Vices

by Creek1989

Summary

Everyone has their own way of coping with anxiety, and each one is sure his way is the best one. When a suggestion is put forward to break the routine and try a different method, the attitudes start to change, the secrets become revealed and the walls built around oneself start to crumble.
"These things are going to kill you one day, man."

Craig lit the cigarette held between his lips and inhaled slowly, while flipping his company a bird. He was well aware of the dangers of smoking and the financial burden of the habit, but he didn't care.

His friend scoffed and took a sip from his paper cup of coffee. His favorite, black, strong, with no sugar or milk to dilute the bitter as fuck taste, but for god's sake without any drugs in it besides caffeine. Ever since that major fuck up that nearly cost his parents their business and above all him, their son, his life, he vowed never to touch anything harder than alcohol, and even that was a rare occasion. But giving up drinking coffee on regular basis, that just wouldn't do.

"That's rich coming from you. You practically inhale that stuff."

"Still not as bad as smoking."

"Whatever."

Their usual banter went like this, when they met at the smoker's corner behind the school. Before, after, in between classes. They would rip on each other's habits but without any real venom behind those words. They have been doing this for a while after all.

It wasn't always like this. There was once Craig's group, well respected by most, colloquially known among others as Craig and those guys, which besides him, the leader, comprised Clyde, Token and Jimmy. Tweek wasn't really a part of the gang. He and Craig barely ever interacted, the closest encounters being their set up fight in third grade, and a those brief moments during the metro fad, when Tweek and Jason replaced Clyde and Jimmy for some reason.

It was four years ago, around the end of middle school, when things started to change.

Craig stood in the bathroom at school and just blankly looked in the mirror. His face would hardly ever reveal anything, as he kept his emotions well under control when out in public, but the turmoil of feelings inside of him was becoming harder to keep contained with every passing day. A single tear escaped one of his eyes. Craig quickly wiped it off and clenched his jaw, as more tears threatened to spill, but he would force them back. He would not break down here and now.
That would be a bad time not only because Clyde just burst in.

“Dude, what are you doing? Stop staring down your reflection and come get lunch, dickface.”

Fucking Clyde. Fuck him, and his permanently cheerful mood, and his stupidly handsome boyish face. And his fucking stupid habit of insisting on physical contact every time. Craig did not want to be hugged or have Clyde’s arm around his shoulders after every forty five minutes spent apart as if it had been ten years they didn’t see each other.

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“I swear that Bebe is getting hotter with every passing day.”

“I think Wendy is hotter anyway.”

“Ha. I wouldn’t touch that with a ten feet pole. I can name at least ten reasons why.”

“Oh? And these are?”

“Well A, her tits aren’t as nice as Bebe’s. B, she’s kind of an prissy bitch, and C, she’s dating Marsh and even when they break up, they’re back together in matter of few days, so that’s a total deal breaker.”

“That’s three. You said ten.”

“G-guys, you’re both w-w-wrong. Clearly Reu-Rebecca is the best girl around.”

“What’s it with you and redheads Jimmy?”

“W-well, I just like them muh-most. blondes are overrated. And black-haired chicks are cuh-cuh-cunts. Wendy being a prime case in point.”

The other two boys laughed while Craig, not finding their usual, kind of sexist, borderline objectifying gossip about females amusing at all, just let out a dry chuckle in order to sound like he’s at least sort of interested, while trying to focus more on the salad after the main course and block out their voices as much as possible, not really wanting to have any part in the discussion.

“B-besides, they say ruh-redheads are b-best in bed.”

“Jeez, you sound like McCormick now.”

“Craig, which girl do you think is hot?”

Craig’s head snapped up and his heart made a few rapid beats when he heard his name being called and being asked a question that any other boy would hardly mind being asked, but not Craig, who liked his privacy in such topics.

“Oh. Fuck. I don’t know.” Craig did know, in fact. But he wasn’t going to give then that answer. Craig flicked his eyes around the cafeteria in hope of spotting a girl, whose appearance no one could possibly criticize. Ideally a blonde one (other than Bebe). That would at least make the lie easier, because otherwise they might not buy it. He hoped his cheeks wouldn’t give him straight away as he felt them warm up.
"Annie is fine. I guess?" Craig shrugged.

"Hmm." Clyde nodded contemplatively. "She is pretty, alright. But Bebe is way hotter."

"Whatever."

"Dude, what's the matter with you? It's almost like you're not interested at all!" Token interjected. "Are you queer or something?"

Craig shot Token a nasty glare and flipped him off along with a hearty fuck you.

"Jeez, cool your shit dude. I was just kidding."

"Yea dude, you don't have to be such a fag about it, or we'll really think you're one."

Craig decided not to retort.

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These days were supposed to be the happiest days of Craig's life. Everyone had thought they were; after all, he was popular, guys respected him, the girls found him attractive, albeit mysterious, his friends were liked by their peers, so how could he possibly be unhappy. Yet that was exactly what he was.

Craig contemplated his existence as he lay on his bed, watching TV with his favorite since childhood show on, petting his guinea pig.

When that failed to cheer him up, he carefully put Stripe the third back in his cage, before he inadvertently hurt him while trying to vent his anger. He'd never forgive himself if he accidently took it out on his beloved pet. Instead he took it out on the poor, unsuspecting TV remote, which, after being used to shut off the box, was squeezed in his palm so tight, small cracks started to appear in the plastic housing, and thrown across the room angrily, shattering upon collision with the wall.

Craig left the room not feeling any better and slammed the door on his way out.

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It was already dark out and Craig still sat on a bench at Stark's pond, mulling over the whole issue of being him.

Then, there were those guys. They were his closest friends. His own group of bros that looked up to him. Why was it, when he thought of himself being so utterly uninteresting, he couldn't fathom. He wasn't a rich charmer like Token, he wasn't a jovial player like Clyde, nor was he a witty comedian like Jimmy. Maybe it was the brooding indifference and aura of mystery that everyone admired. Or perhaps his

He liked their company most of the time. Until one of them hit that wrong button.
Craig has started to realize he was different recently. Although his subconsciousness accepted that this was a thing, he decided it was for the best not to reveal anything. But, as much as he didn't show it, it was a fact that his friends' casual homophobia did manage to get to him.

It hurt. Why did they have to be like that? Token, who was the biggest Queen fan, owning a collection of vinyl records and SACDs of pretty much all of their albums, which he liked to play repeatedly on his absurdly expensive stereo. Clyde, who loved to sing along to Last Christmas every time the radio stations decided it was appropriate because Christmas time was right on the doorstep, even if it was just a day after Thanksgiving. The same Clyde who cried when the sad news of the singer's premature death reached his ears. Why did these guys, who always had a good laugh watching shows like Big Bang Theory, have to insist on making these painful jabs? Sure, they had no idea that they had someone very close to them whom it may concern, and because Craig made sure not to ever say anything, he couldn't expect at least the fake decency of fakely civil peers making sure not to utter casually racist comments when Token was around.

It wasn't like he saw a way out of the shitty situation. Saying something would surely lead to them saying something along the lines of why is he being such a bitchy little faggot about what's no big deal at all. He thought more often then not about the option of punching the lights out of the next person who unknowingly insults him like that. It wouldn't be too hard after all as he had come out on top from a fair share of fights. But what would that achieve, when the person insulting him was one of the guys who were supposed to be his closest friends? Guys who were begging their parents to buy them Apple products, not wanting to even touch anything else, because fruity mobile devices were cool, and anything else was not. If only the same logic could be applied to him.

Craig’s problem was, he knew he was no Freddie Mercury or even the not as famous George Michael, he was no Jim Parsons or Tim Cook. He was just Craig Tucker, the average-in-every-way boy, and if there was nothing too special about him, the only way to still be the same old Craig was to never beouted, because god forbid his generally perceived persona of a troublemaking, tough and not-giving-a-single-fuck leader of his small gang (as exaggerated as it may have been, that image was very convenient for Craig) be shattered and replaced with an identity of 'that gay kid'. Because that would definitely become reality; his sexuality would be the first thing that came to mind when someone mentioned the name Craig Tucker, as that would be his most prominent characteristic. And that would not even be the possible worst case scenario.

He could vividly imagine it; the snickers and the rumors, the sneers from his once friends, now full of contempt and wanting nothing more to do with him, the once popular Craig now becoming a social pariah.

The crushing weight of it all pressed down on Craig, like a thousands of feet of water above the deep abyss that was Craig’s life. He couldn't keep the feelings bottled up any more and let out a choked sob, as the tears he couldn't hold back any longer started flowing.

Chapter End Notes

So I decided to write my first sort of less cheerful story which was first supposed to be just a smutty oneshot, but then I thought about a plot that could go with it. Please let me know in the comments if it's any good at all, so I know if I should continue or not.
Craig sat there for a while longer with his tearstreaked face buried in the palms of his hands, and he almost missed the sound of the approaching footsteps, but he couldn't miss the cracked voice.

"Craig...are you crying?"

Flurry of embarrassment shot through Craig’s body like an electric current, making him jerk his head up so fast his intruder cringed at the though of the hurt of his cervical vertebrae, and then Craig bolted up from where he sat towards the boy with an unmistakable voice and appearance, the high strung, dishevelled blonde caffeine addict, but right now, most importantly of all, an inconvenient witness to his brief moment of weakness, a witness that had to be dealt with if Craig didn't want the whole school to hear Tweek's story that would turn Craig into an utter laughing stock.

In dire situations, Craig dealt with problems using his fists. He'd explain it to Tweek after the beating (one that could also be a good way to vent for his anger, which was a plus) that taking what he just saw to his grave, unless he wanted to be laid in it within the next few coming days, might be a good idea.

Tweek's puzzled expression shifted to shock as he saw Craig lunge at him with balled fists and before he could react, he was roughly shoved against a tree, his back hitting hard against the trunk.

Craig swung his fist at him, but Tweek’s quick reflex allowed him to narrowly dodge the hit, so instead of breaking his nose or disrupting his face with a severe bruise, one that would let him know why one shouldn't fuck with Craig, it merely left a minor abrasion on his cheek and smashed full force against the pine tree's coarse bark, shredding the skin on his knuckles.

Craig gasped in pain and before he knew it, he took a hard hit to his temple that nearly made him black out and sent him falling on the grassy ground.

"The fuck is wrong with you!?" Tweek spat.

Craig hunched and closed his eyes tight, expecting a kick or some other kind of foul play that never came. He opened his eyes and looked around, but Tweek was already gone. Craig grunted and stretched himself as he rolled over on his back.

Craig's phone rang. The caller was his father.
When Craig got home, it was almost 11 PM, the rest of his family, apart from his dad, was already asleep.

"Craig! Where the hell have you been? Your mom and I were so worried about you!"

"Sorry dad."

"Sorry dad doesn’t cut it son, it's a school day and you are god knows where for how long, don't you realize something might have happened to you? Who knows what kind of freaks wander around at night around here."

'Oh, tell me about it' was what Craig had on his tongue, but not to make his situation any worse, he kept his mouth shut, worrying more about the social consequences of his new encounter with Tweek, rather than what his father had to say.

"You got into a fight again, didn't you?"

"No."

"Craig, don't lie to me." The disappointment in his father's voice, stemming rather from the lie than the fact Craig was involved in a fight, was crushing. "Your clothes are all dirty and your knuckles are bleeding."

Craig couldn't look his dad in the eyes, he just absentmindedly rubbed his knuckles and shrugged.

"I don't understand you sometimes Craig. Put some ice on it, hit the shower and go straight to bed."

Craig rolled his eyes and answered with a deadpan 'yeah'.

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After disinfecting his knuckles, showering and brushing, Craig dropped face down on bed, finally able to sort his mind.

He screwed up, big time. Why did he have to have an emotional breakdown outside, in public? Not that home with his family around was a good option either if he wanted to keep his facade, but in public, where anyone could see him? That was so unlike him, and as his father said, who knew what kind of freaks could be wandering around at that time around South Park. He probably had different kind of freaks in mind, other than a high strung, eccentric boy the same age as Craig, walking around South Park for just another one of the crazy reasons that made him do most of things he done, but as Craig saw it, an encounter with a potential violent criminal may have been preferable, because then he would not have to go to school the next day with an apprehension of what sort of rumors would be spread undoubtedly regarding him being seen weeping by none other than Tweek Tweak and also getting his ass kicked by the same person after a failed attempt to remind Tweek why not to tell anybody about it.

Craig wanted to hate him and blame him for everything, but he couldn't. It was all his own fault, Tweek did nothing wrong, he was just at a wrong place at a wrong time, and all he did was defend himself when Craig attacked him, and quite competently at that.

That was the most confusing part. Craig didn't remember ever seeing Tweek fight, with the exception
of their old set up fight in third grade, but that was years ago and hardly relevant to Tweek's present day fighting ability or physique that, as far as Craig knew, was not one of a brawler.

Then again, he hardly ever paid him any mind since third grade, he was in a different class since four grade so they didn't share PE, he hasn't seen him otherwise than fully clothed since they were nine, and he was so indifferent to anyone outside his group, all he basically knew about Tweek's build was that he was few inches short of Craig's six feet.

Did Craig make a basic mistake of underestimating someone about whom he knew very little, or was it just that on that night, luck has been on Tweek's side because Craig was not at his best and any other time, he wouldn't stand a chance against him? Craig would like to believe the latter, but a nagging voice in the back of his mind, telling him the first option was closer to the truth, did not help amplify his self-assurance.

Why, why did he have to fight him anyway? Out of fear that the next day Tweek would go around telling everybody he saw Craig, alone on a bench at Stark's pond, late in the evening, crying, while he was just walking by?

The more he thought about it rationally, the more laughable the whole idea seemed. Tweek was a loner, he hardly ever talked to anybody and when he did, it was mostly nonsense about tiny creatures stealing underwear or some other utterly bizarre, absurd shit, so who would believe him anyway?

But he wasn't thinking rationally at the time, and it would cost him dearly, he figured.

For once he allowed his emotions to surface, just once he let his guard down, he threw rational thinking and logic out the window for one moment and immediately it backfired and made his life just a little bit shittier than he already thought it was, and even now when he considered that the likelihood of anybody believing Tweek's story was low, he could not shake the trepidation that tomorrow the real shitstorm will come and he will have to go through it - not going to school at all was not an option. That would only add credibility to whatever rumors and take away his chances to disprove them.

Craig was worried he would not get any sleep tonight, and not only because his head still hurt. He buried his face in the pillow and tried hard to think about nothing.

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"The fight!"

Craig, still in shock, was almost about to lash out and start denying whatever rumors reached his friends's ears, but Clyde went on being more specific.

"Who's the poor fucker whose face you smashed in yesterday?" Clyde pointed to Craig's scraped knuckles on his right hand, which Craig instinctively covered with his left palm. Great, now all three pairs of eyes were on him and he felt like a defendant in front of a court and full jury. Craig didn't like being in the spotlight.

"Nobody!" That was not exactly a lie. He spotted the 'nobody' in question on the other side of cafeteria and for a split second, as if he sent him a telepathic signal to turn around, they locked eyes for a second before Tweek tore his look away.

"Bullshit! What kind of a bro are you, not only you go out and kick someone's ass and we don't get to watch, now you won't even tell us who it was!"

"I wuh-wouldn't want to be the guy though. If Craig's huh-hand looks like that, imagine whu-what the guy's face looks like."

"I don't think I saw anyone bruised that badly today. It's not like he could hide that." Token mused.

"So they guys's either a high schooler, or he just stayed home. Probably afraid to come to school again. What a fag." Clyde chuckled and punched Craig playfully. "Nice work."

"You wanna be next?!" Craig threatened and returned Clyde the favor with his own not at all playful shoulder punch and a glare.

"No!" Clyde's eyes widened with concern and shook his head. "Jesus Christ!"

"Then fucking drop it, all right?!"

"Dude, the fuck's wrong with you lately?" Token asked aghastly.

"Nothing! Just fuck off." Craig retorted and left the table, leaving behind his food tray and his three friends, dumbfounded and staring in disbelief.

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"McCormick!" Craig yelled at the orange hoodie wearing boy standing next to his locker.

"Tucker." Kenny closed his locker, turned around and replied in much more calm manner. "What do you want?"

"Can I bum a cigarette?"

Kenny gave him a quizzical look with one raised eyebrow, judging his motives.

"I didn't know you smoke?"

"I don't." Craig said and pulled out a two dollar bill. "Now can I fucking have one or not?"
Kenny looked at the banknote, took it out of Craig's hand and thrust a two-thirds empty pack of cheap smokes with a Bic lighter inside into Craig's hand.

"Keep the rest." Kenny turned around and started walking down the hallway, but Craig caught up to him and stopped him.

"Hey wait! I said fucking one!"

"Look, I may not have a nickel of change, but I do have my principles. I'm not going to sell you one cig for two bucks. So either give me something smaller, or keep the pack and do whatever you want with the rest, flush them down a drain for all I care." With that, he left.

"Fuck." Craig cursed to himself and started walking in the direction of the main entrance.

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Craig found a bit of secluded area where he could light up and not have to worry about being disturbed by anyone. He put the cigarette in his mouth and tried to light it, but the wind kept blowing the flame out, so he turned around, and in the corner leaning against the wall was the one person he wanted to avoid most.

Craig looked up and saw Tweek start and take a defensive posture. Always paranoid, that guy was, but Craig realized that being pretty much cornered by a someone who basically attacked him without provocation last night was a valid reason for concern. He put the cigarette and the lighter back in the pack and closed the distance, for a while contemplating giving Tweek a due payback, but he figured that Tweek was unpredictable, he already misjudged him once and it would be just plain stupid to make the same mistake twice. Moreover, he did have a stainless steel cup of seemingly scalding hot coffee in his hand. Another embarassing defeat this time combined with second degree burns on his face were the last thing Craig wanted, so he decided to try a different approach this time.

"What do you want from me?! I swear if you don't fucking leave me alone..."

"I just - I'm sorry, all right?"

"What??" Tweek's eyes widened as he shrieked in a surprised, instead of his former hostile tone.

"I said I'm sorry! I just want to apologize..." Craig cringed inwardly as he looked at the ground and felt awkward, hardly ever truly apologizing for anything. "And to thank you?"

"What?" Tweek repeated his question, baffled. "Why?"

"You didn't tell anybody." Craig looked in his eyes, and for the first time took proper notice of what Tweek looked like. He was shorter than Craig, but he seemed wider in his arms, he didn't shake as he used to do when he was agitated, his fingers, gripping his trusty thermos, were no longer shredded due to constant picking and scratching, his hair was still radiant blonde, short and disheveled, though not as chaotic as it used to be, his eyes, with irises green in the middle and blue around, were cautious as ever, his lips were thin and long, his jaw was slender and he had a nice and cheekbones, with clear skin with the exception of a fresh abrasion on his right cheek, and in general he looked very, very attractive. Craig tried not to blush and to make sure there's no confusion what's he talking about, added: "About yesterday."
Tweek raised an eyebrow and then scowled.

"Why would I do that?"

"Most people that I know would." Craig shrugged.

"I'm not most people that you know". Tweek countered as he eyed Craig (who very much agreed with that statement) and tried to assess if he was going to stop him from leaving. Deciding on probably not, Tweek sidestepped Craig and before he left, added something Craig already sort of knew, but hearing it from Tweek himself made his gut feel uneasy nonetheless.

"Besides, I have no one to tell anyway."

Craig finished smoking the cigarette, tossing the butt down on the ground and stomping it out, and let out a cloud of smoke with a releaved sigh.

"I still don't understand it. How can you drink coffee to calm yourself? It was what made you so... twitchy in the first place!"

"No, that was the 'secret ingredient'," Tweek finger quoted, "not coffee. And like you're any better! I could be blind and deaf and still tell when you're anxios for a smoke!"

"Bullshit." Craig bumped his shoulder. "I bet I could stop smoking before you laid off the caffeine."

"Only if you pick up another deadly habit."

"Maybe you could replace it with a healthy habit instead," said a third voice. The two boys looked to the right where the voice came from and Kenny, of course, was there.

"What are you talking about Kenny?" Tweek asked. "What's a healthy habit anyway?"

"Sex." He said with an easy smile. "Just get yourselves some chicks to shag already and you'll want nothing else, you'll forget about your coffee or nicotine or whatever."

Tweek looked down at his cup and frowned, but Craig quickly grabbed the front pocket of Kenny's hoodie and found a pack of cigarettes inside.

"Then what's this for?" He shook the pack in front of Kenny's face and threw it back at him. Kenny caught them and his cockiness faltered, for a while, but then he just sniggered and shrugged.

"Nothing's ever perfect."

With that, he left.

"He's so full of shit. Like hell he's getting laid all the time!" Craig scoffed. "If any of his stories are at least half true, I wouldn't want to touch him with a ten feet pole. And if they're not, well... then he just is full of shit."

"Hmm." Tweek shrugged, grinned and didn't press the issue any further. Craig wondered if Tweek would make insinuations about Craig touching Kenny, but he didn't.
Craig quite liked that Tweek didn't ask personal or embarrassing questions. He liked how in front of Tweek he didn't have to be careful not to say anything that may sound weird, because Tweek didn't pry or judge or just generally actively try to resolve a great mystery called Craig Tucker. Craig liked to think Tweek respected the privacy of his thoughts and knew that of there was something Craig wanted him to know, he would say it himself, and was fine with it without feeling the urge to figure out what was in the most intimate recesses of Craig's mind. Craig reciprocated in the same way, although very often he wished he knew more about Tweek, or rather that Tweek would tell him more about himself, because the unnerving uncertainty revolving one very pressing issue was almost worse than an outright dismissal of the lasting and with great difficulty suppressed interest.

Almost.

Chapter End Notes

Your comments, whether positive, negative, both, neither or anything in between, mean a lot to me, so please don't hesitate letting me know what you think. Thank you for reading, and please know this, just because I don't answer to your comment, does not mean that I don't acknowledge or appreciate it. Believe me, I do, very much. I always reply if I have something specific and important to say.
Chapter Notes

Events in this chapter take place in the past, shortly before the end of middle school or 8th grade.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

"Craig! Long time no see, huh?" Clyde chuckled and the other two snorted when Craig joined them at the table. "We were actually worried you weren't going to talk to us anymore."

"It's only been couple of days. Geez." Craig rolled his eyes. Craig has been avoiding his friends for several days to clear his mind; rather than take his anger out on others, just try and walk it off, to try and enjoy the serenity of being left alone, with no interference of disturbing elements, such as other people, until feeling better - good enough to seek human contact again.

"Couple days too much. It sucks without you."

"Did you guys really miss me that much?" Craig snorted. "I'm so fucking flattered!"

"Well, believe it or not, it does feel like something is missing when your grumpy ass is not around." Clyde said with his arm around Craig's shoulders and patted his back.

"Oh wow, that is so touching you guys." Craig deadpanned.

"We miss your s-sense of humor v-v-very much." Jimmy said.

"And your warm personality too." Token added.

"We can't really have fun without Craig, right guys?" Clyde said and the other two nodded sharply with mocking seriousness.

"Well, try not to piss me off again."

"I still don't understand how we pissed you off Craig."

"There are lots of things you understand, Clyde."

"Like what?"

"I don't know," Craig shrugged, "half of the curriculum, for example?"

Token and Jimmy laughed, while Clyde narrowed his eyes at Craig and pouted for a while, but then he chuckled too and hugged Craig.

"Oh good, the old Craig is back. All is well."

"Great, now please get your hands off me." Craig flipped Clyde off.

"Yep, it's him all right." Token nodded.
It was during times like these when Craig felt like he truly belonged among his friends. Unfortunately, he couldn’t rely indefinitely on Clyde, Token and Jimmy not doing anything to unwittingly raise his anxiety level. That’s how he, after some time, found himself standing in the same secluded corner as few weeks before, leaning against the wall and taking a drag from the last of the cheap cigarettes he got from Kenny (which Craig vowed never to touch again and buy something better next time, because, as far as Craig’s limited knowledge of tobacco went, the taste was disgusting).

Craig exhaled a cloud of smoke, feeling slightly calmer, contemplating if a nicotine addiction and dangers associated with smoking were worth the little relief they brought. But before he could decide, a blonde guy with a thermos in his hand rounded the corner and flinched at spotting Craig.

"Oh god, it’s you again. What are you doing here?"

"Smoking." Craig answered simply and to clarify it, just in case, he raised his hand with a lit cigarette between his fingers and took a drag. "What are you doing here?"

Tweek frowned at him.

"I come here every day to get away from everything and everybody, and drink my coffee in peace. Can’t you go somewhere else to ruin your lungs?"

Craig raised his eyebrows at him and looked around.

"There’s enough room here for both of us." Craig shrugged and gestured at the space around him. "I don’t bite."

"My last experience with you says otherwise. And even if you don’t bite, I don’t like cigarette smoke."

Craig rolled his eyes and stubbed the unfinished cigarette out against the wall.

"There. Better now?"

"No. You’re still here."

Craig sighed and looked at Tweek. Were it anyone else, Craig would either tell them to fuck off, or just walk away himself, but there was something intriguing about Tweek that made him forgo his usual attitude towards other people that weren’t his close friends, and Craig swore to himself that whatever it was, it was not just the fact that Tweek was a good looking guy.

"Look dude, I already said I was sorry, and I barely, if ever, do that, so believe me that I meant it. I can see why you like this spot, I like it for the same reason. So how about we at least try and tolerate each other?" Craig said, surprised with himself where all that came from. Tweek looked at him suspiciously.

"I don’t trust people. Why should I trust you, of all? How should I know you’re not going to trick me, and jump me when I least expect it, maybe with the help of your friends?"

Craig sighed in frustration.

"Fine. Whatever. Look, I’m not going to try anything funny, all right? If I wanted to jump you with
Clyde and Token - Jimmy isn't of much use in a fight - I would have done it already, but the last thing I want is getting them involved, since..."

"Since what?" Tweek was interested now.

"Oh fuck. Nothing. Just leave it!"

"No. Hell no! You said you wanted me to trust you? Then tell me and I just might."

"Fine! Shit! Okay." Craig huffed in frustration. "I was... it was actually because of them that I was there that night and... fuck..."

"They've done something?" Tweek asked as if he didn't think that that was actually possible.

"Sort of. Are you happy now?" Craig snapped.

"What could they have possibly done that would get to you ..." Tweek paused with emphasis on the 'you', which Craig didn't fail to notice and understood what he was trying to say - that he was aware of Craig's character and was genuinely puzzled, more than he was on that night, that it could be Craig's friends who could drive him, of all people, to tears.

"Please, just drop it! This is personal shit and you already know too much, okay?" Craig returned Tweek's piercing stare. "Normally I wouldn't bother with any of this, but for some crazy reason I do now and I don't even know why."

"Okay?" Tweek seemed genuinely surprised.

"So, can you try and trust me now?" Craig asked.

Tweek looked at him, and his expression softened. He looked in his eyes and gave him a small nod.

"Thanks."

Tweek waved it off and leant against the wall, removed the lid from the thermos and poured his coffee in it.

"Do you mind if I...?" Craig put his left hand, still holding the unfinished cigarette, up and mimicked igniting it with a lighter with the other hand.

"Fine, go ahead. But don't blow the smoke at me. I don't want a lung cancer."

"I don't think you can get lung cancer from just standing there." Craig said and lit the remainder of the cigarette.

"Knowing my luck, I probably can."

"You think you have a bad luck?" Craig scoffed. "How so?"

"Hmm." Tweek laughed dryly. "Where should I start? With my parents getting me addicted to caffeine, and at one point something much worse, so that I had to go to rehab and lie about where it came from, unless I wanted my parents in jail and me ending up in a foster care with some psychos, like Kenny and his sister? Or how about my insomnia, the result of the caffeine addiction that I can't get over, which causes me a ton of other problems?"

Listening to Tweek, Craig realized that those were rather serious troubles that Tweek had to cope with, and his were negligible by comparison - was he then being a baby, when whatever uninspired
gay bashing jokes his friends made, got to him like that? Was it really unjustified, to feel so bad on the inside, that it would drive him to tears, even if it was just this once? Surely not, he had every right to, didn't he?

"Fucking hell dude. And I thought I was unlucky when you caught me right when I felt really shitty and actually let it show, which I do about as often as the Halley's Comet flies by."

"How often does the Halley's Comet fly by?"

"About every 76 years."

"Still a space freak, huh?" Tweek chuckled.

"Yeah."

It was still Craig's dream to make a career in aerospace, but he didn't want to elaborate. He didn't want to sound like more of a dork in front of Tweek than he already might have.

"So actually you were pretty lucky all on that occasion. Not only that you got to see me like that, which happens only every 76 years, as we've established, you were also lucky that I didn't beat your ass right then."

"No, that wasn't luck." Tweek shook his head dismissively.

"Hmh." Craig snickered. "Ask some of the guys who thought they could fuck with me. I think they would disagree."

"That's really cute," Tweek scoffed, "but you're forgetting that you had your friends to cover your back if shit got serious. I never had this luxury. And it's not like I never tried to make friends, but no one wanted anything to do with me after I got back from rehab, since everyone thought I was some crazy junkie freak. And it was when pricks like Cartman wanted to show me just how much of a crazy freak I was, and what I deserved because of it, I realized the hard way that I wasn't going to survive middle school just by laying low and trying to avoid trouble. So excuse me, but cut the bullshit please. I wasn't lucky. I just wanted to go for a walk when I couldn't sleep again, and I definitely didn't want to meet you in whatever mood, but I did, and when I saw you I was concerned what happened to you, even when I don't really like you, and what did you do, try and beat me up? How fucking lucky is that? It was you who was fucking lucky that I didn't take out all the shit I've been through on you, when I had the chance."

"... wow." Craig was speechless. This was not the Tweek Tweak he remembered. Those sharp words were definitely not the kind of words he would expect from him. The bit where he said: 'I don't really like you' stung in particular, for some reason.

"What?"

"I... it's...a mouthful. Is that really you talking?"

"What do you mean?"

"Well - I mean, I don't remember you being so..."

Sharp tongued. And few other things that Craig didn't quite expect.

"I've changed."
"Clearly! I remember you as an over caffeinated, nervous wreck, talking about some imaginary creatures stealing underpants. Not..." Someone who talks about himself being addicted without knowing, going through rehab, being ostracized, bullied and still suffering from insomnia, but with the kind of lack of concern of someone who returned home from grocery shopping, and realized after four hours that he forgot to buy celery.

"They're not imaginary. The underpants gnomes. They exist. And I still drink more coffee than I probably should, so..."

"Okay, I guess some things don't change. At least I know you're not someone else entirely." Craig chuckled. "But the other things... I mean, some of the things you told me... here I thought how shitty my life was, and then you tell me this - how can you be so... indifferent about it?"

Tweek shrugged and took a satisfying drink from his cup with closed eyes. He sighed contentedly and when he opened his eyes, Craig was staring at him with raised eyebrows.

"I guess it happens that you stop caring about shit, like failing grades and bullying, when you've been through worse. Like an addiction to something that you didn't even know you were putting in your body, going through withdrawal, feeling like absolute shit and just wanting to die."

"Did you actually... you really wanted to die?" Craig asked carefully with an unusually compassionate tone and expression.

"Do you actually care?" Tweek rolled his eyes.

"You don't have to be so cynical dude!" Craig snapped.

"Well I'm sorry but you hardly ever gave a shit about anyone, let alone me, so why would you now?" Tweek retorted.

"Maybe I've changed too."

"Prove it."

"How?"

"Isn't that Clyde over there?"

Craig jumped in shock and frantically looked around to see if Clyde is near and whether he could see him here or not, whilst quickly thinking of ways he could explain that no, he was not willingly interacting with this nutcase (he was) and no, they had nothing in common (they did) and yes, the only reason they were within five feet distance of each other was because Craig was just there for a smoke, and Tweek was just being desperately clingy to anyone who could pay him attention (he wasn't). But there was no sing of Clyde anywhere, or anybody in fact; not a live soul in sight.

He looked at Tweek who was watching him with raised eyebrows, unimpressed.

"Don't want to be seen with me? That's fine. Like I said, I've been through worse. Maybe you should go, before someone actually does see you near me."

Craig flipped him the bird.

"Fuck you dude. This isn't right. I will prove it to you that I do actually care."

With that, he left and realized what he just said. 'I will prove it to you that I do actually care.' Craig
kept thinking about it the whole way back to class; he actually cared. He wanted to. That was a new for him.

Craig couldn't believe he was doing this. It seemed almost surreal when he appeared in front of the house with a backpack shortly after turning down his friends' suggestion to go play ball, and rang the doorbell.

"Hi uh, I'm looking for Tweek. Is he home?"

"Well, yes he is home, why?" The man with the extraordinarily smooth voice answered.

"Can I come in?"

Mister Tweak looked at him, as if there being a Tweek's peer at the door, actually wanting to see Tweek, unless it was a prank, didn't occur to him as a possibility. Maybe he was there because of a school project?

"Okay. I suppose you can."

Craig entered the hall as Mr. Tweak let him in, still unsure of his motives. Craig took his shoes off and gestured to the stairs.

"First door, right? May I...?"

Mr. Tweak nodded and gestured for him to go up, watching him go up three stairs before turning around and returning back to the living room.

Craig ascended the stairs and knocked the door three times.

"Come in."

Craig opened the door, and he would probably find Tweek's shock to see him there amusing, if his own heart wasn't beating fast with anxiety. Tweek was sitting at his desk, open school books lying around and the essential, massive mug of coffee with wisps of steam rising from it in tiny coils completed the picture. At least something seemed to be playing into Craig's hands.

"Craig? What are you doing here?" Tweek asked with eyes wide. He was clearly more surprised about this uninvited guest more than his father was. Craig looked around the room,

"I wondered about something you said."

"About what?"

"Your failing grades."

"You came here to ask me about that? Well fucking brilliant, I'm busting my brains over this shit that I can't get right...", he pointed at his Algebra 1 book, "and you coming here to make fun of me is exactly what I need."

"Actually I came to ask you if it would help you if someone, I don't know, like tutored you or
"something..." Craig rolled his eyes.

"Yea, probably, but no one ever wants to work with me, so I guess I just have to suck it up and try not to think about failing 8th grade so much."

"Well, let me then." Craig said like it was the most obvious thing in the world.

"Huh??" Tweek thought he misheard him.

"Let me tutor you. Like, right now, if you feel like it."

"Why would you want to help me? Is this a prank?" Tweek narrowed his eyes suspiciously.

"Because I care, and this is how I prove it to you."

"Really?" Tweek asked with a hint of hope in his voice.

"Yes, really. It's not a prank."

A wide, almost wistful smile played on Tweek's lips. Craig wanted to tell him that he should smile more often, because it flattered him. But certainly not now. He just smiled back and sat down on the chair that Tweek beckoned him to, before he would bring one extra for himself.

...

"You're not that bad of a learner, in fact." Craig told him after he guided Tweek in the right direction to figure out the algebra. "How could you be failing? You're clearly smarter than Clyde, and even he can manage a C-.

"I... it's... a lots of things combined..." Tweek looked down with a sad look, hidden behind which was an immense amount of anger. "It doesn't matter anyway. If I told you, you'd probably just tell me to grow up or something, so..."

"Dude, I won't do that. Actually..." Craig trailed off and scratched his nape self consciously. He figured it would be quite hypocritical of him to tell Tweek to grow up. "Just tell me. It's okay."

"It's not fucking okay!" Tweek snapped up fiercely with a fire burning in his eyes. "Do you really want to know what I have to put up with? My school life has been absolute shit ever since I got back from rehab. Everyone thinks I'm some crazy junkie psycho that should better be locked in a padded cell or something! Teachers ignore me, every time I don't immediately understand something at school and try and ask them, they shoot me down that they don't have time to explain everything twice or slow down because of me. Other kids aren't of any help, because they too think I'm a nutter, and even when I get something right, there is always some fuckhead that makes sure it counts for nothing. Usually Cartman. Well in fact it's always Cartman, and two of his thug lackeys, Bill and Fosse. He and those two are the worst, but everyone else just looks away, so it's not like anyone is much better."

Craig, surprised by his outburst, felt guilty, because he realized that not many days ago, he was one of those people who have written Tweek off as a mental case who only kept going to school for the masochistic purpose of being more miserable than outside of it.
"What do you mean, make sure...?"

Tweek shook in anger and a tears formed at the corner of his eyes.

"It's always something... breaking my pens before tests so I have nothing to write with, knocking my coffee over my books and papers, torn notes, ... he always plays it off as an unintentional accident, and the teachers always buy it. Once he broke into my locker and stole everything. Nobody believes me he does all that to spite me... they just think I'm being paranoid as usual. Nobody ever believes me." Tweek hid his face in his hands and closed his eyes, tears already spilling, and tried to supress a shuddering sob, but to no avail.

Craig felt awkward, now that their roles from the evening at the pond were reversed, as he's never been the best to comfort someone, and felt sick to his stomach. What Tweek was going through were real fucking issues to cry about. Not some stupid, immature shit his friends said. Or was it more than that? He didn't want to be in a situation similar to Tweek's - to be ostracized, only in his case, because of his sexuality. But he wasn't in the same situation - yet.

Craig put his hand on Tweek's shoulder and squeezed in hope it would be of any use at all, trying to get the blond to cheer up.

"I'm so sorry Tweek. And I believe you. I would help you, but..."

"But you don't want to be associated with me." Tweek gulped in a sob. "I get it."

"It's not like that! I'm already associating with you!"

"Don't bullshit me, you'd be embarrassed if someone saw you with me, I know, I saw it!" Tweek snapped again. "Why are you even here? To get something out of me that you can use for fun at my expense? Are you here on a dare? You must be, because someone could see you coming here and you wouldn't risk that. Well, mission accomplished asshole, you can fuck off now and go have fun with the others!"

"Fucking hell, why do you have to be so difficult! I came here to help you, I already did! If you haven't noticed. And as for my friends, well, they're not my favorite people at the moment, so I ditched them today to come here instead!" Craig retorted harshly. "Maybe if you don't want people to think you're a paranoid nutcase, you should stop being a paranoid nutcase first!"

That set Tweek right off. He growled and lunged at Craig, ready to hit, but the door opened suddenly with Mr. Tweak there.

"Boys, what is going on? I heard shouting... Tweek?! What are you doing?!” He raised his voice at his son, when he noticed what looked like his son was about to attack Craig. Tweek let him go and shook his head frantically, trying to convey that this isn't what it looked like. To his luck, Craig stepped in.

"It's all right Mr. Tweak. It was nothing." He smiled, turned his head to Tweek and blinked at him.

"All right, fine, but if anything happens..." he said in a warning tone, directing his sharp look at Tweek, reaching for the door handle, "I'll be right next door."

He left and closed the door behind himself.

"Well? It appears to me I just got you out of trouble. Are you still going to suspect my motives, or are you finally going to try and trust me?” Craig asked Tweek with arms across his chest.
Tweek dropped to his bed and took deep breaths.

"I'm so sorry. I just... hate when people say things like.." he said with a trembling voice.

"Yea, I get it." Craig wheeled the chair next to Tweek's bed and sat opposite of him. "So tell me something. How come you allow Cartman do this shit to you? If you're such a hothead, why don't you just kick his fat ass, when clearly you can?"

"That's the problem." Tweek said gloomily.

"Care to explain?"

Tweek sighed and tried to hold back more tears.

"I hate fighting. I hate confrontations. It always makes me nervous and... I don't want to fight anyone. But I did. And it didn't end well."

"I never saw you in a fight though."

"Well, even the idiot that is Cartman is canny enough to never do anything too obvious. It would always be like, 'innocent' bump or push into the locker here and there, and punching after school when everybody was out of sight... I knew no one would help me, so I started training at this place of out town, so I could fight back eventually..." Tweek recounted bitterly.

"And?" Craig asked, full of curiosity now. "You did fight him back, right. Or what happened?"

Tweek gulped and looked away with a guilt in his face.

"He cornered me once in an alley, with his goons there as usual. Started saying shit like 'you psychos should be in a nuthouse' and 'you should just kill yourself' and such... then he said, 'if you don't feel like killing yourself yet, I'll give you a good reason to'... he started pushing me against a wall and punched me... and I just snapped - like, that was it, the final straw... I saw red and went at him. I don't remember exactly what happened. When I came back to my senses, those two cowards were already gone... they ran away, but Cartman was there, lying unconscious in a pool of blood... I couldn't feel my hands anymore, I just saw they were all red."

"Holy shit dude." Craig exclaimed with wide eyes. "What happened then?"

"I regretted what I've done, but I couldn't move. I was frozen with shock... Bill and Fosse came back with some adults. They called an ambulance for Cartman, they took him to a hospital. Broken nose, jaw and collarbone, some teeth knocked out, concussion, eyes swollen shut... I tried to explain that he and Bill and Fosse were physically and mentally bullying me for months and now they did it again and that I was just defending myself, but nobody ever believed they bullied me before, and they clearly didn't buy it after seeing what I did to Cartman. His mom got involved... she always thought he was a sweet little angel who wouldn't hurt a fly...she took it to the school principal. Bill and Fosse attested to his version of the story that I attacked him without provocation. The principal obviously bought it, and I got suspended for two weeks with a warning that I would be expelled next time I did something. Cartman spent some time in the hospital and didn't show up at school for a month. My parents had to pay for the medical bills and dental care. I got grounded and I had to work it off at the coffeehouse, so... nothing changed for me, really, since I barely ever left my room before and I already worked my ass off at the coffeehouse anyway... I tried to tell them what really happened, but I don't think they truly believed me either. You saw how my dad reacted few minutes ago when he saw me... they never really listened to me, or really understood my problems... when actually they caused most of them in the first place." Tweek exhaled and oddly, he felt a bit relieved,
as if sharing this took some weight off his chest. "So, Cartman now steers clear of me outside school, knowing how he ended up last time. He and those two fucks are such pussies, I swear... but it doesn't stop them from doing shit to me on purpose, like stealing my things... and I can't do jack shit about it."

"Damn dude... just... fucking hell."

Craig was at a loss. Even with the little attention he paid to other students, he remembered that sometime in sixth grade, Cartman suddenly disappeared for more than a month and when he returned, he remembered how for quite some time after, he was grimacing weirdly when eating his burgers and fries with unusual restraint during lunch, which was the most peculiar thing, as gluttonous devoration of any kind of highly caloric food in vast amounts was high on Cartman's list of favorite activities, and Tweek was nowhere to be seen for two weeks. It all made sense now. He has always hated Cartman, but this was just something on a completely different level. And while hearing how Cartman got what was coming to him felt morbidly satisfying, he realized a daunting thing - if Tweek did that almost three years ago, what could he do now, if he became unhinged? Was Tweek dangerous? Should he actually be afraid of him?

"So, if you by some miracle didn't think I was batshit insane whom they should put in a straitjacket, lock in a padded room and throw away the key, I bet you do now." Tweek laughed dryly and looked at Craig with a bored, hopeless expression.

"No," Craig shook his head as made up his mind, that he could be the first person ever to make an effort with understanding Tweek. "I would do the same if I were you. I hope I could have seen it though, because I hate Cartman too."

"Who doesn't! But funny enough, after that happened, even Stan and Kyle, who before that were sort of... well, not exactly friendly, but... I could at least talk to them every now and then... after that, they turned away from me too! And Kyle, who hates Cartman, as well?! Like, what the fuck? Why was he turning his back to me and not to Cartman? I don't get it!" Tweek exclaimed and pulled his hair in frustration, something Craig didn't see him do for quite a while.

Craig reached out and held Tweek's hands in his, squeezing his fists and making him let go of his hair, not failing to notice how nice they felt in his hands, and with a barely hidden blush, let them go instantly. Tweek gave him a questioning stare.

"Don't pull your hair. It would be pity if you went bald. I mean..." Craig coughed to clear his throat and changed the subject. "That should be expected. Stan and Kyle are everyone's favorites, but they're kind of jerks actually."

"So..." Tweek raised his eyebrows, "I am to understand that unlike them, you are not a kind of a jerk?"

"Exactly. And I will prove it, if I hadn't already." Craig nodded, slightly surprised with himself again at how much it mattered to him what Tweek thinks of him. "And if Cartman gives you shit again, just tell me. I'll deal with that prick. And don't worry about failing at school again. If you need someone, I will be there."

"Really?"

"Yes, really."

"And what about your friends, Clyde, Token, Jimmy? What will they think, if...," You associate with me.
"Nothing. And if they do," Craig clenched his fist. "I will explain. Don't forget, I have a reputation too. They won't say shit."

Besides, Craig thought, Craig was known as someone who didn't give a fuck about what other people think, so now would be the time to really act the part.

"Why are you doing all this for me?" Tweek asked with a glint in his eyes.

"Because...," (Because I'm without a doubt a closeted homosexual guy with a fondness for blondes, and I will eventually want to get in your pants, and, failing that, I hope I could at least find a close friend in you, whom I could actually relate to, as opposed to the three dicks of friends I'm used to hanging out with? No, that wouldn't do. Not yet, at least.) Craig though with eyes averted from Tweek's. "I should have been there long ago when you needed someone, and now I feel like it's the right thing to do."

He looked at Tweek's pleasantly surprised expression wearing that beautiful smile once more.

Tweek lunged at Craig again, but this time to wrap him in a much craved hug.

Which Craig returned. More than happily.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry for such a late update. I have no excuse.
"You wanna hang out this weekend?"

Craig asked him the same question for what felt like the millionth time. It wasn't really necessary to ask, since he knew Tweek's works schedule at the coffee shop like the back of his hand and when Tweek wasn't working, the answer was yes.

He started spending more and more time with Tweek, since he and his group sort of drifted apart in tenth grade.

Maybe this time, now after Kenny mentioned the topic the two didn't talk about a lot, maybe now finally he'd have the balls to initiate a proper conversation about the issue of dating and being attracted to someone. At least to the point where he'd know, what his chances are.

He'd much rather not beat around the bush, and tell Tweek directly, what he feels. But it was so difficult. Oh, how difficult it was.

And a lot was at stake.

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"Dudes, you're not going to believe this!"

Clyde caught up with the trio walking away from school and wedged himself in between Craig and Token, nearly giving them both whiplash as he threw each of his arms around their shoulders and pulled them close by their necks alarmingly fast in what was in his mind supposed to be the most broish of bro sidehugs.

"Get off me, Clyde!" Craig pushed him away, annoyed. "The fuck is with you?"

"I asked Bebe out, and she said yes! This is so fucking cool, I'm going out with the hottest girl of our year! Fuck, not year, the whole school!"

"N-n-nice one, Clyde." Jimmy commended Clyde, who grinned at Jimmy and shared a fist bump with him.

"Cool." Token nodded, rubbing his sore neck. "I'm really glad for you, but you didn't have to dislocate my vertebrae because of it."

"Just because she agreed on one date with you doesn't mean you're going out, dumbass."

"Screw you Craig, you don't have to be such a buzzkill just 'cause you're jelly that don't have your own girlfriend yet."

Craig flipped him off without moving his head a single degree.

"S'got nothing to do with it." He deadpanned.

Craig wasn't jealous because he didn't have a girlfriend. He never wanted one in the first place.
Neither did he want to spoil Clyde's joy that the girl he's been pining after for such a long time has finally agreed to go out with him.

But he couldn't get rid of the shameful feeling of the odd man out in their group. Jimmy's dating life wasn't hindered by his disability, he was generally likeable and easygoing (as opposed to someone like, say, Craig), witty and popular, and finding a girl to go out with him was never really a problem for the handicapped boy. Token was in a league of his own. Rich, handsome, tall, athletic, confident and at the same time smart, generous and kind, embodying all the alpha male qualities and more, so the girls basically fought each other over his attention, and it was a small wonder that Craig, not Token, was seen as the leader of the gang known as Craig and those guys, when really it would make a lot more sense if it was Token and those guys. After going out with almost all of the girls in their year (including Wendy, when she and Stan were on another break, and Bebe, much to Clyde's chargin), he ended up back with his first love, Nichole Daniels. Cuz blacks belong together or some shit, was the generally accepted reasoning. Maybe he liked her most because her genuine love interest was Token himself, not Token's wallet. Possibly. And now Clyde had a girlfriend as well. Or at least he was sure he had.

"Yea, totally not." Clyde sneered.

"You know," Token interjected, "Clyde has a point. It's about time you got yourself a girlfriend too. You know, I heard that Annie might actually be interested in you."

"Huh?" Craig blurted out, and it may not have sounded to them like he was alarmed, but inside his brain a big, red, warning light was going on and off, screaming like the air raid siren in Dresden on 13th of February, 1945.

"Annie - you know, the girl you said you liked, she might in fact like you too." Token said as he patted Craig's back. "I've invited her to the party on this Saturday. That's great, right? It'll be the perfect opportunity for you dude!"


"I don't know about that man."

"About what?"

"The party and... I don't know."

"D-dude!" Jimmy exclaimed! "Wh-what's there n-n-not to know?"

"Exactly! You said it yourself you liked Annie!" Clyde reminded him.

"That was more than a year ago!"

"So? If anything, she only became hotter over the time - not as hot as Bebe, obviously, but still... you 'don't know'? What's wrong with you dude?"

"What's that supposed to mean?!"

"Like are you actually gay or something?" Clyde asked him with a raised, judging eyebrow.

"I'm not gay!" Craig lied.
"Then why does it sound like you're trying to bail on a party where you might score with Annie?"

"You know damn well I'm just not a party type."

"You're not anything-that's-fun type lately Craig." Token reproached him. "Come on dude, it'll be great. And if Annie really likes you, you're a shoe-in."

"Yea," Clyde added, "you better fucking come and flirt your way inside her panties, or else."

"Or else what?" Craig scoffed, but Craig was unrelenting.

"What else would you do on a Saturday anyway? Go to Freak Bros and hang out with that weirdo?" Clyde sneered. Craig sent Clyde a dangerous glare and flipped him off.

"Don't call him that! He's done nothing to you. Leave him out of this."

"Why are you so defensive of him?"

"Because he's my friend you idiot." Craig snapped, at which Clyde muttered something unintelligible.

"What was that?"

"More like boyfriend."

Craig's face went crimson and hoped the reason he did would be understood as a due to a justified rage. Not... the other thing. Not only did Clyde confront him for the second time within two minutes with something that Craig was desperate to keep secret, now he also added something that wasn't actually true, but in an entirely different way than in which Craig wanted Clyde to think. Craig punched him in the shoulder, hard.

"Fuck you asshole, it's not like that! Am I not allowed to have other friends than you three or fucking what?"

"I just don't get it. What do you two even have in common?"

"A lot, actually. More than I have in common with you, Clyde." Clyde, Token and Jimmy exchanged worried looks and looked back at Craig.

"What?" He snapped.

"Nothing." Token shook his head. "Will you come to the party or not?"

Craig sighed and rolled his eye. "Sure, whatever."

Craig regretted coming to the party with every fiber of his being. What was the point of trying to socialize, when the volume of the music was cranked up all the way to eleven and he felt like he couldn't for the blaring noise hear a space shuttle launch taking place ten feet away from him, let alone someone else's voice. He opted to retreat into the kitchen with the dining room, where there was less noise and more alcohol. That way, he could at least better mentally prepare himself for the
worst case scenario - that would be, Annie catching up with him and the rumors about her liking him actually being true, he figured as he grabbed a bottle of tequilla, poured himself a shot and drank it. Maybe then he wouldn't feel so awkward if was supposed to 'perform', whatever that could mean. The thought made him shudder. Or maybe he could just be honest and say he's not really interested, thanks for asking, please move along. It wasn't called liquid courage for nothing, right? He poured himself another one and wasted no time with it, already pouring a third, when Token appeared out of nowhere.

"There you are man! I've been looking for you. Annie's over there, and it seems like she doesn't like her company very much."

Craig dared to look in the way in which Token was discreetely nodding, towards the expensive looking sofa on which two people were sitting, one of them being Annie. Thank fuck it was Token and not Clyde, who would probably point at her with his both outstretched arms, not having an idea about what discretion means. Next to Annie was Kenny indeed, she didn't look very interested in whatever suggestions, most likely dirty ones, he had for her.

"Well, what are you waiting for? Aren't you gonna be her knight in a shining armor?" Token smirked and patted his arm. "Now's the best time."

Craig knocked his tequilla shot back and stood up.

"Yeah ok. I'll do that."

He approached the sofa where Kenny and Annie were sitting next to each other, watching as Kenny was telling Annie something and wiggling his eyebrows at her.

"... so, wanna go upstairs and find out?"

"No, thanks." Annie answered coldly.

"Aww come on babe, don't be like that!"

"No means no Kenny, don't you know that?" Craig said as he sat on the other side of Annie and gave Kenny a nonverbal sign that now is the best of times to fuck off. Kenny made a face that was a mix of shock, anger, disgust and disbelief. Was he seriously just being cockblocked by Craig?! He shook his head, scoffed and got up.

"Whatever. I can do better anyway." With that, he left.

Craig flipped his back off, even though Kenny clearly couldn't see it.

"Thanks." Annie smiled at him. "He was really starting to bother me. Sixteen years old and already such a perv!"

"It's okay." Craig said nonchalantly. "I don't mean... him being perv, I mean, you know..." he gesticulated.

"Yeah." She laughed.

Craig quickly thought of what to ask her, before the silence had the chance to become awkward.

"Well, screw him... are you enjoying the party?"

"Oh yea, I'm having great fun." She nodded, still wearing that pretty smile. "What about you?"
"Yea, it's fun." He lied. "So..."

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Now that Craig had a chance to get a close look at Annie, he could tell that she was indeed very beautiful, with her pretty, feminine face, blonde hair that she kept straightened and shorter now, nice plump lips, perfectly proportioned and straight nose that could be described simply as cute, turquoise eyes and a matching color dress that flattered her curves very much... Personality-wise, she seemed like a nice girl as well. If only her cute looks and luscious body could now spark that same, fluttering feeling that Craig tried and failed to supress many times in the boys locker room, instead of just making him simply aware of her blatantly apparent aesthetic appeal.

"It's so noisy in here... wouldn't you like to get away for a while?" She asked him and tugged at his hand, which made Craig break out in a cold sweat. "Lets go outside for a while."

That wasn't that bad. Maybe outside they could talk about this, whatever 'this' was and where it was going, without anyone eavesdropping. For a while Craig was worried she might lure him into a room, and what would happen there would either be unnecessarily embarassing, or disgustingly contemptible, he figured. They walked hand in hand past Clyde who winked at him (that idiot), through the patio door, out to the Black's vast, well kept garden (they didn't pay their gardener for nothing, after all). It wasn't too cold outside. A gentle breeze swept Annie's hair, making the flaps of Craig's chullo hat flit around. He gestured to a bench they could sit on, which, as he noticed with disdain, when they got near it, was right under a white, wooden pergola full of pink and crimson roses. How fucking cheesy.

"This is a nice place." Annie appreciated, unlike Craig, as she looked around to inspect the pergola. "It's kinda romantic."

Craig sighed and closed his eyes, preparing to get only what was necessary of his chest. "Yea, listen Annie, I wanted to talk about..." He began, but he was unable to finish. He felt a pair of soft lips touch his gently. Annie was kissing him, and it felt nice, physically, but there was no tingling feeling in his stomach, no fireworks in the back of his mind, not even a spark of romantic interest, or lust. Craig gently placed his hands on Annie's shoulders and pulled away. She looked at him quizzically.

"...this - it's true then? You like me?"

"Of course silly! What did you think?"

"Well, I..." (thought - no actually, hoped, that it was just another rumor going around, because I'm not ready to be faced with this.) "What is there about me to like anyway?"

Annie looked at him with bewilderment. "Come on, don't be like that! I like you because, well, you're handsome, you seem like a decent guy, and, you're kinda mysterious... I wanted to see the real you! And I thought you liked me as well."

Craig turned away and looked at the ground.

"I can't do this." He shook his head. "I'm sorry. I can't."

"Why?" Annie pouted. "Is it something about me, or what's the problem?"
"No it's not you - look, you're really cute, and kind, but... you're just not my type."

Annie narrowed his eyes at Craig with suspicion. "Is that it? I'm just 'not your type'?"

"Yeah."

"Oh cut the bull please! Is there another girl? Is she prettier than me or what is it?" She retorted with a mildly accusative tone.

"It's not like that!" He hissed, still not looking her in the eyes. "I'm sorry, but I cannot go out with you. It wouldn't be right..."

"But why not, are you..." she paused. Craig, not liking her sudden going silent, turned to look her in the eyes, which have grown wide, and his heart stopped for a moment when she asked him the dreaded question.

"Craig... are you gay?"

"No I'm not!" He denied quickly and looked around in case there was anyone near who could overhear them. It was bad enough that his friends were becoming suspicious, the last thing he needed right now was someone witnessing his sexuality being questioned by a girl he was supposed to take out. The fact that his denying didn't sound very credible at the moment was incidental.

"It's okay if you are," she said apologetically and put her hand on his shoulder, "I understand."

"You don't understand anything!" Craig snapped and got up, about to storm away.

"Please, Craig!" Annie jumped to her feet and grabbed Craig by his hand, trying to stop him. "Just be honest with me." Annie pleaded.

Craig turned around and looked at her, his face hard and unreadable. He wanted to persevere, he wanted to keep the facade and keep declaring untrue all rumors, if there were any, pertaining him not being attracted at all to the opposite sex, and very much to the same one, he wanted to stay in the closet where it was safe and warm. He was already being honest with Annie when he turned her down instead of making his beard out of her and pretending to like her when clearly he didn’t; what more did she want from him?

"Right," she said, dejected. "So I take it it's like, don't ask, don't tell, or something? Fine. I won't pry."

She was about to go away, and just before she did, she said something that made Craig's obstinacy start to crumble. "I just wanted to know why, Craig. I thought I deserved to know."

"Annie, hold on." She turned around with a hopeful, albeit quite dejected look.

"I heard from Millie that Bebe's boyfriend, your friend Clyde, told her about how you said you liked me. I was hoping you were gonna make the first move... well, you know girls, we like to gossip, but..."

Craig interrupted her with a bitter scoff. "Trust me, that's not a girl thing. Guys gossip just as much, if not more..."

"... so you never said you liked me?"

"I did but..." he gulped and looked down, unable to look her in the eyes. "You don't understand!"
Token, Clyde, Jimmy... they can't find out! I was just trying to cover my ass, they would hate me they knew that I'm..." Craig’s voice hitched.

"...gay?" She finished his sentence for him with that one, unspeakable word.

"Yeah." He admitted finally with a sigh.

"They wouldn't be very good friends then, but, I think you're being too negative Craig, I'm sure they'd accept it."

"You don't know anything." He said gloomily.

"Okay. It's none of my business I guess." She smiled at him and nodded sympathetically. "Thanks for being honest with me Craig. And don't worry. I'll keep it to myself."

With that, she left and Craig dropped down on the bench, covering his face with his palms and mulled over what the fuck he just admitted to, and what dreadful consequencens was this going to have.

He shouldn't have drank that tequila.

Craig didn't know how long he sat there, hours may have passed for all he knew, but he dreaded going back in. Maybe if he used the power of his will, he could telekinetically summon some more alcohol to replace the one that was slowly moving out of his system, and then, after a few extra shots of hard liquor he could get rid of the trepidation of going back inside and rejoining the party. Maybe then he'd give less shit about the weird looks and passing jeers he'd get from those who were informed by Annie what was the real reason she just got turned down by him, which would probably be everyone as she definitely grabbed the DJ’s mic and announced the news for the general amusement of the party participants the moment she came back inside the house.

He looked up sharply when he heard someone approaching.

"Dude, what are you doing here? You're supposed to be partying man, not hiding under this - whatever it is?"

Craig shrugged absentmindedly. Clyde didn't drop the G bomb yet, so maybe he at least had a few more minutes of normal life ahead.

"And what about Annie? I saw you two go out and then she came back in without you. Did you fool around? Or at least make out?"

A spark of hope has kindled in Craig's chest. Maybe Annie was true to her word and didn't out him? His heart was beating like he’s just finished running a marathon, but maybe, maybe he could still talk his way out of this, without compromising his social status, or being forced out of the safety of the metaphorical place he was in. Which, in his mind, was the same thing.

"No, we didn't."

"What the hell, why not?"
Craig contemplated his answer carefully. "We kissed. There was just no chemistry." He finally settled on something that was half true and ambiguous enough that it may seem like Annie was the one to reject him, not just the other way around. "End of story."

"And you're sitting here, sulking for hours because of that?" Clyde asked in an amused bewilderment, as he sat beside him and shook him as he put his arm around Craig's shoulders, much to Craig's disdain, again. "So who gives a shit! This was never about serious commitment man, if all you could hope for was a one night stand, it was worth the try, right?"

"Well maybe I'm not that superficial."

"Jesus fucking Christ Craig, what are you, forty five? S'nothing wrong with having meaningless sex at our age."

"If you say so." Craig shrugged, casual on the surface, while on the inside he was screaming with relief that Clyde has bought it hook, line and sinker, and his heartrate was steadily dropping from what felt like two hundred beats per minute to mere one hundred and twenty.

"Yea, like fucking hell I say so. There are plenty more fish in the sea. Just go back in there and with a little effort, you might still be getting laid tonight." Clyde basically commanded him while patting his back.

"No. I'm bored. And tired. I think I have a headache from the noise. I'm leaving." He said and walked away, leaving behind a thoroughly confused Clyde.

... 

"And he just left?!" Token asked Clyde in bewilderment. They were alone in Token's room the next day after the party, after all those who slept over have left and Clyde helped Token clean up, playing some FPS on his brand new Xbox One X, hooked up to envied by many 4K OLED flatscreen, talking about all the fun and moderately or severely embarassing things that took place during the party, who hooked up with whom, which ultimately led to the issue of Craig and his (not) successful courting of Annie.

"Yep. He just said something like that he's bored and some shit excuse about headache, got up and left."

"What the fuck." Token shook his head.

"I know right?"

"Something's wrong with him dude. We have to find out what. I don't want to lose him as a friend."

"Do you think he could really be...?"

"I don't know man. We have to ask Annie what she thinks."

"I already did that. She won't give any details. Not to me, not to Bebe..."

"All right." Token paused the game and set the controller down. "So, let's assume that Craig really is gay and it's eating him up. It would explain a lot about how he's like lately."
"It would..." Clyde pondered, "But then, why does he keep denying it? It's not like he has a reason to think we'd stop being friends or some shit like that, right? Do you think... you know, like we sometimes make jokes about gay shit, that it might, like, hurt his feelings?"

"Ha-ha-ha." Token scoffed. "Hurt his feelings? When has Craig ever expressed more feelings than a rock? He's always like, not giving a fuck about anything."

"Yes, but, what if he just acts like it doesn't bother him, but on the inside, it does, and he's depressed because of it.

Token looked at Clyde for a while like he was doubting the latter's common sense, and then clapped a few times sarcastically.

"Bravo, Dr. Freud. You can't be serious with this. You've seen him trying to act like anything other than a stone-faced himself, right? He's about as good at it as Cartman is at losing weight."

"But that's what I'm saying - he could be keeping a facade of the not-giving-a-fucking-Craig, because that's the only side of him he's ever shown. Maybe we don't know the real him."

"Clyde, you're a shitty psychologist. I don't think he's actually gay, and doing, whatever you say he is. It doesn't seem like him."

"I guess you're right." Clyde shrugged and resumed the game.
"Tweek's staying over for weekend, s'that okay?" Craig asked his parents a question that was more of a statement rather than him asking for approval, after dinner. His father just shrugged with a grunt, meaning he didn't care, really, which was the kind of response Craig liked the most.

A lot more than the kind of response that made Craig feel a bit uncomfortable and try to suppress the reddening in his face, while making up some vague, evasive excuse, made his mother lift a questioning eyebrow while glancing back and forth between her son and husband, and made his sister look away, smirking to herself.

The kind where he responded with a question of his own, if at the age of seventeen slash eighteen, shouldn't he rather be inviting a girl rather than a boy to stay over, so frequently. But it seemed he already got tired of doing that. Thank god.

"You invite your friend to that pigsty of yours? Tidy it up before he arrives, it's embarrassing!"

"It's not that bad." Craig deadpanned. "Besides, Tweek doesn't really care. You should see what his room looks like."

"His room can look like Beirut for all I care, but I'm not having that under this roof young man!" She retorted and flipped Craig off.

"That doesn't even make sense, Beirut's been in perfect order for like, 20 years." He returned the gesture.

"Craig, do what mom says!" Craig's dad intervened and flipped him off as well.

"Ugh." He got up and from the chair and went up to his room, but not before flipping everyone off.

Craig looked around his room at what he could possibly clear away to get his parents off his back. It really wasn't that bad.

Maybe there were a few misplaced pieces of clothes here and there. That wasn't that big of a deal, he'd just throw the ones that won't pass a sniff test in the hamper, and stuff the rest in drawers or in the closet.

But that was about it.

So maybe he had some books and papers on his desk. They were relevant to the stuff currently at school. What was the point of putting it away if he was gonna be taking it out again in less than 24 hours.

Then there were the Craig-specific items. A Nikon SLR camera connected to a laptop on his desk. He had to download the photos for his and Tweek's school project, and after he was done with that, the camera would be attached back to the cassegrain, mounted on a tripod near the window. Their school project was about astrophotography, so obviously the telescope was not going anywhere, because a), the sky wasn't always clear but when it was, he needed all the equipment ready, b), did his mom not have any idea how much effort it takes to take all the parts out of the cases
and put them together? Pointless waste of time!, and c), besides the observations he still needed to do for the project, Tweek loved looking at the stars; he found it fascinating, so obviously, all the things lying around were important, the diagonals and eyepieces, adapters and lens covers, solar and other filters, ... spare batteries, ... papers with star maps printed at the school library, ...
All these things had a purpose and a good reason for being exactly where they were, but to his mom, they were just random pieces of clutter, apparently.

Kind of like the zip lock bag of guinea pig treats right next to Stripe's cage, sitting right on top of his chest of drawers.

None of that contributed to a mess of such magnitude, it would merit the label of a pigsty, not really. Why did his mom never bother Tricia with this shit? Clearly, her room was the one cluttered up with... cosmetic and hair products and... shit like that... whatever these things were. But apparently, that was okay in their mom's eyes. Goddamn women. Well, being gay had at least some perks, he supposed, thinking that he probably won't have to deal with that kind of shit in later life.

"Sooo." Speak of the devil.

"What do you want?" Craig groaned.

Tricia just smirked and stepped inside her brother's room without invitation, closed the door behind her and planted herself on Craig's bed.

"Having another sleepover with your boyfriend?" She sneered and watched with amusement how Craig's face reddened. "It's so cute how gay you are Craig, behind all that facade."

"Keep your fucking voice down! He's not - we are just friends!"

"Suuure you are. I see the way you look at him Craig. How you can't tear your eyes away from his lips, his ass, his crotch... you're so obvious, I can't believe Tweek hasn't noticed himself yet."

"Fucking hell Trish, shut up, they're gonna hear you!" Craig was losing whatever was left of his patience with his sister. She just snorted and waved her hand dismissively.

"They're watching TV, they can't hear shit."

"I don't care."

"When are you finally gonna tell him anyway?"

"I don't know, okay? I don't want to lose the only friend I have right now."

Tricia sat there in silence for a while, mulling it over, before speaking up again.

"At least come out to him. Or ask him if he likes someone, or who he thinks is cute. Don't you guys ever talk about... that kind of stuff?"

"No, we don't."

"Jesus Christs, you guys are both so fucking gay, it's unbelievalex." She shook her head. "Just grow a pair and tell him already. Or at least drop some hint, or something. Tweek doesn't seem like the kind of guy who'd judge you or anything."

"Yeah, thanks for the tip, if only I knew that sooner." Craig dripped with sarcasm. "Get your ass out of my room, now."
Tricia stuck out her tongue at her brother and left.

... "It's beautiful." Tweek said as he looked through the eyepiece. "What is it?"

"Messier 31, the Andromeda Galaxy. It's called that because it appears to be in the middle of the Andromeda constellation. But they're nowhere near each other. The closest star of Andromeda constellation is a red dwarf called HH Andromedae, or Ross 248. It's also ninth closest star to Earth, just 10.3 lightyears away from Earth. The furthest is the Z Andromedae, 2,720 light-years away from Earth. The Andromeda Galaxy is 2.5 million light-years away, but it's so bright, you can see it clearly with like, seven power binoculars. And if the sky is clear enough, even with the naked eye."

Tweek pulled away from the telescope and looked at Craig with wide eyes, who noticed his stare and started looking everywhere except in Tweek's eyes.

"Oh shit, I'm rambling about this nerdy stuff again. Don't listen to me."

"Ngh, no, it's not - I think it's interesting." He smiled at him. His smile faltered and he went on. "And I should, too, next to you I know nothing about this stuff and I feel bad that you do basically all the work in the project. You shouldn't have picked me to be your partner."

"Tweek, you're my friend, who else would I pick?" Tweek still looked guilty, so to ease his worrying, Craig offered, only slightly jokingly: "Next time we can do a project about the art of making coffee. I don't know shit about that."

"Dude, we're not doing a project about that!"

"There probably won't even be another project till the end of year anyway. But if it made you feel better, then why not?"

"Because, dude, shouldn't it be about something you like, like a hobby, and kind of, geh, more scientific?"

"You like coffee. Isn't it a hobby for you as well?" Craig reasoned. "And making the perfect cup is a science too, isn't it?"

"Okay, maybe... but I don't want to think about it right now. I'd much rather listen to your nerdy rambling about the space." Tweek said as he dropped his ass on Craig's bed and rested his back against the headboard, stretching his legs very near Craig's own, without a hint of discomfort about the closeness, and smiled at him.

"Right... where should I start..." Craig scratched his neck nervously. Good thing all lights were off.

"Tell me about aliens. Do you think they exist?"

"Definitely. Probably not in the sense they're shown in sci-fi movies, but I'm sure there's life out there."

"How can you be so sure?"
"Well, pretty much all the stars you can see with naked eye on the night sky are of the Milky Way, but that's just a few thousand. There are estimated one to four hundred billion stars in Milky Way, and at least a hundred billion planets. That's just one galaxy with one planet with life, and there are more galaxies than there are stars in Milky way, and that's just in the visible part of the universe. There could be - no, there are far more beyond. That's ten sextillion planets, just in the visible universe, should the galaxies be at least the size and composition of Milky Way, which is kind of your average major spiral galaxy. At these odds I'm sure there must be a habitable planet with life."

Talking about space was easy. Craig was confident - he had excellent knowledge for a teenager about astronomy, so talking about it was stress free, and even if there was a lot he didn't know, none of it was something that would make him feel awkward or uncomfortable if asked about such a thing.

As opposed to a question about the attractions to the opposite sex, for example.

"Wow."

"Still interested?" Craig smirked.

"Yeah! Go on, I want to know about this stuff. Where do you think could be the nearest planet with life?"

"I think there could easily be a planetary system in Milky Way with an intelligent form of life."

"Intelligent, like our civilization?"

"Perhaps not as much. Maybe as intelligent as Clyde." Craig chuckled and Tweek forced a small laugh.

"But, just in case we are the only ones in Milky Way, lucky enough to have a planetary system with just one habitable planet, then the best odds of there being another planetary system, similar to the Solar system, with one planet that could sustain life, it would be in the Andromeda Galaxy."

"Which is 2.5 million lightyears away."

"Yup."

"Aren't there any closer galaxies?"

"There are, but they are mostly dwarf galaxies with not very favorable conditions. M31 is the nearest major galaxy of similar mass to Milky Way. Bigger, actually, and with even more stars. Probably about one trillion."

"Let me see it again." Tweek got up from the bed and stepped towards the telescope. "Do I need to...?" He gestured to the knobs.

"No need, it's tracking. It should still be in view."

Tweek looked into the eyepiece and indeed, there it was.

"That's kinda cool. How you don't have to adjust it every second."

"Yeah. You know. If you want to make good astrophotography, you need that. At high power the transmitted light is very low, so you need really long exposure time. Minutes or even hours. This is a long exposure photo of the M31." Craig explained and showed him a picture from his camera on his
laptop.

"You took that?"

"Yea, last weekend."

"It's beautiful."

Craig chuckled modestly.

"It's not bad I guess."

"Not bad?! It's amazing!"

"Well..." Craig shrugged with a poker face. "You're the first one who thinks so. Dad thinks all this was a giant waste of money and that I shouldn't think I can make a career out of this. Mom is like... when I took this picture, I had to go up on a hill outside of town... too much light pollution around here, even in this middle of nowhere. So I sat there through the cold for an hour or so before it was finished, and all I heard from mom then was how I'm stupid that I'd get cold and sick and shit... Tricia thinks I'm a massive dork, and the guys thought..." Craig paused, because reminding himself of his former friends for the second time this evening, hurt. "... the same, I guess."

Tweek tugged nervously on the hem of his shirt, an old habit of his that meant something made him agitated. He was uneasy about the topic of Craig leaving his friends. He blamed himself that he was the one to drive Craig away from them.

Craig knew what Tweek was probably thinking and would have liked to tell him that it wasn't his fault, that it was his friends themselves who drove Craig away from them, not Tweek; he had nothing to do with it, all he did was appear at the wrong time at a wrong place (or was it a right time at a right place?) when Craig was questioning if Clyde, Token and Jimmy were really true friends, and through a peculiar sequence of events and circumstances, Craig started to like Tweek a lot more than them. And not just in the platonic sense, either. But communication, regarding that kind of stuff, wasn't Craig's strongest point, so he just said they were assholes anyway, Clyde especially, and left it at that.

"Nnngh.. I'm sure he's not so bad?"

Oh boy.

Tweek has certainly dealt with much worse people than Clyde, but why was he still defending Clyde after their little run-in, that luckily didn't escalate to a fistfight only thanks to Token and Jimmy being reasonable enough to stop Clyde, was beyond Craig's understanding.

Maybe Tweek was just too good for this town, and yet as shitty as the cards that Tweek was dealt were, he took the game head on.

...
"Just give him time Clyde. He's never been the easiest to be around. Remember when Stan had that phase when he thought everything was shit and he was all cynical about everything? Maybe Craig is going through that too."

"Yea, and he ended up being an alcoholic. And now look at Craig, he smokes, he hangs out with that nutter... clearly he needs our help."

"And what are you gonna do if he doesn't want to be around us right now? Force him?"

"Maybe... or..." A light bulb flared up in Clyde's head. "That's it!"

"What?"

"It's him. Spazzy I mean. It has to be. He's fucking with Craig's head, Craig's been hanging out with him too much and he's becoming like him."

"What?!" Token was making sure he heard right, and Clyde felt exasperated that Token wasn't taking him seriously.

"Well duh! Think about it, ever since he's been hanging out with him, he's becoming more and more distant from us, and more irritable. Before that, there was like almost nothing that could set him off... now he gets furious just when you call him gay. He didn't do that before either. And I actually think I know why it is."

"Oh here goes another great theory of Clyde the philosopher."

"Shut the fuck up Toke. What do you know. If you're so fucking smart, tell me what you think."

"I already did."

"Then fucking listen to what I think. You remember when Craig came to school with bruised knuckles, and he didn't want to talk about it?"

"Yea, so?"

"I bet he fought Tweek. He probably beat him to a pulp and then I don't know, actually felt sorry for him because the crazy freak has no friends, and he clung onto Craig like a leech. And now Craig doesn't know how to get out of it."

"Uh-huh."

"You're not being constructive at all Token."

"Your theory has one massive hole. Or two, actually. First, if, as you say, Craig beat Tweek up so bad his knuckles were all scraped raw, explain, unless Tweek is actually Wolverine or something, how is it possible he was at school the next day and he looked completely unscathed?"

"How the hell do you remember that?"

"Because Craig kept glancing at him for some reason. I thought it was weird, and I remember for sure Tweek looked okay. Well, when I say okay. No different than any other day."

"Ummmm..."

"Well?"
"Okay, so maybe Craig fought someone else who was involved. I'm not done yet! What if... something else could have happened that made spaz latch onto Craig. Did you notice how Craig is always defending Tweek when Cartman tries some shit? Maybe Craig came across them and since Craig hates Cartman too, he stopped him from beating Freak up or something. Cartman always had it out for that spaz, and..."

"Huh?"

"Spaz is gay. He has to be. Definitely seems like a homo to me. That's probably why he didn't have any friends to begin with and that was probably Cartman's main beef with him. You know how he always says that he hates fags and they should burn in hell. Craig just walked by when Cartman was trying to take his shit out on Twitchy, Craig just happened to go by, kicked Cartman's ass and spaz took it the wrong way, thinking that Craig is looking out for him now or something, and perhaps Craig felt pleased about that for a while, but now he's too deep in that shit and doesn't know how to get out of it." Clyde reeled off to Token, who still looked unamused.

"And if Craig is always defending him, it would also explain why he always gets pissed when we say some shit about queers."

"Clyde..."

"So I think we need to find spaz when he's alone and have a little chat with him... you know, maybe give him a bit of the ol' third degree. Maybe that'll fucking make him let go of Craig!"

"..." Token sighed.

"See, nothing! You got nothing to counter that with! Which means I'm right."

"No, you're not."

"Why?"

"Because, and this is the second massive hole in your theory, I actually know few things about him. Apparently he started training at some place in Denver where they teach things like Muaythai, and Krav Maga and that kind of shit, shortly after he left rehab. Maybe it was part of his therapy or, I don't know, but what I know for sure is that since that major fuck up in sixth grade, Cartman wouldn't even dare go near him, unless there was someone grown up nearby."

"What major fuck up are you talking about?" Clyde asked, confused.

"The basic story is that Cartman, Allen and McDonnald cornered Tweek in some alley. It kinda seems like them, so I tend to believe that part, even though they claim otherwise. What's for sure is Allen and McDonnald were running around shouting about something and got someone to go with them to where Tweek and Cartman were..."

"...and?"

"...and apparently Cartman was on the ground, out cold. He was fucked up, badly, like he had to be hospitalized. Tweek did that to him. You remember how Cartman was missing for like, five weeks, and made those weird faces when eating for a few more weeks after? He had a broken jaw."

"What the fuck?" Clyde asked, eyes wide with disbelief. "He kept saying he crashed on his bike!"

"Yeah, right. You believed that? As if his fat ass could get to enough speed on a bike to crash so badly to give him two black eyes, multiple fractures, including collarbone, and three teeth missing."
"Okay, and how the fuck do you know all this?"

"My dad."

"What the hell does he have to do with it?"

"Lawyer." Token shrugged simply. "Tweek's dad asked him for legal advice, in case Cartman's mom pressed charges."

"And why the fuck don't I know anything about this?!"

"They implored us to keep quiet about it."

"But WHY?!!"

"Because, idiot, think how it would make the school board look if this got out! Ever since Tweek got back from rehab, the school staff had no fucking clue what to do about him, so they just ignored him, just like everyone else. Except Cartman, obviously, who sensed an opportunity to make him his next bullying victim. Everyone ignored that too, up to the point where Tweek beat Cartman half to death. The adults who came to the scene were members of the school board, which was convenient coincidence. They've done their job to sweep it under the carpet, before parents of other kids found out what happened, because then the shit would really hit the fan. They didn't want to risk parents pulling their kids out of the school and transferring them elsewhere or maybe even to be homeschooled, rather then send them to a school where this shit was going on. And if they did, the school would lose a lot of money. So, they made a deal with Liane Cartman and the Tweaks, so that there would be no talk about anyone being bullied and later beating the living shit out of his bully, and if anyone's asking, Cartman really had a nasty accident on a bike, got it? He was there on a bike, so it didn't seem too far fetched, and Cartman went with it, because he didn't want anyone to think he's a bitch-ass loser who lost a fight of him plus two other guys against one. Especially when the one is that weird spazzy kid nobody likes."

Token finished and waited to see how Clyde would process all this information.

"Everyone already thought he's a bitch-ass loser!" Clyde exclaimed finally, missing the point about the massive hypocrisy of the school staff.

"No shit Sherlock. But you know Cartman and his ego. He still somehow believes that everybody thinks he's awesome and cool as shit."

"Yea."

"So, Ray Donovan, if you still want to confront Tweek, come up with something else than giving him a 'bit of the ol' third degree', Token air-quoted, "because that's actually a very bad idea. I'm sure as hell not backing you up for that. I quite like my face as it is, thank you, and if you know what's good for you, I don't recommend trying to take him on your own."

"Dude, fuck that shit, come on! You're the best football player on the school team! He's got nothing on you!"

"Exactly. I'm a football player, not a fighter. If, what you had in mind by the 'giving him a bit of third degree', was challenging him to a football match, by all means I'm in. But to me it sounded a lot more like you want to rough him up, and that's something entirely different. Much closer to what he's trained for than I am. Call me a pussy if you want, but unlike you, I'm not that stupid to try and pick a fight with someone who I admit I probably can't take."
"You are a pussy!" Clyde declared, and Token's eye roll was a clear enough answer. "Fuck.. okay fine! But we're still going to talk to him when he's not around Craig, and find out what the fuck is going on between him and Craig."

"If you say so... but I don't think it's gonna help anything."

"Fucking hell it will. You'll see."

...

"Go easy on him, all right? You know how he is."

"Whatever."

"F-f-fellas, what do you need m-mefor?"

"You want to Craig back too, don't you?" Clyde said as they were nearing the place they were going.

"You don't ex-ex-expect me to help you fiy-fight?"

"We're not fighting anyone Jimmy, jeez." Token rolled his eyes.

Luckily for them, Craig was sent to the counselor's office for flipping off a teacher who confiscated his cigarettes, which meant Tweek would be alone in their usual spot. An ideal opportunity for a bit of interrogation, Clyde thought. Unfortunately for him, he didn't know that Craig would be let go from the office shortly after, and started walking nowhere else than they did.

"Hey you, spazzy!" Clyde yelled when they were at the place.

Tweek didn't seem impressed by Clyde and kept leaning against the wall, looking down at his styrofoam cup with coffee. He shook the cup to swirl the black beverage a bit and took a small sip.

"I'm fucking talking to you!" Clyde barked. Token sighed and pinched his nose in frustration. So much for Clyde going easy on him.

"I'm not deaf." He finally looked up. Token noticed he had a tired kind of look in his eyes, but it didn't seem to be from a lack of sleep, as he remembered what used to be his thing. "What do you want?"

"You know damn well what we want. We want our friend Craig back, but that's impossible when you're fucking with his brain or something and now he's avoiding us because of you."

"What?!" Tweek shrieked with a scandalized expression.

"Clyde..." Token tried, but Clyde shot him down.

"Shut up Token, let me do the talking. You," Clyde turned back to Tweek, "you're a fucking leech, and you need to let the fuck go. You latched onto Craig and you're poisoning his mind, he's becoming a crazy nutjob just like you, from being around you too much!"

Tweek stared at Clyde with wide eyes and utter bewilderment, thinking that Clyde must have lost all reason. And they called him the crazy kid...

"I did no such thing! Craig's being friends with me on his own accord! Can you leave me the fuck alone?"
"No, we can't!" Clyde went on before Token said anything. "This isn't all. I have a suspicion that you're turning Craig queer, too!"

"Is he for fucking real? How the hell would I even..." Tweek look pleadingly at Token, hoping at least he might be the voice of reason in this, but Token just turned away with a guilty look in his eyes. "This is fucking crazy!"

"That sounds right coming from you!"

"Fuck you man! If Craig wants to be friends with me rather than you, maybe you're the one who has a fucking problem in their head!"

That was the final straw for Clyde who promptly charged at Tweek, but before he could do anything, Token and Jimmy jumped to hold him back, and with quite an effort, dragged the kicking and screaming (and later, when they were far enough, also crying) Clyde away.

Little did they know that Craig was just round the corner and overheard the whole exchange.

"Dude, what the fuck..."

When he approached Tweek, he found him on the verge of fully-fledged panic attack, shaking and with tears almost ready to spill.

"Hey, ugh..." Craig blushed and put his hand on Tweek's shoulder, unsure what to do. He was never the best at comforting someone. "Relax, okay? None of what they said was true."

Tweek turned his head to look at him, with a disarmingly sad, pleading look, as if he was asking just a simple question of, why? Why would Clyde say that?

"See, that's exactly what I was talking about. I'm fucking done with them."

"No - ngh, please, I don't want... I never meant to come between you and your friends, agh! I was just happy when I finally made a friend, ugh, is that too much to ask?! Why can't I just..."

"Tweek!" Craig interrupted him. "This is not your fault okay? You didn't do anything wrong."

...

"I don't want to talk about that now." Craig quickly decided to change the subject. "Do you want to continue with the project? Or maybe we could leave that for later and watch a movie or something."

"Nn, I don't know Craig, what if we don't finish it in time?"

"Relax, there's still a week left."

"That's exactly how procrastination starts dude!" Tweek exclaimed. "You postpone and postpone, thinking you have enough time, untill there isn't any."

"Ahh don't worry about it. Most of the work is finished anyway."

"Okay, ugh. Are we gonna watch on your laptop?"
"Nah, let's go downstairs where the big TV is."

"Nn, all right."

They got up and left the room to go downstairs.

Craig sighed tiredly. Another wasted chance. He could have told him, easily, the topic was even brought up and all it took was to elaborate a bit, and explain what was the real reason why Craig was so disappointed with Clyde (and, to a lesser extent, with Token and Jimmy as well), and how Clyde's accusation of Tweek felt like a stab in the back from someone he considered a friend (even though Clyde, to this day had no idea that Craig overheard it). Why, when Craig could so easily explain the complicated matters of universe, couldn't he explain something that was so much simpler?

Maybe he'd try next time there was an opportunity.

And if not then, then the time next after that. It couldn't be that hard to come out to a friend, right?

How hard could it be?

Chapter End Notes

Please don't lose patience with me, I know I'm taking way too much time with the updated, but I will finish the story.
"Make yourself at home in the living room. Put Netflix on, pick some movie... I'll get us drinks and some snacks." Craig ushered Tweek towards the living room.

"Nnn, I'll, go with you, so you don't have to carry all the stuff." Tweek scratched his neck nervously.

"Nah it's fine. Go on, I'll handle it. You want coffee, right? Black, no sugar or cream."

"Aah, that'd be great, thank you." Tweek smiled at him.

Goddamnit. That smile again, making Craig uneasy. It wasn't fair that he was so beautiful, and so near, yet so out of reach. If only things were a little bit different. But if he wanted that, he would have to act out. But he didn't know how to do it, without the risk of losing Tweek in case things didn't go the way he -

"I'd still rather wait for you, mmm... and help you take the stuff." Craig was aimlessly fiddling with a glass from Ikea, brushing his fingers over the pattern, when Tweek broke his train of thought.

"Oh - uh, okay then." Craig woke up and resumed obtaining the snacks and drinks. "Do you want something else to drink with that coffee?"

"Just a glass of water, that will do." Tweek gestured to the water faucet.

"Dude, tap water?" Craig smiled as he shook his head, and opened the refrigerator. "How about a club soda? Or a beer?" Craig offered with a chuckle.

Tweek shuddered at the thought.

"Club soda is it then." Craig said with a nod.

... 

Tweek carried a platter laden with a plate of nachos, a dish full of dip, a bowl of popcorn and another plate of nachos on one hand, and in his other hand he held his mug with coffee and an empty glass.

Craig carried a bottle of Sprite zero and a glass. Tweek insisted on taking as much as he could to make himself useful, not having any of the 'special guest' treatment. To Craig's surprise, his expectation that he would twitch suddenly, dropping all of the stuff at once and making a mess that would be devil to explain to his parents, didn't fulfill, as Tweek manoeuvred through the kitchen to the living room with grace and set all the items on the coffee table easily.

"What are you guys doing?" Craig's sister Tricia, who was sitting on the sofa and clicking through the many channels on TV, asked.
"Going to watch a movie." He deadpanned. "Means you can move your ass to bed now."

"No way, I'm gonna watch with you!"

"Nope." Craig flipped her off. "Beat it-

"- let Tricia stay if she wants, Craig, I, ngh, I don't mind. She was here first, anyway."

Craig sighed and scowled at her. "All right, fine, but we pick the movie and if you don't like it, sucks for you."

She flipped him off.

"Shit, I forgot your club soda. Here." Craig tossed Tweek the remote control he snatched from Tricia's hand when she wasn't alert, much to her chargin. Tweek looked conflicted as he looked between Tricia and the remote he picked up from his lap. "Pick some movie from Netflix, I'll be right back."

Craig got up from the sofa and walked towards the kitchen.

Tweek turned to Tricia with a guilty look.

"Here." He gave her back the remote. "I don't think, nggh, I should.. I guess..."

"Thanks for sticking up for me Tweek." She shook her head on the offer and gestured him to keep the remote. "It's fine, go ahead."

"Agh, okay."

"How come you're always so nice, Tweek? I'd much rather have you for a brother. Craig's such an asshole sometimes."

Tweek's ears reddened at the compliment. Tricia noticed how nervous he became, and smirked to herself. "Has he told you yet? Not that I think his changes are high, but it's definitely interesting to think about."

"Told me what?" Tweek's eyes widened. What was it that Craig was supposed to tell him at which his chances of succeeding were low? Was Craig due to appear in front of a court for some misdemeanor or felony Tweek didn't know Craig commited, because Craig lead a double life and obviously hasn't told Tweek yet, so Tweek wouldn't have to worry about the possibility of being separated from his friend, whilst fraying his nerves thinking about sexual predators out to get Craig during his stint at a state penitentiary, should he be incarcerated? "Oh sweet Jesus, is it something bad?"

"So he hasn't. Oh boy, just you wait, you won't believe it. But I won't spoil the surprise for you Tweek. Tricia's smirk only widened while Tweek's synapses were busy transferring all the bit of information, necessary to form all the possible scenarios, one more catastrophic than the other, with one exception... but that one was preposterous. That could not possibly be it, despite the fact Tweek found it to be the most favorable one, pleasant even. Or maybe exactly because of that fact, as per Murphy's law.

"What are you two talking about?" Came the sudden, accusative voice from the doorway.

"Oh, nothing important." Tricia chuckled. "Right, Tweek?"
"I - ngh - I hope so." He said nervously as he nervously pinched the skin on his biceps. Craig narrowed his eyes at Tricia.

"Nothing important, huh? Tricia, I swear to fucking hell if you...

"I didn't give away anything. Geez Craig, do you think I would make it so easy for you? It's so much fun watching your frustration every day."

"Craig?! What- what is she talking about?" Tweek panicked. "Did you do something? Oh god!"

"Don't listen to her, she's full of shit." He said as he glared at his sister and flipped her off. "Did you pick a movie?"

"But Craig-

"Look, forget about it now, please?! Well, um..." Craig looked away as his ears reddened. "We'll talk about it some other time. Now what movie did you pick?"

"What movie - oh! I-ngh, this, I guess?" He nodded to the screen. "Is Civil War okay? I couldn't find anything else I'd like, but if you don't want to watch it then I'm not insisting on that!"

"Nah, it's fine, let's watch that." Craig said, gestured for Tweek to turn it on, and narrowed his eyes on his sister, who mirrored his look and they exchanged a mutual flip off.

...

"It's late." Craig yawned and checked the time when the film was over. "Trish, go to bed fucking already!"

"Don't command me Craig, I'm not a little child! It's the weekend!"

"I don't give a shit." He flipped her off. "It's half past twelve, way past your bedtime. If dad finds you stayed up this late, he'll freak out, so move it."

Tricia huffed indignantly. She flipped her brother off while glaring at him, then saw the nervous look on Tweek's face, looked back at Craig, and stood up with a sneer.

"Oh I get it now. Well, don't worry, I'm not gonna c-... block you."

"But you're not -?" Tweek was confused.

"Goodnight Tweek. Have fun with Craig." She blinked at him before going up.

Tweek was confused. He looked from the staircase where which Tricia disappeared up to her room to Craig, who had a strange look in his face, with what appeared to be a blush? Whad did she mean by having fun with Craig, and what was the thing Craig was supposed the tell him again? It almost sounded - no, that couldn't possibly be right.

"Fucking brat." Craig vented. "Are you sleepy yet?"

"Ah, not really - oh god, I shouldn't drink so much coffee, I can't sleep again."

"Dude, I've been telling you that for years. Nevermind though. I'll go shower and brush my teeth upstairs, you can use the downstairs bathroom, then we can watch another film."

"But, ah, if you want to go to sleep - "
"Don't worry about it, I'm not that sleepy either." Craig told a little white lie.

Dressed in their pyjamas, Tweek in his lime green with a button-up top, Craig in his favorite dark blue, with a tiny white dots pattern, one that very much resembled a night sky, they sat next to each other comfortably on the sofa, watching some lesser known Swedish thriller with subtitles, but throughout the runtime, they kept adjusting their positions. At one point, Craig paused the film and huddled himself in a blanket, offering one for Tweek as well, who insisted it wasn't necessary, but Craig got him one anyway. It was shortly after 1:30 AM, when Tweek, still wide awake with his legs resting on an ottoman and his back comfortably propped up on some throw pillows, felt Craig land on his shoulder when he fell asleep.

"Craig?" Tweek whispered.

The boy didn't answer. His only response was the periodic rise and descent of his chest as he breathed with a light snore. Tweek became nervous. He didn't want to wake Craig up, but this was definitely - weird? What if Craig's parents saw them like that! That could spark assumptions that Tweek gravely wanted to avoid. Despite that fact that while it was 'weird', it also felt nice. Or maybe because of that reason exactly.

Tweek tried to reach for the remote that Craig clutched in his hand. Maybe if he took it from him, and turned the TV off, the sudden halt of the sound and light coming from the set would stir Craig up and maybe even wake him?

It didn't. He was still sleeping like a log and the only thing illuminating the room was the screen of Tweek's phone, used to check the time. Tweek put it away carefully and wondered what to do. Just trying to shift and move off the sofa without waking Craig (which Tweek didn't want to do - if he woke up on his own was fine) didn't seem possible, the armrest was in the way to the right, and Craig was in his way to his left and front.

Oh boy, this would be awkward. Tweek only hoped that eventually, Craig would wake up, they’d go upstairs where Craig would lay down on his bed and Tweek would lay out his sleeping bag on the floor. Before he fell asleep himself.

..."What the hell?"

Thomas Tucker was an early bird. It was 6:30 in the morning, when he descended the stairs to get his morning cup of coffee. Finding out there wasn't any left due to Tweek's visit was the most disagreeable eventuality he half expected and has almost come to terms with.

What he didn't expect at all, or come to terms with, was finding his son apparently snuggled up with the Tweak boy on their sofa in the living room.

Unsure whether to wake them up forcefully, shout, be shocked or angry, he went back up to the bedroom.

His wife Laura groaned as she woke.

"Thomas? Do you really have to stomp like an elephant this early?"

"Honey, could you get up and come with me? I need you to see this."
She sighed, squinting at him with a 'is this really necessary?' kind of look.

"Laura. Please." He insisted. Laura reluctantly got up and rubbed her eyes, following her husband downstairs. He led her to the living room and pointed at the sleeping twosome. Laura blinked at the sleeping boys, then gave her husband an incredulous look and turned on her heel to leave the room, going back up to resume her sleep. Did he seriously wake her up because of that?

"Well?" He inquired, going after her.

"Well what? What's the problem?" She said as she looked back.

"What's the problem? Jesus Laura, do you really think this is normal?" Thomas exclaimed, gesturing wildly towards the first floor from the staircase. "They're eighteen for God's sake! I'm gonna wake them up. I want some fucking explanation."

"Let them be Thomas, it's no big deal." She muttered in low voice, not to wake up Tricia as well. "And keep your voice down."

"No big deal?" He repeated unbelievably. "Laura!"

Laura let out a sigh as she shook her head, walking inside their bedroom and getting back under the duvet. Thomas followed her and sat on the edge of the bed.

"Fine. I'll talk to Craig later about this, because I'm telling you, I don't like this." He said as his wife turned her eyes upwards and roller over on her side. "If Craig turns gay, don't come asking me where I made a mistake. This is not how I raised the boy."

"For crying out loud Thomas. They probably just fell asleep watching TV or something and you already jump to conclusions about Craig turning gay."

"The TV was off, Laura. If they 'just fell asleep' watching it," he air quoted to himself, since his wife was laying on her side and looking away, "as you say, it'd still be on. There's something queer going on here. Do you even remember, when was the last time you heard Craig mention anything about any girl of his, huh? Even I don't rememeber. But it sure is funny how close he seems to be with that Tweak's boy!"

"Maybe so." She shrugged. "But if that's how it is, it's none of our business, unless he wants it to be. You don't have to be so old fashioned."

"Old fashioned?!" Thomas hissed. "Laura, do you actually think it's natural for two boys to - !"

"Yes, absolutely." She muttered into the pillow. "Can I sleep now?"

"Ugh."

Thomas considered going back downstairs for that much needed coffee, maybe along with a shot of something harder. He considered for a moment storming inside the living room and demanding answers right now. In the end, he decided against either, but he didn't think he could just stand there and pretend he didn't see anything. He dressed himself, took the keys to his Silverado and decided to go have and breakfast somewhere in town instead.

...  

Thomas spotted Richard Tweak putting a sing outside his coffeehouse in the wing mirror once he passed it and put his foot on the brake as he steered the truck to park it on the curb. It was still too
soon for them to be open, but he could probably talk to him. He stepped out of the vehicle and pushed the button on the key fob to lock it while walking towards the establishment. He spotted Richard and his wife inside, preparing the tables and machines. He tapped on the glass door and when Richard saw him standing there, he beckoned him to come over.

"Morning, Thomas. I'm sorry, machines aren't up yet, but if you'd like to wait..." he gestured to a table.

"...oh, uh, no, I just needed to discuss something with you Richard."

"Ah, of course, well why don't you sit down then, have something for breakfast, and the coffee will be in no time. With the homely scent of fresh grounds, you won't even notice the time flow. Flow, like a creek of crystal clear water, pure like the best Arabica...

"Yeah, yeah." Thomas interrupted him. His idea of a good breakfast comprised a good portion of bacon and eggs sunny side up, not coffeehouse pastries and bad metaphors. "Look, no, this will be real quick. I need to talk to you about your son."

"Oh." Now Thomas had his full attention. "Did he do something?"

"Not exactly. Actually I'm more concerened about Craig. He and your son are around each other almost all the time, and I'm starting to suspect their friendship is not exactly normal!"

"Well, at first I was surprised too, Tweek never had many friends, but..."

"...that's not what I mean," Thomas waved dismissively, "I mean there's something... weird going on. I found them asleep and practically huddled up together this morning."

"Aaah." Mr. Tweak finally took the hint. "You think they're dating?"

"My son is not dating a boy! Your son can date whoever he wants, but my son will be left out that, all right?" Thomas said angrily.

"Well, I can't decide this sort of thing for him, Thomas, so there's not much I can do about that. But if they by any chance are dating, please let me know. Having a gay son could be really beneficial for the coffee business..."

"Damn it!" This was pointless. He sighed and turned around to leave before he lost his nerves. "Whatever."

"Take care Thomas. Thanks for stopping by." Richard bid him farewell with a polite smile. Thomas wondered how was it even possible for someone to be so insufferably calm.

... It was around nine AM. Craig woke up first. He was glad he did, when he realized what position in relation to Tweek he felt asleep in, and that he woke up with a morning wood. He let him sleep and was about to walk out of the room when he heard shuffling and a yawn. He turned around to see Tweek awake, getting up and smiling at him.

"Hey."

"Hey. Erm - you want some breakfast? I won't even ask if you want coffee."

"That would be great." Tweek chuckled. They look at each other for few seconds, and Craig noticed
that Tweek's eyes were fixated to one spot, which Craig, perhaps a bit too late, realized was the tent on the front of his pyjama bottoms.

"Umm..." Craig pointed upstairs. "I think I'll go brush and change first."

Tweek just gave him a smile.

...

"What are you boys planning to do today?" Craig's mom asked at the breakfast table.

"I have a pretty good idea." Tricia sneered, earning a finger and a scowl from Craig.

"Nn, I guess we're gonna finish the project, probably?" Tweek piped up with a hint of uncertainty in his voice, searching Craig's face for answers.

"Why are you asking?" Craig asked as he suspected this was not a simple question she asked in passing.

"Well I need to run to buy groceries and stuff and if you'd come with me and help."

"I'm pretty sure Trish will gladly go with you." Craig nodded towards his sister. "She's probably got nothing important to do, and like Tweek said, we'll be working on the school project."

"That's bullshit!" Tricia protested. "Mom, you're not actually buying that, right? They're just gonna play videogames or... something. They won't be watching any stars in broad daylight! Craig's just trying to cop out of doing any chore again!"

"No I'm not." He deadpanned while flipping her off. "And it's not just about watching stars, moron."

"Don't call your sister moron Craig." Laura scolded her son.

"Yeah don't call me moron, asshole!"

"I'll call you whatever I want." Craig flipped her off.

"No you won't!" She insisted. "Mom, me, Karen and Ike are already set on going to the waterpark!"

"Well then you can come with me and help me with the shopping, then I'll drop you off there."

"But I'm supposed to meet with them at the park, we have other things to do."

"Right." Laura sighed. "So that means I can do everything by myself again."

Tweek onlooked, nervously sipping coffee and contemplating if he should take part in the disagreement or not. Maybe he could offer to help, after all, it was because of him it all started in the first place.

"I can go with you Mrs. Tucker. We can finish the project after."

"Oh, Tweek dear, don't worry about it, I can't ask for this from you, you're a guest here. " Laura smiled at him. "But thanks for the offer. Trish, please come with me, it won't take long."

"But why do I have to go and not Craig?"

"Because Craig has a friend over-"
"-like he does every weekend!-

"- and even though Tweek's at his parents' coffeehouse working all the time, while having a lot more schoolwork than you do, he even offers to help me when he absolutely doesn't have, when he spends what little free time he has with Craig, who has a part time job too." Laura raised her voice, making Tweek blush uncomfortably.

"Petting sick animals at the vet's office is hardly a job!" Tricia huffed.

"Tricia, you're coming with me and that's final."

"Okay, fine!" She pouted. "But I need to be back before 11:30."

... 

"This is why you're so lucky that you don't have any siblings Tweek." Craig told Tweek, as they sat on Craig's bed, once they retreated back to the safety of Craig's bedroom. "She thinks assisting at the veterinary is a pastime or something. If they had any idea how many vaccine shots I had to take and how many times I've been bitten..."

"Oh god, don't even remind me of that." Tweek shuddered. "I'm still worried about you getting rabies and dying on me."

"Don't worry, I'm vaccinated against that too." Craig waved dismissively, although he was rather touched by that.

"But, agh, I know what you mean. Some people think the same about my work, like, they'll say all I do is loiter around the counter while drinking our own coffee for several hours straight."

"Idiots."

"But, your sister isn't that bad?" Tweek tried. "Maybe it's just this pubescent phase, that makes her, agh.. kinda... but I'm sure you like her?"

"I do like her." Craig nodded. "Occasionally. But that doesn't stop her being a twat."

"That's not what I meant." Tweek quickly shook his head. "Oh god I didn't mean to imply anything like that, I..."

"Don't worry about it dude. I didn't say you implied that. Besides, if you did, I'd agree anyway. If mom didn't step in, she'd be even more of a spoiled, bratty little bitch. Dad favors her, even though he says otherwise."

"Why do you think so?"

"It's obvious. She's like, a lot more into sports that me. Also she's always going out camping, fishing and hunting with him. That's what dad and I disagree on the most. Like, sports are fine, fishing is kinda boring but okay, and I've had fun shooting at the range with him too. But baiting and shooting some scared wild animal, not for food, just for the fun of it, that's just fucked up."

"Yeah." Tweek agreed.

"We just don't relate so well. Funny, even Tricia understands me more than dad does. Well, in some areas..." Craig trailed off and cleared his throat discreetly, not sure if he wanted Tweek to inquire
what those cases were, when he noticed that Tweek's interest seemed to flare up, and now when they may actually touch that topic, he wasn't sure if he was ready.

"Nnnngh... that reminds me, is that related with what she mentioned yesterday? Uh, I don't want to jump to conclusions..."

"What?" Craig asked with a choked voice while his heart rate accelerated suddenly. "Oh, that... what exactly did she tell you?"

"Well... she asked me if you... told me about something yet?" Tweek ask-said with wide eyes. "I was worried if it was something bad. Please tell me it's not something bad!"

Craig looked away, breathing uneasily, the pace of his heart not showing any signs of easing.

"Depends what you consider bad. If you're anything like Clyde..."

"I'm not!" Tweek protested, almost scandalized.

"Then hopefully, no." Craig said evasively.

Now was his chance. They were alone in the house, no one else to overhear them, or interfere. Tweek was friends with him for a long time. He was an understanding and non-judging guy. He would understand. He had to understand. He had to tell him now, now was the best opportunity, now or never, NOW -

"I'm gay." He welled up eventually, after quite a pause.

"Huh?" Tweek blurted.

"I'm gay." Craig repeated, and turned to look Tweek in the eyes, in case he was in doubt. "I like guys."

"Oh." Tweek exhaled in relief. "That's all? Oh god! Jesus Christ, oh man I was worried you've done something illegal and, gnh, they'd convict you and take you away or something, aahhh!"

"Well no, I didn't do anything illegal. At least not in the rational parts of the world." Craig said. "But it's not all. Please don't ask me what else then. Or yes, ask me so I can get it over with. Or not. Oh god, this isn't fair.

"What else then?"

"Well, when I said I like guys... I like one in particular." Craig answered vaguely.

"Who is it? Is it Clyde, or Token? Is that why you stopped hanging out with them?" Tweek tried to guess.

"No, neither of them. And I stopped hanging out with them because I was sick and tired of their endless homophobic remarks or them trying to set me up with chicks when I wasn't interested, but that's beside the point-"

"They didn't know?" Tweek cut in.

"No."

"Well but then if you told them, maybe they'd stop?" Tweek reasoned.
"No, they wouldn't." Craig affirmed. "I don't care, they're assholes anyway."

"But, Token seems fine." Tweek disagreed. "But if not him, or Clyde, who is the guy then? If it's okay to ask! Oh man, I don't mean to push or anything-"

"It's you."

"Me?" Tweek's eyes widened. "No - that's impossible, why me of all people? What's there to like about me?"

"A lot of things." Craig answered, this time with nothing but honesty, looking Tweek straight into his eyes. "You shouldn't underestimate yourself so much."

"But, gh, this is too much pressure, I don't understand Craig, how could you like me?" Tweek shook his head in bewilderment.

"Then, I'll explain." Craig said, and cupped Tweek's face, who didn't put up any resistance, and kissed him on the lips.

There may have been a voice in part of Craig's brain, reduced to about one neuron now, that told him he shouldn't force himself on Tweek, but he craved this for so long, that voice was effectively silenced, and forgotten entirely when Craig realized.

He was kissing back.

Tweek didn't respond by pushing Craig back; he responded by kissing Craig back. He held Craig's nape gently with his hand, and coiled his other hand around Craig's waist. Craig wasn't sure if he was dreaming or not, because this surely seemed too good to be true, but if he was dreaming, he wished never to wake up. He pulled Tweek down on the bed, getting more adventurous and passionate. Tweek pulled back after a while, catching his breath, without breaking the embrace.

"Craig, this is crazy."

"I know..." He breathed and dove back in to resume the make out.

"... wanted you ... so much ... so long ..."

He bit Tweek's lip, eliciting a sweet moan from the blond, and slide his tongue inside his mouth.

When Craig broke the kiss for the lack of air, he panted out:

"Believe me now."

"I'm still trying to process this." Tweek

"Oh. Kay. I guess this is kinda too fast, given that I told you everything only few minutes ago," Craig chuckled, "but now that we got this far... I have to know. Would you maybe consider... being more than just friends? As in, dating?" Please say yes.

Tweek visibly became nervous and what was worse, something wasn't seen for a long time, his body shook with a light tremor, indicating an oncoming anxiety attack. Craig immediately regretted pushing the envelope.

"I... Craig, I'm sorry, ngh, I can't..." Tweek sat up and shook his head frantically. "I couldn't do that
"Well I'm not going to force you to do anything you don't want -" Craig assured him quickly, "- wait, 'couldn't do that to me'? Couldn't do what to me? You're not the one doing bad things!"

"No, Craig." Tweek kept shaking his head, as he stood up from the bed and was about to leave. "You don't understand. There are things I didn't tell you either. About myself."

"Then tell me. Please tell me." Craig pleaded.

Tweek closed his eyes, and leaned against the doorframe, resting his head against it. He looked conflicted, and desperately sad.

"I can't. It's not possible."

"Why not?" Craig barked. "I just came out to you, and not only! What could be harder to tell me!"

"If I tell you, you will hate me. If I don't tell you, I will hate myself. I'm so sorry Craig." With that, he left, leaving behind all his things, and a heartbroken Craig.

Craig lay in his bed, staring absentmindedly at the ceiling, when his sister, after knocking several times with no answer, let herself in.

"What are you doing, buttwipe, lying in your bed? Didn't you by any chance claim you and Tweek had work on your school project?!"

"I'm not in the fucking mood." Craig said flatly, devoid of emotion. When Tricia noticed the traces on Craig's face, she quickly put two and two together and changed her attitude one hundred and eighty degrees immediately.

"You told him and he didn't take it well and left?" She asked softly.

"Yes, no and yes." He turned his head to look at his sister, who was not following. "I told him, he took it well, but he left anyway." He explained.

"How much did you tell him?"

"I told him I like him. He made out with me. Then he rejected me and left."

"Oh my god! Why?!" She pressed, flabbergasted.

"I don't know! That's the most confusing! I guess he said something among the lines that it's him, not me."

"You think he'd genuinely mean that?"

"He didn't seem to believe me at first when I told him, asking me like, what could I possibly like about him." Craig mumbled. "So, yes, most likely."

"That actually sounds like Tweek. His sense of self-worth is... problematic, to say the least."

Thanks Captain Obvious, flashed through Craig's head. He wished she'd just leave him alone. He didn't need to relive his first ever (and definitely last) heartbreak once more and alternate between silent apathy and tearful sadness again afterwards. Tricia took the hint.
"I'm sorry Craig. I'll go. You guys need to sort this out."

She closed the door from outside and walked away.

"Sort this out." Craig chuckled sarcastically. He got up, looking around for his phone. Maybe he could text Tweek, or call him, and insist they at minimum establish if they're still at least friends. As it used to be. To make sure there's a foundation to build upon. But pessimism washed over Craig, extinguishing hopes he could at least have that back. He looked at his guinea pig Stripe, who was standing still in his cage. Craig smiled at his beloved pet, picked him up and petted his soft fur.

"At least I still have you."

Something didn't seem right here either, though. Stripe was breathing, but he seemed uncharacteristically unresponsive. Craig noticed his fur was scruffy, and the carrots and treats he gave him yesterday weren't even bitten into.

"Oh god no! Not you too! Don't you fucking dare leave me now!"

Craig rushed to his phone and speed dialed the veterinarian.

Chapter End Notes

I'm such a bastard for doing this to Craig, am I not?

Thank you in arrears for your comments so far, and in advance if you leave any further.

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