Goodnight, Max

by ofbrothersandteacakes

Summary

Max is used to a life where nobody cares about him, so when the Sleep Apocalypse hits and the only way for him to survive is by staying awake, he's more than happy to do his own thing. Then he meets David, an optimistic camp counsellor who has one main goal in mind: make sure Max survives.

Notes

Alternatively known as 'The Fic Nobody Asked For But I Wrote It Anyway'.
Max.

“This is a national emergency. Important details will follow. Do not fall asleep. Do not fall asleep. This message will repeat.”

The words are sudden and ominous and catch Max off-guard, which is hard for anything except his parents to do. He blinks at the television screen, wondering what the hell is going on, and clicks the remote several times as he attempts to get rid of the random message. It doesn't work. Whatever it is, it's being broadcast on every single channel.

Every other ten year old is probably asleep. Had it not been for his shitty insomnia, Max would have been sleeping, too.

With a frustrated grunt, Max slides off the couch and switches the television off. It's most likely a hoax, he rationalises, as he begins to head up the stairs. What else could it possibly be? He steps as quietly as he can along the landing, moving towards his bedroom, which is beyond the room his parents share. Their door is wide open when Max passes it by and he can see them sleeping soundly. If they catch him up at this time (again), he knows they'll be more than pissed.

A small jump helps him to avoid the creaky floorboard. He pushes open the door to his own room slowly, wincing as it let out a squeal. Everything in their house is old and seems to want him to get in trouble.

Max listens carefully for any sort of sign that the noise woke his parents. There's none. A small sigh of relief escapes Max before he continues his adventure to bed. It's all going wonderfully, until he manages to trip over a pile of clothes he meant to tidy up days ago. He lets out a sharp yelp and crashes to the floor and knows his parents must be awake now.

He falls silent, listening carefully. There's no furious shout. In fact, he can't even hear his parents beginning to stir. No matter how little his parents may care about him, he knows it's impossible they're still asleep. The amount of noise he'd created had probably been enough to wake the dead.

It's only then that he realises he hasn't heard his father's very distinct snore since he arrived upstairs.

“Do not fall asleep. Do not fall asleep.”

Suddenly, the words echo around his head again. Max's mouth goes dry and he pulls himself to his feet. Coldness seeps through his entire body, despite the fact he has his hoodie on. His knees and hands aching, he quietly leaves his room and heads back towards his parents'. This time, he doesn't bother to avoid the creaky floorboard. There's still no sound from the only other bedroom in the house.

“Mom? Dad?” Max whispers into the darkness, daring to step into their room.

Nothing.

He switches on the light, any fear of being caught awake disappearing. His eyes are immediately glued to the bed. Both of his parents are there, lying still. Too still.

Max's stomach swoops. He nears the bed and reaches out, hesitantly, to touch his mother. Her skin is still warm, but her chest doesn't move. All he can do is blink as he realises they're both dead, gone.
They've finally managed to leave him behind, like they've tried so hard to for the last ten years.

Numbness fills him. He knows they didn't give a shit about him, and that in return he probably shouldn't give a shit about them, but he's ten and they're still his parents and it hurts, although it hurts him a lot less than it likely would anyone else. He doesn't know what the hell is going on, or why the fuck sleeping is apparently causing people to die, but more importantly, he isn't sure what he's meant to do now.

He contemplates going to bed and letting it be over with.

Instead, he finds himself trotting back downstairs. He switches the TV back on. The same message is still playing on repeat and Max swallows before switching the television off again. He knows now that if he wants to stay alive, he needs to stay awake. He figures that before he sleeps, he may as well have some fun.

Fun is harder to have when all the television will play is one message. Max manages to occupy himself with others things, including his dad's smartphone. There are plenty of interesting apps on it, as well as some dirty images Max is certain the man never intended for anybody to see. He cackles the entire time he's looking through the things, amazed at just how filthy his father was. His mother's phone is similar, which somehow doesn't shock him. It's a testimony to how loveless their marriage was. Neither of them have pictures of Max on their phone; that's a testimony to how little they cared about him.

Guilt begins to gnaw at him eventually and he's soon putting the phones away again. The choices his parents made aren't his fault, yet even he, as jaded as he is, can't help but feel as if he should have some respect for the dead. They're only upstairs after all.

The sun begins to rise before long and Max realises he probably can't stay in the house. Boredom is a sure path to sleep. Already, he's beginning to feel tired. He's functioning on a handful of hours of sleep from the previous day, and even for him, that's not enough. Before he leaves the house, he makes himself the strongest cup of coffee possible, stronger than what he has before leaving for school in the morning. Having breakfast feels pointless, but he does anyway. The cereal tastes like sugary cardboard.

Outside of the house is as quiet as the inside. There are cars sitting on driveways, the usual bustle of the morning nowhere to be seen. It's really beginning to sink in that this is real, that sleep has actually managed to kill people.

For a while, Max walks. He isn't sure where he's going, and knows he's probably wasting a lot of energy, but if he's moving, he can't fall asleep. He finds a bike outside of somebody's house, small enough for him to use, and begins to ride that instead of walking. Each and every street is similar to his own, silent and still, with not a single other soul appearing to be awake.

Occasionally, he breaks into a house to steal another cup of coffee. He finds himself becoming more tired as the day passes by, but soldiers on. It'd be too easy to lie down and fall asleep. He wants to do something better than his parents did, even if it's only surviving.

It's been more than a day since the 'Sleep Apocalypse' occurred. A couple of times, Max has come close to bumping into other people, but each time, he's hid – some people look insane already, a wild look in their eyes, the type of look that comes with losing everything, but mainly from sleep deprivation.

He's pedalling across the road when out of nowhere, a car comes hurtling towards him.
'Hurtling' is an extreme exaggeration. Whoever is driving is still adhering to speed limits, apparently, even though there's literally nobody else on the road. It just *feels* like the car is speeding towards him because Max doesn't realise it's there until it's almost on top of him.

“Fucking *hell*,” Max mutters, his heart pounding and his eyes wide as he stares at the ugly car that's just screeched to a halt inches from him.

“Oh my gosh!” the man who was driving exclaims as he began to climb out of the vehicle, a panicked look on his face. “I'm *so*, *so* sorry,” he says, hurrying over to Max. The man looks ridiculous, like some overgrown kid, wearing a green top with a tree of all things on it, with some sort of brown waistcoat over the top of that and shorts that almost reach his knees. Even stupider than that, he has white and blue socks on, which *also* nearly extend to his knees. Worst of all is the bright yellow bandanna tied around his neck.

Max grunts in response, ready to simply pedal away again. But then long fingers wrap around his upper arm, stopping him in his tracks. “What the fuck are you doing?” he snaps as the man starts fussing around him, as if checking him over.

“Making sure I didn't injure you!” the man exclaims, his own eyes wide. “I nearly hit you with my car!”

An exasperated sigh escapes Max's lips. “'Nearly' being the key word there. I'm fine,” he huffs, tugging his arm away from the man's grip. “Get back in your car and leave me the fuck alone.” He's scowling deeply as he begins to push down on the pedals of the bike again to get away from the man who is *far* too energetic for somebody who can't have slept in at least a day.

“Wait!” the man calls after him, and Max sighs again, slowly coming to a stop. The man rushes after him. “Where are you going?” he asks, stopping a couple of feet behind Max.

Max doesn't turn around to face him. “Wherever the fuck I feel like going,” he answers.

There's a pause. “There's a place I know that's tucked away – my friend says people can sleep there,” the man tells him. “If you want, you could – you could come with me? A kid your age shouldn't be out alone in all of this.”

Max snorts. “Come with you?” he asks, glancing over his shoulder at the man. “Sorry, but getting in a car with a strange, old man, is the number one thing kids my age aren't supposed to do.”

He's tired, though, and the idea of sleeping is tempting. For whatever reason, he still hasn't begun to pedal away again.

“My name's David,” the man – David – tells him. He gives Max a small smile. “I hope you find wherever it is you want to go,” he says, and then he turns around and heads back towards his car. Max watches him the entire time, wondering if what the man said could actually hold any truth.

He figures if it all goes wrong, he can always fall asleep. He doesn't have anything to lose.

“I'm Max,” he blurts, climbing off his bike. David turns around and gives him another smile. “But *any* funny business and I'm not going anywhere with you,” he warns, letting the bike fall to the ground before following after David. He pulls open the passenger side door and climbs in, David doing the same on the opposite side of the car.

“Somebody your height really ought to sit in the back -” David starts, an anxious expression on his face.
“Shut the fuck up,” Max snaps, cutting the other man off. “What are the police going to do, arrest you? They're all dead, idiot.”

That does shut David up.

David starts the car engine and manoeuvres around the bike Max abandoned. “This is going to be the best little road trip,” he announces, beaming. Max can only scowl, staring sullenly out of the car window.

This is the worst road trip Max has ever been on.

“One song! OH! There's a place -”

“David!” Max snarls, whipping his head around to glare at him. “If I have to hear your *fucking camp song* one more *fucking time*, I'll grab the steering wheel and smash us into a tree,” he snaps.

Instantly, David falls silent. “I'm sorry, Max. I thought some tunes would help boost our spirits,” he says eventually, glancing down at the furious child. “The camp is still a while away. Is there anything else you'd like to sing?” he asks and the fact he actually sounds hopeful makes Max feel sick. He has no idea how one man can be so happy.

“No, I don't want to sing anything,” Max says, turning again to glare out of the window again. “I don't want my spirits boosted. Everyone in the world is dead. Let me be *fucking* miserable.”

“Language,” David admonishes, the way he has for the last few hours. *Who the fuck does this guy think he is*, Max can't help but wonder, because David has absolutely no right to boss him around as if he's some sort of parent to him.

They fall into an uncomfortable silence, the only sound that's audible being the world whizzing by the windows and their own breathing.

Max leans his head against the window. The way it vibrates isn't exactly pleasant and will probably give him a headache before long, yet he's tired enough to think of it as a pillow. He realises, then, that it's been a while since he's had any coffee. He doesn't lift his head to tell David that, though. Hell, David would probably tell him how unhealthy it was for somebody his age to drink coffee.

“Max,” David says, his voice loud and sharp, and Max jolts upright. He hadn't even realised his eyes had slipped shut. He glances towards David, only to see the other man looking at him with concern. He almost rolls his eyes. This man has known him what, four hours? Why the fuck does he have any concern for whether Max stays awake?

There's no doubt his parents wouldn't have cared, if they'd survived the initial event.

“Singing would keep us distracted from sleeping, too,” David points out, still giving him that concerned look. “Whatever you want to sing, Max, we can sing it,” he encourages, reaching to nudge him slightly, but Max only shakes his head.

“I hate singing,” he says. It's not entirely true, but he doesn't have the energy to entertain David.

David looks disappointed. “That's fine,” he says. “We should talk, at least. How come you're on your own?” he asks, although he does so gently.

“Way to jump in at the deep end,” Max mutters anyway, rolling his eyes. “I snuck downstairs to
watch TV when it happened, 'cause I couldn't sleep. My parents were asleep,’’ he tells David, shrugging, like it's no big deal. It isn't that big of a deal to him, but apparently it is to David. His expression is suddenly horrified. “That can't be that shocking, David, why else would a ten year old be on his own?” he asks, raising his eyebrows.

“I – I suppose I hoped your story was a little happier than that,” David admits. “I'm so sorry, Max. That's awful.”

Max shrugs again. “It's fine. My parents didn't care about me, anyway,’’ he says.

That only makes David look more distressed. “Max, I'm sure that's not true -” he starts.

“David, stop. They didn't, okay? It's fine. They're gone now, anyway.”

After that, they talk about things they like instead of why they're alone. It isn't as awful as Max expects it to be.

Eventually, they pull up at a pharmacy.

“I'm sorry, Max. I'm exhausted,’’ David tells him, biting his lip as he switches the car's engine off. He hasn't given anything away – actually, he looks like he still has as much energy as he did when he picked Max up. He glances towards the pharmacy. “I'm going to get some – some things , to help me stay awake,” he explains, as if Max won't know he's talking about drugs. David looks ashamed to admit that's what he's resorting to.

Max considers pretending David has succeeded in preserving his innocence, then decides against it. “I think I'll probably need some drugs too,’’ he says, knowing he probably won't survive the trip otherwise.

David opens his mouth, probably to complain, but then shuts it again. “Yeah. Okay,’’ he says, upset flashing across his face. He pushes open the car door and climbs out.

Of course, Max does the same.

“What are you doing?” David asks, confused.

“You can't go in there alone, there could be someone crazy in there. I can't stay out here alone, I might fall asleep,” Max tells him, his eyebrows raising briefly. “Obviously, the sensible option is for me to come with you inside.”

David nods his head. “Alright,” he says, moving towards the pharmacy.

Max follows.

Whatever it is they take, it keeps them awake. Any previous care David had for laws disappears. They drive fast, they drive erratically, and David doesn't mention once that Max is too short to be sitting in the front seat. In return, Max grins and sings along with David, which only makes him even happier. It's fun and they have energy drinks and more drugs sitting in the back of the car, ready for when they need them.

“I'm a camp counsellor, at the place we're going to,’’ David announces, loud and proud and random as they speed down a highway. It's freakishly empty but neither of them comments on that.
Max raises his eyebrows. “I figured,” he says dryly. It wasn't difficult to work out. Nobody except a camp counsellor would know the song of a camp. And nobody except a camp counsellor would dress like such a moron willingly.

David hums. “Today was going to be the first day of camp,” he says, his tone matter-of-fact.

“Great,” Max says, unsure of what else he could possibly say.

“I think you'll like it there. I'll be able to show you everything we have,” David says, bouncing in his seat. He isn't concentrating on the road nearly as much as he should be, his eyes darting around, but Max isn't about to send him into a panic. It's not as if anybody else is on the road, anyhow.

“I don't really like it in many places,” Max admits, shrugging. “If I'd ever went to your camp, I probably would've spent most of my time trying to escape.”

Rather than scolding him, David laughs. “Don't be ridiculous. You'd have loved it, if you'd been attending like a normal person,” he tells him. “Not during the...” He gestures vaguely. “I don't know. What have you been calling it, again?”

Max rolls his eyes, but there's a fondness in it. “Sleep Apocalypse,” he says.

“Yes. Sleep Apocalypse,” David repeats, nodding. “There's a whole range activities at Camp Campbell. You could've done anything. I don't suppose there's many people your age left now, to attend any sort of camp,” he says, far more casually than he would have only a few hours ago.

A soft snort left Max. “Say it like it is, why don't you,” he comments.

“Sorry,” David says instantly, sounding too cheery to be truly sorry at all.

This time, the silence they fall into isn't an uncomfortable one. It's the opposite, actually, because they're both vibrating from all the drugs they've taken.

It doesn't take long before they're both singing again, the windows down and their voices as loud as they can make them. The only sad part, to Max, is that this is the happiest he can remember feeling – and that he feels happier with a stranger than he ever did with his parents, not that he would dare to tell David that.

It's midday and the third day of the Sleep Apocalypse when they arrive at Camp Campbell.

“That says Camp Camp,” Max states bluntly as they pass under the sign that declares exactly that. The drugs wore off a little while ago and he feels like shit, but David insisted that they shouldn't take any more, not when they were so close to safety. “Are you really sure we can sleep here?” he asks, his forehead creased with doubt.

David lets out an indignant huff. “Obviously, Max, the 'bell' part fell off,” he says as they drive up the dusty road, towards a bunch of log cabins.

“You made it sound like this place was the best camp around. They can't even afford to fix a stupid sign!” Max snickers, his shoulders shaking with silent laughter, his eyes squeezed shut in amusement. “God, it's like you were trying to upsell to me!”

The weak splutters of protest David tries to get out only make Max cackle more. “It really is amazing!” he finally manages to say.
“Oh my God, do you actually love this place?” Max asks, blinking open watering eyes to peer at David. They pull to a stop and Max turns to look at the buildings in front of them, each one looking rather dilapidated. “That's even worse. You were going to let children come to this? It looks like a death trap!” he exclaims. As he climbs out of the car, he's still chuckling with amusement.

There's an offended expression on David's face as he copies Max's movements. “You don't have to laugh quite so much, we all have things we might overrate slightly-”

That only eggs Max's laughter on. “Slightly!” he echoes, dropping to the ground and rolling around, clutching his stomach as he laughs. “Slightly!” he says again, raising one hand to wipe at watering eyes.

“Davey!” a loud voice suddenly booms, and Max is on his feet in an instant. “You made it!”

“Max,” David says, gesturing to the man who is standing in front of them. He's beaming up at him as though he's Santa Claus. “This is Cameron Campbell, the owner of Camp Campbell. It's great to see you alive and well, sir!” he chirps, offering a hand to Campbell. “This is Max. I found him on my way here,” he explains, shaking Campbell's hand with more enthusiasm than necessary.

“Hey,” Max greets, his hands tucked securely in the pockets of his blue hoodie. He pulled one out, only to give a small half-wave.

“Hello, Max!” Campbell booms, grinning down at him. “You've certainly come to the right place to outlast this whole drama,” he says, in what Max assumes is meant to be a reassuring voice. “There aren't that many of us. There's Gwen, of course, and then some other guy – no idea who he is, he just showed up,” Campbell chuckles, as if that's perfectly normal.

“My name is Daniel,” says Daniel, suddenly stepping out of what seemed like nowhere. David can't help the scream of shock that he lets out, caught by surprise by the other man's presence. What shocks Max more is the uncanny resemblance Daniel has to David. His entire outfit is pure white and his blond hair matches it. “I came to sleep,” he tells them, his head tilting to a freaky angle and a wide smile remaining fixed on his face.

The woman who steps out from behind him is much less creepy. “Ignore him,” she says, shaking her head. “Hi, Max,” she says. “Recruiting campers even during the apocalypse, David?” she asks, raising an eyebrow at him.

“Heh. Something like that,” David answers, reaching to ruffle Max's hair even as he scowls and ducks to avoid his hand.

“Are you sure we can sleep here?” Max asks, his voice smaller and quieter than he was hoping it would be. Both Campbell and Daniel seem...off. He isn't sure he wants to really trust anybody except David, as ridiculous as that is. He's only known David for a day, but Max is sleep deprived and the two of them have spent a long time in close proximity to one another.

They're in a tent together, which secretly, Max is quite glad of. It's cosy and means they're away from everyone else, everyone Max doesn't trust.

The smile David gives him is small and tired, but reassuring. “Yes, Max,” he says. “We can definitely sleep here. Mr Campbell would never lie to me.” His voice is sincere and Max can't help the pang of pity he feels for David and how naive he seems. At ten, Max can already see the dollar signs that sit in Campbell's eyes.

“How does it even work?” Max asks. They're lying on opposite sides of the tent, on beds that are
only inches from the ground, tucked in sleeping bags that are the same green as David's top.

“Gwen says that Mr Campbell has a machine. Something to do with radiation,” David hums. He shrugs. “It's too much science for me, but she says it works. So does Daniel,” he adds, but he wrinkles his nose seconds later. Apparently, Max isn't the only one who finds the man a bit odd.

“Oh, well, if Daniel says it works, it must be true,” Max mutters. “And I'm going to sleep at the cost of growing an extra limb. Wonderful.”

“Max. We mustn't judge others by appearances,” David scolds, but he's still smiling tiredly at him, and too exhausted to counter his second remark.

“But we can judge them by their creepy behaviour."

“Maybe he's just a bit...different,” David tries, but Max only snorts in response and closes his eyes. David doesn't try to convince him otherwise. “Goodnight, Max,” he murmurs, his own eyes shutting of their own accord.

Max cracks open one eye as David's snores quickly begin to fill the tent. “Night, David,” he murmurs back, when he's sure the other man won't hear him and that he isn't dead, either. It's reassuring and only makes him trust David more, knowing he's been brought somewhere truly safe.

Before long, Max is asleep too, dreaming of a happier life where a parent wearing David's face cares for him.

They actually wake up in the morning. Max can sense that his body hasn't quite recovered from going so long without sleep, but he wakes up anyway and can't force himself to fall back asleep. David makes him breakfast and they eat quietly together. When they finish, David insists they go out and take a proper look at the camp, because they'd both been far too tired to do so the previous day.

“This is the lake,” David tells him, puffing his chest out as he gestures to the large expanse of water. “We do all sorts out here. Fishing, boating, even swimming until we found out the water was polluted.” He beams down at Max, who has his hands tucked in his hoodie, like usual, and an unimpressed look on his face.

“Truly amazing. I can see why all the kids would be clamming to come here,” Max says, letting his disinterest shine through.

David isn't even slightly deterred. “I can sense you mocking me, Max, but just you wait until I show you all the amazing things campers have knitted over the years,” he says, clasping his hands together as if that's the most incredible thing he's ever said. “You'll love it.”

Max is fairly certain he won't love it, but begrudgingly follows David back towards the cabins.

He doesn't hate the camp as much as he expected to, but it isn't amazing, and David's enthusiasm and energy is still pretty disgusting. It'd probably be a lot better if there were other children around, especially if those children actually wanted to be enthused.

“See, look at this blanket one of my campers last year made – isn't it lovely?” David gushes, holding the ugly, blue blanket aloft. They're inside a cabin now, which is apparently used for a range of activities. When Max shrugs, a flicker of disappointment flashes over David's face, but he paints over it with a grin before Max can think too much into it and puts the blanket back in the box he'd tugged it out of.
David carries on talking and starts pulling out a whole load of different things that Max isn't interested in. Max's gaze travels to the window, in time to see Daniel staring in at them. A shiver runs down his spine and he turns to tell David, but by the time he glances back, Daniel is gone.

Frowning, Max gives himself a shake. *It was probably your imagination*, he figures, *sleep deprivation*.

“Shall we go and look at the archery equipment?” David asks, none the wiser.

All Max can do is nod. He keeps closer to David, certain he could sometimes see Daniel watching them out of the corner of his eye.

To distract himself, he actually starts paying attention to what David is saying.

That night, David leaves him in the tent so that he can have a proper catch up with Gwen. It's too quiet and even though Max is exhausted, insomnia manages to strike him again.

He sighs up at the ceiling of the tent before slipping out of bed. The sound of nature outside – crickets and whatnot clicking away – almost tempts him to stay within the tent, but there's nothing to do there. He needs something to occupy himself with.

Carefully, Max unzips the tent and steps outside. It's a chilly night, but he still has his hoodie on and his hands instantly find the familiar front pocket.

In the distance, he can see the light of the campfire David must be sat at with Gwen. Max goes in the opposite direction, figuring it's probably best if he doesn't disturb the two of them. He isn't exactly sure what they are – whether they're a *thing* or if they're just two camp counsellors surviving the Sleep Apocalypse – but it's better, he decides, to leave them to whatever it is they're doing.

The trees are less friendly at night, he quickly realises. A Max who isn't exhausted would never be afraid of something as simple as the dark, but now he is. He swallows hard as he steps further into the trees. It isn't long before he stops and makes the decision to turn back.

As he turns, he hears a twig snap behind him.

*I'm in a fucking cliché movie*, he realises at the same moment.

“Hello, Max.”

Daniel's voice is chilling. It causes Max to shudder.

He's ready to run. Daniel's hand clamps down on his arm and he tuts as he grips onto Max, squeezing so hard it hurts.

“Let me go,” Max says, as firmly as he can. He glares up at Daniel, as if his words would have more impact that way. “I said *let me go!*” he shouts, wriggling hard. Daniel's grip is much harder than David's was, the first day they met.

This grip is intended to do harm.

He only catches a glimpse of the knife before it plunges into his shoulder. It's the worst pain Max has ever felt and he screams as the knife goes in, desperately writhing in Daniel's tight hold. “Let me go, let me go,” he manages to say, teeth gritted against the pain.

The sound of running footsteps drags him from his daze of white-hot pain. He isn't entirely sure
what's happening, but suddenly the knife is yanked from his shoulder and Daniel is dropping him to the floor. Blindly, Max reaches to clamp his hand against the wound which is bleeding freely, dampening his small hand. His knees are quickly moistened by the soil beneath them. Beyond the pain, he can tell there's a scuffle going on, but he can't even begin to guess who is involved.

“Max – Max, it's okay, I've got you,” he hears David saying, eventually, and then there's the sound of him kneeling down next to him.

The voice is so familiar and safe, Max almost cries with relief.
Chapter 2

David.

The TV is simply background noise as David packs his bag for camp. It's nearly 3am and yes, he really should be asleep, but the prospect of camp starting up again in just a couple of days is so exciting and he couldn't sleep knowing his bag still wasn't packed.

Some people probably find the fact he only takes camp shirts with him ridiculous. David thinks he only needs the one outfit – after all, he's only going to be in one place!

His bag is just about ready to go when it happens. The TV cuts off suddenly and all he can hear is, “This is a national emergency. Important details will follow. Do not fall asleep. Do not fall asleep. This message will repeat.” All he can do is blink at his television, completely bewildered. Why wouldn't he fall asleep? He's done all he needs to do for the night. He reaches for the remote and tries to switch the channel over, but each and every one is playing the exact same message.

David hums in confusion, his brow slowly furrowing as he continues to flick between channels. He debates between just switching the television off and going to bed anyway, but for whatever reason, he doesn't. Instead, he pulls his phone out of his pocket and calls the only person he really can.

“DAVID! Don't fall asleep, Mr Campbell just told me – but it's okay – it's okay, somehow he knew? He has this...machine,” Gwen immediately shouts down the phone, all in a rush. “God, I thought you were going to be dead for sure! I can't believe he only just told me – look, you need to get to the camp, okay?”

Everything she says is a struggle to process. “I don't understand,” is all David can say, still frowning.

“Ugh,” Gwen mutters, sounding frustrated at herself rather than impatient with David. “You know Campbell, he has all sorts of connections – whatever this is, he knew it was coming. There's a machine, at the camp. It means we can sleep here,” Gwen explains again, slower this time. “I've never been so glad to be at camp early.” It makes a change, her being there while David has yet to leave home. David wishes he'd gone there sooner too.

“Gwen, it's – the camp is ages away from where I live,” he tells her, his voice faltering. “There's no way I can make it – what happens if I sleep?” he asks, worrying at his lip.

Gwen falls silent on the other end of the phone. The silence between them is heavy. “You die,” she answers, softer than David has ever heard her.

He can only gulp in response.

“I'll set off as soon as possible,” he says, after a while. “See you soon,” he adds quietly.

“See you soon,” Gwen echoes.

It feels more like a 'goodbye'.

David doesn't set off immediately. It'd probably be smarter to. He knows it'd probably give him a
better chance at actually making it to the other side of the country.

The problem is, he can't decide whether stressing over actually reaching the camp is worth it. If the world around him is dying, what sort of life would he be living even if he did manage to get to Camp Campbell? It's a freakishly morbid thought, for David, but a valid one. Camp Campbell is practically his life and if people are dying from sleeping...

Well, David thinks, *Not many camp-aged kids are going to survive that.*

He spends the day desperately trying to reach anybody else. Although he knows his parents won't pick up before he dials their number, for once he feels like it isn't just because they hate him. His stomach churns uncomfortably the entire time the phone is ringing out. It eventually goes to voicemail. The emergency services are the same. There's no trace of a helpline online.

The whole world seems to have gone silent except for the one, repeating message.

He drinks some coffee not long before he sets off, hoping it might be enough to get him all the way to Camp Campbell. It isn't until he's on the highway he realises that he forgot to actually put his bag inside of the car. He doesn't waste time going back. The chances of him actually staying awake long enough to need spare clothes are slim.

Alone with his thoughts is the darkest place David can be. He feels out of sorts and has no idea where his cheery mood has gone, but the entire planet is so quiet, it's scary, and he honestly hates the thought of surviving whatever this is and having no purpose afterwards.

The drive is slow-going and he can feel himself becoming more tired with each passing second. The number of cars on the road around him begin to dwindle more and more the further he gets. Occasionally he sees a car on the side of the road with occupants asleep inside of it. He only slows down once to peer properly inside and see the pallor of a driver's skin. It's pale, the colour of death itself.

He never stops for very long and eventually, he doesn't bother drinking cups of coffee. David knows now that if he survives the drive, it'll be a miracle.

It's as he drives into a small town that he decides it might be best to just pull over and sleep.

But then he nearly runs over Max.

The grumpy ten-year-old is a surprising dash of hope for David. Suddenly, he *does* have a purpose again – he's going to help this kid survive the Sleep Apocalypse, whether he wants to or not.

He does everything he can to keep him awake – he annoys him, sing at him, and eventually resorts to pumping him full of drugs. It isn't his proudest moment, but it works. They both make it to Camp Campbell. When David wakes up the next day, alive, he could weep with joy. He doesn't though. He teases Max instead and drags him around the camp, showing him all the things no other child would probably ever see.

Max pretends he doesn't enjoy it. Sometimes, though, David sees a small smile creeping across the boy's face. It makes his own smile wider.

He likes to think he can make Max's life a bit happier and lighten up his own again in the process.
It's distant shouts that grab David and Gwen's attention. The voice is small and so obviously Max's, and so panicked and desperate that David is sure it makes his heart physically jolt in his chest. In a flash, he's on his feet and running in the direction the sound is coming from. He hopes, initially, that it might just be a nightmare and that Max is safe inside of their tent.

One quick glance in the tent tells him otherwise, then he hears the scream.

He speeds ahead of Gwen, nearly tripping over his own lanky legs as he rushes to get to Max.

The moment he sees Daniel gripping Max's arm, David's vision seems to go red. He lunges at Daniel and the man cackles, tearing the knife from Max's shoulder before dropping him roughly to the ground. That only infuriates David more and he all but flings himself at Daniel.

He hits wildly, his limbs completely uncoordinated. Then Gwen arrives and the fight becomes much fairer. She must've seen Max kneeling on the ground because she's enraged too, angrier than David has ever seen her. The two of them hit Daniel over and over and at some point, they manage to wrestle the knife from his hand and into David's.

"David, wait!" Gwen shouts, but it's too late.

David is on top of Daniel. David rams the knife straight into Daniel's chest, aiming for what he hopes is the other man's heart, and rips it out a second later, sending blood flying.

Panic hits him after the blood splatters his face. His entire chest is heaving as he stares down at Daniel's empty eyes, bile rising up his throat. He's never killed before, couldn't have imagined killing somebody only days ago, but he did it for Max.

Max.

Neither David or Gwen have even looked at Max since the knife went into Daniel's chest. Gwen is horrified, her hands pressed to her mouth, unable to do anything except stare at Daniel in shock.

It's David who manages to get to his feet and move towards Max, who is still clutching at the wound on his shoulder and whimpering to himself. "Max – Max, it's okay, I've got you," David says as he kneels down next to him. Cautiously, he reaches for him, gentle hands trying to feel how bad the injury is. The lighting isn't amazing, but even an idiot could tell that he needs to patched up fast.

"Hey, Max, I'm going to carry you, okay?" David tells him quietly. He doesn't pick him up immediately. He waits until Max gives the smallest of nods, and then is careful as he lifts him, cradling his small form in his arms.

Gwen is retching, her eyes still fixed on Daniel. Then she realises David is moving and staggers after him, her face pale.

They leave Daniel's body lying in the soil and don't look back once.

David doesn't know how Max is still conscious. He's grimacing, but his eyes stare up at David the entire walk back to the camp. The trees around them offer no comfort, as dark and foreboding as they are. Only the occasional glance can be spared by David, who's afraid he'll trip over and sending Max spilling to the floor.

When they finally reach the cabin, Gwen says nothing. She disappears to fetch the first aid kit while David lowers Max onto the nearest bed. Max is still gripping his shoulder, though it's bleeding sluggishly now, if at all.
While Gwen is gone, David concentrates on actually getting to the injury. Both him and Max are silent as he cuts away the hoodie. He doesn't miss the way the boy cringes as the blue fabric is torn through. “I need to cut away your top, too. I'll find a camp t-shirt for you to wear,” he tells him. All he gets in response is another slight nod. Then he carefully cuts away Max's t-shirt, revealing the stab wound in his shoulder.

A wince passes over David's face. Even at a glance, he can tell it's fairly deep. He'll be able to handle it, just about, but the hospital would have been where any sane person would have gone before the Sleep Apocalypse.

It isn't until Gwen returns with the first aid kit that David realises just how badly this is going to hurt Max. He washes his own hands first, making sure everything is as sanitary as possible. They give Max a piece of fabric to bite down on and then David gets to work cleaning the wound. Almost instantly, Max begins to thrash, grunting behind the gag. That's the worst part though, and as soon as it's done, he relaxes, breathing heavily through his nose but otherwise calm.

It's much easier to stitch the injury up, and then all that's left to do is give it a quick clean and put a bandage over it. When it's all over, Max and Gwen look exhausted and David definitely feels it, but they're alive. They're okay. The first aid kit is quickly packed away and David washes his hands again before plopping himself down next to Max once more.

Gwen excuses herself quietly. All David can assume is that she needs to recover from the events of the night. He sees her through the window, sitting back down at the fire and letting out a deep breath. He can't help but let out one of his own as well.

“You've only known me a few days,” Max says suddenly.

Confused, David stares at him. “Yes?” He has no idea why Max is stating the obvious, as if he'd forgotten how long they'd known each other. “What does that matter?”

All he gets in response at first is a small shrug. Max picks at the blanket David has tucked around him. He hasn't winced in a little while, but if he shows any sign of pain again, David is going to give him something to ease it. “You act like you care about me,” Max answers, not meeting David's stare. “You don't have to, you know.”

“It's not an act, Max,” David tells him, shaking his head rapidly. Confusion has been replaced with sadness. “I do care about you. I want to look after you.”

There's another small silence. Then, “Why?”

Max's voice is quiet. It breaks David's heart. “Because you deserve it? Because you might just be the last camper this camp ever has? Because no ten-year-old should be alone during the apocalypse?” he says, unable to settle on one specific answer. “There's a whole load of different reasons, Max. But the point is I really do care about you,” he assures him.

Doubt is written all over Max's face. He's still picking at the blanket with the hand of the unharmed arm. “Thanks, I guess,” Max says, quiet enough that David almost misses it.

The boy is so out of sorts, David can't help but continue to look worried. “I really think it'll be a good idea for you to have some more painkillers and get some rest,” he says gently. He pauses, then dares to ask, “Would you like me to read you a bedtime story?”

Immediately, Max lets out a snort and shakes his head, wincing as he does so. His hand reaches to touch his shoulder. “Fuck no,” he replies.
David smiles at him and gives his hair a gentle ruffle. This time, Max doesn't try to duck away from his hand, but David figures that's probably because it would hurt. It doesn't take much of a rummage for him to find some more painkillers and he drops them into Max’s waiting palm before fetching him a glass of water to swallow them down.

“Night, David,” Max says as he gets comfortable under the blankets again and closes his eyes tightly.

“Goodnight, Max,” David says in return.

Then he leaves the room, letting Max rest in peace.

The sound of the fire crackling away flings David into memories of the past and he can't help but carry on smiling as he heads over to sit beside Gwen, who is settled on a log by the fire. Although she looks tired, she offers up a smile as David approaches.

“All good?” she asks.

“All good,” David confirms. “He's getting some sleep now. I gave him some extra painkillers to make sure he was comfortable,” he tells her as he sits down next to her and fixes his gaze on the fire.

Gwen hums in approval. “I'm glad. He's lucky to have you,” she says, sincerity in her expression.

A chuckle escapes David before he can stop it. “I think I'm lucky to have found him,” he corrects. “I don't think I would have made it here without him,” he admits. He rubs at his eyes. “I was so ready to just stop and fall asleep somewhere,” he adds.

“Good job you didn't. I think he needs someone as much as you needed him,” Gwen says, nudging him lightly. “I don't think that poor kid has had somebody care about him, ever.”

David shakes his head. “No, I don't think he has either,” he sighs.

Without either of them realising it, their eyes have turned to look towards the cabin where Max is sleeping. “Bet you didn't picture yourself adopting a kid at the beginning of this apocalypse,” Gwen teases after a long silence.

Much like Max had only minutes before, David snorts. “Hardly adoption. I just...picked him up,” he says, waving a hand vaguely.

All Gwen does is raise an eyebrow. “You don't think you're the closest thing that kid's had to a proper dad?” she challenges. David blushes almost instantly. “You're great with kids, David. You're great with him,” she insists. “I'm not saying he has to call you dad or anything. I'm just pointing out that's essentially the situation you're in.” She pauses again. “Hell, David – you killed a guy for him after what, two days? That's a lot like a dad in my opinion.”

“Did you study what makes a dad as part of your psychology degree?” David asks dryly.

Gwen hits him. “Shut up. An idiot with their eyes closed would be able to see it. You two have a real bond,” she presses. “I bet even Campbell sees it.”

“Where is Mr Campbell?” David asks curiously, steering the topic swiftly away from talk of adoption. He's still blushing faintly because of it. He looks around, as if he'd see Mr Campbell stepping out from behind a tree.

“No idea,” Gwen says, shrugging. “I haven't seen him since.” She falters, then frowns. “Well, since
a while before Daniel stabbed Max,” she continues slowly.

In sync, they both get to their feet. David dusts himself off as he does so and then fidgets nervously with the camp shirt wrapped around his neck. “We should probably let him know what's happened,” David tells her. “Split up and cover more ground?” he suggests.

“Good idea,” Gwen says, and they go their separate ways, heading in opposite directions.

David hasn't even been searching for five minutes when Gwen shouts.

“David! David, you really need to -” he hears her shout, before she cuts herself off with a retch. Dread curls in his stomach and he follows the sound of her voice, to the part of the camp where the machine keeping them from dying in their sleep is situated.

At first David doesn't see Mr Campbell's body. Gwen soon points him out though, one hand raising a trembling finger while the other hand covers her mouth. Clearly, Daniel made short work of the man, who is littered with stab wounds. It's horrendous and excessive and David has no idea why they didn't question Daniel's presence sooner.

All David can do is bow his head and swallow hard.

“David,” Gwen suddenly says again and when he looks up, it's to see her expression even more horrified than it had been moments before. She's staring at the machine and it's only then he realises it is deathly quiet, not even making a low hum like it had when they first arrived.

Gwen slowly makes her way around the machine and is shaking her head when she reaches David again. “The wires are all torn at the back,” she whispers.

It takes David a moment to realise exactly what that means.

As soon as he does, he breaks into a sprint and runs all the way back to the cabin. His feet almost slip from under him because of the blood and mud, but all he can think about is getting to Max before sleep takes him.

Max is even smaller in death.

By the time Gwen reaches him, David is kneeling down by Max's bed. The blankets are still tucked up around Max, who must have fallen asleep without realising anything was amiss. His expression is peaceful, with nothing to indicate he was in pain when he went.

There are no words. David's mouth is dry, but tears are dripping down his cheeks.

Gwen bites her lip as she crouches down next to him and places a hand on his shoulder, a terrible attempt at comforting him. “David...David, we couldn't have known,” she says quietly.

“Some dad I am,” David whispers. “I was going to look after him.” He can't stop staring at Max. Every part of him is still and it's just wrong. David shakes his head several times. “I was meant to be looking after him,” he corrects, swallowing hard.

“You're not the one at fault here, David. What Daniel did – all of it – it's just pure evil,” Gwen tells him, but the words don't mean much. “Seriously. You can't blame yourself for this.”

David falls silent. There's nothing he can really say, because he does blame himself. Max was the camp's final chance at having a camper. Max was the reason he'd actually bothered to stay awake.
He shakes his head, unable to make his mouth form any sort of reply for Gwen. A sob chokes its way up his throat again and then he has no choice but to bury his face in his hands.

Gwen doesn't say anything else either. Instead, they sit there, David drowning in his own grief with Gwen only able to watch him do so.

With sleep no longer an option again, the next few hours pass slowly. Gwen does research on her laptop while David struggles with figuring out how to tell her what he wants to do now.

In the end, he doesn't have to.

“I'm going to Las Vegas,” Gwen blurts out. They're sat in the canteen instead of the cabin where Max's body lies. Neither of them have been able to go in there for a couple of hours. She clears her throat before continuing. “Not to gamble. There's rumours of some sort of...Sleep Oasis. In the desert,” she explains.

His eyes still red-rimmed, David simply nods. “That sounds great,” he comments, his voice hoarse from all the crying.

Gwen fidgets and her mouth opens, then closes. Then she opens it again. “Do you want to come?” she asks, almost hopefully.

The look David gives her is an apologetic one. Her eyes drop. He knows she probably knew the answer before she asked. Neither of them have any friends left except each other, most likely. It isn't enough to tempt him into going anywhere else.

“I hope I see you again, someday,” Gwen says, but David knows that this is the last time they're ever going to see each other.

“Good luck, Gwen,” is all David says.

She leaves later that morning.

The camp is completely and utterly empty, except for David. Soon, there won't be anybody left. Already the exhaustion is beginning to creep up on him and all he wants to do is fall asleep. There's things he has to do though, matters he needs to set in order.

Daniel's body means nothing to him, but he takes the time to place some flowers with Mr Campbell, as ruined as the man's body now is.

Once he's satisfied the entire camp is tidy enough, David heads back to the cabin and picks up Max's tiny body. He doesn't think as he does it, doesn't think about how little the boy weighs and how if he'd actually adopted him and it wasn't the apocalypse, he might have only been carrying Max to bed.

He lays Max down on the bed opposite his own in the small tent they shared.

He wishes this were all some cruel hoax.

The stillness of Max's body screams that it most certainly isn't.

For the last time, he tucks Max in and ruffles his curls. Still, Max doesn't move an inch.

David swallows.
Eventually, he lies down on his own bed and rolls onto his side so that he can look at Max. The world around them both is horrifically quiet. He briefly wonders whether Gwen will find what she's looking for in Las Vegas.

It doesn't take long for his eyes to begin to close, weighed down by tiredness. It's only then that he dares to speak.

“Goodnight, Max,” he murmurs.

Then he slowly falls asleep.

Chapter End Notes

I can only apologise.
Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

The idea of a third, happier chapter wouldn't leave me alone.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

After.

As soon as he blinks open his eyes, David becomes aware of the weight pressing into his side and the soft snores filling the space around him. One glance down reveals the unsurprising sight of Max’s curly black hair – the kid’s drooling on him. David can feel a saliva patch forming on his t-shirt.

Gently, David shifts Max, doing his very best to avoid disturbing his sleep. Aside from a few indistinct mumblings, Max remains slumbering, his mouth opening and closing a few times. For a few seconds, the drooling stops, but by the time David has leaned forward to pick up the note resting on the coffee table and sat back again, there’s a little pool of saliva on the couch, too.

A small smile flits across David’s face before he can stop it. Then he refocuses his attention on the note.

Figured I’d let you two sleep. Text you tomorrow. -Gwen

David’s eyes flick down to his watch. It’s nearly 3am, so it’s no shock that Gwen saw herself out. Falling asleep, knowing there isn’t a risk to life any more, is all too easy. Despite the numerous movie nights they’ve had together, the three of them have yet to all stay awake through any of them. Could anybody blame them? There’s so much sleeping to catch up on, David sometimes wishes he could do nothing but sleep.

After he places the note back on the table, David’s gaze returns to Max, who is still sleeping peacefully, his expression relaxed. Letting him sleep on, David gets to his feet and moves as quietly as possible around the small downstairs of the house. He checks the front and back doors, more out of habit – it’s not like anybody would be able to break in – and fetches himself a glass of water, then finally returns to the sitting room. A yawn slips free of his lips.

With ease, David tucks his arms under Max and lifts him up, then begins to walk. As soon as he does, Max begins to mumble and shift, his eyes blinking blearily up at David.

“Time is it?” Max murmurs.

“After three,” David replies, keeping his voice quiet, but in the silence of the house, they both sound loud anyway.

Max hums and raises a balled fist to rub at his eyes, then yawns and his shuts his eyes again. Seeing him so relaxed and at ease is a welcome relief for David. Some nights, Max screams himself hoarse, his fingers gripping at the scar on his shoulder, as if it’s still in pain. Though there’s much that’s perfect about where they are, nothing can erase the memories of that night. Those are part of who they are now.

Using his back, David nudges open the door to Max’s bedroom and is careful not to trip over the
stuff scattered all over the floor. It doesn’t matter how many times he asks Max to tidy it up, at least a little; the bedroom is perfectly designed to suit Max, like everything in the house is, and that includes the mess.

When he reaches the bed, David lowers Max onto it and pulls back the crisp, green sheets. He tucks Max up in the bed and runs a gentle hand through his curls, stirring Max slightly, but he seems relatively undisturbed, so David moves towards the door.

Behind him, Max’s voice is sleepy and quiet as he says, “Night David.”

David pauses in the doorway and turns back to Max, smiling slightly. “Goodnight, Max,” he replies, and then he shuts the bedroom door with a soft click and heads for his own room.

As he gets into bed, he wonders distantly if Max will maybe want pancakes for breakfast, and what he’ll want to do with their next day in the afterlife.

Chapter End Notes

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