’m not gonna wash it while it’s dry.”

Richie dunks himself into the bubbles faster than Eddie’s ever seen anyone do it, quickly reappearing to wipe at his face with ringed fingers and to push dark, now wet hair out of his eyes. He shuffles closer to Eddie, looking expectant.

“You’re like a…giant…puppy,” Eddie says, trying not to make it sound fond, but it does and Richie smiles and Eddie tries not to look at the water droplets running across Richie’s lips. And so he takes a bottle of shampoo from the side; it’s the one that Bev uses, he knows it is but he also knows that she won’t care. Richie is the only one without his own shampoo anyway and he always uses other people’s, usually Stan’s –much to Stan’s irritation- because it’s especially for curly hair. He kneels in front of Richie, grateful that Beverly ran the bath really full and that it’s high enough still to cover the lower half of his body with bubbles, and lathers the shampoo into Richie’s hair. He’s a little bit disappointed when Eddie finally stops and tells him to go under again to rinse it off, but he does it anyway, and when he breaks the surface again his hair feels super clean, like, cleaner
than it’s ever felt before. It’s almost squeaky.

“I nearly came,” he chuckles, then, and Eddie hits him in the arm hard but he laughs.

“Rich, that’s fucking gross.”

“You should be a masseuse.”

“It’s masseur. Masseuse is for a woman.”

“Well, excuse me, I didn’t realise you were such a fucking expert.”

“I’m not. I’m just not a fucking idiot.”

“Aaaannd, Eddie Spaghetti is back!”

Eddie is about to tell him that he didn’t go anywhere but then Richie kneels in front of him instead and gets the shampoo, squirting far too much into his palm.

“Richie, you’re using too much, Bev’s gonna be-”

“Excuse moi, who ees ze ‘airdresser, ‘ere, monsieur?”

“Please don’t do that.”

Richie is about to go into the accent again, Eddie can feel it coming, so he quickly dunks his own head under the water while pinching his nose. When he pops back up, Richie is laughing.

“Why do you hold your nose?!”

“…So the water doesn’t go in there?”

“…It doesn’t do that anyway if you don’t breathe it in.”

“Just shut the fuck up and do it.”

Eddie is a little bit irritated at first, because some of the shampoo nearly gets into his eyes while Richie is lathering it on and one of Richie’s rings gets tangled in his hair briefly, but after it happens Richie moves back to slide all of his rings off, placing each one at the side next to the array of products before he continues. And it’s actually nice. Richie’s fingers are long and a little bit rough and they fit into Eddie’s hair quite nicely and Eddie just sits quietly while Richie works on his scalp. Eddie doesn’t have as much hair as Richie does, but it’s still quite thick and it does go curly if Eddie ever lets it grow out but Richie still seems to be doing a good enough job on it. Eddie’s hair feels really clean, too, once he’s rinsed it off and now he feels quite relaxed from the attention.

“You look so cute with wet hair,” Richie chuckles from where he’s leaning back at the opposite side of the bath again and Eddie scowls at him.

“I’m not ‘cute’. Don’t call me that, I hate it.”

Richie looks amused.

“Okay. Then, you look hot.”

Eddie feels his cheeks heat up and he looks to the side to try and casually play with one of Richie’s
discarded rings on the edge of the tiles.

“What? So is that okay? So I can call you hot but not cute?”

“You can call me anything except cute,” Eddie huffs, and Richie watches as Eddie slides one of the rings onto his own finger.

“Cool. So…you look…sexy? Is that okay?”

Eddie stays silent, looking at the ring on his finger and pretending to be distracted by it. But Richie can see the redness in his cheeks.

“How about…seeing you all wet and naked makes me wanna do things that you probably shouldn’t do in a bathtub…”

Their eyes meet, then, as Eddie looks up at him, and Richie sees him swallow hard. Richie is moving towards him, now, and Eddie vaguely feels the edge of the porcelain hit his back and realises that he must have backed away.

“I’ve been wanting…for so long…” Richie continues as he crawls over Eddie and their faces meet, “…to know what it would feel like to have my naked body pressed against yours…”

Eddie makes a tiny noise from his throat and he can’t look away from Richie’s eyes.

When Richie comes down to meet his lips, then, Eddie doesn’t stop him, and it’s slow and teasing at first, just a brush of slightly wet mouths. Eddie feels Richie’s chest touch his own before anything else, and he doesn’t know if it’s his imagination or not but he thinks he can feel Richie’s heartbeat.

And then suddenly, something changes and the kiss becomes almost desperate, like they each can’t get enough of the way the other tastes. Richie stops holding himself away and their naked bodies press together in entirety and Eddie gasps into his mouth. But it’s not embarrassing, like Eddie thinks it should be, it just feels right and Eddie almost wishes that he could get closer. After a while of this, Richie is the one to pull back.

“…Tell me right now if you wanna stop this, Eddie…and I’ll leave and go to bed,” he whispers, still close to his lips. There are drops of water falling from Richie’s hair and onto Eddie’s cheeks, “Because I want you so bad that I don’t think I can stop myself anymore.”

Eddie knows what he means, he knows exactly what he means but he’s quite sure that he wants it, too, and he keens into him to try and catch Richie’s lips again.

“…I don’t wanna stop,” he breathes out, “…Richie…I want all of you…”

He feels Richie’s hips press into him almost desperately, like he can’t even hear Eddie say those words without being insanely aroused and Eddie grinds back against him. He doesn’t even know how he had the courage to do it, maybe the steam is messing with his head or something, but he just knows that he wants Richie. And he wants him right now.

His head feels fuzzy when Richie kisses him again and he’s being pressed back against the bathtub and Richie’s tongue is licking at every single inch of the inside of his mouth and it feels so sensitive and so good. Richie’s arms are resting against the edges of the tub in the limited space, either side of Eddie’s head but he drops one of them into the water to grip at Eddie’s naked waist, earning a groan into his mouth.
And they kiss like this for a long time, hot and wet and they shift to get more comfortable until Richie is in between Eddie’s thighs and Richie rocks against him. The soapy water makes every movement smooth, and the insides of Eddie’s thighs slide against Richie’s waist so easily and it makes the friction between them feel *heavenly*.

Eddie never really considered himself to be a sexual person; he’s done things before with men *and* women, although it’s never led to actual sex and he’s pretty sure that whatever he did with women was experimental because it didn’t feel quite right, but at this point in time, when he starts to rock his own hips against Richie’s and they find a rhythm and he thinks that any minute now they could be doing this while Richie is inside him, he realises that he has never felt sexier. It’s strange and new to him to feel that way, and he wonders if maybe it’s something about Richie that is rubbing off onto himself in the midst of their passion. Speaking of which, Richie is growing more and more passionate by the second, and if the way his hips are moving against Eddie’s right now, when they’re just grinding on each other is anything to go by, then he’s in for a pretty wild ride.

He’s fully hard by now, and he can feel that Richie is, too and it both excites him and makes him feel nerves deep in the pit of his stomach because he’s suddenly hyper aware of Richie’s size and the fact that it has to go inside him at some point. It’s nothing compared to the nerves he feels when the hand on his waist moves underneath one of his thighs and there’s suddenly a finger pressing right between his ass cheeks and he pulls away from the kiss to look Richie in the eyes.

“…Eddie, relax…” Richie whispers with a faint tone of amusement, “It’s not gonna hurt, I promise.”

And Eddie isn’t sure that he believes him one hundred percent, but then Richie is making fucking *love* to his mouth again and Eddie moans into it softly, although he holds his breath subconsciously when Richie’s finger circles him for a while before inching inside. It’s ever-so-slow, but he doesn’t stop to let Eddie react to the sensation until it’s right in, almost as deep as it will go. Eddie breaks the kiss again.

“It hurts. You said it wouldn’t hurt!”

“It doesn’t hurt, you’re just tense! Stop clenching!”

Eddie is about to argue that he’s pretty sure that he isn’t clenching, and that he’s pretty much always tense but Richie’s head dips to his bare chest and he lathes his tongue over one of Eddie’s nipples. And Eddie didn’t know that he was so sensitive there but now that Richie’s mouth is latched onto him right in that spot he’s almost wondering whether he might actually be able to reach an orgasm just from this. He tugs at Richie’s wet hair and gasps and writhes a little bit beneath him and Richie realises that he’s found a fucking gold mine and he sucks at Eddie’s nipple and flicks his tongue against it and even bites at it just gently. When Richie’s hand slides up so he can thumb at the other one at the same time Eddie is lost and he moans Richie’s name rather wantonly and grasps at the edge of the bath. He feels Richie’s finger slip that little bit deeper inside him, with only the slightest push and suddenly that feels good, too because he thinks about how dirty it is that he’s literally being fingered in a bathtub by Richie Tozier.

Richie continues to tease Eddie’s nipples with his mouth, switching between them frequently until Eddie is shivering and there are goose pimples across his chest. It eases him up nicely enough that Richie can start working his finger in and out and Eddie is even responding to that, now. He can feel his hips pressing down just that little bit as if he’s trying to get closer.

Even when Richie eases another finger into him with the first, as gently as he can, Eddie doesn’t tense up like he did the first time, perhaps because the heat of the water is helping his muscles to relax or perhaps because Richie reaches down between them to get Eddie’s dick in his other hand
as he does it and jerks at the tip where it’s most sensitive, and he rubs his thumb over it as he pulls at one of Eddie’s nipples with his teeth and presses his two fingers deeper into him. And Eddie is a beautiful wreck at that second and his wet fingers slip against the edge of the tub as he grips at it and he lets his head fall back and droplets from his hair hit the bathroom floor tiles. He moans quite loud, then, and it’s low and growling and needy and Richie’s pretty sure that someone must have heard it but he couldn’t fucking care less; it’s the new sexiest thing he’s ever witnessed.

“Ri-Richie-”

Eddie’s voice comes out as a desperate whisper and Richie releases Eddie’s nipple from his mouth to lean up to his face, and he places a kiss at the edge of his open lips.

“Yeah, baby?”

And Eddie scrunches his eyes shut harder as Richie’s fingers press closer and closer to something that he can’t quite get an understanding of, but that feels really, really good, the kind of really good that is almost a burning sensation. Richie is sure that Eddie was going to argue at the use of the nickname but then he sees his face change and knows that he’s found what he was looking for.

“F-fuck- fuck, Richie…Richie…”

“What is it?” Richie places another kiss to the corner of Eddie’s lips and Eddie follows it briefly but he can’t seem to focus and he grips at Richie’s bicep instead. Richie starts to move his fingers, curling them so that they rub against him on every outward pull. He scissors them just a little bit, briefly, and Eddie is insanely responsive to it. He’s tight, he’s really tight, but his body seems to want it. At least that’s how it feels to Richie.

Eddie doesn’t seem like he can speak again, although he moans into Richie’s mouth when he kisses him again and Richie is sure that he feels Eddie start to rock against his fingers and if he’s right, then holy fuck. Richie smirks when he pulls away and Eddie’s teeth are briefly attached to his bottom lip.

“Does it feel good?” he teases, looking thoroughly amused when he briefly moves his fingers at a fast rhythm, just to test it out, and Eddie’s back arches and he lets out a deep whine. There’s something there that Richie can almost taste, something waiting just beneath the surface and he knows that he’s close to bringing it out of him and his nerves tingle with the excitement of it.

“Oh…holy-…yes…YES it feels good…it feels so good…”

Eddie didn’t honestly believe that he’d enjoy the sensation of having something inside him like this. He’d considered it once or twice, during his moments alone when he was on the edge of an orgasm, that sticking a finger inside himself might make it feel even better, but he’d never been able to do it. The tight ring of muscle had always felt to him like nothing would actually go inside and he’d always stopped before really trying. But Richie’s fingers had slid inside so easily, like Eddie’s body had only been waiting for them, and it feels so good now that he wonders what he’s been missing out on. It’s a different kind of pleasure completely, more…animalistic, almost. That’s what he thinks as Richie’s fingers start to move quickly in him again until he can’t take it anymore.

“St…stop, R-Richie…Richie, stop.”

He’s pretty sure he could have come just like that, being fucked by Richie’s fingers, but Richie stops as soon as Eddie tells him to and gives him a questioning look, his eyes searching Eddie’s face for any signs of discomfort.
“I just…I can’t take it anymore…” Eddie gasps out, opening his eyes to look at him, “I want you inside me.”

“You’ve had a taste and you want more, huh?” Richie chuckles against his lips, and he swallows the gasp that pulling his fingers out elicits from Eddie. Eddie feels sort of empty now that they’re gone, and he senses his climax slipping further away from him again.

“Get a condom,” he blurs out against Richie’s lips, and it comes out sounding kind of desperate but he doesn’t care right now. And Richie pauses, as if he hadn’t considered that they’d need one, but he realises that of course they do and he moves away from Eddie and climbs out of the bath to search through the drawers in the bathroom. Eddie watches Richie’s naked form this time, he takes in the rather broad shoulders, the long legs, the hips that look sturdy enough to really press him into a bed or against the side of the bath and his mouth goes dry at the thought.

Richie finds a box of condoms hidden at the back of one of the drawers, unopened like it was purchased recently, and he briefly wonders who in this house might have bought them. Then he decides that he doesn’t care, and rips it open to take one out, before throwing the rest back where he found them haphazardly. Some condoms spill out of the box as he slams the drawer closed.

When he returns to the bath with Eddie he realises that the water is starting to lose its heat, that they must have been in here for quite some time but he knows that it’s about to get much hotter anyway and he rips the tiny foil packet open as Eddie watches him like he’s never seen a real condom before.

Eddie watches Richie slide the condom onto himself as the wrapper is quickly discarded onto the bathroom floor, and he finds himself suddenly feeling a little bit light headed. And he can’t decide whether it’s his nerves or because he wants this so fucking bad. He sees Richie’s hand linger for a little while, sees the way he rubs at himself a couple of times before pulling away and he thinks about how hard Richie must have been this whole time while he’s been the one receiving all of the attention.

And he really wants Richie to feel good.

“Come here,” he says quietly and Richie’s eyes meet his own and he leans over Eddie so that Eddie can kiss him. And Eddie thinks about the fact that this is the kiss that is going to seal an actual sexual relationship between them, and he takes his time with it, sucking at Richie’s lips and tasting the inside of his mouth as he holds his hands either side of his face and Richie melts into the affection. He feels Richie’s erection against the inside of one of his thighs and shifts his legs so that Richie can get in between them properly. It’s almost like a silent invitation, and as they continue to kiss he feels Richie’s hand go between them under the water, and then a hard heat against his entrance. Richie is about to speak but Eddie breaks him off with a quick nod.

There’s a brief, stinging pain then as Richie enters him, and for a second it’s so intense that Eddie immediately panics and tries to push Richie away. But Richie holds one of Eddie’s hands and kisses his palm, and he links their fingers together and presses Eddie’s hand against the edge of the bathtub. He doesn’t try and enter him any further, but he gets his other arm around Eddie’s waist and rubs at the bottom of his back.

“Relax. I’ve got you,” he whispers, against Eddie’s lips and Eddie gets lost in Richie’s eyes for a minute. The stinging has died down, now, although it still feels raw and he’s a little bit worried about what it’s going to feel like when he puts the rest in.

“…Just do it,” Eddie gulps, “…go slow.”
“I’m gonna go real slow,” Richie whispers again, and he kisses Eddie’s lips over and over and over, soft and fleeting as he shifts his hips forward. He does go slow, and Eddie’s not sure if that actually helps or not, because maybe it’s just drawing it out. The stinging is intense again and Eddie has to consciously stop himself from wincing because he knows that if he does Richie might stop.

Richie’s hips still after a while, and Eddie doesn’t think that it’s in all the way; Richie’s hips aren’t touching his own, but they’re close. Although he’s grateful for the break from the pain as it gradually dies again to a dull ache. Richie places kisses all across Eddie’s neck and jaw and collarbone, sucking a mark behind one of his ears and it feels good and distracts Eddie from the discomfort a little bit.

“Just tell me when,” Richie says gently, although there’s a definite tension in his voice like he’s trying really hard to stay calm. He dips his head to kiss at Eddie’s chest and it causes his hips to move and Eddie flinches in pain, but then Richie latches on to one of his nipples again and his head goes back in a gasp. He’s really going for it this time, too, and it’s so sensitive that it almost hurts, but it’s just on the right side of the pleasure/pain barrier and it makes Eddie forget about the vague throbbing inside him. He gets so lost in it, as Richie teases him relentlessly, that he only thinks about Richie’s dick inside him again when he tries to press his hips against him and it moves a little deeper. The hitch that it causes in Richie’s breath is so sexy that he does it again, and again, and it doesn’t feel so bad now and he starts a little rhythm in his hips. It doesn’t feel good, either, but it makes Richie breathe heavy and press harder against him.

In fact, it doesn’t really start to feel good until he’s just at the point where he’s getting used to it. It feels strange, being full like this, but he closes his eyes as he continues to press his hips into Richie’s at a slow pace, and he thinks about the fact that the fullness in him is Richie’s cock. The thought sends a shudder right through him. That’s the point where, as he hears a soft groan against his neck, Richie’s hips start to move, too, as if he can’t contain it anymore. It’s slow; he’s simply matching the pace that Eddie has already set, but it lifts the lower half of Eddie’s body with each movement and it pushes him deeper and it almost goes in easy this time.

And that’s when Eddie starts to feel it again, as their hips part and re-join and part again in a slow grind, that faint heat building in his core. He slides his arms around Richie’s shoulders and grips at him, and Richie is holding both of them in position, now, but he doesn’t seem to be bothered. His breath shakes against Richie’s ear and Richie seems to take it as a good sign, because he feels a sharp rut against him, just once, but it draws a groan out of him.

Richie notices it and does it again, and it feels like heat is being pushed deeper and deeper inside him, and he wants to know what will happen when it gets as deep as it can go. He clutches harder at Richie’s back and his neck, whimpering against him a little at the next thrust. He wants Richie to go faster but he’s scared to ask for it because what if it hurts?

So he settles for rocking instead, rolling his own body against Richie’s to set a bit of a quicker pace, and the heat inside him instantly gets more intense. He bites at his lip and buries his face into Richie’s neck. The pain is all but gone now, a faint memory in contrast to the pleasure that’s building.

“Richie-” he gasps out, unable to hold it in any longer and he feels Richie’s shoulders tense and there’s a sharper thrust of his hips which draws another low sound out of Eddie. Richie’s voice is strained when he speaks, and lower than Eddie has ever heard him speak before.

“Tell me what you want…”

“F-faster…”
It’s all Eddie can manage to get out before Richie’s hips start to rock more quickly, wasting no time, and Eddie is sure that he can feel him slip deeper inside. Their hips are almost touching, now, brushing on every other thrust. Eddie doesn’t know how he will be able to handle it when they are touching properly.

Eddie manages to breathe out a faint ‘yes’ against Richie’s ear, as he stops moving his own hips to let Richie do all of the work. He’s doing a fucking amazing job, anyway; as soon as Eddie stills Richie is gripping at his thighs to pull them further around himself, and holding onto him to get better leverage so he can thrust deeper.

And it’s getting quite easy, now, just like before when they were grinding on each other and the soapy water made it slippery, and Eddie tries to press his thighs against Richie’s waist but they keep sliding, although it’s making the movements harder, somehow, because Eddie’s body is moving much more when Richie’s hips hit him.

He was worried that whatever Richie’s fingers found before wouldn’t be easily reachable like this, but he feels it burning there as Richie’s hips start to press firmly against his own with each thrust, now and he’s never felt anything so perfect. It’s like Richie was meant to be inside him just like this. He has to let go of Richie because he’s worried he’s going to break the skin on his back, and his hands fly straight back to the edges of the tub, and he’s scrambling again, he knows that he is but he doesn’t fucking care.

“Richie—fuck please…p-please…”

Richie’s forehead meets his own almost immediately, and Richie’s eyes burn into him like they’re mirroring the feeling inside him and it makes his toes curl.

“Tell me,” Richie breathes against his lips, and his voice is shaky, “Eddie, tell me what you want.”

“I don’t…I don’t know…” Eddie answers, honestly. He really doesn’t know what he wants, but he knows that he wants something. He wants to be pushed closer to the edge, for Richie to really give it to him and…then he suddenly realises what it is, “…Harder,” he says shakily, voice strained and he sees Richie’s eyes go dark with lust.

And he gets exactly what he wants. He feels Richie’s hands grip at his hips, feels every hard thrust against him as the water starts to splash over the edges of the tub onto the tiles and he couldn’t fucking care less. Richie lifts the lower half of Eddie’s body, then, to get a better angle and he has to hold onto the edge of the bathtub as Richie starts an almost rough pace which repeatedly knocks Eddie’s shoulders and the back of his neck against the porcelain. But it’s just what he needed and he feels each movement graze that place inside him and it’s so good that he wants to cry out, wants to scream at Richie to fuck him harder and he doesn’t know where the impulse came from but it’s there now.

And he does cry out, at one point, when it gets too much and he sees Richie’s eyes snap to his own and feels fingers dig into his hips and he gasps out and lets his mouth hang open. The burning where Richie’s dick is rubbing against his insides is intense, now, and so good and he thinks he’s going to come but he can’t really tell.

“…Rich—Richie I’m…I’m gonna come…” he gasps out, feeling Richie’s hips rock and grind harder against him, “I think I’m gonna come…”

Richie looks almost relieved, like he’s been holding back, himself, and he reaches down to Eddie’s leaking erection and wraps his fingers around it to give it a few hard tugs in time with his thrusts. And Eddie knows that it could be better, it could be so much better if they weren’t in such an
awkward position because they’re having sex in a fucking bathtub, but that spot inside him, whatever the fuck it is, is still getting some attention even like this. He comes, hard, the next time Richie’s hips snap against his own and a moan gets stuck in his throat and he drops his head back heavily with a long whine instead. It’s the best orgasm he’s ever had, by far.

He clenches around Richie through it and that’s the last straw for Richie, too, and he presses his hips as hard as he can against Eddie’s when he comes, gripping at the edge of the tub next to Eddie’s hands so hard that his knuckles go white. He moans out a low ‘fuck’ and bites at his lip and Eddie watches him until Richie sees him and leans in to catch him in a messy kiss.

Eddie’s thighs shake against Richie’s waist in the aftershock and he breathes heavily against his mouth as they kiss, groaning in discomfort when Richie pulls his hips back and he slides out of him. And it hurts more than actually having it inside him, somehow, because there’s a deep throb that he didn’t notice before.

And it’s so good that they both just lay there for a while, with Eddie’s legs wrapped around Richie’s waist and Richie’s head resting just beneath Eddie’s chin as both of them catch their breath.

“…We just fucked,” Richie says after a while, into Eddie’s chest.

“We did.”

“Was it as good for you as it was for me? Because for me it was fucking mindblowing.”

“Holy fuck yes.”

Richie chuckles and nuzzles his wet hair against Eddie’s chest until Eddie starts giggling and pushes him away.

“Let’s go to bed,” Richie says as he moves away from Eddie, “This water is fucking cold.”

Eddie stays where he is until Richie actually pulls him into a sitting position, and he winces. Richie looks at him guiltily.

“Sorry.”

“…It’s okay. It’s not that bad.”

Richie climbs out of the bathtub, then, and Eddie sees him take off the condom out of the corner of his eye and tie it to drop it in the trash. Then he comes back and reaches into the water to pull out the plug while Eddie still just sits there.

“…Aren’t you getting out? You just gonna sleep in there?”

“…I feel like if I stand up…everything is just gonna like…fall out of me.”

Richie laughs and ties a towel around his waist. He gets one for Eddie, too, holding it out.

“C’mon, Eddie. C’mere.”

Eddie reluctantly climbs out of the bath, very slowly and carefully, to go to Richie and get wrapped in the towel –and his arms- and Richie kisses the top of his head fondly, chuckling. They both dry themselves off and Eddie ties the towel around his own waist before they leave the bathroom, switching off the light and tiptoeing down the hall to their room. Everyone is obviously asleep by
now and the house is silent. Bill’s door is ajar, but neither of them notice it.

After dressing into their pyjamas –Richie into his underwear only- they climb into bed, feeling satisfied and relaxed but a little bit sore. Having sex in a bathtub clearly isn’t the best way to do it but Eddie thinks that it’s a good enough start, as he presses his face into Richie’s warm, bare chest and Richie’s fingers tangle through his hair.

Eddie is sure that he’s going to sleep through the whole night soundly, but he’s woken at about three in the morning by footsteps and whispering outside the bedroom door. Richie is still asleep beside him and Eddie is still wrapped in his arms and he doesn’t really want to get up, but then he remembers that he forgot to take his evening pills. He reluctantly detaches himself from Richie to get out of bed, sitting on the edge of it for a while to get his bearings in the dark. There’s a faint pain deep in his body but it’s nothing compared to when he first went to sleep, and he gets up to pad slowly to the door.

He can still hear the whispering outside and when he opens the door it’s Ben and Beverly. Beverly is holding a glass of water in her hand and Ben is standing in their bedroom doorway, looking like he just woke up himself. They stop talking when they see Eddie and Beverly gives him a soft smile.

“Sorry, Eddie. Did we wake you?”

Eddie shakes his head a little bit and mumbles about needing to take his pills anyway, and he’s making his way to the bathroom when he hears a noise downstairs. More talking and footsteps. He looks at Beverly and Ben again.

“…What’s going on?”

“Nothing. Everything’s fine. You should get some sleep,” Beverly says sweetly, before she turns back to Ben and Eddie hears part of their whispered conversation.

“It’s fine. Ben, just go back to bed. Mike and Stan are with him, too. I don’t think he wants too many people crowding around him right now. I’ll come back soon, I promise. I just wanna see if he’s okay.”

“Who are you talking about?” Eddie asks, and they both look over at him.

“Bill. But he’s okay, he’s just a little bit sick. Don’t worry about it.”

Eddie pauses, then, as he’s pushing open the bathroom door.

“Bill? Bill is sick?”

“Yeah, but he’s okay. Stan and Mike are looking after him,” she smiles, “I’m sure it’s nothing.”

Eddie is about to speak again when Mike comes up the stairs and sees them all. He looks tired but he smiles at them all regardless.

“Hey, Bev, could you…” he nods towards the stairs briefly, clearing his throat a little bit and Beverly nods with a quick ‘sure’ and passes him to get down the stairs, taking the glass of water with her.

“Is Bill okay?” Eddie asks Mike, and Mike smiles and nods.

“Yeah. It’s probably just one of those…overnight virus things.”
“What…like-”

Mike can see Eddie getting tense.

“It’s just a bug or something. He said he’s gonna sleep downstairs, so…”

But then Eddie feels insanely guilty. The only reason that Bill would be sleeping downstairs alone when he was ill is if he knew that Eddie would be anxious about catching it or something. He goes towards Mike but Mike blocks him from the stairwell.

“You don’t wanna go down there, Eddie.”

“Why not? He’s my best friend, I can handle-”

“Just…let me clean up first, okay?” Mike says bluntly, “He’s pretty sick…and…it’s not pretty.”

“What do you mean clean up?”

“Well it’s…I don’t wanna tell you because I know you’re gonna be overthinking it, Eds.”

“…I’ll be overthinking it anyways, so just tell me.”

“It’s sort of…projectile…” Mike makes a gesture in front of his own mouth with his hand and Eddie looks horror-stricken. He wishes that he didn’t ask.

“Are you sure he’s okay?”

“I mean, nobody’s gonna be ‘okay’ in that situation, but it’s Bill, so…he’s being pretty calm about it.”

Eddie nods briefly and he mulls it over in his mind.

“…I’ll just come and see him for a little bit…just to…see if he’s okay.”

Mike watches him uncertainly for a while, rubbing his lips together for a while as if he’s considering telling him no, but he knows that he can’t, so he steps aside to let him go down. And as he descends the stairs, Eddie is thinking that maybe this wasn’t a good idea. He sees Stan first.

He’s in the kitchen rinsing a cloth under some cold water in the sink and he looks at Eddie and immediately comes over to him. Stan’s hair is messy and he looks tired, too.

“Eddie…what are you doing down here? You should go back to bed. He’s fine.”

“There’s some loud retching, then, unmistakably the sound of someone vomiting, coming from the downstairs toilet. Beverly’s voice follows it, muffled through the door. And Stan is still watching Eddie with vague concern.

“Just go back upstairs, Eddie.”

“I can handle…someone throwing up…” Eddie says, a little bit irritably. He feels like he’s being babied again and it annoys him more than anything else. He moves away from Stan to go towards the bathroom door and Stan follows him like he was heading there anyway. He glances at Eddie again before knocking lightly on the door and then opening it to go in.

Beverly is kneeling on the bathroom floor next to Bill, who is doubled over the toilet bowl and
clutching the edges of it. He heaves and vomits into it again while Eddie is watching and the sound is absolutely sickening and Eddie has to look away. His palms are sweating and he can feel his heart rate speeding up. But the more Bill retches and coughs and gags the more agony he seems to be in, and it’s accompanied by choked sobs and whimpers a couple of times as Beverly pushes his bangs away from his forehead and strokes at his back and tells him things like ‘you’re okay’ and ‘just let it happen’. A few times he just dry heaves and nothing comes out, but he spits into the toilet anyway and he’s clutching an arm around his stomach.

Eddie wants to go inside, to rub at his back like Bev is doing, to tell him that it’s okay but he can’t do it. He can’t step inside the room. It almost feels like there’s an invisible barrier preventing him from doing so. And when Bill finally finishes throwing up and Beverly flushes the toilet and helps him to stand, Eddie instinctively moves back. Bill rinses his mouth with the water that Beverly got for him and spits it into the sink, letting the water run. He stays there for a while, leaning, and for a minute Eddie is worried that he’s going to vomit again right into the sink, but he turns off the faucet slowly and turns to leave the room. He looks absolutely awful. He’s pale and sweaty and his eyes are bloodshot. His hair is sticking right to his forehead and his t-shirt looks damp around the collar. Eddie can tell even from here that he’s shaking. There’s a cut on his neck which looks especially red, too, like his raised temperature is making it irritated.

When he sees Eddie he looks a little bit concerned. Before either of them can speak, Stan creates a sort of barrier between them as Bill leaves the bathroom because he sees Eddie backing away, even though he’s trying not to. And he and Beverly sit Bill down on the couch as Stan places the cool washcloth against the back of his neck. Mike comes in shortly after, carrying a metal bucket, and he places it on the floor next to Bill’s feet and crouches in front of him.

“How are you feeling?”

“L-l-like I’m g-g-g—” he sighs and closes his eyes as the word won’t come, before continuing, “G-gonna d-d-die.”

“Can I…can I do anything?” Eddie asks suddenly, feeling brave in the face of his best friend’s pain and all of them look at him. Beverly smiles fondly as she continues to stroke gently at Bill’s back. Stan and Mike smile at him, too, almost like they’re proud of him.

“I-I’m ok-okay, Eds,” Bill says with a weak smile, although he certainly doesn’t look it.

Eddie takes a deep breath, internally steeling himself as he goes over to stand in front of Bill next to Mike. Bill looks a little bit worried about having Eddie at this close proximity.

“Are…are you sure? I can get you-”

Eddie is cut off as Bill’s eyes go a little bit hazy and he retches again, and Mike immediately grabs for the bucket to hold it in front of him as he vomits into it. Bill holds onto it himself as he coughs and splutters and Beverly shifts in her seat to stroke at the back of his neck when a particularly hard heave of his stomach seems to hurt him and he whimpers.

And Eddie can’t help it; he gags and slaps a palm to his own mouth. He swallows hard to calm his throat when it threatens to happen again but Stan gets up to put an arm around Eddie’s shoulders and steers him away.

Eddie starts crying when he hears Bill, as he spits into the bucket, stutter out a ‘sorry, Eddie’ as if it’s somehow his fault and Stan pulls him into a hug at the bottom of the stairs.

“I’m so…stupid!” Eddie whines, sobbing a bit into the front of Stan’s shirt but Stan strokes his
fingers through Eddie’s hair gently and holds him against him.

“No you’re not. Phobias are stupid. Impulses are stupid. But you’re not stupid,” he rests his cheek against the top of Eddie’s head and Eddie can feel his breath through his hair, “Don’t ever think that.”

“I just r-really wanted to help…” he sniffles, and Stan sways him just a little bit with an ‘I know’. He strokes Eddie’s hair and rubs at his back until he stops crying, before holding onto his shoulders to look him in the eye.

“Bill is fine. He’s with us, and you know that we wouldn’t let anything happen to him. You’re not weak for not wanting to be here, Eddie. You tried, and that makes you so, so strong. But you don’t have to be strong all of the time, because we can be strong for you.”

Mike comes out of the living room, then, and he comes over to them with a smile, and he rubs at one of Eddie’s shoulders, giving it a squeeze.

“You okay, chicken?”

Eddie laughs a little bit at the nickname as he’s wiping his eyes with his sleeves and Stan and Mike laugh, too. It makes him feel calm and happy and he doesn’t know why.

“Yeah. I’m okay. You guys will look after Bill, right?”

“Oh course,” Mike grins, “I’ll sit up with him all night if I have to.”

Stan seems to nod in agreement to this and Eddie is about to go back upstairs to bed when Richie staggers down in his boxers, rubbing at his eyes and looking at them all like they’re crazy.

“…What are you all doing?”

“Bill is sick,” Stan says, and it’s punctuated by another vomiting noise coming from the living room. Richie looks towards it and then moves past them all to go inside. Bill is still holding the bucket on his lap, but his head is currently out of it. His cheeks are quite red in contrast to the rest of his pale face and there are tears streaming from his eyes. He’s not actually crying, it’s just from the effort of the hard retching, but he still looks a pretty sorry state.

Richie goes over to sit at the other side of him immediately as Stan and Mike reappear in the doorway. Eddie has gone back to bed because he can’t take any more of it. And Richie slings his arm around Bill’s shoulders and wipes at his tear-stained cheeks with his palm, chuckling.

“How you holding up there, Big Bill?”

Bill only groans as if he thinks he’s about to vomit again and Richie moves his hand away from his face as Bill leans over the bucket again, but he lifts his head again shortly after and takes a deep breath.

“F-f-f-false alarm.”

“I’m not gonna lie, Bill. You don’t look good.”

“B-b-beep-beep, Richie.”

Beverly is wiping Bill’s face with a damp cloth, now, his lips and chin in particular, and Bill seems too weak and disorientated to stop her or complain even if he wanted to. She hands him a glass of
water, which he takes a shaky sip of, and then another. He has to hand it quickly back to Bev as it comes almost straight back up into the bucket and Richie leans away a little bit.

“Wow. I wish I hadn’t seen that.”

Mike has disappeared into the kitchen again and he comes back with a mercury thermometer, shaking a little bit as he kneels in front of Bill again.

“Okay, you’re gonna have to hold this in your mouth without throwing up, because if it goes in that bucket I ain’t picking it back out,” he chuckles, and Bill looks a little bit amused and he sniggers softly as Mike puts it into his mouth underneath his tongue.

“So…” Richie says, rubbing at his bare knees a little bit with the hand that isn’t around Bill, “…it smells like vomit in here.”

Bill turns to look at Richie slowly with an expression that says ‘you don’t say’, before Mike pulls the thermometer out from between Bill’s lips to look at it. Stan leans over to look at it, too and they both glance at Bill briefly before looking back down at it, then Mike stands to take it back into the kitchen and Stan follows him. They can hear them talking but can’t quite make out what they’re saying.

They both return shortly after and Mike has pulled on some shoes and a jacket.

“Okay, so…I’m gonna take you up to the hospital…” he says nonchalantly, as if he’s trying not to make a big deal out of it. Bill is about to argue but then Stan cuts in. He’s holding one of Bill’s jackets over his arm.

“You have a really high temperature, you can’t even hold a little bit of water down and you’re probably dehydrated.”

“I-I’m f-fine. It’ll p-p-pass.”

“Bill,” Stan says warningly and Mike takes the bucket away from him so he can stand, although Beverly and Richie have to help him because he’s a bit wobbly on his feet. Stan helps him into his jacket calmly but he flinches and moves Bill towards the bucket quickly when he gags, sighing and holding an arm around Bill’s waist to keep him upright. Nothing much seems to come out of him, as there isn’t really anything left in his stomach, but he’s breathing heavily and he lets out a sound that’s half way between a sob and a sigh. His lips are wet and he’s crying again when he lifts his head and Stan wipes his eyes with his own thumb after watching him for a while with a soft, ‘it’s okay’.

“C’mon,” Mike says gently, and he puts the bucket into Bill’s arms properly to get an arm around him, and he and Stan help him outside to the car and into the passenger seat. Stan puts some shoes onto Bill before they leave, although he doesn’t go with them and when he comes back into the house he looks a little bit shaken as he leans back against the front door. He won’t let Bev or Richie comfort him, though, insisting that he’s fine before going back up to bed. Beverly and Richie follow him shortly after.

Mike comes back home minus Bill about an hour later, and he goes room to room to let them know that Bill is okay but that he’s spending the night there to get some intravenous fluids. He crashes into his own bed after that, next to a crying Stan, who is trying desperately to hide his tears in the pillow.

“He’s gonna be fine,” Mike assure him softly, pressing himself against Stan’s back to rest his chin
on his shoulder. Stan continues to cry, and it’s muffled in the pillow as Mike rubs at his arm and places kisses across the top of his back until Stan finally rolls over to let himself be comforted. Mike wraps his arms around him immediately and lets Stan weep into his chest, playing with his curls and singing softly to him until he eventually falls asleep.

And then, thankfully, Mike can get some sleep of his own.
Chapter 31

The next day Mike phones the hospital to find that Bill is allowed to be discharged that afternoon. He’s been pumped full of fluids and antibiotics – apparently swallowing water that literally contains human waste wasn’t such a good thing- and he’s had a good night’s sleep and is apparently feeling much better. The cuts on his neck and chest were starting to get a little bit infected, clearly because open wounds and filthy water don’t mix, but the antibiotics and some ointment are taking care of that.

So Mike drives back to the hospital again just after noon and this time Stan goes with him. He brings a bag with some of Bill’s clothes and all of the stuff he’ll need to clean his teeth –and a comb, because he’s still a little bit pissed that they didn’t think to bring one for him when he was in hospital-. Bill looks quite sickly and pale, still, and he shakes a bit when he stands from the bed for the first time, although he won’t let them help him and insists that he can walk on his own as he goes into the bathroom to get dressed. He spends a lot of time cleaning his teeth, much longer than Stan knows he usually would but he’s grateful for it when Bill comes back smelling minty and looking much more like himself. Stan brushes Bill’s hair for him and much to Bill’s annoyance, tries to part it differently to how he usually has it, but Stan pushes Bill’s hand away and continues with it regardless, insisting that it looks good.

“Are you feeling better?” Stan asks as Mike packs up Bill’s pyjamas and the tube of antibiotic cream which the doctor has given to him to take home.

“I j-j-just want to sl-sleep in my own bed,” Bill replies with a tone of exhaustion. His throat sounds sore and scratchy and it’s giving his voice a gravelly quality. Stan smiles and pulls Bill into his arms gently, feeling the weight briefly drain out of Bill’s shoulders as he relaxes against him. He places a chaste kiss to his cheekbone.

On the drive back to the farmhouse, Bill complains a lot that he’s hungry and gets a bit moody when they won’t stop to take him somewhere to eat. They are under strict orders from the nurses not to let him have anything except bland foods and water for at least today. The nurses also told them to try and get him to relax; they seemed to like how polite and softly spoken he was, but not how often he tried to get out of bed, despite their advising him not to.

He receives a hug from each of the Losers when he gets home, especially Eddie, who seems like he’s never going to let him go once he has hold of him. Bill doesn’t seem to mind, and he chuckles and nuzzles the top of Eddie’s head and even picks him up a little bit. Richie is pissed off about this, because somehow it’s okay if Bill does it, but Eddie would have shouted at Richie for doing the same thing.

They take Bill inside afterwards and get him tucked into the couch cushions while Ben puts a
blanket around his shoulders and Stan gets him a large glass of water. He insists that he drink it all
and stands right in Bill’s space to watch him until he does, before he takes the glass away. Beverly
sits beside him on the couch, snuggled close, and rubs at his back, although she takes half of the
blanket to wrap it around herself as well.

“I’m gonna have to go and do the groceries,” Mike says loudly as he’s walking around in the
kitchen, “So you guys better come help me.”

“One of us should stay here with Bill!” Beverly calls back, clearly volunteering herself for this task
as she is still in her pyjamas anyway and she tucks her feet up underneath herself to pull the blanket
tighter around her and Bill. Bill is clearly happy with this idea, too, and he puts an arm around
Beverly to pull her into his side, chuckling as she nuzzles her head at his chest.

Mike reappears from the kitchen shortly after, and he looks around at the others with a nod.

“Okay. Bev, you look after Bill. The rest of you, shoes on, in the car in five minutes,” he is still
talking as he leaves the house, “And I wanna see coats on y’all! It’s cold out here!”

“Yes, DAD!” Richie says loudly and sarcastically.

“Richie, you don’t need a coat! Your head is so far up your own ass you’re gonna be warm
anyways!”

Richie bursts into hysterical laughter at this with a loud ‘YOWZA’ and he goes outside to high five
Mike. Although he grabs a jacket from the coat rack as he leaves. Stan is the first one out after
them, although he gives Beverly instructions to keep Bill drinking plenty of fluids and she
reassures him that she will. As Ben and Eddie are about to exit the house, too, she turns to shout
over the back of the couch.

“Wait! I almost forgot! Can you guys get me some tampons?!”

They both stop in their tracks and Ben just looks at her with a slightly bemused expression. Bill
looks a little bit uncomfortable next to her and he scratches at the side of his nose absent-mindedly.

“W…what?”

“Tampons,” she repeats, “You know what tampons are, Ben.”

“Yes. Yes, I do…but I don’t…I’ve never purchased them. So…I don’t even know what I’m
looking for…’’

“Just the regular ones will do.”

“The regular ones,” Ben repeats, although he looks unsure, “Got it.”

“It says ‘regular’ on the box!” Beverly shouts after him as he leaves to get into the car without
taking further instructions, but Eddie nods to her with a mouthed ‘got it’ and a quick little wink
before he follows Ben. Beverly chuckles as she hears the front door close.

The car journey is far from what Mike hoped it would be. He thought that maybe bringing the
other guys along would be a good help to him, since he usually does the grocery shopping by
himself. But recently he’s been thinking that if they’re all going to live together that they should
start splitting the chores properly. That and he wants to know what kind of foods everyone likes so
there are fewer arguments about what they’re going to eat for dinner and who stole whose cereal.
But so far this dream is far from reality. There have already been three separate arguments just in
the car on the way there.

The first was Stan and Richie arguing about who was going to ride shotgun next to Mike in the front seat. Richie claims that he ‘called it’ and therefore should be the one to have the privilege. However, Stan took the passenger seat without saying a word while Richie was still talking to Mike outside the car, and locked his door when Richie attempted to open it to drag him out. Thus, Richie was already in a bad mood the second he squeezed his lanky frame into the back seat next to Eddie and Ben.

The second argument was between Richie and Eddie, which was a given considering their track record, and was caused by Richie irritantly shaking his leg and resulting in his knee knocking repeatedly against Eddie’s. Eddie told him to stop, which he did, but then it was replaced rather swiftly with Richie flicking an elastic band against his wrist. The soft twang, in an almost perfect rhythm, echoed through the silence of the car until Mike turned on the radio to cover it— and to cover Richie and Eddie’s bickering—.

The radio, coincidentally, resulted in the third argument of that day. Stan changed the input so he could listen to a news channel, which everyone seemed to be fine with until eventually, Richie kicked the back of Stan’s seat and told him to change it to something that wasn’t ‘total fucking bullshit’. That was the loudest argument of all and lasted almost all the way to the grocery store until eventually, when Ben was starting to look uncomfortable and Mike saw it in the rear view mirror, he snapped out a loud ‘ENOUGH’. The car went pretty silent after that.

Thankfully, the shopping trip itself isn’t too bad. Mike has started a list already, with items that he knows they are running out of and they let Richie push the cart so he has something to do with his hands. Although it’s tough to stop him from going down aisles that they don’t need to and putting things into the shopping cart that he shouldn’t. When they get to the pharmaceutical section, Eddie picks out some things which none of them really pay any attention to— things he probably doesn’t need but nobody says anything— before going over to the feminine hygiene products. He picks up a box of regular tampons and drops them into the cart without saying anything, but Richie follows them with his eyes from where he’s leaning against it with his arms.

“…Something you’re not telling us, Eds?”

“They’re for Beverly, fuckface.”

“Keep your voices down,” Stan hisses as a stranger passes them and gives them a dirty look at Eddie’s cursing. Eddie briefly lifts his fingers to his lips and mutters a small ‘sorry’ to the passerby as Richie swag his way down the aisle with a smug ‘who’s the Trashmouth now?’.

The shopping trip goes pretty quickly again after that, until they reach the alcohol section and Stan spends ten whole minutes looking at two different bottles of Sauvignon Blanc, reading the labels and holding them in his hands almost as if he’s weighing them. Richie scuffs his boots against the floor and sighs dramatically and glares at Stan’s back until he’s done, which is when Mike finally speaks up and tells him to just get both.

“Like…it’s wine. It all tastes the same,” Richie mumbles to Eddie as they approach the cash registers.

They spend a while fighting over who’s going to pay, then. Mike usually foots the bill for the groceries— and everything else— but with seven people it’s starting to get a lot pricier and he eventually allows Ben to take this one. Ben doesn’t seem particularly concerned about the total and it makes Richie wonder just how much secret money Ben actually has— they know that he already has a pretty high-profile job as an architect—.
By the time they get home they are all pretty tired and ready to have something to eat. Mike makes them all help him to pack the groceries away and Richie and Eddie get into stupid fight after stupid fight until Stan tells Richie to go and order them some pizza; this perks him up immediately and he eagerly goes to grab the telephone.

Bill is sleeping across Beverly’s lap in the living room, although he seems to have taken a shower and changed into some fresh pyjamas; the ends of his hair are still a little bit damp. Beverly has covered him in two blankets and is gently stroking the side of his face with her fingertips as she watches TV.

“You guys get some good stuff?” she asks as Stan comes in to perch on the couch next to Bill. He nods and smiles at her a little bit, although his focus is on Bill, and he leans over to place a soft kiss onto Bill’s cheek as Beverly watches them fondly. Bill must have been pretty exhausted because it doesn’t wake him up. Richie appears shortly after that.

“Okay, so, I ordered a plain cheese and tomato for Eddie and Ben, Hawaiian for me and Bev and… Mike, you like spicy stuff, right?” he asks as Mike walks into the room with a shopping bag. Eddie passes the living room muttering something about pineapple on pizza being fucking disgusting and Beverly watches him and sniggers.

“Yeah,” Mike replies, clearly not bothered either way.

“Good, because I ordered one with jalapeños for you and Stan.”

“I l-l-like jalapeños,” Bill mumbles sleepily into Beverly’s stomach and they all chuckle.

“Well, you can’t have any,” Stan says while rubbing at his shoulder, “I’ll make you some toast.”

“No…n-no toast…” Bill slurs again, although he seems to fall back to sleep after that.

Mike perches himself on the arm of the couch next to Beverly and rifles through the plastic bag he’s holding, before taking out the box of tampons and giving them to her. He sort of throws it and Beverly doesn’t catch it in time and it lands in her lap and hits Bill in the head. They all go silent for a minute as Beverly quickly picks it off him and laughs behind her hand, although he doesn’t wake up.

“Thanks,” she says quietly. There’s a little bit of a quiver to her voice like she’s trying not to burst into laughter again.

“Aaaaand,” Mike chuckles, rifling in the bag again before pulling out a tub of double chocolate ice cream and holding it up to show her, “Just don’t tell Bill. He’ll want some and he’s not allowed.”

Beverly claps her hands together and then holds them against her chest, looking around at them all. She lets out a little squeal as Mike shows her the last things in the bag, VHS tapes of Dirty Dancing, Sixteen Candles and The Breakfast Club. They stopped to pick them up on their way back as an afterthought –it was Ben’s idea really–.

“You guys are so sweet. You didn’t have to get me anything.”

“Yeah we know, but…we wanted to give you a girls’ night,” Mike chuckles, “For putting up with us. Living in a house full of guys must be pretty tough.”

“Maybe…it would be if I didn’t love you all so much.”

Mike smiles at her warmly and briefly tucks his arm around her shoulders to give her a squeeze as
Richie leans over the back of the couch to kiss at her cheek repeatedly and she giggles, especially when she feels Stan’s hand reach out to hold hers just for a second.

Bill wakes up when the pizza arrives, as if on cue, and he spends the whole time they’re eating complaining that he isn’t allowed to have any and that it smells good and that he’s hungry. They crowd into the living room in their pyjamas with blankets and pillows in tow and Mike lights the fireplace again. Stan cracks open one of the bottles of wine he picked out and he pours a glass for Bev first and then for himself and the others. Richie makes a sour face when Stan hands it to him but he drinks it anyway as they watch the movies back to back. Ben seems to drink more than anyone else but still manages to be completely sober.

“Bill…can you please stop watching me?” Stan asks as he’s holding a slice of pizza to his lips. He’s crushed onto the couch with Bev and Bill, with Mike at his other side and Bill has been staring at Stan every time he eats rather than paying attention to the movie.

“But I’m s-s-so hungry!” Bill whines, watching Stan take a bite, “Th-this is like porn.”

Stan starts laughing, then, and he puts the slice of pizza down and wipes his hands on a napkin to stand from the couch, still chewing as he does.

“Okay, I can take the hint. I’ll make you some toast,” he chuckles as he crosses the hall to the kitchen. Bill untangles himself from his blankets to follow him.

“B-but I don’t want toast, I want pizza!”

“Well, you’re getting toast.”

Stan hands a glass of water to Bill as he enters the kitchen, before opening various cupboards and drawers to take out all of the tools he needs and popping some slices of bread into the toaster, “And you need to keep drinking fluids.”

Bill catches Stan glancing at him over his shoulder and quickly downs the glass. He watches the back of Stan’s head for a while, trailing his eyes down his neck and across his shoulders from where he’s leaning against the kitchen table, before going over to reach past Stan to place the empty glass against the counter. He leans against Stan’s back afterwards, nuzzling his head between his shoulder blades as Stan sighs and chuckles a little bit. But Stan knows exactly what he’s trying to do.

“You’re not having any pizza, Bill.”

“J-just one slice,” he mumbles against Stan’s back, “Just one…t-t-tiny…little slice.”

“No,” Stan says again, although it comes out as a chuckle as he feels Bill’s arms slide around his waist and there’s a soft kiss against the back of his neck.

“P-please, Stan.” There’s another kiss behind his ear and he sighs as he takes the toast out to butter it, “Please-”

He turns around in Bill’s arms after feeling Bill’s lips move onto the side of his neck, and he holds up the knife in front of him, still with some butter on its edge. Bill looks a little bit concerned at first.

“If you can ask without stuttering, then you can have some.”

Bill tries to read Stan’s eyes but he definitely looks serious.
“Say ‘Stan, please can I have a slice of pizza?’ without stuttering,” Stan continues with a hint of amusement in his voice, “And I’ll let you have some.”

“Stan, please c-” Bill’s throat immediately gets stuck on the hard ‘c’ sound and he stammers it over and over for a while before sighing and stomping one of his bare feet a little bit against the kitchen tiles, “Th-that’s not f-f-fair. You’re h-holding a knife and it’s m-muh-making me nervous.”

Stan chuckles and puts the knife down on the counter but he still seems to be waiting for Bill’s next attempt at the sentence. So Bill tries a different approach, resting his palms against the counter either side of Stan and leaning in to press their chests together and lightly brush their lips.

“Please?” he tries again, in the lowest voice he can muster. Stan keeps his eyes locked on Bill’s with a look that says ‘nice try’, although his stance softens a little and Bill goes for the jugular this time. He leans in further to press a trail of kisses along the column of Stan’s neck, biting at his ear just a little as he whispers into it, “I’ll d-do anything you want. I’ll do that thing you like.”

“And what’s that?” Richie says suddenly as he comes into the kitchen and they jump apart. Stan looks a tiny bit flustered.

“What’s what?” Stan asks nonchalantly as he pushes the plate of toast into Bill’s hand and leaves to go and sit back down. Bill looks at Richie—who is pouring himself another glass of wine and watching Bill from over the top of his glasses- for a while before following Stan without saying another word.

The rest of the night goes pretty smoothly. They finish their pizza and then Beverly shares her ice cream with Eddie as he more or less sits in her lap. After they’ve watched Dirty Dancing, Richie insists that someone try and do The Lift with him and he gets up and tries to pull Eddie to his feet. Eddie is having none of it, and Richie eventually gives up when he kicks him square in the chest and he gets winded. Thankfully for Richie, Beverly is absolutely up for it, and he actually manages to get her off the ground for a while until they both go sprawling onto the floor in a heap of laughter.

Beverly makes them braid her hair after that and it ends in a sort of competition for who can do the best one. Eddie wins by a mile, and he successfully gets Beverly’s hair into a neat and very nice-looking French braid which she keeps in for the rest of the night before letting anyone else have a go.

So they settle for braiding Richie’s hair instead, and he complains a lot when they have to brush his hair first and the hairbrush gets stuck. Although Mike is the one to finally manage to release it and gently untangle the rest of Richie’s curls. He tells them that the trick with coarse hair is to do it in small sections. They watch their final movie of the night, The Breakfast Club, as Eddie braids one side of Richie’s hair and Beverly does the other and Eddie teaches Beverly how to do it neater and faster—none of them are quite sure where he learned to be that good but it isn’t questioned-. Although Richie seems visibly tense whenever Eddie accidentally tugs a little bit too hard, Eddie starts doing it on purpose, and it ends in the two of them retreating upstairs together before the film is over as the rest of them share eye contact and then burst into giggles.

Beverly gives them all tight hugs and cheek kisses before they go to bed, except Bill, who is flat out again on the couch in a very awkward position. Stan is the one to finally wake him, although Bill obviously doesn’t want to be woken and he groans and grumbles when Stan pulls him into a sitting position by one of his arms. He tries to go back to sleep immediately after but Stan shakes at his shoulders a little bit.

“Bill, c’mon, baby-”
The whole room instantly freezes and Beverly and Ben share a look while Bill opens his eyes to look at Stan’s face with a dazed expression. Stan looks a little bit pink in the cheeks.

When he finally gets Bill to go to bed after that, Bill holds onto his hand and won’t let go and insists that Stan sleep next to him—even though it’s a single bed—, so they both end up squished into it, with Bill’s breath right on Stan’s face while he’s trying to sleep. Stan does get cold when he’s sleeping, though, and being pressed against Bill is like having a hot water bottle, albeit one that mumbles a little bit in its sleep and constantly has to have a leg or arm—or sometimes both—draped over him.

Just as Bill is starting to drift off, and his breath becomes softer against Stan’s cheek and he’s in that point of half-conscious bliss and his features look so soft that Stan can’t close his own eyes because he has to keep looking at him, he hears Bill’s voice, so faint that his lips barely move. He doesn't stutter, and Stan thinks that maybe it's because he's half asleep.

“I love you, Stanley Uris.”
Chapter 32

Chapter Summary

This is basically just a smut-fest, so...sorry, not sorry. :)

For days after that, nothing seems to happen. There are no signs of the clown, nothing strange happens, nothing even ‘slightly off’ that any of them can sense and their lives sort of shift into a normal routine. They do chores on the farm, do the groceries, Mike makes frequent deliveries to town in his car and they spend evenings together, usually either in front of the TV watching old movies or sitting in their new clubhouse in the barn.

The only thing that changes is that everything seems to have become a little bit tense between them. It’s an unspoken thing; they all know it’s happening but nobody ever brings it up. Nobody questions it when Bill and Stan curl together on the sofa like they’re a couple, and there are forehead kisses and neck kisses and fond looks. Nobody questions it when Richie and Eddie disappear into their shared bedroom for hours on end and come back looking satisfied and Eddie has hickeys on his neck. Nobody questions the strange, sexual tension between Bill, Richie and Stan which appeared a couple of weeks back, or the little jokes that Richie makes that hint to something that may or may not have happened between them. And nobody questions, when two of the group are alone together, in any configuration, that there’s definitely a spark in the air.

It’s common knowledge that Ben and Beverly have a sexual relationship, the same with Richie and Eddie, and Bill and Stan but exactly how it’s common knowledge remains to be seen, because they’ve never actually said it out loud. Another thing that hasn’t been said out loud is anything regarding the little ‘get-together’ that Stan, Richie and Bill had in the barn. It’s shocking, really, considering the fact that one of the people involved is The Trashmouth himself, but he hasn’t even said anything to Eddie about the subject.

Although Richie has seen the way Bill and Stan and even sometimes Mike or Ben look at Eddie. He’s seen the way they laugh a little bit too hard when Eddie makes a joke and the way their eyes linger on him for a little bit too long. He can’t blame them, really. Eddie just has something about him and Richie knows it all too well. After all, his and Eddie’s relationship has progressed to actual penetrative sex and he only wishes he could tell the others about how often Eddie is the one to initiate it, how often he begs and pleads and is so enthusiastic that it leaves Richie a little bit weak, sometimes. Richie would love for them to get the house to themselves, just once.

Also, he really wants to breach the subject with Stan and Bill, because he feels like the relationship between the seven of them is more than friendship, he just can’t explain why, and he feels like Bill and Stan are a good place to start since he’s already had sexual encounters with both of them and he really, really, really wants to include Eddie. He can sense that they do, too. It’s Eddie himself who might need a little…convincing.

He tries to bring it up casually at first, slipping Bill and Stan’s names into conversation and trying to get something out of Eddie that might hint to him wanting it, too. He even, once, while he’s fucking Eddie into their bed as quietly as he can with the others sleeping next door, slowing his hips whenever the noise of the bed springs becomes too loud, plucks up some courage –or rather
some stupidity-, and bluntly asks Eddie if he’s ever thought about doing this with Bill. And it almost ruins the mood, and Eddie glares and gives him a breathy lecture about asking weird questions while they’re having sex. Although Richie does notice, after, that Eddie grips at him tighter and hooks his ankles behind Richie’s back and seems so much more desperate than he did before, like only the mention of Bill’s name made it all the more intense.

So he brings it up to them a couple of days later. Mike and Ben have gone out to the library that morning to continue their routine search for old history books about Derry. They usually spend half of the day there when they do this, and nobody ever wants to go with them but this time Beverly has been dragged along to help –because she loves Ben and he gave her the doe eyes-. Richie, Stan and Bill sit in the roof of the barn together while Eddie is back at the house taking his morning shower, and Richie smokes out of the window while Stan reads and Bill doodles –if you can call them that- on the wall in some leftover black paint. Richie has been staring at Bill and Stan for a while now, wondering when is the right moment to bring up such a subject, as he drags on his cigarette.

“So…you guys know that me and Eddie are doing it, right?” he says finally into the comfortable silence.

“Understatement of the century,” comes Stan’s immediate reply as he turns a page of his book, “You do know that we sleep next door?”

Richie chuckles at this and takes another puff of tobacco.

“That loud, huh?”

“Does this sound loud to you?” Stan deadpans, without looking up from the page, “Oh, yes! Oh fuck! Harder, Richie, harder! Fuck me!”

Bill sniggers and looks over as Richie raises his eyebrows at Stan, who has somehow kept a straight face.

“You know what, Stanny? If you wanna be shouting that for real you just have to ask.”

“I’m good,” Stan chuckles, although he glances up and catches Richie’s eyes briefly. Richie feels that same electricity again before Stan breaks the contact to look back down at his book.

“So…seriously…what is going on here?” Richie questions to them both, “I mean…Bill…you sucked both of our dicks…so…”

“N-nothing’s…going on…” Bill says vaguely, although he’s stopped painting and is now staring at his drawing, “It was just…an…in the moment thing.”

“But it didn’t feel weird?”

Bill hesitates for a little while as if he’s thinking, before he puts his paintbrush down and looks over at Richie with a shrug of his shoulders.

“No.”

“Are you propositioning us again?” Stan asks suddenly, watching Richie from over the top of his book, “Is that why you’re being so weird?”

“No, no…I mean…sort of…” he flicks his cigarette out of the window now that it’s burned down almost to his fingertips, “…I was thinking about…Eddie.”
“What about Eddie?” Stan says, far too quickly and they both look at him.

“That it would be fun to…include him?”

A silence hangs over them for a while and they exchange a few questioning glances with one another, each of them searching to see how the others will react. Before, tentatively, Stan speaks again.

“Do you want to?”

“Yeah,” Richie says in a tone that says ‘obviously’, “Do you want to?”

Stan watches Richie for a while, shares a look with Bill, as if they’re silently debating it. Bill is the one to finally pluck up the courage to speak.

“W-well…yeah. I’d be lying if I said I hadn’t th-thought about it.”

“I already sort of…kissed Eddie,” Stan blurts out then, “I mean it didn’t go anywhere, but we definitely made out.”

Richie looks a mixture of shocked and pleased. He lights another cigarette and takes a slow drag while he’s thinking.

“This is great. So, you already sucked face with Eddie…so really it’s not gonna be that difficult to, like…move him into…other stuff.”

“You’re really serious about this, aren’t you?” Stan questions with an eyebrow raised.

“I’m not hearing a ‘no’ from either of you.”

Stan glances at Bill again before resting his open book against his crossed legs.

“That’s because we’re not…saying no.”

“So we can get freaky with Eddie?”

“…Not if you’re gonna say it like that.”

“And n-n-not if Eddie doesn’t want to,” Bill adds with a nod of agreement from Stan.

“Oh, he wants to,” Richie chuckles as he places the cigarette between his lips to take another drag. Stan and Bill look dubious, “I mean, he already made out with you, Stan, and he basically never shuts up about Bill. It’s like ‘yeah, I get it. Bill is tall and handsome and confident yada yada’.”

“Y-you think I’m handsome?” Bill chuckles and Richie gives him a sly wink with the cigarette still hanging out of his mouth.

“Okay, well if we’re really gonna do this, it’s gonna have to be while everyone else is out,” Stan says bluntly as he makes to continue reading his book, before he feels Bill and Richie looking at him and adds, “I realise that everyone is out right now, before you say anything.”

Richie chuckles and switches his half-smoked cigarette between hands, “So…are you saying that we can do it right now, or…”

“R-Rich, we don’t even know if Eddie’s g-g-gonna want-” Bill starts, but he’s cut off when Richie holds a hand up in his direction. He notices why immediately, when he hears footsteps in the barn
below that can only belong to the man himself. Shortly after, there’s the sound of someone climbing the ladder, before Eddie’s bouncy, just-blow-dried hair appears and then he hoists himself up onto the platform. He’s wearing a large, cable-knit sweater and a pair of denim shorts; they’re not as short as the ones he used to wear as a young teen, but they’re above knee-length and fairly tight, and Richie isn’t the only one who takes a look at his legs — and ass — as he strolls across to plop himself into the blankets and cushions next to Stan. He smells fantastic, too; Eddie’s shampoo is one of those really fruity ones which lingers in your hair for hours after.

“Hey, Eds,” Richie chuckles as he blows smoke out of the window and Eddie gives him a look of distaste.

“Don’t call me that. And don’t talk to me until you put that out,” he says plainly in reply, watching almost smugly as Richie stares at the cigarette in his hand before stubbing it out and casting its crumpled remains out of the window.

Bill has clearly finished his little doodling session because he pops the lid back onto the paint can and puts that and the brush to one side, where there’s a little table with coffee rings and splatters of paint on its top. He goes to sit with Stan and Eddie afterwards, and he’s about to sit next to Stan but Richie gives him an expectant look from over by the window until he switches sides and plants himself next to Eddie instead.

“H-h-hey, Eds,” he stutters out softly, giving Richie a brief smug look when Eddie doesn’t complain about the nickname and only smiles at him with a fond ‘Hi’ in response.

The room is quiet again for a while, but Richie keeps shooting Bill and Stan raised eyebrows. He’s still sitting next to the window even though he isn’t smoking anymore, like he’s waiting for Bill or Stan to make the first move.

And Bill finally takes the hint because he leans right over Eddie to pretend to look at Stan’s book, rests his arm against Eddie’s shoulder to use him for stability and Richie watches the way Eddie’s eyes linger on the side of Bill’s face, drop to his neck and the hint of collarbone that’s exposed as his sweatshirt gets tugged at the sleeve, and he sees Eddie’s throat move like he’s swallowing away the sudden dryness in his mouth.

When Bill pulls back he sees the slightly uncomfortable expression on Eddie’s face and wraps an arm fully around his shoulders to squeeze him against his side.

“Y-you okay, Eds?”

Eddie only nods in response and he avoids Bill’s gaze for a while before giving him a meek smile. Making sure that Eddie sees it, Bill purposefully drops his eyes to look at Eddie’s lips, lingering there for as long as he dares before he pulls away. Eddie’s eyes follow him, then, almost desperately, although Bill doesn’t see it. Bill doesn’t know that Eddie is currently working something over in his mind, starting to piece together Richie’s odd fascination with bringing up Bill and Stan in conversations. In particular, that time they were having sex and Richie asked him if he’d ever thought about Bill. It was an odd thing to ask with no context. Why would Richie want him to be thinking about Bill when they had sex? But then Eddie remembers Richie telling them all that he and Bill had fooled around, while they were back at the Derry Townhouse. Does Richie want them *both* to fool around with Bill?

*No, that can’t possibly be right.*

But the way Bill just looked at his lips wasn’t just an accidental glance. Eddie knows that much. He looks up from his thoughts and Bill is staring at him again and his heart leaps in his chest. He
really must be imagining all of this. The eye contact continues this time and Eddie can’t help it and he drops his own gaze to Bill’s lips, just to see what will happen and he’s right. When he looks back up, Bill’s eyes are on his lips again and he’s going crazy. He must be. He must be because Bill seems to have moved closer to him; he can feel the press of Bill’s shoulder against his own.

Bill can’t believe that it’s working. But he’s certain that Eddie looked at his lips, too, and that there’s a tense silence between them now. He sees Eddie swallow again, bring out the tip of his tongue to wet his lips and he can’t help himself. He leans in to catch him in a brief kiss, watching Eddie’s eyes go wide as he pulls away. Eddie looks immediately to Richie, to see if he just saw that happen or not and the panic is evident when he sees Richie looking right at them.

“Richie…I didn’t…I mean, Bill just…”

“It’s okay, Eddie,” Richie chuckles nonchalantly, “You can kiss Bill if you want to.”

And Eddie is sure that he must be dreaming. When he looks back at Bill, he’s greeted by a reassuring smile and soft eyes. And he really does want to kiss Bill, because Bill’s lips are always just a little bit wet—he has a nervous tick where he licks them, especially when his stutter gets bad-, and it makes them look strangely inviting. He knows that Bill must be a good kisser, too, because Bill is good at everything, after all. Eddie has never doubted that.

“D-do you want to?” Bill asks softly, and Eddie can’t believe that those words are coming out of Bill’s mouth. He doesn’t even realise that he’s giving him a little nod in response until Bill comes in again, presses a soft kiss against the corner of his mouth, then another at the opposite side, then on his top lip, then his lower lip until Eddie feels the need to part them, and that’s when Bill goes in for a proper kiss.

It’s soft and careful, reassuring, almost, but when Eddie starts to move his own lips back it gets firmer. He’s pretty sure he opens his mouth for Bill faster than he ever has for Richie, and he feels his breath shake at the back of his throat when Bill’s tongue comes in, explores his mouth and licks at Eddie’s own tongue with little, teasing motions. It feels good, and it feels right, kissing Bill. He feels like he’s being taken care of, especially when one of Bill’s warm hands cups the side of his neck, fingertips just resting in his hairline, and he feels Bill’s thumb underneath his chin, rubbing small circles there. Eddie doesn’t know why, but he feels like this movement is Bill asking him to open his mouth wider so he does, and with a small tilt of Bill’s head the kiss deepens until Eddie feels a bit dizzy.

Then he’s sure he’s definitely dreaming this when he feels something on his neck, too, as Bill’s hand moves away. Soft hair tickles his ear and a tongue lathes at his pulse point and he doesn’t even have to open his eyes to know that those are Stan’s lips on his throat. He’s felt them before, briefly, when they were alone in the barn after he sprained his ankle. But this is different; Bill and Richie are here, too, and Bill’s tongue is dipping in and out of his mouth and he can sense Richie watching them.

He feels Stan sucking a wet bruise under his ear, feels a hand on his waist through his sweater, probably Bill’s, and he’s almost frustrated at how…normal…it feels. He senses Bill’s lips detach from his own, slowly and carefully and then Bill’s voice comes through the haze, soft but commanding.

“T-tilt your head back.”

Eddie does it instinctively, exposing more of his neck, apparently, to both of them, because Stan’s lips get more firm and then Bill’s tongue is there, too, in long, slow, licks from his collar right up under his jaw. Then suddenly he’s being moved and the mouths disappear and he realises that it’s
Richie squeezing in between him and the wall, with his feet planted firmly either side of Eddie and his knees bent. He can tell that it’s Richie from the way he smells, musty and smoky but familiar. Eddie would be irritated about it but he almost feels a little bit safer with Richie there and he leans back into Richie’s warmth.

“Hey, Eds,” Richie chuckles against his ear, “Having fun?”

“I don’t…understand what’s happening…” Eddie replies as he finally opens his eyes to see Bill and Stan sitting in front of him.

“Just relax,” Richie’s voice is low, teasing, against the shell of his ear, “Enjoy yourself.”

Before Eddie can reply, Stan is leaning in over him to kiss him, this time. He’s firmer than Bill, in both his body and his lips and when Stan’s tongue slips into his mouth it feels somehow dirtier. Stan is the first one to finally get his hands on Eddie’s thighs, and he pushes them apart so he can get between them properly and slides his palms up and down the bare sections of flesh just below the denim and rubs his thumbs there until Eddie starts to feel a little bit light-headed. He vaguely recalls the sensation of Bill lifting his ankles to slip off his shoes and socks.

Just as he’s starting to get into it, Stan moves away and he’s replaced by Bill. Bill is gentler, and their lips meet again fondly for a while before he goes down to Eddie’s throat, and his collarbone, and Richie tugs at the sweater next to Bill’s lips to give him more space. Then he moves lower and Richie is lifting the sweater instead and Bill’s lips are on his bare stomach and Eddie feels like a stupid teenager again, the same one who used to lie awake on his front in the middle of the night thinking about his best friend and his stupid stutter and his blue eyes and his wet lips, and grinding against a pillow until his toes curled and he came in his pyjama pants and had to stifle his moans in the sheets.

He’s getting hard just thinking about it, and Bill is moving lower and lower and Richie and Stan are watching and he doesn’t know why but that just makes him feel even hotter. When Bill reaches the fastening of Eddie’s shorts, and he gets his fingers against the button and the zip and he can feel the strain just beneath he seems pleased, and he looks up at Eddie with unveiled affection, but there’s a little bit of lust there, too that sends even more heat right to that spot between Eddie’s legs.

“…Bill…” Eddie breathes out, suddenly unsure now that Bill has made short work of the fastenings and is tugging the shorts down onto Eddie’s thighs. Bill looks up at him as he drags them all the way off and carefully releases Eddie’s feet from the denim, and Eddie feels exposed with his hard-on all of a sudden on display to all three of them beneath the thin fabric of his boxer shorts.

“It’s okay, Eds,” Richie whispers against his ear as Bill gives him a reassuring look. He watches with bated breath as Bill dips his head. He can feel hot breath on the front of his underwear that winds him up further, stiffens the flesh even more, and he can’t believe that this is really happening but then his underwear is no longer an issue and Bill’s mouth is on his cock.

“Bill’s mouth is on his cock.”

He says it over and over to himself in his head until all he can think about is Bill’s stupid, fucking, hot, fucking, wet, fucking stupid mouth and he hears himself moan as Richie whispers in his ear again that it’s okay. But it’s not okay. It’s not okay because Eddie has imagined this before but it’s so much fucking better than his weak mind could ever comprehend. It’s not okay because how the fuck is Bill so good at this? Eddie feels like he’s using every ounce of his strength to not come into Bill’s mouth already as he watches him through lidded eyes.
He feels Stan’s hands slide onto his thighs before he sees them, and he’s pushing them further apart for Bill and Eddie lets it happen because Bill seems to get more comfortable and he takes him deeper as he bobs his head and Eddie’s pretty sure that he’s seeing stars already. He closes his eyes briefly, lost in the absolute pleasure of it as either Stan or Bill tugs at his knees and he slides further down Richie’s body –and further into Bill’s mouth-.

Richie’s hands are on his chest, rolling his nipples between fingers and thumbs and it feels like torture in the most beautiful way and he moans again, desperately clinging to that last shred of his sanity that is stopping him from saying Bill’s name. Because even though Bill is currently going down on him, by choice, he still thinks that might be weird.

He hears another sound then, another moan but it doesn’t come from him and it’s muffled and he feels it vibrate around him and shudders, trying so hard not to buck his hips. He can’t understand why Bill would possibly be moaning; surely having a dick in your mouth isn’t a particularly pleasurable experience. But then he opens his eyes to look down and Stan is kneeling behind Bill and one of Stan’s arms is around him. He can’t really see what’s happening from this angle but Stan’s hand is definitely moving. Then Bill shifts and he sees it, sees Stan’s palm between Bill’s thighs, rubbing him through his jeans, which are unfastened. Eddie doesn’t know why but it turns him on even more and he feels himself getting closer. When Richie reaches down to grip under one of Eddie’s knees, and he holds it up a bit for Bill it’s the last straw.

“I…I’m gonna come…” Eddie manages to stammer out quietly, shakily as all of their eyes turn to him at once. Much to his dismay, Bill’s lips pull away until his dick drops against his stomach, wet with saliva and a bit sticky at the head, where there’s a bead of thicker liquid.

“It’s game time,” Richie chuckles from behind him as Eddie stares at Bill in what could almost be considered betrayal, “Same as last time. Last one to come is the winner.”

“…W…what?!” Eddie screeches, looking from Bill to Stan and then back at Richie over his shoulder as he slowly sits up, “How is that fair?!”

“Let’s be real, Eds. You’d be the first to go anyways.”

Eddie looks horrified, and stammers out various word fragments before finally blurtting out a loud ‘FUCK YOU, Richie!’ He shuffles away from him, and as he does, Stan grabs Richie by one of his ankles and drags him across the floor in his direction. He gives a brief glance to Bill, before looking back down at Richie.

“Better catch up,” he mumbles, before unfastening Richie’s belt and jeans, as Richie watches him with vague amusement.

“You gonna go down on me, Stan?” he asks teasingly, as Stan pulls off Richie’s boots and jeans so he’s in a similar state of undress to Eddie. He doesn’t say anything more, but he tugs Richie’s dick free of his underpants and it’s in his mouth before any of them can react.

Richie’s head hits the floor with an audible thud, even through the blankets, as Bill and Eddie sit there in stunned silence. They watch Richie’s fingers tangle into Stan’s hair, both hands at once, as he raises his hips just slightly. And Bill is sure that Stan will stop him, but he doesn’t, just takes it as deep as he can while Richie shudders and gasps.

“Fuck…Stan…I didn’t know you had it in you…” Richie groans out through his teeth, but Stan continues to work on him, with shallow movements of his head, as if he’s trying to keep it as deep as possible. And they can see the way Richie’s feet shift against the floor, the way his knees bend and even, at one point, lift to press against Stan’s shoulders, like he can’t stop fidgeting because
he’s trying really hard not to come.

“You…might wanna…stop…” Richie grinds out after a while, breathing out a lusty curse word, “…or I’m gonna come…right down your throat…”

Stan seems to consider this for a little while, before he slowly pulls his lips away with a satisfying pop that makes Richie visibly shudder. At Eddie’s side, Bill looks like he’s just witnessed some kind of religious event, and Eddie can completely understand why. Stan admires his handiwork for a while, having left Richie in the same state that Eddie was in in only a few minutes, before his eyes land on Bill. And Eddie is sure that they share some kind of secret eye contact almost like they’re speaking.

It escalates quickly after that.

Eddie is still sure that it’s a dream, especially at the point where he’s on his back with Bill between his thighs, inside him, rocking his hips against a pillow that’s been placed underneath the small of his back. He doesn’t know how it got to this point; one minute Bill’s lips were on his and it was just a kiss, body-to-body, but still just a kiss. He vaguely remembers seeing Stan and Richie in a similar position nearby. Then clothes came off, more and more and it was heated and something was passed around which Eddie assumed was lube –he doesn’t know who brought it up here but he’s suspecting Richie- and he couldn’t fight Bill’s fingers stretching him open. He didn’t want to. Bill was so eager to please, so attentive, asking Eddie exactly what he wanted and then giving it to him almost gratefully. So much to the point that Eddie couldn’t even complain about the fact that they had obviously planned this to some extent.

And that’s the point where Eddie, through his sex-fuelled haze, realised that Bill was copying Stan, and that whatever Bill was doing to him was being mirrored right beside him, with Richie.

Richie, who is currently on his back beside Eddie, receiving the same treatment. Richie, who Eddie can’t keep his eyes off because he’s so surprisingly vocal when he’s being fucked. That’s definitely the word, because Stan is nowhere near as gentle with Richie as Bill is with Eddie. He has Richie’s hips in his hands, held up against his own as he thrusts into him. And Eddie is torn between watching the way Richie claws against the sheets and rocks his body so hard back into Stan’s, hair sticking to him with sweat and messed up behind him, and turning his attention back to Bill, whose hips are pressing him so good into the soft support at his back that he feels like he can barely breathe.

The room is a haze, the sexual energy in the air almost tangible. None of them have ever felt anything like it, this kind of all-consuming passion that seems to be reflecting off one another. Eddie can hear Richie’s unrestrained moaning close to him and it’s driving him ever closer to the edge. His toes curl the next time Bill’s hips roll him into the floor and he grips at him with a whimper.

“Bill…”

Bill almost seems shocked at hearing Eddie say his name like that, but the next thrust he blesses Eddie with is almost rough, like he wants to hear it again. Eddie shudders through it and presses his fingers into Bill’s waist harder, nails leaving little half-moon indentations in his skin.

“Y-you can come if you want,” Bill whispers, his voice strained but his eyes clear and loving as he presses down closer into Eddie’s space. He feels Bill’s bare stomach and chest touch his own, hot and a bit damp and he slides his arms around Bill’s shoulders and gets lost in him for a while. For a minute, he forgets that Stan and Richie are even there as he buries his face into Bill’s neck, letting himself get rocked so firmly into the pillow beneath his back that he’s breathing Bill’s name out.
over and over like some kind of mantra before he can stop himself. It causes Bill’s hips to speed up, and it’s so good that he moans out loud and wraps his legs around him, too, hooking his ankles together behind Bill’s back. He’s going to come soon if this carries on, but he’s not sure if he cares.  

“It feels so good…” Bill breathes out against his ear and for the first time since they started, Eddie is suddenly aware that, thanks to his and Richie’s frequent night time activities, he is the one with more experience having sex with men. He moves his face out of Bill’s neck to look at him, at his slightly glazed blue eyes and lips that are so wet and full. They look into each other’s eyes for a while, breathing in each other’s space and it feels different to being with Richie, but so good and Eddie knows that he loves Bill, too. Maybe just as much. He reaches up to touch Bill’s cheek, running the pad of his thumb across his swollen lower lip and holding his breath as Bill places a soft kiss against it. He pulls back slightly, then, and the moment is gone. 

Eddie is snapped quickly out of it when he hears Richie moan next to him again and he turns his head to see Richie’s head dropped back against the floor, mouth hanging open and eyes squeezed shut as Stan’s hips hit his at a fast pace. Bill looks, too, seeming equally mesmerised by Stan. He’s fucking Richie like he knows exactly how it should be done, like he’s done it a million times before and knows just what Richie likes. More likely is that he’s so observant that he noticed straight away which movements affected him in the best way, how hard he had to thrust to get Richie to arch his back, how rough Richie will let him be. 

Pretty fucking rough seems to be the answer, because even for someone who never shuts his mouth Richie is doing a stand-up job of being as loud and graphic as possible with whatever’s coming out of it.

“Harder!” he gasps out again as they watch, and he’s pressing his hips back into Stan’s with almost the same force that Stan’s are hitting him. It’s so hard that it’s actually audible whenever they hit each other, “…Ah-…is that…is that the b-best…you can do?”

And that’s obviously the last straw, because Stan pulls out and flips Richie onto his stomach, with a little bit of struggling from Richie. Although when he feels him slide back in, Richie knows what he’s doing and he pushes himself onto his knees with a groan. He tries to lift the top half of his body, too, but Stan holds him down, gets a grip on Richie’s hair with the other still on his hips and then he’s pounding him again and from this angle it’s even better and Richie is breathing hard and hissing out the word ‘yes’ over and over again. 

Eddie’s quite sure that he could come just from the sight of it, even without Bill inside him. He watches Stan first, and his mouth almost waters at the way Stan grips at Richie’s hips, at the sight of Stan’s cock disappearing and reappearing out of Richie’s body where they connect. And Eddie can’t help it, he imagines Stan fucking him like that, making him beg and moan and swear just the way Richie is doing and he feels himself getting close. Bill is inching closer and closer to that really good spot inside him, thrusting harder and faster each time and kissing at his neck, now. He keeps his arms and legs around Bill but his eyes on Stan. And then Stan looks up and his eyes catch Eddie’s and Eddie feels his breath stop. He watches Stan’s teeth pull on his bottom lip, nice and slow like he’s doing it just for Eddie and it makes Eddie’s chest feel tight and he has to look away. 

He makes the mistake of looking at Richie instead. Beautiful, dirty, messed up Richie with his lips resting against his own forearm, rings creating tight red marks around his fingers as he clutches at the blankets underneath him. Richie makes a low whining sound, and Eddie watches him reach between his own thighs to start jerking himself off in time with Stan’s thrusts. He can see the head of Richie’s dick, red and slick with pre-come that’s leaking into his fingers, sliding in and out of his fist and he wishes to whatever fucking higher power there is in this universe that it was him making Richie touch himself like that, so desperately. And then Richie’s eyes open and connect
with Eddie’s, too. Eddie feels his own lips part to mirror Richie’s doing the same as he moans against his heated skin and his eyebrows knit together. Eddie knows that he’s close and he can’t take his eyes off him in case he misses it.

“Fuck me-”

Eddie sees Richie’s lips form the words, and he knows that he’s saying it to Stan but his eyes are still on Eddie’s, burning into him. Stan must have taken the order well because Richie gets knocked forward, then, from the force of the next thrust, until his cheek is against the floor and Stan rests down across his back to bury his face near his neck. Eddie can see Stan whispering something in Richie’s ear, see Richie’s reaction to it as his mouth forms first a smirk and then falls open in a silent moan and he squeezes his eyes shut. His hand is still working furiously on himself underneath them.

Then his eyes open again to meet Eddie’s, and he moans loudly, shakily as he comes hard into his own hand and across the sheets. His thighs are visibly shaking and Stan stops to lift away from him, rubbing his palms up and down Richie’s waist as he works himself through the rest of it slowly.

Watching Richie come like that makes Eddie lose the last shred of his own self-restraint, and he feels himself nearing the edge.

“B-Bill…faster, please, I’m so close…”

Eddie gasps and grips his fingers into Bill’s hair as he obliges this request, and he’s suddenly being rocked quickly into the soft blankets on the ground. He keeps eye contact with Richie, although he’s struggling to hold them open as his orgasm starts peaking.

“…Come on, Eds…” Richie encourages from nearby. Richie reaches over to lace his fingers into his hair and it draws a loud moan out of him as he tugs his head back for Bill to get his mouth on his throat better, “Come for us, baby.”

Eddie vaguely hears Bill groan against his neck, as if he’s agreeing, before Eddie comes harder than he ever has in his life. It’s so good that all he can do is squeeze his eyes shut and let out small gasps as Bill reaches between them to stroke him through it. He feels almost like he drifts back into his body, slowly, to the sensation of Bill pulling out of him.

Stan is no longer inside Richie, either. Richie crawls over so that he and Eddie can share a heated kiss, then, as Bill sits back to watch them, looking slightly dazed. Eddie moans again into Richie’s mouth, completely lost in the ecstasy of it all, and he runs his fingers through Richie’s sweaty hair and across his shoulders and back.

“That was so…fucking…hot…” Richie mumbles against Eddie’s lips between kisses, “Watching you…getting fucked by…Bill.”

Eddie can’t respond, simply groaning against Richie’s lips whenever he speaks, and he almost wishes he hadn’t come already because he sure as hell would be asking Richie to screw him right about now. He still feels so charged. But Richie pulls away from his lips to look at Bill and Stan.

“…So…my ass hurts, but…Bill…you gotta try that,” he chuckles breathily, sitting up on his knees and wincing a little bit, as Eddie takes some tissues out of the pocket of his shorts nearby and wipes himself down. He gets Richie’s hand, too, while Richie is still looking at Bill.

“…W-what…” Bill is still out of breath, and he struggles when Richie grabs him and pins him
“Eddie,” Richie breathes out, motioning to a tube nearby in the sheets which must contain some sort of lube. The cap is still off it like it was tossed there haphazardly.

Eddie picks it up, although he looks a little bit reluctant as he hands it over and watches Richie squirt a generous amount onto two of his fingers. Stan is still just watching them from nearby, but he looks ready to intervene if Bill tells Richie to stop.

Richie leans down to press a kiss into Bill’s lips and reaches to grip at his still-hard dick with his lube-covered hand. He pulls the condom off him first and throws it aside—much to Eddie’s disgust when it lands near him—before he really gets his hand on and starts rubbing at him and Bill can’t struggle for long because it’s so slick and Richie’s hand is tight and hot.

“I could let you come like this,” Richie whispers against Bill’s lips as he speeds up his hand to an almost brutal pace and Bill is whining and digging his heels into the sheets and bucking his hips, “Do you want to come, Bill?”

Bill’s eyes squeeze shut briefly, and he groans deep in his chest before gasping out a ‘y-yes’ against Richie’s mouth. But Richie stops his hand at that exact moment and pushes a finger into him instead. Bill, still caught on the edge of his inevitable climax, seems to take it really well, and he gasps and his toes curl a bit. Stan sees this and comes over, and he pushes Bill’s hair back from his forehead with an ‘it’s okay’. Eddie is there, too, and he rests his fingers in one of Bill’s palms reassuringly.

“Relax,” Eddie says quietly, leaning down to give Bill an upside-down kiss and, when he does, Richie pushes his finger in deeper, watching the way Bill’s stomach tenses and the way he bends his knees instinctively, as if he knows that it will make it less uncomfortable. Bill grips at Eddie’s forearm next to his head and Eddie pulls their lips apart to look into his eyes, giving him a slight nod and mouthing ‘it’s okay’ as Stan watches him almost desperately. He looks at Stan, then, as Stan leans down to kiss him, too, and Stan reaches down to Richie’s hand to push at it, gets him to slide his finger in as deep as it will go. There’s a shuddering groan into Stan’s mouth in response.

Stan is about to tell Richie to add another but then he has a better idea, and he connects the back of his hand with Richie’s palm as he slips one of his own fingers inside instead, with Richie’s. Stan’s fingers are longer than Richie’s and it goes deeper, and even Richie looks shocked as he watches this happen. He quickly gets some more lube, though, when Bill seems like he’s hurting, and he spreads it around his and Stan’s fingers, and against the tight muscle as Bill bites at his lip.

“I-it hurts…” he stutters quietly, and Richie looks up at him and stops, but Stan presses his own finger deeper, watching Bill’s face as he inches closer to his prostate, almost like he knows exactly how to find it.

“Do you want us to stop?” he asks as he watches Bill’s eyelids flutter and knows that he’s getting close to it and Bill shakes his head as Eddie presses kisses against the side of his face.

“It only hurts at first,” Eddie whispers, “It feels really good. I promise.” He links his fingers with Bill’s loosely as he watches Richie.

Richie is following Stan, now, only moving his finger when he sees Stan do the same. He keeps adding more and more lube, too, and it gets a little bit messy towards the end, when it starts to finally loosen, and Richie removes his finger so that Stan can get another one in, and he pushes them deep, moving with Bill’s hips as Bill lifts them up away from the floor with a shaky breath.
“You like that?” Stan asks against Bill’s ear and Bill nods quickly, moaning from the back of his throat. Richie can’t really tell what Stan is doing, but his fingers are only moving a little and they’re still pressed about as deep as they’ll go, and whatever it is it’s making Bill’s thighs tremble ever so slightly. Stan seems content to push Bill over the edge just like that, but Richie is having none of it and he clearly has something in mind for them already.

“This will be really good,” he explains as he draws Stan away from Bill, before pushing him down onto his back, right against Eddie’s lap. Eddie is extremely grateful that he thought to pull his own underwear back on before this happened, because he’s not sure that he would want his dick pressed against Stan’s shoulder. Although Stan’s hair is incredibly soft against his stomach and he reaches down to run his fingers through it a little, smiling a bit sheepishly when Stan tilts his head back to look up at him.

Bill is pretty worn out at this point, and he takes a little bit more coaxing to sit up at all, let alone climb on top of Stan’s lap like Richie is trying to get him to do.

“Y-you want me to…” he can’t even finish the sentence, like he’s not sure how to phrase it.

“Yeah,” Richie chuckles, patting at Bill’s bare ass a few times, “Show us how it’s done, Big Bill.”

“I-I would if I knew h-how,” Bill chuckles. He’s actually sitting on Stan’s stomach, now, but it seems like he’s hiding his nerves with humour.

“Bill, you don’t have to do anything that Richie tells you,” Stan says quietly, although he looks a little bit excited at the possibility of Bill riding him, which is the clear idea behind it.

“I m-mean the fingers s-s-sort of hurt and this is…much…b-bigger…”

Richie chuckles and slaps one of Bill’s thighs.

“C’mon. I took it!”

“…Yeah, but…no offense, Richie but you’re a bit of a slut,” Eddie says suddenly, and they all look at him and laugh. Richie looks vaguely impressed.

“I’m not gonna do to Bill what I did to Richie,” Stan says bluntly, but Bill looks down at him with a slightly offended expression.

“You d-don’t think I can take it?”

“…I’m not saying that.”

There’s a hint of a smirk at the corner of Stan’s lips, though, that Bill would just love to wipe right off him. He shifts his hips back, feeling the tip of Stan’s dick press between his ass cheeks.

“Well…that’s w-w-what it sounds like.”

“If you don’t wanna do it, Bill, I completely understand,” Stan continues, still looking smug, “I’m not gonna…force you into anything. We can just…cuddle…or something.”

There’s an obvious smirk, then, and Richie’s eyes widen and he makes a very obnoxious ‘OOOOHHHH’ sound. Even Eddie looks amused. Bill gives Stan the dirtiest look he can muster, decides that he’s not going to be the only one here who can’t take it, and manoeuvres himself back onto him until he starts pressing inside. He looks visibly tense, and they all know that it hurts.
“…Bill…seriously, you don’t have to-” Stan begins, but Bill actually tells him to shut up, and then pushes, forces the rest of the way down until their hips meet.

“S-stop…t-t-telling me what to do,” he groans. His breath is shaking and his thighs are pressed so hard against Stan’s waist that it’s a little bit uncomfortable for them both, “I tell you all…what to do. That’s how it works,” he continues, and his voice trembles audibly with both the effort of not stuttering and with the discomfort he’s feeling.

Stan’s hands reach up to Bill’s knees and then slide onto his bare thighs as he watches him silently. He grazes his nails back down after, watching Bill arch his back just a little bit and shift his hips, which makes them both gasp. Eddie and Richie seem to be observing this scene with bated breath.

It seems like an age before Bill actually begins to rock his hips, and it’s slow and precise, just tiny movements as if he’s testing how much it will hurt. It obviously does hurt, and he winces a bit and chews at his already swollen lips, but every time Stan speaks up, tells him that he doesn’t have to do it, tells him to slow down, Bill contradicts him and moves faster.

Richie is having the time of his life, kneeling beside Bill, his eyes flicking repeatedly from Stan, who is clearly trying desperately not to move because he doesn’t want to cause him any more pain, to Bill, who seems to be trying to cause himself as much pain as possible. There’s a sheen of sweat across Bill’s cheeks and the lines of his stomach and he’s bitten his bottom lip so much that it’s bleeding a little bit.

“Bill…this isn’t really supposed to hurt, you know?” Richie chuckles uncomfortably and rubs at Bill’s back a little. But Bill shakes his head and his breath trembles the next time he opens his mouth to speak.

“I-it…d-doesn’t…” he stammers, and his eyes flick shut briefly the next time he rolls his hips, “…it doesn’t h-hurt….anymore…”

Stan’s eyes widen just a little at the realisation, and he slides his hands up from Bill’s thighs to his waist and back down again, watching the way Bill grips at his forearms and wrists almost like he’s being overstimulated and doesn’t know what to do. He rests his palms at the top of Bill’s thighs, tugging at him a bit and guiding him into a rhythm. Bill still doesn’t seem to know what to do with himself, and he first grabs for Stan’s shoulders, then moves down to his chest and abdomen, eventually settling his hands over top of Stan’s on his thighs.

Richie is still rubbing at Bill’s back; he’s moved lower, now, but when he sees Bill’s eyes screw shut in pleasure he goes back up to squeeze the back of his neck, running his fingers into his hair a bit. Stan seems a bit lost, too, from the lack of control. His fingers dig hard into Bill’s thighs when he starts rocking faster, and his own lips are almost as swollen as Bill’s from being bitten to hold back moans.

“D-does it…feel good f-f-for you, too?” Bill whispers as he leans down to Stan’s lips and Stan nods his head and lifts his hips just slightly, pulling Bill down harder onto him and causing Bill to moan against his mouth. Eddie looks a little bit awe-struck as Bill sits back again to keep up the pace, gripping his thighs against Stan to get better leverage as he rocks his hips faster.

“Remember that this is still a competition,” Richie chuckles as he leans over to Bill’s ear, “If you make him come first then you win.”

Bill’s eyes are quite lidded, now, and he’s struggling to keep his hips moving so quickly. Stan’s gaze is on him, unblinking, like he knows that Bill is going to come soon. He gives a testing thrust up into him and Bill’s head drops back briefly and he bites back a moan, although Richie looks
thrilled.

“Do that again,” he chuckles, “I think he’s gonna come.”

Bill opens his eyes again quickly to look at Stan, daringly, and he shakes his head.

“D-don’t…” his voice is shaky and wrecked, like he’s holding something back. Stan ruts his hips up again, harder, digging his fingers into Bill’s thighs to keep him still but it leaves them both a little bit breathless this time and Bill actually moans out loud. He composes himself quickly and grabs for Stan’s hands with his own. It’s not clear what he’s trying to do, but he fails anyway when Stan simply links their fingers together and starts to rock up to meet Bill.

That’s clearly the point where Bill no longer cares about winning, too lost in how good it feels, and he’s more or less bouncing in his lap now, using his knees for stability and coming down on him hard each time. Richie is next to him, encouraging him, with a hand gripped in his hair.

“You gonna come, Bill?” he smirks, and Bill reaches out to grip at Richie’s shoulder like he needs something to hold on to, whimpering behind tightly closed lips.

Eddie looks pretty dazed, now, like he can’t believe he’s watching something so hot, especially when one of Stan’s hands comes back to grip at Eddie’s thigh next to his head and he gets his fingers into the material of Eddie’s boxer shorts. Eddie’s a little bit worried that he’s going to rip them.

“I…I think Stan’s gonna come, too…” Eddie says sort of hazily in Richie’s direction and Richie chuckles and pats at Stan’s thigh behind Bill.

“Not…before he does…” Stan mutters, sounding very much like he’s struggling to speak normally. He bucks his hips hard into Bill’s again, knocking him forward onto his hands. They’re both staring at each other desperately now, each waiting for the other to finally give in, “Bill… c’mon…fuck…”

Bill chuckles a bit against Stan’s lips, although it comes out shaky, and he dips his head to bite at his jaw as Stan grips at his hair. For a while, it seems like neither of them are ever going to give up and let themselves come, until Stan gets frustrated and reaches down between them to wrap his fingers around Bill’s erection. It’s still wet from the lube that Richie put there earlier and he moves his hand fast as Bill’s head drops against Stan’s shoulder and he can’t seem to move his hips anymore. So Stan takes over completely, rocking his hips up hard into Bill’s until he’s stuttering and gasping against his neck and biting down on him to try and muffle loud moans. But Stan is relentless, and he won’t slow his hand even when Bill yells shakily at him to stop, and he has his lips against Bill’s ear, telling, ordering him to come until he finally does, with a weak cry, all across Stan’s abdomen.

Stan comes shortly after, no longer needing to hold back and he ruts his hips and draws another cry out of Bill, who seems to be trying desperately to hold him still with his shaking thighs.

“St-stop! Stan…stop…”

He slides his arms around Bill’s body tightly, holding him against his chest and Bill is breathing so heavily that he might as well be hyperventilating, until Eddie gets his fingers into his hair and strokes him until he calms down. He still doesn’t lift his head from Stan’s shoulder, burying his face into his neck, and for a little while they’re all worried about him.

“Hey, Billy…c’mon, it was good, right?” Richie chuckles as he leans down next to them. Bill
doesn’t reply, but he flinches and visibly shudders when Stan lifts Bill’s hips to pull out of him.

“…Bill…” Eddie ventures tentatively, still running his fingers through his hair. It isn’t until Bill sits up to move away that they all realise why he was embarrassed, because he’s crying. He wipes at his cheeks quickly with his palms and moves away to pull on his underwear with his back to all three of them.

“Bill are you…are you crying?” Richie asks, although he doesn’t sound like he’s making fun of him, just wants to know.

“…I-I don’t know w-w-why…I mean it was r-really good…” his voice sounds a little bit shaky, and he adds, as an afterthought, “I’m s-s-sorry.”

Stan sits up away from Eddie’s lap, crawling over to rest his chin against Bill’s shoulder.

“You don’t have to be embarrassed,” Richie chuckles, and he and Eddie go over, too. Bill is still wiping at his face, “Some people cry after sex. So fucking what?”

Bill looks at Richie, then, like he’s shocked that he would say something so nice and supportive. His eyes are still a little bit red.

“It’s n-n-not weird?”

“No,” Stan says from Bill’s shoulder, and Richie and Eddie both shake their heads.

“I mean it j-just felt so good…it was o-overwhelming…”

There’s a kiss against Bill’s neck from Stan, and Richie tidies Bill’s hair with his fingers, chuckling.

“You don’t have to be embarrassed about anything around us. Ever.”

They lie together for a little while after that, in a tangle of blankets in just their underwear –they make Richie put his back on-, and there’s a lot of fond hair touching and little, soft kisses and cuddling, until Richie goes to have another cigarette by the window. They get dressed, after, sitting to pull on socks and shoes, and Richie smokes another cigarette while he’s standing and tugging his boots on. At one point, he hops on one foot as he’s slipping on the back of his boot, and then disappears over the edge of the platform as he falls into the barn beneath. There’s a thud and a loud swear word as he hits the ground.

“RICHIE!” they all shout it almost in unison, and scramble to the edge to look down. Richie is lying on the ground beneath them in a pile of hay, rubbing at the back of his head. His shoe has fallen off and the cigarette that was in his mouth is now gone.

“RICHIE, ARE YOU OKAY?!” Eddie screams, hysterical, but he calms down when Richie lifts a hand to wave a little bit.

“I’m okay, Eds! But I lost my smoke!” He’s looking around himself for the missing cigarette.

They all climb down shortly after and Bill and Stan lift him to his feet carefully as Eddie dusts him off. He’s leaning quite heavily onto Bill.

“Ah, fuck…guys, I hurt my leg…someone’s gonna have to carry me, I think. Like…just all the time from now on. I would pick Eddie but…he’s so small I don’t know if he could lift me off the ground.”
Eddie looks unamused, and he moves Bill and Stan out of the way, before picking Richie up, over his shoulder, as if he weighs nothing.

“OH MY GOD!” Richie laughs, gripping onto the back of Eddie’s sweater, “I’ve literally never been this happy.”

“Shut the fuck up, Richie,” Eddie says, although he looks a little bit pleased with himself as he carries him out of the barn. Stan bends to pick up Richie’s missing boot, taking Bill’s hand and chuckling a little bit before they follow.

As it turns out, there is nothing wrong with Richie’s leg aside from a large bruise next to his knee.

He later tells Ben, Bev and Mike that he got it doing an awesome flip.

They don’t believe him.
Chapter 33

Chapter Summary

Sorry that this took so long to upload but I've been really busy at work (I know that's not an excuse, but hey)

Anywho, please accept a little bit of Stanlon as an apology for taking such a long time. I'll try to get the next chapter up faster than this, I promise.

: )

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The calm period continues until they all almost forget why they returned to Derry in the first place. It’s just like they’ve always lived there, together on Mike’s farm, with nothing to bother or hurt them in any way, surrounded by each other’s love and laughter and support. The next time something happens to disturb that peace it’s unexpected, and it’s the last straw.

It starts one evening as they’re all sitting together in the living room. There’s a blazing fire going in the hearth, blankets draped over shoulders and the slightest hints of frost on the outsides of the windows. Beverly’s hair is loose on her shoulder and Richie and Eddie’s fingers are slightly intertwined where their hands rest against the carpet. They’ve been here for hours and it’s getting into late evening now as they play board games and drink beers that Mike picked up that afternoon. The room is filled with laughter that’s almost like a protective bubble.

As the evening progresses and more alcohol flows, the mood lifts even more. Eddie’s fits of giggling are a frequent occurrence, just as they usually are when he’s inebriated and it’s highly infectious and sends them all into a similar state whenever it happens. They sit in a circle, now, on the floor, with an empty, glass bottle of Budweiser placed in the centre against the wood. Bill leans forward to spin it first but he’s overly enthusiastic and it careens straight into Stan’s crossed legs.

“Jeez, Bill!” he spits into the silence, but he’s laughing as he rubs at his shin, “We’re playing Spin-The-Bottle! The key word is ‘spin’!”

Bill laughs, too, now that he knows Stan is okay and that he isn’t mad, but there’s still a slight flush of embarrassment in his pale cheeks as he reaches across to bring the bottle back to where it should be. Nobody else says anything. They all know by now how clumsy Bill is anyway, but he gets even more so when he’s been drinking.

“Sorry, S-Stan,” he mutters as he twists the bottle, much more carefully this time, and it spins against the hardwood floor with a very satisfying sound. All eyes are on it until it stops, finally, pointing straight at Richie.

“YES!” Richie yells as he lifts both of his arms into the air in a victory pose. The sound makes Eddie jump at first, but he grins stupidly at Bev when she sees it and they both laugh.

“Aw, m-man!” Bill chuckles, fake whining as Richie crawls across the circle towards him,
knocking the bottle aside with his knee as he goes. All goes silent, then, as he reaches him and everyone is eager to see how it goes down.

It’s pretty straight forward and very like them. As soon as Bill gets on his knees so they’re face-to-face, Richie’s hand is on the back of his neck, pulling him in for an open-mouthed kiss. It doesn’t last very long, but tongues are visible and they are both very handsy drunks. Richie grips at Bill’s waist and Bill’s fingers get in Richie’s hair and there’s a lot of audible heavy breathing amidst slightly drunken chuckles into each other’s mouths. They pull away with a wet ‘smack’ that makes Eddie grimace and mutter ‘gross’ out loud.

Richie spins next when they’ve returned to their seats, giving Eddie a suggestive little eyebrow wiggle as if to say ‘I hope it lands on you’ but he seems just as ecstatic when the bottle stops and is pointing at Beverly. He mimics his earlier actions of triumph, only this time Bev mirrors it and they both move forward to meet at the centre.

“Give me some sugar, honey,” she chuckles, waggling her tongue at him a little bit and they both laugh before their mouths meet.

Richie is just as gropey with Bev as he was with Bill. He wraps her loose hair around his hand to pull her in tighter and there’s something vaguely sexual about the way one of his knees is just casually resting in between her thighs. There’s definitely some tongue there, too, although Beverly breaks the kiss when one of Richie’s wandering hands starts to trail up underneath the hem of her dress.

"Slow down there, tiger," she breathes, and his glasses steam up a little in front of her lips, “We’re only supposed to kiss.”

“As you wish, princess,” he lifts his glasses onto the top of his head, gives her another quick peck on the lips and then crawls back to his space. Beverly straightens her dress when she gets back to her own seat, still smiling, although even in the dim light in the room from the fireplace she looks a tiny bit flustered.

Beverly spins the bottle this time, giving a quick wink to Ben as she does it and earning a chuckle from him. Although, much to Ben’s vague disappointment and everyone else’s sheer joy, the bottle slows and then comes to a halt pointing directly at Eddie. Eddie looks horrified at first, like he’s sobered up for that second and realises that he has to kiss someone in front of all of these people, but Bev gives him a reassuring look and she comes to him, sitting so that their knees press together.

She rests her own hands over Eddie’s gently.

"It’s okay," she gives him a soft smile, “You don’t have to do anything you don’t want to.”

“I do want to,” he blurts out, and the circle goes oddly silent. Beverly gives him another warm look before she starts to inch towards him, waiting each time for him to move forward before she gets any closer. Eventually, their lips meet and their eyes close, and it’s very sweet and everyone else is watching them almost fondly.

They move together a little, unexpectedly, and Eddie seems to be leaning forward into the kiss, like he’s surprisingly okay with it and maybe even enjoying himself. Beverly’s fingers caress his cheek gently, sweeping down to his jaw, and she tilts his chin up just a tiny bit with her finger as she pulls away. When he opens his eyes they look a little hazy.

“W…that was…” he begins, looking like he can’t find the right words, “Your lips are…very soft…”
“Thanks,” she chuckles, running her fingers through his hair a little, “You’re a good kisser, Eddie,” she adds as she moves away to return to her place in the circle and he looks almost a little bit star struck.

“Yowza,” Richie says quietly as Eddie reaches forward to the bottle.

It ends up pointing at Stan, this time, and Eddie looks hesitant until Stan starts to move. They meet in the middle, like Richie and Bev did. Stan is the one to initiate this one, without saying a word and it’s much less innocent than the one between Bev and Eddie. It’s more like Richie and Bill’s kiss, only Eddie is less of a participant and he stays still as Stan works on his mouth. Stan is a good kisser, they all know it; he’s so careful and practiced and oddly…knowledgeable and the flush in Eddie’s cheeks is testament to that. When they pull apart, Eddie takes a heavy breath like he was holding it in and Stan looks a little bit pleased with himself.

When Stan spins the bottle, then, and it lands on Bill, Bill looks like he’s going to wet himself with excitement. They crawl forward to meet in the circle and Bill leans into him expectantly. There’s a lot of teasing, then, before lips actually meet. Bill tries to hold Stan’s hands but Stan slowly moves them away and holds his waist instead, Bill whispers something in Stan’s ear that none of them can pick up and Stan whispers something back that makes Bill go quiet, and then Stan seems to make Bill chase his lips. When he finally gets them on him, Stan pulls away after about three seconds and moves back to his seat, leaving Bill sitting on his own and looking very confused. It does make them all laugh, though.

Things take an interesting turn, then, as it’s Bill’s ‘go’ again and the bottle ends up pointing directly between Beverly and Ben. There’s some heated debate about who he should have to kiss. Opinion is divided until Richie pipes up with a ‘he has to kiss both of them’ and everyone seems to like that idea.

“I meant at the same time!” Richie cuts in as Bill is about to kiss Beverly. He freezes and pulls back to shoot Richie a look. Ben does the same thing but Beverly looks ecstatic.

“OH MY GOD YES!” she squeals, bracelets rattling on her thin wrists as she waves her arms around in excitement.

“Um…o-okay…” Bill chuckles nervously as he scoots across the floor and they all move closer.

Richie moves over so that he has a better view as Beverly kisses Ben first, clearly expecting Bill to join in. He leans in a few times, clearly trying to figure out how the fuck this is going to work before eventually Beverly pulls him in to kiss him, too. It’s awkward, and a lot of the time Bill feels like he’s not even getting anyone’s lips but there’s something strangely intoxicating about it, too, feeling two people’s breath mingling with your own and having hair brushing at your cheeks without really knowing who it belongs to. He doesn’t even realise that Bev has pulled away until he opens his eyes and he’s just kissing Ben. Beverly is still close but she’s just watching them, now.

There’s a chorus of cheers and a lot of clapping around the circle as they pull away and smile at each other sort of goofily, but then Ben gives him a brief hug and he feels better about the whole thing as he laughs into his hair.

Ben doesn’t want to spin the bottle, and they are all starting to get a little bit bored when thankfully, another game is suggested. The suggestion is for them to play Hide ‘N’ Seek and it comes from Richie, and Eddie is hesitant at first and tells them all that it’s stupid but as soon as Richie starts counting and there’s a mass exodus he runs off just like everyone else.
It’s all going well until Mike and Stan try for the same hiding spot. There’s a small closet in the kitchen where the hot water boiler is contained and they keep the cleaning supplies, and Stan is hiding in there quite happily until Mike comes along and yanks the door wide open. They whisper at each other for a long time about who gets to have the hiding spot, until they hear Richie getting close to one hundred and Stan pulls Mike into the closet by the front of his shirt and shuts the door. Neither of them can see; it’s pitch black inside and there’s a broom poking into Stan’s back now that he’s squashed in there with Mike, too, but they’re both a little bit tipsy and neither of those things seem to matter as they hear Richie stop counting.

They’re pressed chest-to-chest, pupils blown in the dark and laboured breaths as they try not to make too much noise. Stan has to stifle a giggle when Richie is right outside the door, and Mike clasps a firm hand across his lips as they both listen intently, but either Richie is too stupid or too drunk to notice the very obvious hiding spot, and he moves on.

“I thought he was gonna find us, for sure,” Mike whispers as he moves his palm away from Stan’s lips to let him speak.

“Yeah…but he might come back. We should…stay here…”

Mike searches in the dark for Stan’s face. His eyes are starting to adjust, now, and he can see that the something soft that has been touching his forehead is some strands of Stan’s curls as he bends slightly in the small space. The closet clearly isn’t made for someone who is over 6 foot tall. Mike is nearly that height, and he’s pretty uncomfortable, too. He reaches up to brush the strands back from Stan’s face—and his own—with a low chuckle.

“I dunno, Stan. I’m not too comfy in here.”

“But what if he finds us and then we lose?”

“You’re really competitive, aren’t you?” Mike chuckles, and Stan gives him a look that says ‘wasn’t that obvious?’

“...I’m not losing this game, so you’re just gonna have to stay here, Mike.”

Some of Stan’s hair falls onto Mike’s forehead again and he brushes it away more quickly this time when it tickles him. Stan only watches him as this happens a few more times, and Mike starts flicking it away repeatedly with increasing exasperation until they’re both stifling giddy laughter and Stan reaches up himself to push it behind his ear out of the way.

“Your breath smells like wine,” Mike half-whispers, half-chuckles into the small space between them and Stan looks amused.

“Yeah, well…yours smells like beer.”

“Point taken. Wine is probably better.”

“It’s definitely better. It’s more sophisticated.”

“There’s nothing sophisticated about you, Stanley,” Mike whispers with a grin, “You’re best friends with Richie, you have a really weird sense of humour that I’m not even sure I get and don’t think I don’t know what you and the other guys have been doing in my barn.”

“You know about that?!”

“Shhhh! Keep your voice down! He’s gonna find us!”
“…I mean it’s…just…a bit of fun…” Stan adds, looking off to the side and waving his hands a little bit as he’s trying to explain himself but he hits Mike in the stomach and Mike grabs for him to stop the movement.

“This room is not big enough for you to be waving your arms around, Mimey.”

There’s a silence between them again as they hear Richie take another walk through the kitchen, followed by the squeak of table or chair legs against the tiles as he knocks into something. They’re both stifling laughter again, but Stan’s laughter is more a copy of Mike’s as he isn’t thinking about whatever Richie is doing out there that is so funny. He’s thinking about how warm Mike’s hands feel in his own, how he’s never noticed before how good Mike smells, how he’s never noticed how plump Mike’s lips looked and how…kissable.

“I’m a little bit disappointed,” Stan whispers, his mouth running off without him, as they hear Richie leave. Mike looks his way again with his eyebrows creased a little.

“Why? About what?”

“The…the game, I…” Stan is stroking his thumbs across the backs of Mike’s hands. Mike’s fingers are rough but the rest of him is soft and it’s a nice contrast, “…was kind of hoping…when I spun it…” He raises his eyes to meet Mike’s as if he’s hoping he’ll piece together the rest of the sentence himself.

“Oh,” Mike drags his bottom lip between his teeth briefly and averts his eyes, and for a brief, terrifying second Stan is worried that he’s said the wrong thing, that he’s made him uncomfortable. He’s about to apologise for being so stupid when Mike’s eyes meet his again and there’s an amused look on his face, “If you want some o’ this you jus’ have to ask.”

It’s said quietly, teasingly, playfully?

Stan smiles then, too, catching a chuckle before it turns into full-blown laughter and he suddenly knows how Bill must feel all of the time, when he stammers out the beginnings of a few different sentences but can’t seem to get his mouth to complete them.

He doesn’t have to complete them, though, because Mike moves forward in the small space to stop his mouth from moving, with his own. It’s soft, so soft, and Stan is sure that it’s going to be fleeting, too, that Mike will pull away any second with an ‘are you happy now?’ expression and leave him wanting more. He doesn’t.

Stan has always thought of himself as a fairly good kisser, not too sloppy and haphazard like Richie, not too timid and unwilling to explore like Eddie, but just on the right side of both. Now he’s kissing Mike, however, he realises that he didn’t really know what kissing was at all. Mike’s lips move against him like he does it every day, like it’s second nature, like he’s somehow overriding Stan’s brain to move his own lips in just the way that will make this even better. He knows exactly how to use his teeth to his advantage, pulling just so at Stan’s lips in all of the right places, enough to leave him wanting more, wanting to chase after him. It’s not rough, not by a long shot, even when he bites it still feels loving and tender, like his every action is meant to cause some sort of pleasurable feeling to his partner. Stan feels like all of the attention is solely focused on him and it’s strangely hypnotic.

A tongue moves in, then, when he’s already feeling a little dizzied. One minute, Mike is peppering kisses across the join of his lips and he can’t resist parting them, getting lost in all of the attention as Mike’s tongue slips into his mouth. It doesn’t feel pushy, like it sometimes can; it’s slow, and careful and teasing and so smooth of a transition that Stan isn’t even sure if he’d be enjoying it
anymore if Mike’s tongue wasn’t in his mouth.

Of course he would.

Mike is like some kind of kissing wizard.

He can feel himself leaning into it, vaguely wondering if he’s coming off a little bit desperate but Mike’s tongue is doing wonderful things to his own and to the roof of his mouth and he wants more of it. One of Mike’s hands is on his hip but he doesn’t even know when it was placed there and he doesn’t care. There’s a broom handle still digging into the small of his back and he reaches behind to shove it aside carelessly. There’s a clatter as it falls against something but it sounds distant, like his ears don’t want to pick anything up aside from their mingled breaths and then the soft thud as Mike gives him a small push and his body hits the wall.

There’s a bit of tugging. Stan’s hands drag at Mike’s shirt, almost like he’s trying to take it off him but he’s not even sure if he is, Mike’s hands pull at Stan’s belt to draw him closer, Stan grips the back of Mike’s neck. It’s heated, now. There are other objects digging into him but Stan doesn’t care. Usually, he feels in control over everything; he likes it that way because it makes him feel safe and secure. But right now this strangely feels like being taken care of, like a burden being lifted from his shoulders as Mike takes the reins and suddenly he’s being hoisted off the floor as if he weighs nothing. He sighs into a warm, waiting mouth as he feels Mike’s body between his legs.

The wall is supporting his back but Mike’s hands are there, firm against the backs of his thighs, firm like the chest that’s holding him in place as he’s plied with more kissing.

He wraps his legs around Mike’s waist eagerly, relishing the feeling of someone else having complete control over the situation. When their lips break apart he’s disappointed, feels the lack of warmth and of Mike’s tongue teasing all of the most sensitive areas of his mouth. He takes a deep breath in, opening his eyes in the dark expecting to see Mike’s face, and not really wanting to because that means that this might be over, but Mike has leaned in to his neck instead. As it turns out, he’s just as skilled there, leaving soft bruises along his skin that feel tingly and warm. It’s a while until he can get out of his own head enough to realise that he has Mike in a near-vice-grip with his thighs, and he’s about to apologise but as soon as he relaxes his muscles Mike is tugging him against his body further to make up for it, like he was enjoying the almost-desperate contact.

A lot of his blood is heading south, now, all the worse for the alcohol in his system and he’s sure that Mike can probably feel it against him but the lips on his neck don’t waver. If anything the kisses get firmer and more meaningful and the hands underneath his thighs are gripping at him and it feels good. He wishes that Mike had longer hair, so that he could pull at it or get his fingers into it or something but he has to settle for grabbing at his back and shoulders instead—which turns out to be an even better option as he can feel the raw muscle there and it just makes this even better.-

“Mike-” he gasps out suddenly into the heavy silence. He’s not even sure if he was going to say anything else when Mike looked up but it doesn’t matter anyway. Stan feels cold in his very bones when there’s a loud, high scream from upstairs –Beverly’s voice- and Mike immediately steps back to let him down. They’re both scrambling to get out, then, and when they make it they’re running up the stairs. Bill and Eddie are behind them, seemingly having come from their own hiding places.

Ben and Richie are up there in the hall, outside Ben and Beverly’s bedroom door, which is closed and seemingly locked. Richie and Ben are both pounding on the door furiously as Ben repeatedly shakes and pulls at the handle.

“BEV! BEVERLY!”
Ben is screaming for her as Stan and the others approach. They can hear Beverly shrieking from inside the room and loud thuds and crashes, one of which is loud against the other side of the door. That’s the point at which Richie steps back before throwing a heavy, booted kick at the door close to the lock. It splinters a little but doesn’t budge. Stan is moved aside, then, as Mike runs past to go and get the spare keys. They can hear him thundering down the stairs.

“BEV! ARE YOU OKAY, BEV?!” Richie adds to Ben’s shouting, pressing himself up against the door to listen. Ben looks frantic. Just as Mike is coming back with the keys, they hear Beverly screaming again and Stan loses it. He steps forward to move Richie and Ben aside, throwing another kick at the door, with a well-polished shoe this time instead of Richie’s boot, although it has significant force behind it and the door bursts open, almost off its hinges as the lock breaks.

They all rush inside to Beverly, who is sitting on the floor by the open window, looking very much shaken and terrified. Her hair is a mess like it’s been pulled at, there are tears streaking her cheeks, the collar of her shirt is ripped and there are bleeding scratches all up her arms and some on her face, like she was struggling against something.

Stan gets to her first, having kicked the door in, and he pulls her into his arms quickly as she clings to him and sobs. Ben and Richie get there next, either side of her with their arms around her back as Eddie comes in, too, looking panicked at the broken furniture in the room. Bill goes straight to the window, leaning out of it and looking around as if whatever it was might still be there somewhere. It isn’t, and he gets his hands on the window to slam it down closed again so hard that it startles them all, including Mike, who is standing in the doorway.

They all watch as he fastens the latch on the window, apart from Beverly who is still crying into Stan’s neck as he strokes the back of her head.

“TH-THAT’S IT!” he shouts, looking briefly like he might punch the wall next to him but he pulls his shaking hand into his side instead, “I’M N-NOT LETTING THIS THING F-F-FUCKING PLAY WITH US ANYMORE!”

Eddie is kneeling beside Beverly, too, now, examining the scratches on one of her arms and quietly reassuring her that it isn’t too bad. The rest of them are still looking at Bill.

“I’m s-s-so sick and tired of being scared in our own home!” he continues, looking to each one of them as if he’s waiting for them to agree, “W-we have to do suh-something!”

Mike comes over to place a reassuring hand on Bill’s shoulder and gives him a nod.

“We will.”

“I agree with Bill,” Richie says, glancing over Beverly again briefly before standing, “If that thing wants to keep coming here, to our house, to try and hurt us then we have to make it so it never wants to come here again.”

Bill looks at Richie expectantly, waiting for him to continue.

“I say we trap this place. Put up…defences…I don’t know! Something! There’s gotta be something we can do to protect ourselves! We’ve fought that thing before, it just keeps catching us off guard!”

Bill and Mike are both nodding, now.

“Yeah,” Mike agrees, “We can…put up trip wires so we know when it’s coming…maybe…stash some weapons or something so we can fight it if it does come back.”
“Yes,” Bill says, loudly, grabbing all of their attention again. Even Beverly is looking at him, now that she’s stopped crying, “W-whatever we do…that thing isn’t g-gonna hurt any of us again,” he hesitates briefly, “Are w-we all in agreement?”

There’s an echo of ‘yes’ around the room. Beverly’s is the loudest, and it’s thick with tears but there’s obvious anger there, too.

Eddie cleans Beverly up in the bathroom and they all sit in there with her while it’s happening. He’s extra gentle as he wipes the blood from the cuts on her arms and cheeks. None of them are too deep, thankfully, and they’ve stopped bleeding already so a lot of it is just dried on. Ben holds her hand from the bathroom floor. Beverly is perched on the closed toilet seat in some clean pyjamas and Stan is close to her, carefully brushing her hair so that he can tie it up. It’s not obvious if he really knows what he’s doing but he manages to get it into a neat-ish bun so it’s out of the way – there are a couple of scrapes on her neck, too, that Eddie wanted to get to-.

That night they all sleep in the same bed yet again, at Bev’s request. It’s still cramped but each time they do it it feels less and less awkward and uncomfortable. They just seem to somehow slot together more easily this time, less afraid of being too close. Beverly is in the middle, of course, and it’s only the presence of them that allows her to actually get to sleep.

And as she’s drifting off she realises something.

That being with these people is the only time she has ever felt truly safe.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry again for this update taking so long. I really have been busy at work.

On a lighter note, with the help of another writer (author of Growing Up A Loser if anyone is familiar) I've set up a Tumblr blog for asking the Losers' Club questions (askpolylosersclub.tumblr.com) in case people are interested. You can ask any Loser anything you like (NSFW is okay, too! They are all over 18) and we will respond as them. (It's a poly thing, too, so feel free to ask about Stozier, Stanlon, Kaspbrough, basically any ship you can think of)

My personal blog is losersclubarepoly.tumblr.com if anyone would like to follow that/send me messages/ideas for this fic/headcanons/just want to chat :)

Chapter 34

Chapter Summary

Sorry for the long wait, again, but hopefully this chapter is worth it :)

Preparations start early the next morning. Mike leaves Stan in charge of the farm and feeding the animals with Ben and Eddie as the rest of them take a trip into town to pick up some supplies. They come back with the car absolutely loaded, but nobody questions this because their safety is at stake, now. Beverly is still a little bit shaken up from the incident the night before and none of them can stand seeing her like this.

Bars go up on the windows first. It seems stupid considering that the creature, whatever it is, seems to be able to materialise out of thin air or something but at least no one can physically be taken from the house that way now. They hide weapons around the house and the barn; there’s a baseball bat -Richie’s personal choice-, in the closet in the kitchen, a 9mm pistol hidden in Bev’s bedside drawer and a number of other things around the rest of the house –most of which are heavy objects that can be picked up and used to swing at something to do impact damage.

The pistol was Bev’s idea and as soon as they bought it, she was the one to practice using it until she was a crack shot. Beverly seems to have some sort of supernatural aim with long range weapons –just like the slingshot when they were kids- and it seems like guns are no different. Besides, although they all sort of hate to admit it, she looks kind of hot holding it. Beverly herself feels empowered. Not only that, but after being attacked in her own bedroom she feels much safer knowing that it’s there.

They place traps around the farm, predominantly tripwires and such that will alert them if anyone or anything should get too close. After a few trips to the library and hours spent poring over old books, they decide to keep stashes of salt and holy water hidden around, too, just in case. None of them are really sure what this being is, but at this point they’re willing to take every single precaution to make sure that nobody else gets hurt.

In the following days after placing the traps, hiding the various weapons and making sure that everyone knows the ins and outs of exactly where everything is, how to prep the traps and what the plan is in the event of it coming back, they begin working on themselves. Beverly, for one, is the most adamant about this. In the days since her attack, she’s been antsy and irritable, feeling angry at herself for not being able to fight back. So they decide to get the group in shape. Mike spends days in the field adjoining the farm, mowing the grass down flat and preparing a sort of running track for them all to use. It’s vast, and Richie, being the heavy smoker of the group, feels sick just looking at it when it’s finished.

Nobody is left out. Ben –being the one who was on the track team at school and is insanely fast and in good shape-, wakes them all early each morning to come out and run laps. At first, Richie can’t even do half of it without landing himself in a heavy fit of coughing so bad that they all have to stop to see if he’s okay. One day, he coughs so bad that he has to sit down on the grass and goes red in the face. They all crowd around him, Mike patting and rubbing at his back as Bill runs back to the house to get him some water. When it’s finally over and he croaks out a weak ‘I’m okay’, it’s the last straw for Eddie. He tells Richie that he must quit smoking once and for all. His decision
isn’t met kindly by Richie, who insists that he’s okay and that he can handle it and that he usually doesn’t get that out of breath. Unfortunately for Richie, the rest of them take Eddie’s side, even Bev, as a smoker herself, who tells him that they can do it together and makes a show of throwing away her own packet of Marlboro’s right in front of him. It’s met with a fond smile from Ben, especially.

Thus, Richie’s journey to becoming smoke-free begins there. At first, it’s tough. It makes his ADHD worse than ever, and his fingers shake and he gets twitchy so often that the others have to find constant distractions for him. He gets grumpy, too, snapping at the least little thing and it’s so unlike Richie that they all almost consider letting him have his cigarettes back –Stan confiscated them-. That is, until one day, Eddie suddenly speaks up as they’re all sitting together and tells Richie that any time he feels a craving coming on, he can have a kiss to distract himself. Richie doesn’t seem to hate the idea too much after that. In fact, he and Eddie seem to spend a lot of time kissing in the following days to that bright idea, so much so that the others start to wonder if Richie’s cravings really happen as often as he says they do, or if he just wants to keep making out with Eddie. If you asked anyone else, they’d say that Eddie doesn’t seem to mind this arrangement too much, either.

So Richie runs the track with the rest of them after that. His distances get greater and greater, and although he has to constantly have nicotine patches stuck to his arms, his long legs mean that he is actually surprisingly fast. Eddie teaches him breathing exercises that he uses himself when he’s running and his chest gets tight, and even occasionally lets Richie use his inhaler when he seems to particularly be struggling to catch his breath. In fact, Eddie seems to be fawning over Richie a lot more, now that he’s decided to quit smoking and doesn’t smell of cigarettes anymore or constantly have one between his fingers or hanging from his lips.

They spend a lot more time together as a group in general. Not only do they enjoy each other’s company more than words can express, but there’s safety in numbers and they feel most secure when all seven of them are there. There’s a rule made that nobody should go anywhere alone – except to the bathroom-, including sleeping. This change means that the single room ends up unused, as Stan and Bill opt to share Mike’s bed, which is the largest one in the house, with Bev and Ben in one of the double guest rooms and Richie and Eddie in the other. Mike is fine with this arrangement; he’s a friendly, comforting person in general and is more than happy to sleep squashed up to either of them. Bill sleeps in the middle, though, as Stan doesn’t really like to be touched while he’s sleeping. Most nights, Bill and Mike leave him one side of the bed to himself and spoon together in the other. Bill is quite content to have Mike’s arms wrapped around him. He feels safe like that.

Life gets good, then. Really good. The house becomes more and more like a home as the days go by. Sharing each other’s company becomes second nature and they fight less and less. It seems odd, given their close proximity, for them to not have quarrels or at least bicker more often, but it’s the exact opposite. The more time they spend together, the closer they feel, the safer they feel, the happier they feel. The days blur together, then. Mornings are spent training together on the track, timing each other’s laps, shouting encouragements, handing out bottles of water and towels to mop up sweat –mostly from Richie because he sweats an insane amount-. Evenings are spent huddled together in the lounge in piles of limbs in front of the TV or the fireplace. At dinnertimes, there’s a raucous, familial energy in the air. Even Richie’s terrible and sometimes offensive jokes are met with laughter and praise and fond looks.

They don’t go out much. It’s not spoken between them but there’s a constant fear of them becoming separated if they leave the house. It’s almost like a protective bubble. That is, until Richie finally snaps and tells them all that he’s so bored that he’s going to die –he always has a flair for the dramatics- and they decide that it’s finally time to do something other than sit in front
of the TV. They plan the trip to stick closely together, staying in pairs if they have to and if someone has to go to the bathroom, they have to be accompanied there.

Derry isn’t really known for its lively night scene, but there are a few bars and clubs, especially now that older buildings have been torn down in favour of the new. Richie and Bev are certainly the party animals of the group and they are the ones who decide for them to go to one of the more popular clubs. Eddie hates the idea of dancing in front of people and the thought of being trapped in a small space with sweaty, writhing bodies freaks him out, but everyone else seems to want to go and he’s out numbered. Mike promises to stay close to him and look after him.

They get to the club at about ten o’clock at night, and it’s already packed. Mike, as promised, stays close to Eddie as they go inside. It’s loud, obnoxiously so in Eddie’s opinion, and just as cramped and filled with people as he feared. There’s a heavy beat in the air, covering the vaguely indistinct chatter of voices, and it’s so dark that it’s difficult to see, even with the blue and purple strobe lights that dance across the walls.

Richie and Beverly head straight for the bar, hands clasped as they move their way through the crowd like they’ve done this a million times before. Beverly is in a short, black dress that looks more like a large t-shirt, her hair tied up loosely on the top of her head with pretty strands hanging around her face. Her wrists are covered in various bangles and beads, just like Richie’s always are, and there are pretty little studs in her ears which glint in the lights. Richie has put no more effort into his outfit than he usually does.

The night moves pretty smoothly. They find a sort of booth to sit in together and Eddie stays close to Mike as the others gradually get up to dance. Nobody is sure how, but drinks keep appearing at the table faster than they can disappear, probably Beverly and Richie’s doing and it doesn’t go to waste. At one point, even Bill and Stan get up to go and join the throng of people on the dancefloor, leaving Eddie, Mike and Ben sitting alone at the table.

“What’s wrong, Eds?” Mike leans in to speak into Eddie’s ear over the music, “You don’t look like you’re enjoying yourself.”

“That’s because I’m not!” Eddie calls back without leaning in, sliding his drink around the table between his hands. He hates the way Ben and Mike both look at him sympathetically, like he’s some kind of child.

“Don’t you wanna dance?!” Ben asks, helpfully, but Eddie shakes his head and takes another sip of his drink. It’s some sort of sweet concoction that has a sour aftertaste and he’s not sure if he entirely likes it, but it’s gradually taking away some of his discomfort at being here. He can’t stop thinking about the fact that the table is sticky and that’s bothering him more than anything else.

As the night progresses, they see Richie, Bev, Stan and Bill pass the table a few times, not always together. Bev pulls Ben up to dance at one point, leaving Mike and Eddie alone. Mike doesn’t seem unhappy at all, though. If anything he looks content just to watch his friends having a good time. He especially seems pleased when Bill and Ben come back to the table together, looking decidedly out of breath and a bit hot. The ends of Bill’s bangs are sticking to his face and Eddie can’t help but draw his eyes to the soft sheen on his jaw as he drops down beside him to take a drink.

“Woah! Guys, you have g-g-got to get out there! It’s amazing!” he shouts, louder than he probably needs to, as he downs the rest of the liquid in his glass. Eddie isn’t sure why but he has the urge to do the same, and seeing Bill’s approving look spurs him on as he throws back his own drink in one. The glass sticks to the table a little bit when he puts it back down, but he doesn’t think about it this time.
“Eds, come and d-dance with me!” Bill suddenly blurts out, then, holding out a hand for Eddie to take. It only takes a glance at Mike and Ben and nods from their direction to make the decision for him, and he slides his hand into Bill’s slightly-sweaty palm, allowing himself to be pulled out of the booth to his feet, and into the crowd.

It’s a lot different to sitting in the booth and being an observer to all of it. Eddie is sure that if he wasn’t already a little bit tipsy he would feel super claustrophobic right now, but that and Bill’s hand tight in his own is making him feel much better about it. He can’t see any of the others in the sea of people, although there’s a mop of black hair sticking out of the top of the crowd nearby that could potentially be Richie.

“Dance with me!” Bill says again as he suddenly stops, and Eddie crashes into his chest. It earns a laugh from Bill, and Eddie, in his mildly inebriated state, chuckles too. He would have died before dancing with someone, even Bill, in front of all of these people but now that he’s had a drink it seems like a good idea. He likes dancing, he decides, as he moves with Bill. Bill has grabbed his other hand, now, too, fingers linking and unlinking as they try to find a grip that’s comfortable.

Someone knocks Eddie from behind at one point and he has to move closer to Bill’s body. Their hands have broken apart at this point but Bill gets a palm on Eddie’s lower back to stop him from falling. It must be the alcohol because Eddie thinks it feels nice, to have Bill’s hand on him right there. They’re almost pressed flush together at this point.

They dance for what feels like hours, body to body, Bill’s lips occasionally ghosting over Eddie’s cheek in their close proximity. Eddie feels fantastic, like he could dance forever. He doesn’t know how much time has actually passed but he doesn’t care. He’s pretty sure that at one point, he might have been kissing Bill while they were dancing.

There’s another body, pressed against his back, shortly after. He doesn’t know when it happened but they smell like Richie and he sees a hand with ringed fingers snake around his waist onto his stomach. It feels insanely good, dancing in between Bill and Richie like this. There’s something almost sexual about it, and he feels a little bit dizzy in the heat of it. He vaguely remembers seeing Bill and Richie’s lips meeting over his shoulder for a while, and he’s positive that Richie’s mouth was on his neck, too, slow and wet and hot and driving him a little crazy.

It’s still a blur after that. Bill disappears into the crowd for a while and Eddie and Richie dance alone. Every grind of Richie’s hips against his ass is like torture and he half considers dragging him into the toilets for a quick fuck up against a cubicle or something. Usually he would find that absolutely disgusting and degrading but right now it seems like a good idea. He starts to wonder if he might actually be half-hard in his jeans, or if he’s just imagining it. He also wonders if he might have had too much to drink.

They continue to dance early into the next morning, frequently returning to the booth for more drinks. Eddie holds Richie’s hand every time, caring less and less about the sweat and the sticky table each time they come back. Once, when they come back for their last drinks as it’s getting to the point where they’re all tiring, Mike and Ben are locked in a heavy make out session against the seat, and Richie sits right next to them to watch as he finishes his drink, before Eddie drags him away to dance again.

Finding Bev, Bill and Stan isn’t easy. Eddie is sure that people should be going home by now, but if anything it seems to be getting more and more crowded. They search and search on the dance floor, occasionally stopping to have another little session –because they’re pretty drunk at this point-. Eventually, Richie tells Eddie very loudly that he needs to take a piss, so Eddie is reluctantly dragged along with him.
It takes them another ten minutes to actually find the toilets in the dark and the masses of people, but eventually they make it. Richie practically falls inside, as he elbows the door open while still holding Eddie’s hands. It’s much quieter inside but the soft beat of the music is still very audible through the walls. Eddie is about to tell Richie to hurry up when they hear something else. There’s a definite moaning coming from inside one of the toilet stalls, only it’s not a male voice. The door of the stall isn’t locked properly.

“This…this is the…men’s toilets…right?” Richie asks Eddie with his brows knitted together. His words are very slightly slurred. Eddie gives him a nod, before trying to drag him away when Richie approaches the cubicle that the sounds are coming from. Eddie approaches it warily, too, still trying to pull Richie away, when they hear it again and it all becomes too clear.

“…Bev?!” Richie all but shouts, pushing the door of the cubicle. He’s clearly ready to intervene in whatever is happening in there with Beverly and this mysterious guy, but he and Eddie both stop in their tracks when they see what’s actually inside.

Beverly is standing in the cubicle against Stan, whose back is up to the wall. He has his arms around her, seemingly holding her up due to what is going on lower down, which, subsequently, is Bill on his knees with his head between her thighs. Beverly looks decidedly wrecked, all flushed cheeks and hair falling out of its band. She seemed to have been wearing tinted lipgloss at one point but it’s now smeared across onto her cheek. Stan seems to have the same shade of colour across his own mouth. Her underwear, a small pair of lacy, black panties, which Richie is sure he’s never seen before—even though he’s seen her in her underwear on numerous occasions- is hanging loosely from one of her ankles, on the leg that is currently hooked over Bill’s shoulder. The hem of her dress is clasped in one of Stan’s hands.

Eddie is sure that if he hadn’t been drinking, this would have been the most embarrassing thing he’d ever seen in his life. Fortunately, he has been drinking because the second someone else enters the washroom, Richie is dragging him inside the cubicle to shut the door again, with all five of them squashed inside.

Beverly doesn’t even seem shocked that they’re there, observing her in this sort of state. All of them have been drinking, that much is evident, as Bill doesn’t stop what he’s doing even after he sees Richie and Eddie, and Stan has to clasp a hand over Beverly’s mouth to muffle the desperate sound that comes out as Richie moves Bill away. Bill falls back onto his knees, his lips looking decidedly wet and his hair a bit dishevelled from being pressed between Beverly’s thighs, but he looks pleased with himself.

They all wait in silence as they hear whoever it is relieving themselves in one of the urinals, before leaving without washing their hands. Eddie is about to make a comment about it when Beverly gasps again and they look back to see that Bill has gone straight to work on her again. She is clutching at Stan’s arms with her fingernails almost roughly, but he doesn’t seem to mind, and the way he’s holding her is almost loving as she writhes against him. None of them have ever seen her like this before, and even Eddie feels strangely taken in by how beautiful she looks with the strands of red hair sticking to her flushed cheeks and her lips parted softly in ecstasy.

Richie leans in to press a kiss into her cheek, and Eddie watches with fascination as one of his hands comes up to the front of her dress over one of her breasts. He whispers something into her ear and Eddie sees her nod frantically, voice getting breathier and more high pitched by the second. Stan has leaned in to kiss at her neck, now, too, and it only makes her grip him harder as she reaches a hand up into his curls. Eddie can see that her pale thighs are trembling, and he wonders what exactly it is that Bill is doing to her to undo her like this. He can’t help himself, then, as he crouches next to Bill to get a better look. He can see Bill’s tongue coming out to lap over her, see
his hands pressed on the insides of her thighs to hold them apart.

“...Please-” Beverly mutters, then, her voice high and pretty and Eddie looks up at her face instinctively. Her eyes are barely visible beneath thick lashes and the freckles on her face are prominent in the pink hue of her cheeks. Richie’s hand is underneath her dress, now, moving beneath the fabric across her chest.

Eddie doesn’t even really know what she’s asking, or who she’s asking it to, but he feels the unfamiliar urge to give it to her anyway. Beverly is a woman, and he knows that he isn’t attracted to women, but Beverly is different...Beverly is one of his soulmates.

“Here.”

Eddie looks to his right at the sound of Bill’s voice, catching his eyes as Bill reaches out for one of Eddie’s hands. He lets him take it, lets him lead it across and between Beverly’s thighs. It’s insanely hot there, that’s the first thing Eddie notices, and when his hand connects with her he can feel that it’s wet, too. She visibly shudders above him at the contact. He’s not really sure what to do from here, but Bill guides him, doing the motion with his hand to show him what to do, so he presses up with one of his fingers, surprised both at how easily it slips inside her body, and at the lustful noise it draws from her when it does.

Richie is watching him now, too, with an unreadable expression.

“Is this...okay?” Eddie asks tentatively, not to anyone in particular, but he feels Beverly’s hips move, like she’s desperate to find more contact, and pushes his finger in deeper. Bill leans in, then, to continue working with his tongue, and a few times it brushes Eddie’s palm and there’s something insanely arousing about the whole situation. Eddie isn’t sure that he’d be here if he hadn’t been drinking, but even then, the sounds that Beverly is making, and the knowledge that what they are all doing is making her feel so good, is spurring him on.

He still has no clue what he’s doing, but every time he moves his finger it draws some kind of a response from her, and eventually, with a little coaching from Bill, he starts it into some kind of a rhythm. Eddie has never touched a woman like this before, and he isn’t entirely sure that he’d want to do it again, especially not with someone who isn’t Beverly, but there’s still something weirdly hypnotic about it, about the way her hips roll with the movements he makes, about how easy and slick it is, about the soft noises it draws from her lips.

“P-push it...deeper...” Beverly’s voice comes, breathless, after a short while, and Eddie knows that it’s directed at him this time, so he does it, and it earns a more pronounced sound from her this time. He still has no clue what he’s doing, but there’s a spot inside her that he can feel with his fingertip that has a different texture to the rest, and each time he touches it, her hips and her breath shudder. So he focuses on that, trying his best to get his finger on it. After that, she’s even more responsive, and Eddie knows that he must be doing something right by the way her eyes screw shut in pleasure. Her breath comes more sharply and it’s laced with little, soft shouts of ‘yes’ and ‘right there’. Even Richie looks a little bit shocked.

“...Are you fucking kidding me? The first time Eddie’s ever seen a vagina and he finds her fucking G-Spot?”

Eddie doesn’t really register the comment. He’s too absorbed in Beverly’s increasing desperation as she clutches at Stan and Richie and hooks her knee in tighter over Bill’s shoulder. Eddie scoots closer on his knees so he can get a better angle, and it only takes a few more seconds before he feels the muscles contracting around his finger and she lets out a shaky cry. Bill pulls back first, looking up to watch as Stan and Richie hold her steady.
When Eddie pulls his finger out, gently—he’s not sure if it hurts the same as having it inside your ass but he’s still careful about it—Bill wipes at him with some toilet roll and then flushes it. Eddie moves out of the way as Bill carefully pulls Beverly’s underwear back up and Stan lets go of the hem of her dress so that Bill can smooth it out. Beverly looks kind of washed out but totally relaxed and happy.

“...Oh my god…you guys…”

“Hey...how were we supposed to know that Eddie would be so good at fingering?” Richie chuckles as she turns her head each way to first give Stan a kiss, and then Richie. She pulls in Bill, too, and then looks at Eddie expectantly.

“...W...I didn’t...really know what I was doing I just…”

Beverly pulls him in before he can finish and presses their lips together, and Eddie, quite happily in his alcohol-plied state, kisses her back. Beverly’s lips are soft and now that he’s kissed her twice he thinks that it’s actually quite nice. There’s even a little bit of tongue, just for him—because he saw her kiss the other guys and knows that there wasn’t any—and he feels a little bit special, chuckling as they pull apart.

They decide to go home, then, making their way back to the booth where Mike and Ben are still sitting. They aren’t kissing anymore but they’re still sitting very close together and Ben is watching Mike with a sort of drunk fascination as he talks. It takes a long time to get everyone out of the nightclub, as they’re all being quite handsy—Richie in particular—and it takes even longer to get back to the farmhouse. They have to walk, obviously, since Mike wanted to drink, too, so he left his car behind.

As they walk through the town, they sing, loudly and out of tune. Bev has her arms around Stan and Richie and they keep picking her off the ground, which results in her squealing and giggling every time. Eventually, Stan picks her up on his back and Richie has to walk behind them to hold down her dress so she doesn’t show her panties to the whole town.

When they finally get back to the house, it’s nearly four in the morning, and it takes Mike a few tries to get the front door open when he can’t find the right key on his fob. The rest of them watch him in a sort of huddle. They’re all feeling the cold, now that they’ve taken a walk in it.

“GOT IT!” Mike shouts, and it echoes into the silence of the farm and startles some of the animals into making alarmed noises nearby. Eddie hushes him with a finger to his lips and a drunken giggle, as they all practically fall into the house at the same time. There’s a strange rush, then, to get upstairs. Beverly disappears into one of the bedrooms with Stan and Richie, while Ben and Mike stumble into Mike’s room. There’s a lot of laughter involved.

Bill and Eddie watch all of this happen from the top of the stairs with vague amusement, and share a glance with one another before Bill lets out a soft chuckle.

“Um...I guess...I’ll just g-g-go to...bed...” he says, rather quietly, motioning to the small room with the single bed but Eddie is quick to butt in.

“Can I just...sit with you for a while? Besides...we’re not supposed to sleep alone...right?”

Bill smiles and nods his head, his hand moving awkwardly on top of one of the wooden posts of the stairwell for a brief second, before they both head into the single room. Neither of them really know why they go into that one, when there’s a perfectly good double room right next door that’s been left empty, but it must be something to do with the alcohol they’ve consumed.
Eddie closes the door softly when they get inside, and they’re both briefly drawn to the sound of Beverly’s high-pitched laughter from another room through the walls, sharing another glance and a fond chuckle before they sit together on the edge of the bed.

There’s still a sheen of sweat across Bill’s skin, drying now from the cold but faintly visible, especially across his collarbone beneath his shirt and on his cheekbones and jaw. Eddie can understand it. It was sweltering in the club, with the heat from tightly-packed bodies and the effort of dancing so hard and for so long. He feels quite worn out, himself.

“W-what you did to Beverly…” Bill starts suddenly, drawing Eddie’s attention back up to his eyes, “It was…r-r-really…hot…”

Eddie feels a little bit nervous, suddenly, but he doesn’t know why. He still feels light headed and a bit tipsy, and he’s come to the realisation that he’s never actually been alone with Bill like this. Not since they had sex, and even then, Richie and Stan were both there, too.

“It wasn’t…I mean…I don’t know why I did it, I just…it was weird. It was like an-”

“I-impulse,” Bill says, finishing the sentence for him, and there’s a stretched out silence between them as they look into each other’s eyes and Eddie nods his head so slightly that he thinks that Bill can’t have even seen it.

For a while, neither of them speak, and Eddie is startlingly aware of the place where their shoulders press together. He doesn’t remember sitting this close to Bill, but it feels nice. Being next to Bill just feels nice in general. It has for as long as Eddie has known him. It feels sort of unreal, knowing that all this time, Eddie had feelings for his best friend. All this time he had fantasies of kissing Bill’s lips, of catching that stutter in his own mouth, of being drawn into that tall, strong body.

Now, when he’s this close, he knows that he can have that if he wants it but it still doesn’t feel like reality.

He feels Bill’s thigh press against his own. They’re still watching each other in the dark, neither saying a word but Eddie feels like there’s some sort of tension building between them the longer they stay silent. Bill’s hand is so close to his own on the bed, so warm and inviting and Eddie can’t help but reach out for it. When he does, Bill’s palm turns up and he laces their fingers together.

“Bill…I…” Eddie finally breaks the silence, thinking that it will break the tension but if anything it feels worse than before as Bill’s piercing eyes really focus on his own, now, “…You know that I’ve always liked you, right?”

Bill nods and smiles softly, and Eddie feels fingers tighten in his own.

“No.” Eddie is fidgeting, now, “As more than friends. This whole time. I mean I always looked up to you, of course…but…I always sort of…wanted you.”

Bill’s smile becomes more understanding, then, and it makes Eddie feel a little bit embarrassed.

“That’s okay, Eds…”

“No. You don’t understand what I’m saying. I…I always wanted to kiss you, Bill…I…every time I looked at your face, I wanted to kiss you so bad. I imagined what it was like…all the time.”

Bill is about to speak again but Eddie stops him with a look.
“I didn’t just wanna kiss you…” It’s all coming spilling out, now, “I…had fantasies…about you touching me…” He sees Bill sit a little straighter. “I used to lie awake at night…wondering what was wrong with me…”

“What else did you think about?” Bill asks suddenly, and Eddie isn’t sure he understands the question at first, but when it dawns on him he doesn’t hesitate. He thinks maybe it’s the alcohol making him more confident.

“I…thought about you…touching me…and making me come…” His breath shakes a little when he feels Bill’s hand move onto his thigh, “And…whispering dirty things in my ear…” He can barely think straight, then, as Bill’s hand slides down between his legs over the front of his jeans. He’s getting hard already, he knows he is, and the thick, denim fabric is starting to feel restricting. He lifts his hips from the bed against Bill’s palm.

“W-what else?”

“Y…your lips…” He’s finding it difficult to talk as Bill’s hand starts to rub at him through his trousers.

“What about my lips?”

Bill’s voice is lower, now, but he’s closer, turning towards him on the bed. His lips are almost on Eddie’s ear and the sensation of Bill’s breath there is working him up further.

“I thought about your lips…all over me…” Bill’s lips brush his ear and he shivers and bucks against his palm again, trying to search for more friction. Thankfully, Bill reaches over properly to unfasten Eddie’s belt and unpop the button on his jeans. As he slides the zip down, Eddie watches with bated breath until he sees Bill’s palm disappear into his waistband, “Ah…I…I thought about you going down on me…” he manages to blurt out, earning a harder press of Bill’s hand that makes him shudder and spread his thighs, “Bill…Bill, please…”

“Did you t-touch yourself?” Bill asks then, and Eddie can see him swallow heavily as if he’s waiting for the answer. All Eddie can do is nod in reply as he watches the vague shape of Bill’s hand inside his jeans. He’s a little bit worried that he’s put him off, then. Like maybe that wasn’t the answer Bill wanted to hear, as he retracts his hand and moves away.

“T-take off your clothes,” he says then, suddenly, and Eddie doesn’t have to be told twice. He kicks off his shoes, first, before shedding everything but his underwear. He can see Bill doing the same out of the corner of his eye but it doesn’t really hit him until Bill moves onto the bed properly and pulls Eddie with him, and Eddie lands right on top of him, chest-to-chest.

Bill’s eyes scan Eddie’s own for a while, as if he’s looking for some kind of indication that this is not okay. He clearly doesn’t find one, though, because soon after that their lips are moving together and tongues collide and it’s hot and wet and wonderful. Eddie gets lost in the moment, still a bit drunk, and he starts grinding his hips down into Bill’s, feeling relieved at the sensation that Bill is just as hard as he is. It feels amazing, for a while, and Eddie kind of wants to just come like this. He could; he’s certain that he could, and from Bill’s soft groans into his mouth and the occasional jolt of his hips he’s thinking that Bill could, too.

But Bill seems to have other plans for them, and out of the corner of his eye he faintly sees Bill reach out to the bedside drawer and fumble around inside it, without breaking the kiss. It’s a while before he actually pulls something out of it but when he does, Eddie sees that it’s a small tube of clear liquid. The label has been peeled off, both front and back. It’s obviously some kind of lube, and judging by the missing label Eddie thinks that this must be Bill’s own supply, perhaps that he
uses for himself when he’s alone. He briefly imagines Bill using this when he jacks himself off, fingers slick and sheets pooled around his ankles as he bites at his lip and tries to stay quiet, but the image is too much and he pulls himself back to reality when he feels Bill push the small tube into his hand.

He searches Bill’s face, then, for a reason that he might be giving it to him, but Bill only pushes it into his hand harder, and when Eddie doesn’t cooperate, unscrews the cap, takes Eddie’s hand and squirts some of it onto his fingers.

“B…Bill…”

“P-please.”

Eddie’s mind feels quite blank, then, as he comes to the realisation that Bill might possibly want Eddie to fuck him. It takes him a while to snap back to reality, during which time Bill has manoeuvred himself free of his boxers beneath him and tossed them aside. He is still watching Eddie with an air of expectance, and Eddie thinks that he looks almost…embarrassed for wanting it this way, and Eddie doesn’t want him to feel like that, not for one second. He nods at him as a signal that he’s okay with it, before reaching down between them to press a finger to Bill’s hole.

He’s never done this to anyone before, and only on himself a couple of times after he and Richie first had sex, although he knows how it works by now and he presses against the tight ring of muscle until his finger starts to slide in. Bill gasps a little, but he doesn’t seem to be in any sort of pain, so Eddie keeps pushing; keeps pushing until he feels like he can’t go any further, and then stops.

“Is this okay?” Eddie asks quietly, earning a quick—and rather enthusiastic- nod from his best friend. He sees Bill pulls his knees up a little bit, and recognises what he must be feeling, so, without thinking it over too much, he slowly adds another finger. It doesn’t feel much different, other than the angle, to doing this to himself. He can sense when it will go further and when he needs to wait for it to adjust, and he works accordingly. Using this knowledge, he manages to work him up to the point where it feels good pretty fast. He can tell by the way Bill’s eyelids flutter and his breaths come more sharply.

Eddie’s fingers are dainty; thin, like Beverly’s so it doesn’t stretch too much but clearly just long enough to reach where they need to go and pretty soon Bill is asking him for more and gasping and Eddie feels strangely empowered. He’s seen Bill like this, underneath Stan or Richie but never underneath him. It feels good, to be the one causing Bill this sort of pleasure. This sort of pleasure that he understands all too well himself, now.

The preparation doesn’t last long; Bill is impatient and he keeps whining at Eddie for more and it’s driving him crazy. A couple of times, Bill told him how good he was doing and it nearly broke him completely, hearing Bill praise him like that for something so dirty. When he pulls his fingers out—three, now-, Bill’s head is back against the pillow, his hair sticking to his face again like it was in the club, chest rising and falling rapidly as he tries to keep himself moderately composed.

He watches at Bill’s hand dips into the drawer again to pull out a condom, and Eddie is worried for a second that Bill is just going to throw it at him and leave him to it, but he sits up and rips open the packet. Eddie is embarrassed to admit that he’s actually never worn a condom before, but Bill doesn’t seem to care about any of that. He rolls the condom on for him, placing a rather wet kiss to Eddie’s lips for good measure as he gives him a few strokes to work him up that leaves Eddie a little bit speechless.

“Are you s-sure you’re okay with this?” Bill whispers against Eddie’s lips. Bill’s hand feels a bit cold, and that’s when he realises that he must be coating him with some more of the lube. It’s an
odd feeling but not all unpleasant. Eddie can only nod in response as Bill drops back away from him and against the bed again.

He can’t help but feel strangely excited, then, as he watches Bill part his legs and moves between them. He’s always sort of wondered what it would feel like from this side of things, and he’s finally going to get to find out. He feels like it couldn’t really have been with anyone but Bill. He’s about to ask if it’s okay for him to go in, but one of Bill’s hands gets on his hips and pulls him closer and he doesn’t have to.

He realises then, as the tip of his dick sort of pops past that first ring of muscle, what all of the fuss is about. It’s so unbelievably tight and hot that it leaves him a little bit breathless, and for a second he’s sure that if he moves any further he’s going to come. He can see Bill biting at his lower lip, but that hand stays firm on his hip, still pulling, encouraging him closer.

“…I-it’s okay…” Bill says softly, sounding a bit out of breath already, and Eddie shifts his hips forward another inch or two. Bill’s thighs are resting over his own and it gives him a strange sense of reassurance to have part of Bill’s warm body there, heavy and strangely grounding. He stops when Bill groans in what might almost be pain, but the hand on his hip tightens to stop him from pulling out like he was going to. “N-no…keep going…”

It goes slowly like this for another couple of minutes until Eddie feels like he’s comfortably inside. Comfortably for him, at least. It’s better than anything he’s ever felt before, and he feels like he totally gets it, now. Bill’s thighs are shaking ever-so-slightly against his own, and the feeling of being the one to have caused that is the best thing yet.

“It…f-feels good. Really,” Bill says before he can ask, but there’s a soft strain to his voice which makes Eddie not so sure. He takes his time before he starts to move, only doing so when Bill’s grip tightens on him rather desperately. Stopping himself from moaning out loud is the hardest thing. He thought that it was good before, but moving his hips, feeling the slow rub of tight heat all around him is the best fucking torture.

He works up to a slow grind, in a sort of rhythm, when Bill looks like he’s comfortable with it, and it reaches a point when he can’t help himself and he has to moan. Bill looks a little taken aback by it at first, but Eddie feels thighs press tight against his waist, and hips start to rock back against his own, and it increases the sensation tenfold.

“Fuck…Bill…” he whines, and his hips stutter when Bill tugs him in closer, lifts his hips against Eddie’s for a better angle. He’s sure that it feels good for Bill, too. His breath is shaky, and getting faster, but he seems so drawn in by Eddie’s enjoyment of it that he’s forgetting himself. It completely changes, though, when Eddie can’t stop himself and he starts to move faster, dropping first one hand against the bed next to Bill, and then the other, to brace himself.

Bill’s thighs press hard into him, then, and there’s a soft, almost desperate whine from Bill’s throat. He can feel the movements getting easier as the muscles relax, aided by the lubricant, almost as if Bill’s body has decided to accept him. Their hips hit together, once, as Eddie presses a bit too hard but Bill’s head snaps back and so does one of his hands, and he fumbles with the pillow to get a grip on it, mirroring the action on Eddie’s waist.

“D-d-do that again-” he breathes, and Eddie immediately tries to find whatever it was that he did, moving further over Bill’s body so he can rock his hips harder. It feels insanely good, so much so that he’s not sure how he hasn’t come yet, but it feels like Bill is all that matters, now. A breathy ‘yes’ from Bill tells him that he’s doing something right, and he finds the courage to get over him properly. Bill’s face is right beneath his own, now, his mouth opening and closing in silent pleasure with words that just won’t come out as Eddie presses him as hard as he can manage into
the bed with each thrust. It must be pretty hard, because the bed is creaking slightly against the wooden floorboards, but in the middle of this sort of pleasure he can’t seem to bring himself to care.

It’s not long before he gets what he really wants, and Bill is scrambling at the sheets more frequently, switching between that and grabbing for Eddie’s hips. When Eddie’s name leaves Bill’s lips on a whine, he finally loses his last shred of self-restraint. He was holding back, really, even with his own hips hitting Bill’s on each movement. When he sets the pace that he really wants, it leaves him gripping for the sheets just as much as Bill, and he’s sure that if Bill doesn’t come soon that he’s going to finish first.

“Oh my god…” he breathes, breath hot against Bill’s cheek, but Bill grabs at his face to try and get his attention, ghosting their lips together and kissing him solidly a few times through heavy breaths. Eddie’s name seems to be frequently leaving Bill’s mouth, now, against his lips, and it’s so unbelievably sexy that Eddie can’t focus.

“E-Eddie…please…” Bill’s breath is so hot against his lips that it’s making them feel wet, and he’s so close he can feel it burning right in the base of his abdomen, but he opens his eyes to look into Bill’s anyway.

“What? Tell me…tell me what you want…” he manages to choke out. Bill’s thighs are so tight against him that it’s overwhelming.

“I’m s-so close…” Bill whines. His blue eyes are hazy with lust and Eddie can’t look away, “M-make me come…”

Eddie would usually have been so flustered by hearing those words coming out of Bill’s mouth, and he almost can’t believe that they’re directed at him, but he’s not one to say no to a request like that, especially not from Bill. He snaps his hips harder against Bill’s, watching as his head goes back and feeling the sudden urge to get his lips on his neck, so he does, sucking and biting at him to try and distract himself from his own need for release as he continues to fuck Bill so hard into the bed that he’s not even sure he knew he had it in him.

Bill comes not long after that, crying out so loudly that someone else must have heard, but Eddie watches him through it and slides a hand under Bill’s back when it arches from the bed. It’s nothing like he’s ever experienced before.

He’s so close himself, but coming inside Bill doesn’t feel right, now, and he pulls out when Bill finally settles, earning a confused look.

“Oh…”

He pulls the condom off, too, carelessly tossing it aside in his haze, and he gets his hand on himself instead, deciding to just work through the last of it like this. Bill sees what he’s doing and scoots closer on the bed. Eddie is still between his thighs but Bill pushes himself up onto his hands and glides his palm across Eddie’s chest, pinching at one of his nipples and shocking a shaky moan out of him. His hand is slick with pre-come, and he’s so close that Bill’s hushed encouragements are all it takes to push him over the edge and he comes hard right onto Bill’s bare stomach and chest. Bill doesn’t seem to care, though, and he moves Eddie’s hand away and strokes him through the rest of it slowly, rubbing his thumb through some of the sticky, white liquid at the tip in vague fascination. Eddie eventually has to push Bill’s hand away when it gets too much, too sensitive, with a shaky ‘stop’.

They lay together in their state of undress, then, after cleaning up, both feeling too hot and sweaty
to cover themselves with the sheets for a while. Eddie is sure that he’s going to regret this in the morning, mostly the alcohol consumption. His head feels like it’s starting to hurt a little already. Eventually, he falls asleep with Bill’s fingers lacing through his hair and running over his scalp lazily.

And he feels safe and calm and content, and has a pleasant dream that night.

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