What the fuck are you laughing at?

by sacrebleu0

Summary

"What the fuck are you laughing at?"

Evan traced over the words again and again as he perched on the branch of an apple tree. It was one hell of a soulmate quote, that's for sure. It had shown up on his forearm sometime during junior year, and his mom was probably (definitely) more excited about it than he was. He had been worried he would never get a quote, that he didn't have a soulmate; after all, who could ever love Evan Hansen?

Apparantly, Connor Murphy.

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Tree Bros AU where the first words your soulmate says to you are tattooed on your arm!

Notes

My first DEH fic, woo! Thank you to my lovely friend, Grace, for putting up with me screaming about this AU. This one's only going to be three chapters, but they're pretty damn long, so buckle in I guess lmao.
See the end of the work for more notes.
Evan traced over the words again and again as he perched on the branch of an apple tree. "What the fuck are you laughing at?"

It was one hell of a soulmate quote, that's for sure. It had shown up on his forearm sometime during junior year, and his mom was probably (definitely) more excited about it than he was. He had been worried he would never get a quote, that he didn't have a soulmate; after all, who could ever love Evan Hansen? He had severe social anxiety, and he couldn't go more than five seconds without picking at his nails or the hem of his shirt or his shoelaces. He stuttered and he mumbled and he spoke too fast. He was unloveable by anyone except for his mother, and even that felt forced to Evan.

He looked down. Dappled sunlight filtered through the leaves and left highlights on the grass below. He scratched the bark of the tree by his thigh, trying to distract himself from what he was about to do. A tear dripped down his chin, falling on the stark black ink of the tattoo. Most everyone had found their soulmate by now, it was senior year, he was seventeen, what was wrong with him? He had no friends--only Jared Kleinman, who insisted he was a "family friend."

He wiped at his eye and looked up at the leaves above him. Cotton candy clouds drifted lazily in the sky. It was a beautiful day.

He let go of the branch.

Wind whistled by his ear.

His arm went numb.

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"I, uh, I fell. Out of a tree."

Evan picked at his cast as Jared laughed. "You what? What are you, an acorn?" His infectious laughter made Evan feel a little less anxious, and he sheepishly smiled downward. "God, you're hilarious. Anyway, I guess I'll see you around?" He flashed his signature Jared Kleinman smile at Evan and turned, walking down the hallway.

Evan waved at him gently, curling in on himself as he was alone once again. He still heard Jared's voice as he walked away. "Hey, Connor, digging the new hair length! Very school shooter chic."

He looked over his shoulder and saw Jared standing next to a tall boy--Connor--with shoulder-length hair. He looked... bitter. His mouth was pressed in a hard line as he looked down at Jared, his fists white-knuckle gripping his messenger bag.

"It was a... I was joking," Jared sounded exasperated or even slightly scared to Evan, which worried him greatly.

"I know. It's hilarious. Don't you see how hard I'm laughing?" Connor's voice was cold and stony. If Evan wasn't already terrified of him, he'd laugh. "Am I not laughing hard enough for you?" Connor growled, stepping into Jared's personal space dangerously.

Jared laughed awkwardly, taking a step back. "You're such a freak," he mumbled as he retreated down the hallway past Evan.
Connor's eyes caught Evan's as they followed Jared. Evan cracked a hesitating smile at the unexpected eye contact, immediately scolding himself for being so awkward. Connor strode towards him, scowling. "What the fuck are you laughing at?" he threatened.

Evan's blood ran cold. His hand shot up to his cast instinctively, which covered the same remark tattooed onto his skin. His face turned red and his palms turned sweaty as he grasped for words. Holy shit, holy shit, holy shit, his mind screamed in a never-ending loop. "What?" was all he could manage, his throat hoarse and his brain running at a mile a minute.

Connor took a step back, sneering. "I'm not a freak, you're the freak," he grumbled, shoving past Evan as he ran down the hallway. His combat boots loudly hit the linoleum floor and Evan swallowed. Jesus Christ, was he his soulmate?

He never even fathomed that his soulmate could be a boy, much less a boy like Connor. Anxiety flooded his senses and bile pooled in his stomach. His head swam and his temples burned. He pressed his casted hand to his forehead and he fell back against the lockers, the hallway turning and warping around him.

Calm down, Evan, he thought. Deep breaths. He slowly filled his lungs with air and expelled it. Again. And again. His heart rate slowed. The bell above his head rang loudly and he flinched. He resolved to think about it more during first period, skittering down the hallway in an attempt to regain his footing.

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His brain wouldn't shut up for the entire day. Connor. Connor. What did he know about Connor?

His last name was Murphy, Evan thought. He was the brother of Zoe Murphy. She was a really nice girl, and Evan had humored the thought of her being his soulmate for a while before he got his tattoo. But her soulmate ended up being Alana Beck. He was devastated for a week, scratching and clawing at his stupid, blank arm until it bled.

If he really thought about it, he might have remembered seeing him last year. He was smoking outside the cafetorium during the Jazz Band winter concert. Evan had gone to support Jared after learning he played the trumpet, but halfway through he had to go outside for some fresh air because he was overwhelmed by all the loud noise. He had spotted a pale boy dressed in all black, smoking something and leaning against the wall. He seemed to be brooding, so Evan figured it'd be best to just leave him alone. After he regained his composure, he'd re-entered the cafetorium and he didn't see Connor again.

God, was he going to have to talk to him now? How could he? Connor didn't exactly seem like the most approachable guy, especially not to an anxious, socially awkward mess like Evan. The tip of his pencil broke and he realized he had been scribbling in his notebook absentmindedly. Thankfully, the teacher didn't notice and Evan resumed doodling.

His eyes wandered to his cast. It covered his soulmate quote, which was normally the subject of his doodles. He often crossed it out with Sharpie or filled in the holes of the letters or went over it with different colors. The dark ink never budged, no matter how hard he scraped at it. A plain, sans-serif font with an aggressive statement.

"What the fuck are you laughing at?" his arm taunted.

He stopped fiddling with the fabric under his cast and decided to try and pay attention in class for once to no avail.
Dear Evan Hansen,

Turns out this wasn’t an amazing day after all. This isn’t going to be an amazing week or an amazing year, because why would it be?

I know, because there was Zoe. But now apparently there’s Connor. Connor, who I don't even know, and doesn't know me. Maybe if I could just talk to him. Maybe nothing would be different at all. I wish everything was different.

I wish I was part of something. I wish that anything I said mattered to anyone. I mean face it, would anyone notice if I just disappeared tomorrow?

Sincerely,

Your most best, and dearest friend, me.

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He pressed the Print button with finality, despite still feeling shitty about the day. He found his soulmate, which was a good thing, but it was Connor Murphy, which was decidedly not a good thing. That asshole had been on his mind all day. Jared had teased him relentlessly at lunch for his cast, which thankfully took his mind off of him for at least a little while, but as soon as Jared left his mind was overwhelmed once more. Maybe "What the fuck are you laughing at?" is a more common statement than Evan thought, and he wasn't his soulmate after all. He found solace in this pipe dream.

Evan stood and stretched. He felt a tap on his shoulder and whipped around, realizing he wasn't alone in the school library.

"How'd you, um, how'd you break it?" Connor said, pointing at his arm. Evan's heart jumped to his throat and he stared blankly at his face. His hands curled into fists at his sides. Connor had very blue eyes, Evan noted, except for a little bit of brown in his right one. "Your arm."

Evan shook his head to shake himself out of his reverie. "Oh, y-yeah, I, uh, I fell out of a t-tree." He mentally kicked himself for stuttering so much.

He was caught off guard by Connor laughing. He had a nice laugh. His eyes crinkled and his frown had turned into a wide, open-mouth smile. His hand rose to cover his grin as he was obviously taken by surprise. "Well if that isn't just the saddest fucking thing I've ever heard, oh my God," he chuckled, making Evan laugh awkwardly in response. "Nobody- uh- nobody's signed it," Connor stated, composing himself again. Evan felt heat rise to his face; he felt like he was intruding on a private moment.

Evan shook his head to shake himself out of his reverie. "Yeah, um, I know," he stuttered. God, he was making such a fool of himself in front of Connor, he thought.

"I'll sign it."

Evan's heart stopped and his eyes widened. Connor's hands fiddled with the strap of his messenger bag, maybe a nervous tic of his? He had a sheet of paper in his left hand. Evan tried to detect any sarcasm or mockery, but he couldn't find any. He waited a beat before responding, feeling heat rise to his face. "You-You don't have to," he said, looking back down.

Connor took a step closer to Evan. "Do you have a Sharpie?" he asked, long fingers worrying at his
strap as he tucked the sheet of paper into his arm. Evan dug into the side pocket of his backpack and retrieved a black Sharpie, handing it to Connor with a shaking hand. His therapist's voice echoed in his mind: Take deep breaths. It's not the end of the world.

Connor tugged the cap of the pen off with his teeth and grabbed Evan's casted hand, making him yelp in surprise. Connor looked at him and his grip softened as he began to scrawl his name on the cast. His handwriting was so big, it almost took up the entire cast. It was messy and rushed, but Evan felt flustered nonetheless. Connor, his soulmate, just signed his cast. Did he even know that he was his soulmate?

"There. Now we can both pretend that we have friends," Connor sighed, capping the pen and handing it back to Evan. He looked at Evan with an undetectable emotion.

Evan laughed awkwardly, reaching up to rub the back of his neck as he avoided eye contact. "Ha, y-yeah, I guess s-so," he managed to say.

"Oh, is this yours? 'Dear Evan Hansen,' that's your name, right?" Connor asked, taking the sheet of paper out from his side. He held it out to Evan, who froze.

"O-Oh, yeah, it is, it's, um. It's f-for an assignment, I-" Evan choked out, reaching for the paper.

Connor looked down at the paper, holding it closer to himself and out of Evan's reach. "...There was Zoe, but now apparently there's Connor? What the fuck? Is this... is this about me?" he fumed, eyes darting back up to meet Evan's.

Evan's face flushed dark red as he reached for the paper desperately. "N-No, different Connor, it's something else, I, uh, it's not-" Connor held the letter out of Evan's reach--not too difficult, considering he had a few inches on Evan height-wise.

"You wrote this to freak me out, didn't you?" Connor's voice was calm, and it scared Evan even more than it would if he were angry. "You saw I was the only person in the library and you printed this weird-ass note about me so I'd find it and blow up. Then you could tell everyone that I'm a fucking psychopath!" Connor lashed out, running a hand through his hair incredulously.

"W-What? No, w-why would I-"

"Well I'm not, okay? I'm not fucking crazy!" Connor yelled, gesticulating wildly.

Evan's heart broke in two as he looked up at the frustrated boy in front of him. He felt tears prick at the corners of his eyes; he was an anxious crier and he hated getting yelled at. "I d-d-didn't say you were! I, um, it was for my therap-pist," Evan choked out, trying to suppress a sniffle.

Connor crumpled the paper and shoved it into the pocket of his jacket, pushing past Evan. His face was red with anger. Evan stumbled backwards, nearly falling on his ass. Connor had pushed him twice today... how was he going to ever end up as his soulmate, Evan wondered. "C-Connor, I, uh, I really need that paper canyougiveitbackIreallyneedpleasegiveitbackpleasegiveitbackpleasegiveitback!" His words slurred together as he scrambled to chase Connor while holding back tears. He was already out the door and storming down the walkway when Evan reached the glass door, though, and he sighed.

Defeated, Evan wiped his tears on his forearm and retreated back to his computer to print another copy of the letter. His mom would be pissed-or, rather, disappointed-if he didn't have a letter to show her when she got home.
After Evan got home from school, he quickly threw his backpack on his bed and ran right back out the front door. He decided he would go to the apple orchard near his apartment complex; he went there whenever he was feeling particularly shitty and the trees always helped him calm down. He hadn't been since his botched suicide attempt, though.

His eyes darted to the cast at his side, now branded with his apparent soulmate's name. He bit back a bitter laugh at the irony of it covering his soulmate quote. Of course Evan would get Connor Murphy as his fucking soulmate. That's just his luck, wasn't it?

Evan decided to get a friend--er, family friend's input on the matter. He fished his phone out of his pocket and typed a text to Jared. He was shocked to see an immediate reply.


[4:17 PM] the insanely cool jared: shoot, ev

[4:18 PM] Evan Hansen: Well. I think I found my soulmate?

[4:19 PM] the insanely cool jared: wait really??? holy shit congrats my dude

[4:19 PM] the insanely cool jared: whos the lucky girl?


A long pause. Evan wiped his sweaty palms on his khakis as he waited for Jared to reply. He was nearing the orchard.

[4:24 PM] the insanely cool jared: har har very funny evan whos ur actual soulmate

[4:25 PM] Evan Hansen: I'm serious, Jared. You know how my soulmate quote is "what the fuck are you laughing at?" He said that to me today. First time I've actually talked to him.

[4:26 PM] the insanely cool jared: holy fucking SHIT evan

[4:26 PM] the insanely cool jared: you know how to pick a fucking keeper dont u

[4:27 PM] Evan Hansen: I didn't have a choice! Trust me, I'd choose someone else if I could...


[4:29 PM] the insanely cool jared: i have no fuckin clue man

[4:29 PM] the insanely cool jared: hes like easily the least dateable person at our school

[4:30 PM] the insanely cool jared: maybe offer to shoot up with him or something lmao

[4:31 PM] Evan Hansen: This is serious, Jared! I don't know what to do! I can't even make friends, much less flirt.

[4:32 PM] the insanely cool jared: well at least youre both socially inept

[4:32 PM] the insanely cool jared: maybe hell find it charming

[4:33 PM] the insanely cool jared: i gtg gl tho
Evan locked his phone and shoved it back in his pocket as he approached the orchard. He gently pushed the old, rusted gate open and entered, closing it with a loud squeak. The orchard had been closed for almost a decade and weeds had overgrown all the pathways, but Evan loved to climb the giant apple trees.

He bounded down the path, breathing in the fresh air gratefully. It did wonders for his anxiety, and it was just what he needed after a stressful first day of senior year. He scouted out the perfect tree to climb near the front of the orchard and began to scale it with an experienced proficiency. He sat on one of the first branches, finding no motivation to climb higher and slumping down against the trunk.

A breeze whistled past his ear and he sighed happily. Sitting in the branches of a tree was his happy place, free from the stresses of high school. Jared loved to tease him about how his "only friends were trees" but Evan didn't see anything wrong with that.

He heard a deep rumbling and he turned to see what the source was. A dingy truck had driven up to the wrought iron fence and parked. Evan tilted his head in confusion; as far as he knew, he was the only person who still came to this orchard. He sat up and wrapped his uncasted arm around the branch below him to keep his balance.

The door opened and slammed shut. Evan internally screamed. Of course the driver of the truck was none other than Connor Murphy. He shoved his keys into his pocket, the long black lanyard hanging out of his skinny jeans. He flung open the gate with a loud screech and didn't bother to close it.

Evan shifted his weight on the branch anxiously and cursed under his breath when it creaked. Connor immediately tried to pinpoint the source of the sound. Evan sat as still as he possibly could until Connor relaxed again and continued down the path. Evan quietly sighed with relief and dropped his head back against the trunk of the tree. This force caused an apple to fall off the branch he was sitting on and roll into Connor's path.

Evan buried his face in his hands and groaned quietly, cursing every god in existence. Connor's eyes snapped up directly to Evan and frowned. "Evan Hansen? What the fuck are you doing here?"

Evan reluctantly climbed down from the tree, bracing himself for Connor's wrath. His mind was already buzzing with excuses. "I, um, I come out here when I need a b-break. I like… climbing trees." And he had to choose the worst excuse, didn't he? He mentally slapped himself.

Connor rolled his eyes. "You obviously aren't very good at it." Evan rubbed his cast and laughed awkwardly as he continued. "I can't fucking escape you today, can I?" he grumbled, pulling a joint and a lighter out of his jacket pocket.

Evan coughed upon seeing the weed. "I-I-Sorry, I guess. I didn't m-mean to upset you. At the library, I mean," he added. He always felt the need to apologize.

Connor sighed, lighting the joint. "Sure. Whatever. God, you must think I'm insane." He took a deep breath and held the smoke in his lungs for a few seconds before blowing out a cloud of smoke.

Evan grimaced at the stench of weed; he'd never smelled it before and it took him off guard. "I d-don't think you're insane," he tried to comfort Connor.

A cynical laugh. "Bullshit, Hansen. I don't need your pity." He ran a hand through his long hair in an exasperated manner as Evan choked out an apology. "How do you know Zoe?" he asked, changing the subject. At Evan's puzzled look, he elaborated, "You mentioned her. In the letter."
patted his jacket pocket, seemingly unwilling to draw the letter out.

Evan felt his shoulders rise in defense and embarrassment. He felt his body flush and he picked at his cast subconsciously. “I, um, well, I don’t? Not really. I w-was, uh, looking for my soulmate, and she. Um. She...” He trailed off, hoping that Connor wouldn’t make him finish that statement. Admitting this to her brother was beyond shameful, but Evan couldn’t think of a believable lie on the spot and he didn’t really want to lie to Connor, someone he was trying to build trust with.

Connor scoffed, puffs of smoke curling in the autumn air. “Jesus. She found Alana already.”

“I know, I-I’m, uh. Sorry.” A painful silence. Evan bit his fingernail, waiting (hoping) for Connor to say something so he didn’t have to.

“You apologize a lot,” Connor observed.

Evan felt another wave of embarrassment crash over him. “S-Sorry. I, uh, I mean, you know what I mean,” he mumbled awkwardly.

Connor barked out a laugh and Evan couldn’t help but laugh with him. “Sit,” Connor instructed as he sat at the base of the tree. Evan quickly scrambled to the ground, sitting cross-legged next to him. A minute passed, Connor taking another deep breath and exhaling smoke. “How do you know about this shitty orchard?” he asked hesitantly.

Evan picked at a blade of grass as he spoke. “Well, I find trees really, uh, fascinating? And my mom used to take me here sometimes when it was still open. What, uh, what about you?” he asked.

“Me too. I mean, when Zoe and I were little, my parents used to take us out here all the time. I like it a lot more now that it’s abandoned, though.” Connor looked down the path and took another drag, seemingly nostalgic.

Evan nodded. “Yeah. I think I like it more this way too. L-Less people. Except for you, I guess.” He congratulated himself sarcastically for being so smooth, pinching hard at his skin as a punishment.

This earned an unexpected laugh from Connor, and his grip loosened. “Y’know, I don’t think I’ve laughed this much in ages,” he half-whispered, looking back at Evan.

Evan’s ears burned. He must know that they’re soulmates, right? He couldn’t see his quote due to his jacket sleeve and he cursed internally. He cleared his throat. “M-Maybe it’s the drugs?” Evan suggested idly.

At this, Connor burst into another fit of laughter. “Holy fucking shit, Hansen,” was all he could say, covering his eyes with his hand. “I don’t even know where to begin.”

Evan couldn’t help but stare. He’d never seen Connor laugh before; well, to be fair, he’d rarely seen Connor at all before that day. He didn’t seem like a very happy person from what Evan had seen. He traced Connor’s name on his cast with his finger absentmindedly. “I-don’t even know where to begin.”

Evan couldn’t help but stare. He’d never seen Connor laugh before; well, to be fair, he’d rarely seen Connor at all before that day. He didn’t seem like a very happy person from what Evan had seen. He traced Connor’s name on his cast with his finger absentmindedly. “S-Sorry.”

Connor rubbed the now tiny joint out against the dirt, extinguishing the light. “It’s fine, Hansen. God knows I could use a good laugh.” His voice sounded oddly bitter and Evan’s heart twinged acutely. Connor’s head fell back against the trunk of the tree and he looked into the sky. His fingers worried at the threads that hung from the holes in his ripped jeans and Evan felt reassured in his nervousness.

A more comfortable silence spread between them as they watched the sky in the presence of one another but not together. A light breeze rustled the leaves above their heads as the clouds moved lazily through the beginnings of a sunset. Evan wasn’t used to the company during his anxiety-
induced escapes, but it wasn’t necessarily unbearable.

Both of them flinched hard as Evan’s text tone played from his pocket. He was already overflowing with apologies and Connor reassured him that it was fine. Evan wondered if he was imagining it when he seemed to pull his jacket tighter around him.

[6:41 PM] Mom: Hey, honey!! Sorry about the appointment today, we were just swamped at work. I know you’re probably at the orchard, but come home for dinner soon! I got take-out. <3

Evan exhaled as he read the text. He felt torn between wanting to stay with Connor, which he knew was totally ridiculous because he didn’t even know Connor but it was easier to accept that maybe, just maybe, he had a soulmate when he was sitting next to him in a quiet, content silence and knowing in a deep part of his brain that there was no way that Connor could ever be his soulmate, since soulmates were reserved for people like Zoe and Alana and certainly not people like Evan Hansen and why was he fooling himself, even temporarily? The all-too-familiar crushing sensation began to rise up in his chest again like desperate floodwaters, laughing at his shoddily-constructed levees, and it was getting hard to breathe and just breathe, Evan, God.

His thoughts were interrupted by Connor, who was looking at him in a certain way. “Hansen? You okay?” he asked in his cool, unwavering, apathetic tone.

Evan swallowed and nodded too eagerly, his eyes refusing to meet Connor’s, even when he felt his gaze boring into him like a cattle prod. “Y-Y-Yeah. Sorry. I’m f-fine. Sorry.” His thumbs hovered over the keyboard and he quickly typed a response.

[6:49 PM] Evan Hansen: Yeah okay I’ll be home soon Mom.

He had to delete and retype a few times due to his shaking thumbs before pressing Send. He roughly shoved his phone back into the pocket of his khakis, standing abruptly and brushing off the grass and dirt. Connor’s eyes followed him, looking up at him as he struggled to find his balance, rocking on the balls of his feet. “I-I have to go. My m-mother, uh, wants me home,” he explained. Connor doesn’t even care, why are you explaining? he asked himself.

“Okay,” Connor said quietly.

A beat. Evan fidgeted with the hem of his blue polo. “T-Thanks. For sitting with me,” he coughed.

Connor smirked. “If anything, I should be thanking you. I’m surprised you didn’t go fucking running when I showed up, everybody thinks I’m one bad day away from pulling a fucking Sandy Hook.” His voice was obviously resentful, and he looked down at his lighter as he flipped it around in his hands.

Evan offered a hesitant smile. “W-Well, if it’s any c-consolation, I think you’re pretty cool,” he mumbled, hoping that he wasn’t coming off as creepy.

Connor barked out a laugh. “Thanks, Hansen. You don’t seem all that bad yourself, if a little nervous.” He shot a little tight-lipped smile up at Evan before looking back down with his previous scowl.

“A-S-See you around?” Evan said with an upwards inflection, waving as he began to walk away. Connor didn’t wave back, instead choosing to fish for and retrieve a pair of headphones from his pocket, slipping both into his ears and closing his eyes. Evan bounded down the path, feeling vaguely triumphant for navigating a social situation with little pain, especially with his soulmate. He pushed the nagging feeling of anxiety building in his throat back down as he began the walk back to
The next morning, it took all of Evan’s strength not to fall asleep during school. He had stayed up late the night before thinking about Connor and how to handle the situation. He can’t just tell him, he’d be beyond freaked out and he probably wouldn’t even believe him. He figured the best plan of action would be to keep quiet about it while trying to befriend him. Maybe one day he’ll explain it to him. Maybe.

After an hour of nodding off in APUSH, Evan made his way to the picnic table outside where he and Jared normally ate lunch. He rested his head on the table, hoping to sneak in a five minute nap before Jared arrived.

Before he could fall asleep, though, he felt a tap on his shoulder. He looked up blearily and was surprised to see Connor, not Jared taking a seat across from him. “Hey, Hansen,” he greeted halfheartedly.

“H-Hi, Connor. Why’re you sitting here?” Evan asked, rubbing his eyes to try and suppress a yawn.

Connor snorted. “Nice to know I’m welcome. My parents were up my ass yesterday because they found out I skipped, so I’m forced to be here today.” He picked at his already chipping black nail polish.

Evan blinked. “B-But didn’t I see you yesterday? A-At school?” he asked while retrieving his lunch from his backpack.

Connor laughed a little. “Well, after our friend Napoleon Complex Kleinman fucked with me I decided to go to the orchard. I had to come back later to pick up Zoe, though, and she noticed that I wasn’t on campus so she ratted. It’s the second goddamn day and I’m already fucking done with this school,” Connor muttered. Evan felt honored that Connor not only remembered him, but came and sat next to him. He tried to push the feeling down under the guise of remaining cool, though.

“Hey, Connor, I think the My Chemical Romance concert is that way!” Connor and Evan turned to see Jared approaching them with a smirk on his face.

Connor rolled his eyes and grabbed his messenger bag, standing once more. “Thanks for the pointer,” he sighed and left, leaving Evan and Jared the only two at the table. Evan watched him leave and cast a frustrated glance at Jared.

“You really weren’t shitting me with that soulmate shit, huh?” Jared exclaimed as he took Connor’s seat across from Evan.

Evan shrugged and bit into his apple. “N-No. I, uh, I went to the orchard yesterday and, um, guess who showed up?”

Jared burst into laughter. “No fucking way! He’s a tree-fucker too?” he asked incredulously. “Maybe you two were meant to be!”

Evan blushed and sunk into his seat. “K-K-Keep your voice down!” he whispered, scanning the area for Connor and relaxing slightly when he didn’t see him.

A mischievous grin spread across Jared’s face. “What, you don’t want anyone to know that you and Connor fucked in an apple tree?” he giggled, voice still louder than Evan would’ve liked. Evan felt his face turn even redder as Jared continued. ‘Fuckin’ jerking off as you talk about how
misunderstood you are--!” Jared burst into an uncontrollable fit of laughter as Evan shushed him.

“T-T-That’s not t-true!” Evan cried, holding his hands up. “P-Please shut up, Jared,” he pleaded. “You’re just m-making fun of me because y-your arm is still blank, anyway,” he remarked, crossing his arms on his chest.

Jared rolled his eyes as his laughter ceased. “Whatever, Ev. I’d rather have no soulmate than have Connor fucking Murphy as my soulmate any day.” He took a bite out of his sandwich, leaving the two silent for a moment until his eyes widened once more. “Holy fucking shit, he signed your cast.”

Evan looked down and realized that his cast still had Connor’s name on it in huge, black letters. Evan covered his face with his hands and groaned, preparing for another round of taunting from Jared.

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Evan trudged into Calculus BC and sat in his seat, taking out a battered notebook and beginning to doodle an apple tree. The bell rang and the teacher began speaking but Evan zoned out, adding details to the bark and leaves. He was snapped out of his reverie by the door opening and closing behind him.

“You’re late,” barked the teacher.

“I’m well aware,” came Connor Murphy’s stone-cold voice behind Evan, making him whip around in surprise. Jesus Christ, Connor was inescapable. Their eyes met from across the room and a small smirk appeared on Connor’s face as the teacher reprimanded him. Evan turned back around and hurriedly began drawing once more in the cover of his notebook.

Connor took the only empty seat, across the room from Evan, and Evan felt his stare bore into him. He refused to lift his head and continued scribbling as hard as possible for the rest of the period.

Or, rather, he would have if he didn’t feel a paper ball hit his ear. He looked for the source and found nobody, so he hesitantly unfurled the crumpled paper. On it in scrawled handwriting read “FUCK THIS CLASS.” Evan looked back up, wondering if the note was meant for him before locking eyes with none other than Connor Murphy from across the room. He winked and Evan felt his insides melt to goo.

Evan took his pencil and wrote underneath “agreed.” He paused, and then added, “also sorry about jared, he’s a dick.” He crumpled the paper back up and waited until the teacher turned his back before throwing it back at Connor, landing it on his desk perfectly.

He watched as Connor opened the note and wrote a reply, launching it back to Evan. “YOU’RE TELLING ME? I HAD NO IDEA.” Evan couldn’t help but snicker at the snide remark. He wrote a reply of “i know, shocking” and tried to launch it back, but both him and Connor watched as it flew directly out the window. Evan gasped, immediately feeling guilty.

Connor burst into laughter, provoking another lecture from the teacher. He didn’t attempt to pass any other notes to Evan for the rest of the period, much to Evan’s dismay.

When the bell rang, he bolted out of the classroom to avoid talking to Connor again. He didn’t know what to say and he didn’t want to push Connor, so he resolved to stay silent. Anyways, Connor was probably tired of Evan annoying him.

The rest of the day passed without incident; once Evan got home, his mother persuaded him to do homework and he played online games with Jared, who thankfully refrained from mentioning
Connor. He considered writing another letter to himself but decided against it, collapsing on his bed and staring at the ceiling.

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A few days had come and gone with no contact with Connor and Evan was beginning to worry. Maybe Connor wasn’t his soulmate after all, maybe “what the fuck are you laughing at?” is a more common phrase than he’d thought, maybe, and this was the most likely solution, Evan was going crazy. What was he thinking, trying to befriend or God forbid woo Connor fucking Murphy?

His sneakers hit the pavement harder than he was intending to as he took the left that turned into the orchard. He found solace in the tarnished sign, the rusted gate, the scent of apples that will never be picked, the setting sun that reminded him that he shouldn’t be out so late, the dingy truck that was parked haphazardly by the sign--

Wait. The dingy truck. Connor’s truck.

Evan stopped in his tracks, considering turning around and heading home. He brought his fingers up to his teeth, biting them to calm himself down and clear his head. He figured he should talk to Connor, he might be his soulmate, but on the other hand, what if he says something stupid and Connor hates him forever, or worse yet, what if he says the right thing and Connor still hates him?

“Hansen.”

Evan flinched as he looked up and saw Connor walking towards him through the gate. “M-Murphy,” he replied feebly, dropping his hand and wiping it on his pants.

Connor laughed once and stood next to Evan. “I was just about to leave, but I’ll stay if you want me to.” He fiddled with his keys for a moment, spanning Evan’s shocked silence. He’d stay at this shitty orchard for Evan? He continued hastily. “That was presumptuous, I’ll just leave--”

“N-N-No, no, you can, um, I don’t m-mind if you stay!” Evan interrupted, maybe a little too loudly, grabbing Connor’s jacketed arm as he tried to turn away. Connor looked at Evan’s hand in a surprised manner, mouth agape and eyes darting up to meet Evan’s. Evan quickly retracted his hand like he had just touched a hot stove and he felt his face heat up. “I-I mean, y-you don’t have to or a-anything, um, I was-just--”

“Here, let’s compromise. I take you to À La Mode, and you take a fuckin’ chill pill, eh?” Connor proffered, holding up his keys.

Evan nodded quickly, unable to suppress a smile from spreading across his face as he followed Connor to his truck. “H-How old’s the truck?” Evan asked as he opened the door. It seemed like it was originally black, but years of rough use had dulled the paint and turned it brown in places.

Connor took the driver’s seat and laughed. “Only God knows. I think she’s a ‘97, ‘98? We bought her well-used when I turned sixteen, because I refused to have a fancy-ass new car. Mom tried to buy me a top-of-the-line hybrid bullshit but I’d rather die than drive in one of those fucking clown cars.” He turned the keys in the ignition and the truck stuttered and stammered before finally roaring to life. “She’s old as dirt but she’s put up with all my shitty driving so she’s more than earned her keep.”

The seats were torn and stained, and the entire interior stank of weed. An empty beer bottle sat in the cupholder and many scuff marks adorned the dashboard, likely from reclining with those combat boots of his. A pair of dog tags hung from the rearview mirror along with a pine tree air freshener.
The seatbelts were tattered and the floor and seats were covered in miscellaneous shit--parking and speeding tickets (Goddamn, there were a lot of them, thought Evan), rolling papers, cassettes, random quarters and pennies, a Nirvana tank top that Evan could never picture him wearing, a baseball bat (No way in hell did Connor play baseball, Evan remarked) and more. Overall, the interior appeared to resemble Connor’s brain.

Evan sat stiffly in the passenger seat as Connor stuck his elbow out the window, right hand barely grasping the wheel. He gripped the stick shift (holy shit, Connor drives stick shift? Nevermind, of course he drives stick shift.) and reversed out of his impromptu parking spot. “Have you ever been to À La Mode?” Connor asked, driving away on the dirt path that led out of the orchard.

“No. I’m assuming it’s, um, an ice cream place?” Evan said, looking at Connor. He played with a lock of long, chocolate-brown hair as he drove and Evan reached up to run a hand through his sandy brown hair, suddenly self-conscious.

“Oh man. Yeah, it’s fucking amazing. I’ve gone there ever since I was little.” Connor looked at the obviously outdated stereo system and hummed. He thumbed through the stack of cassettes that lay on the seat between him and Evan and chose one, popping it into the player and pressing Play.

Heavy guitars and drums began blasting from the speakers, making Evan jump and Connor laugh. He turned down the volume before mumbling to Evan, “Sorry. It’s a habit of mine.”

Evan laughed awkwardly and stared forward at the road. The drive was short and before long Connor was parking at an old vintage-looking ice cream parlor. Evan got out of the truck and entered À La Mode with Connor.

It was cold yet inviting. The tiled floors and old-school menu signs gave the aura of a 1960’s dive and Evan could see why Connor liked it so much. The two walked to the display and Evan was overwhelmed with choices. Connor seemed to already know what he wanted and dictated his long and complicated order while Evan decided.

Evan stood at the counter and paled. “Uh, Connor? I d-didn’t bring any money… I guess I won’t--”

“No, I’ll pay. My treat.” Connor smiled down at Evan as the cashier handed him his cone. He licked the side of the cone and gestured for Evan to order, holding a credit card between his first two fingers. Evan flushed. He had forgotten how affluent the Murphys were. He was surprised that his parents even trusted Connor with a credit card; God knew how many stupid things he probably bought. He remembered his own financial situation and shrunk into himself as Connor paid for his ice cream.

Five minutes later they were back in Connor’s truck, eating their ice cream as the Arctic Monkeys flowed languidly through the speakers. Evan had ordered plain chocolate, while Connor had opted for a mint chocolate chip cone with an absurd amount of toppings. “T-This is really good. Thank you for, uh, taking me here and buying my ice cream,” Evan said quietly.

“No problem, Hansen,” Connor said between bites. “It’s… nice. To talk to you.” His voice was so quiet Evan could barely make out what he said and Connor buried his pink face in ice cream.

“I… yeah. Y-Yeah,” Evan replied, pushing down the butterflies, “it is.”

Connor paused before continuing shakily. “I-I mean. You. I… I don’t mean to be creepy or whatever. Nobody fucking listens to me, so it’s nice to have somebody who finally fucking does.” He refused to meet Evan’s eyes, staring out the window of the parked truck and licking his ice cream. He’d never heard Connor stutter before.
Evan couldn’t help but laugh. “M-Me too, Connor.” The tattoo burned his skin as he got a nagging feeling to confess. Maybe… Maybe Connor would respond in kind. He seemed in a pretty good mood right now.

“Okay, fuck this feelings bullshit. Let’s drive,” Connor abruptly stated, biting the cone and backing out of the parking lot. He sped out of the lot, going fast down the road that lead to À La Mode and farther, hand white-knuckle gripping the steering wheel. Evan felt confusion and fear as he saw the intensity in his eyes as he set his jaw. He had just gotten Connor to open up, what did he do to set back his progress?

The familiar welling of anxiety bubbled up and Evan attempted to repress it by sinking his teeth into the ice cream. He shivered.

Wind gusted through the rolled-down windows as Connor accelerated. He turned up the radio, now playing a Guns n’ Roses song, to an excessive volume that made Evan wince. They drove like this for a while, the sun treading below the horizon and the moon growing in the rearview mirror. Evan’s mind raced. What did he do to upset Connor? A million actions, ten million apologies swam through his brain.

Connor turned the volume down. “Where do you live?” he asked sternly.

Evan blinked for a moment and blurted his address, cursing himself for being awkward as he ate the last bit of cone. Connor had been long done with his, having wolfed it down soon after he began driving. Connor silently drove to Evan’s apartment complex and parked, turning off the radio and turning to face Evan. “Sorry for… that. I should’ve dropped you off before,” he muttered, running a hand through his mane of hair.

“I-It’s fine. Thanks for the, um. The ice cream.” Evan unbuckled his seatbelt and looked back at Connor. “It, um. I like hanging out with you,” he said before he could convince himself not to.

Connor looked shocked, his eyebrows shooting up into his hair. “Oh. Well. Um.” He coughed. “I’ll see you later, I guess.” He looked out the window and Evan saw his ear turn red.

Evan said goodbye and exited the truck, entering the apartment complex and bounding up the stairs. Connor just bought him ice cream, holy shit, maybe he is his soulmate after all!

A nagging voice chimed in in the back of his mind as he unlocked the door to his apartment. Connor freaked out after buying the ice cream. Maybe he regretted saying that he enjoyed his company. Maybe he was lying so he didn’t hurt Evan’s feelings. Evan felt his eyes burn and wiped at them angrily as he walked into the apartment.

“Evan! You’re home! Who was that, that just dropped you off?” asked Heidi, hugging Evan happily.

“A f-friend,” Evan replied vaguely.

“You know I don’t like it when you’re out this late,” she said, tugging on her shoes, “but I guess if you’re making friends I’m okay with it.” Evan realized she was dressed in her scrubs and he sighed. She had another night shift tonight.

He immediately felt selfish and forced himself to smile. “Yeah, I, um, it’s going well,” he mumbled, playing with the hem of his polo.

Heidi grinned widely and pecked Evan on the cheek, grabbing her work bag and walking to the door. “Well, you know how it is. Another night shift. I’ll see you tomorrow, though! Bye, honey, do your homework!” she said as she ushered out the door, checking her watch.
Evan waved halfheartedly as she closed the door and immediately ran to his room, falling onto his bed. He lay down for a moment before sitting up and retrieving his phone that he’d forgot he’d left on his desk until he was already halfway to the orchard. To his surprise, he had two missed calls from his mom and a text from Jared.

[5:21 PM] the insanely cool jared: hey man wanna play some wow?

[8:03 PM] Evan Hansen: Sorry. I was at the orchard.

[8:04 PM] the insanely cool jared: i assumed lmao

[8:04 PM] the insanely cool jared: did ur boyf show up?

[8:05 PM] Evan Hansen: Actually, yes. We got ice cream.

[8:06 PM] the insanely cool jared: holy shit, evan hansen the ladykiller

[8:06 PM] the insanely cool jared: are you two together or what?

[8:07 PM] Evan Hansen: God, no, no, not yet. I’m too chicken to tell him about my quote.

[8:08 PM] the insanely cool jared: you got fucking ice cream, hansen, you really think hes gonna turn u down??

[8:10 PM] Evan Hansen: …

[8:12 PM] Evan Hansen: Look, Jared, I don’t fucking know. You know how unpredictable he is.

[8:13 PM] the insanely cool jared: i mean whatever you say buddy

[8:14 PM] the insanely cool jared: lets just play wow now

[8:14 PM] Evan Hansen: Okay, opening it now.

Evan threw his phone to the foot of the bed and opened his laptop. Maybe all he needed was a game with Jared to calm down.

Two hours later, Jared had signed off and Evan was lying in bed in the dark. He should probably try to go to sleep, he thought. It was a school night and he was sleep deprived as hell for the past couple of days. He tossed and turned.

Connor Murphy.

He’d seemed like he was opening up to Evan, by the way he threw a note at him in Calc and how he bought him ice cream. But, on the other hand, they went a few days without talking and Connor freaked after buying Evan the food. It was almost scary, the way that he drove with such intensity. Maybe he just didn’t want to open up to Evan, a practical stranger, said the rational voice in his head. Or he hates him, said the less rational one, and he regrets talking to him.

Evan pressed his face into a pillow. Why did it have to be Connor fucking Murphy of all people? The hardest person to befriend, let alone romance, in their entire fucking high school?

That night he dreamt of ice cream, of apple trees, of a crystalline sunset, of loud music, of long hair, of hard bites, of blue eyes, and of hot flames.

“What the fuck are you laughing at?”
Evan slept well.
The next morning, Evan felt a hell of a lot better than he did the previous days. He attributed this to getting more than an hour of sleep, which was seemingly a rarity these days. He praised the forces that be that it was a Friday; he was looking forward to a weekend of limited human contact.

Evanglanced at his phone as he got off his bus and saw that he had another fifteen minutes before the first bell rang. He sighed against the cool autumn air and decided to sit at the picnic table him and Jared ate at during lunch. He walked across the high school campus, carefully avoiding the puddles of rainwater that had accumulated in the night. The campus was always so peaceful before school started; Evan wished it stayed this quiet and serene.

As he crossed the school, he noticed a dark figure leaning against the brick wall of one of the buildings. Evan immediately recognized it as Connor with his eyes closed and a calm smile on his face. He walked closer and noticed a pair of black headphones in his ears; he could hear the drums from an impressive distance away. “Hey, Connor, y-you look like you’re in a good mood,” he greeted, and Connor tore the headphones from his ears and looked up at him.

“Hey, Hansen. I’m feeling uncharacteristically not angry today, so lucky you.” His steely voice held a hint of humor as he ran a hand through his hair. “After I dropped you off last night, I drove until well after midnight. I managed to avoid Cynthia and Larry when I snuck back into the house, which is nothing short of a fucking miracle, so maybe that’s why I’m not as murderous as I normally am before noon,” he mused.

Evan was confused for a moment before he realized that Cynthia and Larry must be Connor’s parents. He never called his mother Heidi. Connor must really hate his parents, Evan thought. He spoke aloud, “Well that’s good, I guess. S-Sorry for keeping you out late.” He picked at the dirt under his fingernails.

Connor laughed. “Evan, I was out driving and shit way after I dropped you off. It’s what I do when I need to think. It’s not your fault,” he assured him in an oddly gentle manner. Evan realized this was the first time Connor called him by his first name and tried to suppress a wave of butterflies in his stomach. He brought his hand up to his cast instinctively and dropped it when he remembered he couldn’t touch the tattoo under it.

“W-Why’d you need to think?” Evan asked hesitantly. Shit, that was way too personal, why did he even ask that?

Connor seemed to be caught off-guard by the question by the way his eyes widened. He cleared his throat. “I dunno. I—ugh. Um. Do you—Do you consider me a friend?” His head turned as he looked at Evan, who was stood by his side.
Evan choked on air and began coughing loudly. His chest felt like a piano was just dropped on it; his brain short-circuited and his arm burned with the intensity of a quasar. His ribcage ached acutely. Fuck, did Connor really just ask that? He finally cleared his trachea and coughed one last time with finality.

“You don’t have to answer that, I was just--” Connor began again.

“No, no no no, no. I do consider you my friend. I-I-If that’s okay with you,” Evan blurted, feeling heat rise to his face.

Connor laughed again, easing some of Evan’s anxiety. “Well, good, because it is. Now we both have at least one friend, eh?” he suggested, punching Evan’s shoulder affectionately.

Evan nodded. “Yeah, that’s true.” He wondered if Connor was telling the truth as students lazily milled about the hallway in front of them. He thought about Connor’s statement. He must have other friends, right? Even Evan had Jared, and Connor seemed infinitely more confident than Evan. What about Zoe? He didn’t seem particularly fond of her from what Evan could tell.

The bell rang abrasively from above their heads and Evan flinched hard. Connor waved at him and began walking backwards down the hallway. “See you in Calc, I guess?”

Evan nodded enthusiastically and waved, turning to head in the opposite direction. He was already missing the quiet companionship of Connor. They barely even talked, what was wrong with Evan? He ignored the burning of his tattoo and began walking towards his first period until a girl caught his arm.

It was none other than Zoe Murphy tugging him off to the side of the hallway. Once they were out of the flow of traffic, she turned to face him. “Hey, Evan, is it? I saw you talking to my brother and I just wanted to thank you.”

Evan blinked. “Y-You wanted to thank me?”

Zoe smiled. “Yeah. Connor, he doesn’t really have any friends, per se. To be completely honest, he’s a fucking psychopath. But, um. Don’t tell him I told you this, but I think he needs a good influence like you, y’know?”

Evan was taken aback. “I-I, um,” he stuttered, unable to think of a coherent response. He couldn’t tell her that he was probably his soulmate, she’d likely tell him and it’d be awkward as hell. “Uh, no problem? I d-don’t think he’s, uh, all that bad.”

“I also wanted to kind of, uh, warn you about him. He’s not a good person. He’s a fucking asshole. He’s manipulative. He’s seriously a sociopath.” Her voice had turned icy cold. “I mean, be his friend, I’m not stopping you. Just don’t get too close, yeah?”

Evan froze. What the fuck? Connor seemed like a pretty nice guy to Evan, not to mention the fact that he’s his soulmate. He fought back his worried thoughts with a swift nod. With that, she left, rejoining with Alana and clasping their hands together. Evan resolved to think about it in first period.

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He floated through the first four periods in a dissociative state. Connor was the only thing he could think of. His arm stung as he tried to understand Connor and Zoe’s actions. How lonely was he? What did he do to Zoe? He must have been pretty bad off…

Lunch. Evan walked to the table and was surprised to find Connor already sitting there, headphones
in and book in hand. As Evan got closer, he saw that Connor was scribbling something in the book. He sat across from him and mumbled a greeting. Connor hurriedly closed the book and shoved it in his bag. “What’s with the book?” Evan asked earnestly.

“Nothing. It’s, um, an assignment.” Connor coughed as Evan took out his lunch and began eating. Evan decided to drop it. “Still feeling happier than normal?” he teased.

Connor rolled his eyes and nodded his head to the left. “Well, I was.”

“Hey, tree fuckers!” Jared’s smug voice rang as he sat to Evan’s right, shrugging off his backpack. “How’s the honeymoon?”

“Eat a dick, Jared,” Connor remarked, but stood his ground and didn’t move to get up.

“Projection much, Connie?” Jared mocked, pulling out a binder from his backpack. “Anyways, Evan, you’re in APUSH, right? Can I copy your chapter one outline?”

Connor shook his head at Evan, and Evan gulped. “Uh, I already turned it in. I have it third period,” he lied. He had APUSH for sixth period, but Jared didn’t know that. Connor smiled widely at him, making Evan’s inside liquefy. He felt bad lying to Jared, but if it made Connor happy. (Cheating was against the rules anyway, he reasoned.) Jared groaned. “It’s the first fucking week and I’m already failing this class. Remind me why I took this instead of AP Euro?”

Connor scoffed. “I’m surprised you’re even taking an AP class. Isn’t being an asshole your full-time job?”

“I’m surprised you haven’t dropped out,” Jared seethed. “After all, you are the class stoner.”

Evan felt anxiety bubble through his veins. “Guys, guys, can you p-please stop fighting?” Connor folded his arms across his chest reluctantly.

“Whatever,” Jared remarked, “I have a chapter outline due next period.” He pulled out his hefty textbook and began writing.

The rest of lunch was blanketed in a comfortable conversation between Connor and Evan, with Jared piping up with a sarcastic comment every once in a while between scrawling lines of notes. By the end of the thirty minutes they had for lunch, Jared had a page of passable notes and Evan was feeling marginally better about Connor.

With a “good luck” to Jared, Evan stood and gathered his things. Connor slung his messenger bag over his shoulder and followed Evan to their shared fifth period Calculus class. As they walked, Evan felt their fingers brush and a jolt of electricity shot up his uncasted arm. He cursed himself for acting like a schoolgirl with a damn playground crush, but it was getting hard to ignore the itching from under his cast.

“Fuck calculus,” Connor muttered as they neared the classroom, tugging at his jacket.

Evan shrugged. “I don’t know, calc isn’t that bad for me. It’s the one subject I kind of understand,” he said sheepishly.

Connor looked at Evan incredulously. “Wait, you understand this shit? Damn, Hansen. Child genius.” Evan laughed as he the bell rang and they separated, sitting in their respective seats. Evan
took out his notebook and began doodling.

Halfway through Calculus, a paper airplane landed on Evan’s desk. Evan turned and saw Connor with a smile on his face. He gently unfolded the airplane; this one was a drawing of himself holding a gun to his head. The face was scribbled out, but Evan could recognize the self-portrait by the hair and was amazed at his artistic ability. Evan could never draw very well, but apparently Connor could. He speculated that Connor must have been drawing during lunch when Evan approached the table.

Evan looked at the note, trying to think of something to add. He finally decided to add flowers coming out of the barrel of the pistol aimed at Connor’s temple; they paled in comparison to Connor’s original drawing, but they would do. Evan gingerly folded the airplane back up and tossed it back once the coast was clear. He watched Connor open the note and--was he hallucinating, or did he blush? He wrote it off as hopeful thinking and continued watching Connor as he wrote on the paper, tongue darting out as he focused intently. Evan swallowed his feelings and feebly picked at his cast, waiting with bated breath for Connor’s reply.

Connor finished and turned, closing one eye to perfect his shot and threw. It hit a random girl in the ear and the teacher turned around, hawk eyes focused on the paper airplane.

He snatched the paper and unfolded it. “It appears as if Mr. Murphy is not only a bad timekeeper, but he is also an artist. ‘You’re… effing adorable.’ Unsavory language aside...” the teacher read, peering down his nose at the paper. A few students laughed and Connor sunk deeper into his chair. “Flirt on your own time, Murphy, I’m sure this girl would appreciate it,” the teacher jeered, leaving the innocent female student in a stupor and Connor’s face red with anger. “Stay after class, Murphy.”

Evan’s entire upper body flushed as he realized Connor was trying to call him “fucking adorable.” He covered the bottom half of his face with his hand and made eye contact with Connor, who shrugged and crossed his arms. His ears were bright red and Evan assumed that he looked the same. He thanked every deity that the bell rang soon thereafter as he ran out the door.

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The rest of the school day was uneventful, except for “You’re fucking adorable” looping through Evan’s brain like a broken record. Maybe… Maybe Connor does like him back, he thought for a split second. He shooed the thought out immediately, drowning it with a flood of self-deprecation. Connor couldn’t possibly fall for the socially awkward, untalented, useless, unintelligent, unwanted Evan Hansen, he figured.

When he finally arrived home, he was amazed that his mother was there. She greeted him happily, giving him a bear hug and gushing about how happy she was to see him. She explained that she had a day off from work and she had spent the entire day cleaning the apartment. Evan was taken aback; it was very rare that she had a day off. He scrambled to his room as soon as he could to avoid her smothering.

He put on a pair of headphones and decided to listen to music… what had Connor put on in the car? He remembered the Nirvana tank and googled Nirvana. He played the first song that came up-“Smells Like Teen Spirit”-- and wrinkled his nose. He much preferred softer music; the loud, grungy guitars set him on edge. After listening to the song, he took off the headphones and looked at the other songs. Maybe it’s an acquired taste. He hoped it’s an acquired taste.

Evan heard a knock on the door to the apartment and closed his laptop. His mother opened the door and he heard a conversation. He didn’t think they were expecting anybody, so he decided to go out and investigate.
He blanched when he saw none other than Connor Murphy conversing with his mother in the living room. Connor caught sight of him and smiled. “There he is. Ready to study some calc?” His voice sounded incredibly fake to the highly confused Evan.

His mother turned around and grinned at Evan. “Your friend Connor here just came and said you had a study date for your calculus class! I was just about to get going to class, so I’ll see you later tonight. Bye, honey!” she exclaimed, hugging Evan and kissing the top of his head before leaving.

Connor groaned loudly as soon as the door closed. “Holy shit, I didn’t think your mom was gonna be here! I think I deserve a goddamn Oscar for that performance,” he snickered, slinging his messenger bag onto the ratty couch.

Evan laughed incredulously. “So, uh, can I ask why you just showed up in my apartment?”

Connor shrugged nonchalantly, a goofy smile on his face. “I was bored, Hansen. There’s only so much you can do at an orchard. Where’s your room?”

Evan led him to his room, in which he promptly collapsed on his bed. “Ugh. Speaking of calc, an you believe that fucking teacher? Not only did he read my sarcastic remark in front of the class completely straight, but he accused me of flirting with some random chick.” He sat up, rolling his eyes. “Jokes on him, I’m not even into women,” Connor laughed darkly.

Evan choked on air and coughed, trying (and failing) to repress a smile. That’s one mystery solved, he supposed. The nonsensical part of his brain whispered that he was one step closer to being his soulmate but he quickly switched his train of thought.

“Not to mention how he held me after fucking class. He had the nerve to say some bullshit like ‘if you have suicidal tendencies you can always talk to your guidance counselor’ or whatever the fuck. None of them actually give a shit.” Connor’s voice had turned bitter and resentful as he played with a pillow Evan had on his bed. “We all know damn well they’d be a hell of a lot happier with smaller classes, huh?” He cynically laughed and tossed the pillow to the foot of the bed.

“I-I-I know that wasn’t what you meant, but. Um. I care,” Evan stuttered, refusing to meet Connor’s eyes even when he felt his stare bore into him. “I know you, uh, weren’t serious about, um, killing yourself but I, uh, I care about you. If you d-died, I’d be, uh, really sad,” he mumbled quietly.

A stunned silence settled over the room. Evan bit his nails hard, drawing blood. He shouldn’t have said that, he was way overstepping his boundaries, Connor was going to hate him, anxiety was building, his heart rate was rising, his palms were so fucking sweaty…

Connor slowly stood from the bed and walked over to where Evan was standing near the doorway and promptly hugged him.

Evan’s brain short-circuited as Connor’s long arms wrapped around him, pulling him close to his chest. Due to the height difference, Evan’s cheek was pressed against his collarbone. He could hear Connor’s heart beating frantically. Connor’s chin fell to rest on the top of Evan’s head. Evan’s entire body burst into flames, especially his forearm. It felt like he was struck by lightning and he was frozen in place with nothing but the steady thumping of Connor’s heart keeping him alive. He slowly lifted his arms and wrapped them around Connor’s torso and Connor made a happy noise.

He felt his chest quake with laughter. “Thanks, Evan. It… it means a lot.” Connor’s voice was shaky, far shakier than normal, and his skin was warm. Evan took a deep breath to try and prevent himself from falling into cardiac arrest. Connor smelled like pot, apples, and cream soda. Evan couldn’t stop himself from inhaling deeply and tightening his grip on his jacket. His ribcage buzzed
like a wasp’s nest, dangerous yet almost intoxicating. (Evan wondered if smelling weed on someone’s clothes was enough to get high.)

Much to Evan’s chagrin, Connor began to pull away, smiling down at Evan. “Clingy. I like it,” he laughed.

Evan felt his face grow redder and he groaned as he rested his forehead on Connor’s chest. “S-Shut up, you hugged me f-first,” he protested meekly.

Connor pat his head gently and pulled away, shedding his jacket. “It’s hot as hell in here, what the fuck is your thermostat set to?” he complained, throwing his jacket on Evan’s bed. Evan’s eyes immediately darted to his wrist. He could finally see his soulmate tattoo!

He was taken aback by all the scars on his wrists. His hands flew to his mouth. Horizontal and vertical lines adorned both his wrists, a pale grid on already pale skin. Connor traced his line of sight and sighed, showing them to Evan fully. “Whatever. Yeah. I have scars. Laugh at me all you want.”

Evan held one of his skinny wrists gingerly, running a finger over the scar tissue. Some of them were fresh, harsh red lines contrasting against the paper white skin. “Connor…” Evan could barely form a full statement. He felt tears prickle at the corners of his eyes. “I, um, I… I’m sorry,” he croaked, a lump forming in his throat.

Connor’s eyebrows furrowed. “Oh, shit, shit, shit, Hansen, I didn’t--fuck, please don’t cry,” he muttered, bringing a hand up to Evan’s cheek. He crouched down so he was looking up at Evan. “Look, man, I, just-- fuck, man.”

Evan sniffed loudly and wiped his nose. “I-I’m sorry, it’s just reallyfuckingasadanditsuckstoknowthatyou’vefeltthawayandI’msorry,” he blurted, his words blurring together as he tried to talk past the lump in his windpipe.

Connor sighed and pat Evan’s shoulder, obviously unsure of what to do. “That’s why I wear the damn jacket all the time, because everyone freaks out when they see my wrists,” he mumbled in a soft tone of voice. “Look, I’m okay, Evan, I promise.” He shot a sheepish smile up at Evan from his crouched position on the floor.

Evan felt like he was drowning as he struggled for air, wiping furiously at his eyes. He felt the familiar heat in his nose and cheeks that indicated that he’d been crying, and he took a deep, shaky breath. “I-I’m s-sorry,” he whispered, kicking himself mentally for crying in front of Connor. He hated that he knew how Connor felt. He pried his eyes away from his cast and looked at Connor’s open, worried face.

“It’s okay, Evan. C’mere,” Connor assured him, opening his arms again. Evan eagerly accepted the hug, unable to stop himself from grasping at the fabric of Connor’s t-shirt desperately as he kneeled alongside him. He hiccupped once and he buried his face in the space between Connor’s neck and shoulder. He couldn’t ignore the searing sensation of his forearm or the palpitations of his heart. Connor was immensely warm; a stark opposite to Evan, who was always cold. Connor rubbed a gentle circle into Evan’s shoulder blade, making him shiver.

Evan could have sat there for forever, nose pressing into Connor’s pulse point and arms wrapped around his ribcage, but Connor pulled away after an indeterminate amount of time. “Sorry for upsetting you, Hansen. It’s just… yeah.” He couldn’t seem to find the right words and Evan understood.

“I-It’s fine. Sorry for, uh, getting snot on your t-shirt,” Evan said, looking at the wet spot on his
shoulder embarrassedly.

Connor laughed and shrugged. “It’s fine. I have, like, twenty identical black shirts anyway.” Evan remembered his original objective and looked back at Connor’s wrist.

Written on the heavily scarred skin there was “What?”. Evan almost burst into laughter. He had forgotten their first encounter, in which Connor said “what the fuck are you laughing at?” and Evan grandiloquently replied “what.” God, how long has Connor had to live with possibly the lamest soulmate quote in the history of soulmate quotes tattooed on his arm? Evan cursed his inability to speak like a normal human being. (At least it isn’t “um,” he thought.)

Evan had a realization. “What” was an incredibly common word. Connor mumbles a lot, too; people must say “what” to Connor all the time. Connor didn’t know that Evan was his soulmate. Evan’s blood turned to ice. He didn’t know.

Connor stood and stretched. “You got an Xbox?” he asked, effectively switching the topic.

Evan shrugged as he stood, still trying to regain his breath. “We have, uh, a shitty old Xbox 360 in the living room.” He remembered how his mother had saved up for years to buy Evan a used one when he was eleven. Evan had played it almost every day; he had to smack it to get the disc tray to open and sometimes it crashed for no reason, but he loved that thing. “We also have Halo and Assassin’s Creed?” he suggested, leading Connor out to the main living room.

“Oh, I’ll kick your ass in Halo,” Connor smugly announced, flopping on the shabby couch as Evan turned the Xbox on.

“W-We’ll see, Murphy,” Evan laughed, sitting next to Connor and handing him a controller.

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A few hours later, Connor was accusing Evan of cheating and Evan was crying with laughter. “This is fucking bullshit and you know it, Hansen!” Connor yelled as Evan meleed his character to death. Evan collapsed into laughter as he looted Connor’s full-ammo Needler. Connor gasped in betrayal and pushed Evan into the arm of the couch. “You gun-stealing asshole, you’re totally screen peeking,” Connor whined as he waited for his character to respawn.

“I cannot believe you would cast such aspersions on me!” Evan faux-gasped in disbelief, leaning forward in concentration.

“I don’t know what that means, but I’m still coming for you,” Connor grumbled, sprinting across the map in Evan’s direction. This caused Evan to snort loudly, which in turn caused Connor to giggle. They devolved into a fit of laughter, unable to play any longer. “Okay, okay, fine. You win, you win,” Connor relented, throwing down his controller in defeat.

Evan cackled triumphantly. “H-Hell yeah! So, what do I win?” he asked, turning to face Connor.

Connor kicked his booted feet up onto the coffee table, folding his hands behind his head. “Uhh, I dunno. What do you want? A massage or some shit? I’ll buy you more À La Mode, maybe,” he suggested.

Before Evan could respond, he heard a muffled guitar riff. Connor sighed and tugged his phone out of his pocket, looking at the caller ID. “Fuck, it’s Cynthia. Be as quiet as possible,” he mumbled to Evan before swiping to accept the call. “Hey, Mother.”

Evan could hear her screaming on the other end; something about Connor being disobedient.
“Mother, I-- it’s none of your damn business where I was. I don’t care what Zoe said,” Connor snapped, pinching the bridge of his nose as Cynthia resumed her spiel. It was hard to make out any words from Evan’s position. “I—I’m at the orchard.” A pause. Connor scoffed. “Why do you suddenly give a shit about me, huh? Ninety-nine percent of the time, you don’t even fucking notice I’m gone. So why do you care--” He was cut off by Cynthia’s voice, now quieter. “You’re really going to fucking ground me because I was hanging out with a friend yesterday? My only goddamn friend?”

Evan’s heart tore out of his chest. A beat passed. “Fuck you too, Mother. I’ll be home in thirty minutes.” Connor hung up and threw his phone onto the carpeted floor, sighing loudly. “I fucking hate my parents.”

“I-I don’t think I like them, either,” Evan offered quietly.

Connor snickered and ruffled Evan’s hair affectionately. “I gotta go. Apparently Zoe saw me when I snuck in at two a.m. last night and she snitched. Cynthia’s pissed that I was out so late and apparently Larry’s pissed that I lied when they asked today. They’re making me give them my fucking keys.” Connor retrieved his phone and his messenger bag.

“I-I’m sorry your parents suck,” said Evan feebly, standing.

Connor made a dismissive hand gesture. “It’s not your fault. Anyways, I don’t think I have your number?” He gave Evan his phone to input his number into a new contact. Evan titled the contact “The King of Halo” and inputted his number, handing it back to Connor. “Thanks. I’ll text you, or something.” He shoved his phone back in his pocket and paused. He hesitantly side-hugged Evan, releasing him quickly. “Bye, Hansen.”

“Bye, Connor.” Evan waved with his casted arm as Connor exited, slamming the door behind him. Evan sighed in frustration, burying his face in his hands and screaming. Connor Murphy was going to be the death of him. He thought back to the hugs and felt his cold body yearn for the heat that Connor brought. “What?” read Connor’s soulmate tattoo. Evan must be his soulmate, he thought. Not only did he say that when he first met Connor, but his tattoo burned like hell whenever he touched him. He must be.

He felt his phone vibrate in his pocket and he hurriedly retrieved it.

[8:38 PM] Unknown number: i bow to the halo king :P

Evan felt a doofy smile spread across his face as he typed a reply.

[8:39 PM] Evan Hansen: Show respect, peasant ;D

Was a winking emoticon too much? Oh my God, that was creepy, wasn’t it? Before he could second guess himself too much, he hit Send. He also created a new contact for Connor, and he tried to think of a suitable name. He hesitantly entered “Connor <3”. No, what if Jared sees it? He’d never let him live it down. “Connor Murphy” was too stiff. He settled on “Prince of Halo” and locked his phone. He figured he should at least try to get some homework done and left to his room.

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On Monday, Connor wasn’t at school.

Not a weird thing in and of itself. He apparently liked to skip a lot; if anything, it was rarer that he showed up than not. Evan sent him a pensive text during lunch.
He didn’t get a response. He wasn’t too concerned, though, as Connor often took a long time to respond to texts.

Jared noticed his quieter than usual demeanor and questioned him about it. “Missing your boyfriend, Ev?”

Evan rolled his eyes. “H-He’s not my boyfriend, Jare.”

“Highly debatable. My gaydar lights up like a goddamn Christmas tree whenever Connor gets within five miles of me,” Jared argued through a mouthful of apple. “And you know how good my gaydar is. I knew Alana Beck was gay before Alana knew.”

“That doesn’t mean he’s into me!” Evan spluttered, feeling a blush creep up his neck. “There’s plenty of guys at this school.”

Now it was Jared’s turn to roll his eyes. “And how many of them have a quote from him tattooed on their fucking arm? Oh, yeah, one. Anyway, are you coming to the jazz band concert tonight? We’re playing ‘Crazy in Love.’ I got the fucking solo, in case you were wondering.”

“Watch out, Louis Armstrong,” Evan snorted. “I forgot there was a concert tonight. I’ll go if I can, maybe Connor can drive me.”

“You better show, Hansen. I haven’t been practicing this fucking twenty-measure run for nothing. The director’s been so far up my ass about practicing I think she could play my trumpet herself,” Jared scoffed.

Evan laughed. “Yeah, I-I’ll be there. I’ll bring a bouquet of roses to throw on stage at you.”

“You better, bitch! I’m the god of trumpet-playing. Bow before me, mortal!” Jared joked. Evan’s state of anxiety over Connor was much, much lessened. When Jared wasn’t the source of anxiety, he was remarkably good at alleviating Evan’s stress.

And so, Connor was off of Evan’s mind for the first time in a week.

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Evan tucked his blue button-up into his khakis and took a step back to look in the mirror. Jared would be arriving any minute to pick him up since Connor still wasn’t responding to any of his texts. He was excited to listen to Jared (and Zoe) play; he was obviously very passionate about it.

He heard a knock on the door and opened it to see Jared in a black tuxedo shirt and black pants. “Looking sharp, Hansen. Ready to go?” Jared held out his elbow like an escort.

“Same goes to you, Kleinman,” Evan replied, grabbing his elbow and closing the door behind him. He didn’t realize until he was in Jared’s old car that he forgot his phone, but he shrugged it off. He figured he wouldn’t need it anyway.

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After the concert (which went splendidly, Evan had no idea Jared could play the trumpet so well), Jared dropped Evan off at home, but not before bragging about the wild after party he was on his way to. Evan just rolled his eyes as he closed the car door.
He walked up the stairs to the apartment and unlocked the door. He was exhausted. It was only eleven, but he felt like he could fall asleep walking. He decided to check his phone as he unbuttoned the top few buttons of his blue plaid shirt. He was astounded to have missed texts from Connor.

[9:17 PM] Prince of Halo: i got in a huge fight with my parents.

[9:57 PM] Prince of Halo: are you there?

[10:31 PM] Prince of Halo: i’m sorry.


Evan felt nausea wrack his body. Fuck, fuck, fuck, what happened to Connor? He paced back and forth, trying to decide a way to reply.

[11:13 PM] Evan Hansen: Oh my God I’m so sorry for missing your texts, I was at the jazz band concert. Are you okay???

An aching feeling in his gut urged Evan to go to the orchard. If Connor was angry or hurt, he’d surely go to the orchard before anywhere else. He was already down the stairs before he heard his phone ping.

[11:22 PM] Prince of Halo: i fell oit of thr tree

Evan blinked. Connor never made typos. Oh God, what had he done? At least he knew for sure that Connor was at the orchard, he thought. Evan reached the base of the stairs and began running.

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Evan ran as fast as he could until he saw the orchard’s sign. His legs burned and his lungs stung, the cold night air hard to breathe. He bolted past Connor’s haphazardly-parked truck and flew open the rusted gate. He had only one thought, and that was to save Connor.

Connor couldn’t die. Evan had just found him. He couldn’t let his soulmate die. This was all Evan’s fault. If he had been a better friend, maybe Connor wouldn’t be in this position. Connor, Connor, Connor.

“Connor!” Evan yelled, unsure of which tree Connor was in. He sprinted down the dirt path, screaming Connor’s name. “Connor, w-where the fuck are you?” he cried, making no effort to stop the hot tears that ran down his face. His mind was racing. He remembered the scars on Connor’s too-skinny wrists, the fresh, angry red cuts, the bags under his eyes, the sallow pallor of his skin.

Evan heard a groan and froze. “C-Connor?” he called. He heard retching and ran towards the source of the sound. He found Connor on his hands and knees in the dirt, retching and vomiting. Jesus, he must’ve overdosed on pills, thought Evan. He scrambled over to Connor, tripping on the root of the apple tree and falling on his face. Pain shot up his casted arm as he braced himself against the fall and he felt the wood of another root cut his cheek. He shakily stood again, not bothering to brush off the dirt on his shirt and instead rushing to Connor’s side.

“Connor, Connor, C-Connor, are y-you okay?” he gushed, kneeling by his side and pushing his shoulders up and against the trunk of the tree so he was facing Evan.

His eyes were dull and glazed over, his skin was paler than normal, his hair was greasy and tangled, he had bile dripping down his chin. The sleeves of his jacket were soaked through with hot blood, dripping into the dirt. His jeans were ripped far more than normal, the skin of his knees scraped and
bleeding, he had blood smeared on his collarbone and cheek and vomit on his shirt. He was in worse shape than Evan had anticipated, feeling more and more tears blur his vision and drip down his face.

“E-Evan? Y-you… y-you c-came for m-m-me?” Connor muttered, more blood bubbling from his mouth.

Evan inhaled sharply, his heart shattered into infinitely many pieces as he saw Connor’s complete and utter hopelessness. He thought Evan wouldn’t come. “C-Connor, I will always come for y-you,” Evan whispered, shakily grabbing Connor’s hand. He noticed an empty Prozac bottle and couldn’t suppress a whimper. He pocketed the bottle and tried to help Connor up. Connor resisted, lurching to the side and vomiting more. It seemed like he was only regurgitating bile at this point, no more solid food was left in his stomach.

Evan realized he couldn’t carry Connor to the hospital and retrieved his phone from his pocket, hastily making a call. This was a stupid, stupid idea, but he was the only one he knew would come.

“Evan? Why the fuck are you calling me at midnight on a Tuesday?” Jared’s groggy voice sounded on the other end. Evan had never been happier in his life to hear Jared’s voice.

“J-J-Jared, Jared, p-please, I need y-you to drive to the o-orchard as f-f-fast as you can,” Evan pleaded, trying to stutter as little as possible.


“Connor, C-Connor just tried to k-k-k-kill himself,” Evan gasped, his throat closing around the act.

Evan heard rustling. “Holy fucking shit. I’m on my way.” He hung up. Evan looked back at Connor, who wiped his mouth and collapsed on the ground.

“Connor, no, p-please st-tay awake, I need you to stay a-awake,” Evan murmured softly, holding Connor’s face in his hands. He carded his fingers through Connor’s hair and held him up to look at him.

“Evan…” Connor mumbled. His eyelids fluttered shut and Evan shook him to wake him up. His eyes opened once more and he swallowed. “Evan, w-why are you here? Why are y-y-you my… f-friend?” he croaked, tears forming at the corners of his eyes.

Evan sobbed and rubbed his cheek with his thumb. “C-Connor… Connor, you’re a-amazing, Connor,” he said quietly, “you’re t-the best person I know, y-you’re b-b-beautiful, you’re f-funny, you’re everything…” He kept babbling everything that came to mind, the words just kept coming and coming as he tried to comfort Connor.

The tears flowed freely down Connor’s face as his eyes screwed shut. A mixture of blood, bile, tears, and drool slipped from his lips and he openly broke down, sniffing and rasping and weeping. “I’m so s-sorry,” Connor wheezed, his voice like sandpaper. Evan had never seen him so vulnerable, so unguarded.

Evan noticed he had stopped vomiting for the time being and seized the opportunity to stand him up. He slung Connor’s arm around him, not caring that the blood-soaked sleeve would stain his sky blue dress shirt. He held onto Connor’s waist with his right arm and held onto Connor’s arm with his left. He slowly walked Connor to the entrance as he continued to babble a stream of apologies. “E-Evan, I’m so sorry, Z-Z-Zoe, I’m s-so sorry, I’m sorry, I’m sorry,” he repeated like a broken record.

Evan couldn’t move to wipe the tears from his own face. As he crossed the open gate, he saw the headlights of Jared’s shitty four-seater and sighed with relief. Evan hobbled over to the back doors
and rested Connor in the too-small backseat. He decided to squeeze in with Connor instead of sit shotgun and rested Connor’s head on his lap, still in shock of his incredibly tired face.

“Is he alive?” Jared asked immediately, turning to look at him.

“B-Barely, fucking drive, Jared,” Evan insisted, slamming the door shut.

Jared obeyed, speeding out of the orchard. Evan’s heart spasmed as he remembered just a few days ago when Connor had sped out in the same manner. Evan looked down at Connor, who was breathing slower and slower. He played with his hair with one hand while stroking his cheek with the other. “Connor, look at me, l-look at me, keep your eyes o-open,” Evan whispered. Connor’s blue eyes were struggling to stay open, the pupils contracted until they were just pinpoints.

Tears snaked around Connor’s temples. “Why… Why did y-you come? I don’t… I don’t see w-why,” he mumbled, hand reaching to Evan. Evan shakily locked their fingers, shuddering upon feeling how cold and clammy Connor was.

“B-Because, Connor, you’re my friend. T-That’s what friends do.” He bit back ‘because I love you.’ He bit back ‘because you’re my soulmate.’ He bit back ‘because you’re my only friend.’

“We’re getting close to the ER. Honestly, it’s a fucking miracle I haven’t been pulled over for speeding, I’m currently going seventy in a forty-five,” Jared called from the front seat as he made a sharp right turn.

“Thank you, Jared,” Evan said sincerely. Jared was the only person who would come this late on a Tuesday night and he was incredibly grateful.

The next hour was a blur. Jared parked and helped Evan carry Connor into the emergency room. They handed him off to nurses and waited in the waiting room anxiously. Evan was biting his nails and jiggling his leg and breathing shallowly. Jared placed a hand on his shoulder supportively.

“Deep breaths, Ev.”

“S-Sorry for calling you so late. I just… he texted me, and I showed up at the orchard, and he was puking his guts out and his wrists were bleeding profusely and I was so scared he was dead,” Evan gushed, unable to stop the words from flowing. He blew his nose in a tissue from a box the receptionist handed him.

“That sounds… rough. It sucks that you had to see that,” Jared said quietly, then added, “I’m really proud of you, y’know that? I’m so proud that you were able to call me and keep it together.” His voice was laden with emotion.

Evan felt a tear slide down his face and he made no motion to wipe at it. “I can’t believe that this is happening.”

“Me neither, buddy. Also, you have a big ass scrape on your face.”

Evan reached up to feel the bloody skin and remembered his trip on a rootin his fervor to reach Connor. “So I do.”

A pregnant pause. “What did… how did he try to do it?” Jared asked hesitantly.

Evan swallowed thickly. “H-He, um, from what I could see, he s-s-slit his wrists, c-chugged a bottle of Prozac, and f-fell out of a tree.” The bitter irony was not lost on Evan that both him and Connor attempted to kill themselves by jumping out of a tree. He remembered Connor’s texts and felt acid in his throat.
“Holy shit,” Jared sighed. “He was thorough.”

Evan couldn’t do more than nod feebly.

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By the time a nurse came to retrieve them, Evan had fallen asleep on Jared’s shoulder. “Wake up, sleepyhead, we got a suicidal jackass to visit,” Jared mumbled, pushing Evan off of him.

He wiped at the string of drool that hung from his mouth and yawned. He remembered Connor’s suicide attempt and stood abruptly. “W-Where is he?”

The nurse led Jared and Evan to another sickly clean hospital room. It reeked of death and disinfectant. Evan entered the room and burst into tears again upon seeing Connor’s frail body hooked up to an IV drip. His entire forearms were bandaged to the point where it looked like he had a cast like Evan’s, not to mention all the bandages on his knees and head. His skin was as pale as the sheet he rested on and his hair was drawn back into a low ponytail. A million wires and drips were inserted into his wrists and inner arms. He was barely awake.

The first words out of his dry mouth were “Why the fuck is Kleinman here?”

Evan couldn’t help but burst into laughter. “Well fuck you too then, asshole! Evan and I just saved your damn life!” Jared spat with no real malice.

Connor tried to raise his hand but only got an inch off the mattress. “No loud noises. Talk slow,” he requested. Evan and Jared sat in the stiff chairs next to his bed and nodded.

“W-What happened, Connor?” Evan asked, touching one hand to his shoulder.

Connor feebly sat up, the IVs dangling from his arm. “Well, before Cynthia, Larry, and Zoe left for the concert, they started arguing with me about stupid shit. It wasn’t pretty. I brought up how they grounded me for nothing, they brought up my smoking, I said I probably wouldn’t smoke if I had half-decent parents, shit hit the fan.” His lips pressed together in a line. “You didn’t reply and I… felt horrible. It’s not your fault, it was just a mix of everything, it was the cherry on top of this shit sundae. And I-I had been planning for a while. Everybody was out because of the concert, so it was the perfect time to-to slip away to the orchard,” Connor explained, his voice bitter.

Evan swallowed. “A-And then y-you texted me.”

Connor sheepishly looked away. “Well. I had already, uh, downed the pills and slit my wrists. I was sitting in the tree, waiting for it to, y’know, kick in. I got woozy and I thought of you, so I was trying to text you but I fell out of the damn tree.”

Evan choked back a sob. This was all his fucking fault, if he had replied or picked up his phone Connor wouldn’t be almost dead, his fault, his fault, his fault.

“I can hear you over-thinking from here, Hansen,” Connor said snidely but not cruelly. “It’s not your fault. It really isn’t.”

Jared yawned. “Well now that you two have had your heart-to-heart, it’s fucking four a. m. and I have a test in first period tomorrow. Want me to drive you home, Ev?”

Evan shook his head hard. “Evan, you don’t have to--” Connor began.

“I want to,” Evan interrupted. He couldn’t abandon Connor like that again; he desperately needed
the support.

“Suit yourself. I’ll bring you food and shit after school tomorrow if I can remember. Sleep tight, tree fuckers.” Jared turned to leave and paused in the doorway. “...Feel better, Connor.”

“I’m on it, dipshit,” Connor said sarcastically.

“I should’ve expected that. Night.” Jared left and it was just Connor and Evan. The room was silent except for the rhythmic beeping of the EKG and the hum of machinery. The clinical hospital lighting cast a sallow sheen onto Connor’s skin. Evan wordlessly slipped his hand into Connor’s, not as a romantic gesture but as a gesture of solidarity and grounding. Connor weakly squeezed his hand and his eyes closed.

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Evan woke up to a hand grasping and pulling his hair. He yelped, springing up from the bed in surprise. “Sorry, sorry, I didn’t mean to tug. They put something in my IV that fucking burns,” Connor said through a grimace as an apathetic nurse wheeling a cart out of the room.

“W-Why were you touching my hair?” Evan asked groggily as he rubbed the sleep from his eyes.

Connor shrugged. “Well, you fell asleep with your head on my stomach which must’ve been very loud as my stomach won’t stop fucking growling after all the pills. I woke up earlier because your mother showed up but we didn’t want to wake you up, and I don’t know, I needed something to do with my hands and your hair is soft.” He mumbled the last bit, fiddling with the IVs sheepishly.

Evan’s eyes widened. “My mom came? Was she one of your nurses?”

Connor barked out a hoarse laugh. “Yeah. Incredibly awkward, considering how she knows me as your calc study buddy.” He tugged at the sleeve of his hospital gown. “I fucking hate hospitals.”

“Knock knock, bitches, I brought McDonald’s,” Jared announced as he entered the small room.

“Jared! Thank you for remembering,” Evan exclaimed, eagerly grabbing the bag.

Connor leaned over and stole a handful of greasy fries as Jared replied. “No problem. It felt hella quiet today. Are you feeling any better, Con?”

“Don’t give me a stupid nickname, Kleinman, and yes, I still feel like a test dummy for a torture device.” Connor shoveled more fries into his mouth with reckless abandon. “Fries help, though. I’m fucking starving.”

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After prying him away from the hospital bed, Jared offered to drive Evan home. They were climbing into the tiny car when Jared spoke. “Does he know about the soulmate shit yet?”

Evan jumped at the sudden question and felt embarrassed. “N-No.”

“Are you ever gonna tell him?” Jared asked in frustration.

Evan felt his face turn red and wished he wasn’t having this conversation right now. Connor almost fucking died, now wasn’t the time for talk of romance. “Eventually.” Jared shot him a distrustful glance. “Look, it’s n-none of your business!”

Jared turned the key and the car coughed before stirring to life. “First of all, it is my business,
because you’re my friend. Second of all, I heard you two talking in the backseat last night and I saw you two holding hands and shit. You’re lying to him, dude.”

Did Jared just call Evan his friend and not his family friend? Evan would be a lot more happy about this if the context wasn’t what it was. “Connor would’ve thought I was using him if I told him I was his soulmate!” Evan retorted.

Jared sighed. “No, he wouldn’t. He’d be damn happy that he found his soulmate, it’s practically a goddamn miracle for him.” He gave Evan a look before returning his gaze to the road. “I’m no expert, but I think he needs some good news about now.”

Evan picked at his cast as he thought. Jared was right, he couldn’t keep lying to him like this. His chest and his forearm were physically aching every time they touched and it hurt like hell. It was supposed to subside when the soulmates actually get together, and Evan would totally take that. “It feels wrong to tell him ‘by the way, I’m your soulmate!’ right after he tried to kill himself,” he mumbled.

“Then wait until he’s out of the hospital if you have to. I just mean, doesn’t it bother you? If I found my soulmate, I wouldn’t shut up about it for forever.” He pulled into the parking lot of Evan’s apartment complex and stopped. “Are you gonna be okay?” he asked.

“Y-Yeah. I’m just--still kind of in shock. There was so much blood…” Evan trailed off, lost in his thoughts again. His finger was bleeding where he bit it too hard.

“Well, if you ever need me, I think I’ve proved that I’m one call away, okay?” He smiled at Evan as he unbuckled his seatbelt. “C’mon. Bring it in. Kleinman hugs are very rare, so cherish it,” he japed, holding his arms wide open. Evan laughed and accepted gratefully, hugging Jared. (He noted that he liked hugging Connor more.)

Evan’s body walked up his apartment stairs on autopilot, his brain far too preoccupied. He was lying to Connor, wasn’t he? This was wrong and Evan hated lying, especially to his soulmate. He thought about how Connor would react if he told him right now. Would he attempt again?

His mother was waiting for him when he opened the door. “Evan… I’m so sorry.” She hugged him close and for once Evan didn’t squirm out of her grasp. (He’s hugged more people in the past two days than in the rest of his life, he thought.) Having a mother who fully supported him no matter what reassured him greatly, subsiding the flood of anxious thoughts for a little longer.

“It’ll be okay. I know Connor’s your friend, so it must be really… really hard on you,” his mother said softly, rubbing Evan’s back in a relaxing manner. “I’m always here if you wanna talk, alright? If I’m at work, you can call me, you know that, right?” she said and Evan nodded, taking a step back. “I love you, Evan.”

“Love you too, Mom.” Evan retreated to his room and promptly fell asleep, collapsing soundly on his bed. He dreamt this time of trees, of free-falls through nothingness, of Zoe Murphy’s worries, of Nirvana tank tops in a beat-up truck, of blood and stomach bile, of a full moon, of a tsunami. He found himself missing the sensation of long, nimble, black-polished fingers carding through his hair and massaging his scalp, of a too-skinny stomach rising and falling with each breath, of the loud beeping of the heart monitor that reminded him that Connor Murphy was still very much alive.

Connor Murphy was still very much alive.

Evan tossed and turned.
i just want to say thank yall SO MUCH for the overwhelming support!! ill definitely write more deh/tree bros in the future when this is over! you guys are so so so nice & every comment makes my day and makes me so happy so thank yall sm!! <333
For the next few days, Evan spent twenty-four hours a day at the hospital with Connor. He kept him company, bringing his laptop to watch movies (Connor was a big fan of Wolverine) and talking to him while he waited to be discharged. Whenever his family visited, the tension was so thick Evan could’ve cut it with a knife. Larry was very sparse with his conversation, often only saying “get well soon.” Zoe, when she did visit, was silent, rarely saying more than a greeting. Cynthia was more expressive, the only one of the three who tried to hold a conversation. She would ask him how he was feeling and ask what she could get for him.

Connor only asked for one thing: his sketchbook. When Cynthia brought it the next day, he thumbed to the next blank page and didn’t stop drawing for a long time. Evan tried to subtly look over at his book but he always rotated it so Evan couldn’t see. “No peeking, Hansen.” He sometimes talked to Evan while he drew, but most of the time they sat in a comfortable silence while Evan read.

Jared surprisingly visited fairly often. He always brought junk food and a gift, like a book for Evan or a new pencil for Connor. He brought Connor a charcoal pencil the second day, and for the rest of his stay the nurses were griping about the black smudges everywhere. They were on his hospital gown, the sheets, his face and hands, and even the IV drip, somehow. After Evan complained about getting the dark stains on the pages of his book, Connor lunged out of the hospital bed to smear more charcoal, this time on Evan’s face. Despite Evan’s begrudging expression, he was secretly insanely happy that Connor even had the strength to nearly jump out of bed. (He had almost taken the heart monitor with him, too.) Another day, Jared brought a bottle of black nail polish ironically. Evan and Connor tried to paint each other’s nails; Connor’s entire fingertips were blackened, while Evan’s nails were neatly and expertly painted. Connor yelled at Jared to bring acetone next time, to which Jared said to be more careful, dipshit. Evan felt vaguely guilty, but it was hard to be sad when Connor was frantically waving his hands in the air to dry the polish so he could scratch off the excess.

After the first day, Connor refused to eat the McDonald’s that Jared brought, as the salt and grease pained his still-sensitive stomach. He gladly accepted chocolate milkshakes, however, and would greedily chug as many as he could get his hands off. “You have no fucking idea how gross hospital food is,” he would whine before taking another long sip.

A week after the attempt, Evan was dozing off in the uncomfortable hospital chair he had spent the past three days straight in (he was careful to avoid resting his head on Connor’s stomach again.) The main nurse entered and gently removed Connor’s IV. “Am I finally getting out of this hellhole?” Connor said bluntly. Evan’s eyes fluttered open at this and he wiped the drool from his shoulder.
“Yes, today is your discharge date. You’ve been fairly stable so the doctor cleared you. Keep your arms bandaged until they are fully healed, be careful what you eat, and avoid strenuous physical activities…” the nurse droned on, helping Connor stand.

Evan rushed over to where Connor shakily stood and provided support. “Y-You’re finally getting out, Connor!” he exclaimed, smiling up at him as he slung his arm around Evan’s shoulders.

“About goddamn time,” Connor mumbled, gratefully clinging to Evan.

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Monday morning. Connor and Evan’s first day back from the hospital. The dawn’s fog had yet to lift, shrouding the entire school in mist and giving the aura of a cemetery. Connor’s hands were shoved in the pocket of his hoodie and Evan was fidgeting with the hem of his shirt as they walked down the hall to their table, students’ heads turning to watch.

“Oh my God, it’s Connor Murphy.”

“Did you hear?”

“He was the one who tried to kill himself.”

“Holy shit.”

Evan tried to ignore the voices and drifted closer to Connor’s side. He froze when Alana Beck approached them, putting a hand on Connor’s shoulder gently. “Hi, Connor. I heard about… your troubles and I wanted to say I’m here for you.”

“Like hell you are. I’ve never spoken to you before in my life, except for when you take Zoe out,” Connor growled, the dark circles around his eyes threatening her.

“Yes, that’s true, but if you ever want to change that, I’m here.” She smiled warmly up at him despite his demeanor and Evan gawked at her bravery.

“Fuck off,” stated Connor simply, stomping down the hallway past her.

“S-Sorry about that, h-he, um, he’s still… y’know,” Evan offered meekly before running after Connor. He turned a corner and saw Connor chucking his messenger bag on the table and sitting. He sat next to Connor and tugged out one of his earbuds. “It’s o-okay, Connor, she only meant well,” he tried to explain.

“Bullshit, she just wants to befriend the suicidal guy for another bullet point on her damn résumé,” Connor sighed, but his breathing slowed and he seemed to calm back down. He ran a hand through his hair (the moment he got home, Evan watched him race to the bathroom to take a shower; he apparently hated having greasy hair) and plucked out his other earbud. Evan picked at his cast; it was supposed to come off in another week, but he had become accustomed to Connor’s name in big, bold letters in his periphery and was almost sad to see it go. He couldn’t hide his soulmate quote from Connor any longer after his cast came off, and the thought of confessing hurt his stomach. Just a little longer, until he’s stable, he told himself.

Evan was shocked out of his reverie by a cold hand sliding into his own. He turned to look at Connor, heat rising to his face. Connor made eye contact and coughed. “I just need to make sure that you’re… that you’re real.” He didn’t move his hand and neither did Evan. They sat for the next fifteen minutes, hands intertwined under the table and watching the fog lift. Evan hoped Connor couldn’t feel how sweaty his palms were. The bell rang and the two reluctantly withdrew their
hands. “Later,” Connor said gruffly before slinging his backpack over his shoulder and walking the opposite direction.

Evan stared at his hand, still in shock. He rubbed his palm on his khakis to rid them of sweat and shrugged on his backpack, making his way to his first period.

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Forming coherent thoughts was hard. Evan dazedly trudged through his first four periods, his mind dulled by six days off of school. He missed sitting in the hospital room with Connor, sipping milkshakes and trying in vain to erase charcoal smudges from the bedsheets. His arm ached acutely. Nonetheless, he made it through to lunch.

He sat at the table again, the scene around it transformed by daylight. The leaves that hadn’t fallen yet were turning a beautiful fiery orange and the unmistakeable smell of fall was in the air. His hand tingled and he rubbed it anxiously.

Connor wordlessly sat next to Evan and linked their fingers again. Evan swallowed the butterflies that threatened to choke him alive and reciprocated the gesture. Words weren’t needed. Connor and Evan had a strange kind of mutual understanding on almost everything, from mental health to music to the silent vow Evan made to Connor to never snoop in his sketchbook.

“Thank God you two dumbasses are finally back, it was getting eerily quiet around here,” Jared exclaimed happily, taking a seat. Evan was relieved he seemed to not notice their hands.

“I’m pretty sure I can still hear the damn heart monitor,” Connor stated sourly. Evan’s arm burned.

“Has anybody said anything about it?” Evan asked, gently squeezing Connor’s hand. (Fuck. Was he being weird? He was totally being weird. Holding hands is weird.)

He was reassured by Connor’s calloused thumb rubbing a circle into the back of his hand, his heart rate rising and stomach getting caught in his throat. “Nah. Nobody has the balls. Sometimes being the school’s resident psycho has its benefits, I guess.”

Jared laughed at this. “True.” Evan zoned out as Connor and Jared continued talking, lost in the coolness radiating off of Connor’s body. His thumb continued making lazy circles on his hand. Evan wondered if he played guitar due to the rough callous on his thumb. His black nail polish gleamed in the sunlight and Evan bit the nails of his free hand absentmindedly. Jared’s voice sounded in the back of his mind as words seared into his forearm; he was going to have to tell him sometime. He couldn’t keep lying to him like this. Connor deserved the truth. But what if Connor didn’t like him back yet? What if Connor was weirded out? What if Connor wasn’t his soulmate?

Connor nudged his shoulder. “Hansen? You there? Jared asked you if you were going to eat that.”

Evan blinked a few times and looked back at Connor. “S-Sorry, I zoned. Yeah, you can have it.” He tossed the granola bar to Jared and took a deep breath. His hand had gone clammy around Connor’s, but he didn’t seem to notice.

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For the next week, Connor couldn’t let go of Evan’s hand. Evan speculated it was due to his attempt, and Connor later explained it as a way of grounding himself and reminding himself that he was okay and alive. Evan wasn’t complaining, of course, he loved clingy Connor. It wasn’t just hand-holding, either; Connor would rest his head on his shoulder, or touch his knee, or even wrap his arm around him when he was feeling particularly brave. He did it when they were in private, like at the orchard.
or in Evan’s room, and in public, like at school, leaning against the lockers and daring any onlookers to say anything.

Evan’s head swam at every instance of casual physical contact, but he couldn’t say he didn’t like it. Connor was right; it felt reassuring that yes, Connor was a real person and he’s right beside him and he’s tracing the tendons in his hand with a polished nail. (Evan liked running the pad of his thumb along the smooth, black enamel on Connor’s nails.) Sometimes Evan noticed people giving them strange looks, but whenever he nudged Connor, he would squeeze his hand twice as hard and pull him closer. Somehow this always untied the knot of anxiety in Evan’s gut better than any anxiety med he had tried (and he’d tried them all.)

It was nice.

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The saw buzzed loudly as it cut through Evan’s cast. He looked at it numbly as it cut a strike through Connor’s name. His mother smiled and clapped as the halves of the cast fell apart to reveal the pale, dirty arm underneath. The black quote stared up at Evan as he looked at it for the first time since the summer. He hesitantly moved his wrist, feeling disconcerted. He forgot what moving his wrist felt like. The lightness of his arm was also striking. He didn’t stop flexing his wrist until he got home.

Evan took a long shower, scrubbing the grimy arm as hard as he could. “What the fuck are you laughing at?” The quote felt like it was boring a hole in his arm. He rubbed the washcloth harder, hoping that the text would fade in vain. Connor was going to see it, no doubt; Evan didn’t own very many long sleeve shirts. Jared’s argument echoed in his mind. How could he possibly confess? The skin was red and irritated. The too-hot water that cascaded down his back was now turning lukewarm. He wet his hair one last time and shut off the water.

As he towelled off, he considered some fantasies.

_They’re at the orchard, sitting at the base of a tree at sunset. Their fingers are casually laced together as they cloudgaze; Connor points out a cloud that looks like a heart and Evan laughs warmly. “Hey, Connor. I have something I need to tell you.”_

“Yeah, Evan?” Connor asks sweetly, turning his head to look at him with those soft blue eyes Evan’s seemingly always drowning in. His thumb is rubbing Evan’s hand affectionately and the sunlight gives a warm cast to his skin, making him look nothing short of angelic.

“I think you’re my soulmate. Here, look at my quote,” Evan states smoothly, not a stutter in his voice, as he shows Connor his forearm. He feels no anxiety, no nagging voice in the back of his head; just the setting sunshine on his face and Connor’s warmth by his side.

Connor gasps and his free hand shoots up to his mouth, his face turning pink. “Wow, really? I can’t believe it!” he says in shock. Evan smiles and leans in, kissing Connor chastely. His lips are soft and warm and he squeaks in surprise. Evan withdraws from the kiss and grins at him, heart racing. Connor blushes and threads his fingers into Evan’s hair, pulling him closer as he bites his lip--

Okay, Evan, time to stop, he thought quickly, shaking his head roughly. That’d never happen, he was being crazy. He should get real. What might actually happen? He thought of another situation.

_They’re at lunch with Jared. He shoots Evan a glare, egging him on. Evan clears his throat anxiously. “C-C-Connor, I n-need to, uh, t-tell you something,” he stutters sharply. His voice_
“What the fuck do you want?” Connor seethes, sneering at Evan.

“W-Well, I, um, I think y-y-you should s-see my s-s-soulmate tattoo,” Evan stammers, thrusting his forearm at Connor. He grabs his wrist roughly, his black nails digging into Evan’s sensitive skin as he scrutinized the ink.

He burst into laughter. “Oh my God, you don’t actually think we’re soulmates, do you? God, you’re so stupid. I’d never love you, not in a million years, you fucking freak! Can you believe it, Jared?” he cries, wiping his eye as he laughs loudly. People are watching the spectacle and whispering. Evan feels hot shame curl in his stomach.

“What a fucking loser! I can’t believe he fucking fell for it!” Jared cackled, laughing with Connor. Evan shrunk into himself as Zoe and Alana and everybody at the school circled the table, laughing and pointing and whispering at Evan, Evan, what a fucking freak, what a loser, what an idiot, what a dumbass--

Evan’s mother knocked on the bathroom door. “Evan? You’ve been in there for a long time. You okay?”

Evan looked at the door blankly. He was crying on the floor, still not even clothed. He rubbed his eyes and yelled, “Yeah, I’m fine. Just g-getting dressed.” He heard her footsteps fade and sniffled acutely. He tugged on a pair of sweatpants and a hoodie and ran to his room. He dry swallowed two of his anxiety meds and sat on his bed, hot tears dripping from his chin and onto the blue comforter. His phone dinged and he flinched, reaching for it shakily.

[10:36 PM] Prince of Halo: you. me. your prize for winning halo: à la mode. orchard. tomorrow. 4 pm. i’ll pick you up. you in?

[10:38 PM] Evan Hansen: Of course!!

Evan’s mouth twisted up into a smile and he held his phone close to his chest, resisting the urge to kick and dance. Fuck yes, another friend-date with Connor! Maybe he could confess then… His mind drifted to the first scenario dreamily. He decided to get a second opinion on the matter.

[10:47 PM] Evan Hansen: Okay so Connor and I are going to get ice cream & go to the orchard tomorrow… should I tell him?

[10:48 PM] the insanely cool jared kleinman: DUDE OFC WHY ARE YOU EVEN ASKING THAT

[10:49 PM] the insanely cool jared kleinman: why are you even asking man of course you should

[10:49 PM] Evan Hansen: I don’t know!! I’m really nervous.

[10:50 PM] the insanely cool jared kleinman: have you not seen the way he looks at you like youre in a goddamn nicholas sparks romcom??

[10:51 PM] the insanely cool jared kleinman: seriously like im thirdwheeling mega hard


[10:54 PM] the insanely cool jared kleinman: DEEP SIGH
Evan locked his phone and placed it on his nightstand. Did he really look at him like that? Jared must be kidding, right? He fell asleep uneasily.

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The next morning, Connor smoothly interlaced their fingers again, squeezing gently as he scrolled on his phone. He had one headphone in and Evan had in the other one and they were leaning against each other, the grungy chords of Nirvana flowing through the tiny speakers. Evan couldn’t fathom how nonchalant he was about holding his hand. “Wait. You got your cast off,” Connor said, looking at Evan’s arm.

Shit, shit, shit, Evan thought. He can’t see the quote, Evan wasn’t ready, what if he saw the quote? Evan shrugged as coolly as he could. “Yeah. I’m finally free, I guess.” He thanked his lucky stars he was wearing a jacket today.

“Nice. Want me to write my name on your arm, just like old times?” Connor quipped, nudging him with his elbow.

Evan felt ice run through his veins; he was absurdly close to the truth. “I-I think I’m okay, thanks.”

Connor changed the subject and yanked out his earbud. “Excited for your prize today, Halo King?” he teased, withdrawing his hand and drawing circles on Evan’s palm instead.

Evan shivered. “Yeah. This’ll be your first À La Mode since the hospital, huh?”

“Oh hell yeah. You already know I’m going to put so much sugary shit on it, it’ll be a damn miracle if I don’t immediately fall into a diabetic coma,” Connor smirked.

“No comas on my watch, Murphy,” Evan laughed, leaning on Connor’s shoulder affectionately.

“You don’t even listen to your mom!” Evan giggled, poking Connor’s hand in jest.

“Shit, you got me there, Hansen.” Connor laughed genuinely and Evan couldn’t keep his eyes off him. His heart pounded in his chest and his wrist ached but he ignored it, taking in Connor’s gleeful expression. It was pretty rare that Connor smiled fully, wrinkles forming around his eyes and nose crinkling. Evan was awestruck and his heart skipped a beat. Connor squeezed Evan’s hand and Evan squeezed back.

The moment was shattered by the bell ringing loudly above their heads. Connor ceased laughing and ran a finger along Evan’s wrist. “See you later, Hansen,” he said, standing and leaving Evan dazed and lovestruck.

---

Lunch came and Evan found himself looking forward to the physical contact with Connor, as much as he was ashamed to admit it. They sat in their usual position, with their hands intertwined under the table and thighs touching out of Jared’s line of sight. Evan was looking at the trees, transfixed by the changing colors of the leaves. The breeze rustled the branches, making more leaves fall lazily to the ground below. Evan loved to stare at trees.

Jared coughed conspicuously. Evan’s head jerked back down and he looked towards Connor for an explanation. Much to his surprise, Connor had his chin in his left hand and was staring at Evan previously. He quickly moved, pretending like he was looking at a student who was passing by. “W-
What is she wearing, right?” he mumbled and returned to his lunch, which was a bottle of Diet Coke. Jared barked out a laugh and nodded at Evan. Evan felt his body flush and looked away. As much as he pained him, Jared was right. Was he being naïve? He tightened his grip on Connor’s hand.

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Connor hadn’t been able to pass any notes to Evan since the teacher intercepted his gun drawing. This day ended that, however, as a crumpled paper ball landed on Evan’s desk. He eagerly unfolded it and saw a doodle of an apple tree. He smiled down at the paper and decided to add a suspiciously tall and lanky boy at the base of the tree, eating an apple. He re-crumpled the paper and threw it back.

Next time, Connor added a shorter boy with a highlighter-blue polo and an ice cream cone. Next to Evan’s stick-figure-esque scribble, Connor’s depiction of Evan was detailed and beautiful. Evan added an ice cream cone in Connor’s hand and a smile on his face. He catapulted it back at Connor.

Watching Connor open it and grin like an idiot made Evan’s arm burn dully. He wrote on the back of the paper and threw it back at Evan.

“I WANT TO SHOW YOU THIS PLACE. ITS RIGHT NEXT TO THE ORCHARD + I THINK YOU’LL LIKE IT.”

“:O Really?! Sounds cool!! I can’t wait!!”

Connor shoved the note in his pocket and shot a smile in Evan’s direction. He didn’t send another note after that and Evan buried himself in his Calculus notes.

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Evan nervously ran his hands through his hair in front of the mirror, trying to make himself look presentable. He knew Connor wouldn’t care, but he couldn’t help himself from adjusting his Ellison State Park tee anxiously. A knock sounded on the door and Evan ran to open the door, smiling when he saw Connor standing there in his trademark black jacket and ripped jeans.

The two traveled downstairs and Evan climbed into Connor’s truck enthusiastically. He inhaled deeply and noticed a smoldering joint in the cupholder; Connor must’ve been smoking before he picked him up. Connor turned the ignition and, much to Evan’s surprise, a light and happy guitar or ukulele melody flowed through the speakers. “First stop: À La Mode,” mumbled Connor, reversing out of the parking lot.

Hot wind blew through the open windows, kissing Evan’s face and ruffling his meticulously-combed hair. His hand rubbed at the skin where his cast used to be; as weird as it sounded, he missed it. It was his shield, it gave him something to do in awkward situations instead of pick at his nails and the hem of his shirt. It was a social crutch even more than a physical one to Evan. The breeze on his arm felt foreign and strange after losing the familiar feeling of the heavy weight of the cast. He had decided against a jacket, wanting to make the most of his naked arm. He pushed the nagging feeling that Connor would notice his tattoo back down and focused on the plucky chords that Connor was humming along to.

He turned his attention back to the serene Connor that sat beside him. He was leaning on the palm of his left hand, the elbow resting on the window slot, and tapping on the steering wheel to the beat with his right hand. The tails of bandages trailed out of the cuffs of his jacket and Evan was happy that he was taking care of himself. Connor’s black nail polish was chipping and his long hair was messy, but Evan realized he loved the imperfections. They reminded him that he didn’t have to be
perfectly put together, either. (It also helped that he liked to look at the little, almost imperceptible freckles that adorned Connor’s cheeks.)

A minute later, the breeze ceased and Connor was parking the truck. The two paused for a minute before exiting the car. “It’s nice outside today,” Connor said quietly.

“It is,” Evan replied. Connor gave Evan a look that he couldn’t quite describe. The sunlight framed his face in a way that was nothing short of seraphic, turning his hair into a white glowing halo. His breath caught in his throat. The air was warm and pressing on Evan’s lungs in a not completely unpleasant way. His normal suffocation feeling was lessened, and his arm was buzzing with sensation. There was a foot between them but he felt close.

Connor opened the door and Evan snapped out of it. They ventured into À La Mode and bought two cones—Evan’s was still a plain chocolate while Connor’s this time was cookies and cream with a pound of toppings. Connor paid for both again and Evan let him as his trophy for beating him earlier. They drove together to the orchard, a short drive, but took a right at the last second. “Here it is, my favorite place,” Connor announced, the car sputtering to a stop.

A wide open field, framed with trees, with tall wild grass carpeting the ground laid in front of them. The wind blew the grass and the leaves, gently rustling. The golden sunshine gave the entire clearing a beautiful warm tint and Evan wondered if he was in heaven. He gasped and swallowed. “It’s… beautiful.”

Connor nodded in Evan’s periphery. “C’mon, stop dripping ice cream on the seat and let’s go sit.” Evan reeled in embarrassment upon noticing the chocolate was dripping down his hand and pooling on the seat of the truck. He began stammering a profuse apology but Connor cut him off. “These seats have been through worse, Hansen. Let’s go.”

They exited the truck as Evan hurriedly licked the excess ice cream off the cone and his hand. The last breezes of summer blew Connor’s hair and Evan felt his palms grow sweaty around his ice cream. Connor’s long fingers closed around Evan’s wrist and he tugged, leading him through the tall grass. He let himself be dragged through the picturesque field, his entire body flooding with emotion. Connor was still so skinny; he was always skinny, but during his hospitalization he became almost emaciated and it was apparent by the way his jacket hung on and tried to slip off of his shoulders.

A word popped into his mind as he looked at Connor’s spindly legs sprinting deeper into the field with Evan in tow: bittersweet. The hospitalization, his tattoo, Connor was bittersweet. Evan was beyond happy when he found out that he had a soulmate, but it was Connor, and Connor wasn’t a very friendly or open person. He pondered for a moment about why Connor talked to him in the first place. Maybe it was a bet. Maybe it was Jared paying him off so Evan wouldn’t cling to him as much. Maybe he was just as lonely as Evan. His mind wandered to his suicide attempt. Evan’s stomach twisted as he remembered the blood, the vomit, the empty pill bottle. He felt acute guilt in his ribcage like a caged bird struggling to escape. If he had been a better friend, would Connor not have tried to kill himself? He should’ve brought his damn phone, should’ve picked up when he called, should’ve responded when he texted, should’ve stopped his suicidal thoughts in their tracks. He thought back to his attempt before the school year started. He wished he had Connor then. Everything would have been different, he wished everything was different. Connor’s hand was cold. He remembered the first day, when he had sat with Connor, leaning on the trunk of an apple tree. He was warm. Heat radiated from Connor like he was the sun, volatile and blinding, and Evan wasn’t wearing sunglasses. Now, though, his touch was cold and somber, more like a dying star. Something had shifted.

Connor slowed to a stop, turned to face Evan, and laid down on the ground. Evan laid beside him,
missing the feeling of his grip on his wrist. Just as he thought that, Connor slipped his hand into
Evan’s, long fingers tangling with his own. His forearm itched relentlessly and his heart rate
skyrocketed as he looked up at the sky with Connor. Cotton candy clouds lazily drifted across the
horizon. Evan gripped Connor’s hand a little tighter.

Connor was the first to break the silence. “Thanks.”

“For what?” Evan asked quizzically.

“I don’t know. Staying with me?” Connor mumbled, massaging his wrist. A silence (not comfortable
nor uncomfortable) spread like jam between them. Evan inched infinitesimally closer to Connor.
“It… It means a lot,” he finished, looking over at Evan.

“N-No problem,” coughed Evan. Jared’s smug voice sounded in his ear, “Just fucking do it already!
He’s in a good mood, he just said some really sappy shit, you’re sitting in a fucking field, the timing
couldn’t get more perfect.” His arm sang in anticipation as he tried to work up the nerve.

Connor sat up abruptly. “We’re friends, right?”

Evan slowly sat up to face him and placed a hand on his shoulder. “Of course, Connor. W-What’s
up?” he said through a lump of anxiety.

Connor’s teeth worried at his lip and he picked at his nail polish. “Okay. Okay, this is happening,”
he whispered, running a shaky hand through his wild mane of hair. Evan tilted his head in confusion.
Connor shifted so he was sitting on the balls of his feet and facing Evan who sat cross-legged in front
of him. He took a deep breath and continued. “Well, uh. I… I have feelings for you,” he blurted
loudly.

Evan’s brain short-circuited. His heart jumped to his throat and his pulse skyrocketed, his palms
became sweaty on his knees. “W-W-What?” he stuttered, his diaphragm about to burst.

Connor laughed awkwardly. “Evan Hansen, I have no idea if you’re my soulmate or not, but I… I
kind of really fucking love you,” he continued, his face turning a bright red color that Evan had
never seen before. “You’re just, fuck, I’ve never really had a friend like you before and God you’re
fucking amazing and I love your smile, your eyes, your stupid fucking jokes, your goddamn tree
facts, the way you care so unfathomably much, and I don’t know how soulmates work or if you’re
even my soulmate but if you aren’t mine there’s been a goddamn glitch in the system because you’re
a fucking masterpiece,” he rambled on, his voice getting progressively shakier, a rare occurrence for
the chronically over-confident Connor. Evan’s body was on fire but his brain still hadn’t processed
the information and he looked at him numbly. Did he just actually say that?

“God, you really aren’t getting it, are you? Stop me if you want,” Connor mumbled and Evan’s
eyebrows knitted together in confusion and he was leaning forward and oh my God Connor’s lips
were on his. They were chapped and tender from his lip-biting and their teeth clacked together
unpleasantly. Connor exhaled through his nose, his hands fist ed in Evan’s collar and pulling him
closer, the tip of his nose pressing against Evan’s cheek. Evan felt his entire body burst into flames
and his eyebrows shot up to his hairline, his open eyes taking in Connor’s screwed-shut ones. He
was sure he was blushing deeply as Connor was. The split second felt like a millennia and a
nanosecond all at once, just a clumsy peck on the mouth yet Evan’s entire being reeled. The burning
in his forearm subsided.

Connor slowly retreated, his eyelashes fluttering and his mouth slightly open. His entire face was red
down to his ears and his neck. He hesitantly let go of Evan’s collar as a pregnant silence enveloped
them. The breeze whispered quietly around the two as the gears turned in Evan’s head. “I’m sorry, I
thought…” Connor began and Evan saw anxiety and paranoia set in on his face.

Without thinking, Evan surged forward again, trying to knot his hands in Connor’s hair. He missed his mouth and instead got the corner of his lips, which made Connor burst out laughing. “Oh my God, Hansen, you’re such a dork,” he chuckled, pressed a warm hand to the nape of Evan’s neck, and pulled him in to kiss him gently.

All the anxiety melted out of Evan’s body. The only word on his lips was Connor, Connor, Connor, his fingers tangled in his hair, heat emanating from his body, a smile on his lips as they pressed against Evan’s, a hand on his cheek. Evan’s eyes shut this time and he was absorbed in the sensations; Connor’s mouth, his calloused fingers on his chin, his other hand wrapped around the back of his neck, the warmth seeping through Connor’s shirt as Evan put his hand on his side, Connor’s muffled happy noises. Evan’s arm didn’t burn anymore. His head felt full of cotton, like he was dreaming. He hoped he wasn’t a bad kisser as he tried to move his lips softly against Connor’s.

Connor finally separated from him after what felt like an eon and touched their foreheads together, a big, goofy smile spreading across his face. “I’ll take that as the feelings are mutual?”

Evan nodded. “Yeah, C-Connor, I also kind of really fucking love you,” he managed to say despite the heat that rushed to his face. He couldn’t suppress a grin as he intertwined their fingers. “A-A-And, um, t-there’s something I think you should see?” he said with an upward inflection, reaching his left arm out for Connor to see.

He ran his fingers over the letters gently (God he was so gentle with Evan) and his face went through a million emotions. “I… I said this. Oh my God, we’re soulmates. Jesus Christ, Evan, you’re my soulmate,” Connor wheezed. The sun was setting behind him, sunlight spilling around him and casting him in an ethereal glow. His eyes lifted to meet Evan’s, and holy shit, his blue eyes (with just a bit of brown in the left one, he noted) were so bright and luminous and full of hope for the first time since the hospital. Evan’s chest ached with something, maybe love, maybe affection, maybe pain. “Why didn’t you tell me before?” Connor asked tentatively.

A hot wave of guilt crashed over Evan’s body like a tsunami. “W-Well, I, um. I, I’m kind of a really nervous person and I was scared you would react badly? I was going to, before the, um, the attempt, but then it happened and I didn’t want you to think I was taking advantage of you, because I would totally never do that, and I, uh, I figured that maybe I’d do it when I got my cast off but I haven’t thought of a plan but I guess I don’t need one now?” He gushed, the words bleeding together as he talked quickly. “I mean, I guess what I’m trying to say is I want you to like me for me, and not for the words on my arm, y’know? I wanted it to be more… organic, I guess, I don’t know,” he trailed off, looking down at his nails.

Connor put a hand under Evan’s chin and lifted his head so he was forced to look at him. Connor’s eyes were wet as he replied, “Evan, it’s okay, it’s okay, I understand. I’m kind of happy it worked out this way in the end.” He wiped his eye and smiled into Evan’s face.

“What does this m-mean? For us?” Evan asked hesitantly, unable to take his eyes off of Connor. He had never seen him so hopeful and radiant and he hoped he would get to see him like this more.

“I don’t know. More ice cream, I guess?” he laughed, shrugging. Evan laid back down on the ground and Connor curled up by his side, watching the sunset together. Connor ran his fingers along his quote gently.

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The main thing that changed was that now Connor showed up at Evan’s apartment randomly. They
challenged each other in Halo often, and sometimes Connor would bring his sketchbook and after Evan begged for a while he’d let him look through it. He flipped through the pages and noticed that the charcoal pencil Jared gave him was particularly well-loved. He apparently liked to draw Evan a lot; Evan found himself blushing as he looked through pages and pages of him smiling or climbing a tree or sitting in the field by the orchard. (Connor stated that drawing and Evan are two of the things that help him relax the most, so he often combined them. Evan blushed.)

The field became a common hang-out (are they dates now? pondered Evan) spot. Sometimes Connor would park the truck near the orchard and he and Evan would cuddle in the bed of the truck for hours on end. Evan always instantly relaxed when Connor wrapped his long arm around him, pulling him into his chest where he rested his head and listened to his heartbeat. Connor remained exceptionally clingy, the physical intimacy seemingly instantly soothing his ever present anger.

Mental health remained a struggle. Evan was still anxious, especially when Connor wanted to get exceptionally eager or handsy with the PDA, even though Connor was the best way to calm him down. He learned to talk quietly to Evan when he had a panic attack, whispering sweet nothings and embracing him tightly. He let him soak the shoulder of his shirts with tears and he rocked him back and forth gently, drawing on his back with his black nails. He also found that Evan loved it when he played his ukulele (After a while of Connor’s rough thumbs brushing against his cheek or the back of his hand, Evan asked him about his callouses on his hands and he sheepishly confessed his love for playing his ukulele. Evan found it adorable and tried to get him to play as much as possible) and often serenaded him. During Connor’s episodes, all he needed was for Evan to sit in his lap and bear hug him as hard as he could. He explained that he wasn’t just a horny teenage boy; physical contact did, in fact, help ground him in reality, but when Evan brought up the fact that Connor loved giving him hickies, he stopped arguing his innocence outside of his mental illness. (Explaining these hickies to his mother became increasingly harder, as Connor left them not only on his neck, but on his collarbones, his jaw, his chest, and sometimes his hips if he was feeling particularly affectionate. Evan always playfully pushed him away before he managed to get below the belt, though, much to Connor’s chagrin.)

Connor loved kissing and tracing over Evan’s soulmate quote. He felt guilty that his quote was so shitty, but Evan expressed that he actually liked it. It was very distinctively Connor. Evan felt way more guilt than Connor did, though, once he learned that Connor had no idea who his soulmate was for most of his life.

“Well, ‘what?’ is really vague. Pretty much everyone who talks to me’s first word is ‘what,’” Connor shrugged nonchalantly, playing with Evan’s hair as Evan laid on his chest in his bed.

“Jesus, I’m so sorry I’m so nervous all the time,” Evan muttered into Connor’s neck. He pressed his lips to his pulse point to try and atone, burrowing into Connor’s neck and hair more. He breathed him in, smelling the distinct, familiar smell of Connor; candy sweetness, something tangy, and a hint of weed that always clung to his clothes.

“It’s okay. It’s kind of cute,” Connor laughed, petting Evan’s hair gently. “I’m glad it turned out the way it did, anyway. I was so anxious before telling you, did you know that?”

“You were?” Evan asked, looking up at him. His forearm tingled happily as he interlaced their fingers again.

“Yep. I was pining so hard for you, man. It took a small army to get me to finally bite the bullet and kiss you. I’d never had a crush on anybody before and I was so scared I was doing something wrong. I mean, I put up with Jared fucking Kleinman for you, so you know I was dedicated as hell,” he smirked and Evan felt his chest shake with a chuckle.
“A b-brave sacrifice,” Evan giggled. “I still can’t believe you love me back,” he whispered, his nose pressing against Connor’s jawline.

Connor pressed a kiss to his forehead, running his hand up and down his shoulder. “And I don’t know what you see in me, Hansen,” he replied. “I’m a mentally ill, suicidal, angry, skinny, pale-ass stoner.”

Evan rolled his eyes. “You forgot ‘stupid.’”

“Ah, yes, my mistake,” Connor replied amusedly, tightening his arm around Evan’s shoulders. “You’ve turned me into a sap, Hansen,” he mumbled. “You’ve turned me soft.”

“You’re welcome.” He angled his chin upwards to give Connor a kiss on the lips this time, and Connor eagerly reciprocated. Connor moved his hands to Evan’s hips and pulled him up on the bed so he could get a better vantage point, licking his lip in typical, impatient Connor fashion. Evan smiled into the kiss and wondered what he’d done to deserve a soulmate like Connor Murphy.

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Jared screamed when Evan broke the news to him. He said he was proud of Evan for not completely losing his shit when Connor ended up confessing first. He sat Evan and Connor down at lunch the day after and cleared his throat. “I have something to tell both of you.”

“Kleinman, we know you’re gay, if that’s what you’re saying,” Connor smirked.

“Shut your damn mouth, Murphy. So, basically, the entire time you two dumbasses were head over goddamn heels for each other, I was caught in the middle. Evan kept texting me about how he wanted to make out with Connor and Connor kept texting me about how hot Evan looks in his khakis or whatever. This has been the most fucking harrowing experience of my entire life, and you are both damn lucky I didn’t tell the other before you doofuses did.” Jared dug out his phone and showed Evan a text log between him and Connor and Connor sputtered a protest.

[11:58 AM] the insanely cool jared kleinman: ur not subtle yknow
[11:59 AM] tall angsty asshole: i’m sure i don’t know what you’re talking about
[12:00 PM] the insanely cool jared kleinman: the heart eyes. ur totally gay for hansen, arent u??
[12:03 PM] tall angsty asshole: dont be ridiculous
[12:04 PM] the insanely cool jared kleinman: I FUCKING KNEW IT AHAHAHAHAHAH
[12:05 PM] tall angsty asshole: IF YOU TELL HIM I’LL FUCKING KILL YOU KLEINMAN

Jared laughed and scrolled down. “Remember when you were in denial?”

“That murder’s still on the table, Kleinman,” Connor growled.

[11:27 PM] tall angsty asshole: FUCK man how is he so cute
[11:28 PM] the insanely cool jared kleinman: go be gay somewhere else
[11:29 PM] tall angsty asshole: jared i’m fucking dying over here
[11:29 PM] the insanely cool jared kleinman: ask him out you goddamn coward
[11:30 PM] tall angsty asshole: what if he doesn’t fucking like me?
[11:31 PM] the insanely cool jared kleinman: i mean can you blame him lmao
[11:32 PM] the insanely cool jared kleinman: im on it

“Fuck you, Kleinman, these were confidential!” Connor yelled. Jared snickered and scrolled down.

[1:48 PM] tall angsty asshole: WHAT THE FUUUUUCK
[1:50 PM] the insanely cool jared kleinman: any particular reason why youre texting me in the middle of fifth period??
[1:51 PM] tall angsty asshole: YOU’RE THE ONLY ONE I CAN VENT TO ABOUT EVAN SO YOU’RE STUCK WITH IT
[1:52 PM] the insanely cool jared kleinman: oh my goooood just make out w him already
[1:53 PM] tall angsty asshole: i’m fucking trying you cunt
[1:53 PM] tall angsty asshole: you know how goddamn TEMPTING it is whenever i drive him anywhere?
[1:56 PM] tall angsty asshole: he sits in the passenger seat with the window down and his hair’s all blown from the wind and he's smiling all cute and he’s bobbing his head to my shitty music
[1:57 PM] tall angsty asshole: it takes all my goddamn willpower not to stick my tongue down his throat okay
[1:59 PM] the insanely cool jared kleinman: yknow i dont think i needed all that detail but its good to know that youre a goddamn sap
[2:00 PM] tall angsty asshole: shut the fuck up

Evan felt his face turn red and he squeezed Connor’s hand. “Oh my God, I had no idea! Jared was telling me the same thing, trying to get me to ask you out,” he said incredulously. “You’re a goddamn mastermind.”

“Thank you, thank you. You’re fucking welcome, by the way.”

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Zoe and Alana were ecstatic when Connor and Evan broke the news to them. Alana gushed about how she pretty much knew anyway by the way they acted like more than acquaintances and Zoe shrugged, saying she figured it out when Evan refused to leave his side during the hospitalization. “I mean, you were like conjoined twins. It doesn’t take a detective to figure it out.” Connor punched her shoulder.

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It was three AM and Connor burst into Evan’s room. Evan had been crying on his bed, another anxiety attack rearing its ugly head. He had texted Connor that he was feeling bad and not ten minutes later Connor was in his apartment (Evan had long ago had a copy of the key made for Connor) and dropping plastic bags on the ground to rush to Evan’s side.
“Evan, Evan, I’m here, Evan, it’s okay, babe, Evan, love…” He whispered pet names into his ear as he held him close, Evan shivering hard against his chest. His body was wracked by sniffles and sobs. Evan’s hands knotted in Connor’s loose t-shirt and Connor rubbed his back sympathetically.

“Everybody h-h-hates m-me. I-I’m such a fuck-king b-b-burden,” Evan whimpered, tears soaking into the cotton of Connor’s shirt.

“No you aren’t, Evan, you’re not a burden, you’re my best friend, you’re my soulmate, you’re the best damn thing that’s ever happened to me,” Connor reassured him, petting his hair and hugging him as tightly as humanly possible.

Evan looked up at him through teary eyes. “N-N-Nobody likes me, C-Connor. I’m a w-w-whiny, anx-x-xious, annoying, s-stupid piece of shit,” he sobbed, tears and snot dripping down his face.

Connor pressed a kiss to his forehead, “I love you,” his left cheek, “I love you,” his right cheek, “I love you,” his nose, “I love you,” and his chin, “I love you. I love you, Evan Hansen, and you are not whiny or annoying or stupid, you are my favorite person and my soulmate and I love you more than anything else in this world.”

He was nervous, he mumbled, he bit his nails, he wasn’t athletic, he wasn’t attractive, he liked trees more than people, he had insomnia, he had social anxiety, he had no social skills, he had a terrible stutter, he couldn’t talk in front of people, and he was always uncomfortable.

Who could ever love Evan Hansen?

Connor kissed Evan tenderly and withdrew, rubbing a thumb on his cheek and smiling down at him.

Apparently, Connor Murphy.

Chapter End Notes

Kudos & comments are very appreciated!! Yall have been so supportive and I love you guys so much!!!! I’ll definitely be writing more deh; maybe Kleinsen, Sincerely Three, or more Tree Bros?? Lmk what yall want ;)))))

You can message me on tumblr @ xsalazzle :)

End Notes

Thank you so much for reading!! Kudos & comments are very very appreciated (especially comments) <3

My tumblr is @xsalazzle so feel free to message me!

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!