It's One, Two, Three

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th>Mature</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Archive Warning:</td>
<td>Choose Not To Use Archive Warnings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category:</td>
<td>F/F, F/M, M/M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fandom:</td>
<td>Homestuck, Marvel Cinematic Universe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship:</td>
<td>Dave Strider/Karkat Vantas, John Egbert/Roxy Lalonde, Rose Lalonde/Kanaya Maryam, Pepper Potts/Tony Stark, Jane Foster/Thor, Jake English/Dirk Strider, Clint Barton &amp; Natasha Romanov, John Egbert/Terezi Pyrope, Peter Parker/Gwen Stacy, Bruce Banner &amp; Tony Stark</td>
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<tr>
<td>Character:</td>
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<tr>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**It's One, Two, Three**

by visionaryScribe
Summary

How is all of this shit is supposed to go?
Do we play up our powers or keeping them down low?
Do we strut around saying we made your universe?
We died just to have the chance so don’t make this worse
On us for all the things we’ve done for this shot at life
After years of fearing, drifting, conscious of time passing by
We’ve all got our issues that we have overcome or
Still are overcoming because it’s not just once and then it’s over

Current Progress:
Act 1 - Chapters 1 - 22
Act 2 - Chapters 23 - ?

Notes

Pesterlogs are hard. They’re hard and everyone understands.
Chapter 1

Chapter Summary

Roxy pester the Avengers and gets Jarvis instead.
Rose and Dave got in trouble with some anti-mutant people and Dave's now suffering the consequences.
Karkat is worried.
The Alpha Kids have a 4-way feelings jam.

--tipsyGnostalgic [TG] began pestering justifiedVigilance [JV]--

TG: hi. i was wondering.
TG: if any of the avengers were available.
TG: specifically anyone able 2 ya know legally, specifying that, emphasis and all
TG: like legal documents and stuff. for like. legals stuff. bank accounts cause we gots stuff but nowhere to put it or turn it all into dollars.
TG: other stuff to cause we probs don't legally exist.
TG: & friends of ours cause they don't either. most likely. yeah.

JV: I am sorry. Who is this?

TG: no no i’m sorry. didn’t tell ya my name
TG: I’m roxy. roxy lalonde. & you r?

JV: I am Jarvis.

TG: omg! it’s so nice 2 meet u! oh i’ve got to tell di-stri. he might be able to make hal an actual body now.
TG: *gasp*
TG: i can totes see u guys being the best of friends
TG: ai buddies!

JV: Sorry to derail your train of thought but you were wanting legal documents? Through legal means?

TG: yeah we’re not gonna be going breaking the law. well. most of us :/ if someone does plz know it was not cause we all like, agreed to it or whatever.
TG: & like. let me or the rest of us know cause we need 2 be in the loops so we can kick their ass.
TG: sorry about sort of hacking u btw.

JV: It is no problem, Miss Roxy. I could get in contact with some people but you will need to put forth some information first.
JV: Basic things like your names, ages, where you were born. At the least.

TG: well i can give you mine sorta. i’m 16. i dunno where i was born, or lived really it might’ve been somewheres upstate new york?
TG: tentacleThrapist
TG: *tentacleTherapist
TG: that’s rose’s handle. she would kno more about where exactly we lived than me. 
TG: timaeusTestified, dirk, & turntechGodhead, dave, lived somewhere in texas idk where Davey is rn. Dirk is w/ me. 
TG: gustyGumshoe, jane is w/ me rn but she & ectoBiologist, john, lived somewhere in washington. jade & jake, gardenGnostic and golgothasTerror, lived on some island, which we're on rn btw. we called it hellmurder island but it’s probs not it's actual name. jake is with me rn 2 obviously. 
TG: there’s also a sweetheart, calliope, uranianUmbra, though she hasn’t shown up online yet. dunno how old she is, maybe teen, and have no idea where da fuck she used to live. sorry bout that. TG: dunno where jade is other than she’s w/ John & that rose is w/ dave. we haven’t had a lot of time 2 talk 2 each other & come up w/ a plan or place 2 meet up yet. 
TG: anything else? 

JV: Not at the moment, no. Do you mind keeping this chat window open? 

TG: not at all jarvey. hey. uh i’m gonna step away for a bit. dirk n jake n jane r gonna be talking some things out n things r getting kinda tense & awkward. gotta make sure no one snaps. 

JV: That is fine. Though when you get back I would like to know who this Hal AI is. And the handles of any other friends, please. 

JV: And how you knew I am an AI myself. 

TG: oh yea sure but before i go if ya find anyone with grey skin n horns. or maybe black skin idk then they’re kinda our friends 2. we know em. need legal stuff for them to plz. 
TG: brb 

--tipsyGnostalgic [TG] is now an idle chum--

--justifiedVigilance [JV] began pestering ironTitan [IT]--

JV: roxylalondelog1.png 

JV: Sir. Are we going to do something about this? 

IT: hold on I’m reading 

IT: and you found this chat program how many days ago? 

JV: Several. Five days to be precise. 

IT: that was when the first sign of the Heir and Witch showed up. 

IT: SHIELD has been a pain in the ass trying to get the avengers to investigate them. just like Spider-Man. it’s ridiculous. they’re kids. all of them. give them a goddamn break. 

IT: and the Heir and Witch while powerful yeah haven’t done shit as far as anything remotely illegal. The Witch even volunteers at a fucking animal shelter last I heard. maybe more than one. 

IT: and the Heir goes around helping orphanages. they even help each other out and switch things up or team up and just... 

IT: damn it. these kids don’t deserve to have the spy agency to end all spy agency on their asses.
JV: Roxy said she was sixteen although I am uncertain if the rest of her group is of similar age.

IT: which is Spidey’s age

IT: *sigh* one moment. i think one of Roxy’s friends is messaging me.

--ironTitan [IT] ceased pestering justifiedVigilance [JV]--

--tentacleTherapist [TT] began pestering ironTitan [IT]--

TT: You are Ironman yes?

IT: yeah why?

TT: Please help.

TT: It’s my brother. Dave.

IT: what’s going on? where are you?

TT: Abandoned apartment four blocks south of your tower.

TT: He got injured earlier and now he’s sick with something I have not been able to clearly identify and I...

TT: I’d ask Jade to teleport Jane here to heal him but we don’t want to attract any more, frankly, unwanted attention than we already have.

TT: And we don’t have the money for medicine. Yet. And we are not so desperate as to...I am not so desperate as to steal.

IT: i’ll get Widow and my driver to pick you two up and get the med floor ready. anything we should immediately know about?

TT: Fever. He’s delirious. Looks like the flu, I think, but I know for a fact he’s never been to a hospital in his life nor has he had any immunization shots. It could be infection from one of his wounds, however, which I haven’t the knowledge nor experience in treating.

TT: I don’t even know if there’s any shots required between the ages of thirteen and sixteen, which would be the ones that I myself missed.

IT: Widow is on her way now with the car. just sit tight.

IT: my legal team is being informed now of what documents we will need for you. are your horned friends mutants?

TT: Aliens actually. They are the last of their race. It’s why Roxy mentioned to try not to pin any crimes of one of them on the whole. She told me about her conversation with Jarvis earlier.
TT: The way that some of them grew up was...rather violent. One in particular I know for certain, off
the top of my head, not to mention that there will be a whole slew of other cultural differences that I
would be happy to get into if it weren’t for the current situation.

TT: I’m sorry I have to go.

IT: wait. why?

TT: He’s...throwing up.

--tentacleTherapist [TT] ceased pestering ironTitan [IT]--

--carcinoGeneticist [CG] began pestering tentacleTherapist [TT]--

CG: ROSE! WHAT THE EVER PITYING FUCK IS GOING ON WITH DAVE?! HOW IS HE?

TT: He’s sick. Someone is coming to pick us up so that he gets medical care.

TT: Where are you?

CG: IN THE MIDDLE OF A PARK FACING MY QUEST SLAB SURROUNDED BY
BUILDINGS AND PEOPLE.

CG: I'M ITCHING. LIKE PHYSICALLY ITCHING AND SCRATCHING AT MYSELF AND
MY STUPID DANCESTOR IS IN MY HEAD ALONG WITH THE MEMORIES OF EVERY
KARKAT AND KANKRI THAT EVER LIVED BUT KANKRI ISN'T SO INSUFFERABLE
NOW. IT'S REALLY WEIRD.

CG: ROSE?

TT: Sorry Karkat. I was helping to get Dave into a car. Black Widow, a hero of this world along
with the team she works with, is assisting us. If you happen to see a- hold on, Quest Bed?

CG: I KNOW I'M FREAKING OUT OVER HERE AND IT'S PISSING ME OFF. THERE ARE
A BUNCH OF PEOPLE STARING AND TAKING PICTURES. IT'S THE MIDDLE OF THE
GODDAMN NIGHT AREN'T YOU A DIURNAL SPECIES WHAT THE FUCK?! I'M ON
THE QUEST SLAB NOW BUT I DON'T EVEN KNOW IF I SHOULD DO THIS. LIKE.
NOW THAT IS. THESE HUMANS WOULDN'T REACT WELL TO ME BLEEDING THE
FUCK OUT AND DYING AND THEN WHOOPS I'M ALIVE AGAIN WITH ANOTHER
TROLL SPONTANEOUSLY FORMED FROM MY DYING LIKE A FUCKING FIRE
FEATHER BEAST, NO BIG FUCKING DEAL.

CG: KANKRI STOP TRYING TO CALM ME THE FUCK DOWN YOU ARE NOT MY
MOIRAIL OR MY MATEFRIEND. YES I WILL MESSAGE KANAYA JUST SHUT THE
FUCK UP FOR ONE GODDAMN SECOND AND STOP WORRYING I CAN HEAR YOUR
THOUGHTS YOU ARE LITERALLY A PART OF ME RIGHT NOW. YES I AM TYPING THIS OUT FOR ROSE’S BENEFIT.

CG: IT'S BECAUSE THE SEERS IF NO ONE ELSE SHOULD KNOW A FRACTION OF WHAT'S GOING ON, THAT'S WHY.

TT: You seem to be occupied at the moment. I will message you later, then. Let me know if you’re okay if you do go through with it now. Also, please keep me informed if anything else happens. Like suspicious people in black suits wanting to take you somewhere.

CG: WAIT, WILL DAVE BE OKAY? WHY IS HE SICK? I THOUGHT GOD TIERS COULDN'T GET SICK! WHAT'S THE POINT OF ACHIEVING GOD TIER IF YOU'RE DYING FOR A SLIGHTLY LESS SHITTY SITUATION THAN THE ONE YOU WERE IN BEFORE AND THAT'S ONLY BECAUSE OF THE VAGUE CONDITIONS ON HOW YOU GET TO DIE?!

CG: ROSE!

CG: ROSE FUCKING ANSWER ME!

--tentacleTherapist [TT] ceased pestering carcinoGeneticist [CG]--

CG: WELL FUCK YOU TOO THEN!

--carcinoGeneticist [CG] ceased pestering tentacleTherapist [TT]--

--CURRENT tipsyGnostalgic [TG] opened memo on board Hellmurder Island Anonymous--

CTG: alright fuckers

CTG: time to shoot shit and get all our dirty laundry out of this stupid memo and to the bottom of the fuckin’ pacific ocean where it belongs.

--CURRENT timaeusTestified [TT] RIGHT NOW responded to memo.--

CTT: Roxy, we’re all right here.

--gutsyGumshoe [GG] RIGHT NOW responded to memo.--

CGG: yeah.

CTG: were you three actually going to

CTG: to talk to each other about the shit you need to talk about and not just dance around those stupid ass bushes?

CTT: …

CGG: …

--CURRENT golgothasTerror [GT] RIGHT NOW responded to memo.--

CTG: …

CTG: i thought so. This memo is named because of us all being here right now.
CTG: not because Jakey’s the only one who needs to air out his bathroom ‘cause it stunk for a whole month.

CGT: hey! That only happened once!

CTG: and it only needed to happen once.

CTG: but that’s not what this is about. Like i said.

CTG: who wants to go first?

CGG: I’m sorry for, um, all those things I said to you while in that Derse prison, Jake. Same for you Roxy but, like, in a more generalized period of time.

CTG: Hey. I’m not the focus here. Not right now...it’s appreciated though and forgiven.

CGG: Jake?

CGT: While I also appreciate the apology I don’t think it’s needed.

CGT: What you said was true, in that prison. Well, one thing in particular.

CGT: I am stupid.

CGT: I was so stupid that I didn’t even ask how you felt about, well, a lot of things. I was selfish in thinking that everything would be fine even after we were all Tricksters and that we could all maybe just forgo all that infernal trite of lost time.

CGT: I was so stupid. I didn’t communicate, with either of you, with any of you, at all. When things got tough with Dirk and my friendship with you, Jane, was crumbling. What did I do? I called Dirk a blustering ass, or something similar. I was a scared, snivelling coward who hid with his tail between his legs. I avoided both of you when I had no dag blasted valid reason!

CGT: I mean it wasn’t as if you were...I mean, out of all of us, I was more an overzealous pawn than anything else, much less a god. Not like either of you.

CGT: I was weak and pathetic and I…

CGT: Why did you two ever like me? Ever. Even as a friend?

CTT: Okay, hold the fucking phone, and park your ass down, English. I mean it, sit the fuck down.

CTT: Who the FUCK said you could talk about yourself that way?


CTT: …

CGT: Need I go on, Strider?

CTT: Actually, yes. Because Jane was, as you said, brainwashed, and you?

CTT: Jake you…

CTT: You can’t lay blame on yourself for what happened. You can’t okay? I was the one that practically pushed you into a relationship in the first place!
CGG: Guys. Not to derail you but, um, how much blame are we putting on the trickster mode?

CGG: Because I would say all of it but I was the one who started it all.

CGG: I didn’t try to pick up the pieces after it ended either. I mean we sure did think we talked about what happened over the last...what? Half year? But did we really? Like Roxy said we were just kind of, dancing around the bush instead of, I don’t know, beating the gosh darn thing with a stick.

CGG: We talked sure. That was great. But it was all surface stuff and talking to each other using someone else as a messenger.

CGG: Anyway...

CGG: I didn’t try to tell you that I loved you Jake. Not before the Game. Not before you, Dirk, swooned him off his feet. I missed my chance there and after we all went trickster I was mortified by what I’d said and done in equal measure with what I hadn’t leading up to it.

CGG: And Jake?

CGG: i’m sorry.

CGG: i’m so, so sorry.

CGG: you both need to talk this out with each other more than, well, more than anything that i need right now. I’m not mad at either of you, just...just so that’s out there. I can wait until you’re done.

--CGG banned herself from the memo--

--CTG unbanned CGG from the memo--

--CGG banned herself from the memo--

--CTG unbanned CGG from the memo--

CTT: I’m sorry, but what the fuck Jane?

CTT: You don’t just say stuff like that and then abscond the shit out of dodge like it's no big deal and you didn’t just word vomit all of that onto us.

CTG: don’t worry I got her.

CGG: Roxy, stop it. Let me go!

CGT: Jane, please.

CGT: Don’t fight Roxy on this.

CGT: And Dirk? From your point of view it may have seemed like that. I’m not going to argue that at this point.

CGT: But for heaven’s sake you didn’t push me into anything, much less a relationship with you!

CGT: That’s now how *I* saw things.

CGT: You’ve always been helping me out. Sure I needed space but I was the one who didn’t have the gall to communicate with you about it and just let it go on and on
CGT: And I was talking Jane’s ear off about...I..Roxy...

CTG: No way Jakey. You gotta tell them now. I’m not going to speak for any of you until you sort this ship out.

CTG: Or unless someone tries to leave.

CGT: So. Um…

CGT: I… I’m not brave. I don’t love adventure. I’m almost glad you didn’t tell me before, Jane, because I didn’t get to break your heart. Not like what happened with Dirk, at least.

CGT: And oh I’m sorry I talked your ear off about him and me.

CGT: Blast it Roxy we already did this pre-god tier!

CGT: Why must we go through it again?!

CTG: Because.

CTG: Apparently.

CTG: It didn’t quite sink in last time.

CTG: Because we were all being stupid teenagers at the time and we all got more space from our problems than we likely deserved.

CTG: What with everything else that happened after we died.

CTG: Not to mention how we might as well have taken two steps back with this shit.

CTT: That’s fair.

CGG: True. We were all being...kinda douchemuffins about it at the time anyway. :P

CGT: holy toledo you laughed, Dirk!

CGT: you must laugh more. Show more emotions gosh darn it! That was actually like, half the reason why I got all fed up and was an accidental ass to you! Take off those shades, Strider. Right now.

CTT: Seriously. Wait, no, wait

CTT: Hello Jake, Jane, Dirk. How are you?

CGT: You may have him back after we’re done. Hi, Hal. Yeah we’re doing alright I guess. Talking about emotional stuff.

CTT: Damn it, English.

Looks like they’re gonna be at this for a while. Why not be someone else in the meantime?

⇒ Be Thor
Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

==> Thor: Be Nervous

==> Karkat: Fucking Ascend Already

⇒ Be Thor

You knew that humans considered you to be a god, once upon a time. You knew that some think so even now. Now that you are a part of the Avengers, now that you, Jane, and Darcy have taken up residence in what is now the Avengers Tower.

Contrary to what some people (Clint) think, you know how human technology works in a general sense. It’s just that Tony tends to give his machines sapience, or at the very least sentience, and that makes dealing with them harder than what most consider normal.

You are also very nervous.

Tony and Jarvis have been in contact with actual gods and they haven’t noticed.

You felt their entrance into this realm five days ago, when the first two appeared on what you now identify as the United States’ west coast. Since then, more have appeared in pairs, trios, even as a group of four on one occasion. Each time you felt and heard their influence.

You were afraid, though you had told no one of this.

The first two gods have taken to becoming heroes for the entire state of California. With their impressive, immense, and far reaching powers, you had no doubt in your mind that they could accomplish this.

The next thirteen were scattered about the planet. Some you had barely felt initially, yet after a column of light and another wave of power their influence grew in addition to another being arriving. This did not happen to all of them, but to maybe half, maybe a little less, and from your counting and
keeping track of these things (Loki would have been proud of the use of your mind), there were some that already had achieved this state and did not need the extra boost in power. Whatever they had to do to achieve it.

The next four, two days ago, were far away. You barely felt their influence besides a few moments where you were robbed of your senses, another few where your heartbeat became irregular (though thankfully that didn’t last), a half minute where you were so filled with hope, cheer, and energy to do things that even after it faded you had a stupid grin for the rest of the day.

The most recent three, arriving only yesterday night, were painfully close. It had woken you up in the middle of the night, blood singing and boiling in your veins like fire, the dim moonlight giving you more clarity of sight than should be possible. There was a sense of exactly what time it was that beat in time with your heart, with your blood, with the pulsing sensation behind your eyes.

It was certainly the first time that these sensations felt as if they would overpower you, like you could get lost in them. One of the three had parked close to the tower, you didn’t know exactly where yet, and had not moved for hours and the harsh feeling in your blood eased until it passed as the moon hung high overhead.

The other two however…

Tony had sent out a group message to all of the Avengers, sans Natasha, that your shield sister would be picking up two teenagers who needed help. Teenagers who had no records, who only showed up yesterday with a burst of power that he and Bruce had been tracking (you hadn’t known they had been doing so to) yesterday. One of them was sick and injured, the man of iron informed you all. Natasha would be bringing them back to the tower.

Tony and Bruce thought they were powerful mutants at the very least. You bit your tongue as you couldn’t bring yourself to tell them just how wrong they both were (though, granted, there was the ‘at the least” bit to take into consideration). The two gods (god and goddess) didn’t want to create any more chaos, or attract more attention to themselves than they (the god and goddess pair of California, maybe others elsewhere) already had, from the lack of action or news about the new pair. You would respect their wish of silence and anonymity.

But there was still the indisputable fact that two gods would, in just a few minutes now, be in the Avengers’ medical floor of the tower.

Clint didn’t quite trust them and said as much, though given that they appeared as children, he would hang back and assess the full situation first.
Just as the moon was sinking beneath the western horizon and the sun equally began to rise, the god and goddess were there, just a few floors below you, and for reasons unknown the twin senses that had woken you up had not yet left. There was the sensation of your blood boiling, followed by a wondrous yet confusing sight when you saw Bruce.

Bruce was tending to the god when you walked into the room they were occupying for the moment. His back was turned but even then you could see threads wrapped around him leading elsewhere, and others around the god and goddess. You weren’t sure entirely of what they meant, though it didn’t take long for the additional sight and for the feeling in your blood to fade again.

The goddess, who had the symbol of a stylized sun on the outfit she wore, was sitting in a chair beside the bed that the god was lying in. Bruce was informing her of what was wrong, nothing he wouldn’t recover from, the “not that kind of doctor” reassuring her in the same breath. It was probably just the flu, though there were twin bullet holes that you could now see that could complicate things. One was less a hole and more a semi circle shape that was missing from his shoulder, while the other looked large because of his missing feathers.

Relief was visible as her shoulders sunk and she rested her arms and head on the edge of the bed, even though you could not see her eyes. Her hood, bright orange, covered them and hid them from view.

How were you to address a goddess, a true one, a creator of the universe, when she did not want to be known as such to mortals? As you think, your clarity of sight caught details you would be previously unaware of. The gear symbol on the god’s shirt. The paleness of both their skin and hair, far paler than you’d ever seen. The goddess’s hair was short, or styled in a fashion that you could only see strands that poked out of her hood, but it was a really pale blonde that you’d never seen even on Asgard. The god’s hair in contrast was practically white. Both had bandages from other injuries, with at least one on their faces.

“Hello. Thor, right?” The goddess looked up briefly to greet you. You nod your head, aware of how low and for how long you did so.

“I am Rose. It is nice to meet you, though I do wish it had been under better circumstances. This is my brother, Dave.”

Rose and Dave. You resolve to commit both names to memory as you nod again, sharper this time, to show that you heard and acknowledged what she was saying.
“Your brother is in good hands,” You finally say to her in a hushed tone.

“It would be a hell of a lot easier though if he’d gone to the hospital at least once in his life.” Bruce grumbled as he worked, mostly to himself though Rose answered him anyway.

“He didn’t have the greatest childhood.” She said as her facial expression became guarded, “That’s all I can say without Dave’s permission.”

“I’m sure we can figure the rest out on our own, then. Until or unless Dave wants to open up.” Bruce’s tone was kept light as he performed some final checks on the god. The wings that he had were large, as pale as his hair and even while one was folded against his back as the other, the one with the hole, seemed to make the rest of him seem smaller than he already was.

Silence fell upon the room, though it didn’t feel awkward like you had expected. It was calm, filled only by Bruce shuffling out the door (“Going to grab breakfast, let me know if anything changes.”) and Rose’s quiet humming.

“Mi-” The sound of a half formed word died on your tongue as none other than Tony himself walked into the room with a glass in one hand. The liquid didn’t smell like any alcohol you knew he had by now. It was more...carbonated. A clear fizzy soda drink that you forgot the name of. He was keeping up appearances even now? Even here? What would drive him to want to drink so much that he had to do this just to resist the urge? Well, you supposed as you mentally took a step back, the glass didn’t look like the usual ones for wine or alcohol so he may not actually be keeping appearances or resisting a drink.

A moment of misunderstanding on your part. Probably.

“Hey. Rose right? Of course. So, this super spy agency with grimy fingers want their claws in you and your friends and Pepper, my fiance, and I are doing what we can so far to hold ‘em off. Just thought you should know that. Anything else other than legal shit that you need? Bank accounts, right? Wait, are you related to that Roxy kid too?”

How he said this all in the same breath, you have no clue. Seeing Rose’s face as her lips twitch into what you can only guess to be an amused smile as she tilts her head to see who was talking to her, you think that maybe she does. Or doesn’t somehow, and finds it funny.

You are nervous, and send a silent plea to her that she does not strike at him if he angers her. You are
afraid, because you know you would step in to take the blow should events ever come to that.

“In order? This “spy organization” would have to be rather stupid to go against us, or clever. Yes, bank accounts would be nice. We have items to trade for currency, but we, as you know, need the legal documents to get this set up properly and have somewhere to put it all. Unless someone messages me about something, merely a place to stay after you help Dave would be sufficient. Yes, we are related to Roxy.”

Rose did not say how they were related. She did not say why they would have to be clever even though the word spy would make one think, in your opinion, that they were clever already. Perhaps she meant more clever than herself, in which case, he would agree. Because “stupid enough to stare down challenges greater than themselves and then be clever enough to try them despite the odds” were basically the defining points of humanity as a whole.

You’ve learned this from many interactions and deep discussions with your shield brothers and sister, late after a movie night when none of you found sleep to be easy, or restful.

“You all minors, right?” Rose shrugged at that.

“For those of us that are human? Yes. With the Trolls-”

“They’re actually called Trolls?”

“-We’re estimating about half of them being adults, but we don’t know for certain.” At Tony’s continued curious expression and raised eyebrow she added, “Over half of them were dead before we arrived here.”

“Well that explained absolutely nothing.”

“They might tell you if and or when you see them. Or you may be able to tell that for yourself. You are, after all, a genius, yes?”

“Hey Rose. Rose. Roast. Damn. Rose. Rosie.” Dave was wake enough now to be capable of conversation, though he did cough every so often into his uninjured shoulder, “Fusk. Fuck. My words Rose. I need something to help so I can say words.”
“Aw. And I was just thinking that I liked you better when you’re quiet.”

“Damn it sis. C’mon.”

Suddenly Be Karkat For No Apparent Reason

You are now Karkat. Your internal panic rose when several factors made themselves clear. First and foremost was the lightening sky which told you that the sun would be rising soon. The second, was that the man in a black suit that Rose had made mention of was walking over to you.

You weren’t ignorant, or arrogant, to not see the way that the human carried himself, even if he didn’t appear to be armed at first. He walked like Dave used to, only with what was probably a night and day difference as to why that was. He carried himself with confidence.

Now though, he was getting a bit too close for comfort. Closer than any of the other humans around here got. You let out a warning hiss, making sure to keep it within human hearing even though if it were to get any higher in pitch the sound would take on a very different meaning.

“Stay back there.” English was hard, specifically its vowels. Why did it have to have so many vowel sounds? Alternian only had like, three total. A high pitch “ee” and an “ah” that could be high or low. That was it. Everything else was consonants and clicks, chirps and trills and purrs. While Dave and Rose were on the meteor, they’d learned Alternian as you and the other trolls learned English, even though a third of Alternian was spoken with sounds outside human hearing (that they couldn’t replicate) and English, again, was a pain in the throat to pronounce.

Not to mention how it butchers the way things are spelled and just gives the same sound to two (or more) different words on multiple occasions.

The man, to your (and Kankri’s) surprise, stops walking toward you.

You had to do this now. Kankri needed a body, you would both benefit from God Tier (even if only a little), and you frankly wanted your Dancestor out of your head yesterday.

The itch beneath your skin was still there, too.
“Do not come closer! Tell others! I will be fine!” Of course you had to simply take a guess as to the human being concerned for your well being once you go through with this. Humans were practically always laying on pale feelings for each other or things that were hurt. At least, from the movies you’ve watched (however limited the amount and given the genre you primarily watched this could be exaggeration) they did.

You didn’t know what the ones who were watching you earlier were feeling. Or thinking. You didn’t really want to know, actually.

You didn’t know if Earth’s sun would hurt you, whether it would burn you or not, but you couldn’t take chances yet so that mean you had to god tier now.

You decapchalogue one of your sickles, and with a moment to steel yourself, you drive the point straight through your chest.

⇒ Now Would Be A Good Time To Be Dave
Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

==> Dave: Be the Sick Guy
==> Kankri: Be Alive Again (and overwhelmed)
==> ???: What Are You Doing Here? Wait. No-
==> Roxy: Save John

⇒ Now Would Be A Good Time To Be Dave

Every part of you was sore, your throat was itching and quite frankly the thought of food made your stomach churn. You’ve been zoned out for a while, mostly just taking in your new surroundings and the new people that Rose was interacting with. Your ectotwin was doing a remarkable job of keeping her cool. Ten out of ten. But, really, why did she have to keep those cool new cat ears hidden? Maybe it was because of your equally new wings? They were pretty big and drew enough attention towards her just by her being seen with you. Earlier when you both had just arrived, her ears were out but ever since you caught the sight of a group of asses who called you both mutants, she’d tucked them under her hood and closed up the opening at the top.

She said it wasn’t because of what they said, or that they’d literally tried to shoot you both. A bullet had grazed her cheek but that’s as far as it went because at that point you’d flash stepped to take the next two and God did that hurt. She said that it hadn’t affected her but you were both out of your depth here. Of the two of you, you were the one with the medical knowledge, but, would you look the fuck at that, you were the one that had a chunk of your shoulder missing and a hole where a bunch of feathers had been ripped out.

You had a currency they couldn’t even cash in on without raising suspicion. You weren’t anywhere near your apartment (you didn’t want to be there anyway) and neither of you were sure that Rose’s house existed here. Jade had their planets so that was out. The only food the two of you had was what was in your sylladex’s (which wasn’t much), there were no medical supplies, and, despite having all of these cool fucking powers, Rose said it would be better not to use them for now.

Well, cool fucking powers as in everything besides time travel. Fuck time travel. You would only ever use it again, only ever consider it, for one of two reasons. A, using it would make you all not doomed, even if it meant this version of you would die (a last resort). Or B, using it would help to protect-defend-save one of the collective human-troll group (again, last resort). At least, one that you
gave even the smallest of shits about because no, Gamzee didn’t count and you’d only save Vriska because it would make Terezi sad and TZ was your friend.

Even now, the multiverse just loved to mess with you. You had memories that criss crossed and twisted around from all the time-traveling splinters of yourself and trying to comb through them for useful information would only give you a skull splitting headache. Your “crew” (it popped up somewhere while on the meteor, stuck, and now extends to everyone) separated with some of your number likely in another country, or even half way around the world with your luck, and worst of all?

You couldn’t even care right now because of how bad you felt and weren’t gods supposed to, you know, not be able to get sick? Maybe the reason the gods in all the myths hadn’t was because they’ve lived for so long that any disease that came across them was like, “fuck it, i’m not dealing with this. Hacking through this firewall could literally get me killed. I’m out.”

That was pretty funny. Maybe you should tell it to Rose once you got better. For now you were content with laying on the medical bed and stare out the window at the column of light that was there for like, three and a half seconds. You bugged Rose a bit but that didn’t last very long. One of the two guys in the room, Tommy? No, Tony. Yeah. You asked him if he had any apple juice around.

To which a disembodied voice replied that some had just been ordered not three seconds later which made you wince. You hadn’t been expecting that, but hey, whoever it was had apple juice on the way.

Score! Now all you needed was Mo...Roxy; your ectodadbro, Dirk; Kanaya because she was pretty cool and made Rose fucking beam; and Karkat because he was basically the best there is. Then you would be really happy.

“Hey. Did anyone see that bright as shit light earlier?” You asked.

“Light?” Everyone was giving you this look even though you couldn’t tell who had said that.

You nod a little anyway, “Yeah man. Ya know, it kinda reminded me of when John and Jade we-Oh shit.”

Rose had come to the same conclusion, smacking her forehead with a facepalmx2 combo and explaining hurriedly that the light thing meant someone nearby (one of theirs because who else
would it be?) had found their Quest Bed, which meant it was one of the trolls and-

“Karkat. Or Kanaya. Please, Rose, can you tell if it’s either of them?” Rose let out a frustrated sound, staring off into space as her eyes gave off this inner light. After a tense minute, two things happened. She shook her head, so it could be anyone, shit, and Tony got a phone call.

⇒ Be Kankri the Signless Sufferer, Find Out What’s Going On

You were alive again.

You were alive again.

You weren’t sure how to feel, what to feel, or if you should be feeling anything at all. The senses that were assaulting you (scent of grass and flowers, rain about an hour away, light, a gentle wind, the twitching of your own wings as they and your horns picked up vibrations and psionics) were amazing and yet overwhelming. In the Dream Bubbles, your senses were muted. Being dead, you really could only rely on one of your senses at a time. More often than not, it wasn’t sight.

You felt worn down by the memories of all your alternates and yet relieved to not have to share a thinkpan with your dancestor who had a whole other set of memories to deal with.

You feel glad that he is no longer weighed down by your added presence.

You had trolls and humans to find, though, humans to avoid, such as the one standing maybe ten feet (human measurement, you think, or did trolls use it first?), and trolls that you desperately wish had the sense to not go batshit insane.

Karkat was rubbing off on you.

Your Alternian memories were a far greater influence, though. You felt that your Beforan self was more of an echo, those memories, those doomed selves, adding experiences and knowledge but did not change who you felt you were.

You were Kankri Vantas. You felt like the Signless. Both were the same person, the same troll, and
yet each name carried a different sort of weight that you couldn’t articulate.

Stop. Focus. You could think about these things at length later, when you knew you and Karkat were somewhere safe.

There. The human was staring at you again. Karkat was trying to speak to him again in English, trying to get him to understand that what you did was a one time thing, you were not going to pose a danger to others so long as they did not threaten or attack you in turn. He had pulled out a phone (that was the right word, right?) and talked to someone at the other end for a couple minutes.

You shifted focus again.

You could see ribbons, pulsing in time with their heartbeats. Wrapped around the human (Phil, was the name you caught in their conversation), were several gleaming silver tinged with several different colors, one per ribbon (platonic-pale varying in strength and importance) and a few (a handful, really) that were bright and pale like silver snow with designs and patterns in other colors (family not bound by genetics, in this case, pity-love for those few held close to his heart), silver apparently being this human’s color.

Around Karkat was something similar, though most ribbons ventured far out to tie themselves around those who were far away (like Phil) there were others that did not seemed shorter (like Phil’s...friend-family, you should come up with a better word for it later or see if humans hadn’t already made one themselves). His were bright red like you speculate your own to be, if you could see yours to.

You should really be paying attention to what Karkat and Phil were talking about. Something about being taken to a tower, about a Rose (the human who was Karkat’s quadrant-corner, oh) who wanted to see them, who was there at this tower with Dave.

Karkat gave an out-of-human-hearing (abbreviation: oohh, that is kind of funny) chirping-purr combination that rang clear with love the strength of which you had only ever felt yourself when-

Oh God, Meulin. The Disciple. Your Beforan memories echoed with pity for others. Cronus, in a few timelines. Meenah, one timeline stood out to you with her in particular, though there was a couple where you felt black for the tyrian. Damara, twice you can recall clearly. Latula at one point or another, though you’re convinced that was just a crush.

But Meulin? Only your Post-Scratch self had ever pitied her in the way Karkat’s vocalized-pale-red
combo showed his love (transcending quadrants altogether, fuck the quadrants) Yeah, your dancestor really was having an influence on you and you don’t mind in the least, or maybe it was more of your memories that were the Signless and not the other Kankri’s? Only your post-scratch self had ever felt this combination of quadrants, this human love, for anyone, so that made sense.

The ribbon you suspected represented his and Dave’s relationship wrapped around his entire torso it was so wide, unlike the strong silver ropes that anchored themselves around Phil’s arms. It was bright red and glowed like lava, the glow pulsing with a steady beat. It was woven together like a scarf, wrapping around the base of his wings (which had folded and dissolved beneath his shirt the second he noticed them) and over his shoulders and around his neck.

“ Karkat? ” The chirp-purr had stopped several seconds ago with only the echoes of echoes replaying over in your head, “ Are you alright? ” You wanted to say more, ask more, but your voice was hoarse as if you hadn’t spent most of your afterlife talking others ears off.

“ No you insipid, writhing, nimrod. ” He responds to you first in Altemian, consonants harsh and vowels sharp with his quirk. “ Last I saw him, Dave was not okay. He was injured from the final battle. Fucking ass probably still is and I have no clue if he’s been treated or not and, and…”

“I will be fine.” He says in English, shaking himself out of whatever panic he’d almost spiralled into and stands tall, looking Phil in the eyes as he adds, “Take us there, please. You can ask more questions there. Rose would likely have more answers anyway.”

You could tell that Karkat was tense (and you were amazed that he’d yet to curse in English), you could tell that Phil was to (and that he also didn’t quite believe Karkat being fine), but you stayed quiet. This was not the time for you to be speaking right now and to be honest, you were pretty overwhelmed right from the moment you opened your eyes.

Might as well add being relieved that you weren’t being burned alive by this planet’s sun to the list of emotions flooding your mind and heart.

Maybe later you will be able to thank your dancestor for making sure you both didn’t go crazy and for bringing you back to the land of the living.

⇒ Be ???

You are now the person whose name is, for now, unknown.
You’ve been tasked with killing the mutants (giant butterfly wings, able to hide them somehow; ears with the edges looking like fins; one is over 6 feet tall with night black skin; the other five foot and a half, roughly; both with horns, claws, and fangs) and you’ve just now gotten into position. The addition of the taller, more formidable looking mutant was unexpected, but that did not change your plans. You were just expected to kill them both now, is all.

One good bullet to the head oughta do it.

⇒ Be Roxy

Speech to Text Mode Initiated.

--ectoBiologist [EB] began pestering tipsyGnostalgic [TG]--

EB: ROXY!

EB: I need help.

TG: help w/ what?

TG: john? do u need me there?

TG: goddamn it.

TG: answer me, john!

EB: can’t right now, s’rry.

TG: y the f’ing hell not?

EB: You know how Jade and I are kinda superheroes now?

TG: fo’ the past few days now, yeah. john, wat happened?

TG: did you get hurt? do i need to send a bitch 2 the hospital?

You hear a yelp over the rushing wind.

TG: johnny?

EB: can’t become wind to get out of this.

EB: somebody shot me with, with something.
EB: I think I’m lucky to even be flying right now to be honest.

TG: kay, c’n u get somewhere 2 hide?

TG: voidy thing works better if ur in 1 spot.

EB: I think so.

EB: Although I’m kinda tired so I may be dropping soon anyway.

TG: where’s jade @?

You hear a thump from the other end of the “pester-call”.

EB: Back alley, dunno who’s following me.

EB: Dunno if they got Jade.

EB: Oh God I hope they didn’t get Jade.

EB: Snuck up on me. Could’ve gotten her to. Maybe.

TG: b r8 there.

--tipsyGnostalgic [TG] ceased pestering ectoBiologist [EB]--

You yell to get your friends attention, asking if they wanted to hunt down a fucker who hurt one of your mutual friends (who you liked, a lot). Further explanation would be given when you got there.

Three hands land on your shoulders in response. Maybe they’d overheard your conversation with John?

It didn’t really matter so much, because in the next few heartbeats you’ve reached out into the white void of nothingness, “stole” that same nothingness away from your destination, and bent it around your current location.

You land in a dimly lit back alley between restaurants, fresh food and garbage assaulting your nose in equal measure. You bit your lip to prevent yourself from gagging at it and focused on locating John (your boyfriend, you’d like to think, but you hadn’t had the time to make anything official). Dirk and Jake immediately set themselves into their fighting stances, strife weapons out at the ready in case anyone tried to sneak up on them.
“John!” It was Jane who’d found him, curled up on the ground shaking with a dart in one hand and a pinprick hole just above his elbow, “John can you hear me?”

“Sound far away.” He mumbled as a response, his eyes misty, lips paling in color and for a second you allow yourself to wonder if that was because of the dart or if he really was dehydrated on top of everything else.

“Janey dear, can you do anything to help him?” Her eyebrows were already drawn together in concentration as she gathered Life to weave around her fingertips, pressing one hand to his elbow and the other to his forehead.

You feel a little helpless right now.

You shake it off by turning your attention to Dirk and Jake.

“See, or sense, anyone coming?” You hiss as your eyes narrowed, fixing them on the other end of the alley that stretched further and branched out in what you think is two different directions.

“Several people.” Dirk responds in a clipped, detached tone, “Most going about their business. A couple travelling by rooftop toward us. Can’t tell yet who might be with them on the ground.” You grimace at that.

You really wanted to punch someone in the face. You wanted to do something instead of just wait around.

Instead you send a few quick messages out while the tension builds.

--tipsyGnostalgic [TG] began pestering gardenGnostic [GG]--

TG: where u @?
TG: ur bro got hit.
TG: fuckin’ ambushed more like.
TG: answer as soon as u see these.
TG: hope ur ok. john’s worried ‘bout ya.

--tipsyGnostalgic [TG] began pestering tentacleTherapist [TT]--

TG: john and jade have officially entered the hero biz.

TT: Why would you say that?
TG: i’mma deck a fucker, rosie.
TT: Roxy?
TG: evidence points to some1 attacking, john.
TG: or tranq? poison? dunno yet, jane is workin’ her lifey magicks on ‘im.
TG: tryin’ 2 get hold a jade but gurl not answerin’ me!
TT: Fuck.
TG: c’n ya see or is mah voidiness gettin’ in the way?
TG: rosie?
TG: ...
TT: Shit.
TG: uh…
TG: hold the phone, the idiots tailing john r here.

--tipsyGnostalgic [TG] ceased pestering tentacleTherapist [TT]--

As it turns out, there was more than just the two who attempted to ambush you from the roof. In fact there were, with a quick head count, eight people total. You personally didn’t care who they were, but one of them was holding another dart (who the fuck even cares about the gun it went with) which meant he was now on your personal shit list.

You gave the guy a wide grin as you readied yourself, prepared to call on your riflekind if worst came to worst. For now, though, it was Dirk and Jake on offense, taking on two of them without
using their powers. You didn’t have time to remind yourself why, other than that these seemed (keyword) to be normal people.

Maybe they weren’t. Maybe they had something to them but weren’t so powerful as to be the ringleader and so got thrown into the ring as grunts and canon fodder.

But maybes wouldn’t help you in a strife.
Chapter 4

Chapter Summary

==> Roxy: You are the BAMF, It is you

==> Karkat: Find out that Kankri can be terrifying and there is a reason why no one messes with adult trolls

==> Here's a brief Intermission with Tony Stark

==> Jade: Wake Up Already

⇒ Roxy: Strife

STRIFE!

Dirk wasted no time and flash stepped to avoid a bullet. Jake had moved onto a rooftop and out of sight with three of the eight goons going after him. The guy with the dart loaded it into that gun you hadn’t cared about two seconds ago, and pulled a second one, a pistol like the ones Jake used to have before alchemizing better weapons, to accompany it.

⇒ AGGRIEVE!

You drop down to avoid a bullet and shoot forward to trip the guy, before popping back up to face another.

⇒ ABJURE!

Oh shit. That was a close one. Goon dude has a knife, and not one of those little butter knives either. We’re talking butchering recently dead animals for tonight’s stew kind of knife.

“Heart!” You bite out as clearly and quickly as you can in Alternian, what with the fight still being in full swing, “Your six!”
You’re thankful to know as much as the both of you do of the alien language, even though in the heat of things you weren’t as likely to speak in general. It gives you a leg up in pretty much whatever thing you’re doing that you don’t want other people to know, though.

Unless they’re trolls, of course.

Dirk didn’t say anything back but he did spin on the ball of his foot and caught a guy in the arm that was trying to sneak up on him, while Dirk’s focus was elsewhere. Fuck. You wanted to hurt these guys but they were human, right? They couldn’t take what you and your crew could dish out. Dirk’s Unbreakable Katana sliced through the dude’s arm, cutting off the wrist from the rest of it and-

Your thoughts cut off as pain bloomed below your left knee, white hot and blinding.

You’ve been shot.

Fuck no. Fuck this shit.

⇒ ASSAULT

You let out a loud, furious growl that rattled in your chest and filled the alleyway, reaching out to the void with anger and, somehow, remained coordinated enough to get the bullet from inside your leg, and buried in, in, one of your opponent’s sides. You weren’t sure how deep, or who it was exactly, but at this point you don’t care. You’re pretty sure you’re not thinking straight right now anyway.

If humans could have a highblood’s rage, the thought drifts unbidden and incomplete through your mind. Well, Her Imperial Fishbitch did try turning humans into trolls at some point, right?

Who’s to say that the experimenting started after the failed revolution lead by your mom and Dirk’s bro? Who’s to say that didn’t somehow affect you or Dirk?

Another string of curses pass through your mind (and probably your lips) as you tackle the other guy who was targeting you, wrestling the knife from his hands (ha, so it was tranq dude), and pinned the guy’s shirt as close to his neck as you could get it to the ground.
“Why did you ambush the Heir?” You ground out through the snarl that felt like it’d rip your chest in half if it got any stronger, “Where’s the Witch?”

The goon you pinned just spat in your face.

⇒ Be Karkat: Dodge a Literal Bullet

Something was wrong with Kankri.

Something was wrong with you to, sure, but that had never stopped being a thing.

Kankri was nearly as silent as figurative fucking stone, not spewing any social shit or lectures out of his ass. In fact he hadn’t done that since maybe a few minutes after they’d found out that “oh yeah, your dancestor is in your head”. On one hand it made him more tolerable, yet on the other?

Well, on the other it was starting to worry you (not that you’d tell anyone but Dave or Kanaya).

You took a step, dragging Kankri with you by the end of one of his sleeves in a spur of the moment decision and froze as a loud bang shot through him straight to his bones. The Seer of Blood was suddenly staggering backward and out of the corner of your eye, you saw blood.

“ Oh god, oh god, you’re hurt, you’re bleeding, oh fuck. ” Phil had taken cover beneath the trees, out of the open. He had a small gun out and was looking around with some mix between calm and determination.

Kankri though...

“ Shit. ” You breathed out, taking in the sight. Kankri’s blood was twisting and writhing, the bullet visible for a mere second before being obscured again. Were either of you using your powers without noticing it? Was this a Seer thing or a Knight thing? You found yourself entranced at how it could even move like that without more blood being spilled, a tingling feeling shooting through your horns and wings as you silently pleaded to yourself to calm down and focus because Kankri didn’t seem fazed at all.
In fact he looked pissed the fuck off.

What the fuck?

“Can you ask Phil if I could, perhaps, borrow one of his guns?” Your dacestor asked you in his normally calming tone that now had an edge to it that make you fight the instinct to run because damn it this was Kankri. Still, though. That grin was terrifying. Since when was Kankri terrifying?

A couple minutes later you handed him one of Phil’s spare guns, both you and the human giving him a look of confusion.

You narrowed your eyes, taking a moment to think over what the hell just happened. Had it hit a spot with a vital organ? You didn’t think so. You think that the person had been aiming for the head, that’s what Eridan had said that he went for when shooting those Angel creatures of his land, but…

How did it go from “probably the head” to “hit the chest?” It didn’t make sense!

“This will only take a few minutes. The tower is the one with the giant ‘letter A’ right?” You nod your head sharply, “Have Phil take you there. I’ll catch up.”

The tingling feeling was still going strong. It wasn’t pleasant, nor painful, it was just weird. Was this how psionics felt? Were you just feeling the psionics or did you awaken some stupid blood power? Was it Kankri who was doing something?

“What are you going to do?” You ask after translating for Phil. You sort of knew but seriously. This...Kankri was...how much was his Alternian self affecting him? It had to be his Alternian self. There was no other explanation for this sudden behavior change that you could think of.

Who had your dacestor even been?

Man, you wish you’d cared a little more about ancestor stuff before the game. Oh well. Too late for that now.

Kankri tilted his head, eyeing the pistol in his hand, “What do you think I’m going to do?” When
you didn’t answer he continued, “I’m going to make them pay.”

⇒ Stop Being Karkat You Idiot

⇒ Be Tony: Watch The Strilonde Soap Opera

“Nope.”

“Dave.”

“Nope.”

“Dave!”

“No can do, Lalonde.”

“Strider, get your ass back in that bed.”

“...You know there are so many ways I could be taking that comment.”

“David. Elizabeth. Strider. Get your feathery ass back in that bed or so help me-”

“Rose. You had to pull out the middle name? Really? I just want to get me some goddamn apple juice and stretch my legs a bit. Is that a crime?”

Rose let out a long, audible sigh and replied in a deadpan tone, “You’re still sick, you have stitches-”

“My legs work fine.” Was Dave’s immediate response, cutting his sister off.
“You know what? Fine. I’m done. What do I care if you pass out in the middle of a hallway?”

“...I’ll come right back in here.”

“You do that.”

You sat in a chair you’d found in the room as the two siblings (twins, they claim), argued when Dave tried to sneak out. The door had been open, you think, because you’d passed Thor not even a few seconds ago. Too bad for Dave though that Rose hadn’t actually been napping. You had walked in sometime around the end and just resolved to wait it out.

“‘Sup kiddos.” Rose twitched as she turned around to face you, the top of her hood moving where it really shouldn’t, but hid her surprise well. Dave, however, tensed up, face falling blank behind his shades. His wings flared in what you assume to be an instinctive motion which whacked Rose upside the head.

“Dave!”

“Shit. Sorry Rose.”

They really do look like children. Could probably pass for being thirteen or fourteen years old if they wanted to, though why they insisted on sixteen you didn’t know.

Well, Sixteen and whatever specific time down to the second that Dave had probably pulled out of his ass.

“I could go with him, Rose. To make sure that he doesn’t spontaneously pass out in the middle of the hallway on his way back.”

“Goddammit I do not need to be babysat. I’m not a little kid.” Yeah, he was just five foot three, scrawny, and had way too many scars.

You didn’t have that many but you did have a hole in your chest. Bruce had virtually none on the account of the Hulk. Steve, well, you didn’t know, really. Had to have some though, because of his
super soldier background. Natasha and Clint probably had their fair share but they’re adults and assassins. Thor had his but he was an alien prince of some warrior culture and also an adult. Or at least looked like one. Shit, you need to ask for a translation there, didn’t you?

You chose not to comment though. You did have some tack.

“I hear it’s Steve’s turn on breakfast duty. Hopefully there’s something left after Thor gets to it, if Steve hadn’t already set some aside for us that is. If not we can just order something in, no big deal.” There was an expression on Dave’s face that disappeared so fast you wondered if you hadn’t just imagined it.

“’Kay. We c’n all go, then. Tha’ way Rose won’ git all...get all- fuck.”

“Hey. Do I have to tell you to watch your fucking language?” You ask with a raised eyebrow. Poor Rose was trying so hard not to smile at that.

⇒ Be Jade: Wake Up

Your name is Jade Harley. Well, no, it’s Jill Harley… English, it was-is Jade English. No, it is-was Harley and you were-are sixteen. You were-are thirteen. You are Jade English-Harley, you are thirteen-sixteen-sixty five, and you are very, very confused.

Okay, what was the last thing you remember?

Prospit burning - Dying from a meteor on Earth because you weren’t able to enter the Medium - Dying from a meteor on the Skaian battlefield after the Reckoning started - Being killed by good dog best friend who was now black and had limbs and a knife (Something about this one wasn’t right) - Staring down a mind-controlled lusus - A stranger’s face as you were trying to reach John to warn him about...about something. Or someone?

This wasn’t getting you anything but a mind numbing headache.

You were faintly aware of your own body, curled up as much as physically possible and lying on cold, smooth, unforgivingly cold floor. Your god tier outfit had been traded for something twenty times less comfortable, so that was probably why you were shivering like a leaf in autumn. Not that you’d know about that outside pictures and other media.
Actually you did. You’d traveled the world. You’d lead a resistance against the Batterwitch and oh wasn’t that funny because you were a Witch yourself. Well, a witch of a different kind. A good one.

But you hadn’t done any of those things and you certainly didn’t have a brother named John because his name was Jackson (Everyone called him Jack though, why did the name Jack make you scared?).

Jack and Jill went up the hill…

Fuck, you had to shut your eyes as soon as you’d opened them because the lights (artificial ones) were way too bright. Focus on the now. Focus on what you can hear around you.

To fetch a pail of water…

“Meowtherfurker! I’ll kill you! I’ll kill you! Give her back! Give my kitten back!” Something was rattling metal, hissing and clicking and trilling with an angry, no, furious tone that sent a shiver up your spine in fright.

“Shut up you mutated freak!” A human voice snarled back in English, followed by more rattling and a yelp.

Jack fell down and broke his crown...

Jack-John (fuck) had been killed by a meteor to, just a few weeks before you died (no dumbass he was alive you saw him not that long ago). Rose-Rain (no, she had changed her name, remember? All four of you did) had predicted it. She’d seen your grandniece (your mother, technically) arrive on that meteor. She’d seen your little Jake (grandson but somehow your poppop and your father? This was getting weird) decades before you’d actually found him (on another meteor).

She’d predicted two more children. You didn’t get to live long enough to see them.

Except you did see them. You’ve seen all four of them.
And Jill came tumbling after...

You wanted to grip your head and tear out your hair. You wanted to claw at your face to make it stop aching so much. You wanted to scream until your voice went hoarse and the other noises in this too bright, too loud place were drowned out.

You wanted to fall asleep and never wake up.
Chapter 5

Chapter Summary

==> Be Dave
==> Be Thor
==> Be Meulin
==> Be Mindless Employee

⇒ Quick, Be Dave, See Karkat and Weep

You did not weep. You didn’t bawl like a baby. You didn’t shed one goddamn tear when you hear Karkat’s voice for the first time in...has it only been a day?

You are not a lovestruck fool. You are not.

It’s a lie and you know it.

You, Rose, and Tony had arrived at the communal floor and into the kitchen. You specifically were drawn in by the scent of apples. Lo’ and behold there was not only apple juice, but apple pie (which you never had before) and dear lord it was heavenly (maybe you were getting better, or weren’t that sick in the first place, because clearly your taste buds were working fine). That Steve had apparently make it from scratch had you saying that he was the best baker out of all 6 something billion.

You were corrected because apparently the number was 7 billion.

Fuck, the human race needed space travel, yesterday. Or supernatural powers, which some of them did have (mutants) but these people were like, the outcasts of society in most countries (well that was a problem that needed fixing sooner rather than later).

You manage to say “God bless you and your baking, Steve.” between bites and sipping from your apple juice.
“Only the best, yeah?” Tony had asked, to which you give a thumbs up in confirmation that yes, this is the best.

It was around the time you finished your food, feeling full (even after a solid year of it on the meteor you still weren’t used to the sensation), when you heard the elevator ding and an all too familiar voice talking to someone.

“You can’t just cut us out of the Genepool you fuck sticks! Seriously, I’m surprised that Kankri had it in him but I applaud him for going after the sick fuck who thought it was a good idea to cull us. If he hadn’t ah’d’ve seriously thought ta go at ‘im mahself!”

Aw, he drifted into using a bit of your Texan accent.

Wait.

You stilled completely, turning your head just enough to see Karkat and some other human in a suit walking into the kitchen. Karkat was in a god tier outfit.

That particular thought got stuck on rewind, like a broken record.

He’d never order nor ask someone to just up and kill him like that.

He would’ve killed-

The more primal part of your brain rebelled at the very thought, forcing it to remain incomplete and for you to shift, carefully, silently, out of your chair.

Your matefriend was here. He was here and he seemed okay.

You had thought just a day ago, before the final battle, that you wouldn’t ever see him again.

Goddammit you couldn’t stay quiet. Not when he was still ranting and you know how he could go
“K’rr’k’t?” The mix of sounds that came out of your mouth were like bird chirps and trills, saying his name in English but keeping the way that you would’ve pronounced it in Alternian.

Your matesprit-boyfriend choked mid sentence, sputtering as he swivelled his head to see who had said that before landing on you.

“Dahiiv.” You only had a second to prepare yourself for the warm (insanely warm, yep, that’s karkat the furnace alright) body that slammed into you, going from zero to twenty miles an hour in an instant. He didn’t say anything else to you for a while as you let yourself calm down and relax into him, but his thundering purrs intermingled with the occasional chirp of his own (that could probably be heard or felt floors above and below you) told you pretty much everything you needed to know anyway. You didn’t really know what to do with your wings though, so kept them folded against your back for now.


Overall it was enough to soothe you to the point where next you knew you were half asleep, the one leaning against him this time because you’ve run out of energy and- oh. Yeah. You’re mind was feeling foggy with this pressure on your nose and forehead again. It was enough to remind you of how congested your nose still was. How you’d been worse only a couple hours earlier.

Did you care though?

Nah. Not really.

You, hesitantly because this is the first time you’d even be able to make these sounds, chirp back. It didn’t sound the same. His was like a cricket’s wings while yours was a literal tweety bird but you hoped it got the message across.

Love you.

His breathing hitched, and the purring lowered in volume, just for your ears to hear. You keep up the quiet stream of sounds even as you both lowered to the floor, right there in the middle of the
goddamn Avengers kitchen (you didn’t care, you weren’t fucking lucid enough anyhow) and Karkat was shaking as he tried to suppress what you identified as tears.

He was crying?

No. No, please. You let out a low trill, the equivalent of a thousand messages like every other goddamn pseudo-word in this language but right now you wanted to mean something a little more specific. You needed it to mean this because you knew what he was afraid of (Losing you and Kanaya). You knew he had trouble seeing further, planning further, than a couple of days ahead because he didn’t think he’d live that long anyway.

*We beat as one. Nothing will separate us. Nothing will be able to break our heart.*

You’ll vehemently deny the tiny, barely audible “cheep” later but shit, your matefriend had a strong grip. If you were the taller one, you think, then maybe you could wrap your new wings around him, have him be the one sitting in your lap for once, wrapping your Self around him like a cocoon, a shield against the world for him alone.

But, since you are at least a few inches shorter this was not to be. It’s only a few inches, but for some reason that was a world of difference for trolls. You didn’t understand it.

Your mind buzzed (ha ha) with a sensation you vaguely recall Karkat explaining to you as Serendipity. Fuck. Guess you’re able to feel it now to? Or maybe that was the sickness talking. Either way your hair was getting wet, stained pink no doubt with Karkat’s tears and fuck this you still couldn’t handle a lot of emotion. You didn’t know how to handle this. Where was Kanaya? Fuck. Whatever.

Your sounds got weaker as you ended up settling into this hum, like a hummingbird’s wings, which you supposed is the best you could do for a purring equivalent right about now.

*Nothing else matters right now. I’m here. You can rest easy.*

It was just now sinking in.

You won.
You won that fucking game.

Hell fucking yes.

⇒ Be Thor

You were swept away with the two god’s influence. Your clarity of sight had faded, but that had hardly bothered you.

You had to sit down somewhere, lest you fall.

There was a beat of music, of a clock ticking by, of metal against metal that moved in time with your blood. Steve was tapping out the same beat on his leg as your team, Rose, and Phil retreated to the area reserved for games and movie night to give the two their privacy. It didn’t have a specific name, but you’d picked up that some would call it a Den. Fitting, for how it is in these places that your shield siblings typically gather here, if not the kitchen.

You weren’t really apart of the conversation yet, so you had time to think (as much as you could with the influence) about what had happened just before the two gods reunited.

Dave had blessed Steve (and his baking). He’d said it so casually that you had to take a minute to register that it had even happened. The tinge of red that coated your sight for a few seconds after he spoke had been unexpected.

Was that how Steve could tap out that beat that thrummed through you? It must be, surely. Did he realize what it was that he was doing? Probably not. You’d never seen the gods before, and from the stories your father had told (or lack of them), you knew that he hadn’t either. Your mother had only glimpsed one, as a girl. She’d seen a beautifully tall goddess with large horns curling back in spirals like those of a ram, giant translucent wings keeping her in the air as she flew on by.

The horned god in the kitchen looked similar.

Natasha was giving Steve a calculating gaze, trying (and very nearly succeeding) to mimic the pattern with only a hiccup every twelve notes or so. She couldn’t know what had happened to him,
could she?

“Oh my Gog, Dave. What happened to you?”

“Some people who thought we were like, human mutants. Me ‘n’ Rose. It’s okay though. I mean, I’m not feeling my best-”

“No shit. I can smell the sick on you, Dave…”

You settle back in your chair, resolutely ignoring Dave and Karkat’s conversation that you (and anyone with super hearing) could hear from the kitchen. The gods influence was ebbing away and after a while you could see that Steve (and by association, Natasha) had stopped their tapping as well.

At least, you try your best.

“I am looking for trolls throughout the continental US, Miss Rose, but so far have only found the Zahhaks, the Captors, and the Leijons. The Captors and Leijons, I will admit to losing track of for and am finding it hard to locate their positions again. The Zahhaks I am able to locate but not see.” Jarvis said as he pulled up video feeds and picture marked with previously known locations on the television screen, “The others may be foreign countries or in a remote area.”

“Which would make it harder for you to track them down. I understand, Jarvis. The Zahhaks, and Roxy, are known for being able to cloak themselves like this. The Captors I can understand as they have been previously exploited for their powers. The Leijons you were able to detect so they didn’t appear in a wilderness, which from what I’ve heard is their domain, but for them both to…” Here, Rose paused to think for a while as everyone else waited patiently, “They may have absconded to some remote area where others are not so likely to find them.”

You could tell that she wasn’t certain.

⇒ Be Meulin

You are now Meulin, for a time. You weren’t sure how long you’ve been in this place that reeked of the worst smells and had horrible human adults. You only knew that your kitten had brought you back from death as you both ascended and that these humans had found you shortly afterward,
capturing you with electricity and nets stronger than you were, somehow.

You didn’t have time for the confusion going on in your thinkpan because as soon as you were in a building with white walls, white floors, white ceiling (white, white, always white) you’d been separated from Nepeta. Your kitten with a robotic tail and feathers in her hair (“Furom my time as Davepeta, I think.”) and the most adorable smile.

You yowled at them as they locked you up, demanded that they give you back your dancelor as most of them (all but one) left you. The one that was left had snapped at you, hit your fingers that wrapped around metal bars, the only opening in the heavy metal door leading out of here. Only then did you shut your mouth, but continued to glare at the human while rubbing your knuckles.

There were other voices around you, other sounds and bright white lights (just like everything else in this place that made no sense why was everything white?). Whimpering and whining, like a bark beast, was close behind you (though you didn’t want to see what it...she, what state she may be in right now), someone speaking Alternian further away but was too far away and overlaid with the static of psionics for you to understand the words.

“Mew and efuryone of the ofurs you work with won’t live to see your kittens!” You yowl again at him even though you knew he wouldn’t understand you, if he could even hear you in the first place. At least this time you weren’t near the door so the guy wouldn’t hit your hands.

⇒ Be Mindless Employee

Well, you weren’t mindless. No one who worked at your company was. You were, however, rather methodical and policy was one of the strictest you’ve come across. It paid good though, so there was that. You whistled as you walked through the halls. Your shift was pretty boring as no one ever walked in and your friend was manning the front desk for you, so you now had time to let your mind, and feet, wander.

Hm? You hadn’t seen that door before. Had you taken a wrong turn somewhere? No, that was impossible, you’ve been here for two years and there had never been a door there, at the end of the hall where the florescent light in the ceiling above wasn’t working.

Okay, this was creepy and common sense was screaming at you to walk away and pretend you never saw anything. Common sense was punted out the window however when you started hearing voices (and incoherent sounds that sent shivers of fear up and down your spine) from what you dared to assume to be the other side of this mysterious door.
You were going to regret this, weren’t you?

You take one step forward, followed by another, and then another.

You reached for the door handle (it was unlocked, totally not terrifying) without pause and opened the door with a soft click.

Yeah. You were definitely going to regret this.
Chapter 6

Chapter Summary

===> Natasha: Take Over This Entire Chapter

===> Karkat: Troll The Aquatic Drama Queen

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

⇒ Be Natasha

This is not the first time you’ve seen a troll.

Nor is it the second. Or the third.

To be fair, it’s really just been one troll that you keep seeing. One troll who you think has always been there. She claims to have been there the day you were born. You certainly wouldn’t be surprised.

She was a being who was made of time, travelling through it as she pleased, sometimes appearing to you with wings flared and sometimes with them hidden. As a child, you had played with her and would get all kinds of gifts. Sometimes it was an animal skull (mostly small ones polished and preserved, one was a large ram preserved the same way, horns painted red, orange and yellow like her own), sometimes it was an antler or some other not quite but still sort of dead thing. Sometimes it would be pieces of crystals, or watches, or whatever else she could find that “represented time”. You tried to give her gifts in return, despite being so young and not really knowing how, but the best times you could remember clearly were the adventures she took you on.

You asked once if she was your Fairy Godmother and why you would need one.

The nickname stuck (she had said she could be, if you wanted it), but she had never answered why.

That had been before the Red Room.
You had been in a pit of despair, thinking you would never get to meet her again.

After you turned nine, you met her again in the dead of night, chained to your bed so that you wouldn’t run away. She’d given you her name, then. She’d unchained you each time she visited, even though at some point you began to protest. Her visits were never as long as they used to be. You didn’t go on adventures in the fraction of time between one second and the next. You mostly just talked while she would give you small gifts that you hoped to hide.

It didn’t always work and those times you were punished but Aradia never really stopped. She just “sent them to a better time to give to you”.

Above all she hated having to put your cuff back on when her visits were over or when staying any longer would risk her being seen.

When you were twelve, on your birthday, she appeared to you with a nervousness about her that you’d never seen before. She always looked so happy. She wanted to give you the greatest gift she could give to anyone, was her reason, but wanted you to be old enough to understand what it was you would be given.

You just whispered back to her to get on with it already because of course you would understand.

“Then, Natalia Alianovna Romanoff,” She spoke your full, true name with a little grin, “I bless you in all you do. A piece of Time shall forever be with you. You may not be one of mine, child of the Sagittarius, but I would very much like it if I could continue to be your Godmother.”

You wondered why she would say that when of course she was your Godmother. You didn’t understand until after three whole months had ticked by (down to the second) and she didn’t show. You spoke her name, pleaded in the dead of night when you were thirteen, and then fifteen, begging her to show up she didn’t even have to talk just be there.

You never failed at anything you did since that night that involved timing to be precise. Basic tasks to missions. You never failed at being exactly on time and where you were supposed to be when you were meant to be there.

By sixteen you gave up asking for her. By your twenties you resolved that maybe it was The Red Room, the KGB, and Hydra that was keeping her away. You knew it wouldn’t be easy getting away from them. You only succeeded after years of careful planning.
You thought that maybe when you succeeded, when you joined SHIELD, you would see those gifts sent to your future self. You thought that maybe you would even see Aradia. After a while you told Clint and Phil about her, but she still didn’t show and no gifts came.

You would’ve given up hope if it weren’t for those two.

The morning after the Battle of New York, Tony had called you that there was a pile of gifts for you in the tower, on your floor (Your floor? That had caught you off guard almost as much as the mentioning of the gifts had). He said that he couldn’t walk two steps without feeling like he’d accidentally kick or crush something so choose to leave it be. Jarvis had done a scan on them to make sure none were hiding something like trackers.

You knew there wouldn’t be but the gesture was appreciated (since when did Tony care?).

“You want them checked for poison or some shit?”

You scoff (you wanted to laugh), “No Tony. I’ll be there soon to look through them.”

Afterward you immediately tracked down Clint and the two of you were at the tower for the next week going through everything just to sort it all, and the next week after that to take time to open and appreciate each and every one. You even found the giant ram skull that Aradia had given you (to wear this Time, was the note attached) so long ago.

You wore the skull over your head, several maroon, or burgundy colored (Aradia’s color) beads, bracelets, and even a scarf, one day and scared the shit out of Tony. Clint had laughed for so long and you even managed to smile a little.

The two of you hadn’t gone back to SHIELD since.

You’ve been trying to wear something with maroon in it as often as you could (your hair, you think, is already a testament to it, being a natural dark red). Today was no different, with a bracelet that was brilliant silver, red gemstones embedded into it with the Aries symbol etched into the spaces in
between. It was on the hand you’d been using to attempt at the pattern Steve was tapping but you found yourself only able to do so to a point. Every few notes you stumbled and had to wait a while to find the rhythm again.

It was infinitely easier to recall the music that followed Aradia.

“So. Now what? Do we just wait and hope to be able to reach them in time? Don’t you have a way to communicate with them?” Tony asked, as he multitalked with different projects to keep his mind occupied.

“Just because we have a way to contact each other, doesn’t mean that we’re able to use it to get around a lack of wifi.” Was the teen’s response as she took on a stormy expression.

“Shit. Okay, so that’s out.”

While everyone else was tossing ideas of what to do back and forth like this was a tennis match, you retreated inward.

‘Maid of Time? You told me I could call on you like this whenever I needed you. I’m not sure how much of this you’re hearing, but thank you, first of all, for all of the gifts. You must’ve known what I was about to go through, didn’t you? Well, there are other gods here at the tower, and others still are out there. Did you know about them to? About this? We don’t know how many there are yet, the Avengers I mean, but the goddess, Rose, looks worried.’ You visualize writing your thoughts down as a letter, ‘There isn’t much of a reason for this, but help in finding them however you can will always be appreciated. Finis, Natasha Romanoff’

At some point during this, you’d closed your eyes. As soon as you opened them again, that all too familiar music box began to play with the backdrop of gears churning and sand shifting like in an hourglass.

Shoes clicked against the floor and now there was a warmth just above you, a chin resting on your head followed by a giggle as the goddess took in your blank shock.

“You called, goddaughter?”

“Oh, hi Aradia. From your appearance here could I assume that you and Damara are both doing
well?” Rose asks unfazed by the other goddess’s abrupt appearance. Jarvis paused mid-speech as the television, for a moment, gained bits of static. Steve was wide-eyed and held the arms of his chair in a death grip. Clint’s response was a halting movement toward a knife hidden in his shoe, but relaxed some when you met his gaze with a stern glare.

Thor on the other hand, was as white as a sheet of paper. You flick your eyes over to the Norse god and Clint followed your gaze, eyebrows raising as he took in the sight. The Thunderer looked about ready to faint.

“What the hell?!” Was Tony’s response after doing a rather accurate impression of a fish.

Aradia laughed again, retreating only to jump over the back of the couch and landing next to you, wings vanishing in a snap.

“You’ve chosen good friends, goddaughter.” She trills, “Though as for helping, I’m not too sure of how much I can do without dooming us all. I cannot tell you, yet, where the Captors and Leijons are at least.”

“God dammit.” Clint let his face fall into his hands dramatically, “Why can’t we ever get straight fucking answers?”

“And risk dooming us all?” Steve asked back with a ‘really?’ expression on his face, “I don’t think so. Let the lady help how she can, Barton.”

“Yeah Legolas. I like living, thank you.”

A check up on Thor let you know that he was looking better but was still not looking as if he’d be speaking anytime soon. Oh well. Maybe you could get answers as to why out of him later.

“What I can say is that the Makaras, Pyropes, and Serkets are all together and currently somewhere in Germany.”

This time it was Steve who let out a frustrated sigh, “Why is it always Germany? Why can’t it be somewhere else? Like oh I don’t know, Spain. I’ve never been, but I heard it’s nice there this time of year.”
Aradia pulled a face, concern, you think, “Oh I wouldn’t go there right now. They’ve...got their own shit to sort out. They wouldn’t take kindly to American heroes stepping into their business.” she perked up again after beat of silence, “You could try the Caribbean, though. Make sure to bring Karkat when you do.”

“So, by elimination, that means the Amporas and Peixes are there.” Rose frowned, shifting into a more comfortable position to think.

“Correct.”

The pictures that had been up on the television screen disappeared as Jarvis began flipping through channels, settling on a local news station in Puerto Rico.

“What the FUCK does Eridan think he’s doing?” You turn your head to see Karkat, carrying a sleeping Dave, standing there with his face twisted up into a snarl, “How long would it take us to get there? Shit. His dancestor is there to.”

“A few hours by plane. Maybe less if we take the jet.” Tony replied before asking, “What are they going to do?”

“Slaughter everyone there if we don’t haul our asses over and I somehow distract them long enough in the meantime. Fuck, this is bad...Hi Aradia.”

“Hi Karkat. Glad to see you’re not dead...of course that would propel a doomed timeline, if you were.”

“Of fucking course it would.”

“Oh. Shit. Yeah that’s bad. C’mon, we should get going now actually. That would be for the best.” You roll your eyes at his rambling as you all suit up and prepare the Quinjet. Dave had his own spot with Rose watching over him.

⇒ Be Karkat: Troll That Whiny Dramatic Bitch
--carcinoGeneticist [CG] began trolling caligulasAquarium [CA]--

CG: ERIDAN!

CG: HOW MANY TIMES DO I HAVE TO FUCKING TELL YOU?!

CG: AND PASS THIS ALONG TO YOUR GODDAMN CRETINOUS SHITMOUTH OF A DANCESTOR I AM NOT GOING TO SAY THIS TWICE.

CG: QUIT TRYING TO KILL THE LAND DWELLERS YOU VOMIT INDUCING SHIT-TRAIN!! WE ALREADY HAVE SHIT TO DO WITHOUT YOU MAKING EVERYTHING INTO A FUCKING DRAMATIC SHITSHOW!

CG: REIGN YOUR DANCESTOR IN UNTIL I GET THERE AND THEN MAYBE, MAYBE I'LL BE GRACIOUS ENOUGH TO KICK HIM IN HIS SHAMEGLOBES MORE THAN YOU!

CA: oh.

CA: okay Kar

CA: might be hard to do though

CG: AND WHY THE FUCK IS THAT?

CA: he’s kind of

CA: tryin’ to black flirt wwith me

CG: OH GOG DAMMIT.

CG: YOU WOULD THINK THAT OUR DANCESTORS HAD A BIT OF SENSE AFTER ALL THE ROMANTIC DRAMA THEY APPARENTLY WENT THROUGH.

CG BUT NO...THEY JUST...

CG: MAKE SURE CRONUS DOESN’T GO AROUND KILLING PEOPLE OR DAMAGING PROPERTY, GOT IT?

CG: I’M ABOUT AN HOUR AWAY.

CG: YOU *CAN* LAST THAT LONG, RIGHT?

CA: yes of course i can

CG: GOOD. NOW. IS FEFERI WITH YOU?

CA: no

CA: wwell yes but she’s not on land

CA: she hasn’t been feeling wwell
CA: says evverythin’ itches an her dancestor bein’ in her head ain’t helpin’

CG: SHIT.

--carninoGeneticist [CG] is now an idle chum.--

--caligulasAquarium [CA] is now an idle chum.--

CA: i got cronus to hold back
CA: i think i’m gonna puke
CA: nevver again, kar. nevver evver again
CA: how far are you now?
CG: I'M HERE, SHITSTAIN.
CG: LOOK UP.

--carninoGeneticist [CG] ceased trolling caligulasAquarium [CA]--

Chapter End Notes

I know the second half of this chapter is pretty rushed.
All of the essential parts are there though, so I'll probably go back to it at some point and
fluff up that pillow cause seriously I wrote it and I think it's pretty flat. :/
Not much I can think of to do right now though to make it any better, sadly.

Off Screen: Kankri gets to the tower, Jarvis lets him up to the communal floor, sees that
no one's there and Jarvis has to explain that they've all gone to some island to pick up
three, possibly four trolls and make sure they don't kill anyone.

Kankri just sighs and goes about getting a shower (taking clothes from a spare guest
room) and maybe something to eat.
Your quest slab was not even a mile away from the shore of the island that Eridan and his dancestor had swam off to. You’d tried to convince them to stay, to not harm anyone, but their memories were twisting and tangling their personality up. You didn’t really blame them for their actions this time, even if you wanted to slap some sense into them.

You weren’t all right in your own head nor in any condition to do much of anything right now.

The itch beneath and along your skin was a constant buzz, arching along your scalp, the inside of your horns, around your eyes and nose and mouth, everywhere. There were splotches of fuchsia along your arms where you’ve scratched so much it was starting to leave marks.

Neither you nor Meenah wanted you to ascend yet. You didn’t want that killing urge (you’d likely die in the fight anyway), and Meenah wanted to at least try to sort through some of her memories. There were so many of them between her pre and post scratch selves though, so many different ones. It was taking her longer on the account of both her selves having an equal amount of influence on her.

“Guppy. Am I hallucinating or do I sea Nubs?” Meenah’s voice drifted through your mind as you shifted around (wringing your hands to keep them from scratching). You squinted, seeing brown and red, small horns poking out of a mess of black hair. If that didn’t clue you in (with the blood aspect symbol occasionally visible as he swam), his partially finned ears were unmistakable.
“No, that’s him haulright.” You shut your mouth again as the itch tended to get to your throat whenever you tried to talk.

As he got closer, you could see why Eridan was there.

Oh cod, Karkat couldn’t handle saltwater, could he? How was he holding up this long?

“Trout of sheer spite, probubbly.” Meenah grumbled, her focus divided between Karkat now and her post scratch self’s...interaction with Kankri. From what you could tell, she was holding onto the former with an iron grip and you really couldn’t blame her. You wouldn’t want to hate him platonically either.

“Feferi!” Karkat’s grin as he touched down on the shelf your slab was located on dropped with a shudder, the gills on his neck showing a little as the neck of his outfit was weighed down by water.

“Crabcatch.” Please let him be okay, “You shoaldn’t be down here.”

“Fuck that. I can’t just let you ascend and get into some kind of death duel with Meenah! If you didn’t end up tearing apart literal islands I-” Another shudder and the concern you and Meenah both had for the troll doubled, “Do you need me to, ya know, kill you or something? Oh gog that - That sounded - Shit. You know what I mean.”

Your own memories rebelled against the idea of having him go through that.

Meenah was oddly silent even though you could practically feel her frown as if it were your own.

“I can do it Crabcatch. I just was concherned about the krilling instinct to.” You thumbed through your sylladex where you’d stored your trident and decaptchalogued it, “Get to the surface and breathe. Swim back only if you think you can handle it.”

There was no friendly teasing, no insults, no response while Eridan stayed unusually quiet. Maybe it was because of something Karkat had said to him before swimming down here?

Either way, “Eridan. Make shore he gets to the surface.” Your tone was now layered over with
Meenah’s adult voice as you gave the other saltwater seadweller a stern glare. If you had to pull rank just this once, to help a friend, you (both) would.

Karkat's eyes went wide as he struggled against Eridan’s sudden grip on his sweater, “Come on Kar. We’re not goin’ far. Just enough to get out of the wway of the ascension.”

“Please Crabcatch.” Karkat glared at you as he was tugged away, “I’ll be fine.”

And you would be fine. Both of you, that is. But Karkat was hurting himself just by breathing in this water and that was very, very bad.

“NO! FUCK YOU! LET GO OF ME I’M FINE!”

You take a deep breath, reminding yourself that this isn’t the first time you’ve done this, reminding yourself that you’ll wake up.

You press your feet as flat against the slap as you could, just to make sure.

One you knew (hoped) that hey were far enough, you drove the trident through your body.

That...that was a lot of fuschia…

The ascension light, bearing the Life symbol, would be seen for miles around.

⇒ Dave: Dream

All of the colors around you were intense or some pastel shade. The light was harsh on your eyes and feathers but you steadfastly ignored it. You were trying to keep up with a jet, after all, and though you were, surprisingly, doing a good job of that. You moved underneath the jet, and felt immediate relief to be in it's shadow instead of the harshness of the sun.
As the jet slowed when it reached it's destination and maneuvered to find a space to land, you rolled away and flitted through the shadows of buildings on the island beneath it instead to keep up.

The aircraft landed, you found a place to perch and rest your wings in the shade. The people inside weren’t out yet so you busied yourself with checking your wings over for damage.

“OH MY FUCKING GOD, LALONDE!” The sound of a familiar shout startled you enough to stop and see what was going on. Sadly, you couldn’t quite hear the voice as it lowered in volume, at least not until the owner stepped out of the jet and you flew over to rest in his hair, between his horns.

“Ah! Get off me!” He yelped as he tried to swat you and shake his head to get you to fly away.

Fat chance of that happening.

“That’s a crow.”

“Tell me something I don’t know, Rose. We saw plenty in the Dream Bubbles. What’s your point?”

“It’s white, has red eyes...” Rose mused, you think, mostly to herself as she stepped within Karkat’s personal space to see you better, raising a hand slowly out to you. Pfft. You weren’t some common bird. You wouldn’t fly away.

Fingers traced over the nearly healed scar at the base of your wing, and then the area where there used to be a hole with missing feathers. She was gentle enough that the touch tickled and had you squirming as much as you could without accidentally hurting Karkat. Though you didn’t know if your talons could pierce his thick skin (and you never wanted to find out), you didn’t even want to tug on his hair too hard. Hurting the troll in any way shape or form (even accidentally) was so far down on your to-do list it wasn’t even on it.

“This still isn’t telling me anything-”

“I think it’s Dave.”
What?

“But that’s impossible. We literally saw him, fast asleep like a goddamn wriggler, not even two minutes ago in the jet.” Thank you Karkat, but, here’s a thought.

How the fuck?

Back up. Hold the phone. Let’s try this again, shall we?

What the FUCK was going on?!

Ow, ow. Okay. You were not expected the feeling of being launched by a catapult back into your own body with a thud resounding inside your skull.

Even as you wake up, wrapped up and comfortably safe inside the jet, feeling better than you had all morning, you still couldn’t quite shake the weird double vision going on with your eyes.

⇒ Be The Fuming Mutant Blood

You could breathe again. It didn’t hurt to breathe and you didn’t feel like your insides were draining out from little straws in your neck and mouth and oh that mental picture was disturbing. You’ll just stop right there, thanks.

You could breathe but you hated it. You couldn’t even help your fucking friend because doing so would put you in danger of dying and oh, look at that, your timeline would apparently be doomed to the furthest ring and back if that happened.

Why of all trolls- no, why of all creatures in existence were you the one that was so important that in every timeline you died, everyone else did to? Why was it that even though Feferi was alive again you were so genetically fucked up that you couldn’t even stay by her side as she skewered herself?

You pull in deep breaths, counting the seconds and as soon as the light faded you dove right back down.
“Kar wwait!” You ignored him because no you could not wait around like a cowardly imbecilic piece of hoofbeast shit. If you don’t get there in negative five seconds, it didn’t matter the kind of self control those two tyrians had, they’d be chasing each other across the globe (Meenah probably doing the chasing) faster than you could ever hope to swim.

The sight you were greeted with was...not what you were expecting. The tension between them was thick, yes, and yes, it did look like they were strifing, but if you were being honest with yourself?

It looked like a dance.

Yes they were going for each others gills but both were skilled enough to protect themselves. Meenah didn’t seem to have those stolen powers anymore either, so that was a point in Feferi’s favor.

How could you possibly hope to match them enough, both of them, to get them to stop? How were you supposed to get their instincts to calm its metaphorical tits? There has never been two tyrians in close proximity without one of them dying before. How were you going to do what even the Horror Terrors and Paradox Space couldn’t, or wouldn’t, do?

You were so royally fucked.

⇒ Be Roxy

You weren’t calm.

Part of you wondered if you could ever be calm again.

The rage pulsed beneath your skin like a living thing, twisting your insides and strangling your lungs. Your pulse was a racehorse and the air around you felt cold even though this was California and it wasn't even noon.

Everything was too bright but you didn’t care an ounce because even after an hour (and change, probably, you weren’t exactly keeping track) you hadn’t found a trace of where Jade could be.
Your friends were back at the island where you’d voided them to with the tied up ambushers, maybe waiting for you restlessly to come back, maybe occupying themselves just fine.

You were tired, exhausted, more like. Using your powers this much had your head swimming and you think you should head back now but you didn’t want to mess it up. You didn’t want to just give up either.

You weren’t too sure why you were trying so hard in the first place, now.

There was a pink tint to your vision and you felt simultaneously too large and too small for your body. You were probably sweating, okay you definitely were, and yeah you were just a touch lightheaded.

A little voice in your head that sounded like Dirk was tell you to get your ass back home already and drink some fucking water like seriously no need whatsoever to pass out from dehydration that shit is not something anyone wants to mess with. You give that voice two doses of the mental middle finger and prepare to void home anyway.

The moment your feet touched the soft, slightly damp soil (had it rained while you were gone?) your legs decided that they didn't want to keep holding you upright anymore.

“Roxy!” Footsteps drummed in your ears and not a moment later you saw god tier shoes that you think were supposed to be green, “C’mon Ro-lal.” His voice was a whisper now, spilling reassurances as he lifted you up, letting you lean on him as much as you needed to.

“Jane! How much drinkable water do we have?!?” He called as you walked toward where a campsite had been made up, complete with lean-to shelters that Jake likely made and the smell of cooking food which you attributed to Jane. You don't acknowledge the tied up, unconscious bastards at the edge of the campsite, all eight tied around a tree. That once guy who lost his arm you think was patched up by Jane but you don't know, nor have the energy to care, about the one who you put a bullet into.

“A couple gallons between us, not including whatever John might- Oh my God!” Jane was scrambling now for one of the jugs of water that you could now see, pouring some into a cup and handing it to Dirk. He sat you down on a chair (you didn’t know who had one in their sylladex) and held it steady for you while you drank.
“Roxy?” John looked like shit, but at least he was awake and moving again, “You’re glowing.”

You managed a tired grin (the rage had faded, then, that was good), the pink tinge making his blue get up look like lavender and his shoes some shade of peach, “Yeah I know I look awesome, right?”

John shook his head while keeping his gaze on you, “No. You’re literally glowing. Um...I think I have a piece of glass or a mirror somewhere.” He paused to look through his sylladex before carefully taking out a piece of sharp glass. Holding it as careful as he could so he didn’t cut himself, he held it up to your face.

You really were glowing. Your eyes glowed, your freckles did too (bright pink like your eyes), and damn in this shaded area you looked fucking badass. Your grin grew a little wider, a little sharper.

“Hell yes.” John gave a little giggle snort that was so fucking adorable you thought you could just kiss him right there, “Johnny, I look badass.”

“You’re a badass whether you glow or not, Rox.” Dirk rolled his eyes but was smiling anyway.

You let out a laugh and after a few minutes of resting and water the tinge was gone from your eyes. You think your glow had faded, but you don’t mind.

When John’s feeling better you’ll pull out some sick interrogation skills on the idiots, or give’em over to the superheroes to sink their claws into. For now though, you’re content to pull John by the sleeve down to sit next to and cuddle, eat whatever delicious thing Jane had made, and just forget your worries (for Jade, for anyone else those guys might’ve gotten) for a while.

Chapter End Notes

Edited Spelling and Grammar

Off Screen:

The Nitrams and Maryams (Kanaya curled up tight around the matriorb) have taken shelter in an abandoned building. The people outside didn’t seem very welcoming of them, when they'd arrived, but at least no one outright attacked them. Yet. The main problem the four of them faced was not being able to understand the humans.
"You said you knew a human language, right Kanaya?" Kanaya nodded her head, giving a short hum in confirmation.

"And it's not what the people outside are speaking?" A shake of the head was the response Porrim got, "This is...equal parts fascinating and terrifying."

"I haven't been able to get onto Pesterchum. The connection to this "wifi" is nonexistent and all possible connections it gave were password protected." Kanaya murmured, hugging the orb even tighter, if that was possible. Porrim, after sharing head space with the other jade blood, could tell she was missing her matesprit terribly.

"Well we can't just sit around in here all day when we know the human's sun won't hurt us." Rufioh commented as he paced around the darkened room.

No one had anything to say to that. They didn't want to risk the orb's safety but were quickly running out of options.

None of the options remaining looked good.
Chapter 8

Chapter Summary

==> Karkat: Do the Bloody Thing already

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

⇒ Karkat

You have to make a decision sooner (infinitely sooner) rather than later. Not making a decision in the timeframe of the next three minutes (maybe shorter, you didn’t know how long exactly you could survive in this saltwater and was not planning on finding out) would mean either your death (Just or Heroic or Neither?) or something equally as bad, given the situation.

Which lead him back to the problem of how to get the two tyrians to stop when they didn’t want to fight (you think) but their instincts were telling them to do so anyway.

How in the world were you supposed to stand up against an 8 foot tall (somewhere around there, maybe a bit shorter, you couldn’t tell) fuchsia blooded Thief of Fucking Life?

Fuck.

You could hear their blood pushers (strong, loud, different than his own, different from the humans and land dwellers), see the red tinge to your sight creep up on you, feel the emotions around the two of them like a smell.

Reluctance (they didn’t want this).

Mutual respect (for their skill, for holding back, for fighting the instinct).

Desperation (like when you had to hide in your hive whenever pirates and other conscription dodgers decided your neighborhood was a good place to terrorize).
You made a snap decision. A stupid one, really, but you didn’t see any other options. None that would work anyway.

Even this was a stretch, though.

Dave would kill you if he ever finds out what exactly you were planning to do.

You swam forward in a moment where the two paused, wings rippling from your back and were laid outstretch on either side of you. You knew Feferi wouldn’t (thought she wouldn’t, one timeline you’d mediated an ashen relationship between her and Eridan, hoped she wouldn’t) hurt you. You were less certain (zero percent, Meenah had been might still be the Condense, looked like the Condense) about the (former?) Empress. There weren’t exactly a lot of trolls to be the Empress of.

Please let her have enough of her Beforan self who you think at least tolerated your presence to not just cull you right here.

Both of them had their claws on your wings and you couldn’t suppress the shudder that swept through you, both because of that and because of the water.

You couldn’t give them the room, the time, to speak, so you did what you did best and ran your mouth.

“Look I know you’ve got this little voice in your head telling you to wipe the other out of existence. I get that it’s hard to fight it.” It would be hard, still is hard, for you to get over some of the habits you’ve lived with your whole life, “I also get that NOT listening to this voice may or may not fuck you up. Mentally, physically, who the fuck knows? With that in mind, here’s what we’re going to do.”

“ You get to do your duel thing and posturing and shit, maybe just full out fight for dominance. Make it some tyrian hierarchy thing or however you two decide to do this shit. I’m not going to be dictating every single little thing about this like this is one of Dave’s micromanaging boredom games on his phone. ” Your voice echoed and warbled as you spoke. It was like you were a one man choir, voice carrying a piece of your Beforan self that you hadn’t had the time to acknowledge, much less think about in depth. Not that you were thinking clearly right now. You could barely hear your own voice over the symphony of one, then two, then three, then dozens and hundreds of other blood pushers (a handful of troll ones, the majority were human).
Eridan’s was behind you. Feferi’s was to your left, Meenah’s was at your right.

You could feel a pulsing in your body, spreading out into your wings, leaving and then bouncing back inward. With each pulse you drew your wings a little closer to you, drew the two tyrians closer to you, to each other. Your breathing, even with the sensation of deflating and vital things being pulled out of you from a straw, evened out and synced with theirs.

Only once you three were nearly touching forehead to forehead, horns locked with yours in between theirs, Meenah being so much taller that you think she sat down at some point, did you speak again.

"But it will ONLY be that. NO KILLING EACH OTHER OR MAIMING EACH OTHER BAD ENOUGH THAT NOT EVEN A LIFE PLAYER CAN FIX. Once one of you yields or however you, or we, decide the rules of this dueling shit, that will be that and you can both get on with your lives and maybe be able to tolerate each other's continued existence. Do I make myself clear?"

You clenched and unclenched your hands in a need to rest them on something (like a huge weapon you could just stick in the ground a little). Your wings twitch as the two highblood’s claws were no longer pressing dangerously on your wings, which you had feared would tear like paper should they so much as twitch.

"Wow, shouty. How the shell did you do that? Blood powers or somefin?"

“I don’t fucking know, Meenah.”

“Maybe this came trout of one of his books.” Feferi giggled.

“Feferi I swear to god.”

“You mean us, right Crabcatch? Cause we’re all gods now?” You squirmed, “We shoald surface. I’ve been using my life powers to shellp you breathe.”
“Okay sure thing I do feel better now but sis can you tell me

How is all of this shit is supposed to go?
Do we play up our powers or keeping them down low?
Do we strut around saying we made your universe?
We died just to have the chance so don’t make this worse
On us for all the things we’ve done for this shot at life
After years of fearing, drifting, conscious of time passing by
We’ve all got our issues that we have overcome or
Still are overcoming because it’s not just once and then it’s over-”

“How holy shit this kid’s good.” You surfaced on the island, all four of you with Eridan being blissfully yet unusually silent, to witness one of Dave’s raps. How he was comfortable with revealing this (unless he’s claiming irony to hide behind) heavy shit you may or may not find out later. It depends on whether or not he was willing to talk about it. The Avengers, Phil, Cronus (eugh, you never did like him), and some of the island’s inhabitants were watching and you think it was that Tony Stark person who made the comment.

“To become as we are we all had to die
Over and over for some but for others once or twice
But once is more than enough when you’re floating out in space
Watching a countdown unable to stop the destruction of your race
Here lies your quest bed your death bed the place where you finally close your eyes
Shed your mortal skin in fire, blood, or pain and gain immortality as the long awaited prize
But there’s conditions for your end should you ever choose to go
And there’s no guarantee that you’ll ever again physically grow.
You’ve got to take the plunge to survive this bloody dead end game
Doomed timelines filled to overflowing with all of your mistakes
Light the forge, defeat the king, create the frog and thanks for playing
Could’ve done without the nightmares, could’ve done without the losses along the way
But that’s just what we get when we scratched and cheated to see our happy ending
Can’t complain when they revive can’t complain about what your words can’t convey.”

As you get closer you can tell that this was either a part of some sort of party (given all the food around) or the people here just don’t want you guys to be mad and please leave as soon as possible, thanks. You think it might be closer to the second one but what the fuck did you know? You spent a sweep and a half with a grand total of two humans who had left (to say the least) everything they knew behind. You didn’t know shit about other humans and what standards and customs there were outside of “the continental united states”.

“Karkat! You got the royals...Fuck what happened to you man? You look like something the cat dragged through a blender.” Dave had stopped what he’d been doing, dropped it entirely in fact, to bound over to your side. His wings fluttered with some emotion you couldn’t place yet but at least now that he was close you could see that the hole in his wing was closed up.

You bet if you looked underneath the bandages around his shoulder that there’d only be a scar left.

That stupid bird had flown away almost as soon as Rose had commented how she thought it was Dave and now you wanted it back here to prove whether or not it, in fact, had been.

Or you could ask Dave himself but even though you remembered every dream you’ve had since wrigglerhood (and in fact, quite a lot of non-dream related things since then), that didn’t mean Dave would.

“I thought you were sick, you ass.” You frowned, avoiding his question.

“Tch. I’m fine now Kitkat. My nose is still fucked to hades’s fields of punishment and back but I don’t feel like I’m just gonna fall over and- hey. Don’t dodge the question dude,” You could tell he was glaring at you behind his shades, “Feferi right? What happened to make him look like a drenched cat that lost a fight?”

Feferi let out a little “bloop” sound as Meenah inched away to, well, somewhere else you suppose, “What happened is he’s a freshwater catfish,” You glared at her but she ignored it, “that dived fins first into saltwater.”

“That’s bad, isn’t it?”
“I had to use my lifey thing to let him breathe.” Wow. No puns in that sentence?

“Kaarkaat. Whaat the fuuck dude? You coulda died on me?”

And now you felt like shit. Wait, no, worse than shit. You felt like the kind of shit that isn’t even allowed to be useful for whatever the fuck and is just incinerated instead.

“I DON’T GLUBBIN’ PITY YOU AND NO, I DON’T GLUBBIN’ HATE YOU EITHER!” Well shit. Eridan was being hit on again.

You wonder, briefly, what he’d had to do to get Cronus to not just up and kill, threaten, maim, or blackflirt with the humans.

“WWHAT PART OF NO DON’T YOU GLUBBIN’ UNDERSTAND?!?”

On second thought, maybe you didn’t want to know.

“-acts kinda like you used to.”

“Shut the fuck up Clint I had standards and at least took ‘no’ for what it fucking was. Why are we bringing him back with us again?”

Dave was snapping his fingers in front of you, jolting you out of whatever daze you had found yourself in.

“You’re not going to do that again, right?” He asks once he has your attention and you just wilt. You shake your head like a scolded bark beast.

“No. I actually didn’t know I couldn’t breathe saltwater. I’d only breathed freshwater before, apparently, and, well, you know what my schoolfeeding was like. I didn’t know there was a difference until I started reading novels with seadwellers in them.”

“And yet Alternia is dead.”
You huffed, “For the twelfth time, yes. Alternia is dead. You can’t go that far back in time while crossing universes to, and I quote, “slap a bitch”. You’d have to slap a lot of them and then you would die because they would kill you, thus dooming that timeline if you ever did manage to do that.”

Dave hummed, stretching his wings out wide while you took the moment of silence to observe your surroundings. Meenah (you refused to think of her as the Condense since her Beforan self seemed to have a positive effect on her), was talking to Rose now while the Seer was tinkering with her phone again. Probably trying to see if Kanaya was on.

You didn’t blame her. You’d do the same thing.

The other humans, besides the avenger hero people and Phil, were a mix of things. Some were curious, some of the crowd had dispersed (maybe gone back to their hives...homes), others were still around offering food or packing up and taking said food with them.

One of the curious ones was a wriggler (a girl), who ran up to the two of you on tiny feet (was not having shoes a thing here or was it just this kid?).

How old even was she? Two sweeps? Three?

“Hey kiddo.” Holy fuck was that gentleness in your matefriend’s tone, “You ‘ere for the wings or the horns?”

“¿Habla usted Español o Inglés?”

“Ambos.” Dave responded without hesitation, “¿Quieres un aventon?”

“Tu estás diminuto.” The little girl giggled, pointing to you as she added, “El luce mas fuerte.”

“Dave. Dave. What’s she saying?” You haven’t heard enough of this language (How many did humans even have?) for the Gift of Gab to kick in yet.
Dave had this half amused half offended look on his face as he replied, “I just asked if she wanted me to pick her up ‘n’ hold ‘er but she thinks I look small-”

“You are small.” You interjected, chuckling at the exasperated sound that he made at that.

“-and that you looked stronger.”

“So she wants me to hold her? How the fuck do you even hold a human wriggler, Dave?”

Dave just rolled his eyes and spoke to the wriggler some more and eventually you had lifted her up to where she was clinging to your side. It was a bit awkward but she tried not to touch your wings (fuck, they were still out, fuck, everyone could see them, no turning back now, shit) and was rambling on about something with Dave when who you assumed to be her lusus-ancestor walked over to you.

The child, noticing her, started saying something (about wings and you thought you heard the word pretty in there) before her lusus cut her off with a sharp retort that had the wriggler clicking her mouth shut.

“Ma’am?” Dave spoke this time in English.

The lady practically snarled something at him and now the wriggler was squirming in your arms so you set her down. Before you knew what was happening they were both walking away with the child complaining (you guessed by her tone) the whole way until they were both out of sight and earshot.

“What was that about?” Dave’s whole posture had slumped, his expression downcast like someone stole his midnight (high noon) meal money.

“Her mother didn’t like us.” Was the only explanation he gave.

Chapter End Notes

Spanish was generated with google translate. I know it's at least somewhat accurate due to my limited knowledge (bare bones basics yet unable to string a sentence together
myself XD) of the language. If it can be improved, please feel free to comment with your suggestions because really I've only taken two classes of it in high school and conjugating verbs were my biggest enemy you don' even know.

On another note...
Karkat, you do realize you just did the impossible, right?

The tyrions instinct leading them to kill each other is an Alternian thing. You can thank (or curse) Doc Scratch for that.
=> Be the Employee

You were immediately greeted by a man dressed similar to yourself (dressed to impress, a suit that was, in your case, tailored for women), with one exception. The whole thing was white with silver (metal?) boots, those gloves you’ve seen in hospitals, and a rather weird look on his face. It was like he was going to cosplay as some surgeon but switched to wealthy businessman halfway through.

Around you, everything else was similarly white and silver. The doors (heavy looking, polished, also metal?), the floor (tile so clean you could clearly see your reflection), the walls, the ceiling.

All in all it was extremely unsettling.

This man was extremely unsettling.

There was that chemical smell that always drove you up the wall as a kid. Hell, it make you want to do that now.

What the fuck was this place?

“Oh! You must be the transfer employee that we’ve been promised.”
“Transfer? I think you have the wrong person, sir. I’m just a front desk.”

“Nonsense. You wouldn’t have been able to see the door, if you were “just” anything.”

Okay, creep meter just raised. Also, what did he mean by….door?

You turned around to where you were sure there’d been a door but was met with only bare wall.

“What kind of shit are you trying to pull here?” Your tone came out even even though every part of you was screaming alarm bells, “Where’s the fucking door? It was right there.” Ah, there was the rising pitch of onset panic. Hello old friend who wasn’t there to stop you from entering this twisted nightmare in the first place.

“The door has left to find other people to be our new co-workers. Or, perhaps, has gone back to it’s original location. I could never tell these things. My expertise is in, hm, genetics, rather than breaking all of the known laws of physics.”

“I’m not supposed to be here.” Yep, you were definitely panicking now, not daring to take your eyes off this stranger who looked like he could kill you with a smile.

“And I just said that you are, or else you would not be here.” The man’s face contorted like he was done with a child’s endless questioning and motioned you to follow him. Neither of you moved for a good half minute but ultimately you took the initial step needed to start both of you on this path leading to who even knew where.

You passed silent rooms with doors that looked like they should belong on jail cells. You almost passed rooms with twin coal black hands and yellow claw-like nails you briefly saw, along with whimpering and some kind of hissing that you chose to ignore as soon as you heard it. There was a guard standing outside this door where others, even with sound from inside indicating there was someone or some creature in there, did not.

“You primary task will be to look after three mutants. Two of them are through that door but will soon be moved to a larger room in order to fit the third.”
He gets closer so you could see the keypad code to open the door, punching in an assortment of numbers you don’t understand, and when the door slid open (it had a little window with metal bars and somehow it worked like this you didn’t understand that either), he moved, pushing you inside and closing the door.


The guy, now on the other side peered in through the slots and had this grin that made you shiver.

“I’ll just leave you to get acquainted with these two. See you in...oh, six hours? Who knows. One can never really keep track of time in here.”

You lay there on the ground for a while, not daring to move or speak as a black (dark black, night black, dark smoke grey pads on the inside those that dogs, cats and other related animals have but with a more human shape to it), hand with yellow (candy corn, actually) colored claw-nails rested by your head. Right in front of your face.

You stopped breathing for as long as you could manage to hold it.

There was a chittering buzz right behind you, above you at first before lowering til it seemed right up close to your ear. The arm was lifted some, ghosting over your head, then the arm you landed on (the part that was visible).

The thought hit you like a hammer. She (you think) was checking you for injuries. The whimpering you’d heard earlier was gone, though you didn’t know if you’d be able to hear it over the insect-mammalian mixed sounds that your ears were drowning in.

Did she understand English? Did any of the three that you were apparently now playing zookeeper for? Ugh, that word now left a bitter taste in your mouth. They were sapient, right? That should make them as much human, as much of a person as you were.

Even if some people thought you weren’t just because you flat out didn’t care what pronouns you responded to or what clothes you wear despite being female in body. They were just words. They were just clothes. You knew you were female so why should you care what the rest of the world thought of you if you rejected stereotypes or accept male pronouns if, in someone else’s culture, you would be taking on the role of one?
The mutant lady at your back shifted around, chirping and crooning and buzzing all the while, before threading fingers in your hair like your mother used to when you were a small child.

You allowed yourself to breathe again, once you realized she didn’t see you as a threat and wouldn’t just kill you. Not going to be thinking further on that though. Nope.

You hated it when your mind wandered to those dark and or weird topics that you could only catch preemptively about half the time. Nothing you could really do about it though. It wasn’t like you had any that you gave serious thought to since most of the time if they got this far you’d shove them into a mental box for some future version of you to handle.

The second mutant you were aware of was now hunched down on forearms and knees in front of your face. She looked mostly human. There was the darkened brown skin tone, a nose that was a couple shades darker than the rest of her, thick black wavy messy hair and some black and white outfit you couldn’t really see. Bright green eyes bore into yours where you could only just process that she didn’t have human ears (most of her hair rested over one shoulder so you could see the lack and it struck the uncanny valley part of your brain like truck) but two furry white ones that poked out of the top of her head.

“Are you okay? I think, um, Me-aw-lean,” She rolled the name around with her face scrunched up as she tried to get it right, “Meulin, yeah. She says she doesn’t smell blood so you’re not bleeding but you did hit your head.”

She had little fangs, canines that matched the ears on her head and the darker color to her nose.

And she spoke English.

Hallelujah!

“Thank god one of you speaks English,” You start off by saying, “And I, um…” Come on, say something, “I’m sorry you’re stuck in here.”

Jade sits back on her toes and knees and lets out this chilling bout of laughter, “I’ve been stuck in worse places.” Coming down from the fit she adds, “My name is Jade, by the way.”

“Carmine. It’s nice to meet you both” You shift til you laid fully on your stomach with your chin
resting on the back of your hands, “Now how about we figure ourselves a way out of here?”

⇒ Be Dirk

Right now you didn’t want to be Dirk. Dirk didn’t even want to be Dirk, but here you were, looking through his eyes and rummaging through his thinkpan like it’s a dumpster and this could be the last chance you have at a meal before the apocalypse really sets in.

Well. The Dirk’s Mind apocalypse as all of the chibi Dirks who ran the place were running around screaming as a chibi Bro was setting things on fire. Really, you weren’t in the best of shapes right now. You, Roxy, Jane, Jake, and John voided over to the Avengers tower with the now conscious attackers in tow. Thor (the large guy with blond hair), once he knew what the situation behind this seemed all too eager to take them off your hands. Clint and Natasha (the two people wearing all black) following him to help with the whole interrogation thing.

You could see how John relaxed more once they were out of sight.

The reason why your mind was on metaphorical fire?

The moment you shuffled out of the elevator (you’d ended up on that large platform hanging off the building like what the fuck who designs a building like that?) you came face to face with Dave.

Last you saw him, last you remembered, it was the night before his fifth birthday (it had only been a couple days ago, you both were sixteen, he was fighting by your side). You’d been all prepared with presents and had been tucking him into bed for the night so you could wrap a last minute one you were hoping he’d like (you were standing on the lily pad with him, john had been reaching out to open the door).

Distant sounds reached you as you snapped (like a stretched rubber band) back to the present.

You saw Dave’s new wings (An orange dave fighting beside you, god no stop it you’ll be killed), and face (no glasses, oh yeah, the lights are dimmed), worry in his and your family’s (you only had dave you couldn’t leave him not to that possessed puppet) eyes.

“Dirk!”
“Di-stri? You good, hon?” That was Roxy. You didn’t know exactly who else had said your name.

“’M good.” You croaked, “Lett’n’ m’self emote. You’re always ragg’n’ on m’ about ‘t. Heh, Ro-lal, what’re those tears for? Said ‘m f’ne, yeah?” Ugh, your voice was on a roller coaster as you pushed your way through speaking the words. Speaking had always been a hard thing for you, just as it was with Roxy along with basic expressions and emoting like shit you both had gotten the short stick there. You had a tendency to drop ‘ih’ and ‘ee’ sounds or turn ‘ee’s into ‘eh’s. Heh, that may as well be your quirk, if you wanted.

The reason why you hadn’t was because you’d always thought it would make you sound stupid, if you were to ever meet people other than Roxy.

And oh, meet people you had.

You just had to have yourself decapitated twice over in order to have the chance to do that.

“You just saw Davey and dropped to the floor like a fuckin’ bag of rocks.” Roxy deadpanned, giving you this flat stare that you both were too good at.

“Was ah spark’n’?” You immediately shot back, using the wall to support yourself as you stood back up, wiped at your eyes (noting that Jake had your shades- Hal, again) and overall pull yourself together.

Roxy shook her head in a “sort of” gesture, “Your eyes, a little, but really you were just crying and silent and not responding to anything we did. You were like a doll or something.” Or a puppet with it's strings cut, your mind supplied unhelpfully.

“Well, ‘t’s over now. No ne’d to worreh.”

Roxy and Jane pull you over to the couch, shoving you down to sit next to Dave. You think they’d done the same to him but he didn’t look bothered. In fact, you hazard a guess that he looked nervous. If the fidgeting hands and bouncing leg were anything to go by.

He also wasn’t looking at you.
“What did you see?” He asks finally once the rest of your crew, John, and pretty much everyone else clear out. The only one who stayed with you two was Karkat and you really didn’t blame the guy. Not one bit, when he must know at least something of how your alternate self treated his boyfriend. Fuck. All the points go to him, you approve so much.

“You, mostl’. As a ch’ld.” You press on when there wasn’t a response, trying to actually pronounce your i’s for once, “You were four. The...next day was your birthday. I...don’t remember anything after that very clearly.”

“You don’t?” God, Dave’s voice resembled his four year old self so much just then. You shake your head violently, messing up your hair but not really caring.

You let your head fall into your hands, “Everything after that night is...weird. Like there’s a second voice in my head telling me what to do all the fuckin’ time.” You couldn’t stop the word vomit now, “Shit. I tried everything, before that point. Everything to get rid of that voice and that fuckin’ ass puppet. I tried throwing it away when you were one but it just showed up the next day. I tried selling it, let it be somebody else’s problem. I sliced it in half, in pieces, but it showed up whole afterward. I tried burning it. I had us move, when you were about two, to the apartment in Houston,” You saw the memories flicker in and out of form around you as you remembered but you stubbornly held on to reality by clawing at the furniture, “By the time you were three I was just trying to keep the thing away from you. I hated it, putting you in preschool. Wanted to teach you myself, but I didn’t see another way to get you away from it. You were four before I knew it and, god…” Your heart hurt, “It crossed my mind, to send you away completely. Away from me. Track down some relative, hire somebody and get the fuck out, something, anything because this shit was following my ass wherever I went. But it- it didn’t like that. I couldn’t move for days.”

“And somehow this all leads up to you shoving a sword into his tiny two and a fucking half sweep old hands, emote zero percent of the time, forcing him to fight and making him scared of not only you, but scared to be in his own fucking home. Somehow this possessed puppet changed you so much overnight?” Karkat growled, ears flaring and lip curling over sharp teeth, “I call hoofbeast shit.”

“You’re right.” You don’t feel better as the troll falls silent, even though he keeps up a skeptical glare, “It wasn’t overnight.” You hoped, silently pleading that one of them would get what you’re hinting at.

“That whole five years. It took that thing five years to crack your brain open.” Dave was hugging himself, knees pulled up and trying, you think, to sink into the couch, “It was talking to you that entire time, wasn’t it? That time when I was four, when you couldn’t move, that was just the worst it had been. Not the first. It happened whenever you tried to destroy it. Every time you tried. You were
You didn’t have anything to say to that.

You kind of wanted to scrub your Self, your soul, your mind, raw. You wanted to rid yourself of everything that this other you had done under those orders.

It took you several long moments before you spoke again, “It was still me, though. I could still think, I wasn’t blind to my own senses. I just, from then on, I was lead to believe that doing what it told me to do was a good idea.” You let out a snort, “At first I justified it by fooling myself into thinking that if I did what it said, you’d be let off easy. After a while it was just...fear. Fear that if I didn’t, it’d move on to you.”

You had been stuck between a rock and a cliff. It was allow yourself to be the puppet or allow that demon thing to hijack Dave.

There had been hundreds of moments, now being one of them, where you wonder if you made the right choice.
Chapter 10

Chapter Summary

==> Be Peter
==> Be Jade

⇒ Be Peter Parker

2:00 P.M.

Your watch blinked those numbers at you as the alarm you set into it (Mr. Stark had given it to you so of course it did more than simply tell the time) made the thing buzz once, twice, three times before settling down. The bell rang for fifth period not even a minute after that and you shot up like a bullet, grabbing your backpack and shoving classwork into it without care. You had the incredible fortune to have your last class be your lunch period, and so was able to take off a whole hour earlier than the majority of your school.

On one hand, this is perfect because then you could get to the Avengers Tower (where you were this paid intern as a PA for Mr. Stark, now, getting him coffee and making sure he actually ate once in awhile, Ms. Potts told you all of this on your first day a good few months ago) early. This was good because you could get there even faster if you somehow managed to change into your suit (costume, thing) and swing the majority of the way there. It was good because then your aunt didn’t have to worry so much about you when you can just text her that you’re at the tower because if that place isn’t fortified to hell and back you’d eat your socks.

You hightail it out of there, half skipping, half jogging down the street that would lead you to this little abandoned place (that hadn’t been torn down yet) where you could change.

On the other hand, getting out early meant not seeing his friends or Gwen as often. Well, mostly his friends. Gwen had an open invitation to the tower while his friends were getting there, maybe. It wasn’t so much a trust thing (you think) as it was making sure they wouldn’t freak out or do something otherwise stupid while they were there.

Gwen’s invitation had initially been because she was your girlfriend but since then grew to include her contributing to Mr. Stark and Mr. Banner’s conversations as much as you yourself could. At least, you think that was why. Half the things that Mr. Stark did you had no way to explain with
logic or reason.

The abandoned building was this little four story apartment that had closed down only a few years after it had been renovated from some office type of place. You were careful of who might see you but you think everyone was absorbed in their own world anyway. There was a window on the second floor that was broken in (it wasn’t like that yesterday afternoon) so you climbed the fire escape to check out the inside.

You froze as soon as your feet hit the floor with an low, echoing thud.

The air in here was stale, the smell you associated with sickness still present even after so long, blood was splattered (you thought there was a gold sheen to some of it), and large white feathers (no normal bird has feathers that large, no normal bird has feathers that large that were white and had maybe gold-red glowing like lava blood) scattered among it all.

You bit back a curse.

What were you supposed to do in a situation like this? Try to clean it up? This had to be a mutant of some kind so if someone who had a thing against them found this blood, found the feathers even, the mutant in question could be tracked.

If it hadn’t already happened.

You let out a shaky breath, pull out your phone, and dialled Ms. Pott’s number. You didn’t want to call Mr. Stark in case he was busy and it wasn’t like you had the other Avengers on speed dial. You, as a civilian that is, had no reason to.

Ms. Potts picked up after the first ring.

“Peter?”

“I-” Nope, you could not afford to lose your train of thought right now, “Did you- Did a mutant show up on the...the news yesterday? Like, last night?” You were out patrolling elsewhere and had been so tired or busy with homework and school after that you hadn’t had the chance to check the news, “I’m seeing a lot of, odd? Odd looking blood and these huge white feathers, Ms. Potts. I’m at this abandoned building I sometimes go to, to think, and...”
“Peter. Yes there was a mutant. Widow helped bring him to the tower so Banner could take a look at him...Peter?”

“So he...he’s okay then.” Your vision was swimming but you grit your teeth and shook your head to get it to clear. You weren’t sure whether it was because of the sight, the smell, the relief that just washed over you or a combination of the three.

“Oh Peter.” You could hear the gentle sympathy (if not empathy) in her tone that tugged at your heart and tear ducts, “Are you still coming to the tower today?”

“Yes. Um...Can someone come out here to...to clean this up? I’m getting the feathers but I don’t have anything for the blood.” Your stomach lurches even though you’ve seen blood plenty of times before, even though you’ve been shot in the leg, even though you were Spiderman.

You could shoot webs out of your wrist (strengthened and effectively hidden by the webshooters you made, strong enough to hold a school bus full of kids as you have found out through a very stressful situation), strength and flexibility you didn’t have before, a sense for danger on top of other senses you couldn’t quite name right now. You could stick to virtually any surface no matter if you should be able to or not because science (that one took a while for you to wrap your head around). You knew this wasn’t even the end of it, that your abilities were still growing (and that equally made you excited and terrified at the same time).

You were only sixteen. Who even knew where you would be next year or by graduation?

You were only sixteen and you’ve already been shot at too many times to count and somehow this still affected you.

Maybe because this was a mutant. You could, in a way, relate to them now after all. You hardly had a clue what that bite did to you and for all you know one (or all) of your abilities could be because of the radioactive bite messing with some dormant x-gene.

Another string of curses died before they could be spoken. Ms. Potts would probably allow it (given the situation) but your aunt definitely wouldn’t and you could practically hear her scolding you preemptively.

2:10 P.M.
The numbers on your watch seemed to mock you as he picked the last of the feathers up, careful not to touch the spots with blood on them at first but, as you went along, not really caring. There weren’t as many as you’d first thought and they all fit easily in one hand.

“Of course.”

“Thank you.”

By three o’clock you were at the tower, stepping into the common room with one hand holding a tray of Starbucks coffees (one for you, one for Mr. Stark, and two for whoever else was here because almost everyone, except Mr., Dr.? Mr. Banner drinks coffee in this tower) and the other holding a large gallon sized ziplock bag with the feathers inside it. You felt a bit self conscious. Maybe the chaos that you were immediately surrounded with helped. Maybe it was something in the atmosphere, but whatever it was, your mood lifted like clouds parting after it rained.

You didn’t see the winged mutant around (that was okay, though, he may still be recovering or something) but you did see people who had white-ish blonde hair (one was dyed with a pink streak) and just in general with not your everyday casual clothing. In other words, clothes that are either because they’re cosplaying for something you didn’t know about, or are superheroes that you didn’t know about.

Either one you’d readily believe.

“Hey Mr. Stark!” You call above the laughter and teasing over some game (two of the white-blonde haired people being the ones at the controllers). You walk over to the coffee table where, yep, there was Mariokart (you forget which one but you think it’s one of the recent ones), as Mr. Stark swiped his from the tray.

“Hey Pete. Pepper texted me about what, uh, oh…” Oh yeah, you still had the feathers in your other hand.

The background noise screeched to a halt (well, Mariokart was still playing it's music but now everyone was looking at you, and the feathers with the dried blood that still looked like lava).
“Where’d you get those?” The white-blonde (you really should prioritize learning their names) with the pink streak asked, her tone and overall body language setting off the beginnings of your spider sense.

You tried not to let your nervousness show (and fail, probably), “I found them. At this place I go to, to uh, think.” You hissed at yourself for your stammering but it was hard because now the one with the Sun styled outfit was giving you suspicious looks, “My name’s Peter.”

⇒ Be Jade

-- cardinalSentry [CS] began pestering villainousNocturne [VN] --

CS: okay
CS: can’t really talk right now
CS: im in a weird place, stuck, trapped, whatever
CS: wifi’s gone to shit but it does work sometimes
CS: been here for a while actually
CS: fffudge popsicles
CS: yeah those things i’d really like one
CS: hey do you think you could get one of your tech savvy friends to i dunno
CS: bust my ass out of here
CS: this dude kinda locked me in a room and left
CS: creep meter was shot dude he looked like he could be a part of one of those cult things where hey cool drink man thanks
CS: but nope, it's gonna kill you if you do
CS: but you’re trapped with other people who are in the same shitty situation as you so you stall for time because your life, and theirs literally depends on it
VN: Oh goddammit not this again.
VN: Wait. What kind of...just how shitty is this situation, exactly?
VN: Do I have to rescue you like some damsel in distress?
VN: I mean seriously, how many times has this been now?
VN: I’m not a goody two shoes birdy it’s in the fucking handle.
VN: God do you even know what time it even is?

VN: In the middle of the day that’s what.

VN: I’m supposed to be sleeping. You are literally the sole reason why my sleep schedule had gone to shit and back.

“Are you asking a real villain for help? Will they help?”

“No, Jade. No they aren’t a real villain. They just….don’t think of themselves as a good person.”

CS: shut up for a minute

CS: yes this is like the shittiest of shitty situations

CS: i’m hearing screaming down the hall and i dunno

CS: it’s been going on, off and on, for a while now

CS: the creeper guy said something about a magic moving door

CS: and that i wouldn’t have been able to see it if i wasn’t meant to like

CS: be here

CS: which is bull, i think

CS: but now i’m kind of questioning that

CS: for all i know this place could be perpetually moving through spacetime

CS: like the doctor’s tardis but spatially proportionate and several levels more sinister

VN: I get it, alright? You need me to play hero for you. Again.

VN: I’m going to need to get a hold of WG and SL, though.

VN: So you’ve got to hold out until then, at least.

VN: Look. If wifi’s so fucked up there maybe you can do something useful.

VN: Like conserving your fucking battery and hiding your phone if need be.

VN: I’m going to go.

VN: Get me if something worse happens or whatever. Or WG or SL, I guess. You know, our other roommates? They’re a thing that exists even with our fucked up sleep schedules.

CS: thanks dude, you’re the best

VN: The things I do for you. *sigh*
VN: Just don’t die on me and I’ll consider us even.

-- villainousNocturne [VN] ceased pestering cardinalSentry [CS] --

“But you think they’re a good person? That’s why you’re friends, right?”

“We’ve known each other, me, VN, WG, and SL, since middle school. We’re roommates now, actually, which I guess says something. But yeah, I think VN is a good person.”

“Hm.” You start sending out your own texts (taking your phone out of your sylladex which surprised Carmine) to Karkat and find yourself laughing so hard you couldn’t breathe in the middle of it.

“What? What’s going on?” Carmine asks as they turn off their phone and places it in the little space between their head and the floor.

“What are mew talking to?” Meulin adds as she checks the door every few minutes to see if, or when, someone other than their guard would come around. Well, that and hoping that Nepeta would be brought back soon.

“It’s nothing. Just talking to one of my...friends I guess. I can’t pinpoint where we are because this place is fucking with my spatial awareness so I’m just being cryptic and watching him squirm and rage at me that the universe...multiverse, isn’t fair and nothing is ever easy.” You explain while typing, your thumbs a blur and your eyes not leaving the screen, “He types in all caps and i’m here just...having a field day with this oh my god I haven’t laughed this hard in years.”

Silence met your words and you pause to look up at Carmine’s sad-pensive-concern scent and body language (not to mention their face), and Meulin? Meulin had fixed you with a stare that had you raising your heels (digging your now clawed feet into the floor) and staring right back at her. You ignored your pesterchum until the pings of new messages got too annoying to ignore and made it clear (as you broke eye contact) that you weren’t backing down by looking away first.

Sometimes you hated your animalistic instincts.
Chapter 11

Chapter Summary

==> Dave: Take over this chapter and send these readers on a Feels Train

⇒ Be Dave

You found yourself in one of the hallways of the highest guest floor (there were, like, four of them and the rooms were all huge and the doorways to everything in the tower had to be seven or eight feet high) mere minutes after Dirk had told you what he remembered from being your Bro. That Dirk remembered at all should have been a given thing, something you knew but paid no mind to, but now it was setting off the fire alarms in your head as well as the category five hurricane warnings that was only a few hours out and there was zero time to prepare.

So now you was on one of the guest floors that Jarvis (the AI was awesome, seriously), had directed you to, continuing to give you helpful advice and reassure you that no, Tony Stark would not be mad if you claimed a room and messed with the furniture (and also hoarding a bunch of pillows and blankets). So long as you weren’t going to do that to every room or just make a mess without purpose (as if), you could do pretty much whatever.

You chose the room nearest to the outside (and the open living room kitchen combination). One wall was actually a window (reinforced and blacked out for now) while the closet was easily the size of your room had been back in Houston. The connected bathroom (score!) was nearly just as large with half of it being this shower that had fancy settings that you didn’t think you’d be able to wrap your mind around that any time soon.

You had found no less than two closets full of pillows and blankets and captchalogued every single one, listening to your gut instinct backed by knowledge gained over the last three years.

Following this instinct, you focus your attention on the bed (a giant king woah) and move it to one of the back corners, taking out the mattress (holy softness) and the...box spring thing beneath it. You put the box spring up against the window-wall with the bed turned around to the side so that there were three “walls” and so that there’d be some small amount of privacy.

Next you flip through your sylladex, find a screwdriver, and take out the side board facing you before doing the same to the support boards in the middle of the frame, before setting the mattress back down on the floor in the space you’d created.
Okay, now what?

The mattress fit well enough but you tucked in a few of the smaller pillows and blankets into the ends and side, before dumping the rest of what you had haphazardly on top of it.

It wasn’t quite a pile. It wasn’t anything close. You could already hear Karkat’s voice in your head criticizing it but maybe a pile wasn’t what you were going for.

Nest seemed like a better word.

You blinked, catching that thought in a strangle hold. Nest? Fuck. Fucking bird instincts twisting your thinking and just-

“Dave? The Jarvis person told me you were up here and-...please tell me that’s not some half assed attempted at a pile.”

“Uh no. No it’s not...It’s not a pile. You know by now I can’t make one worth shit.” Karkat raised an eyebrow. god tier cape swishing around with every step toward you he made and oh.

“Tch. Then what monstrosity is it?” He asked with this grin on his face and his hands on his hips as he jerks his head toward the….fuck okay it’s a nest.

“A nest.” Your wings were moving of their own accord, or maybe it was those stupid instincts again because that crow you’d speared didn’t look like a baby one. Fuck you didn’t even know whether it had been male or female and why in the multiverse are you thinking about this now? Your wings were flapping a little, half raised and your eyes were doing something crazy but you did your best to ignore it.

“A...nest.” Your matefriend repeated, his grin growing wider, “Like a bird nest.”

“No, like a halfway point between a bed and a pile. Yes, a fucking bird nest.”
Your world tilted sideways and the next thing you knew, you had a pillow in your face and Karkat laughing next to you.

“Oh shut the fuck up.” You growled into the pillow, not bothering to get up.

“Oh. Your wings are moving around like crazy, Strider. Get those limbs under control.”

You tried, sort of. Maybe you only made half an attempt at not whacking the troll in the face.

“I’ve only had these for like, a day, Vantass.” You give up, folding your wings up being the only thing you really knew how to do so far, “You want to talk? Work on the room? Make out? What?”

“Maybe number one. Mostly number three.” Karkat hummed as he laid down next to you and you both took a minute to shift into more comfortable positions, “We can work on the room later.”

You hadn’t seen him all day. He could have died in that water just because his gills or whatever weren’t adapted to handle saltwater. Then there was Dirk, and Bro, and how “mutant” wasn’t exactly seen in the greatest light whether or not it meant something different than messed up eyes or a blood color that shouldn’t exist.

You press into him, one leg over his and one hand scratching lightly at the back of his neck. You slowly unfold your left wing and try to go for setting it across both your sides gently but it ends up being more of a flop instead. Oops.

One of Karkat’s hands was raised to your face, his fingers tracing your forehead, your cheekbones, your jaw, under both eyes, and being careful with his claws. He traced the scar just above your lip, the one over the bridge of your nose that stopped just under your right eye, the thin one that was almost lost to your hairline, the one that started from the bottom of your ear and went down, around to the back of your neck for a good couple inches.

“Do you want to forgive him? Put blame on that puppet or whatever was controlling it instead?” He whispers, not moving his hand from your neck. The warmth of his body heat seeped into you as he rubbed diamonds and hearts into your skin.

“Maybe some? Dirk isn’t Bro though.” You refuse to think that he is. You are swimming so far up this river called De Nile that you forgot where you’d started. It wasn’t De Nile though. Because Dirk
wasn’t Bro, even if he did have his memories now. Even though he spoke as if he were older, as if it had only been yesterday when you turned five and got a sword for your birthday, a strife, and had to find those presents he’d originally prepared torn apart the next day.

“Shh…Shh…” You drew in a rattling breath, pressing your face into your matefriend’s neck and gripping the fabric of his outfit like it was a lifeline, “He doesn’t have to be Bro, you’re right. But I’m telling you now that if he fucks up this chance I’m giving him, with you, I will not hold back. Brother or some other convoluted human relation or not.”

“He won’t.” Your reply was muffled but you knew he heard you, “He isn’t Bro.” He cares, he cried right in front of you, choked up while trying to explain his memories and talk to you which Bro had never, ever done that you could remember.

A sigh was met with a kiss to his neck and that turned into a rumbling purr that you could swear you felt down into your bones.

“Do you want to talk about your very real chance of dying on me?” You didn’t care if it would be temporary. Dying sucked. It was painful and you didn’t want anyone you cared about going through that now that, especially that, they were all Gods, “For all I know, that stunt you pulled back there could have counted as Heroic and then where would that have left me? Or Kanaya?”

When he didn’t immediately reply you add, “Don’t you go making me a widow the literal fucking day that we got here, bitch.” Karkat’s purrs turned into that sound you recognized as a car trying to start but something was wrong so it only got halfway there. His frame shook and you think maybe he would actually start coughing but after a minute he settled down, chuckling being suppressed as much as possible.

“I told you. I didn’t know before today. But I will take… I will take that into… oh my gog Dave. I promise I won’t, ya know, try to go off and die Heroically. Dave. I can’t think with you kissing me. Do you want me to be able to talk or not?”

You leaned back, “Alright. So… I distinctly remember you telling me about the hemospectrum a few months ago. And that, at least on Alternia, tyrians wanted to put other tyrians heads on a spike.” You gave him a halfhearted glare, “So… should I be calling you like, the legendary auspistice or does that title go to Eridan?”

Karkat groaned, “Hey, you asked me whether or not I wanted you to talk.” You add, rubbing the part of his back where you’ve seen his wings retract to.
“Dave if you don’t want me to kiss you until you forget your name don’t do that.” You stop the rubbing but keep your hand there, keeping eye contact and catching it when he tried to look away. You know the pale part of your relationship didn’t exactly fit the textbook definition of what it should be for trolls, but you at least knew how it affected him.

Getting him to talk about things varied in how difficult it would be. The more it affected him, the more personal it was or the more that he tried to hide that shit, meant more effort on your part to draw that out. There was a lot of details and nuance to it that was hard to explain, but generally speaking, that was the basics of it.

“Karkat?” You wait until you’re sure he won’t try to look away again, “I’m not mad.”

“You have every fucking right to be mad at me, Strider.” The snarl that ripped it’s way out of him held all of the sharpness of his quirk without being overly loud, for which you were glad.

“Why should I be mad?” You challenge even as you acknowledge that you did feel a little weird, maybe a little hurt. You’ve pretty much tracked that down to how it was romantic for them, to be in that ashen relationship. You didn’t much care in regard to yourself, but for Karkat? For your matefriend? That meant something entirely different.

“You know perfectly fucking well why.”

You gave a little sniff, “Explain it to me like it’s the first time I’m hearing this ashen quadrant stuff then. Like I’m a little wriggler or whatever.” You goad, not moving even though you kind of want to. Moving now might give him an excuse, no matter how miniscule, to not talk about this and put it off until forever.

“I auspistized between Feferi and Meenah because if I didn’t, that island could’ve sank, Feferi could’ve died, who the hell even knows what else.”

“So it was a necessary thing, then?” You ask even as you knew the answer.

“Gog. Fucking yes, Dave. And it’s not...it’s not like the pale or red quadrants or even, shit, it doesn’t come close to the complicated mess that is human love.” He traced his symbol into your neck in the silence as he thinks on what to say next, “It’s this frustration and irritation and this sense that you
have to, even if you don’t literally like I did, that you have to stop them from going too far for whatever reason under the moons.”

“So…” Here comes the risky part on your end, though really, risking might be making it more dramatic than necessary, “You aren’t like, going to someday…night, find someone that you hate romantically then? You aren’t going to want to, I mean. I-” You were biting you lip even though

“What? Where did…oh who am I kidding that’s a perfectly reasonable question after what I went and fucking did.” Shit, you’ve been trying for the better part of the last year and a half to get Karkat to stop hating himself so much but this question wasn’t helping at all.

“I’m so-”

“Dahiv.” Oh shit, “Do. Not. Be. Sorry.” You opened your mouth again but close it when his other hand clamps it shut, “I will never, ever think of finding a kismesis. I fucking love you too much, dammit.” Your foreheads were touching now, nose to nose. You hated not being able to smell much of anything because all you could sense is this warmth that has hints of something else you can’t identify.

“I know-”

“Apparently not, dipshit.” He interrupts without bite, rubbing and chirping and purring so much the meanings were lost in this haze of literal mixed signals, “I love you so fucking much it hurts to see you hurting, it hurts that I could very well have left you alone, it hurts that I’m the one who caused that fucking shitass question to enter your thinkpan.”

You were quivering, rubbing back and trying to find your words, “I love you to. I’m so glad to know that though. That you won’t ever- That I won’t end up just being some kind of-. I’m such a mess.”

“Some kind of what? And you’re far from a mess.” You were pretty sure that all this warmth and vibration was melting your insides but you try to keep yourself from becoming human liquid and explain.

“It’s hard for me to sometimes, like, draw a line between how much a heartmate cares for their partner and how much a palemate cares for theirs and just…how much that is compared to love.” You duck your head to have your hair pressed against his chin, pressing your forehead now against his collarbone…collar bone plate thing, whatever trolls had.
“I’m...not sure I know what you’re saying.” Dammit, now he was giving you this sad little croon and nope nope you had to stop that shit now. Slam on the fucking breaks and three point turn that car right around back to happy sounds.

“Like…”Oh hell how to even say this when the two of you barely even touched on the subject, “With the...red being concupiscent. I mean I know Kanaya loves...pities? Rose a lot. I just...I don’t know how that fits with like, two to four other people involved like how much do you care when you’re splitting your time up like that and aren’t palemates usually the ones who would share a house, hive, whatever?” Just let it all out in a stream of consciousness, why don’t you?

You haven’t really touched on what was bothering you, beneath all that, and Karkat apparently knew that because before the silence could stretch into some uncomfortable beast, he began asking questions like you did.

“So...this has something to do with…” You could almost see his face scrunching up as he thought, “pailing?”

You almost laugh because you both were so uncomfortable around the thought of actually doing that even as you throw around vulgar words and innuendos like they were about to go out of style.

You didn’t, because that really was hitting the nail on the head, wasn’t it?

You nod into the edge of his cape that wrapped around his neck, curling up until your knees were touching his stomach.

“Correct me if I’m wrong. Please tell me that I’m wrong, but you’re worried that if I did settle into the quadrants and had you as my heartmate only, I wouldn’t want to talk to you as much or care about you as much because it would be pale. That with my “being divided” so much between other people and you, that when I did...that I would only want to..that it would...it would only be physical? Is that what you’re trying to say here?”

You nod again, feeling a lump in your throat and a burn in your eyes that you angrily tried to squash because you hated not being able to see (for multiple reasons, now more than ever even though a clogged up nose won’t do too much to you now) and that the more effort you put into not crying, the more it was likely that you’d be holding your breath for as long as possible if only so that you didn’t break into horrendous sounding sobs.
“FUCK!” You gripped his shirt, clamp both your wings to your back, and pretty much do everything you can to not be shaking, “Fuck, fuck, fuck. I’m sorry.” He’d noticed. Of course he did, “That won’t ever happen, Dave please. Breathe, Dahiiv. Breathe.” You shake your head defiantly but eventually your stupid need for oxygen wins out, as well as the ugly sounds you were now just trying to keep quiet, “I won’t ever let that happen. I can’t- You’re the only one who I’ve ever felt red and pale and black for all at the same time. Hell, even ashen snuck it's way in after that one time with you and Vriska just so you didn’t stab her.”

He paused for a moment to let that sink, “You’re the only one, Dave. All four quadrants. Even with Terezi I was just vacillating between them. I love you. I’ll say that as many times as I need to for it to sink into your thick fucking thinkpan because you’re MINE. You’re mine, I’m yours. We both have eternity now, Strider, I can literally go on until the end of time itself. I’ll never up and leave you. I’ll never get tired of talk to you. I’ll always fucking care about you.”

You thought he was done after half a minute of silence, purring to try and encourage your subconscious into calming you down, but it seems he had one last thing to say, “So please. For all of the universes that went into making this one, for all of the time we have now that I can’t even wrap my own thinkpan around, please don’t ever forget that.”

And then he goes (all gentle so who were you to refuse?) shifted you both until he could see your face again, wiping away and cleaning up the tears and snot (ugh, so fucking gross) with tissues (and were those some kind of wipe things that you’ve seen in movies, you know, the kind at fancy restaurants where did he get those when did he even have the time?) he had to have stored in his sylladex. You stayed there, confused and dazed and halfway to feeling numb, before he goes and kisses you. First it was the pale kind of kisses, the forehead and temples, over every scar he could see, the cheek, your hands (both hands, both the back and the palms of them). Then it was a black sort of kiss, right on the lips, rough and with teeth that you pretty much had to push back into because hello? No way were you letting him have the upper hand with this.

And then that turned into a burning red make out session that, like he said, made you nearly forget your own damn name.

God, you love this troll.
It was evening now.

The sun was setting on what turned out to be a very long day so you decide that the meeting you and the other Avengers should be having today after all this bull will most definitely be happening over dinner.

Pizza, specifically. Shwarma was post giant battle or otherwise saving the world food.

There was hawaiian, meat lovers, vegetarian, and others. You’d given four boxes to the mutant crew (the kids had been ecstatic and the few adults had been no less than curious) and so you and your team lined up the remaining ten across the kitchen counter to pick from whenever.

Thor, Natasha, and Clint had wandered back in with tension and fury visible in their body language. Bruce was stirring honey into his tea, probably preparing because he could sense that the three didn’t have good news to share. You had Jarvis pull up information he had been compiling for the better part of the day onto a holographic display on the table (you grinned at their surprise, even Natasha raised her eyebrows, because this isn’t even the most “futuristic-tech” thing you’ve made). Your eyes fell to read some of the documents and watch video clips that expanded at your seat, frowning at what it showed.

Mutants were going missing. If it were a United States issue you would’ve been able to more easily track down the perpetrators, let your team know and mount some kind of rescue. Sadly, it was near global. The reported cases didn’t match the footage and time-location stamps that Jarvis had put together. Some of the mutants were homeless. Some were identified as orphans.

Some were adults.
Most were children, teenagers, minors under pretty much every government’s laws.

The disappearances didn’t make sense either. They would walk through a door (that was really the only correlation between them all) and then would not be seen again.

Except that door disappeared with them, showing up in other locations (for all you knew, other times as well) and that?

That pissed you the hell off.

You were not only going to be dealing with an international issue (though it sickened you that some would be celebrating over the mutants “leaving”) but one where you would be going up against something you didn’t know the rules of. This teleporting (possibly time travelling) door was a giant question mark, an unknown variable, a wild card the likes of which had your head reeling from questions bouncing around in your head.

“Tony,” Your head snapped up at the sound of Steve’s voice, “Please tell me we’re going to do something about this.”

You wanted to say yes absolutely. You wanted to say that you were going to do something right then, that you had a plan (even if it was locate the door, walk in, and claw your way back out).

You can’t just attack, though, for multiple reasons.

You settle for taking a chunk out of your pizza to stall for time, thinking before replying, “As much as I want to just track this fuckin’ magic door down and get all of those mutants out of there, we don’t know what’s on the other side or if, when we get there, the door will just disappear again.”

There was also the guests at your tower who could be attacked while you were gone if they went out. Hell, they already have been already been attacked. Kankri had already healed from that bullet (Phil commenting that he had stumbled but otherwise hadn’t been bothered by it at all) and Dave (poor kid) had been shot at twice and then had been sick for hours (maybe a full day, you didn’t know for sure) on top of it. Jarvis had let you know about Rose’s animal ears (you thought until then that she just didn’t have any) that she had only shown when Roxy had pulled her hood down. Not to mention what happened to John on the other side of the country and that his sister was now missing, most likely because of these people.
Roxy had to be held back by Rose so she didn’t stab Meenah. Dirk had been “sparking” as they called it when he’d first seen her but otherwise just glared and kept his distance. Jake and Jane (Having two Jane's around was going to be weird) had taken over the kitchen for lunch earlier and wow that had been amazing. John had been cleaning up and hung out with Peter and Feferi and Aradia until Peter had to leave. You hadn't seen Dave or Karkat since that moment when Dirk had been talking to them both in the Den, though. You hoped they were doing alright. Kankri was avoiding Cronus like the plague while Eridan had dived feet first into the Harry Potter series you lent him when he asked for "wizard books".

These mutants (you had to account for the adults, though despite their height they didn’t always act like it, more like older teens) and aliens (trolls) were inching their way into your hearts.

Shit.

“Then what’s the plan? Do we keep gathering information? Wait around, rolling our thumbs until something else happens?” Clint seemed frustrated. You were to. There hadn’t been any major villain attacks for the past week and though you were enjoying the break, something like this being brought to light was making you all anxious. None of you approved of how mutants were treated here in the U.S. but you had no solid ground to fight on, no “reason” backing you if you decided to just openly go against the laws that were in place.

But now?

Now there was a global mutant issue. Now you had mutants who were living in your tower until you could get them settled with identities (which might take a while despite how good your team of lawyers were). Now you had a reason that other people might believe.

But fuck, that thought just sent you a little ping of “wouldn’t that be using them, you ass?” and yes, you kind of thought it would.

And now you feel horrible but couldn’t show it. Great.

“Unless someone can come up with a better idea? Unfortunately.” You agree with a sigh, nibbling at the crust of the piece you were eating. While it had been a large one, you normally ate at least two, if not three, and yet the thought of eating anymore than this almost made your stomach revolt.
“But...we cannot do anything for them?” Thor’s question had you all thinking again.

“What about safehouses?” Natasha offered, sipping at whatever it was she’d chosen to drink, “Set them up ‘round the states?”

“That would be a good idea if not that this is a teleporting door. Unless you were talking about getting the government off their asses.” Bruce had been quiet as he spoke, having paid more attention to the food until then.

“We’d need to plan around the government and police and, fuck. I’m going to need to get Pepper in on this, she’s good with this kind of thing. Except we’re going to need both safe houses and decoys because god only knows that there are shitty anti-mutant people who don’t-”

You spotted Karkat at the arch separating the kitchen and den from the hallway. He was still wearing that costume with some weird bloody cut symbol or whatever on it, and the hood with a cape, can’t forget that. There were still bags under his eyes that you could see even from this distance, and he was walking over to you.

Okay walking felt like the wrong word to use here. It was some bizarre mix of hesitation because you were the only one awake and you have to be quiet, and a tense, jittery nervousness that had him closing and opening his hands into fists. The ear-fins were twitching to.

“What’s wrong, son?” Steve finally asks once Karkat reached the other end of the table, standing behind the chair.

“Yes, actually. What the fuck do you want?”

Even you had to pause at that.

“What do you mean?” Bruce spoke up over some comment that was half way out of Clint’s mouth before Natasha kicked him in the shin.

“I mean,” He ground out, every part of him strained, “What. The Fuck. Do you want? You helped my matefriend, flew us to some island in the middle of nowhere, allowed four more strangers to be brought back into your hive, didn’t even fucking blink when several more appeared and tied up fuckasses who attacked them, and are, what, just going to let us stay for however long this stupid ass
process of becoming legal citizens of your country takes? Help more of us out when you don’t even
know us? Without wantin’ fuckin’ anyth’n’ for it? Bull. Shit.”

He was keeping his voice low, not quiet a whisper, but enough that it didn’t carry over into the Den
where there was likely to be a pile of sleeping teenagers if you got up to check. You didn’t know
how to respond, though.

“Karkat, right? We don’t want anything from you. Any of you. We aren’t—” Thankfully Steve was
there to pick up the slack but Karkat, glaring at all of them with stormy grey eyes, interrupted him.

“You’re trying, and failing, I must add, to convince me that you are perfectly fine with all of us just
taking up your space, eating your food, and may very well bring laughssassins or threshecutioners
down on your hive. Because clearly the humans out there don’t fucking like us so why the fuck are
you putting up with our shit?”

“Why do you feel like you have to repay us?”

“You mean aside from the obvious fucking fact that you aren’t gaining anything by having us here?”
When no one said anything he let out this long, suffering sigh as he let himself lean on the chair for
support, “No one just does things for you and nothing is free. Just tell me what you want me to do
already.”

A light bulb went off in your head, “You said you as in not anyone else from your group.”
Something in you sank.

“Yes, now get to the-”

“As in whatever you thought we’d have you do, you didn’t want them to be involved.”

“This isn’t-”

Natasha jumped in, “You don’t have to do that, you know. None of us are going to hurt you.”

“Stop it just tell me-”
“What did you think you’d be protecting them from?”

“Fuck. You. Fuck you all. None of you are my moirail, you don’t even know what you’re fucking doing so cut that shit out and just tell me what you want!”

Karkat was fuming, shaking, glaring yet his eyes were darting between all of them.

God, he was scared.

You had the idle thought of just throwing all the pizza out, or gifting it to the people working at this hour.

“Where you came from,” You start off slowly, gaging his reaction as you speak, “What would be expected of you, normally?”

The troll bit down on his lip hard enough you were surprised there wasn’t blood, “That depends. On a lot. If they’re one of your quadrants,” You made a note to ask about those later, “Specifically your matesprit or moirail you may just be expected to help around the hive, because going to your auspistice is insanely rare and going to your kismesis is unheard of.”

“What about an adult?” This time Karkat almost laughed.

“Go to an adult? Pfft. No, you’d only do that if you were scraping at the bottom of your grave because all you would find are outlaws and conscription dodgers.” The ‘anything they’d want from you is probably going to be illegal’ went unsaid, “Whatever they “ask” of you? If you die and are never seen again? It’s your fault for seeking them out in the first place and you deserve whatever you get.”

⇒ Be Thor

You were not so afraid of these god beings, now that you’ve been around them for some time. Of course there is the healthy amount of respect and fear that one should always bestow the Gods, but it was not so much that it gripped you whenever one was caught by anger. You were grateful for that.
Because if you were still affected that much then the Knight of Blood’s words would be pinning you where you sat. Tales of the Blood Knight’s rage were numerous, only outweighed by the saga of his uniting the fractured Horned Gods into a whole as they fought against horrors and a large monstrous giant in order to create the Wild Gods universe.

He had been your favorite while the Heir of Breath, Father of the Wild Gods, had always been Loki’s favorite. It helped, you think, that he was known for being a trickster.

But the words that the God of Blood had said. The things that he had implied.

It broke your heart to know that he, likely the other Horned Gods to, grew up in such a world. Whether or not the Wild Gods grew up in the same manner, with those same implications, you didn’t know and found that you didn’t want to.

“There were no other adults around? No parents?” Steve asked and you could see the Knight’s restraint.

“What part of “only finding outlaws” did you not fucking get? There were no other fucking adults, shitstain. The sweep that you reached adulthood was the sweep you were conscripted and sent off planet for the rest of your nights unless you were a Jade blood who all got sent to the caverns to live underground until they die. Now. I will ask, again. What do you want?”

“Jarvis? Can you pull up the information we’ve been going over for Karkat? Thanks.”

The God eyed your shieldbrother warily before sitting down, reading and taking in the situation you had on your hands. He murmured to himself in his native tongue, one that your Allspeak did not catch either because of the nature of it or because you could barely hear what he was saying. Every so often his head would snap up to look at all of you before resuming whatever he was reading or watching.

“You want my help.” He says, finally, in English as he leans back in the chair half an hour later. The tenseness to his posture had melted into exhaustion.

“Only if you want to. Same goes for everyone else. And only in whatever way you’re comfortable with. I’m not going to be forcing anyone of you into solving this clusterfuck of a puzzle.”
“You want my help to save these people? These...mutants?” His eyebrows drew together, “Why are there wrigglers missing I thought you humans were like, super protective, or meant to be, is this one of those situations where people don’t give a fuck what happens or is it because they’re mutants?”

“It’s because they’re mutants.” Clint’s head thunked against the table, his plate discarded to who knew where.

Karkat hummed, “So. If it’s because of them being mutants, why did you...why did you and Phil help me, then?” He added after a moment, “Me and Kankri.”

He sounded so confused. Genuinely confused as to why they’d want to help. In that seat, sitting the way he was, he looked small. He was a God and yet he was also a child.

As Tony and Clint would say…

Fuck.

You glanced over at your teammates. Tony’s jaw was set and he had that look that told you he wanted to break something. Bruce was busying himself with pouring more tea. Natasha and Clint looked ready to murder someone (really, you think they had been for a while now), and Steve had that look he always got whenever a child was seen hurt or in danger.

“Karkat?” He turned his attention to you now and you felt immensely awkward for having addressed him by his name like it was “no big deal”, “There was a tale my mother would tell, when I had asked her why she went out of her way to help others the way that she does.” You hope that you aren’t sounding like a fool, “if, of course, you wouldn’t mind hearing it?”

The God raised a skeptical eyebrow like he couldn’t believe what he was hearing, “Yeah sure, whatever. Knock yourself out.”

You held back a grin as the tale you were about to recount was not one with a happy ending, “It’s a tale about a god and goddess who, for a time, became mortal.”

“Is this some Asgardian Jesus and, I don’t know, his sister or some shit?” Tony snarked, only to be shh’d by Clint though Tony was about to just keep running his mouth before Bruce nudged him with an elbow (what) and he just, clicked his mouth shut and slumped in his seat (again, what).
“The god of fire and the goddess of prophecy,” You continue as if Tony hadn’t interrupted, using one of their lesser titles to hopefully keep things vague, “became very well known throughout the land, but quickly found that these people they’d been living among for so long didn’t have much time left. See, a goddess of war had been walking disguised as a mortal for many years before these two and had since gained control over much of the mortals lives. The war goddess was going to lead these mortals to their deaths. That, the goddess of prophecy knew, couldn’t be avoided. However, even knowing this, they rebelled against the war goddess together for years. Later, the goddess of prophecy again had another vision. This one of hope. If they couldn’t fight for these mortals and succeed, then they would fight so that in the future, there might be a chance for other gods and goddesses after them to finish what they started.

“Our,” You have a tilt of your head to show you meant you and your teammates, “purpose is much like theirs. We help even though we know we can’t save everyone. We help others, like you, like your Intended, because even if it is only you and yours who we help, who we save, it will have been worth it.”

“We helped you because we want to. We don’t care if you’re human, mutant, alien, mutant alien, ghost, cyborg, or whatever the fuck else.” Tony adds after a beat of silence.

Karkat didn’t even glance down at the table again before he spoke, voice barely above a whisper, “...Where do I sign up?”
Chapter 13

Chapter Summary

==> Be Kanaya

==> Be Dave

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

⇒ Be Kanaya

It’s been four days.

You’ve moved around each night, wary of the humans around you, and learning more of this language every day. Tavros and Rufioh have taken to scavenging and hunting (often flying for hours each way) to get the four of you food and other necessities.

Tavros, you've noticed, lived for flight. He seemed leagues more confident in the air and you couldn’t be happier for him. He’d been so scared before God Tiering, so nervous that you had wondered if he’d ever gain confidence in himself. Gaining his wings, it seemed, had been the key.

It was this night that you finally, finally found a place with connection. You had wasted no time in making a clean, comfortable spot in the little five room house, keeping the Matriorb in your sylladex for the time being, and immediately set out to contact Rose.

--grimAuxiliatrix [GA] began trolling tentacleTherapist [TT]--

GA: Rose!

GA: Rose, Are You There?

TT: Kanaya?

TT: You’re okay, aren’t you?

GA: Of Course, My Heart. <3
GA: We, That Is, Porrim, Myself, Tavros, And Rufioh, Are All Doing Well.

GA: We Have Been Avoiding The Humans Though. They Were Not So Welcoming When We Arrived.

TT: I’m sorry to hear that, but glad that the four of you are alright. I must ask though, as I know it’s important to you.

TT: Is the Matriorb safe?

GA: Yes. Thank You For Asking. I Must Admit I Was Worried But It Seemed I Needn’t Have Feared.

TT: That’s certainly a relief. Do you know where you are?

GA: Somewhere In A Place Called Spain, Though I Don’t Know Where Within It Yet. Porrim Is Navigating The Internet Now In An Attempt To “Do Something Useful” For Us.

GA: She Hasn’t Been Taking This Well.

TT: Oh. How so?

GA: She And Rufioh Have Been...Merely Tolerating Each Other With Cool Indifference. She Had Not Said Why, Though I Think This May Stem From Their Game Session. She Has Also Told Me Of Her Growing Worry For Kankri.

TT: Please let her know then that Kankri is safe and with us.

GA: ...She Would Like To Talk To Him Once We Are Finished Catching Up.

TT: That’s perfectly fine. How have things been for you, exactly? It’s been nothing but chaotic shenanigans over here.

GA: Well, Aside From The Unanimous Thought That The Humans Are Planning Something, Not Much Has Actually Happened. I Am Sure The Others Would Agree With Me In That We Are All Growing Restless, Wondering Why We Haven’t Been Driven Out Of The City.

TT: Oh.

GA: Rose, I Can Assure You That We Will Be Fine.

TT: If you say so, then I will believe you.

TT: It will not stop my worrying, though.

GA: I Know.

GA: Would You Mind Detailing What Chaos Has Happened?

GA: ...And Could I Safely Assume That Karkat Is As Well As Kankri Is?

TT: Karkat is fine to. I’ll message him to let him know you’re online in case he’s busy.

TT: Well, I “landed” with Dave, we ran into some…
TT: Dave called them “featherless assholes”.

TT: Anyway, Dave was injured and so we sought out the help of a group of superheroes.

TT: We have since found Eridan, Cronus, Feferi, and Meenah, the latter two Karkat somehow managed to stop from killing each other. You’ll have to ask him for details.

GA: Oh I’m Sure I Will.

TT: Aradia’s here, so is John, as well as Roxy, Dirk, Jake, and Jane.

TT: Not mentioning the superheroes that is.

TT: Fortunately, the tower we are now located in is large enough for all of us and then some.

TT: Unfortunately… Jade is missing and we have lost track of the Leijons and Captors. They’ve been gone for a little over three days now.

TT: John is understandably upset.

GA: It Looks Like Karkat Is Online, Now. Though I Wish To Not Have To Cut This Conversation Short. I Promise To Be On Later.

TT: It's alright. I think I'm about to be busy anyway.

--grimAuxiliatrix [GA] ceased trolling tentacleTherapist [TT]--

--grimAuxiliatrix [GA] began trolling carcinoGeneticist [CG]--

GA: Hello Karkat.

CG: KANAYA. OH THANK GOG. ROSE TOLD ME YOU WERE FINE. YOU ARE FINE, RIGHT?

GA: Of Course I Am. Are You?

CG: NEVER BETTER.

GA: And This Is Including Having, Somehow Beyond My Comprehension, Diverted Two Tyrian Caste Trolls From Attempting To Murder Each Other?

CG: OH GOG DAMMIT. THAT WAS A FEW NIGHTS...DAYS AGO. I AM PERFECTLY FINE. JUST...REMIND ME IN THE FUTURE TO NEVER AGAIN SUBMERGE MY SORRY ASS IN SALTWATER.

CG: HURT LIKE A BITCH.

GA: So Long As You Are Sure. You Do Know That When We Meet I Will Be Checking You For Injuries, Right? Regardless Of How Many Day-Night Cycles It Has Been.

CG: YES, KANAYA. I KNOW.
GA: Good.
CG: YOU’VE BEEN GETTING ENOUGH BLOOD?
GA: Yes.
GA: And Before I Forget.
GA: Does This Mean You Have Your Ashen Quadrant Filled Now?
CG: YES.
GA: And You Have Since Talked To Dave About This?
CG: KANAYA. OF COURSE I HAVE.
GA: Good. Now I Might Be Able To Rest A Little Easier.
CG: ARE YOU SURE YOU DON’T NEED US TO GET YOU OUT OF THERE?
GA: For Now I Am Sure. The Humans Have Not Yet Done Anything That Would Make Us Want, Or Need, To Leave In Such A Dramatic Fashion. I Will Be Sure To Let You Know If Anything Changes.
GA: <>
CG: I’LL BE HOLDING YOU TO THAT.
CG: <>

--grimAuxiliatrix [GA] began trolling carcinoGeneticist [CG]--

You pass your husktop over to Porrim once another window pops up with a crimsonGuide, exchanging it for the map and phone that she’d been trying to use to pinpoint where they were. So far she’d narrowed the four of you down to somewhere along the ocean-facing coast.

It wasn’t long before Rufioh and Tavros came back, looking worn out and not dropping an animal or something else that would count as food. They didn’t retract their wings and Tavros was fluttering around nervously, his lance out and eyes flickering to back the way they’d came.

You frown, waiting for either of them to speak as Porrim was typing with a speed that told you she was aware of the change in atmosphere and was attempting to speed up the conversation (as much as you knew she didn’t want to) so she could focus.

“What happened?”
Rufioh answered for them both, “Humans with firearms. We didn’t get hit, but I wouldn’t put it past them to have tracked us here.”

Well. There went Porrim’s progress unless they stuck to the coast. Maybe you should troll Karkat again to let him know you’ve changed your mind.

⇒ Be Dave

You are now Dave, even though you really, really didn’t want to be.

“What the hell are these things?!”

“Why do they keep respawning like shitty mmo monsters?!”

You bite down on your lip as you and others of your crew watch as the Avengers (even the Hulk is out there) fight off the monsters that you had all fought in the Game.

Only now, they seemed distinctly more fluid and didn’t have to stay with one form (an imp on screen combined with several others to form a basilisk once). They respawned a lot faster than they did in Game (or the rules were different this time and you’d have to relearn all of this all over again). They had varying powers depending on the prototypes you all had (a crow, a giant sea goat, Bec, oh my god oh my god). Some could teleport. Others had wings and a beak. Others still looked more like a writhing mass of tentacles. Karkat idly commented on how fucked they were that there was the potential for a monster to have the features and abilities of Feferi and Meenah’s lusus as well as Bec’s first guardian powers.

You were too busy trying to calm your racing heartbeat and breathing to say anything back. Your hands were aching but the Avengers needed your help now. You’d been here for a pleasant (if not quiet) four days and now that small break is over.

You were wrong.

You weren’t done yet.
You were distantly aware of asking Jarvis to open a window as CalDESCRATCH drops from your sylladex into your awaiting hand. Pulses radiated through your skull and you think for a moment that you feel lightheaded but you ignore it in favor of running through the now open space that the AI had (very reluctantly) made for you.

For two seconds your wings remained pressed against your back before they shot open, catching the air and allowing you the sweet, addicting act of flight. It was a thing you found out quickly, that you couldn’t just float whenever you wanted to now. You had to use your wings. In some ways it sucked, but in others (like the sensation of air flowing through and over your feathers) seemed to make it worth the extra effort.

You could hear the rapidly fading voice of your matefriend, quickly replaced by the rush of wind in your ears, as you flew the several blocks toward the nearest river (you haven’t bothered to memorize the names of these things yet). The hand that was holding CalDESCRATCH was doing so with a death grip and...wait, you were still hearing something.

It was like having a gnat buzzing around in your ear, except the sound wasn’t anywhere near as annoying.

‘Hey. Think it would be a good idea if you took a break?’

Pfft, no. You scoff at the thought.

‘You sure about that? You’re still shaking and your flying isn’t nearly as smooth as you think it is.’

What the hell? Of course your flight was...okay you had to admit that the little conscious in your head is right. Even though the whole idea of it was really odd. Maybe it was a God thing. With all of your overlapping memories you were only surprised that these new ones of hundreds, maybe thousands of other dead ones and their time clones hadn’t gone and made you immobile under the pain of a killer migraine yet.

‘Geez kid.’

Uh what?

‘How did we get such a shitty deal out of life again?’
Uh.

‘I mean I managed to claw my way to the top, big fuckin’ deal. Didn’t mean I wasn’t waking up and missing someone I never met. Didn’t mean I wasn’t scared to death about failing my descendent kid. Boy am I glad to—’

Stop.

You glide down to one of the roofs of a taller building, recaptchalogue your sword, and hold your head in a grip that made the pulsing worse and the pressure behind your eyes become noticeable because oh god that was worse than congestion aches.

‘Hey, kid pay attention. Please, c’mon if you won’t you’ll crash.’

You grit your teeth but did successfully land, even if it was with a stumble. You wanted to ask this guy very politely to fuck off and leave you alone. You wanted him to do the opposite and tell you who he was, which version of you he was. You wanted to ask him just what was he doing separate from everything else in your brain when he should just be a part of the tangled mess wound up tighter than a ball of yarn.

‘I’m your Scratch, dude. At least, that’s what I’m getting from the disorganized mess in here. Goddamn we need to clean this place up. Hey...I stand by what I said before. You need a break.’

But the Avengers. You couldn’t finish that thought. You could barely hold yourself together as it was.

‘Just let go, please. I’ll take over or something. Just let yourself rest so you don’t break.’

You found yourself not seeing New York anymore. Instead you were back in what you thought, at first, was your apartment in Houston. Except the turntables looked like the ones you had now. Except the pictures hanging from strings along the ceiling showed scene from the meteor and sburb and hey there was even some from the past few days. Except the lighting in here was all wrong and all the colors looked off somehow and woah, was this what your head space looked like?
You hesitantly turned your head around to get a better view of everything. The door was open to the hallway and wow everything looked...newer? Cleaner?

Why is this even happening now?

‘Hell if I know, kid. That’s something for another day.’

He’ll take over and...then what? Would he still have access to your memories?

‘Maybe. Maybe not. I’ll be able to fight even without them.’

This place is weird why is this the apartment you hated it here you mean you grew up here you guess so there’s that but c’mon couldn’t this be like, literally anywhere else?’

‘Well, it’s not all like this? At least the part I’m trying to clean isn’t. Now find somewhere comfy and go the fuck to sleep before I have to hunt down an ball of yarn to chuck at you.’

You didn’t reply, or roll your eyes, or did anything you actually wanted to because something about the colors and how you could see dust motes floating around made you drift. No, not dust, tiny dream bubbles with little GIFs of memories (could you expand one to actually see the memory? Could they pop? What would happen if they did?).

Despite you wanting to continue that train of thought, the echo-memory of that level of discomfort (pain, idiot, it was pain) really made you not want to join the land of the...whatever you were going to call it later.

You found yourself curling up (there wasn’t anyone next to you, no warmth that you were used to) on this mental version of your bed that you think was just a copy-paste of the bed you had on the meteor, closed your eyes (you didn’t bother with your shades) and…

Woah. Head rush. Ow. Okay. Note to self, switching with your Beta felt like getting dunked into ice cold water for all of half a second and then getting a brain freeze. Not to mention you were so goddamn tiny now what the fuck happened to this version of you? At least you still had the clothes you were wearing before you went and kicked the bucket, albeit at a smaller size to fit the scrawny ass frame you now had.
You had only woken up, what, yesterday, you think, and had kept silent mostly out of confusion, rather than something a decent person would say like respect for boundaries or some shit like that. You had started cleaning up the mess in what you quickly identify as the kitchen living room communal area of the meteor that Scratched you had lived on for three years of his life.

Except it wasn’t quite how it should be, each time you turned around to pick something up, another stack of books or fabrics or movies would be there. Each time you went to put something away, like a book, the bookcase you would have put it in had moved across the room.

It was maddening, really it was.

Maybe Beta you would be able to make better sense of it all once he wasn’t leaving tiny pieces of himself to fracture and push back together all wrong and end up rubbing against other pieces in ways that hurt like being stabbed through with a trident.

You shake your head a little to focus, take the sword out of your sylladex and head straight to the battle that you could see not even two or three blocks away.

The Avengers were having a rough time. Might as well help, yeah?

You dive bomb one of the larger monsters, driving your sword through it and oh, there’s rewards. Cool. Your touch has them disappear in this light that makes it look like they teleported somewhere. You flash step more than use your wings unless you had to be airborne or glide, and take out about a dozen in quick succession.

“Dave!” Huh? Oh yeah that’s right, little you had a bae. He was cute to, standing there with his sickles, one hand on his hip and looking at you with this “I’m so done with your shit” look you had to grin.

“Yeah Karkles?” You sliced through an imp that had lunged at you without even turning to look at it.

Something flickered in his expression that you couldn’t understand before he huffed, fins twitching once as he turned from you to make a path toward the...Hulk? Yeah. The Hulk.
In the process of ending the existences of some of the monsters you noticed one thing. The bigger they were, the more different kinds of twisted features they could have, the more powerful and harder to kill they got. You keep Karkat within your (boosted) eyesight as you weaved and danced between one monster and the next. The Hulk was making short work of the larger ones (ones as huge as he was) with the only downside being that they only turned into a puddle of ink-goo and reformed a short while later.

You found yourself frowning as you came across one with teleporting powers. It was the one of the bigger ones, a disgustingly humanoid looking figure that seemed to glitch out and have these dog-like ears. Something nagged at you to call it a lich, but seriously, the thing hardly looked skeletal or undead so why should you?

This wasn’t even the largest one and it was giving you trouble.

Swing. Parry, dodge the claws. Twist out of the way of a teleport yet get clawed anyway, for all the good that did you. Pull out your best dance and martial arts moves to make up for a lack of reach and get several more nicks and bruises in the process. Catch the humanoid-dog in the mouth with your sword, slice it's head and collect the things that look like gemstones and pearls. Move on to the next creature that was easily three times your height with two heads, one eye for each head, and woah this thing had lasers.

The back of your shirt was likely soaked by now, stained through and ripped. Your arms and legs were on fire and you were silently cursing your lack of endurance. You were the type (on both sides of the Scratch it seemed) to rather end the fight before it began and this? This was draining you.

You briefly saw Iron Man as he flew past, shooting some blue laser thing back the way he came. Curiosity got the better of you, though you did keep out of the two headed cyclops’ way, letting the kid in bright blue (John) bring down a huge ass hammer into the side of one head, knocking it into the other.

Holy fudge on a stick, what horror movie had been watched to birth this monstrosity?

“GET DOWN!” You dived to the side, rolling biting back sounds of pain as you did (did you have more injuries without noticing them?), looking up just in time to hear a loud bang (the echo ringing loud in your ears) and the monster turn into gems (some of them the size of an SUV). The owner of said weapon toss a strand of dyed pink hair out of her face. She barked something in Alternian (your brain supplying the necessary translation of: I’m going to help him, cover me!) and yet another person dropped down from the rooftops, wearing familiar pointed shades and wielding a katana.
You get to your knees, keeping an eye on both of them, as the girl took out another monster with the guy covering her six. Dirk. He was Dirk and she was Roxy. You could almost cry. If you hadn’t been watching Dave’s memories as you sorted them you would certainly be hugging the life out of yours and Rose’s descendants (dancestors). You think you just might do that anyway, once this was over.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry if Kanaya's part seems... odd or cliche or just downright not good. :/
It was harder than I'd thought it be to write her pov, well, her pesterlogs really. How does one Kanaya?
Chapter 14

Chapter Summary

==> Be Karkat: Take Over This Entire Chapter

Chapter Notes

Well.
I hope the reason for this chapter being over 3500 words takes you on the Feels Trip I intended it to.
Because it's not going to be over come the next chapter.
In fact you might need tissues. Just, you know, fair warning for emotionally sensitive types like myself.

⇒ Be Karkat

One step. Two steps. Three steps. Four.

One step. Two steps. Fight, Cull, Roar.

Five steps then six. Slip out the door.

Seven steps then eight. Nine steps, ten.

Good work, Threshecutioner, your target is dead.

Visions passed before your eyes as you fought, dance, and fall into a rhythm. Words that you’ve never heard passed through your mind as your sight changes. You were slipping away with each breath, each swing of your sickles, each step you took. The little voice in your mind had asked to help, a way to show that it, he, wasn’t going to lead you to your death. You weren’t sure. You’d seen the way that Dave had greeted you, heard how his voice was as different as his clothes. He was Dave still, that much you knew, but he wasn’t yours (for now, while he was fighting, he was different) and that hurt more than you thought it should have any right to.
So you allowed the voice to guide you through the rhythm that was now becoming like second nature to you. Step, swing, behead. The visions had started part way through. Not taking you the way Dave said they did when he was panic stricken, but lingering in your mind’s eye like a midnight dream.

‘Recite your oath, Knight.’ This wasn’t the voice, but the memory currently wrapped around your thinkpan.

You found yourself answering aloud, mouthing words that were little more than breath, “I swear upon my life that I, now and forever, will serve and be faithful to the crown. I will fight in defense of the crown even at the cost of the breath that gives me life. My actions will be without hesitation, my thoughts without deceit, my body both a sword and shield for the crown to use against those who would seek the crown’s destruction.”

You had both fallen into the deepest sleep you’ve ever had, and awakened from the longest dream you could remember with startling clarity.

Your Alpha self had let you take over under the condition that you would give it back to him once you were certain that Dave (his beloved his mate) and the others were alright, once the monsters were taken care of. And you were fine with that but-

There was no crown left, no Beforan Empire, not even an Alternian Empire, just you and 23 other trolls. It was hardly enough to make the smallest of villages.

Being a Knight was your wrigglerhood dream come true. Serving directly under the Empress herself as her bodyguard was more than you could have ever asked for, or thought to ask for. Yes it was tough. Yes it was exhausting work, but there had been an upside to it all. The Empress, of all trolls, had asked if you were willing to be her moirail. The empire couldn’t have been more shocked than you were in that moment. Couldn’t have been more overjoyed.

And now, though you were putting your skills and prowess to good use, that life you had was over.

Nothing you could hope to do could bring that back.

Your oath was void (because you had died? Because the empire no longer existed?) and you were only still fighting these damned things because not doing so would get you injured (at the least),
other people injured (in your defense), or any other number of consequences that you couldn’t just stop and think through right now.

You spun on your toes, armored foot striking an ogre in the kneecap before you lunged, jumped, and brought your sickles down on it's eyes. Rolling with gravity you lessened the impact on yourself when you hit the ground, popping back up only to be pressed back into something by an enraged basilisk.

“Sorry.” You heard as you raised one weapon to block the attack while the other was stopped halfway to slicing Dave’s (not Dave, some other Dave. One who didn’t know you) arm off, “So-Woah.”

He was staring at you, gawking perhaps if not for the gleam of interest in his eyes. You growled at him to snap out of it, pulling on his shoulder downward to give you leverage and kick the basilisk in the face (upward, closer to you, that’s it), before tearing it's head off and falling because other-Dave apparently couldn’t handle the weight or was thrown too far off balance or something.

“Fuck. Sorry ‘kat.”

“Stop saying sorry.” You both get back up, fight and defend each other. You’d noticed the blood and injuries. You’d noticed how he was slipping in footing and concentration (otherwise he kept up with you just fine). How he managed keeping up with your movements, keeping from falling out of sync if not for the occasional lapse (he wasn’t used to fighting for so long, was he?) you didn’t know.

It was a sight, though.

You reached over to make contact with him multiple times in order to try and use whatever Blood powers you had to make him stop bleeding. A cut here, a bite wound on the upper arm there.

Eventually though he found out what you were doing and snapped at you. You had this resource at your disposal, he argued when you tried to heal him again. You were a Knight (your Alpha self’s role in that Game), and Knights weaponized and protected with their aspect (he said he knew from personal experience. You didn’t doubt that). Taken literally, you should be able to bend the very life that flowed through his veins, your veins, to your will.

Use it. He barked.
You didn’t want to use his blood, though.

ALLOGENEIC PENDULUM

You had to. The Fraymotif had already been kicked into motion and the world around you, for as far as you could see, was awashed in a red tinge. You weren’t sure if it was you or if the tinge was visible to other people but now your sickles felt lighter, you could sense other Dave’s presence as if he were an extension of your own consciousness, hear his heart, see the paths that his blood took in his veins (bright red like yours, tinted with a golden glow that shone, you think, from inside each individual cell). His steps didn’t falter, as if he’d been given strength, and now you both were a whirlwind of fury, attracting the attention of monsters further down the road.

The blood that he had already spilled, though, you could use. You just had to make sure he didn’t lose any more of it. By some subconscious thought, it moved and coated the blades of your sickles (so that’s why they felt so light), and now whenever you struck out, the blood would strike at even further at anything behind the monster you hit.

Eventually, the two of you had some breathing room (the fraymotif fading and you think you had a few minutes to rest or move to somewhere with, maybe, zero monsters so you could fulfill your promise to your alpha self. Other-Dave took this time to speak.

“Call me Dove.”

“Hm?” He wanted you to call him by a different name? Why?

“That was the name that I, not my Scratched self, I, was born with. Changed my name as soon as I hit....” The monsters were thinning, you were making progress, “Shit. 8 and a half sweeps? Round about? I think that’s right. Yeah.”

“Oh. So that we have a way of telling you two apart?” Da-Dove shrugged, “Why would you want to be called that when you changed your name?”

“S’like you said. So I could say ‘Hey, no man, I’m Dove right now, sorry’, ‘nd other people would know that my Beta ain’t there and I’m takin’ messages for ‘im.”
Right. It still didn’t make any sense to you, but alright.

Maybe you should do that to.

“I was called the Exemplar.” You were titled so because of how you were the first candy red blooded troll, someone sent to them (as the Empress had told you) from the stars. You refused to take on a sign of your own even when, at your titling night, you were free to choose from any of the 48 (Hell, they said you could make one up for yourself but that had left a bad taste in your mouth. It felt like you’d be taking advantage of your situation and blood rarity).

“Huh. Sounds like a pretty awesome name, man.” You turned to face him fully, taking in the sight of his damaged wings and back (You’d only been able to stop the bleed, not the pain. Clearly you weren’t cut out to be a healer) before he turned to face you to.

From your alpha self’s memories, he wore his shades because his eyes were photosensitive (said once that if he had the choice, he’d be nocturnal like trolls but needed at least some sunlight or else he’d go mad or some crazy shit like that). The suit he’d been wearing was ripped to hell and parts (like his sleeves) appeared as if they were still connected to the rest only by tatters and threads. Even with that and all the scrapes and bruises, even with him looking like he’d just walked through hell, he was still standing, grinning, had somehow been able to follow your steps as you wove together Beforan martial dance with Alternian ones.

Was it a bad thing that you thought he was kind of attractive?

Probably. He still had the appearance of a wriggler (6 sweeps old) and when you had died, you’d been fourteen sweeps. Roughly thirty earth years. Fuck. You’d been practically lowkey flirting with him (as far as flirting between two members of the military went) this entire time.

That your own, your alpha self’s, body was not all that much older in appearance did not ease of these thoughts.

“Yeah, well, it was that or be called something cliche like Champion.” You shrug, trying desperately to be calm and not think about it, “Or the Cardinal, for my color. The Empress wanted to title me Paradigm.”

That was really all the time you had, though. You caught the approach of a large monster, large cat in it’s appearance (the other additions you couldn’t identify), twin mouths snarling as it ran through
the middle of the empty street, crushing abandoned cars in it's wake.

“Time to go.” You maneuvered Dove up and onto your back in a flurry of movement that he could only really sputter arguments about and cling to you as to not fall back onto the harsh, unforgiving ground.

“What?! Ex- fuck. Exemplar, I can run on my own two goddamn legs put me the fuck down!”

“Non.” You regretted not being able to pull your wings out but set yourself at as fast a pace as you were willing to go with a passenger on your back, “Giant ink roarbeast was incoming. Had to get us out.”

“Shit, really?” You felt a bit more pressure from his arms as he turned to look behind you, “Well then, guess I can’t blame you. It’s still following us, by the way.” He turned his head back around and the pressure lifted. You heard a low rhythm pick up that you almost swore at because what the hell was Dove doing with activating a solo fraymotif now?

TREBLE COUNTDOWN

It wasn’t so much that you were going faster now, but that everything around you (not that there was much to look at that was moving) was slowed down.

“You better not pass out when we get to safety, Strider.” You bit out as you neared an intersection of road where you saw...was that Feferi, “Actually. Safety is right here. E- Feferi!” You wince as you used her hatch name even though you had no reason to feel bad about it, “Over here!”

The moment that you (and Dove) see the trident she’s wielding, Dove lets out this little sound, presses his face against your neck, moving his hands and folding his legs at the knees so they were out of sight.

“Oh my Cod!” Her Radiance’s expression shifted once she saw what was following you. In a blur, she was past you as the fraymotif faltered and you had to twist on your foot to see the beast burst into what had to be a hundred gemstones. Another soft sound, a terrified rattle accompanied the bird-human’s racing heart.

Feferi rushed over to you and Dove (oh my god now there’s pale feelings to?! dear starlight this was
wrong wrong wrong) flinched and you couldn’t help but react to that with a warning trill, higher in pitch than any red or pale sound. She froze instantly. Fuck. Fuck whatever happened to make Dove afraid so much and the person, human or troll, responsible.

And fuck whatever was making you have these thoughts in the first place.

“Dove,” You whisper as you set him down, “She will not hurt you.” He poked his head out from around your shoulder.

“Can ya please put the trident away?” He asked. Feferi captchalogue the weapon without another thought. She held her hands out toward him, Life’s brilliance flowing across her palms. She didn’t move any closer though, knowing that doing so without his say right now would cause him, or you, to snap at her.

Stupid shit ass instincts.

“You’re different.” He mumbled as if he were far away, mentally. He repeated the words as if they were a lifeline as he took the few steps necessary to stand in front of you (still keeping close, just in case). Her Radiance took a step, nothing happening, and then another, before lightly pressing her hand to his shoulders (Not his face. That would be more pale, given the situation, than you wanted to think about because you wanted to do that and what no no stop that).

Wounds stitched the rest of the way closed from the mediocre work that your powers accomplished. You could see the way his wings raised, fluttering as his posture straightened and energy flowed into him.

‘Final-fucking-ly. God do you even know how nerve wracking it was to see him like that? Never mind that he’s a different Dave.’ You kept your reaction to that to a twitch in your facial expression.

Well hello to you to. Have a nice nap?

Your Scratched self muttered something unintelligible.

‘Will you be taking control back now?’ You thought as Feferi places a hand on you (even though you’ve told her all you would have at worst are bruises later) to ease the ache.
You didn’t want to just, give up right now. You wanted to wait, at least until Dove switched back over, but you had no clue when that would be.

‘Um, no? Not yet. This armor you’ve got is useful, at the very least, in case we run into more monsters or whatever other bizarre as shit scenario we can think of on the way back to the tower.’ You hummed as Feferi began to lead you both (grabbing you each by the wrist) down the road. She hadn’t bothered to take flight, which you could only assume to be because of some pain or healing ache still present in Dove’s wings.

‘So,’ Your alpha self started back up again when you were near your destination, having passed several civilians who looked at you strangely in shelter-houses passed the perimeter you and other heroes had been keeping, ‘You were a knight.’

‘You state the obvious. What is it you want to talk about, really?’ You thought back.

‘I mean- you had a good thing going for you. You were Feferi’s personal guard even above the other royal or imperial or whatever guard. You were her fucking moirail. How...what happened?’ You could almost see his scowl even without being in your head space, ‘How did you even get to the top anyway?’

Ah. There it was. He didn’t want to have his opinion of himself extend to you, now that he knew what position you had held and yet that resistance seemed to have doubled back in onto himself. He wanted to know how you (and therefore himself by extension) succeeded and what had happened to end it.

He was you, your successor in soul and yet apparently, the reason why you even exist in the first place.

He deserved to know.

‘I wish I could say it wasn’t at all because of my blood status, but I’d be lying if I said I didn’t suspect it playing a part.’ You wove the scene in your mind, yourself standing beside other trainees, all of them pages with lords and ladies unlike yourself. You and the others were around 3 sweeps old (you had just turned 3 in the last perigee). You don’t remember your caretaker all that well, only that she’d been a troll with no lusii partner, but she had been very kind and did all she could as a merchant and courier to get you here. You would not be wasting this shot at making her proud and bringing in enough for her to never have to worry for a single caeger again.
You were the smallest of your peers, fins and tiny horns making you stand out.

You were sought after as an easy target up until you proved to them you could dish out just as much as they could, and soon enough they left you alone. All of them.

You learned a lot of things. How to ride a hoofbeast, how to properly wield a variety of weapons (the sickle had always been your favorite, much to the squire teacher’s confusion), how to behave around the nobility. You learned music. You learned dance (for your footwork and balance).

At six and a half sweeps you became a squire. Teaching pages and attending to the actual knights being added onto your list of required duties. You were lonely, aside from your caretaker and the small group of pages you taught (they were always a joy to be around and you hated being harsh with them) but you didn’t mind that so much. The group you taught was, when they became squires and later on, knights themselves, praised heavily for their teamwork, for their humbleness that not all of your peers and their groups had.

Your mother had gone with you to the ceremony and both of you had doted on them as much as their own caretakers and lusii had.

There hadn’t been any revolts or criminals to track down and both of your neighboring countries were dealing with their own problems (you had thought) to think of causing trouble. There was no war to prove yourself but there were tournaments you eagerly participated in, just to see your caretaker and former students when you won second place most of the time and enough money that your caretaker could’ve gone to become minor nobility on wealth alone. She was overjoyed that you thought so highly of her.

The one time you won first place, the heiress (soon to be empress if the rumors were true, sad as the thought was) had been watching.

‘This sounds like a fucking wriggler fairy tale straight out of one of Tavros’s books.’ Karkat mumbled soft enough that your concentration wasn’t broken.

‘Hey. He was one of my students, you know.’ You snapped lightly, highlighting him among the group in the midnight (day) dream as you moved on auto pilot through the Avengers common room now (wow, you’ve been really out of it) to situate yourself on a couch.
'Mother Grub.' Was what he chose to respond after several moments of silence before you dove back into your memories again.

At ten sweeps was your titling night. Feferi by then had become a friend, one to the point where you were allowed to use her hatch name in private or trusted company. You went with Exemplar because Champion was only a brief moment of your life, Cardinal didn’t sound right on your tongue when you’d sounded it out, and Paradigm (among the host of others thought up and offered to you) were variations of the same thing, essentially. The First of the bright reds.

The Only candy red.

Similarly went your choice in sign, though you rejected all of them. These trolls, most you didn’t care for, others were strangers, somehow valued your opinion to the point that choosing would mean favor on one of the 48 and cause resentment and ugly arrogance and pride.

You played it safe, stating that your only sign would be the one your caretaker bore (the Sign of the Hills of Creation).

This peace you had was not to last, however.

Deceit found it’s way into your empire, into the castle, turning the empress mad in her final sweeps. Purple bloods were suspected and yet there was no way you could hunt down who’d done this, combing through an entire caste for someone who may very well be dead long before you find them.

The empress ordered a hunt on the lime bloods instead.

The Mad Empress was the mockery that was whispered now. Feferi couldn’t stand seeing her caretaker and leader acting like this. You couldn’t stand having to follow through with the hunt.

You detained and fought lime bloods. You’d arrested and killed those even outside of that caste because what did the empress think she would get other than a revolt, for her order?

You had signed up for this. You had dreamt of this, of leading others of all different castes, of fighting by their sides. You’d dreamt of a reward beyond comprehension.
You had trained for this.

It was the dawn of your twelfth sweep (no, you could continue, you couldn’t just stop now) when you, Feferi, your caretaker, your troop (as you affectionately called them), and the frighteningly small amount of trolls that Feferi brought with her (that she trusted) met in the servants quarters of the castle, one of the last safe places you could find because oh stars above one of your own troop was a lime blood you couldn’t bare the thought of hurting him, ever.

The perpetrator (traitor! fiend!) had been caught (already dead, but caught, somehow) and yet the empress was no better. You’d been a fool to think she would have.

On Feferi’s orders (pained, choked, pleading through insults to herself that you couldn’t stand but couldn’t help), you had killed the thing that used to be your empress.

⇒ Exemplar: Finish the damn story already!
Chapter 15

Chapter Summary

--> Exemplar: Finish Your Story

--> Be Hal

⇒ Exemplar: Finish the damn story already!

You were half way into your twelfth sweep when things began to calm down some. Your mother (you used this term for your caretaker sparingly though she smiled every time) was given the title of baroness and was now the royal seamstress (which she took to with a passion). Your troop were among Feferi’s new guard (she’d been working tirelessly ever since her caretakers death and you were more than a little worried).

Among the changes she’d been pushing through, she’d taken you to one of the rooms that she’d rarely ever been allowed to be near, much less see within.

Apparently the former empress had, uh, slaves. You weren’t too sure about calling them that but it was the first word that jumped into your mind. All of them had been told they were free to leave, but a few stayed behind. An ochre and an olive requested to stay at the castle, working in the forge (the former) and the garden or hunting grounds (the latter). A third didn’t voice what he had wanted right away, one you’d personally of about a half dozen, but he made no indication of what he wanted to do. The troll was a burgundy, a ten sweep old (he would have had his titling night a few perigees ago, he’d told you). The ochre and olive (Diyark and Jaykal, you think their names were) showed signs of not wanting to let him go either, like they’d been his caretakers (two of them, no lusus in sight, of course there wouldn’t be by now). They both claimed to be around eighteen sweeps, and that they had been in service of the former empress for far longer than most. Deivad was the only one who came close.

You had no idea what she had any of them even do (Diyark mentioned chores like washing clothes and making tea, Jaykal commented on how Deivad was ‘wicked fast and got said chores done faster than anyone he’d ever seen’). Neither you nor Feferi thought to pry, focused on making their life better from here on out.

A quarter of a sweep went by (you as Feferi’s bodyguard) before the empress started actually pale flirting with you. You spent all of two nights silently panicking before cautiously returning those feelings (you were a pale as snow for her but hadn’t exactly been in any position to act on them).
You could almost feel the connection that bloomed there like it was a living thing.

Deivad usually helped Diyark in the forge or Jaykal when he went out hunting. When neither of the two were available, he danced or sung for you, for Feferi, for anyone who’d watch really. You liked it especially when he would wander into your block (you made it clear multiple times that he could do so whenever he felt like it until he did so the first time, hesitant and skittish) to share with you lyrics to a song he was writing or music sheets that he’d longed to play himself but had no instruments to do it with. You felt as if you owed him that, for all he’d never asked anything from you or anyone else.

You went ahead and, with a lot of help from Diyark, created a machine of steam and psionics that you hoped to the stars would work as you envisioned it, and true to Diyark’s word it did. Throughout it, the ochre kept giving you these odd looks like he knew something you didn’t. You didn’t comment as you thanked him profusely and left with the gift.

You had made it a surprise for his wriggling night and the look on his face alone had been worth it. You’d told him that it was meant to create, record, and playback any sound he wanted, any sequence of sounds, and that he could etch them onto disks that Diyark was still making and mess with whatever music he had come up with even further.

He looked at you like you’d just handed him the world.

Your thirteenth sweep (and his eleventh) was spent tip toeing around feelings you shouldn’t have. Red with Black undertones like hot coals fueling a fire. It wasn’t vacillation like you’d first thought. It was well and truly mixed together. The aggravation that he was better than how he saw himself (and wasn’t that mixing Black and Pale? You were pale for Feferi though, even still, even now. What is wrong with you?), that twisted Red whenever you got him to actually take pride in something he did.

Between these interactions (the pale diamond you locked in a box, the red fire with black embers) there were would-be assassins that you took out with no hesitation. There was playing auspistice between your empress and the nobility who wanted your mother out of their ranks (among other things). There were concerns and treaties and trade agreements with the other countries that had to be settled.

You and your empress were in desperate need of a day off. Or maybe a vacation. Go somewhere nice. Relax.

Ha.
It really was too bad, wasn’t it?

At the start of your fourteenth sweep you still hadn’t confessed to Deivad, you still hadn’t told your empress about the pale feelings all mixed up in that tangled mess, and you still hadn’t gotten that vacation.

Two perigees passed, Feferi was hosting a ball for her wriggling night and for how the empire was growing and rebuilding from having a sizable percentage of its population cut out from the picture. You were there, prepared to protect her should anything happen (even though as a tyrian she was formidable in her own right).

Neither of you expected the attack to be one made on yourself.

It came out of nowhere, the blade in your back that found a kink in your armor. The troll had a second one ready and waiting and stabbed you a second time before you really crumbled. You couldn’t stand, your legs were numb even though logically you knew they were still there, and everything around you was chaos. Feferi had flown into a rage, attacking your assassin and ordering the castle to be put on lockdown. You noted a couple of trolls trying to flee the scene before they were caught and all the noise of other panicking trolls made your head throb.

Deivad and your mother were at your side, followed shortly by Feferi, in your final minutes. Of course healers were brought in, but either they couldn’t truly fix you or something had gone wrong even afterward.

You bit back a curse as the image shattered when something was pressed lightly to your face.

You knew better, but for a second you saw Deivad there, instead of Dove.

This time, in a revelation that both you and your alpha self had, you did curse because how did you not notice before now? Seriously? Deivad, Dave, Dove. Hell, their names were practically the same, with exception of perhaps Dove. Paradox Space didn’t do coincidences like that. It didn’t do coincidences, period.

The thing pressed against your face was a cloth, it was damp now, and it took you a second to register that you’d been crying.
Everyone else in the room, you knew, was curious on some level but attempting to distract themselves. It worked better for some than it did for others. Dove’s (who you saw flicker and switch over to Dave) emotions were everywhere though. Even after the switch, there was only hints of curiosity, mostly wrapped in layers of concern and that mix of pale-red that had you wanting to start crying a wave of new red-tinted tears, despite the audience.

“Do you want to go lay down?” He whispers to you once you succeeded in stopping the flow of liquid leaking from your eyes.

“No. No, I’m good.” You bit your lip, “Do you want Karkat back?” You asked back, feeling your counterpart pressing at your senses but unwilling to just rip control out from under you like a rug.

“Thought you were Karkat to, man. Just, you know, you go by a different name so we all know who’s talking about who here. Like imagine having four people named John in the room things are going to get weird if ya call ‘em all John.” You poked him before he could go on a full blown ramble like Deivad often did when talking about things he liked, or when he was nervous.

“It’s okay if you want him back in, what was it, “the driver’s seat of the four wheel transportation device”?” You heard someone bust out laughing at that, others hiding their amusement better, “I’m not going to be mad or disappointed.”

This was already eerily similar to conversations you’ve had with Deivad when encouraging him to do something he liked or try something new.

Fuck. Maybe it would be better to switch over now.

You felt like you were running away, like a snivelling, whimpering coward, when you switched without waiting for a reply. You felt like you were falling, falling asleep and literally falling.

You felt like you were coming up for air after spend who even knows how long underwater and being unable to breathe in it.

 Fucking hell. You needed to figure out a better way to do this. Especially since you were planning on it being a regular thing.
You are Hal, or lil Hal, or Auto Responder. You really didn’t care so much right now because less than a week ago, you were a game sprite. Less than a week ago, you had a body that wasn’t merely a container for your code, a body with arms and a tail and a way to speak through an actual mouth. You could see in ways more than what the shades had allowed you. You had other senses besides sight!

When the Game had ended you expected to die (you had been scared). When the Game ended and you didn’t die (you were relieved) you were in a lulled state, your processing speed not up to full and your connection to the internet (or what had remained of it that you hadn’t hoarded into your data banks) severed.

It took you a full twenty four hours to come to the realization that you only had sight again (touch was unreliable enough you refused to count it). It took you longer than that for it to dawn on you that you no longer had a body (even though something in your memory spoke of being yet another splinter, the one that had latched onto Jake). It was a hazy memory and a weird one to ruminate about (you tried to for as long as you could). That ghost of a projection that had only hearing to add to your list of senses that grabbed at Jake’s mind, his soul, and was able to exist there because of the wellspring of Hope that existed in him.

That...sounded familiar somehow.

You were probably just looking a little too much into it.

It stood though, that you now know things that Jake had known. You now know that having been attached to the guy has had an effect on your code. You should know. You’ve checked it over a half hundred times in the past four days alone and you still couldn’t understand just what it was you were seeing. You see the string of code for your color is still red, but that there’s a readily available option for green and a third for a dark goldenrod. Both colors hadn’t been there before.

There were other pieces to, strings that when put together made up a complete Mind symbol with the Hope and Heart ones orbiting it on loop, endless and seamless with no jarring transitions from one “picture” to the next. You weren’t really sure if you could call it a picture or image, even though that was the only word (out of literal millions in several different languages) you could think to describe it. Other than, perhaps, the more broad and simpler term of ‘mark’.

There was a third modification to your code that showed four boxes, each outlined in a different color, two of them with names. The other two you couldn’t open the files for and found that
increasingly frustrating. Focusing back on the ones you could access, you identified =--E-q-u-i-u-s--Z-a-h-h-a-k--> immediately.

You do kind of miss being a sprite, other than the fact that it had given you a body.

You wonder how he was doing.

The other name took you by surprise. You didn’t voice it, but you still had to ask. Who the hell was called Just A Rather Very Intelligent System? Why attach Stark at the end of it all, distinctly separate just in how it didn’t fit in with the rest of the sequence, when you already had a name that long?

Several days pass with you speaking little to Dirk, or Jake, Jane and Roxy aside from a hello and idle chit chat that you only focused half your attention on, and now, five or six days (you hadn’t been keeping track) since you’ve arrived and only about half an hour since the battle with Game monsters ended, you found yourself at a loss. You’d done enough introspection to last you months.

So why now, when Dirk was communicating with you, were you keeping silent? Why was it when he was asking for forgiveness, when he was trying to fix whatever had (in his mind) fractured and broken between you two, were you focusing on how the voice you hear isn’t truly hearing. Just as much the voice you would answer with wouldn’t truly be a voice. Not yours. Not something flesh and blood, or as close as it got, being a sprite.

“So look, actually, forget what I said..asked, about you forgiving me. You don’t have to.” Dirk rambled as he looked over the mass of metal and wires and circuit boards that he had asked Tony for (and subsequently gained access to a workshop that Tony had set aside incase any future Avengers happened to need it). Or, like Dirk, happened to be the tinkerer type.

You were placed nearby on a table, angled so that you got to observe what Dirk was planning to work on.

“I mean, I know you were all antagonistic and we had that dramatic confrontation and I almost…” He trailed off again, falling silent as he picked out the pieces he wanted to start with, “Well, I haven’t forgiven myself for that. Can’t really expect you to if I can’t, right? Wouldn’t be fair.” His voice was wispy, lacking high pitch sounds as usual.

“You haven’t said what you would be working on.” You say finally, keeping your tone as neutral and robotic as possible.
“Oh.” There was another lapse of silence where you noticed the distinct lack of blueprints (usually he had those just in case he messed up somewhere and had to fix it, but had been working for over a day with no breaks and needed the visual aid).

“Oh...what? C’mon Dirk, you’re being open about pretty much everything else right now.”

“No, no it’s just. Just. I thought you’d’ve just...guessed. Or known, really.” Dirk let out this little sound that was half a huff of breath and half a snort, “I’m making you a body. A real one, not ‘just a pair of shades’.” He explained, tone indicating that he was quoting you with the ending there.

You were once again confused.

“But I thought you didn’t want-”

“It doesn’t matter what I want.” He hissed, interrupting you and working on what you see now as a wireframe (you pull up an image of the human nervous system, finding it to mirror what you see in front of you) for a hand, “It never matter. Whatever insecurities I have-had... they don’t matter right now. They never did when it came to you and I was an unbelievably shitty asshole to not see that.”

“I don’t understand you.”

“I just. I’ve seen how Mr. Stark and Jarvis act with each other. How they aren’t just, I don’t know, creator and created, I guess. They work together. They’re like, family maybe? I mean I can see it, sort of. Sense the emotions from them. I thought, maybe, I thought that I wanted that? With you. But I’ve fucked up so spectacularly on that front haven’t I? I mean, if you were downright afraid of me I’d completely understand. I’d hate it, but I’d understand, because your life was literally in my hands and I almost fucking ended it.”

The hand he was making was...small. Was it due to a lack of material to work with? Surely, he could just ask Tony Stark for more if he needed it.

But then there was what Dirk had laid out for you, that memory where he’d nearly broken you into pieces.
You think that may have been what pain was.

Now there was a casing around the wrist, cannibalized circuit board parts and adding thicker cables in between it and the wire-nerves. Muscles, or the equivalent you thinking. Joints were made to bend and be flexible and as you watched, not saying anything, you noticed how much attention he was paying to detail. Was it his goal to make this body (however small it turned out to be) as realistic and lifelike as possible? Did he pay as much attention to detail when fixing up Sawtooth and Squarewave? Would he go so far as to mimic blood for you, if you asked? Not that you would. There is a point where ridiculousness sets in.

You take a moment to go over what materials Mr. Stark had even given him.

“That’s...really high grade stuff.” That one comment got Dirk babbling away again, excitement leaking into his tone and body language as he told you the vision in his head, the things that humans could do that he wanted to mimic. A healing system (not quite an immune system like with organic life, but similar) with nanobots stored in your body that, at your command, would patch you up given that there’s suitable material lying around. A “brain” that was not just located in your head but spread out, to some degree, like an octopus. That way you’d live, he hoped, even if you were down to just being a finger (though he did admit at that point, cut off from the nanobots you would need external help unless you had remote access to them). Remote access, or wifi access, to the nanobots being another feat that Dirk wanted to be done.

He was well and truly going to do this, wasn’t he? He wasn’t even going to settle for mimicking human function in appearance but attempt to mimic actual function.

He’s not half assing this.

“I mean, you’ll have internet access and we could put backups of your code and stuff in like, a dozen different places, if you want.”

You have never in your three years of existence (excluding the thirteen years of memories from him and however the fuck long a time Brain Ghost Dirk had) had seen him like this. With Jake it was...different. A different set of emotions. A different kind of energy to it but one that might’ve had him talking just as much as he was now, if the text to speech function had been available to Jake before the Game.

“...Dirk?” He stopped mid movement, mid thought, “Why are you doing this?”
“What do you mean by that?”

“Just a week ago you practically couldn’t stand to look at me, sprite or shades or otherwise. Did that talk with Jane, Jake, and Roxy change you that much? Did some other conversation I wasn’t present for change you? Was observing Mr. Stark and Jarvis really what moved you to take action like this?”

“All of the above.”

You were caught off guard, “Excuse me?”

You could almost see Dirk rolling his eyes, “Option 4. All of the above. Everything that you offered up. Hit the nail on the head.”

You would’ve frowned if you were capable of it.

Hours ticked on by, the both of you bouncing ideas off each other of just what Dirk might make this new body of yours capable of. It ranged from the reasonable (like night vision) to the insane (the capability or taste buds and being able to eat things (metal things, oil, components that your hypothetical nanobots would be able to break down and recycle for whatever other purpose (maintenance, not just repair) was possible or needed.

Eventually though, you caught Dirk’s eyes beginning to droop, his head nodding as he was clearly fighting to stay awake.

“Dirk.”

There was no response.

“Dirk. Sleep is one of your vital functions.”

“Nuh. ‘m good Hale, Hill, Hal.”

“How long has it been since you slept?”
“Mm goin on forty nine hours ish? Can still keep going s’not a big deal ‘ve gone longer.”

“Well clearly today is not one of those days, Dirk. Seriously. Do I need to call Roxy?” Truth was, you were already messaging her to get her ass down here so Dirk can stop being a colossal idiot.

“Noooo.” She was three minutes from reaching you. Good. Dirk was leaning on the table for support now, and you half worry whether or not he’d knock the now completed hand off the table and have to fix it later or, worse case scenario, have to start over from the beginning. Would he get discouraged if that happened?

“Dirk. Just close your eyes and rest already. You won’t get this done any faster if your going to keep on having to go back and fix the mistakes your sleep deprived ass creates for you.”

Roxy hauls Dirk up (and grabs you as well, to your shock) and places your shades on her face before leaving the workshop. The lights clicked off behind you as the door shuts and automatically locks itself.

You make a note to thank Jarvis at some point later, and maybe ask about where he got his name from.
Chapter 16

Chapter Summary

==⇒ Be Bruce

==⇒ Be Dave

⇒ Be Bruce

Early morning for you meant waking up shortly before the sun, making your way down to the communal kitchen to make yourself some tea. Early morning meant that Steve would be out for a run by now and Natasha and Clint would be sitting with twin coffees on a couch watching whatever channel on the TV. Once your tear was made you set things up and make Tony the ‘tea that doesn’t taste like tea’ for when he’ll shuffle his way into the kitchen a few minutes later as you go to sit down by one of the large floor-to-ceiling windows. As you meditate, facing the rising sun, Tony would come down, grab his tea and settle down beside you to attempt to do the same, sometimes successful, sometimes too wired by some project that he was working on to calm his mind. On those mornings, he would finish his tea and make a coffee when breakfast was made.

Thor, Jane, and Darcy would wander in around that time for coffee, and Pepper, depending on whether she was away or had a meeting, would at least grab a coffee and breakfast to-go. If not, she’d just grab a coffee and sit down on one of the chairs in the Den. Steve was usually back shortly after the sun was over the horizon (around seven o’clock, most days), and would come back to the tower, shower, and start making ‘an actual breakfast’ for all of you. Depending on the mood, sometimes one of the others would help him. Pepper, occasionally. Darcy helped a few times. Even Jane did, once.

This was all assuming no one had anything else going on, missions or otherwise.

Now there were several more people to account for, including the four that Clint and Natasha helped get here in the middle of the night with the aid of the quinjet.

Rose and one of the new comers, Kanaya, now sat with you and Tony. Roxy and Dirk came in with Dirk passing out on one of the other couches. John, Jake, and Jane Crocker shuffled in at some point with Jane breaking off to go to the kitchen (as it turned out, she and Steve make a pretty good team).

The adults trolls didn’t show, along with, well, most of the other trolls in general. The only other one
besides Kanaya to wake up this early (at least for today) was Porrin.

Your meditation was usually to try and get in touch with the Hulk. You were still skeptical about him but there were a few things you’ve learned about the other guy since you started. First and foremost, he listened to Tony. Sure, he listened to the other Avengers but it was always with you having to prompt him into action. With Tony? He just, did whatever the man asked.

And Tony actually asked, where the others usually told the Hulk they needed him to do this or not do that.

Once breakfast was ready, more seats were added and some chose to eat in the Den.

You feel a little out of your depth, though to be fair most of the newcomers (mutants, aliens, wary and weary in equal measure) made adjustment easier (for all of you, you’d like to think), by going off to do their own thing elsewhere in tower in the spaces of the guest floors that they’ve claimed for themselves. These past few days have been more or less uninterrupted if not downright peaceful. Barring the strange monster attack of course. You note that Rose and Kanaya were the only ones to not have left the Den yet. Tony had retreated with Dirk (who had woken up to breakfast and had stubbornly refused to fall asleep again) and Roxy to what you suppose was now Dirk’s workshop. Clint and Natasha were in the kitchen helping Crocker clean up while Steve took John and Jake to the recreation (workout) floor so they could have a look at the gym and shooting range respectively.

Rose eventually got up, spoke to Kanaya about something (you hadn’t wanted to listen in) and made her way toward the hallway (and you think the elevator).

You wonder what made her leave so abruptly.

⇒ Be Rose
⇒ You Cannot Be Rose Right Now
⇒ Spy On Rose’s Pesterlogs? Y/N
⇒ Y

--carcinoGeneticist [CG] began pestering tentacleTherapist [TT]--

CG: ROSE GET YOUR ASS UP HERE

TT: Karkat, lovely to hear from you though I do wonder why, given the hour.
TT: From your habits on the meteor I hadn’t expected to hear anything from you or Dave until at least noon.

CG: CUT THE SHIT OUT LALONDE, DAVE’S PANICSTRICKEN AND I NEED SOME GOD DAMN HELP. NOW. IF YOU WOULD.

CG: HE WOKE UP EARLIER GRIPPING HIS STOMACH AND NOW THERE’S BLOOD LEAKING FROM A HOLE THAT WASN’T THERE BEFORE.
CG: OKAY I STAND CORRECTED. IT WAS THERE BEFORE, BUT NOT BEFORE THE GAME ENDED. HE SAYS HE JUST IGNORED IT BECAUSE IT DIDN’T HURT THEN AND WASN’T BOTHERING HIM OR ANYTHING BEFORE THIS MORNING.

TT: Bleeding?

TT: This is going to be a blatantly awkward question because I believe I already know the answer, without the use of Seer powers, but I need you to answer honestly anyway.
TT: Where’s the hole?

CG: YOU’RE ABSOLUTELY RIGHT.

CG: THIS IS AWKWARD.

CG: ITS BETWEEN HIS BULGE AND HIS ASS.

TT: Well then.

TT: Karkat. What you are describing to me is...it’s normal. I’ll be there in a minute, however. There are items I have left in my room that will help him.

CG: THE FUCK? HOW IS MY MATE BLEEDING FROM A HOLE THAT WASN’T THERE BEFORE THE GAME ENDED, NORMAL, EXACTLY? PLEASE, LALONDE, EXPLAIN THIS TO ME.

TT: It’s a thing that happens to female humans once a month after a certain age in between childhood and adulthood.

CG: ONCE A PERIGEE? EVERY. PERIGEE?

TT: Karkat.
TT: This is better explained face to face.

TT: I’ll be there in a minute.

--tentacleTherapist [TT] ceased pestering carcinoGeneticist [CG]--

⇒ Fine, Be Dave Then

Okay fine. You’ll be Dave for a while. It’s not as if there’s other people you could be busy being right now.
Your mind wasn’t in a very good place right now, to be honest. Karkat had stopped messaging Rose saying that she’d be here with something to help you and be able to explain what was going on. You only half heard him, staring at the pants and boxers you now had to either clean or throw away or something. You didn’t know the protocol for this. You only in the vaguest of senses knew what was even happening to you and even then there was that persistent little voice telling you that this shouldn’t be happening.

People do not suddenly have a...dear lord you couldn’t even bring yourself to say it. People did not gain a hole into their bodies practically overnight. From what Rose and the internet taught you, you should have had more time to, you know, get used to the new addition to your anatomy before any crazy shit like this happens. Well you weren’t most people and not only were you still biologically half a guy but also the thing responsible for this additional gender wasn’t human.

Wasn’t even a mammal, really.

You had been tossing and turning all night, though it was when you’d settled to laying on your stomach that you got the most rest.

Now in the morning, you were tired, irritable, and panicking (did you mention you were panicking before, because you were). Of course, that panic had turned now into a sort of calm that had you feeling a little disconnected from everything. Like in the rare moments when you were keenly aware of your being a spirit (with a soul) inside a body and that body was just some vehicle you were driving around the physical realm in.

Shut up, you’ve seen weirder.

Anyway, it was that kind of disconnect. You were still there, still in the present, but you felt odd, a little numb even, all over.

Except for when the blood leaked out of you and you had to look away even though that did nothing for you. Just the feeling of this whole thing was up there, nearing the threshold of how much utter bullshit you could take in a week.

Tick.

Karkat had fretted over you the moment he noticed you weren’t okay.
Then again he was the one with a fully functioning sense of smell.

“Dave?” You heard Rose distantly as she entered your room, the bathroom being designed in a way that gave you and Karkat a few more moments of privacy before she poked her head and oh God you felt horrible and vulnerable and at least you hadn’t gotten any blood on the floor for all it did nothing to improve your mood.

Tock.

Karkat hissed something to her and you saw her a moment later. She didn’t pull a grimace or some other odd expression. She stopped a few feet away from you when your matefriend made it clear that he wasn’t going to let her in closer just yet. She hands him a bag (not a box, not a package, not a bag but you didn’t have another word right now) of a lot of square-ish looking things in it.

Tick.

Your world was shifting, the ticking noise that was always at the back of your mind becoming a larger presence than you usually allowed it to be. You were faintly aware of someone moving your body around some, getting one of those squares (packages, folded up padded rectangle things) and a clean pair of boxers and pants for you and dressing you.

Tock.

You hated mentally checking out like this. You hated it because Time and all of its associated concepts and parts became all you could think about, all you could hear. Your sense of touch became muted, your sight was there but your response time (ugh) slowed to a crawl. You hated this because it made you vulnerable. It was an amplified, God Tier level of the disassociation that you sometimes got when patching yourself up or found yourself locked out of the apartment after a strife.

This?

Tick.

You did not want to start comparing this to those experiences.
Timelines are stable. Branches turn into Loops eventually (most of them, like, ninety percent), and merge back with the Alpha or break off and collapse if they don’t.

The inevitability of death and (a lesser known concept), given enough time, the possibility of birth or rebirth (both of them associated with Space and Life). The whispers of Time itself calling to you, telling you how to halt its movement if needed, telling you how to slow it down, speed it up, and how to travel through it forward and backward. Its whispers was the sounds of clockwork gears turning (metal on metal that you should hate, you do hate, but found yourself relaxing in this sole instance), the ticking of the clock that those gears turned. It whispered how everything was alright, it was happy, even, to have three Awakened Heroes to claim and help and have you (and them) aid it in turn.

It’s Witch would keep consequences of fucking up (death and doomed timelines) at the bare minimum. It’s Maid would help clean up the aftermath of those that do happen. You?

For you it would be a sword, a shield, a grappling hook if that’s what you needed. In turn, you protected it from corruption and destruction from the things that may slip from the Witch’s grasp or the Maid’s eyesight.

You didn’t have to be its Hero. Just it’s Knight.

You were nearly lulled to sleep, but Karkat’s presence (wrapped around you as much as was possible, you in his lap and his wings extended fully to cover you like a tent, casting a red tint to the light the filtered in. Your own wings were folded over your sides, over Karkat’s arms and over your own.

“Rose?” You wonder where she had gone. Had she left? Had she been explaining to you and Karkat this whole time how this would all even work (wait, wasn’t Jaspers a boy cat? Did Rose have boy cat parts now?) while you were too out of it to pay attention to her?

Time’s presence wasn’t as overwhelming now and you could both hear and feel the vibrations that was his purring.

“Went to put your clothes in the wash or something. Said she’ll be back soon.” Was the reply you got and you...didn’t mind. Really, you think you were just emotionally drained by this point or the sort of numbness was still lingering.
“Oh. Okay.”

“Dave?” You let out a hum to let him know you were listening, “Are you okay now?”

You hummed again, buzzing like a hummingbird’s wings.

When Rose did come back, she was allowed in the butterfly-wing-tent and the three of you shifted around some as she made herself more comfortable. You and Rose had, for the first year on the meteor, shared a room and that had pretty much killed any awkwardness between the two of you. Even now that you both had mates (matefriends, matesprits, datefriends), the two of you refused to make things awkward if you had to talk to each other with one or both of them around. They in turn made an effort to do the same regarding each other.

Terezi and Vriska had kept to themselves more, especially so for the first year and a half, but after so long of sharing what amounted to being a pretty small space with each other for so long, they’d gotten used to not hiding their moirail shit around you, at least with the little things like holding hands and other public displays of pale affection.

The small space was really just the section of the meteor that they’d closed off as safe. The rest of the complex was, you quickly found out, crawling with weird game monsters that didn’t fit into the norm. They were still all black and looked a bit like large imps, but walked on all fours, had lion or fish-like tails, had a strangely humanoid face, and, well, okay they weren’t like imps much at all.

Aside from the fact that the black color scheme stuck to everything and the white-dead glow that was supposed to be their eyes, they looked more like weird troll-human hybrids that did not hesitate when they saw you to attack you. If it weren’t for the fact that they dropped grist and boondollars that refilled what would have otherwise been a limited supply, you’d all have avoided them like the plague.

As it was, when you did venture that far out, you were (meant to) take one other person (at least) with you.

“Rr’ss?” She made a sound to let you know she was listening.

“Jaspers was a boy cat, wasn’t he?”
“Yes, Dave, and yes, I am now half male as much as I am, apparently, partially or half domestic cat.”

“Does it like, feel weird to you? As much as this thing is weird for me?”

“It does feel “weird” on some level, I suppose.” This was Lalondese for yes, I am completely weirded out, my weird meter broke and now I’m left unable to calculate the amount of weirdness that this thing is for me.

You bit down on your lip, fighting a grin, “Would you be mad if I said I’m glad I’m not alone in this?”

“No.” Because she was glad to not have to go through this alone either.

“Welcome to being more troll-like.” Karkat mumbled into your hair, “Keep your genders or switch on adulthood, doesn’t fuckin’ matter what you do or are because you’re the same as everyone else otherwise.”

“Wait. Why switch with adulthood?” You could almost see him raising his eyebrow at Rose’s question.

“Because right after we finish our adult pupation, or molt, whichever is fine, we...okay so sometimes if there’s a, uh, hormone yeah, sometimes a troll who chooses one gender during their grub to wriggler molt may end up having more hormones tied to the other gender and if there’s enough they can actually switch over during their adult molt.” He explains with a shrug.

Huh.

Wait.

“When’s the adult molt? Like, is it eight and a half sweeps? Nine? Is it different depending on like, blood color?” Now you were curious, “Cause like, I remember you telling me about how long the different castes “expected lifespans” are,” But didn’t tell you how long he was expected to live because maybe even he didn’t know (at the time it kind of low key terrified you), “but if you all pupate at the same time...”
“Well,” Rose, being the one who could actually look at him right now, was also waiting expectantly, “Our eyes start to change color at about eight sweeps and we have our molt at eight and a half, yeah. At nine the drones come knocking and at ten sweeps you’re conscripted, given a job, a title, and either live on one of the colony worlds or in a space ship if you aren’t a jade blood for the rest of your life.”

“Aradia and Feferi’s eyes have started to change.” Rose noted with a carefully maintained monotone, “Never mind that you’re all aging somehow. Maybe we will to, now that we’re out of the Game.”

“They’re all older than me, Feferi and Aradia are the oldest of our brood sweep.” Karkat shifted a little more, uncomfortable and probably trying to hide something. You start thinking as Rose gives you a sideways glance. She was giving you the reigns of this conversation since Kanaya, for whatever reason, wasn’t here at the moment.

Probably because this started out as her helping you.

“Kanaya’s doted on you a lot. I mean, giving you hugs n pale kisses n the whole deal six months and two weeks after we started drifting through the Horrorterrors playground. Though, at some point,” You knew when, you just don’t want to say it because that particular memory wasn’t a fond one, “Terezi and Vriska started handing out platonic friendship hugs to you and Vriska actually started backing off when you told her you didn’t want to spar.” Rose’s face lit up as she remembered something.

“Hey. Wasn’t that after Kanaya almost broke her promise to not hunt down Gamzee and kill him?”

“Yep. And I think Vriska and Terezi wanted to join in. Terezi seemed especially mad.”

“Guys you don’t have to fucking tiptoe around what happened, alright? Gamzee opened the door to one of the Dungeon areas, got the monsters attention, kicked me out there with them and locked the door behind me.”

“Why didn’t you let me go find and kill the bitch again?” You ask, the memory coming to mind as if it were yesterday, how Karkat had been left twitchy for the rest of the day and how you’d bet your left hand that he either hadn’t slept at all or had night terrors for a solid week afterward. You all did, actually. Everyone was wary of the vents and no one wanted to sleep alone.

You had been the one to help Karkat and he in turn helped you get actual rest while the other kept
“Maybe I was under the impression that killing him would do more harm timeline wise than good. I don’t know.”

“So. Vriska dealing out hugs like cards in a poker game.”

“Funny how you’re mind goes straight to poker and not some other card game.” You stuck your tongue out at your twin. You were just trying to get back on topic.

“Oh real mature David.”

“Shut up Rosalyn. Anyway. So there was that. I mean I didn’t notice anything off but apparently they did and somehow Kanaya was let into the loop.”

Ten seconds passed by in silence.

“Karkat?” He moved his hands and you adjusted yourself to see that he was...taking out colored contacts?

Fuck.

His eyes were a dark burgundy sort of red.

Soon (you don’t know how soon but soon) they’d be as bright a red as your own.

Fuck.
Chapter 17

Chapter Summary

==> Be Pepper Potts
==> Be SL

⇒ Be Pepper Potts

I-70 Eastern Utah

KARKAT: THIS DOES SEEM LIKE A GOOD SPOT TO HAVE A FEW HIVE STEMS SET UP, MAYBE A BIT AWAY FROM THE ROAD THOUGH.

Highway 50, Nevada

KARKAT: SAME THOUGHTS AS THE ROAD ABOVE. THE NUMBER FOR BOTH SHOULD BE KEPT TO A MINIMUM THOUGH.

Northern Maine

KARKAT: CANADA IS LAX ON MUTANT LAWS RIGHT? THIS WOULD BE A GOOD PLACE TO SET UP, FOUR OR FIVE HIVE STEMS MAYBE, DEPENDING ON SIZE AND RESOURCES. IF WE’RE LOOKING FOR SELF SUSTAINING THEY’D HAVE TO BE PRETTY LARGE, RIGHT?

Southeast Oregon

KARKAT: I LOOKED UP THE NUMBER FOR A SELF SUSTAINING POPULATION AND GOT SEVERAL DIFFERENT ANSWERS. I’D SAY MAYBE A THOUSAND FOR EACH HIVE (WITH ROOM TO SPARE) WITH MIX GENERATIONS IF AT ALL POSSIBLE, THOUGH. MIGHT HAVE TO REDUCE THE NUMBER OF HIVE STEMS TO TWO OR THREE PER AREA NO MATTER HOW LARGE SAID AREA IS.
KARKAT: IF ROSE IS TO BE BELIEVED, WHICH, GRANTED, SHE PRETTY MUCH ALWAYS IS, THERE’S A STRETCH OF WILDERNESS WHERE WE COULD BUILD A Hive Stem WHERE HER Hive USED TO BE.

Pepper was an exceptional woman when it came to organization. While the Avengers were looking into the “Magic Door” as they’ve taken to calling it, she had been tasked to look into building mutant safe houses with Darcy, Jane Foster, and the Mutant-Alien group now taking up residence in the tower.

So far, Karkat has really been the only one of this group to be helping, but that was because he didn’t want to get any of the others involved.

Jarvis had shown her a recording of the events that had gone on the first night Karkat was there and God she had to restrain herself from hugging him when she saw him in person.

Thor had been regaling more legends to the A.I. as well, which were relayed to the rest of the team, herself, Jane, and Darcy whenever they asked. You weren’t sure how much truth were in these stories, but as you worked through papers that S.I.’s lawyers had given to you (to give to Tony and the mutant-alien group) to fill out and sign off on, you thought you could use a good break. It wasn’t even all those paper either. There were the ones that Karkat had been meticulous about and going through as Darcy and Jane worked out the best places across the U.S. for safe house locations that you were looking over. There were reports from Darcy about the other assistants in Jane, Bruce, and Tony’s collective lab space (affectionately known as Candyland).

As good as you were with these things, you were starting to get tired and your eyes were starting to strain.

A break sounded like the best idea you’ve had all week.

“Jarvis? What recent legends has Thor recorded?”

“There is one tale involving the God of Storms, the God of Fire, the Goddess of Prophecy and the Goddess of the Hunt.”
You hum an affirmative sound and he starts to recount it to you, playing back the story in Thor’s voice.

The gods, children at the time, had never actually met in person despite their being friends for most of their lives. So they decide to make a plan to meet up. The Goddess of Prophecy had foreseen a meteor shower (falling stars, they had thought, make a wish, the same wish, and it would come true). The shower started, seen by all four, and they made their wish to see each other.

This wish was granted, but not in the way they’d imagined.

They gained each other, but lost their realm.

Whisked away to another realm they were to face challenges and trials that would bring them to the edge of breaking. Trials that would bring them into their true power as gods. The God of Storms was the first of them to ascend, followed by the Goddess of the Hunt, while the God of Fire and Goddess of Prophecy ascended at the same time.

Though they ascended, they would not be able to win against a terrible monster that they themselves had made. Without that, they weren’t able to bring the realm that they were tasked to create into fruition.

So they, essentially, hit the reset button and cheated their way out of being erased along with the Trials.

The tale ended there as one part in a longer story.

A much larger story that Jarvis said he was piecing together with each tale the God (or Demigod) of Thunder told.

You hadn’t exactly gone to sleep, but you had rested for what the AI informed you to be about half an hour. He also told you that Kankri was outside your office, waiting patiently to be let in. Had been for the past five minutes and didn’t want to interrupt your break.

You sigh, straighten yourself up in your chair, stretch, and glance over at the coffee machine that was
connected to every other in the tower by yet another AI. You’d actually been the one to name her, which was a surprise.

You asked Java to brew you another cup of coffee, your third today, and told Jarvis that Kankri could be let in now.

With the scent of coffee in the air, you could see that Kankri as he walked in relaxed the longer he was in your office. You motion to the chair for him to sit in, and he does so, tail curling around one of his legs.

“Is there something you wanted, Kankri?”

He bit his lip, “Signless, please. I am more my Alternian iteration than I am my Beforan at the moment. I have asked Jarvis, if there was any way I could possibly lend my help, as the other residents of this tower are all busy with something or another and I haven’t the heart to pull them away to ask. Jarvis said your break would be ending soon, so, if it isn’t any trouble of course, I thought I’d come by to see if there wasn’t anything I could help you with.”

You wanted to hug him to.

“Of course, if that’s what you want.” You spin around a small stack of legal documents regarding the citizenship of himself and the rest of his group, “At present this only applies to those of you in the tower right now as we have yet to locate Jade, the Leijons, or the Captors yet and the Zahhaks, Pyropes, Serkets and Makaras are either elsewhere in the U.S. or in Germany. You don’t have to read through it, but I would appreciate knowing if someone was trying to trip us up.”

Signless gave a nod of his head and stared down at the papers. His eyes gained a watery pink tint to it before blood (you think, you don’t want to believe) trailed down his face as tears. You knew by now that he was an alien, but that didn’t mean aliens couldn’t have mutants with powers of their own.

It just took you this long, apparently, to fully realize that since he didn’t seem to be in pain (or moving at all really).

You were prepared to be up and moving just in case you were wrong.
He grabs a few tissues from the box that you keep by your desk a couple minutes later when Java chimes so you know he coffee had cooled enough that it won’t burn your mouth on the way down. Wiping his blood-tears away he turns his attention to you.

“It is sound. No one is attempting anything underhanded.”

It was then that you finally got up to actually take your coffee and take a sip.

"Thank you. Would you like Java to make you some?" You ask as you gesture to the machine.

"No thank you, but I do appreciate the offer. I suppose we can both rest a little easier now, though, knowing that my and my...Crew's bid for citizenship here, however long it may take, is not going to be sabotaged so soon."

Your smile didn't reach your eyes, noting the hesitance (or just unfamiliarity) in saying the word that the kids called their group, "For now."

"For now." He agreed.

⇒ Be SL

You are now sedentaryLoophole, best friend of Carmine, Viridian, and Wisteria.

Your name is Sapphire (you aren’t too sure of why your mother named you so but she hasn’t been in your life for years now, you choose not to care), Groves. Again, you aren’t sure how you gained a name that sounds like something straight out of My Little Pony but most people only know you by your first name or one of your nicknames. Fire and Pyre being two of the most common.

You had ended a group call about four days ago with two of your roommate friends and are undeniably furious to find out that your fourth, your red bird, had been kidnapped.

You and Wisteria wasted no time in setting yourselves to work, working in tandem to locate where Carmine had gone. Carmine and Viridian say that they’ve known you since middle school as a way to avoid the awkwardness of ‘how do you guys work so well together when you've only known
these two for two years after popping up out of nowhere?”. You knew they’d popped up out of nowhere, to. Your skill with a computer was up there, according to all of the (three) people who you knew (and liked).

Their story was just detailed enough that no one would question it. Just vague enough that it gave nothing away. The two of them had a foster mother who kept tabs on all of her foster children after they grew up and left the house. Their middle and high school were actually the ones that you and Wisteria had gone to. They had records even though you certainly had never seen them, not even in passing.

Wisteria just brushed it off, saying that they’d tell you about their past when they’re ready.

Something in you had told you as far back as a year and a half ago that they’d never been ready.

And then a year ago Carmine had gotten a visit from their “foster mother” and everything you thought you knew did a u-turn.

You had been there. You and Wisteria both, really.

You motioned for her to stay still and silent as you muted the volume of your laptop and she pretended to read.

“You stupid lowblood. You can’t do anything right, can you? You’ve been compromised haven’t you? Haven’t you?!” It was at this point that you tapped the ‘record’ button on one of the apps you’d downloaded onto your phone, “Little pissblood can’t do anything right. Not powerful enough to be a helmsman of a ship. Not dumb enough to be a decent infiltraserver! No. We cannot have our cover be blown by some pathetic lowblood who can’t even hold her thinkpan together to run a ship! Do you know what we do to trolls like that, Leikos? Do you fucking know?”

“No, ma’am, I’m sorry-”

“WE USE YOU AND PICK APART YOUR THINKPAN AS WE DAMN WELL PLEASE. WE SHIP YOUR TRAITOROUS ASS OUT TO THE DEATH PLANET, AND YOU’LL DIE THERE REGRETTING HAVING EVER BEEN HATCHED!!!”

Ever since that evening you had been running program after program to translate what you’d heard.
It certainly wasn’t any language you knew of, and after two months you conclude it wasn’t anything seen on Earth, you know, for how it used sounds outside human hearing.

You were friends with two aliens and one of them had been tortured (screaming haunted your nightmares for weeks after that) while the other had to come back to a partner (co-worker, quasi-platonic datefriend?) who all three of you had to piece back together.

You didn’t care what they were. You didn’t care that your crush and her sort-of-girlfriend (you needed their terminology for this somehow without being obvious that you know what’s up) may have been originally sent here to scout your planet for invasion (the only option that made sense right now). You didn’t care that they haven’t even hinted anything, for all they had breathing down their necks.

Carmine got better, you think, but you still hadn’t been able to translate much of anything other than insults and that final sentence that the duo’s “foster mother” had practically snarled at your friend.

You practice with some of the insults that your vocal chords could actually produce, in case you ever run into that bitch again.

Now your fingers were a blur of motion over your keyboard as you get down to tracking that damned door that Carmine said they’d gone through. Wisteria took the information you got and ran through it for patterns in locations, attempting to pin down where it went and for how long did it stay. Wisteria had only left the house once to stock up on food, drinks, and hygiene. You hadn’t left at all.

Viridian had been for the past... (almost a week maybe, you were bad at telling time) while now, the only person in the house to be raking in any money. Well, you picked up some of the slack by coding things for people but you’ve been too distracted to pick up anything new, only finishing what you had on your plate as you and your friend found out a piece of interesting information.

The door always kept going back to one location, no matter wherever else it went to.

A good decade ago, Crocker Corp had bought that land outright and even though that had caught the attention of the media, it died rather quickly. You scroll through newsfeeds and even the company’s official website. Nothing shows that they’ve built anything on that land and the official site doesn’t have any record of buying a piece of the Sahara Desert at all.
You wanted to scream.
Chapter 18

Chapter Summary

==> Be John

==> Be Doctor Binner

⇒ Be John

You’ve been distracting yourself.

You’ve been distracting yourself with games and the battle and practicing the few unarmed combat moves you know with Steve and Jake on the workout floor. Steve said he called it the Weapons floor. This and the two floors below it make up the recreation floors. This one, one dedicate to the Arts, and the lowest of the three is where the pool is. There are showers and changing room on this floor and the Pool floor, and part of the pool floor had both a sauna and a large hot tub.

Apparently the Pool floor hot tub was the only tub in the entire tower. Everywhere else had large showers.

You were distracting your thoughts by thinking in tangents as long as Dave’s ramblings.

You punch a bag, making it swing back on its chain to be punched or kicked by Jake back toward you. You’d set up a rhythm. Steve was watching you but you didn’t focus on that. You focused on Jake and how he was starting up a conversation now.

“We’ll find Jade.” Or maybe he was just making a comment? Maybe he was just telling you that he knew you missed her?

You responded anyway, “I know. It’s just. I tried everything I could think of. I turned into the wind for a full day, Jake. A full day of flying hundreds of miles an hour and I couldn’t find her. I tried those Retcon bullshit powers and guess what? Whenever I think I got close,” You hit the bag back toward him for a fourth time since you started speaking, “Wherever she was fucking moved and I’d have to search all over again.”
The bag swung back to you and you kicked it back.

“John?” You waited a few seconds before seeing that Jake had caught the bag and had moved it back to where it could rest on the chain without swinging. “John. Jade’ll be alright. She’ll get through this and if she by chance doesn’t go and rescue her own self then you can bet all of the fuckload of irons in that fire that we’re going to make all those damned people rue their life choices.”

You knew he was right, but that did fuckall at making you feel calmer.

“So her not tearing a hole in space and teleporting her way out by now would mean that we do have to rescue her. That something bad has happened to her.” Something in you was hissing and whimpering simultaneously at the thought. You knew she had internet access sometimes and that whoever had her didn’t know or care about her sylladex, so you’ve been able to send some messages back and forth but the issue there was that you usually passed each other by. You would end up sending messages the lengths of letters instead of it being like the instant conversation you could have with anyone else.

“How can you be so sure she’ll be okay?” You ask, sliding down into a seat that Steve had lead you to without your noticing.

Jake paused, eyes flickering back and forth from you to the superhero, “I know because if she’s anything like my grandma, she’s not the type to let anyone just walk all over her like a welcome mat. I know because it is what I’m choosing to believe and hope in. I could hardly leave my grandma-granddaughter-daughter to face this alone without believing in her, could I?”

You shook your head, “No, man, you’re right it’s just... It’s hard. My brain just won’t shut up about this. It’s fine.”

“You know how she is.”

“Maybe an actual round of roughhousing would help?” You groan out a frustrated no in response.

“Sorry to be all bummed out, Jake. I think I’m just going to leave you and Steve to do whatever, maybe find Jane, see how she’s doing.”

“Well, alright.” He replies as you get up and leave the room. You don’t hear what he says as you close the door, choosing to just walk down the hallway to the elevator.
Be Doctor Brinner

You are now Doctor David Brinner, next door neighbor of one Joan Crocker. In the past few days you've noticed a number of things about your neighbor (You'd like to think of him as your friend, to). First and foremost, his last name has been changed to Crobert. He'd told you about it over coffee after he got home rather late from what should have been a normal work day. The second thing you noticed was how, the next day at his place, he looked to be in the middle of rearranging furniture. He said he'd woken up two days ago as if he were now a different person. The change in surname, he's explained, was a compromise.

You didn't have the confirmation to know, but you had a pretty good guess as to what that compromise had been about. Be this person he woke up as, or be who you had known him to be for nearly a decade now.

You hum into your coffee as you watched him effortlessly move up and down the stairs with heavy furniture that he shouldn't have been able to (wasn't able to, in fact, before now) lift by himself in the first place. Not overnight.

"Where's Jane scampered off to, Joan? I haven't seen nor heard any mention of her in the last week, at least." For all you know it could have been longer. You were beginning to worry. Joan loved his daughter (adopted from some other part of the family, he'd said, didn't matter). You'd known the girl for most of her life, which was more than what could be said about the rest of Joan's family.

He stopped for a minute for some water and a break, sitting down at the kitchen table across from you, "She's...Oh joy. Have I ever told you of something I found out...dear me, it's been a good few months now." You wait until he composed himself before shaking your head, gesturing he go on, "Well, you know that most of my family isn't...the best. Jane has a younger brother that I hadn't known about. Jane is with John right now but,” He runs a hand through his hair as if to ward away mounting stress, “but I wouldn't be surprised if there were more of my family involved in this whole, “He made a motion with his hands, “mess.”

Your eyes narrowed as you give him this flat stare that told him you would believe him for only so long as he told you everything eventually, “Is she really with her brother, or are you just hoping she is?” He shook his head, dropping it into a hand.

“I know she is, it's just, I've messaged her twice now and though she says she's okay, she has told me that John isn't and knowing her that's...it's just...I know she's not telling me everything, she doesn't want me to worry. Me. Gods...”
Gods? Plural? Was this a slip of the tongue? No, it couldn't be, he's never alluded to believing in anything but, perhaps, Judaism on some level. Or maybe it was a mix of Christianity and Judaism? The traditions he kept were certainly a mix of the two religions, some years leaning toward one more than the other around the holidays, but still. Both of those were monotheistic. You yourself knew something or someone like a god was out there but hadn't been able to pin down what, or who. Agnostic, you think the word was.

Should you ask him about it?

You think you should. If nothing else it would fill the silence and give you something to debate about. Who knows, maybe this was just a slip and you were over thinking things. Again.

“Gods?” He shook a little as if coming out of a daydream, chuckling nervously.

“I'm sorry, friend. But, yes. Gods.” Okay then, one question answered, several more to go, “I suppose its...part of that compromise. I must believe in something, I can't not, but these past few months...” He trailed off, face contorted in thought. Several seconds ticked by before he let out this aggravated sound.

You felt your eyebrows try to reach your hair line.

“Joan. Jo. Don't strain yourself over this. I have a doctorate in linguistics, not medicine.”

“Pfft. Sure, okay. Not that kind of doctor. I get it.” He stared down into his now empty cup, “I've had what I can only describe as an extended divine encounter.”

You didn't normally curse.

“Shit,” You would make an exception for this, “Tell me everything.”

Joan Crobert was no liar. His mother, no matter how bad she had been (and now was missing for long enough to put someone else in charge of Crocker Corp), did not raise a liar. You've known each other for long enough to tell that he was not lying.
“I’m not sure how much there is to tell, David. One of them has your first name, several of them look like aliens, at least four look like they could be related to my family and one of those four had the ears of a canine instead of human ears.” It was at this point that he raised one eyebrow at you, “Still want me to try and explain?”

You nearly choked, “Let me get my phone out for notes, at least. God...s.” You take your time in setting up the document (linked so you can access it later from your laptop later) before motioning for Joan to continue.

“The God of Time is the one that has your name. The four that look related to me are the Gods of Breath and Hope, and the Goddesses of Life and Space. Space was the one with the canine ears. There was a God of...I think Heart, a Goddess of Light, and a Goddess of Void.” He’d closed his eyes by now, trying to conjure up memories you think, “The others didn’t have anything to show what they were the god or goddess of, but I know there were two others who shared Space. I’m not sure of the distinction between them. There was one Goddess of Mind and a God of Blood.”

Your fingers flew over the keyboard on your phone, the input of information taking longer because of how much you had to correct your spelling.

“Were there any others?” He gave a nod of his head but told you he didn't know who they were or what they were the gods or goddesses of, “Alright then. Several spaces left blank for the future. What did this encounter actually, you know, involve? What happened?”

“Would you like me to start with the demon that I faced and the story surrounding that little adventure or how I was at one point held captive by the gods enemies?”

“Don't you sass me, Crobert. Go in chronological order like a sensible person.”

And so Joan told a story that you typed dutifully down in the document you’d pulled up but could hardly wrap your brain around. If you didn’t have the faith in your decade long friend that you did, or the evidence that insane things like this could in fact happen, you wouldn’t have believed him. Facing down a demon that had killed him in another lifetime. Fighting alongside some of them as they faced their final battle on what he only knew to be multiple fronts.

There were only a couple of things that they all shared. One thing he knew due to his fatherly given instinct, and the other was as plain as day for all to see.
The more obvious of the two? They all looked like children. Some older and taller, sure, but children nonetheless.

The other? None of them were straight.

“Joan!” You croak, thanking everything that you hadn’t been drinking anything, “You can’t just...what do you mean none of them were straight?!”

“It wasn’t like they were hiding it.”

“Still! How can you be so casual-”

It was at about that point in the conversation that there was a knock on the door.

You both paused, backs straightening as Joan got up to look through the peephole. You knew of the assassination attempts. You were the one who tutored Jane in most of her school subjects after the third attempt. You couldn’t say you were used to them, or used to watching your back, or something useful in this situation like carrying some kind of weapon with you.

Joan not immediately panicking didn’t make you relax.

“Jo?” A safe popped into existence in the air beside him and he expertly caught it with one hand.

If you didn’t believe his story before, you think you do now.

“Do you know anyone that drives an old, kind of of beat up truck?”

“What?” The question caught you off guard, “No.” You get up to peek through the closed (always closed) blinds covering one of the front windows to see there was an old looking truck out front and the person standing in front of the door couldn’t be any older than, well, you would say college years but there had been an influx of middle aged people going back to college. This person though, a girl by the looks, couldn’t be older than mid twenties. Surely not.
You let the blinds fall closed as Joan tucks the safe just out of sight and opens the door.

“Hello. Are you Joan Crocker?”

“Crobert now, miss, but yes. And you are?”

“My name is Sapphire Groves. I’m doing a report on Crocker corp for a project and thought to ask you a few questions about them since you showed on their website.”
Chapter 19

Chapter Summary

===> Be Rose: Get Kanaya Before This Gets Even More Pale

⇒ Be Rose

You’d just finished messaging Kanaya to make her way to the new fort Crabapple (Or Davekat, or whatever other combination of words you and your mate used to describe them as a unit). Dave, Karkat and yourself had since squirmed and pushed each other around (getting into a pillow fight in the process) while trying to get into a more comfortable position. At some point you ended up with one of Dave’s wings sprawled out across your lap, the underside facing up as the top pressed into your stomach. Dave himself was in between you and Karkat, who was laying half on top of Dave’s legs and had Dave’s other wing resting across his back. There was one of the smaller pillows resting on Karkat’s neck that Dave was now using as an armrest, and other pillows scattered haphazardly around the three of you.

This is the sight that Kanaya walked in on.

The expression on her face was priceless. Dave twitched, you think, in the way that told you he wanted to get his camera (boy had that costed an arm and a leg’s worth of grist and boondollars, completely worth it though) out to take a picture. The camera was as high tech as you could think to make it, and had costed so much in large part because of how many mistakes and near misses you had made getting it there. It had been a joint gift from you and Kanaya. Vriska and Terezi had gotten him his turn tables, while Karkat had gone and done the impossible and managed to get him apple juice. You don’t know how he had done it, because just alchemizing an apple was a challenging enough task that it took you an entire year to do it. Other foods with more complicated processes to make? Not a problem. But apples? Heaven forbid it be so simple.

Karkat had done it though.

You think, that first Christmas (you celebrated your and Dave’s birthdays on Christmas, just because it was in the same month), that was the first time you’d ever seen your brother smile so wide (genuinely, not the “ironic” smirk, not the twitch of the lips that told you he wanted to smile but felt he couldn’t). Knowing that had hurt in a way that, when you described it to Kanaya, lead her to explain more in depth about moiraillegiance to you.
You wanted him to smile like that more. You wanted to see him laugh to be happy. You wanted him to be able to relax more (he always seemed so tense and there were days at a time when he holed himself up in your shared room for days on end). You wanted to have inside jokes (that weren’t between you two and John and Jade as friends). You knew you’d been looking out for him, how he was doing. When he had nightmares you were right there to soothe them. If he couldn’t sleep and was out wandering the meteor you stayed up until some ungodly hour until he came back. Often times your eyes would be drooping and he’d come back to you having staring at one page in a book you were reading for the past ten minutes.

You pretty much fit the bill for being his moirail, in troll terminology. It just took you that long and an explanation from Kanaya to see that.

Of course, you still had problems expressing this concern to him at times, especially, you think, because of how you had this whole therapist act and for the longest time him getting that mixed up with what you were trying to go for (just honest sibling discussion and debate or whatever was on your minds) messed things up. You had settled sometime around the last year on the meteor into turning that therapist and patient act into a kind of joke. You were fine with that. You could handle that. Getting most of the psycho-babble, as Dave calls it, out of these feelings jams was harder. He’d caught on by this point after Karkat straight up told him and he went to you to confirm or deny.

You’d been nervous, because of how much this moiraillegiance was ingrained into your relationship as siblings by now. It took a long talk, a movie, both of you crying at different points, two small tubs of rocky road ice cream, and him actually taking off his shades (holy shit, though you felt bad for not being able to give a similar gesture of trust back to him), before you’d settled the matter. It took twice, maybe even three times the work necessary to establish the boundaries than it would in a troll to troll moiraillegiance.

Looking back on it brought a smile to your face.

“Kanaya! Hi! Karkat was about to tell us something really important so we thought you should be here for it.” Dave says, chirruping as you let your fingers brush over the shoulder of his wing.

“Oh rea- Karkat.” Your matefriend’s tone dropped into ‘please tell me this is a joke’ territory, “Your eyes are turning.”

“Yeah. Started a couple days after I turned seven.” Fifteen, “They’ll be bright red by the time I turn eight, maybe sooner. Who the fuck even knows?” His eighth sweep would put him at a little older than seventeen, in human years, and it was August, last you checked. He was practically half way there.
“Karkat...that’s a whole sweep early.” Kanaya was sitting down by Karkat now, a hand running through his hair.

You and Dave stayed quiet, or as quiet as Dave could be with you practically tickling his wing (trying to keep the mood light).

“Yeah, well. Tell me something I don’t know.”

“Have you at least thought to start preparing for your pupation?”

“Maryam. Kanaya. I’ll have you know I’ve done fuckall and was until now of the mindset that doing so would be a pointless endeavor.”

“You have half a sweep then. Gog.”

“I hardly think that dying mid molt would count as Heroic or Just, Kanaya.”

“Did it cross your mind that she already knows that, and is still concerned for your health anyway?” You asked, moving Dave’s wing a little to be able to reach over and poke him in the forehead. He sniffed, head moving back and Kanaya used that to pull him off Dave’s legs and tuck him into her side.

“Kanayaaa.”

The four of you were curled up around each other for a long while, not talking in favor of soaking in each other’s presence, in the calm and silence that you wanted to last forever. At some point, you were wearing Dave’s shades, Dave had gotten one of Karkat’s sweaters (he’d been wearing one in between the shirt and cape of his God Tier outfit) while Kanaya took his cape (Karkat took the bangle-bracelets on her wrists in return), leaving him with just the blood-symbol long sleeved shirt. You didn’t have anything in the way of accessories to give, so you settled for giving them lipstick marks. Dave on the cheek, Karkat (you had to lean over Dave to reach him again) on the forehead, and Kanaya on the lips, mixing your lipsticks in a mesh of green and black.

This wasn’t a pile by any means, but it was something enough for the trolls of your little group to want to bury themselves (and you, and your brother) in the pillows and blankets.
Rose: Lay down your arms, it's time to come home
From those lands, those streets, those memories you roam

The song started soft, slow, a breath of sound in between you and your twin. You were between Kanaya and Dave with Karkat on his other side and both trolls had done their best to give you as little room to move as possible. You and Dave had come up with it in the last few months on the meteor, in a human imitation of the fact your humanness and shoosh paps and feelings jams would never work with you two the way they did for your trolls.

Dave: Lay down your wands, your needles, that anger filled thread
Your fingers need time to heal from the light that they’ve bled

He answered you back, both of you not bothering to mask your accents.

Both: Your vigil is over,
The battle’s been won
And your surrounded
By the sky, the earth and
the fire of tomorrow’s sun

Dave: Deep below the surface, you hid all that you could
With sharp words and books and thinking this is for your good

Rose: You hid all you had behind a wall of deflection
And you absconded at the first sign of genuine affection

At least this way you had a way to sort of make up for it. Songs to draw attention to things bothering the both of you, or in this case, past hurts that have healed (mostly an allusion to other issues now).

Both: But now though we may have to pick up our weapons
We’ll open the heavens
From the sky and the earth
to the fire of tomorrow’s sun

Dave: So lay down your wands
For all that we’ve fought we’ve strengthened our bonds

Rose: And lay down your swords
For there is a tomorrow now to be aiming towards

Both: The war isn't over,
soldier, but

Rose: Your vigil is over
(Dave: As I pick up my weapons)

Dave: The battle’s been won
(Rose: We’ll open the heavens)

Both: And dream for the day we
will stand under tomorrow’s sun

Above all it was a reassurance that you would always have each other. A lullaby (in this instance) to
let each other know that “Yes I know your flaws. I see you. I know you and there is nothing that I
see that would make me leave. There is nothing that I see that could make me leave”.

Light drifted in through the window and the thin blanket over the nest, casting shadows and giving
everything a sort of peaceful appearance that you couldn’t place. Of course, though, Dave had to go
and break the comfortable silence with his ramblings.

To be honest you weren’t mad or annoyed, knowing what you did about him. You just wished he
could’ve broken the silence some other way. Hum or something.
“So. How much are you even going to need to eat or maybe I’m getting this wrong and you don’t need to eat anything. Maybe you just need to like...like...sleep a lot. I mean sloths and guy lions sleep a lot but you guys are more insect like, right, so maybe it’s not like that? Or maybe it’s both. Wait so you guys mention pupation and molting as if it’s like, the same thing but molting is actually pretty different so is it more like shedding like what snakes do or is it like, you actually make a cocoon or chrysalis or whatever the fuck- wait what would you even make it out of? It can’t be silk or some shit cause you guys don’t do that, maybe, it’d be kind of weird but seriously do you guys just make this huge compact pile or-”

“Dave if you don’t stop talking I might just bite you instead of answering your questions.” Karkat interrupted him with a growl.

“Dave,” You catch your brother about to reply with a glare, “I know what you’re thinking. Don’t say it.”

“Oh c’mon. He practically gave me the-”

“I don’t care. We all know what you were going to say-”

“Oh so does that mean-”

“Dave, no. Dammit Dave. Stop wiggling your eyebrows and snickering, I simply knew what you were going to say to that, nothing more.”

“Oh really now?”

You let out a huff of air, not quiet a sigh, “Yes. Though now that you’ve made mention of it in your own special way,” You give him a halfhearted glare, “I find myself curious to. Of course, neither you,” This time you were addressing Karkat who just rolled his eyes, “or Kanaya have to answer.”

“I do not mind answering, if that is alright with you Karkat?” Kanaya spoke up, though you couldn’t see her expression you could see the rise of both eyebrows slightly as they always did when she asked a question, “Dave. You are right in that we do need to eat more and sleep. Mainly a lot in meat and sugars, for the kinds of foods.”
“Sugar?” You ask, turning to lay more on your back so you can see her better.

“Yes. We would not be able to build our chrysalises, or cocoons if you’d prefer, otherwise. The sugar gets turned into a wax-like substance that we, ah, spit back up, which hardens soon after we do so, so I’d highly suggest.” Here she pointedly glared at Karkat, “That you find the place where you’d like to build yours sooner rather than later.”

Karkat grumbled hiding his face in Dave’s hair.

“Speaking of,” Kanaya continued, “Karkat how much to you weigh right now?”

His reply was unintelligible.

“I’m sorry. I couldn’t quite hear you.”

“The scale in the bathroom said ninety so...hundred thirty five.”

Well that was a conversion you didn’t think would come up ever. That’s...forty-five pounds more? Alternia apparently had slightly heavier gravity than Earth. Who knew?

“When you said you hadn’t done anything to prepare I still had hoped...”

“Well, not like we can do anything to change the past without creating some mind-fucking paradox.”

“Karkat you’re going to have to take on at least half your weight currently. In half a sweep, maybe less. How is this not a concern to you?”

This question, unlike her previous one, was met with silence.

“Okay I kind of really regret saying anything now but um, if we really need to, like, I’d be willing to pull some Timey shit out of my ass to give him whatever amount of time he needs. Or we could figure something else out if that turns out to be a bad idea.”
Kanaya and Karkat both relaxed and let out twin sighs of relief. You could just make out Karkat murmuring thank you’s mixed in with his (and Kanaya’s after a beat) rumbling purr.
Chapter 20

Chapter Summary

In which Thor gets the spotlight for all of a few hundred or so words before Loki pushes him off screen like the diva he is.

⇒ Be Thor

It has been all of a week, Jarvis dutifully tells you as you wake the next morning, when you ask him how long it’s been since the first two, since Rose and Dave (She who sees your fortunes and your luck and may yet tell you only how to avoid the unfavorable paths; He who guides the untimely dead back to the living and who comforts the newly dead before their goddess whisks them away) first arrived at the tower. You rub the sleep out of your eyes for a third time as you make your way to the kitchen. Jane was three steps ahead of you, a coffee already cradled in her hands as Darcy, you saw as you turned your head, was already on the couch with Rose and they both were talking about human beliefs and myths.

Specifically the ones about you, your father, and Loki. From what you gather, the three of you were the ones most likely to be known among humans just as certain (actual) gods are more well known to Asgardians as a whole than others.

You sit down by Darcy and Rose, get roped into the conversation, and though you try to keep things light (mostly about the pranks Loki would pull as tributes to his chosen patron, or the sheer shenanigans the two of you would get up to as kids) when the otherwise peaceful morning was broken by a roar-

“GET BACK HERE ASSMUNCH SO YOU CAN GET ACQUAINTED WITH MY FIST!”

“But you have such an amazing singing voice, Kitkat, there was no way I wasn’t about to record that shit I mean fuck it’s not like I took legit video, dude! Besides, look at how many Youtube and Twitter followers we just got!”

“So!” Rose said cheerily as if nothing unusual was happening, “I was curious about some of the myths regarding Loki and wanted to check with you, to confirm or deny them.”
You’ve been in this cell for many Earth months now, you think. It’s hard to keep track of time, down here in the dungeons. You were given amenities that other prisoners didn’t get, visited by your mother (most prisoners did not have visitation rights at all), and so they jeered and hissed at you from their own cells. Jealous. Envious. They taunted you with words you’ve already accepted (except you hadn’t really), useless jabs because you had resigned. Resigned to be the prophetic mother of monsters. The jotunn once-prince who could have (almost did) destroy your own race. The god (demigod) of lies and tricks and magic. The not-quite-a-man who, as a child, listened with rapt attention to the stories of the Trickster God of Breath (Storms, The Sky, Father-King-Creator of the Wild Gods) and Goddess of Life (Rebirth, the Generous One, the Truth Seeker, Goddess of Childbirth and New Life yet did not bear her children herself).

You are father to two of your children (Fenrir, Jormungandr), and mother to your other two (Sleipnir your eldest and Hela your youngest). Sleipnir’s mind and magic were bound and Odin took him as his steed, as if he were just a common horse. Jormundangr was cast into one of Midgard’s oceans and Fenrir was banished to a realm with no intelligent life (magic bound by a collar that looked like a ribbon, but was made of a material that would not break) when they “grew to be too big and posed a danger to the people”. And Hela?

“You will see her again, Loki Wordsmith.”

You were just another prisoner now. After all that happened, Thanos, the Chitauri, the Tesseract and your body turned into a weapon and scapegoat both. You fought as much as you could, lead the Chitauri straight into the heart of the hero’s realm where you hoped (and later confirmed from Clint Barton, Hawkeye’s mind) there would be a higher chance of you (and the army) being defeated. All you had to do was put on an act worthy of the God of the Arts himself. No pressure.

Thor was the one who argued for lightening your sentence. If it hadn’t been for him, you would have been venom-eyed. The snake responsible would have had venom only strong enough to cause pain and perhaps blindness and or paralysis (no lethal harm however). You would’ve only been given enough food and water to survive and even then, well, you hadn’t known how long you would have (could have, should have, why did Thor save you?) been kept chained there. The Allfather had either not given a duration for your punishment (you were tired, aching from the effects of being with the Chitauri for you knew not how long), or you had not been listening.

It could have very well been the first one, for all you knew.

Your perception of time down here wasn’t much better and restful sleep rarely came no matter how long or fervently you prayed to the Horned God of Sleep and Memory and the Forgetfulness of the void.
You prayed to every god and goddess you could think of. The horned goddess of motherhood, beauty, and the vast clouds of dust and gas (nebulae) that were the cradles and graves of so many stars, you pleaded that she watch over your children.

Hela, you had to leave on Helheim, a desolate rock that held only the ruins of a civilization, torched by its own star. You’d placed all the protections on her that you could, but doing so proved pointless. Pleasantly pointless, though. The God of Time had showed himself to you, promising that your daughter would be safe with him.

Just because you were to leave her there, he’d said, didn’t mean that she had to stay there.

He didn’t look any older than a young teenager, yet when you looked at him you saw lifetimes. You believed him, then.

You’re not sure if you believed him now, hundreds of years later.

There was the telltale sound, or sense, rather, of your mother using her magic to project an image of herself into your cell. Your head automatically, instinctively, looks up to see her image standing there, an expression in her eyes that you thought you’d never get to see.

There was hope.

“Mother.” You greeted, keeping your tone calm, “To what do I owe this visit?” Your mother grinned at that.

“There are gods here.” Her words, barely loud enough to reach your ears, were full of awe and wonder and a childish giddiness, “The gods are here in Asgard. They wish to see you.”

You were caught up in the first sentence for what felt like a long time. Too long, maybe. The gods were here in Asgard? How many of them were there? All of them, or two? Were they Horned or Wild? Were they both?

And then your brain decided to catch up to the fact that they were, apparently, here to see you.
“Why would the gods be here to see me?” You asked, the beginnings of a sneer creeping up into your expression, “I am naught more than a-” You faltered when your mother gave you this soul-pinning stare before she replied.

“They are here, with my granddaughter, asking for you and, dare I say, when I left to fetch you the God of Fire was giving your father a look that could turn his throne to liquid metal.”

What?

You’re automatic response of “he’s not my father” was put on hold due to other information present.

“Hela is- They have- She’s-?” Your mother’s stare goes soft though you still felt constricted.

You will see her again. He’d told you that. Spoken those words like a promise without actually promising anything. He hadn’t sworn upon anything, you note, in your vicinity. He could have easily made such an oath to Hela. But all the same he wouldn’t have had to keep it. Not unless he swore by the God of Oath’s name, of course.

He wouldn’t have done that though, surely. The gods do not make those kinds of oaths lightly.

Which would mean he remembered what he’d say, so long ago, and had-

“Loki?” The other prisoners were oddly silent and your mother’s voice rang loud enough to you that you startled. The barrier-door was down, three guards just outside waiting for you, and your mother gives you this blinding smile before her image dissolved.

Alright then.

Guess you had no choice in the matter. Your daughter was involved, you’d go anyway, for her. The gods were there, you’d go anyway, if only to sate your growing curiosity.

You step out of your cell, cautious, and make your way out of the dungeon.
You couldn’t use your magic with the nullifying cuffs on, so the trip just to the servants quarters took several minutes, and by the time you and the guards reached the throne room, enough time had elapsed that you worried the gods would have gotten fed up with waiting around for you.

Were they really only here to reunite you with your daughter? If that was the case, then why were others accompanying the God of Fire, when he could just have come alone? Would Odin be amiable whilst the god was here, while he was watching, only to turn around and have Hela cast out again? Would he do so this time without the bitter mercy of allowing you to be the one to take her to wherever she’d be sent?

What you saw, entering the throne room, was not anything you’d expected. What you heard, even more so.

You expected silent waiting, or entertainment having been brought in, or food.

You did not expect a third of the entire pantheon (eleven, no, twelve) to be there. You did not expect the God of Fire to be carrying Hela on his hip, still appearing as the young child (human equivalent of roughly six or seven years old) you’d last seen her as. You did not expect the intensity of the glare that he was giving Odin even with your mother’s comment, nor that the other gods were giving the Allfather similarly scathing looks.

What was the saying again? Oh yes.

If looks could kill.

It was anything but quiet, to.

“I HAVE HALF A MIND TO VERBALLY EVISCERATE YOU RIGHT NOW! I MEAN, I’M ALL FOR LISTING OUT EXACTLY WHAT YOU DID IF YOU DON’T HAVE THE SIMPLE FUCKING DECENCY TO REMEMBER!”

Ah, right, the God of Blood and his temper. At least he was tolerable in that he more often threw venomous words around rather than a sword like most Asgardian men.
Odin seemed… almost resigned? He didn’t say a word, which didn’t ease the fury on the Horned God’s face.

“You stole your adopted wriggler away from a home you raided, not truly knowing if he was left to die or not. Not that you’d care, you just took him and one of their Items of Power anyway. You favored your biological wriggler over him, treated him better. When he tried to help you and had his own wriggler as a result? You bound your descendant's mind and forbade them from seeing each other! You bound your descendant and treated him like a common fucking animal!”

“He is an animal.” Odin replied, emphasizing each word as if it’d get his view across.

You were frozen, tense, barely breathing and not wanting to draw attention to yourself for fear that fire would turn on you (even though it was being used now in your defense of all things).

“NO HE’S NOT YOU BLITHERING IDIOTIC ASSWAGON! HE IS JUST AS SMART AS ANY HUMAN OR ASGARDIAN OR TROLL! I WAS RAISED BY A BEING THAT LOOKED LIKE A CRAB! THAT DIDN’T MAKE HIM ANY LESS OF A SENTIENT, SAPIENT BEING! WHAT ABOUT HIS OTHER WRIGGLERS??” The god spat, “IS THAT WHAT YOU THINK OF THEM, TO? IS THAT WHAT YOU THINK OF HELA? ALL BECAUSE OF A STUPID ASS PROPHECY THAT ISN’T WRITTEN IN THE FUCKING STARS LIKE YOUR PRETENTIOUS GODDAMNED SELF SEEMS TO BELIEVE? YOU THINKPANLESS ASSHOLE!”

The God of the Skies stepped forward, the long tail of his hood settling around his feet as the other god took a step back in turn, moving to stand beside the God of Fire and your daughter.

Though the Sky God was no where near as loud, he didn’t have to be. His voice carried and echoed throughout the hall enough with his control over the winds being what it was.

“We are not here to demand that you change. We are here to change Loki’s sentence. Instead of wasting away in a prison cell, or having snake venom dripping into his eyes, or whatever other torture method you had in mind for him, he will leave when we do and return to Earth with us.” His voice wavered some and his words were measured and slowed down enough that he wouldn’t be tripping over his own words, “He will help us with whatever tasks we give him, and at any time we may discuss with him and change the terms of his sentence.”

“For what reason would you want his help? For what tasks?”
To you, it sounded almost like they were negotiating a trade. As if you were a slave, or a noble or royal daughter whose hand was being given away to some other noble or royal’s son.

“It shouldn’t matter what the tasks are.”

“And what would I-”

“Look, man, this isn’t a negotiation.” The God of Souls interrupted, his posture laid back but his tone sharp, “We’re gonna take him, go back to Earth and give him his kids back. We’re just being courteous people ‘n’ all, giving you a heads up before we actually do the thing.”

“And if he does not want to help you?”

The Goddess of Prophecy answered with a grin, “You’re grasping at straws, Allfather. If he does not want to help us, then that is our situation to deal with. Not something that you would ever need to be kept informed about. After all, this concerns Loki and his children, not you, unless Loki specifically wants you to know something.”

“IN OTHER WORDS,” The Blood God growled, “GO FUCK A CLUCKBEAST.”

“Do you forget his crimes?!?”

“Damn. I want popcorn now. Hey lil warrior princess how bout we see what the cooks be cooking after the show, yeah?” The God of Fire mumbled. You didn’t hear your daughter’s reply, but the “Heck yes” lead you to assume she agreed.

The guards around you hadn’t moved away from the triangle they formed around you (as they hadn’t been given the order to) but the Goddess of Life (holy bigleshnipes) and God of Nature had made their way to stand in front of the two guards ahead of you.

“Enlighten us.” The horned god snapped back.

“He attempted the genocide of an entire people!”
Low, seemingly distant music hummed and beat like drums as the god and goddess duo nearly danced to get around the two guards. Though, once they were able to reach you, the third one (behind you) pressed his spear into your back. It wasn’t enough to break skin, not through the clothes (yet) but it did serve as a warning.

“Yeah? That’s it? Seriously? We destroyed the universes we came from. On accident.”


The nature god (adventure and hope to, you think) tugged you to the side as the goddess smacked the spear away with a fork-trident away from your back.

“Except for you, Aradia, yes. But still, though. The rest of us had no idea what the blinding burning fuck would happen and oh look at that, the Trolls are all gone now except for us. Oh, what do you know? Humanity up and died to! Twice! Now we’re here with this universe. You want to talk crimes? Lay it on me. I doubt anything Loki did was worse than that.”

Now you were away from the guards, standing in the middle of the gods of fire and nature and blood, and the goddess of life.

“Psst.” The God of Fire (and Time, and Wealth) hissed at you midst the chaos because Odin did not take your being taken from the guards very well, “Want to sneak away while Odin’s distracted? Roxy should be getting back soon so if we don’t sneak out in the next, hmm, three minutes or so, there’s going to be even more chaos than there is now.”

“Where had she gone?” You asked with one eyebrow raised, “And the Allfather is already mad enough that you are attempting to “steal me away” like he actually cares.”

The god let out a low whistle, “Damn son. But yeah. Did we or did we not say we were reuniting you with your children? As in all of them? Because that’s a thing that’s actually happening, dude. We weren’t just saying that to piss king eye patch off. Although, to be fair, that is a bonus that I’ll gladly take.”

“COMING THROUGH!!!”
The doors were kicked open with a shuttering bang that made the fire god wince.

You didn’t want to believe what you were seeing at the same time as you wanted to never let this end, if it were a dream.

It sure did have the shenanigans that was often common in such states of sleep.

“Mother!” Your son’s voice echoed through your mind, “Mother, mother, mother! I can talk again! I can think! The kind lady freed me!”
Chapter 21

Chapter Summary

==> Be Sleipnir

==> Be Damara

==> Be The Unknown Troll, Begin Side Story Number 1

Chapter Notes

This chapter took for-fudging-ever. Whoops. Hopefully I'll be able to get back to a more steady pace after this. Hope it's good though. Don't know if I'll reuse any of these pov's again but we shall see.

⇒ Be Sleipnir

You are now Sleipnir and this is the best day of your life. The Kind Lady, or Roxy as she told you to call her, had used divine magic on the saddle that kept you bound and silent to make it disappear from your back and reappear somewhere else. She’d opened the door to your stable and had kept up with you as you ran through the building passed all the other not nearly as intelligent or powerful horses. You’d both startled the stable boy, to which you were only apologetic in passing because the freedom you now had to stretch your legs was getting to you and Roxy was leading you to where you’d be able to see your mother again.

What she hadn’t told you, when you had kicked the door open upon arrival, was that there were a lot of other gods there, your mother, and your youngest sibling. Was it the anniversary of your birth, you thought to the goddess who’d saved you. She rubbed a hand over your mane as she answered with a, even if not, you would have been given this anyway. You deserved to be with your family.

Your not sure if you would have believed her without seeing your mother and sister for yourself.

Your hooves click against the floor as you trot over to your family, noticing as you get closer that they were loosely surrounded (guarded?) by a few of the gods as the others were more free to roam around. You also notice at about this point that your mother has magical nullifying cuffs on.
“Why hasn’t anyone gotten those cuffs off of mother?” You send the thought out for everyone to hear, but before anyone could answer you, one of them off to the side threw out a comment that you could only catch some of the meaning to. Something about leaving.

They were leaving?

“Hey.” Roxy got your attention again and you gave a snort of air to show your discontent at having to divide your attention between all of these different things, “We’re going to be going now, so I was wondering if you had a more….travel sized form that you could take on?”

Wait.

“I am leaving with you?” You sent to her specifically.

Roxy gave an emphatic nod of her head, grinning widely and gesturing to your mother and sister, “All three of you are going to be coming back to Earth, Midgard, with us.” At this she drew in a little “gasp” of breath before continuing, movements (to you) seeming exaggerated in order to get her emotions across, “Dirk! Di-Strilonde I am surprised at you!” She exclaimed, turning to face the god who you think had given that parting comment.

“Wait. For what? And Strilonde?” The god with the halved heart symbol and the odd green colored tiara on his head, asked as everyone got moving, ignoring the Allfather’s words and the guards who were intimidated into standing aside as you exited the palace. Allmother Frigga, your grandmother, was accompanying you and with her, there was now a total of more people around to talk to than you normally saw in a month, much less a week or day.

“Yes, Strilonde. Is that not our combined family name?”

“I mean I never signed anything that said we were combining family names, Ro-Lal.”

“No. That’s besides the point, but you will. Anyway. Why are you not just absolutely fanboying over Sleip-y-bear?” What did your name have anything to do with a bear, “You love horses and he’s like, horsiest horse to ever be a horse!”

The horsiest what now?
“Yes I do like horses, but Sleipnir is as sapient as you or me. It just, strikes a bit as uncanny valley territory, to me.”

“But you like that show with that talking horses, ponies, whatever. How is this different?” No one, it seemed, wanted to get into a fight with any of the gods. Not the guards, when not following orders, not the Allfather, not really, and not the other Asgardian citizens that you passed on your way out of the mega-city.

“I don’t know!” The god gripped his hair in his hands as they walked, fighting to keep his voice low and so his words came out as little more than a hiss, “I don’t know why this is different!”

“Dirk?” You ask into his mind alone and continue once you have his attention, “You can pet my mane.” You figured you’d keep it simple.

“Are you sure though?” You whinny and give an emphatic bob of your head, “Alright then.”

You had succeeded in becoming “travel sized” as the Goddess Roxy put it, and now you were trotting not through the golden streets of Asgard but through the halls of the Tower of Avengers. You now had your sister on your back and the Goddess called Rose was “doing her Seer thing” to find out the way to getting your mom out of those anti-magic cuffs.

You were still pretty amazed that you had managed to just walk right out of Asgard, for the most part. You think your mom was surprised that it had gone so well. From what you heard, there was a lot of yelling and little bit of fighting for a couple of the gods but they hadn’t actually needed as many people as they had brought.

Someone had commented on that saying it could have been because of the amount of people that the Allfather hadn’t put up more of a fight. Something about a show of force.

Still though, you were free!

Now if only everyone would stop being so gloom and doom and serious. Sure the Avengers and the gods had to rescue a bunch of people, your two other siblings had to be found as well, but that didn’t mean that there couldn’t be time for fun right?
You had for around a week now been traveling the Realms. You had walked through the streets of villages in Central America, bringing to visibility the ghosts of the dead for all the living around to see. You had done similar in the Hawaiian islands. In fact, it was a facet of your powers you hadn’t explored, and were now working on controlling. As of now, you’d been avoiding the others of your session like they were what humans referred to as the plague. Whichever plague that happened to be. You spent a night in China, partying and carefree for once. You drew eyes to you as much as if not more so than you drew cameras. Gaining access to the internet in public libraries you noticed how videos of you were gaining popularity.

You grin.

Your fourth night in this world of humans who all bled bright red was in the Philippines. You flitted around, control over the dead rising as you used this power consciously more and more. You reunited loved ones and family and those who were once like moirails. You gave them closure and peace of mind because you wanted to and because you were loving the fact that you had not a care in the world.

Your fifth night was spent in a time long ago in another realm, another world filled with life, just flying around on large burgundy wings.

Your sixth night alive was spent exploring Japan. You loved it there the most, you think, out of all the other places on Earth because of how you could soon speak to them and have it sound pleasantly similar to Eastern Beforan to your ears.

You partied, you learned, you ate and you spent the day at the house of a generous human who gave as much snark and insults as you dished out. You spent that time getting to know this human more, this mortal who wanted to know why you talked the way you did, this human who was not put off about the fact that you looked like a mutant.

Mutant, in this world, having a vastly different context than what it did back on Beforus or even Alternia, if Aradia was to be believed. She usually was. You still took the time to correct this man, this mortal man, that you were an alien, from another planet, hell, another universe entirely. You were not any kind of mutant. You liked this human.

You traded stories and banter and it was only when the third evening set in that you realized you didn’t want to leave. You hadn’t already left to visit South Korea two nights ago. You hadn’t gone to some other remote world in a far off time period last night. You’d stayed here in Japan where people
admired and adored you.

That is.

You had until another version of you appeared with the sound of flutes, drums, and the ever present backdrop of gears that accompanied every time player.

⇒ Be The Unknown Troll

You are now a troll who would prefer to have their name and gender hidden, for now. You’ve been traversing the islands of this colony you’ve been sent to for quiet some time as a trader, and have learned a thing or two about the trolls who’ve made their home here. For one, as there was no dominant species on this world capable of anything more than sentience, no one had to hide their appearance. For another, the cult of the Boundless made this island world their base of operations, at the edge of Trollian controlled space. Others called them the Shackled, as it attracted far more low bloods than high bloods. Others still called them the cult of the Heretic, the cult of the Unorthodox, the cult of the Defective.

Your job here, officially, was that of a merchant who ran supplies from the Hub out to the hives in the area. Normally, drones and other robots would be doing this job instead of you, but being so far out of the way, the Empress apparently decided that it would be a waste of resources.

Oh well. At least you get paid. At least you had a home here and your lusus and the friends you’ve made here. You may not have any quadrants, but it wasn’t all bad now. Yes, your kismesis was a low caste and had died four sweeps ago, your matesprit was conscripted into one of the combat military units and had been culled by some species that they were fighting a sweep after your kismesis went, your moirail wasn’t fated so that diamond broke, and you’d never filled your ashen quadrant.

Now that you’ve been here for half a sweep?

You’d settled down into your new job, lived in a hive that you shared with an olive ambi (a gender where a troll has both male and female aligned hormones in their body) troll and a young teal that they had taken to raising them self since the lusii that had chosen the young nil (where a male troll doesn’t have all of the hormones associated with being one, but no female ones to balance them out and instead has neutral ones that are associated with both genders, the feminine equivalent being a nix) was small and not cut out for caring for anything (a type of "giant" squeak beast, you were informed).
Your time here has really opened up your eyes to just how wrong some of the rumors about the Boundless are. If you had the skill set for it, you would have become a journalist (one of the midblood castes jobs) just to be able to tell the rest of the empire how it is here. Before you’re culled that is. Or mysteriously disappear. Or “have an accident”. Or any number of other things depending on who actually got sent to get on with culling you.

This particular supply run had gotten interrupted, however, by a couple of trolls who looked rather out of place with their surroundings. For one, they both were on the short end of the height scale that screamed burgundy caste everywhere but one had fins, eyes that were far too bright to be burgundy, and had you mentioned the fins, and the gills, and the tail that, while furred like a land-dweller, was shaped not unlike a sea dweller? That one had short horns and was glaring at you and your two wheeled flying device (a hover bike, as the highbloods would call it) like you and it had personally offended him. The other, smaller troll was an actual burgundy, at least you think so. The ambi had all the traits of a land dweller, a thin furred tail with a tuft at the end, no fins or gills anywhere to be seen, it’s just you couldn’t see their eyes because of the protective (you assume it to be protective in nature though you weren’t certain as to what it was protecting them from) eye wear covering them.

The taller of the two, gave a low click, a warning to have you leave right now. The shorter responded with a high (pale) chirp to calm the taller down.

They were moirails? Maybe. Being on this planet, they could be anything. Maybe they were just dropped here? Some ship crews didn’t have the decency of landing first. It would certainly explain how you’d never seen them before.

“Who the fuck are you?” The taller, seadweller looking troll frowned at you and telegraphed every signal for ‘back off’ and ‘if you try anything I’ll gut you like a fish’. The other one nudged him, getting his attention, and they both shared a look.

“Think we traveled, dude.”

“Oh for fuck’s sake. You told me you weren’t going to do that shit anymore because it messed with your thinkpan too much.”

“Well. Yeah. Apparently didn’t stop them from being used instinctively or whatever the fuck.” The land-dweller covered their face with both hands, the first sign of emotion they’ve showed.

“How far did we even go? Which way?”
“Half sweep and a couple perigees back. Y’know, before you...we;” Here the smaller ambi glanced at you, “b’came adults.”

The odd-blooded seadweller’s fins flared, “Right. Yeah. Can’t believed you managed to change that much of yourself when at that point Jhayke had only gotten as far as he did because “he believed he could”, gog dammit.”

You signaled for your “bike” to start up from the low power mode it automatically went into when stopped. This made it hum as it floated higher and broke the two other trolls out of their conversation.

“You need help getting set up ‘round here?” You ask, keeping your tone light as to not start a fight, you still had a few more runs to do before this planet’s star came up, “The temple island is that way.” You pointed to the northwest, “Find a gal named Dahlia, tell her Lynnal sent you, she’ll help you with whatever you need.”
Chapter 22

Chapter Summary

The one in which Tony gets a bit of Spotlight again.

Chapter Notes

Holy crap okay I know this took forever but here it is guys. I thank you all for your patience and hope that this chapter lives up to the expectations/standards that previous ones have set.

⇒ Be Tony

You had no idea where you were.

You had finally gotten to sleep at around four in the morning, having stayed up helping Dirk with creating Hal's body and working with Jarvis to determine a place away from every country's jurisdiction where these people, these kids and young adults, could retreat to for safety. A place that was big enough that mutants could go to seek refuge if America started to spiral, if any country decided that they didn't want to keep the rescued mutants from their country or even go as far as kicking the ones still in there, out. You didn't think it would get that bad. You hoped it never got that bad. Sadly, hope had never been something you could use to will the things you want into existence, and so were left with the things you could actively do instead.

You had fallen asleep only to be greeted with feeling sand underneath you. Startling, you pulled yourself first to sit upright, and then further when the sight of actual sand and what you were wearing prompted you to figure out what was going on with the ability to move.

Okay. First thing. You were wearing something that looked purple and should be better suited for someone cosplaying at a renaissance fair. Or maybe it was closer to magenta? You really couldn't tell in this light. Or lack of it. There was enough from the sky though that you could barely see the outline of a crescent moon, pale in color that it almost glowed in the dark. The second thing you noticed was the sand, the hills of sand, and the sparse vegetation that you clung to because now was not the time to be thinking of something that happened years ago.
You were in a desert or semi-desert area but it had no connection to that. Were you kidnapped again? No. Impossible. They'd have to get passed a lot of muscle and fire power, not including an overprotective AI, and all of that would have woken him up anyhow. He should have some kind of memory of it, if anything like that had occurred.

So kidnapping was out. What was left? This felt far too real to be a dream. You looked around more, noting that your feet weren't sinking as much into the sand as you thought they would, and that despite having laid on it, or in it, earlier, there was no sand on you anywhere. It didn't cling to you or your clothes like you know it should.

Okay what was a way to absolutely rule out dreaming? Because you were only half convinced, still. Pinch yourself? That didn't always work. Maybe you should think of something ridiculous? Try to will something into existence since you wouldn't be able to do that while awake?

What had been something you've been wanting over the past couple of weeks? A drink? No. Ice cream? It wasn't exactly something you were wanting but really, any food would do. Five seconds pass. You think about how you really, really wanted shwarma again but couldn't because there had only been that one battle with the really weird reforming ink-like monsters this week. Ten seconds passed. Still nothing.

You walked farther, absentmindedly and only able to see the outlines of most things thanks to the sky and the reflective moon symbol and fur around your collar and wrists and the top of the boots you had on. Seriously. What kind of weird shit would make your mind dream up you wearing this?

You moved through the sand like a ghost, your eyes kept firmly on the land in front of you.

Wait. You stop, eyebrows drawing together as you thought. The sky had s...had a m...was lit by s...You couldn't think of anything but the sky. You couldn't think of what should be up there. You hadn't ever risen your gaze to look beyond the horizon.

You almost jerk your head, before something screamed in your mind DON'T LOOK UP. It rang through you so seemingly loud that you obeyed, even if now your curiosity was nagging at you like a child to see what it was you weren't meant to see.

You didn't look up.

You did, however, after a while of walking, find someone who looked a lot like Steve in a similar
get up to your own. With the exception of it being this yellow, maybe golden color.

You awoke to someone, Pepper, nudging your shoulder and Jarvis saying that SHIELD agents were in the building.

The mental image of magenta and yellow clothes and sand followed you as you got dressed and followed Pepper out to the Den where there was indeed three agents there, not including Director Fury and Coulson. The kids, all of them by a quick head count, were in the living room huddled up as if they'd been having some sort of slumber party. However instead of being passed out they were awake, alert, and eyeing the agents with wary expressions. A few, like the two Strider kids, had their weapons drawn from whatever odd subspace inventory thing they had going on. You really need to look into that soon.

Right. Fury and Agent and other agents.

“Captain eye patch, Agent, background characters. What are you doing here?” You asked, motioning for the kids to lower their weapons but not to put them away entirely.

Fury ignored them now that you and Pepper were there, sending you a leveled look that told you he was getting real tired of whatever shit he was putting up with. Knowing how the Avengers' relationship was with SHIELD, you were certain it had something to do with you.

“First of all I want to know why you're protecting those mutants.”

“And aliens.” Was what you wanted to add, but decided against it. That wouldn't help you right now.

“Okay lets see here. A, they've done nothing wrong, unless you count existing and somehow a mutant-related law passed without mine nor Pepper's notice, which by that way that's like, point one percent of a chance of happening. B, most of them are kids, if I hadn't done anything before now Steve would have give me the puppy dog eyes and Pepper would glare at me until I did help them. C, and lets try to get this through your head, the worst they've done was scare a few people. Seriously. I'm a hero, Steve's a hero and you actually like Steve, and we've both done worse than that. Did I mention they're children? Pepper did I mention that?”

Pepper smirked, “I think you might have, but don't forget that two of them chose to be heroes but, you know, pay attention to the rules and asked if they could help the police and fire departments
“Oh yeah, and there's that. And they helped out animals and orphans. Fury, seriously. What is your deal here? That they're dangerous? Pfft. Try again. C'mon. Find something so I can tear it to pieces.”

A quick glance showed that Karkat and Kanaya were paying close attention, looking in between you and Fury like watching a tennis match.

The things he brought up were, in your eyes, not at all solid arguments and horribly cliché. How long before they become a danger? How long before blah blah self-righteous and prejudicial bullshit about them being unstable and untrustworthy.

You held the bridge of your nose, let out a long, suffering sigh, and then looked him in the eye when he was done and answered each point with a flat tone, “They won't ever be a danger; attitudes like that are what make the people they're directed at, super villains and criminals; and, hmm, fuck you.” You turned to your fiance, “Anything you wanted to add?”

“I think it'd be better if you ask Karkat that.” Was her reply and you looked over to see the kid seething mad, held back only by Dave and Kanaya but, given that Pepper's comment was as good as permission to speak up, he opened his mouth and did just that.

“LISTEN YOU BULLSHITTING PROLAPSED FUCKHOLE, JUST BECAUSE YOU CAN'T BE TRUSTED TO WIPE YOUR OWN FECAL DRIBBLINGS DOESN'T MEAN WE CAN'T TAKE CARE OF OURS. WE'RE NOT THE ONES HUNTING DOWN CHILDREN BECAUSE THEY'RE STRANGE. SOME OF OURS ARE MISSING RIGHT NOW AND GUESS WHO WAS MOST LIKELY TO HAVE DONE THAT? YOU BULLSHIT NON MUTANTS THAT'S WHO!! WHO THE FUCK DO YOU THINK YOU ARE TO COME IN HERE AND SPEW THIS SHIT LIKE WE'RE THE ONES WHO CAN'T BE TRUSTED WHEN IT'S NON MUTANTS LIKE YOU THAT ARE STEALING OUR WRIGGLERS IN THE NIGHT FOR WHO KNOWS THE FUCK WHAT!?”

“Yeah. Fuck you man. Pretty sure ya'll can like, get I dunno like arrested and shit if you don't leave right the fuck now cause you for sure ain't welcome like, Agent man with a plan over there is probably cool, sorry you had to be in the line of Vantas Fire like that dude, but if none o' ya'll step off we're going to have to make you and man let me tell you nothing is more sad and pathetic like a guy getting knocked off his high horse.”

It was around that point you think that Kankri, no, Signless, had walked by and peered in to see what all the commotion was about, or just to see what set Karkat off this time. He stands there at the other
entrance to the room for a long moment, staring wide eyed at the SHIELD agents before his eyes narrowed. His ears and fins flattened back against his skull and his upper lip drew back to reveal sharp shark-like fangs as if he were looking at something that he was disgusted by. Considering that there was a bright red that was a bit too opaque to just be tears, he was also using whatever powers he had as well.

That he still had this look on his face and was rocking back and forth on his feet when the not-tears beaded over, made everyone else in the room become far more tense. You think he was making some kind of vocalization to, even though it was outside your realm of hearing, because Karkat and the other trolls, plus the Strider-Lalonde kids a hot second after, picked up similar stances and added their own voices to the mix.

“Would anyone, by chance, care to tell me if there is a beast on Earth known for it having a bizarre resemblance to that of Gl'bqolyb, and, how two of your number, sirs and madams, believe yourselves affiliated with the creature even though the ties I see are muddled by some kind of poison or toxin that is rotting your think pans?”

“The Gl'bqolyb is an ancient eldritch deep sea monster with many limbs. Similar creatures in more well known mythologies are the kraken which I believe is the most similar, then the leviathan, and then the hydra even though it's “limbs” are more so “heads” in which two grow back when one's chopped off.” Rose rattled off before anyone could ask what the Gl'bqolyb was. Namely you.

But then again, hearing her explanation didn't do the two not-SHIELD agents any favors.

Signless hissed, “Well whatever it is we need to-” Though he didn't get to finish as one of the “poisoned” agents drew her gun, prompting the tense atmosphere to escalate. It was pointed not at Fury or Coulson, but at the kid closest to her which happened to be John. The other one had their gun pointed at themselves. Coulson and Fury had swung around to point theirs at the woman aiming at John, and Kankri had his at the back of the woman's head before anyone could blink.

John looked frozen. The rest of the kids were a mix of scared and angry, or in the Striders’ case, void of any emotion at all. Jarvis you think was ready, willing and able to deploy any of the anti-intruder defenses that you'd set up in the Tower, while you noted Pepper inching toward where there as a hidden compartment with hand guns and tazers.

There was no monologue about some villain destroying the Avengers or ruling the world. There was no spiel about a SHIELD take over. There wasn't even anything about mutants or some bullshit ideology.
One second, two, three seconds as music from nowhere rose in volume, “Hail hydra.”

Four seconds and the woman fired only to have her gun click uselessly and visibly, rapidly start to rust. The guy’s gun though worked as intended. The shot rang though you weren’t sure if you were processing everything after this moment correctly. You think the kids pulled back into a corner, Dave and Rose already holding onto John and pulling him back with them. You think Fury, Coulson and Signless had the woman disarmed and handcuffed. You think that Pepper and yourself had moved to where the children were and lead them away from the Den and up a few floors to one of the guest floor living rooms.

Then the blurred memory refocused only for you to see John and Dave both trying to catch their breath, the music having stopped while Dirk, Roxy, and a few others were rather vocal about going back down there.

“Can I destroy her soul?” Came from Dirk.

“Holy fuck she could’ve killed me.” John mumbled. Dave patted him on the shoulder, and offered a reply you didn’t hear over everything else.

“I could interrogate the human man’s ghost, if you would like.” Aradia’s suggestion was met with an enthusiastic ‘yes!’ from the others.

“Maybe I could make his ghost not exist afterward. Is that a thing I can do? I want to find out.” Roxy gave him a raised couple of eyebrows while making sure that John would be okay with Jane watching over him for a bit.

“I thought you didn’t want to be a destroyer?”

Dirk shrugged as he sat down on one of the couches, prompting everyone else including you to do the same. Well, except for Pepper who mentioned having to go check in on some of the other tower residents.

“I’m willing to make an exception.” Was what he responded with and yeah, you could agree with that.

“When are the last of your crew getting here?” You asked after a few minutes where everyone got
comfortable and resigned (for the moment) to not going back immediately, even Aradia though she said she could get the ghost of that guy, and the woman if need be, whenever. Because, you know, time travel.

Right.

“Equius And Horrus actually got in early this morning but haven’t left their rooms yet. Either sleeping or working on getting Loki out of those cuff things.” Feferi chimes in, having been silent until now, “The Pyropes, Serkets, and Makaras are going to get here later.” You nod, thinking of the plans you’d been making with your team and these SL and WG people who’d found a possible location for where all the missing mutants had gone.

They’d even gone through the trouble of trying to track the magic door down. All because one of their friends and roommates had gone missing because of this and their fourth friend was starting to go crazy with worry.

That’s the explanation they gave at least.

You don’t know how long the interrogation is going to last, or how much of wrench this is going to throw into the plans, but you had little under a week left.

Five days until show time.
You’ve always been Karkat, but okay then, you’ll continue to be yourself for the rest of your, admittedly, not as miserable nor short existence as you thought you’d have, but you digress.

In the past four, almost five days, you have been busy. You’ve been busy with organizing mutants who volunteered to help the construction of one of the hivestems, since that piece of land had been the easiest buy Pepper claims she’d ever had. You’ve been busy with eating until your stomach felt like it’d burst if you took any more throughout the course of the day, because if you didn’t Kanaya would give you that sad look you couldn’t stand.

But right now, all of that has been put out of your mind.

“Is everyone in position?” You bite your lip, hearing Signless reply with an affirmative even though you didn’t feel all that confident now. Signless and Steve were leading two teams designated to sweep through the building and free the mutants inside. Bruce and Dolorosa (as she went by now, rather than Porrim) were waiting about a half mile behind you with a medical base camp and the best team of nurses and doctors that Tony and Pepper could get to come out here. Tony himself and Meenah (she flat out refused to go by any version of her title) were leading their own charge into the building alongside Signless and Steve's teams.

You’d been broken up into four teams of five people, each taking a side of the facility. John would be on area control (mainly with the weather) alongside Loki before they both joined up with one of the four teams.
Thor was back at the Tower with Jake, Tavros, Phil, and a couple others from SHIELD that Phil personally interviewed and background checked, along with a number of other processes, to keep watch over Loki’s kids and to keep some manpower defenses there. Not that you didn’t think Jarvis and Hal couldn’t handle it if someone managed to get in there in the first place, but having the extra arms and manpower didn’t hurt.

In two minutes, John would be kicking up a tropical storm (or, well, maybe just the equivalent of one) while Loki, with his magic, would anchor the building and the Door to where they need it to be so John can cave the doors in, probably shatter a few windows, maybe even tear a piece of the roof (or the whole thing) for good measure. Dirk, Hal, Equius, and Jarvis would be helping with the technical side of things, relaying information where and when it was needed. Dirk, Equius and Horrus were also on guard duty to protect the mutants once they reached the camp.

You’re grouped with Signless, Natasha, Terezi, and Roxy, the five of you having set up just behind a hill and you have been here for several minutes already. It was blazing hot to the point where you bet everyone wouldn’t mind asking John to create an actual storm. Which is why it came as a sigh of relief when the sky darkened with rain clouds, but the clap of thunder overhead startled everyone when Horrus gave the go ahead for Loki to do his thing. Static from Signless’s earpiece hissed as someone was yelling at John.

“JOHN, WHAT ARE YOU DOING?!” That was Tony. Signless winced at the very near screech being projected right into his ear, “JOHN! Horrus, do we have the go ahead?”

“Yes sir! But, I must warn you that as an Heir he has the ability to turn into the very wind itself! If you go in there to pull him back out-”

“We’re aware, thank you. We’re going in there to help him.” Rufioh (or Summoner) was the one to reply, loud enough from wherever he was to be heard through the device.

You found yourself looking up at the sky, shifting from foot to foot, and wondering what powers you’d actually have, the sort you could fight with, as the Knight of Blood.

Dave, he knew, was able to turn time itself into a weapon. Forward, backward, pause, travelling in either direction, exploiting time in order to achieve his goals. Whether they be defending himself, protecting his friends, or in some cases, break the stock market. Latula by contrast has so far only shown to be able to turn other people’s choices, perceptions, and expectations into something she can use to further her goals. Usually in the form of talking circles around people and somehow being able to read their minds without actually Seeing them.
Seconds ticked by, blurring into minutes before Signless and Steve were told to get their teams moving.

Terezi and Roxy helped Natasha fly as the five of you moved in on the building’s west side. As you approached the wall an explosion of some sort, followed shortly by the feeling of very powerful psionics, rocked through you and confusion over the comms sprung like a geyser. The sensation of the psionics left a buzz in your horns that had you itching to shake your head in an attempt to clear it, rumors of cracked and broken horns due to psionics alone flitting through your mind.

“What was that?!”

“It was some sort of red and blue beam!”

“That must be Sollux! Or Mituna!” A third voice joined in the audial chaos and you found yourself glad that you didn’t have one of those in your ear.

As you vault over the low wall where there used to be a wide window (“Get them out of there!”), another explosion of psionics rattled the walls and made you nearly fall flat on your face into shards of glass. Mutants from that part of the building were pouring out of the giant hole in the wall, according to the shouting from your dancestor’s comms. Loki was nearly done anchoring everything to this location so that he didn’t have to hold it there, saying he’d be there to help as soon as he was done. Someone shouted back that there was gunfire and someone needed to be there now.

You didn’t know who responded to that.

Running through the halls your group came up to one hallway with maybe two dozen doors with keypads next to them. Roxy moves on ahead of you and your dancestor to crack one of the pads while Natasha takes one on the other side. Terezi jumps one guy with a gun who runs into your line of sight. Signless calls to whoever was behind a third door and, once they were out of the way, kicks the whole thing in like it was nothing.

“Guys I think I see Meulin!”

“Dude, she’s tearing these bastards apart!”

You start leading the freed children out to the window as Roxy, Natasha, and Signless streamline the
process of freeing them (You notice your ancestor falter for a minute as he registered that Meulin, Disciple, was there, but picked back up with a renewed strength at the thought of her kicking ass and taking names) and Terezi fights off enemies like an enraged dragon protecting her hoard. You make sure the way was clear and that the glass was all swept aside once you actually got to the opening, helping whoever needed it. The storm outside was more wind, lightning and thunder than it was rain now, but the air was significantly cooler.

You idly wonder how Dave was handling all of this.

You settle into a rhythm for the next several minutes, the trip between the hallway and the window becoming steadily longer as progress was made. Twice that you accurately remember you had to protect the kids from one of the deranged people who had kept them here for who even knew how long. Other times you don’t really remember what was happening other than the human-twisted-monsters would kill you or the children and end their lives, sever their bonds. You maybe thought that if they were so willing to end the lives of Those Under Your Protection then maybe it wouldn’t be so bad if they were the ones who were released from the mortal coil.

It took you awhile to register that one of the children was following you. It took you even longer to realize that they weren’t just not leaving you, but helping you. You blinked twice and shake your head a little to clear it as you came to the end of the second hallway and had freed what had to have been over fifty mutants from this place and still no sign of Nepeta, Sollux, or their dancestors.

Your focus on the task at hand shatters for a moment to look down at the kid who’d been following you, keeping up with the pace you’d set, somehow. He, your nose told you, was small, was skinny, had a tail and webbed hands that had little claws instead of fingernails and what you think might be a layer of fur over most, if not all of his body.

Gog, the kid was adorable.

Another hallway was cleared and close to a hundred mutants, some this time closer to your age and more like teenagers, before Signless had you all stop where you were. You had just gotten the last kid out onto the sand while the boy who’d stuck to you like glue this whole time was looking at your ancestor now in confusion.

Signless’s shoulders slumped, “We found out what’s been happening with the rest of the mutants.”

You bite back a growl. Some of the rooms, cells, whatever they were, had two or even three people inside them, and the fourth hallway you’d gone down had been it for this section of the building. But even then, with the 96 (you’d counted) cells and multiplying that three there would still only be 288
people kept here. From the map of the place, there were four sections that had cells like these, and even then the number would only total a little over 1100.

Which was far too low of a number when it had been at the very least five times that number for the United States alone.

You hiss, “What happened? Where are the others?”

Your dancestor looked distraught, his ears laying low but not pinned to his head, his tail dragging along the ground, but it wasn’t him who answered you.

“They’re dead.” The boy at your side mumbled, though in the relative quiet his voice rang clear, “An experiment was wrong, older ones rebel but fail, others try escaping but fail, others end each other, others end themselves instead.”

Your body couldn’t quite decide whether it wanted to punch a wall or be sick all over the floor.

Thousand of mutants. Fuck. Who even knew how many by this point? All of them just... Gone.

*Focus. Don’t punch a wall like we both want to. Scaring the wriggler is not on our list of priorities.*

Right. Thanks for the advice, Exemplar.

It was nice to know he was still around, somewhere inside your head. Your mind would feel a little more empty, you think, without him there.

“How many are there now?” Dirk’s voice came in over the comms now.

“Counted about four hundred here.” Porrim, sorry, Dolorosa answered back, her tone almost light enough to be considered cheery, “Though some of them are going to need more medical attention once we get back to an actual hospital.”

“Make that five hundred.” Tony announced, “Should be trickling in your way in groups of ten.”
“There’s another fifty on the way.” Signless reported in, “Not including one that has stayed with us.”

“Eighty-four by our count.” Steve’s team was the last to call in, “There would be more but…” His voice trailed off as you could hear a faint aggravated snarl from someone in the background.

“Right. The building seems pretty quiet now so- uh, anyone with visual on the sky can you tell me who that is?”

“It’s Damara.” Rufioh, or Summoner, you hadn’t talked to him enough to know which he settled into, answered back though his tone carried a tinge of fear, “The Handmaid.”

“Is she here to… oh hi. Are you here to help?”

Rapid Japanese followed that you, for now, could only catch pieces and individual words from, to which Dirk, somehow, replied with ease. The exchange went back and forth for a good few minutes before Dirk sent a message out to everyone.

“Alright. Damara here is going to help with the dead on both sides of this rescue. Also she says she will be giving the, ah, mad scientists-” Damara interrupted him with something and he coughed, “sorry, the pieces of…rancid nook…wait what?… Okay moving on. The monsters who should have all gotten fucked by horroterrors ages ago, will not have at all pleasant afterlives…” More Japanese and Dirk just groans in frustration.

Signless was directing you all outside now, back to base camp and you specifically to where the medics had their things set up since the kid didn’t look to be leaving you alone anytime soon. You nodded once you were outside before picking the mutant boy up like you had with the girl back on that island, and flew away from the building.

Glancing back, it looked more like something out of an apocalypse novel.

=> Dave: Fight

You, Steve, Clint, Rose, and Latula, or Redglare (you didn’t really know), were the second team to
enter the building, on the side opposite to the one Karkat’s team would be going for. Your swords (Caldefwlch and Caldescratch) were a half second away from dropping into both of your hands as you advanced on the eastern side, noting a distinct lack of windows here. Clint cursed, trying to come up with an alternate solution to getting in as your sister stepped up. She had her skull wands equipped. You knew what that meant, even if everyone else didn’t (Terezi’s dancelstor probably had a clue, however).

You made sure everyone stepped back as she took aim, charged up those dark magics of her, and fired.

What was created was a large hole, big enough for Steve and Clint to both step inside with caution, side by side, with you and Rose in the middle and Latula Redglare following close behind.

It felt like too long for your team to clear the entryway of enemies (dodging, weaving, Steve calling out orders) and locate the area where your some odd hundred, or thousand, mutants were being held. From what you could see, the locks on the doors were of the keypad variety, and you didn’t much know how you would be getting the kids and fellow teens out of there.

What you did know was that there was no time to waste thinking things through. Whether by design or pure coincidence (which you didn’t believe in), there were a lot of armed people in this part of the building. The job of freeing the mutants was quickly narrowed down to Rose and Redglare while the rest of you dealt with the grunts being thrown at you.

Rose had light shining from her eyes and the Light symbol glowing at the center of her forehead as she punched in code after code to open the doors that she could reach. Redglare on the other hand, being a Knight of Mind, was using some of her own power you think in order to get those same codes from Rose’s head, or the heads of the people who apparently thought this was where the party was being hosted at.

You aimed to subdue, to capture, to incapacitate, and should they try to get up and attack again? Should they try something underhanded? Well, that’s where Clint and Steve picked up. Your Treble Countdown fraymotif was very handy for a situation like this, allowing you to zip past the two adults with a combination of your time ability and your flash stepping, and have almost complete control over the hallway battlefield from there.

The cuts you doled out were either long and shallow or short and deep. They were always in places where you knew it wouldn’t cause a major vein or artery to be opened or some other consequence of not being a hundred percent in control of yourself. You knew from experience, being cut in multiple places, being killed in more ways and places than you cared to think about. Dove was right there in your head, keeping you together and keeping your grip even as your hands shook and your joints ached.
Steve cleared a path to the exit as you and Clint fought to keep it safe. Rose joined you at your side after a minute, her needle wands crackling with unholy light.

That was about when everything went to shit.

Another two explosions had you on your knees and you could barely heard anything past the ringing in your ears. The kids you were working on saving panicked. The older ones fled. You could barely stand to try and call out to them, stop them, get them to run out the way you made for them and not deeper into the building. Your grip on your swords tightened. Rose was shaking her head, rubbing at her ears and looking around with those light filled eyes.

She turned and saw you, saw the children you were stumbling to try and corral and calm and in the case of one, carry as they’d climbed onto your back. Your shades were cracked and half hanging off your face. The child, a little girl you think, tried to hook them back over your other ear but with the way you were moving around and using your time powers like tomorrow would never come, they slipped completely off your face at some point and you were too busy to care. All of you was in some sort of pain at this point so it didn’t much matter if your eyes stung the more you tried to see.

You don’t see where Redglare went, or where the other adults were for that matter.

Your wings felt too heavy, dust and rainwater from earlier weighing them down. Your gut screamed at you yet with all that was going on it felt distant. Rose pulled you, the few older kids and teens that you could still see through stinging eyes helping however they could with the younger ones, and before you knew it you were stepping out of the hole in the wall.

Clint was there. You couldn’t really hear him too well but at least you could at all. He was saying something directed at the mutants, pointing where to go. Behind him and around him there were the dead. Dead mutants and dead humans alike. You think he was trying to get them all to move as quickly as he was because of that.

You set the kid you were holding down long enough to duck back behind the wall and emptied what remained of the breakfast you’d had that morning.

=> Vivian, Or whatever your name really is: Find Your Moirail

“The CEO of Stark Industries, Virginia Potts, made an announcement just yesterday about the acres
of land she’s been buying across the country, stating that they were to be for an experimental way in building homeless shelters and apartment complexes. However, in an interview with one of the board members it’s been found that these complexes are to be built primarily for mutants…”

You had travelled all the way out here with pieces of the latest news report fresh in your mind to another country, another continent, to search for your moirail. You’d slipped right on past Other Trolls, dear Empress save you, and through the crowd that had gathered around the part of the camp serving as the medical wing. It wasn’t hard to find her, though when you did you almost wished you’d prepared yourself more.

Her disguise had fallen, and with the state of mind she was likely to still be in, she wasn’t taking it very well.

No one was taking it very well. The trolls around you didn’t seem overtly hostile but that could just mean they’re biding their time and waiting to get your moirail alone to interrogate her.

Shit.

“In further news, billionaire Tony Stark has been seen conversing with and helping mutants in the Manhattan area where he can, and even stated in a brief interview that he would hire them and be more than happy doing so…”

Shit, shit, shithive maggots. How were you going to explain this? How were there other trolls here in plain sight? Why did your superior not inform you about them if she knew they were here?!

You move to where your moirail was anyway. You grab the device that allowed you to disguise yourself completely as a human. These humans think that your kind were mutants, right, or did these trolls tell them the truth? Were they working undercover in a way that would allow them all to take down these psionic humans or was this something like the Boundless?

You nearly shuddered as you got maybe five feet from her before something, no, someone, blocked your path. You looked up and saw Fuschia.

You yelped, ripping off the device and dropped it on the ground in front of you as you stumbled back. Your human form wavered, replaced by the bronzeblood that you actually were. You could tell that your moirail had calmed, if only to watch you and take her mind off her own predicament. Who even knew what she’d be thinking of you now? As a liar, maybe?
The fuchsia blood narrowed her eyes and bared her very, very sharp teeth and you winced. You dropped down to the ground in fear not caring for the sand, “I’ll tell you everything I know, I’ll do whatever you want, just please don’t cull me or my moirail.”

Chapter End Notes

This has been a long time coming, and a long time writing (and being distracted by a half dozen other story ideas), but here it is!

Hope it lives up to the standard I've been setting.
Chapter 24

Chapter Summary

==> ?: What's going on???

==> Troll Empress: Contemplate Your Options

==> Peter Parker: Surprise!

Chapter Notes

this isn't dead! WHOO!
let me know if you want to see/read some of the other stuff i've been distracted b- I mean working on, yes, that.
Three guesses as to who the new question mark mystery person is!... whoops accidentally wrote that part in third person... ah well, I guess its fitting, for now at least.

==> ? What is going on ?

“Nooo, not again. It was going so well this time. It’s already bad enough I missed several important character development moments and I can’t even move from this blasted place.” The scene righted itself as the owner of the very familiar voice moved back to examine it. The person, or spirit as the case may be, she didn’t much know, had been here for years and years with only a laptop that she could manipulate. She’d figured out quickly that she could channel her abilities through the laptop to be able to see any location and goings on that she wished to, and yet as amazing as it was, she could not contact any of the people she was seeing nor, as she had just stated, move away from the place she was trapped in to go and see them and help them herself.

The scene showing on the laptop switched to a third person point of view, and then again quickly to another scene that she had been putting off on watching as it didn’t fit into the narrative that was being shown to her.

And yes, she hardly had any control over what she was shown, only a capability to prompt it to focus on certain people or places. Whether it followed her mental and often times verbal pleading was not always a guarantee.

She turned back and away from the laptop on the rock in front of her back to the platform that her body, unconscious or even, likely, comatose as it was, was floating over. The platform was a slab of
colored stone or marble, she had never been able to tell exactly what it was made from, only that this was not how things should be. This wasn’t what she wanted.

“At least I can do this much.” She tried to give herself hope, but the changing colors of light cast by her laptop screen bid her to look at it again, and see the very same scene she hadn’t wanted to look upon yet. It was all she could do to hold back a sigh, even if there was no one around on this barren chunk of floating rock to look at her strangely or reprimand her for it.

The hope she’d found within herself worked only up to a point, “Might as well know why fate wants me to see this now, then.” As she made the decision, the laptop’s screen cleared up and settled down, and began to play without her even having to push a button.

=> Empress of the Alternian Empire: Contemplate Your Options

Your name was not known to the masses of your population. Only a handful of the oldest highbloods knew your second name, the name of your line, much less your first. To every one of your subjects, you were known as Her Imperative Clarification, Her Clarity, or any other variation a troll could think of. To everyone, you were the Savior of the Last Homeworld Matriorb, and yet it and the two ancient jadebloods that came along with it, had caused far more problems for you than you had initially realized. The jade bloods, as previously stated, were old as fuck and could keel over any sweep now despite them being seemingly healthy and able to do their work with only a hindrance to the speed of said work. You assigned a few of your younger crew, caste notwithstanding, to aid them so they didn’t forget anything and have the matriorb die.

There used to be ten mature mother grubs and then some on Alternia, Old Alternia now, alone. Now there was only ten throughout the entire empire.

Not including that outlier colony on the fringes of your empire but the deal would be broken if you went and showed your face to them now.

What were they calling themselves now? Oh yeah, the Boundless.

Stupid as they were, you had your reasons for not simply going down to their planet yourself and culling them all yourself.

Gliding through the halls of the flagship Reflection, you pass trolls who bow to you and trolls who snap to attention, distinguishing your military from your civilians on board so you didn’t have to think too hard on who was who. As you reached the observation deck, you caught sight of
communication screens to the various planets that your trolls were surveying and scouting out for the potential to become New Alternia.

So far, two of these are swamp planets, one had such wild weather that colonization would be a hard long road even for tech such as the kind your empire had at its disposal, and a fourth was occupied by an intelligent species already that has dipped it's fronds into the vast ocean of space already, but as far as intel goes, this species, calling themselves humans, have yet to go any further.

Some of your trolls have reported it being largely overpopulated, and that, while the empire is putting it's conquest of the stars on hold for now, why not gain an ally instead of using this planet as the one to be colonized?

That and your trolls have also been saying the strangest things about the local fauna, flora, and the humans themselves. Not to mention the weather and to what extremes it can get too. Apparently, you had stumbled upon what the lowbloods were calling a Death World. Apparently all these factors together made the one with wild weather look like a vacation spot by comparison.

All said, you were willing to overlook millenia of warfare if it meant the survival of your species.

But if push came to shove? You knew what you would chose.

Turning from the observation deck after getting your fill of staring out into the void of space broodingly, you made your way to the communications block. There, you were met with several midbloods and highbloods who all either pause what they were doing to bow, or gave you a brief salute because whatever they were working on simply could not wait. You were willing to overlook that too.

“What’s our status, Argall? You addressed the teal blood closest to you. He brought himself into another hasty salute before responding.

“All but two accounted for, empress, and those two should be checking in any minute now. Though there has been some troubling reports within the last few hours, and more so if we consider the past few day-night cycles. There appear to be more trolls unaccounted for on the planet, my empress, ones that no one has been able to identify as being under their jurisdiction, nor have they any means to disguise themselves. Multiple incidents have cropped up in the past wipe regarding them and the human mutants.”
You hummed for a moment as you thought on your answer. This wasn’t good news, but you would adapt. You had to adapt.

“Is the populace at large aware of these trolls being trolls, or are they under the mistaken impression that they are one of their mutated?”

“Everything indicates toward the second.”

“How many are there of these unaffiliated trolls?”

“Several. Twenty by our last count and there’s no telling how many there actually are that could just be in hiding. They are regularly accompanied by a number of mutant humans. Whether they all are considered a unified swarm or if it’s a mix of crews and droves, we haven’t yet been able to decipher.”

“Just the trolls?” Argall shook his head at that and you frowned.

“They appear to include at least some of the mutated humans as their own.”

Your frown wavered. That was certainly surprising. Your ascension was only a short number of sweeps ago, and that some of the populace may have fled the empire to wind up on that planet to seek refuge from your predecessor, well, you would welcome them back personally as you invite the humans into whatever sort of alliance would favor the both of you.

No use in making one if they would be the only ones getting anything substantial out of it. Being brought into a new era and into the intergalactic playing field was no small feat.

“Do you know their castes?”

“We counted two of almost every caste, in addition to a caste we have no record of.” It was a blue blood who answered your question this time, pushing glasses up further onto the bridge of his nose, “Including two jades.”

Well then.
Things just got very interesting.

“Almost every caste? And what of this unknown caste have you found?” The blue blood nodded sharply to an olive who stood up to stand at his side, who by the looks of things was pulling up files on her flat husktop.

“There are two rust bloods on record, however they have moved around so much that keeping track of said movements is near impossible. There are two bronze bloods, two jade bloods, two teal bloods, two blue bloods, two indigo bloods, two purple bloods, two violet bloods… and two fuschia bloods, empress. The unknown caste we only know has both sea dweller and land dweller traits. We also know that there are two of them, but determining their exact blood color has been difficult, even with human technology and interconnectivity.”

“A mutant?” Not just a mutant, but a blood mutant? All of the trolls in the room were tense, even the ones who were stubbornly working through it to get their tasks done, “A blood. Mutant. Please tell me they’re just a brighter shade of fuchsia.”

“We don’t know that, my empress, not yet, but from the looks of things, it’s not likely that they are a brighter shade of your color. We would not presume them to be any more royal than you or the two heiresses we do know about.”

The heiresses. You could work with this, and you could uncover what sort of caste has been revealed within these trolls who had no doubt fled to escape your predecessor’s reign of shear calamity.

“Get me in touch with one of our scouts nearest to them on the ground.”

Just as you gave the order one of the purple bloods in the room announced, “One of our unaccounted for has just checked in, your clarity, and has made contact with the elder of the two heiresses. Should I patch them through?”

“Yes.” You barked, walking further into the room from the raised platform at the entrance, eyes now firmly fixed on one of the giant screens on the far wall. You didn’t say anything further, but you didn’t have to. Tense moments later the screen flickered to life with the faces of both a bronze blood scout now without her disguise (no doubt because of her wrist communicator being off in order to get the heiress within viewing range), and the eldest heiress herself who…
Was an adult.

You can work with this. You would not flip out, even as you gave a silent order for Argall to contact your own heiress so that she would be present as soon as possible.

“I am Her Imperative Clarification. May I ask what your name is, lost heiress, or what title you may have assumed?” You were painfully polite here, asking instead of demanding, but you knew by now that demanding something of a troll who owed you nothing only backfired on you, as evident by the pieces of your ears and fins having holes and edges torn from them.

You think that the fuschia was taken aback, but whatever expression she wore on her person was quickly stamped down, “I am Meenah Peixes, and I hold no title. Now. What. The Fuck. Are you doing spying in on the humans world? Ya planning to invade?” The words, because that won’t end well, went unsaid. Your fins flared subconsciously before you could bring them back to their relaxed positions.

“I greet you, Meenah Peixes, not with hostility or intent to invade the world you have sought refuge on, but with open arms to welcome you to an Alternian Empire that is no longer ruled over by Her Infamous Calamity, may her true name and title be lost to time.”

The bronze blood scout bowed deeply, but briefly, before Meenah rose to her full height and told her to go find a human named Rose Lalond. After a second where the bronze moved to execute the order, she added to get a troll by the name of Karkat Vantas.

Your heiress stepped into the room a mere minute later while you were waiting and you, not surprisingly, didn’t have to fill her in on what little she had missed. Meenah had found a chair that she was now lounging back in and only tipped her head back with slightly wider eyes and fins to your heiress’s entrance.

“Huh, looks like things really are different now, if you and your heiress there can stand to be in the same room as each other and not want to cull each other where you both stand.”

The casual way in which that statement was delivered made your heiress, a mere seven sweeps old, shiver with a cold chill of fear. Being honest, it made you a little uneasy as well, but from experience you knew that what Meenah was saying was something Her Calamity would have done to her heiresses.
“What’s your name, gill?” It was added almost as an afterthought, but your heiress responded as if she were speaking with you. Which is to say, she spoke with a bluntness that spared no feelings.

“Meraud Koralo, Heiress Peixes. May I inquire as to why you are having a human join us for this discussion, and what caste this Karkat Vantas is? I can only assume that he is not the other heiress with you, being a male.”

Meenah, for her part, did not look the least bit impressed, “No, he is not a fuschia. What caste he is does not matter, as it hasn’t to any of us living here. It hasn’t for a good number of sweeps and I will politely ask for the both of you and all the rest in that little communication block of yours to not make any mention of it. He is the leader of our swarm, not I, and not Feferi, the other heiress here. As for Rose? She is a Seer.”

You could only gape in shock at the news for a few steady moments before you remembered yourself and steel your expression again and say, “Very well then.” as the human seer and troll both entered the room to find just who Meenah was talking to.

“Oh for fuck’s sake.” Karkat, with stormy grey eyes of pre-adulthood and short, rounded horns spoke with an exasperated sigh, “Rose? Why am I not surprised that we were wrong in being the last trolls left?”

“Because as our luck runs solely with Vriska, so too does our chances of having a moment’s peace for the near future.”

They have a seer on their side.

Karkat merely rolled his eyes at that but didn’t say anything to contradict her, and how could he, with her being a seer, before he addressed you and your heiress, “So, your the new empress? And heiress? Huh. Things actually changed.”

Meenah gave him a sideways glance and a shark’s grin, “That’s what I said, nubs.”

Meraud cleared her throat, prompting the three on the other side of the screen to refocus again onto the two of you, “If you are willing to hear us out, we would like to establish communications with humanity’s leader, patriarch Vantas. We would like to also welcome you and your swarm back into the empire. I’m sure that once we get the humans to not, as I’ve heard the saying goes, ‘shoot first
“Oh of that I have no doubt, it’s just you’re forgetting about the politics that humans have and their capacity for both stupid decisions under pressure and also the paranoia bordering on xenophobia that some of them have...more toward paranoia though if I were to ever be optimistic. There’s also one other key thing. There is no ‘leader of humanity’. The humans of this planet are in no way a unified forced under one government, and considering just how widespread their multiple cultures and languages can be, how monumental misunderstandings can get, we have a lot of work ahead of us on that front.”

=> Peter: Surprise!

You were at school when the Avengers and the other heroes got back from saving all those mutants. It had been broadcasted to as many locations worldwide as possible, so you hadn’t really missed it despite not being there yourself to help out. Not for lack of wanting to, but you couldn’t miss more school than you and the other students at Midtown already were with the attacks on and near your school disrupting everything.

That didn’t stop you from bouncing your leg in a nervous fidgeting gesture, glancing at the clock and out the window every few seconds, and twisting one of the feathers that used to belong to Dave between your fingers. He’d strung them up on a necklace, the feathers having all turned bright, brilliant gold, amber, and bits of ruby from his odd colored blood.

Not that you found it weird, because you didn’t, you’d seen weirder, it was just odd from the perspective of being a superpowered human and yet still having the same color as everyone else, while Dave… didn’t. He’d spoken some kind of magic over each feather, all thirteen of them, which was supposed to protect you in some way.

The only caveat you had because of that was that you couldn’t openly show the necklace as Peter Parker, and so hid it beneath your suit which was itself hidden beneath your normal clothes.

This made it easier to not be found out by Flash, who for some reason had stayed away from bullying you these past few days, but that was neither here nor there. You hadn’t even gotten a chance to see them in action and actively doing their thing because aside from the strange monster attack around Manhattan and Long Island, no actual super villains, none of your usuals anyway, had thought to show themselves in the days and weeks between Dave giving this to you, and today.

But as the saying goes, you should really be careful of what you wish for.
It was during the last ringing of the bell for the day, the one that would let you out to go to the Tower, maybe with Gwen this time if she agreed to, that the landscape around you shifted.

The clouds outside changed colors first, becoming predominantly yellow, which made you think they turned sulfuric, but then also started to shine in an array of color. You made your way outside hastily, staying under the cover of the awning as rain began to pour from these clouds, and as they hit the ground, you could see the water was brightly hued like the clouds were. Cyan, magenta, and of course bits of yellow.

The next thing that changed, roughly ten minutes later after you and everyone else deduced the rain as not harmful from what you could see, was the ground. The ground under your feet literally shifted and threw your balance off as white sand rose up through the cracks and through the concrete itself and defying science as you knew it.

Or, your mind tried to reason, it’s that the concrete and other parts of the earth beneath you were being changed into sand. Never mind that such an alchemic change would give off a lot of heat that could cook a person, probably, which wasn’t what was happening here either.

You found your balance before you fell, looking out at all the changes you could see with your enhanced sight. The roads weren’t being changed, and even though the ground had seemed to move as it changed, all of the buildings around you still stood. The only thing was that there was still a blanket of rain pouring down on you and oh yeah, all of the buildings were some kind of pink.

It was also, despite the cloudy day, very bright all of a sudden.

"Look mommy, rainbows!" A little kid called out from somewhere off in the distance.

Which, you know, things wouldn’t have been so bad if it had just been this for a few hours out of the day.

But no. The Parker Luck would not allow that to happen.

For one, there were now pink turtles of varying sizes walking around on their hind legs and talking, like people. It weirded out some people, you noticed as you found Gwen and made the unanimous decision to explore together, but they weren’t hurting anyone and were even friendly. Some of the kids in a park you passed by even tok up playing with smaller pink turtles that you think were the...
kids of the species by their darker pink color.

After a while of walking and getting sand in your shoes though, the both of you decided web travel would be nice. So you changed out of your normal clothes and let your feather necklace of protection out to be freely seen. Carrying Gwen while web slinging wasn’t a problem. The rain wasn’t bad enough to hinder your vision and your webs stuck to the pink versions of these buildings just as they would any other.

The problem came when you landed on a roof to a local, family owned restaurant you remember going to as a kid and finding some kind of pastel colored ogre scaring both a number of kids and young turtle people.

Gwen whispered a plan into your ear, “You drop me off with the kids and lead the ogre away while I make sure the kids get to safety.”

All in all it was a good plan, simple enough to be adaptable yet fairly straightforward. You dropped into the alley in between the ogre and kids so Gwen could do her thing, while you leaped forward using that same momentum toward the monster and shoot a web right into its face.

It bellowed as it's eyes were covered, thoroughly distracted enough for you to veer off to the side and pull the ogre with you a couple of feet. The sand was not being at all helpful in this instance, but the one good thing you could see was that there were hardly any people outside except for those in cars on the street and the occasional person around that with one look at what the commotion was, was moving to the nearest building.

You didn’t have the time to think on that though, as you pulled the ogre out into where the open sidewalk would be so Gwen could lead the group of kids away, before said pastel monstrosity grabbed ahold of your web and tore it off, snarling at you with anger visible on its face.

“Uh oh.”
== Chapter 25 ==

**=> Peter:**

"Why won’t any of them just stay down?"

You’d asked this same question, in varying ways and levels of intensity, several times in the past five minutes. You weren’t quite sure how you knew it had been five minutes exactly, but ever since you’d taken to wearing that feather necklace, the easier it had become to tell the passage of time. The question you now had the time to say aloud because the ogre thing you had been fighting was now flailing in the canal of what used to be the street, canoes, gondolas, and other boats of varying sizes passing by where there used to be cars.

"What the hell is even going on?" Was a second question that closely followed the first. One that was asked again with different levels of intensity that this time included swears made up on the spot, so as to not bring forth the image of an irate aunt May to mind.

You weren’t sure what you were more afraid of. The monsters surrounding you now, or your aunt when she got really worked up about something.

Probably the latter, if you were being honest.

Included in the number of monsters around were the ogre that you’d spectacularly pissed off, a multi-legged creature with a face that was mostly a mouth, a longer centipede like creature with the same and green goo (venom?) dripping from its mouth, and a flying eyeball.

Out of all of them you couldn’t begin to pin down who was uglier. Maybe there’d be a contest?

You made a quip, asking as much, before doing some impressive near hit acrobatics to get away from all of their attacks. Music had risen from nowhere you could see, accompanying the fight, but now there wasn’t much room at all to retreat to. Your only option here was to scale the building you were being backed up against. From a glance into the window of an opposite building you could tell that wouldn’t be acceptable however. Dodging even just the smaller one’s attack at this point could lead them to sailing straight through the window behind you and into a scared, slowly retreating upstairs, crowd of people.
Your teeth ground together tight with this knowledge, gripping one of the feathers of the necklace with one hand. Now would be the time for some protection, you pleaded in your head, webbing the centipede and other multi-legged ones legs together so that couldn’t move without the other moving with them. The eyeball mouthed thing swooped down on you, knocking you down hard into the sand and getting a bunch of the stuff into your mouth.

The crowd behind you shouted and gasped. Children were crying. You think someone might be calling the police. More people were rushing upstairs now in a swarm of real panic and not just a kind thinly veiled with calm. Someone else was shouting “SOMEONE GET THAT DAMNED BACK DOOR OPEN NOW!” over the noise.

The ogre raised a fist and you couldn’t find energy to rise to more than a crouch.

The ticking of a clock droned. A metronome and a deep pulsing sound, like that you’d heard in bits of that dubstep music some kids at your school liked to listen to, matched the rhythm. Everything around you tinged RED.

A crow’s caw resounded loudly across several city blocks.

“Might wanna step back a bit there Spidey!”

That was… the feather was burning up in your hand, crumbling to ashes and making a stark contrast in the sand yet you didn’t feel a thing. Did the feather get him here. Was this some sort of power of his, to travel, to teleport near instantaneously to wherever these feathers are? Or had it been that and your desperate situation? Had you subconsciously been calling for his help?

He looked different though. Even with his hero outfit. It had some actual armor, with shin guards, forearm guards, boots and something padded to protect his chest. Each were dyed in that same red toned color scheme, and to top the image off he was dual wielding a pair of swords. He was hovering in circles above you and the monsters, who had taken more of an interest in him now.

There was a breathless, silent moment in which you thought to run inside with everyone else, make sure they all got to safety as Dave took care of the monsters here, but they’d been a serious challenge for you. Who’s to say more weren’t on their way here right now because you’d somehow used his protection charm to summon him here?

And wow, even with you knowing magic is a thing that exists, with how you naturally focus on the
scientific side of things, that statement you just thought right there sent you for a loop.

You dismissed the thought, only chancing a glance backward to see what was going on. Some of the lobby and stairwell were cleared, now, so either they were all heading out or upstairs. A glance up at the people rushing away from the windows told you it was likely the latter. Great. You could focus here on helping Dave and-

And he seems to have this whole thing under control. The monster with a mouth for a face goes down first, exploding into weird gemstones that get half or partially buried in the sand when they hit the ground. Except for one, which goes sailing and lands on the other side of the river road.

Should you go get it? Is it important somehow? Would that be a way to help him, since he’s essentially saved your spider-themed hide?

You barely catch it as Dave goes kareening past you, lands in the sand, and slides until half of him, thankfully not his wings, was in the water. That had to be a good few hundred feet, but you also idly think that the culprit, the ogre guy, could’ve sent him flying much, much farther than that.

Okay maybe not flying but still.

You turn around and crouch low in the same instant, spidey sense wailing just seconds before that centipede one jumped right over you, and now you, the ogre, it, and Dave who was getting up now, almost could make a line.

Great.

Wait. Where did Eyeball Batwings go?

You inch your way more toward the river, changing a glance skyward-

-and then springboard into a series of backflips as the winged eye rams into the ground. It rolls, wings weakly flapping as it tries to get airborne again, pupil wandering and unfocused.

“Heh. It’s a good thing Eye Saw what you tried to do there, Batty.” God, that pun was awful even
for you. You need to get an upgrade.

STRIFE!

Uh, where did that sound just come from?

=> Roxy:

When everything in the Tower turned a shade of pink, and bipedal turtles showed up with it, you were nearing Dirk’s room. He’d retreated there saying that he had to work on something, but hadn’t come out or spoken through Hal and Jarvis to ask what was going on. With Jade in the state she was in, and half of your Crew out of the Tower right now, you’d grown worried. Jane had urged you to go check on him, citing she’d rope Jake into making something quick and making a game plan for what to do. Just the four of you.

Yet when you opened the door you weren’t greeted with anything you thought would be usual. He wasn’t hunched over a desk working on a project. He wasn’t going through files and code. He wasn’t even reading or practicing with his bladekind, with what room there actually was to move in here, that is.

No. Your grip on the door handle tightened until your knuckles turned white and your nails dug into your palms. No, it was none of that.

He was lying on the floor, on his side with one hand going through through his shirt. From the fuchsia and orange sparks coming off of his hand and forearm, the faint glow and the hum, Heart magicks were definitely at play here. Dirk wasn’t looking in your direction, but he was breathing hard and you had to do something.

Your first thought was to rush to his side, get him up and to that medical floor. When your foot touched down to take that first step, however, Dirk twisted himself around enough to see you. His eyes widened, glowing faintly and also giving off those same colored sparks.

“Roxy, Stay BACK!” His voice was layered with something older, “GET OUT! LOCK THE DOOR!”

“Like hell I am!” Roxy snapped back, planting her foot firmly and taking another step, “Just what the fuck are you doin’ to yourself, Di-Stri?!”
“He is attempting to isolate, and if Dave wishes it, eliminate his older self from the equation.” Hal’s reply came over one of the speakers in the room with Jarvis following up on the statement with his own.

“The Avengers have been alerted in the event that something goes wrong, as well as the rest of your family, Miss Lalonde. Sir is currently monitoring the room as we speak.”

“So what you’re tellin’ me is that you have everythin’ under control?” You squint up at where you know one of the security cameras is, “I smell bullshit.”

“I don’t.” Dirk gasps for breath in between his replies, which has you whirling around and continuing on your way to him, “I don’t have it under control. Something’s gone wrong, Rox. I can’t move.”

“What can I do, then?” No answer. Not immediately. You wait, checking his eyes and breathing, “I’m gonna get you to Dr. Banner, okay, Di-Stri?” Still no response, other than his eyes fluttering like he was fighting to stay awake.

“Di-Stri?”

== Jade: ==

You weren’t all too sure what was going on at the moment. There was something that was setting your pack on edge, though, and you didn’t like it one bit. John was flitting around usually, trying not to hover too much with the help of the others to distract him, but you were happy to know he cared so much. You were happy to see him happy. Now, though, John and the ever present breeze that accompanied him had stilled. He was hovering in front of a monitor with about half of the Avengers present.

Dirk was onscreen, Roxy had just entered the room, and something within you was howling. Something was wrong, wrong, wrong, and it needed to be fixed now or else you felt like you’d explode. Something was wrong with one of your packmates, with Dirk. Something he was doing to himself, from what the voice called Jarvis had informed you all of.

And the next thing you knew, you could feel and hear a vibration from one of the floors above. You
reach for that infinite Space, fold it in between envisioned hands, and then CRACK! You land in the space between a wall and a Roxy that not even a second later collides with you.

CRACK!

This turned out to be a good thing, as when you arrive back in the common room, with the monitor, a few turned to see Roxy and concern and worry welled up quickly. John took her from you, helping to move her to the couch where...Banner? Banner, yes, he was looking over at the slash across her chest. It spanned from shoulder to hip and had more than a few people talking to each other. Some were yelling, some were telling the yellers to be more quiet and calm, while others still, like John, were trying to get everyone to not be a disorganized mess.

Jake and Jane took one look at each other after having a lip-read conversation you could only make a few words out of, nodded their heads, and ran off.
Chapter 26

Chapter Summary

===> New HIC

===> Jade

===> Leader of the Unbound

=> New HIC: Weigh Your Options

You were tense. Meraud had left once she was dismissed with a polite but unnecessary bow before you turned back to the observation screen. Peixes, huh?

And that Karkat troll, while knowledgeable, was a similar enigma. Two Heiresses fled to for all intent and purposes a backwater planet. An anomaly of a troll as their leader instead of they themselves. A human, named Rhoaze (or perhaps using some other spelling, this was just the one that you chose until otherwise informed), was a Seer and oh what strange creatures humans were. As you scan over reports from informants on the ground including the outed bronze and goldbloods, you can tell that this species has just as complicated and bloody a history as trolls did.

All in the span of a few thousand years. A fraction of the millennia that your species had to look back on. Wars of caste and territory, wars between feuding fuchsias and violets with small countries to back them up. Your caste had once been more plentiful than the mere two, now four, that existed. The limebloods had once existed at all, and ever since taking the throne it had become a personal project to bring them back.

Only. That project was being put on hold for glaringly obvious reasons.

The rest of the jades that had made it off of the old homeworld you had sent to the colonies which had mother grubs still and hoped, prayed even, for the best.

“Let me know if anything changes or if the swarm contacts us.” You let the communicofncer in charge know before turning to leave the block, “High priority.”
“Yes Empress!” Was the unified call back from everyone in there that had overheard the command as you closed the door and started walking down the hall.

You had some thinking to do.

On one fin, you could petition the leaders of the planet Earth to set up shop temporarily on one of their unused plots of land. On the other, perhaps a planet in their system would do if they refused the first. There was no guarantee that they would accept the former, however. The latter also proved to have it's own challenges. As a last resort you could ask to terraform one of the other planets in their system if that’s what it took, but you had a Mother Grub egg to worry over. Your entire species could hinge on its survival and the production of other Matriorbs that would be produced in the First Laying.

And even if that was managed, there would be no lusii for a long time. You would need to have something set up for that. Trolls would have to be in charge of one or more grubs, in all likelihood. You couldn’t ask for these Humans to help in this, not even ones that are connected to the Earth Swarm. You would already be asking a lot of them, sharing what is theirs by their species’ hatchright.

You could perhaps have your Scouts search farther, deeper if need be, for planets harboring life or having the conditions to sustain them and a matriorb that was halfway to hatching. By the jadebloods words.

And it really was just an estimate. Anywhere from two to four sweeps more. It depended on what kind of environment it was in and the kind of care it received.

You could not make a mistake here. It was a stress weighing upon your shoulders enough to make your skin turn pitch dark before your fifteenth sweep.

You have no doubt that moving forward and succeeding would require, no, outright demand that you work with the inhabitants of Earth, that you work with the hemoanon lead swarm.

The projected time of arrival into the outer edge of their system was roughly half an orbit around their star.

=> Jade: Speak
Jane and Jake has gone to deal with the weird shadow Dirk last you saw. You would go with them, really, but Roxy was injured and John had just Winded over to the floor Dirk and Shadow Dirk were to help them.

You knew they had this situation well in hand now. Roxy was being treated for that wound and the rest of your pack that was in this tower were ready to apprehend the weird solid shadow if it got this far.

It was a relief that it had yet to leave that floor.

Your ears twitched almost constantly as people around you talked. A few were murmuring something and mentioned your name. Bruce was transporting Roxy down to the medbay and you could hear a tired snarky conversation from the two of them even if you couldn’t tell the exact words being exchanged.

You didn’t like just standing around doing nothing.

You would open your mouth to speak only to find that the words wouldn’t come to mind. You knew what you wanted to tell them. What you had seen in those brief moments as you caught Roxy and teleported back out of there.

You kept trying anyway. Your pack mates that were talking about you had mentioned recovery and heart powers and how you were space and doing what Disciple and Nepeta did had unintended consequences. You had had to do it a different way, and by doing so you buried everything about you that wasn’t connected to the canine part of you.

That wasn’t connected to Bec.

Nepeta and Disciple has been able to pull themselves out of it faster and easier than you because they were aligned with an aspect that was about the self. Their identities and their souls were easier to manipulate.

You think it would be the same for Dirk if something about it hasn’t gone sideways like those clips of planes and trains with music you didn’t fully understand but found funny anyways.
You gripped your arms tight. You wanted to know what she was missing. You needed to remember soon. It felt urgent that you remember the other pieces of yourself, and besides that you just wanted to speak and let people know you were getting better!

You opened your mouth for the nth time, face scrunching up in concentration. Conversation died down around you but you didn’t bother to notice if it was that in reality or if it was simply you tuning everything else around you out.

“Ah~” Progress! C’mon Harley you could do this. You could do this certainly. You were part First Guardian. Your powers may no longer be connected to a Green Sun but you could still teleport via localized portals folding spacetime and if you could do that you could surely, surely be able to say a few worlds. Stilted words and not full sentences you would take if it meant communication!

“Goo-.” No, no try again, focused on the sound and make your vocal chords and mouth do the thing, “Guys!” There! A word! You spoke!

“Guys! The..” You wince, why did this hurt?

The what?

“The not Dirk! He…” He isn’t after Dave. At least it didn’t seem that way. That’s what everyone was worried about right?

“He’s not-.” Fuck!

You whine and whimper like a pathetic newborn puppy as you registered a presence at your side. Nepeta, you blinked, who was in a wheelchair until Equius could make her a new robo spine-tail. You remember him saying he insisted on doing it himself at some point.

You smiled at her through your annoying headache.

“He isn’t wanting to find Dave. He looked really mad though. I think he’s mad at Dirk but I don’t know why-.”
Pain shot through your head like a spike and you crumbled to the floor before you could finish saying everything that you wanted to.

Someone was yelling again. Then multiple people were. You feel hands, troll ones. One large and two small. Your babbling something that you could barely hear or register as another set of fingers touch your temples.

Fuck whatever was trying to keep you from speaking. Fuck whatever was stopping you from thinking too much on memories of the pack you knew and loved. Of the memories of what you had gone through in that- with Nep-, Carmine!

You think you say her name. Disciple is holding up two fingers and you do it back but you aren’t entirely sure why. Maybe, you internally growl, if you were more coherent you’d know what is going on with you right now and what the trolls around you are talking about!

=> Be The Comatose Girl

=> Observe

The ghost-like being watched with mounting horror as Jade’s eyes glazed over with a bright lime green sheen, glowing with some inner light. She was mumbling and asking questions related to her other component lives. Asking where Jake was. Cursing the Condesce out. Growling in a manner and lashing out in a way that spoke she wasn’t aware of her current surroundings.

What Jade was seeing however was something this stupid laptop would not show her. The Observer fidgets where she was floating as she watched.

STRIFE!

The Disciple and Redglare had Heart and Mind powers at the ready. Vriska tried putting Jade to sleep, which only succeeded in making her drowsy for a minute. Zeroing in on the blue cerulean blood, Jade made her the focus of her next attack.

She lunges, but was intercepted by Signless who tackled her to the ground. Jade snaps at him, misses, and then teleports away.
There’s a half second of silence. A beat of where she would pop up next either in the tower or maybe somewhere else. Kanaya then twisted around on the ball of her foot and grabbed a reappearing Jade by the tail.

The Witch yelped and fell flat on her face.

“Oh I’m so sorry to have to do this, but you are not in the best state of mind-.” Jade lifted up with the power of her flight, twisted her body around, and, face a bit bloody, sinks her teeth into Kanaya’s shoulder.

=> Sidestory 1: Continue

=> Unbound Leader: Confront

Karkat and his matesprit, Dahiiv, has been here for several night cycles now. Long enough that they knew some of the ins and outs of how this planet, this society worked. They knew that the temples were places of meditation and worship. They knew there were areas within them they were not allowed to go.

And yet they both ignored this very basic rule not even a few minutes ago.

You were there in the inner hall of the Goddess of the Sea when he barged through the doors. Priestesses trailed after him in the hope to detain him but stopped short of the doors themselves and averted or covered their eyes so they would not see inside. They, at least, obeyed.

Karkat was carrying his matesprit and you had to wonder if this was simply the act of a desperate troll even in your anger.

“PEIXES!!!” He roared with the force and command of a high blood, “HEAL HIM!”

And that’s when you saw that his form was no of the troll you’d seen up until now. It was of a pale creature, so much so your first thought was that he may be akin to a lusus to some other alien species. It had color, however pale, in it’s massive feathered wings that were burning. Primary feathers having been lost to fire that still raged in their shapes. Secondary ones alight and singed at their tips yet have not yet been wholly engulfed.
You were still mad. He could have asked for the healing of his shapeshifter matesprit (or perhaps glamoured) in the second hall. Dahiiv would have been healed all the same!

“YOU HAVE DISGRACED THIS SACRED HALL!” You roar back, “LEAVE AT ONCE AND YOU MAY BE FORGIVEN FOR THIS AND YOUR MATESPRIT HEALED OF HIS AFFLICTION!”

“FUCK YOU AND THE HOOFBEAST YOU RODE IN ON! I’M NOT GOING ANYWHERE! PEIXES, GET YOUR BUBBLY NECROMANCER ASS OVER HERE I KNOW YOU’RE ABLE TO DO IT!”

“You don’t n—E—Ed to b—E so rud—E, Karcrab. I would hav—E answ—Erd no matt—E ah—Er—E you w—Er—E.”

You were stunned into a stuttering, mumbling quiet as Karkat and the Goddess continue their conversation.

“HIS WINGS ARE LITERALLY ON FUCKING FIRE.”

“And I am t—Elling you th—E fir—E is not spr—Eading and h—E is unconscious so it is hard—Er to gaug—E his pain. It app—Ears to b—E an —Eff—Ect of his pow—Ers. You did say that you Trav—El—Ed h—Er—E. It could b—E that his Pr—Es—Ent it—Eration is p—Erforming on—E of his f—Eats of...T—Emporal T—El—Eportation I Think is th—E t—Erm.”

“This HAS NEVER HAPPENED BEFORE WHEN HE- Oh. It’s because we’re still here and not in our own time.”

“It would mak—E th—E most s—Ens—E. I could try to Dous—E th—E flam—E?” She offers with a small grin. Her form is mostly transparent, her image superimposed onto the waterfall at the end of the room.

“No. Well. Maybe. If you think it will help him wake up so we can go home faster, be my guest.”

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