love is the answer (at least for most of the questions in my heart)

by buckydarling

Summary

Jack Kelly and Charlie "Crutchie" Morris meet each other, and they fall in love, and sometimes, that's all there is to it. Featuring art museums, the moving of furniture, Friday night movies, really understanding roommates, good coffee, happy accidents, dumb college students, and two (2) very exasperated lesbians.

**UPDATE: PERMANANTLY ABANDONED. READ AT YOUR OWN RISK**

Notes

hello! i'm back, and by that i mean back on my bullshit and probably won't update this regularly at ALL.

some notes:

I'm making it a rule for myself to not update until I've written the next chapter (i.e. not posting chapter two until chapter three is done) so hopefully this will provide motivation.
am i going to follow that rule? probably not.

we'll see what happens anyway

this is my first time writing a trans character so please i am begging you if i get something wrong Call Me The Fuck Out

(also thank you byrd for answering some of my questions today) (PSA people byrd_the_amazin writes better newsies fics than myself, the next guy, and God, so check them out)

i'll try to work on tagging things, so if something isn't tagged let me know

and these chapters will get longer i promise, it's the beginning so bear with me

(i'm dying)

See the end of the work for more notes.
Sometimes, later on, Crutchie would sit back and wonder how wildly different his life would be if he hadn’t moved into an apartment with Racetrack Higgins.

It had all happened by chance, really. Race and Crutchie had known each other as kids - gone to each other’s birthday parties, played in each other’s yards, the whole nine yards. Race was the only person Crutchie sort of kept in touch with now that had known him pre-transition (and one of the only people who accepted him post-transition, Crutchie thought bitterly, before pushing it out of his mind). So after Crutchie got sick of living in on-campus housing for two years, he started browsing the campus newspapers and bulletin boards for ads searching for a roommate.

Finding a roommate without the help of the university’s personality-matcher bot online was terrifying to Crutchie. How was he supposed to gauge the guy’s personality? Hell, he could end up with a full-on transphobe as a roommate, if he wasn’t careful, and the idea made him practically start shaking on the spot. It had been a little under two years since the top surgery, and Crutchie had been lucky enough to have been on testosterone since he was sixteen, thanks to some incredibly understanding parents. He should count his blessings, really, he thought; most trans kids weren’t as lucky as he’d been. But being trans was still a danger in some ways, because there would always be people who didn’t agree with it, and so for Crutchie, the fear was always there.

And then one day at the very end of sophomore year, he quite literally ran into Race in the university bookstore where he worked.

“Shit!” Race yelped in a high-pitched voice, barely saving his coffee cup from spilling over the both of them. Crutchie’s stack of t-shirts was less fortunate, but he didn’t mind folding them again. He picked them up one by one with his crutch, piling them one by one in his arms. Race straightened up, running a hand through his fair hair, still as curly as Crutchie remembered it. “Man,” he said, “I am so sorry about that, dude, it’s been a weird day--”

“It’s fine, Race,” Crutchie cut him off. Race looked up, startled.

“How’d you know my n-- no way.” He peered at Crutchie for a second, as if making sure it was really him. “Crutchie? No way. There is no way we’ve been going to the same school for two years and I didn’t know about it.”

Crutchie flashed him a grin. “ Surprise.” Race let out a delighted laugh before carefully setting his coffee down and yanking Crutchie in for a tight hug.
“No way, man, I thought it was you!” He pulled back and held Crutchie at arm’s length, surveying him. “How’ve you been?” Crutchie laughed, scratching the back of his neck.

“Good! Been working here this year, getting ready to declare my major sooner rather than later,” Crutchie exhaled. “Not the most vibrant social life, but, well,” he shrugged, “can’t have everything, can you?” Race let out a pfft noise.

“Guy as friendly as you? I’m shocked you think you don’t have a social life,” he joked. He dropped his voice a little. “How’s everything been in terms of your, uh, transition?” Race paled suddenly. “Was that an insensitive question to ask? I’m sorry, you don’t have to answer that, I’m sorry I brought it up—”

“Race!” Crutchie cut him off again, laughing. “It’s fine!” He smiled. “Everything’s been going real well, actually. Been just over a year since I got the surgery.”


“Thanks,” he said. “So how are you? What have you been up to?”

Race shrugged. “Eh, nothing spectacular. Grinding my way through my classes, working part-time at the coffee shop down the street from here.” He ran a hand through his hair, giving an exasperated sort of huff-laugh. “Man, I can’t believe I work a block away, and you work in the fucking campus bookstore, and we’ve still never run into each other. That’s insane.” Crutchie laughed in agreement as Race continued. “Anyway, my only real issue right now is figuring out where I’m gonna live next year. I found this perfect apartment,” he breathed, his gaze going a little dreamy, “in the same building as all my good friends, and it’s amazing, but I need a roommate to cover the rent, and everyone else doubled up already.”

Crutchie’s heart skipped on a funny little beat, and his head shot up just as Race’s did, their eyes locking.

“You know, Race,” Crutchie drawled with a shit-eating grin, “I was just about to say that I’m trying to move off campus, and desperately need a roommate because I can’t cover the rent anyplace myself.”
“What a funny coincidence,” Race murmured, and then that was all either of them could take before they burst out laughing, Crutchie grabbing a bookshelf as he almost lost his footing on his good leg. Race straightened back up, wiping a stray tear from his eye.

“So, Race,” Crutchie started again, “wanna be roommates next year?”

Race grinned. “I’d like nothing better.
how to move a couch

Chapter Notes

HEYYYOOOO ya girl is back with another chapter (THEY WILL GET LONGER I SWEAR TO JESUS CHRIST)

jack and crutchie finally interact

don't say i never give you anything

beware because there are def some minor continuity errors here but idc

by the way the title of this fic comes from the song "better together" by jack johnson

if you haven't listened

do it

in conclusion, here is ch 2

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Pivot!” Jack hollered down the staircase as best he could over the large couch balanced in both of his hands, his feet dangerously close to slipping off of the step he was perched on. He heard Spot curse loudly from somewhere beyond the mound of fabric.

“Shut your fucking mouth, Jack, I’m doing my best!” he called back. “And stop it with the stupid references to that one Friends episode. Ross was an asshole, and we both know it.”

Jack just rolled his eyes. “Regardless, this couch has gotta budge, or I’m gonna fall off of this step and on my ass, and this couch,” he tugged halfheartedly at it, hoping it would become unstuck, “will fall on you.”

Spot made a noise of frustration, and Jack heard his breaths grow heavier as he pushed at the couch again. Suddenly, it popped free of where it had been stuck in the turn of the stairwell, causing Jack’s leg’s to almost fly out from under him. He whooped in triumph, regaining his balance, and together he and Spot maneuvered the couch the rest of the way up the flight of stairs and into the apartment, setting it down in the living room with a satisfying thud. Spot flexed his arms once, nodding curtly, and Jack laughed. “Sheesh.” His phone buzzed at the same time Spot’s did, and they both pulled them out to find the same text from Race.

[Race] yo yo yo can one of you fine gentlemen (or both) come help me move some furniture
[Race] new roomie has done everything he can but the reality is you can’t move a couch w a bad leg

[Spot] sure asshole

[Jack] yeah i’ll b there too. We can grab lunch after?

[Race] sounds good. @ jack you’ll like new roomie, he’s super nice.

[Jack] what’s his name

[Spot] ohhhh is this ur childhood friendddd

[Race] yep. His name’s charlie, but he’s got a nickname he prefers

[Race] i’ll let him introduce himself. We’re in 4B

[Jack] we’re comin downstairs

He and Spot locked the apartment and trotted down the stairs together to the floor below, scanning the doors for 4B. There was a simple iron knocker on the door, and Jack let it drop once, the sound ringing hollow in the empty hallway.

“Just a sec!” hollered an unfamiliar voice from the other side of the door. Steps approached, the pattern sounding a little off, almost like something was dragging, but Jack hardly had time to think about it before the door swung open to reveal who must have been Race’s roommate, Charlie.

He was a little smaller than Jack, with fluffy blond hair and smile lines crinkling at the corners of his eyes. He was leaning on a pair of forearm crutches, most likely due to the awkward angle that his foot hung at; it barely brushed the floor. It belatedly occurred to Jack that this must have been the source of the odd steps he’d heard, but he couldn’t really register it in the moment.
Because Charlie was really cute.

He stuck out his free hand, and Jack shook it. “You must be Race’s friends, right? Nice to meet you!” He grinned. “My name’s Charlie, but everyone I know calls me Crutchie.”

Jack let out a half-laugh of disbelief. “No kidding.” Snap out of it, idiot. “I’m Jack,” he added, trying to force the gears in his head to start turning again as Crutchie let go of his hand.

“I’m Spot,” Spot added, shaking Crutchie’s hand as well. Crutchie’s grin brightened.

“Oh, you’re Spot!” he exclaimed, delighted. “Race will not shut up about you, it’s nice to put a name to a face.” Spot turned as red as a tomato, and Jack had to stifle a laugh.


“He’s downstairs, if you wanna run down and help him carry some stuff up,” he continued. “And you,” he turned to Jack, tapping a hand lightly on his shoulder, “can help me move some stuff around in here.” Jack nodded.

“Sounds good,” he answered, trying to remain nonchalant as Spot practically sprinted down the stairs to find Race and he followed Crutchie inside. Crutchie moved around the space with a remarkable dexterity given the crutch, hopping off a small step into the living room space with ease.

“Okay,” he said, leaning on his crutches and absently swinging his good leg off the ground and back. “Do you think you can shift this couch for me?” Jack grinned at him, hoping his face didn’t look as red as it felt.

“Certainly,” he replied, hopping down the step and surveying the small couch. “Where do you want it?”

Crutchie furrowed his brow. “Hmm,” he hummed, scrutinizing the small living room. “Over there,” he decided, pointing towards the space in front of the window, “by that wall. If it’s not too much trouble,” he added, looking almost apologetic.
Jack waved him off. “No, no, course not! Happy to be of service,” he joked, giving a funny little bow and eliciting a giggle from Crutchie. (Even his laugh was already adorable, Jack noted with mild alarm.) He walked around the couch and lifted one end with relative ease, beginning to drag it over to the other side of the room. “So,” Jack began, “Erm, Crutchie.” He shook his head with a laugh. “I know it’s how you introduced yourself, but damn, I almost feel bad using it!” Crutchie laughed again.

“Oh, no, that’s the reaction I get from a lot of people,” he replied with ease. “I really don’t mind; I kind of like it, actually. It was a little kid nickname, and it’s stuck with me pretty easily.” He sat down on a chair near where Jack was moving the couch. “I’m uh,” Crutchie continued, suddenly sounding hesitant, “I’m trans, and I love the name Charlie, but sometimes early on it felt a little too close to my birth name. And I’d always been Crutchie, regardless of the name on my birth certificate, so I kept using it.” Jack nodded, setting down the couch for a moment to give his arms a break.

“That makes sense,” he responded. “Although,” he added, “Charlie’s a pretty cute name, if you don’t mind my saying so,” and then he froze, because Jack did you just flirt with the cute guy you barely know. To his immense relief, Crutchie just laughed, turning a little pink.

“Wouldn’t’ve picked it if I didn’t like it,” he shrugged. “And thanks,” he said, meeting Jack’s eyes. Jack smiled easily at him, picking up the couch again.

“Hey,” he continued, nodding at the small trans pride flag he’d just noticed already hanging by the entrance to the kitchen, “if you want a bigger one of those, they have them for pretty cheap at the LGBT resource center down in Pulitzer Hall.” He finally reached the wall where Crutchie wanted the couch and set it down, nudging it a few times to adjust. “That’s where I got my bi pride flag,” he explained, “and it’s decent quality, too.” Crutchie brightened.

“Really? That’s great! Uh,” he stood, grabbing his crutch, and ran a hand through his hair, “I’ll have to check that out. Been meaning to get myself a regular old rainbow flag as well, so that’ll be a great place to look. Thanks.” Jack smiled.

“No problem.” His phone pinged with a text from Race.

[Race] jack if you’re done flirting with my roommate can we go to lunch

[Spot] amen to that
[Jack] i was not FLIRTING

[Spot] ok heart eyes whatever. I want cheese fries for lunch

[Race] tell crutchie he should come too

Jack huffed a laugh and tucked his phone in his pocket. He looked up at Crutchie. “You up for joining us for lunch?” he asked. Crutchie smiled, and together they walked towards the door.

“Sounds great.”

Chapter End Notes

they've met each other finally god bless
sparks are FLYING
props to you if you caught that reeeeally weird and obscure six-degrees-of-separation mean girls reference
because ben cook is in mean girls
cheese fries
ha
(it wasnt even race who said it but shhhh this does not matter)
kudos and comments make the author thrive! send me asks and find me on tumblr: stevetrevvors
Chapter Summary

Crutchie makes what he thinks are a lot of new friends all at once. It's pretty nice.

Chapter Notes

IM BACK BITCHESSSSSS

Sorry I'm actually terrible at updating, senior year has been kicking my ass

but

the good news: college apps are mostly in and therefore I have a little more time to write!!

other good news:

i have literally this entire fic shitposted/outlined in my iphone notes, so it has a substantial (???) plot!! get ready for some slow burn kids, if i finish it this is gonna be a long one

on that note, here's a ridiculously short chapter so we can finally get all the character introductions out of the way and get into the gooooood stuff

yay

See the end of the chapter for more notes

As they met Race and Spot on the stairs, Jack got a text.

“Oh, awesome!” he said, looking up. “Guys, we gotta wait down in the lobby. Sarah and Kath want to join us for lunch.” His phone pinged several more times. “And Davey,” he added. Ping! Ping! “And Albert,” he laughed.

Crutchie’s eyes were widened with slight alarm. “Wow. That’s…” he trailed off. “A lot,” he concluded, because it was a lot. Lots of new people, and it was only Crutchie’s first day living with Race. His roommate furrowed his brow in concern.

“Yo, Crutch,” he asked, “you gonna be alright with all these new people? You and I can skip town and grab food somewhere else if it’s too much.” Crutchie smiled at the gesture, but shook his head.
“No, don’t do that for me. I’ll be fine,” he replied. “It’s a nice chance to get to know my new neighbors, right?”

Jack smiled at him, bumping casually at his shoulder. “I’ll introduce you to everyone, don’ worry. They’re all gonna love you.” Crutchie grinned.

“And how do you know that, Mr. Kelly?” he teased, bumping Jack back. “You met me twenty minutes ago.”

Jack flashed him a disarmingly charming smile. “Exactly. Only known you twenty minutes and I already like you.” Crutchie blushed, looking down at his shoes.

“Not so bad yourself,” he replied. Race gave an undignified snort and promptly earned himself a whack in the shins with a crutch.

Footsteps on the stairs behind them as they entered the lobby signified the arrival of Jack and Race’s friends, and Crutchie looked up to see who was there as greetings and hugs ensued.

“Jack!” A short girl with a long head of auburn curls leapt up to throw her arms around Jack’s shoulders. “You asshole, I missed you!” Jack laughed, spinning her around a little before setting her down. She turned and met Crutchie’s gaze with intelligent brown eyes. “And you must be Race’s roommate!” She reached forward to shake Crutchie’s hand, her grip firm. “I’m Katherine,” she introduced herself, “and this is my girlfriend, Sarah.”

She was joined by a slightly taller girl with brown hair. “Nice to meet you both,” Crutchie replied, shaking Sarah’s hand as well. “My name’s Charlie, but everyone calls me Crutchie.” Sarah laughed, a bright, happy noise that seemed to light up the lobby of the apartment building.

“Well,” she said, “if what Race has been telling us about you all summer is any indication to go by, you’re a pretty awesome person.” Crutchie turned to Race with a cheeky grin.

“Aw, shucks, Race,” he called, “you been talking about me to these gals over here?” Race winked playfully.
“Only good things, sweetheart,” he called back, eliciting twin spluttering noises from Jack and Spot.

Crutchie was greeted next by a tall boy with dark curly hair. “Hi,” he said in a friendly voice, “I’m Davey. I’m a friend of Jack’s.” Jack came up behind them and slung an arm around Davey’s shoulders, ruffling his hair playfully.

“Me and Davey here have been friends since the third grade,” Jack explained, and Davey smiled bashfully, rolling his eyes.

“He picked me,” Davey added, giving Jack a gentle poke in the abdomen. “I still don’t understand why. We’re literally polar opposites.” Crutchie laughed.

“Well, I’m sure he just has good judgement,” he said, and Jack grinned broadly.

“Hey, losers!” Spot called over the crowd of them. “It’s lovely to see all of you again, but I really want me some cheese fries. Can we finish this meet and greet over lunch?”

Over hollers of feigned exasperation and a voice that sounded like Race’s yelling that Spot should stick it where the sun don’t shine, the group began migrating towards the diner they’d agreed on a few blocks from the apartment building. Along the way, Crutchie was introduced to Albert, Davey’s roommate and a friend of Race’s from some of his classes. Albert had flaming red hair and walked like a dancer, lightly on the balls of his feet but with a swagger of confidence. He and Crutchie finished their introductions, then he promptly spotted Race and let out a holler, launching himself at his friend in a tackle hug. Crutchie was left in the back, but he wasn’t even alone five seconds before Jack appeared at his side.

“You doing alright?” Jack asked him, shoulder-checking him lightly. Crutchie smiled gratefully.

“Yeah, thanks. Everyone’s really nice,” he replied, surveying the rowdy group in front of them. Jack laughed knowingly.

“Yeah, they’re a good bunch,” he said fondly. “They’re a lot to take in at first, but they’re all really good people.” He looked at Crutchie. “You’ll fit right in. They already like you.”

Crutchie smiled. “I hope so,” he said, and Jack grinned.
“Yo, this diner’s got really good pancakes, but they’re huge,” he piped up, changing the subject. “You willin’ to share an order with me?”

Crutchie grinned and shoulder checked him enough to make him stumble just a bit. “Chocolate chips and I’m yours,” he replied with a smile, hoping Jack didn’t notice the way his cheeks turned pink.

They sat side by side in the diner, their shoulders squished together in the corner booth they’d all claimed, and as he fought Jack for bites of pancake, surrounded by his new neighbors and new friends, laughing at Race’s jokes and rolling his eyes with Davey whenever someone did something stupid, Crutchie felt more at home than he had in ages.

He had a feeling it was going to be a good year.

Chapter End Notes

i swear i'll try to update more often i swear to jesus im so sorry
also yes jack says yo and im not sorry about it

Tumblr: stevetrevvors

let me know what you think in the comments or just leave some kudos to make me happy :)}
how to start your morning off right

Chapter Summary

Three bad things, one great thing, and a cup of coffee on the house.

Chapter Notes

BOY HOWDY LOOK AT ISA CHURNING OUT ALL THESE CHAPTERS LIKE IT'S NOTHING

my writer's block is gone for some reason?? so i'm getting out as much as i can before it comes back

and we all suffer

this is un-beta'd as is everything i write so if there are glaring mistakes call me out

heeeeeere's chapter four

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Jack started off the first day of classes with three unpleasant or bothersome things and one very, very nice thing to make up for all of it.

Unpleasant item number one was that Jack did not, as he expected to, wake up to his alarm, but instead to the voice of Spot Conlon singing in the shower. Jack muffled a groan into his pillow, traipsing over to his door and down the hall to the bathroom whilst changing Spot's contact name in his phone to [Worst Roomate Ever]. He hammered on the door, smirking a little at the subsequent yelp from Spot and the loud thunk that indicated a dropped shampoo bottle.

“Shut the hell up and stop using all the hot water!” Jack hollered through the door, ignoring his roommate’s grumbles of protest as he walked back down the hall to get dressed. He yanked on a clean shirt and jeans, halfheartedly raking a hand through his unruly hair before giving up.

Jack rummaged through the fridge before remembering they hadn’t gone grocery shopping and therefore had nothing decent for breakfast. Unpleasant item number two, he thought to himself bitterly. It was eat out or have ramen for breakfast. Sighing, he checked his wallet to make sure he had money for food and shut the fridge. “Guess I’m leaving now,” he muttered to himself. He’d saved as much time before class as possible to sleep in, but he needed time to grab a coffee and maybe something to eat before his first lecture. Great. He hollered some semblance of a goodbye to Spot, who was still in the shower, before stuffing his feet halfway into his sneakers and grabbing
his backpack on the way out the door.

The third unpleasant thing was both definitely Jack’s own fault and a direct consequence of the first two: he’d made it two steps down the staircase before tripping over his untied shoelaces and collapsing in a pile of flailing arms and shrieking on the landing below. “Fuck,” he spat, struggling to push himself up despite the stinging in his palms. Why the shitty building didn’t invest in some better flooring than the pebble-studded concrete he’d landed on, Jack had no idea, but he definitely had some scrapes on his palms and chin, and he’d have plenty of bruises in a matter of minutes. Cursing under his breath, he flopped back down to tie his shoes before stumbling a little unsteadily the rest of the way downstairs and walking the two blocks to the bookstore cafe, wondering if his luck really would be that shitty and they’d be out of the coffee he wanted.

However, the head that popped up to greet the incoming customer when the bell rang as Jack opened the door made him swear all the pain vanished from his scrapes.

“Jack!” Crutchie called delightedly from behind the coffee counter, wearing a university ball cap perched backwards on his fluffy hair and a matching, brightly-colored uniform apron. “Gee,” he said, as Jack approached the counter, “you look awful.” Crutchie reached out and brushed a tiny piece of gravel off of the scrape on Jack’s jawline, making an apologetic face when Jack hissed in pain. “You alright?”

“Yeah,” Jack shrugged, leaning on the counter. “Just had a bit of a nasty run-in with the stairwell in the building. Those floors are merciless.”

Crutchie laughed a little. “Oh, no!” He fixed his hat and checked to see if the line for orders was empty (it was, and there was another barista on duty) before perching on his elbows to talk to Jack. “Your morning okay otherwise?”

Jack thought about it. “To be honest,” he sighed, “not really.” He made eye contact with Crutchie and smiled. “Better now.”

Crutchie smiled, turning faintly pink. “Well, at the very least let me make you a drink to brighten up your day,” he offered. “On the house,” he added determinedly, jabbing his pointer finger lightly at Jack’s chest. “I won’t take no for an answer.” Jack threw up his hands.

“You sure?” he asked. “I don’t want to take away from your business.” Crutchie made a little pshaw noise (Jack just about melted, it was so adorable) and waved his hand.
“Just you wait. Give it an hour and this place will be so packed with students needing their morning fix that you wouldn’t be able to move an inch without bumping someone. You’re fine,” he chided, and busied himself with grabbing a coffee cup. “What’ll it be?” he asked cheerfully, posing so ridiculously with a Sharpie in hand that Jack couldn’t help but laugh.

“Uh,” he hummed, peering at the menu board on the back wall, “let’s see. Are those caramel lattes any good?” Crutchie winked.

“When I make ‘em, they are,” he answered, and Jack struggled to keep every gear in his brain from short-circuiting as Crutchie started on the drink. He’d more or less come back to himself when the warm cup was pressed into his hands, their fingers brushing for less than a second. Jack raised his eyebrows and took a sip, mindful of the heat.

“Damn!” He looked down at the cup in his hands. “That’s a good coffee right there.” He looked back up at Crutchie, who was obviously trying very hard (and failing miserably) not to beam with pride. “Also,” Jack added, “since when have you worked here and somehow we’ve never met? I’ve been getting my coffee here since freshman year.” Crutchie shrugged, leaning forward on the counter again.

“I only started behind the cafe bar this year,” he replied. “Before that I was mostly stocking shelves and stuff. I still do that, usually.” Jack furrowed his brow.

“I just feel like I would have remembered seeing you,” he pondered. Because you’re the most adorable human I’ve ever met in my life, his brain added very unhelpfully. Crutchie smiled.

“Boy, I wish,” he sighed. “We could’ve been friends way earlier.” He seemed to freeze all of a sudden, and then started stammering a mile a minute. “Was that weird of me to assume? We are friends, right? I don’t know why I said that, I guess I just thought since we’re neighbors and you’re really nice to me and I don’t know, forget I said that I’m just making things weird-”

“Crutchie,” Jack cut him off with a soft laugh. “Of course we’re friends.” Crutchie blushed, looking a little embarrassed, and then smiled hopefully at him.

“Really?” he asked. Jack grinned.

“Yeah, really,” he replied. “Here.” He stole the Sharpie from where it was stuck behind Crutchie’s ear, trying to ignore how soft his hair was, and uncapped it, tugging at Crutchie’s forearm and
scribbling his phone number down. Jack knew it was stupid; they both had phones, and he could have put his number directly into Crutchie’s contacts instead of writing it on his arm like a teenager. But somehow, when he met Crutchie’s brilliant smile, Jack couldn’t bring himself to care one bit.

“I gotta get to my first class,” he admitted with regret, “but I’ll see you later?”

Crutchie blinked. “Uh - yeah! Yeah, sure!” He waved as Jack backed towards the door slowly, reluctant to turn, and for some reason the sight of the digits of his phone number on Crutchie’s arm made Jack’s face turn red with irrational delight.

“Bye,” he laughed, turning and pushing open the door to the bookstore, trying to hide his grin in the collar of his jacket as he walked across campus to his first class. Before he’d made it thirty feet, his phone buzzed in his pocket twice in rapid succession.

[unknown] hi jack!!

[unknown] sorry that was weirdly fast im just excited and didn’t want the numbers to wash off

Jack laughed out loud as a third text came in.

[unknown] oh this is crutchie by the way

Jack entered the number into his phone, putting a little star beside the name, and took another sip of his coffee, barely watching where he was going as he texted Crutchie all the way to class.

Chapter End Notes

yaaaaaaaaay flufffffff

by the way just warning y'all this is gonna be slow burn as FUCK

i love pain

yay
kudos and comments to make me happy :) and hmu on tumblr: stevetrevvors
Chapter Summary

College parties are pretty overrated when you could just have movie night instead.

Chapter Notes

my dudes!! i'm sorry this update is so late coming, it's tech week and costuming/publicity is kicking my ass

i am dying

but here's the next chapter!! i like this one a lot, and things are sort of starting to happen plot wise (yaaaay??)

i think that's all i have rip

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Crutchie only snapped out of his focus on the syllabus he was attempting to decipher (seriously, his professor was being so cryptic is was ridiculous) when he felt the couch jostle underneath him as Race flopped onto it with a dramatic sigh. Crutchie put the paper down on the coffee table, rolling his eyes a little as he looked at his roommate, who was splayed across the couch with an arm draped over his face like he was a damsel in distress. “Can I help you with something?” Crutchie asked him, his voice tinged with amusement.

“I’m bored, Crutch,” Race whined. “It’s Friday, and everyone else on this damn campus is out being stupid and dumb-drinking. That’s no fun.” Crutchie huffed, his lips curving upward in a smile.

“Well, then, that’s an easy fix, right?” He prompted. “We just make our own plans, stupid.” He pulled out his phone and typed in the contact names of everyone he could think of with unpracticed fingers - he’d only been living with Race a few weeks, and it still took him a minute to recall what were only four or five names.

[Crutchie has created a group chat with Albert, Spot, Jack, Race, Davey, Kath, and Sarah]

[Crutchie has named the group chat “NEIGHBOR SQUAD”]
[Crutchie] hello everyone

[Crutchie] race is very very bored and does not want to “dumb-drink” like everyone else on campus

[Crutchie] would anyone else like to come over and watch a movie and do some classy drinking instead

[Spot] sounds fun im down

[Jack] i like it

[Jack] will supply beer and pizza rolls

[Albert] davey and i can also bring beer and stuff

[Davey] alby im very concerned that given how well you know me you roped me into this plan without consulting me first

[Davey] but also sounds fun

[Davey] what time

[Sarah] kath and i are in (she’s too lazy to type a reply and im sitting right here so)

[Crutchie] awesome!

[Crutchie] we should be good for people to come by seven
Crutchie didn’t look up from his phone, laughing as he felt Race slide across the couch like some sort of slug and wrap his arms around Crutchie’s abdomen. “You’re the best roommate ever,” Race conceded, his voice muffled by Crutchie’s sweatshirt, dragging out the R in ever. Crutchie ruffled his hair affectionately.

“Don’t mention it,” he sighed. “I know you just want an excuse to cuddle with Spot on the couch for three hours,” he added in a teasing voice, and Race smacked him.

“I take it back, you’re the worst-”

“And blame it on the alcohol-”

“Charlie Morris, I swear to god-”

“Because you’re in love with him!” Crutchie sang, laughing breathlessly as Race jabbed him repeatedly in the stomach, his face flushed red. He flopped back onto the couch, and Race gave up, curling in on himself and pretending to fume.

“Don’t even act so aloof, Mr. Tough Guy, everyone knows you’ve already got it bad for Jack Kelly,” he muttered, and Crutchie flushed almost a darker red than Race, grabbing one of his crutches from its spot on the floor and whacking Race in the shins, earning a yelp.

“I do not,” he denied vehemently, mimicking Race’s defensive posture, and they both lasted about five seconds of being serious before they burst out laughing. Crutchie grabbed his other crutch and hopped up off the couch, holding out a hand and yanking Race up with ease. “Come on, we’ve gotta at least attempt to clean this place before the hooligans get here.”

“Crutchie,” Race teased, beginning to clear miscellania off the coffee table, “did I just hear you unironically use the term hooligans?”
“You keep up with this teasing, Mr. Higgins, and you’re gonna end up with no feeling in your shins.”

After thirty or so minutes of Crutchie actually cleaning and Race stuffing things into his closet and under beds, a confident knock that could only be Spot’s sounded at the door. Hollering at Race to get his crap off the kitchen counter, goddamnit, Crutchie vaulted over to the front door and peered out the peephole to find Spot and Jack shifting on the landing, arms laden with beer and food.

“I’m sorry,” Crutchie called through the door, “I’m not interested in whatever you’re selling.”

“Goddamnit, Crutchie, you’re exactly like Race, you little fucker,” came Spot’s muffled voice from the hallway, and Crutchie laughed, swinging open the door to let them in.

“What should I, uh,” Jack asked him, gesturing with a large tupperware, “do with these?” Crutchie took the container from him and peered inside.

“No way. Jack, did you make brownies?” Crutchie gaped at the neat rows of baked goods stacked inside the container. Jack blushed, running a hand through his hair.

“I, uh,” he shrugged, “like to bake?” Spot snorted, swaggering past the two of them to put the beer down in the kitchen.

“He started frantically whipping up a batch as soon as he heard we were coming over here,” he called over his shoulder. “It was hilarious.” Jack made a face after him.

“Aw, Jack,” Crutchie grinned at him, “you didn’t have to do that.” Jack smiled.

“It’s alright. I wanted to.” He took the tupperware back carefully and walked into the kitchen after Spot, leaving Crutchie briefly to stand by the door and regain his wits, ignoring the part of his brain that was sounding veritable alarm bells. He can BAKE HE BAKES HE WANTED TO BAKE BROWNIES--

Another knock at the door snapped him out of it. Sarah and Kath came in with bags of chips and two bottles of wine (because “if we’re going to drink, Crutchie, we might as well be classy about
it”) and Davey arrived with Albert in tow and more food. The apartment filled with the sounds of bottles and bags opening and people talking. It was loud and cheerful, without being overwhelming; it was homey. Crutchie found himself grinning a little absurdly as he went to join everyone else, grabbing a beer and snagging three of Jack’s brownies (which were amazing.)

They settled on some superhero movie that Crutchie hadn’t seen yet - maybe Captain America? - and settled down on various pieces of furniture in the living room. Sarah and Kath claimed the armchair right away, tangling their legs together and draped over each other so much Crutchie wasn’t sure how they were going to manage getting up at the end of the movie. Davey and Albert settled on the floor with a few pillows, a bowl of chips and salsa between them as they argued over the merits of the different superheroes within the franchise. Crutchie ended up on the couch, with Race and Spot tucked together on his right. Jack came in from the kitchen and flopped down on his left, resting an arm casually on the back of the couch.

“Aw, Spot,” he complained, “who’s gonna cuddle with me during the scary parts if you’re all snuggled up with Race?” Crutchie grinned as Spot flushed beet red.

“We’re not snuggling, ass,” Spot snapped defensively, as Crutchie watched him literally burrow further into Race’s side. “It’s a small couch. And I’m not moving, so if you want someone to cuddle during the scary parts, Crutchie’s gonna have to do that for you.”

“Don’t worry, Jack,” Crutchie reassured him playfully, patting him on the shoulder as he tucked his legs underneath him on the couch, “I’ll protect you.” He leaned back against the cushions, doing his best to ignore the fact that Jack’s arm was right there behind him.

“My hero,” Jack remarked, and then as the movie started he casually dropped his arm around Crutchie’s shoulders like it was nothing. As if it didn’t send his heart racing in circles in his chest that had nothing to do with the action sequences on screen.

He doesn’t like you, Crutch, he admonished himself, barely paying attention to the movie. Don’t make such a big deal out of it. So he settled in, focusing on the movie (it was actually Thor, not Captain America, but Crutchie hadn’t seen either) and not on his stupid crush.

At least you’re not stuck in a situation like Spot and Race, he thought later in the movie, as his thoughts kept circling back to it. They’d been friends since high school, Race had told him, and anyone with a brain could see that the two of them were both hopelessly in love with each other and fiercely in denial of it. Crutchie looked over at the two of them on the couch and couldn’t help but smother a small noise, elbowing Jack to get his attention and gesturing.
Race (who had seen the movie before) was fast asleep, his head tucked on Spot’s shoulder and an arm draped over his stomach. Spot was barely paying attention to the television, instead looking down at Race with the softest smile Crutchie had ever seen on his face, one hand gently carding through Race’s blond curls. Spot looked up to see the both of them looking at him, and Crutchie raised an eyebrow as if to say, really? Spot made a face, but didn’t move at all, instead turning his gaze back to the TV, his fingers still absentmindedly playing with Race’s hair. Crutchie huffed out a soft laugh, turning back towards the screen and unconsciously moving a little closer to Jack.

“That two really need to get it together,” he whispered. Jack nodded in agreement.

“Mm-hmm,” he replied, his eyes now fixated back on the movie. Crutchie let himself stare for just a moment before turning back to the TV as well.

He told himself, it’s just a little crush, you’ll get over it; but with the way his heart fluttered just a little when Jack’s fingertips grazed his upper arm, Crutchie knew deep down that he was just lying to himself.

Chapter End Notes

race and crutchie are an iconic dynamic duo and the best roommates

comments and kudos make the author super duper happy!!

tumblr: stevetrevvors
how to not have your shit together

Chapter Summary

Jack doesn’t know how to accept his feelings; thankfully, neither does anyone else. (Except for Kath and Sarah. They’re perfect.)

Chapter Notes

IM BACK BITCHES

GUESS WHO’S FINALLY ON THANKSGIVING BREAK

hint

it’s me

hopefully this means you’ll get more than one update this week

maybe

we’ll see

anyway have some Crushin Bois bc i can’t think of anything else interesting to say

The next Friday night, Jack found himself in Davey and Albert’s apartment, squished between Sarah and Crutchie with both pairs of legs draped across his lap, debating the merits of the new Star Trek movies versus the original series.

“I mean, the reality is,” Sarah explained, readjusting her feet so that she wasn’t kicking Jack in the stomach, “the acting is just better. And hey,” she added, “I may be gay as fuck, but the reality is, Chris Pine is pretty easy on the eyes.” On Jack’s other side, Crutchie nodded solemnly.

“You’ve got that right,” he sighed, and Race cracked up beside him. “But,” Crutchie argued, “the original series was groundbreaking! You can’t ignore the fact that it was one of the most progressive shows of its time.”

“Well, yeah,” Jack jumped in, “but if you’re watching for entertainment, then the new movies are better.” Crutchie thought about it, and then nodded.
“I suppose I can’t argue with that,” he conceded. “On that note - Davey, are you having any luck with the TV?”

“No,” came the frustrated answer from over by the television. Albert walked by with a bowl of snack mix and patted him on the head with sympathy.

“Don’t worry, Dave,” he reassured him, plopping down in the armchair, “you’ll figure it out.” Davey shot him a dirty look and turned back to the remote.

“God damnit,” he hollered, jabbing a random button on the remote. The TV all of a sudden lit up brightly, the title screen for Star Trek displayed on the screen. Davey whooped with triumph and promptly tossed the remote to someone else, muttering something about not wanting anything more to do with the damned thing, and grabbed his beer, shoving Albert aside and settling next to him in the large armchair.

Jack felt Sarah shift her legs off of his lap to sit closer to Kath, and suddenly it was just Crutchie’s legs on his lap. Spot turned off the lights as they started the movie, and before the opening credits even finished Jack heard Crutchie yawn loudly beside him.

“You gonna make it all the way through the movie?” Jack joked quietly, and Crutchie just shrugged, shifting a little closer.

“I dunno,” he whispered. “I’m pretty tired. Sorry in advance if I fall asleep on you.” Jack tried to ignore the way his heart rate picked up as he replied.

“Won’t blame you,” he whispered, settling back into the couch and reaching for a handful of popcorn.

Sure enough, by the time Kirk had managed to get himself banished from the Enterprise, Jack felt a warm weight on his shoulder and turned to see Crutchie leaning there, fast asleep. He blushed for a second before carefully adjusting himself and turning back to the movie, careful not to disturb him. Davey shot him a cheeky grin from across the room, and Jack flipped him off, eliciting a quiet laugh.

After the movie, Spot disentangled himself from Race to go turn the lights back on, and Jack carefully nudged Crutchie with his shoulder. He made a soft noise, blinking slowly as he lifted his
head off of Jack’s shoulder, and Jack had to pretend that that didn’t send his stomach into flurries of butterflies.


“No problem. Sleep okay?” He rolled the shoulder Crutchie had been leaning on, stiff from being held still. “Sorry I’m not the most comfortable pillow.”

“Nah,” Crutchie sighed, still half-asleep, patting Jack slowly on the head, “you did a good job.” Race walked up, laughing at the sight of his roommate blinking disorientedly on the couch.

“Alrighty, Crutch, time to get you back home,” he announced, hoisting him up. “I’ll take the elevator with you. C’mon, you need sleep, you haven’t been getting a ton recently.”

“M’ fine,” Crutchie protested halfheartedly, even as he placidly allowed Race to pull him up and hand him his crutches. “Just talkin’ to Jack.” He waved, stumbling just a little, a combination of alcohol and tiredness. “See ya, Jack.”

Jack gave him a little wave back. “See ya, Crutch.” As the pair exited Davey and Albert’s apartment, Spot flopped down on the couch beside Jack, occupying the space Crutchie had just been.

“Someone,” he drawled playfully, “has a cruuuuush.” Jack scowled and smacked him in the stomach.

“You,” he snapped back, “are not allowed to tease me about any of this until you figure out whatever it is is going on between you and Race.” Spot scoffed.

“Nothing is going on,” he denied, but Kath shook her head as she carried a stack of empty plates into the kitchen.

“The two of you looked like a human pretzel that entire movie,” she said, laughing at Spot’s face as it flushed beet red. Sarah tsked, standing up and stretching her arms.
“Why are Kath and I the only people here who seem to have our shit together?” she wondered.
“And Davey,” she added, who smiled brightly at her from below the ace pride flag on the wall.
Albert snorted offendedly.

“I would make the argument that I definitely have *my* shit together,” he protested, and Davey sighed.

“Try again when you’re done hopelessly pining over the boy in your biochem class that you won’t shut up about.” Albert gave an undignified splutter as Kath squealed, reentering the room.

“Aww, is this Elmer?” she asked. Albert was as red as his hair.

“Yeah,” he admitted, “but it’s nothing.” Davey hummed sympathetically as Albert keeled over in the armchair, falling so his head was in Davey’s lap.

“It’ll be okay, Alby,” Davey reassured him, running a hand through his red hair. “Just be yourself. There’s no way he won’t like you.”

“Mmph.” Albert looked like he was on his way to falling asleep, which everyone else took as their cue to head back to their respective apartments. Jack stood up and stretched before yanking Spot up as well, waving goodbye to Davey and Albert before making their way to the door. Kath and Sarah exited behind them, shutting the door quietly. Davey and Albert were on the top floor of the apartment building, while Jack and Spot were on 5 and the girls were three floors down on 7, so they all started down the stairs together.

After that, Friday movies became somewhat of a tradition. All of them had other activities, of course, that they were a part of at the university; Davey and Kath were on debate, Spot played intramural rugby, Crutchie did technical theater, Jack spent time at the art studios. But they all started keeping their Friday nights open for each other, and when they were all out of class they’d find themselves in someone’s apartment by seven with plenty of snacks and alcohol, tangled together on the couch and whispering loudly to each other as a movie played on the screen.

Jack loved it. Sure, they’d all been friends the year before, but they hadn’t been a tight-knit group like they were this year. Hell, Davey and Albert had just met the previous year in an English seminar, and Sarah hadn’t started dating Kath until the spring.

And then, of course, there was Crutchie, who seemed to complete the whole group in a way Jack couldn’t really explain. He had a way of making everyone he spoke to somehow instantly like him. He was smart and agreeable, so genuinely *nice* about everything that there was really no
conceivable way you could dislike him. (And sure, maybe Jack was a little biased, but he saw it on the faces of everyone else in their crew.)

“Yeah,” Race was saying to him one day as they walked together to their next class across the quad, “we were best friends when we were kids. Neighbors, sleepovers every Saturday, the whole nine yards. Hell,” he laughed, adjusting the reading glasses perched on his nose, “I was friends with him before he called himself Charlie, that’s how long we’ve known each other.”

“Huh.” Jack thought about it. “Sounds like he got pretty lucky, with his family and all that when he wanted to transition.” Race nodded.

“Yeah, he was lucky. His parents accepted it right away - I think they’d always suspected something - and we went to a pretty progressive school, so they had no trouble changing his name and stuff.” Jack looked appraisingly at Race.

“And the kids? You?” Race shrugged, as if it was nothing.

“I mean, we were young. No one had ever taught us any different. It didn’t matter to us that he was Charlie, because he was still our friend.” He laughed. “And we all called him Crutchie back then anyway, so when he told us he still wanted us to call him that, it made it a little easier for us.”

“Right,” Jack said, as they made their way under an archway in the middle of the quad, “that makes sense.” A thought suddenly occurred to him. “How did he end up with the crutch? Does he ever talk about it?” Race frowned.

“Yeah, I remember. It was when we were real little, maybe four or five.” He sighed. “I wasn’t there, but they were all playin’ in the coul-de-sac where all our houses were, right? Some block party. And this car started backing out of a driveway, and our friend’s little sister ran right behind it to grab a toy car or something.” He looked up, laughing bitterly. “So Charlie, always the self-sacrificing idiot even as a child, pushed her outta the way. Got his leg run right over by the tire.” Jack inhaled sharply, and Race hummed in agreement. “Yeah. The doctors wanted to amputate at first, but it just wasn’t damaged enough to justify it, you know? Like he lost a lot of use in it, obviously, but otherwise it was in okay shape.”

Race adjusted his glasses. “So he got a pair of crutches and a year of PT, and we all started calling him Crutchie, and then when we were seven he became Charlie, and that was that.”

“We ended up at different high schools. His parents wanted him to go to a smaller school, thought it’d be easier on his leg, so he went to private school and I went to public school. And then freshman year my family moved to a different house a few streets down, and we just…” he trailed off. “I don’t know. I always felt bad about it. We really were best friends, and then things changed, and I met Spot in high school, and…” He blinked suddenly, and Jack reached out to squeeze his shoulder.

“Hey, hey, what’ve you got to feel bad for? Things happened the way they did, and that’s done. And now you’re here.” Jack grinned. “You’re a really good friend to him. You guys make a good pair.” Race laughed.

“We do, don’t we?” he replied. “I mostly feel bad that I went here for two whole years and didn’t realize we were at the same place.” He shrugged. “But, yeah, what’s done is done, I guess. And we make a good team now.”

Jack elbowed him. “Not as good as you and Spot, huh?” Race blushed, shoving him away.

“Shaddup, you. No more teasing about that until you get over your dumb feelings and actually ask Crutchie out on a damn date one of these days.” Jack felt his face grow hot, shaking his head.

“No way. He doesn’t like me.” Jack laughed. “God, listen to us. We sound like we’re in middle school.”

Race giggled as they trotted up the steps of the building, stepping inside and making their way towards the stairs. “Yeah, we’re quite the pair, aren’t we?”

Chapter End Notes

yes, in my head, modern au race wears ben cook's glasses, don't @ me
you can rip this headcanon from my cold dead hands
usual schpiel: leave kudos/comments if you liked it
tumblr: stevetrevvors
Crutchie had, over the two years and change he’d worked at the university bookstore, become somewhat of an expert at getting his job done efficiently. He wasn’t blind, nor was he stupid; he knew that every prospective employer looked at his crutch and immediately saw it as an inconvenience, something that would hold him back or get in the way. Crutchie hated it, but he knew that until the world could force itself to update its priorities a little, it was just the way it was, and it meant he simply had to work a little harder to prove what he and everyone who knew him knew to be true; the crutches were simply a part of him now, almost, and that was that.

Choosing to forgo an amputation and, therefore, a prosthetic limb, meant that the crutches functioned almost as limbs of their own, doing everything Crutchie’s bad leg couldn’t and then some more besides. Years of use had made it something he didn’t even think about anymore, like breathing, or just walking normally. Use one crutch to prop open that door before it closes. Launch quickly across open spaces and crosswalks to make up for his lack of stride. Use them for a little extra balance when his hands were full at the coffee counter. Sure, they had their ups and downs - hell, Crutchie still couldn’t walk up more than one flight of stairs, and he couldn't exactly carry a lot of stuff in his hands, but in the end, the crutches were like old friends.

The folks at the bookstore had been sympathetic, and although he’d started simply standing behind the counter at the cash register, they’d quickly realized that his capabilities weren’t limited by the crutches, and began giving him more jobs around the store. Today, Crutchie was restocking shelves, standing at the base of the ladder in the nonfiction aisle and stacking books on the platform before preparing to ascend and restock the upper shelves. Satisfied that he had enough up there to not have to come down and get more for a while, he untucked one crutch from his arm and hooked it onto the top railing of the ladder, using it and his other arm to hoist himself up the ladder with ease before hooking both crutches onto the top rung of the ladder to hang there while he worked.
Once situated, he got himself into a rhythm. He knew just how to display the books so people would find them easily and the displays would be accessible, and he allowed himself to zone out as he slid books onto the shelves, occasionally using his arms to pull the ladder farther down the shelf. Customers carefully gave him a wide berth, only coming down the aisle if they needed something from one of the shelves; most knew better than to bother the guy at the top of the tall ladder with giant stacks of books.

Which is why Crutchie wasn’t expecting it at all when the footsteps down the aisle knocked into his ladder, causing him to lose his balance and topple backwards, arms windmilling like a cartoon, almost in slow motion. He let out a sharp yell, limbs already moving to shield himself from any impacts he might come into with the shelves, but he was only falling for a brief moment before he felt himself hit…

…not the floor, that was for sure. Crutchie’s eyes were squeezed shut, but he realized that someone had caught him somehow. He opened his eyes and found himself staring straight at a very amused, slightly concerned looking Jack Kelly.

“Um,” Crutchie said eloquently, not quite sure what to say.

Jack laughed. “Hey there, pal. Fancy seeing you here.” As if just realizing he was literally cradling Crutchie bridal-style in the middle of the bookstore, he gingerly set him down on his good leg, reaching over to grab his from where they’d fallen by the ladder. Crutchie accepted it with a grateful smile, tucking it under his arm.

Jack ran a hand through his hair. “Uh, sorry about that,” he apologized, gesturing to the slightly askew ladder. (Crutchie noted with annoyance that his stacks of books were entirely undisturbed.) “I didn’t notice it was you up there. In fact,” Jack continued rambling a bit, “I don’t think I even registered that there was a person up there. I don’t even know why I was in such a hurry. I just--”

“Jack!” Crutchie cut him off, laughing softly. Jack looked startled, a slight pink blush rising to his cheeks. “It’s fine,” Crutchie told him. “Really. Besides,” he added, teasing a little, “you caught me very heroically, so I think that makes up for it.”

Jack grinned cheekily. “Now, that really was a lucky accident. I just looked up and bam!” He mimed catching. “One Crutchie Morris, sittin’ in my arms like he dropped from heaven.”

Crutchie turned a little pink himself. “Aw, shucks,” he replied a little bashfully, rolling his eyes. He
saw his supervisor walk by the aisle all of a sudden, and breathed a sigh of relief when she didn’t look his way. “While I love talking to you,” he told Jack, “I should get back to stocking these shelves. I’m still on shift for another hour.” Jack nodded, watching with a kind of fascination as Crutchie hoisted himself up onto the ladder with ease, turning to face Jack from where he was perched on the platform.

“Hey,” Jack asked, “are you free later tonight?” Crutchie’s heart skipped a few beats.

“Uh - uh, yeah! My shift ends at six. Why?” Oh my god oh my god oh my god-

Jack scratched the back of his neck awkwardly. “I was just wondering if you wanted to study for the Lang 101 test together. I’m having a bit of trouble with the material.”

Crutchie tried to deny the way his heart sank just a little. He wasn’t going to ask you on a date, stupid. “Oh - yeah, I’m free! Six thirty at my apartment? Race is going out later.” Jack smiled brightly, and Crutchie went a little weak in the knees.

“Yeah, sounds good! Always better to study with good company,” he added. “See you then!”

Crutchie waved as Jack wandered out of the store. As he turned to keep stocking the shelves, it suddenly occurred to him that he hadn’t seen Jack buy anything. Huh. Weird. Wonder what he was in here for. He shook his head and went back to stocking books, the remaining hour of his shift dragging on slower than an overturned bucket of molasses.

Six arrived with the cheery chiming of the cuckoo clock behind the information desk, and Crutchie hurriedly clocked out, waving goodbye to his co workers and making the ten minute hike back to the apartment building rather than waiting at the bus stop. Race had already left for the evening when he got back to the apartment, leaving behind a sticky note on top of a container of mushroom lasagna. Crutchie grinned, sticking it in the microwave to reheat and wandered around the apartment, lazily attempting to clean the place until he heard Jack’s familiar knock at the door.

“Hey!” Jack wandered into the apartment, a bottle of wine tucked under one arm, holding a tupperware container. Crutchie laughed.

“You made brownies?” he asked, reaching over to take the container. “I thought that was a special occasion thing. Like for movie nights and stuff.”
Jack shrugged bashfully. “I like baking.” He laughed as Crutchie eagerly dropped one crutch to open the container, grabbing a brownie. “And anyway,” he added, “I like to think that any time I get to hang out with you could be considered a special occasion.”

Crutchie punched him in the arm lightly, blushing furiously. “Aw, you flatter me,” he said. “Come on,” he gestured, picking up his other crutch and making his way towards the couch. “It’s more comfortable in here than at the table; we can spread our stuff out.”

They both settled comfortably on the big couch, quizzing each other on flash cards and going over the terms from the book they were reading, interjecting and interrupting each other with stupid jokes and comments about the characters. Between the two of them, they downed almost two thirds of the bottle of wine. Crutchie could feel himself slowly gravitating closer and closer to Jack, but couldn’t find it in him to care, and by the time they were long done studying, English materials cast aside in favor of casual conversation and a netflix show in the background, their legs were tangled together between them, their bodies close enough that Crutchie could have easily leaned in and kissed Jack, had he wanted to.

But he didn’t. Because Jack didn’t like him. And this wasn’t a date.

He didn’t realize how much time had passed until he heard the front door open and Race walked into the apartment. “Hey Crutchie,” he called absently, before noticing the both of them on the couch. A smirk grew on his face. “Oh, hey, Jack,” he greeted him, and Crutchie made an exasperated face at him from the couch where Jack couldn’t see. Race winked.

“Jack,” he continued, “it’s pretty late. Don’t you have class tomorrow?” Jack frowned.

“It’s not that late, is it?” He and Crutchie both checked their phones at the same time. 12:33 AM. They met eyes.

“Shit,” Crutchie said, and they both burst out laughing. Race just rolled his eyes again, leaving the room.

“Night, fellas!” he called, before shutting the door to his room. Jack stood up and stretched, and Crutchie started gathering up their things.

“Well,” Jack said, “I should probably hit the road.” Crutchie snorted, standing up.
“Jack, you live on the floor right above us.” Jack shrugged, a bit of a dopey smile on his face.

“Yeah,” he said. “So close yet so far, right?” Crutchie rolled his eyes.

“Drama queen,” he snorted, “you can visit whenever you want.” They walked to the door.

“Oh, good,” Jack sighed, draping himself dramatically against the doorframe. “I don’t know what I’d do without you.” Crutchie laughed, his cheeks flushed - from the wine or his stupid crush, he couldn’t tell. Jack opened the door, hesitating over the threshold.

“See you at tomorrow’s test,” he teased, and Jack mock groaned, a smile on his face.

“Bye, Crutch,” he said, and then, to Crutchie’s surprise, leaned in and wrapped him in a solid hug. Crutchie stalled for a second with surprise before hugging back, hiding his ridiculously wide smile in Jack’s shoulder. Jack gave good hugs; his arms were solid and warm, and he didn’t hold back, squeezing tight. Crutchie attempted to adjust the crutches under his arms before simply giving up and doing away with them, dropping both so he could wrap his arms around Jack’s middle, balancing on his good foot. He didn’t know how long they stood there, simply holding each other in the doorway.

Jack pulled away first, clearing his throat a little. “I better go. We both need sleep before this test tomorrow.” Crutchie smiled shyly, moving to lean on the doorframe.

“Don’t worry,” he said, “I think you’re gonna ace it.” Jack smiled back, slowly backing out the door towards the stairs.

“See you tomorrow, Crutch,” he said with a small wave, and Crutchie waved back before shutting the door. Leaning down carefully, he picked up his crutches and made his way to Race’s room, barely stopping to knock before he opened the door and walked in to flop on the bed. He buried his face in one of Race’s pillows and screamed loudly into it, curling his body up on top of the covers. Race laughed, patting his back sympathetically.

“Man, Crutch,” he sighed, “you’ve got it bad, haven’t you?” Crutchie only groaned in response.

“It’ll be okay,” Race hummed, rubbing his back. Crutchie could only hope so. He wasn’t sure how much longer he could last before he fell apart, before the ache in his chest just got too strong to
He thought he might just explode.

Chapter End Notes

we're getting there, slowly but surely.

i'm warning y'all: next chapter is a bit of a doozy. may or may not have cried a little writing it.

anyway

we'll get there when we get there

leave kudos and comments if you're enjoying the story! this is probably by far the most effort and time i've put into a work on here so far

so

appreciated me pls

tumblr: stevetrevvors
how to host a costume party

Chapter Summary

It's Halloween, and everyone looks really darn good in their costumes. 'Nuff said.

Chapter Notes

okay so this chapter gets a bit heavy

get ready kids, here comes the angst train

on a serious note: tw for panic attacks/descriptions of past abuse

(it gets happier i swear, this is a mostly happy fic)

this was tough for me to write, both because it's heavy subject matter and because i've never written panic attacks before so please, if there are inaccuracies or you feel like i'm doing something wrong, please let me know!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Halloween arrived on campus with plenty of fake cobwebs and candy bowls on the coffee tables in everyone’s apartments. Jack couldn’t help but smile - Halloween wasn’t necessarily his all-time favorite holiday (that award went to Christmas, he wasn’t ashamed to admit) but Halloween always hailed the beginning of the holiday season, and he loved the spirit that came with it.

Halloween fell on a Friday, conveniently, and Kath and Sarah offered to host a party at their apartment - it would have been their turn to host movie night anyway, so everyone agreed. In addition to the eight of them that lived in the building together (Jack refused to call them “neighbor squad” out loud, no matter how much Crutchie pushed him to), they were all inviting people they knew from class and around campus. Jack invited Romeo, his classmate who also worked with him in the campus admissions office, and his boyfriend, Specs. (His real name was actually something else, but he’d introduced himself as Specs due to the round glasses he never seemed to take off, and Jack wasn’t about to question it. Plenty of people in their friend group had odd nicknames anyway.)

Albert, after a lot of blushing and pushing from all of them, had invited Elmer. Spot had invited Mush Meyers, the manager of the intramural rugby team, and his boyfriend Blink, who played on the team. Davey had invited Finch, his roommate from freshman year, and Katherine had roped in her friend Darcy from debate. By the time it was all settled and the invitation sent via email, they had a sizeable party.
Now Jack just had to figure out what to wear.

“Spot, what are you doing for the Halloween party?” he asked his roommate on the Monday before. Spot raised an eyebrow from his place on Jack’s bed; he was writing an essay, and Jack was helping him edit as he dug through his clothes in search of inspiration.

“We are not coordinating, before you ask,” he said, and Jack mimed being offended. “I’m probably going as a sailor,” Spot continued. “An old-fashioned one, you know? Like the striped shirts and the gelled hair. Like Popeye, ‘cept I’m not going as him.” Jack nodded.

“I’m just strapped for ideas, ‘s all,” he answered. “Race already said he and Crutchie are coordinating.” Spot hummed in response.

“Yeah, I saw. Wonder what they’re doing,” he wondered absently, scrolling on his phone. Jack groaned, digging through his t-shirt drawer. Suddenly, he came upon the perfect shirt, crowing with triumph. Spot perked up.

“Come up with something, Jackie-boy?” he asked, and Jack whipped out his Superman shirt in response.

“Clark Kent!” he announced. Spot nodded with an approving face.

“I like it,” he said. “We gel your hair back, find you a button-down shirt and some glasses, and you’re done.”

“Not my best ever,” Jack pondered out loud, “but for Friday, it’s perfect.”

Friday arrived after a long, dragging week of classes, and Spot and Jack made the final adjustments to their costumes before trekking two floors up to Kath and Sarah’s apartment. The party was just kicking into full swing - they could hear it from the hall as they walked up to the door - and from the cheerful way Sarah answered the door, dressed as Princess Leia, it was clear she’d already had at least one drink.

“Come on in! Guys,” she called out to the rest of the apartment, “Jack and Spot are here!” They walked in, grabbing beers from a cooler and surveying the costumes. Katherine was dressed as Hermione, chatting with Davey - he and Sarah had obviously gone with the twin costume route,
because he was dressed as Luke Skywalker. Albert was leaned on the kitchen counter, wearing a fox onesie and not-so-subtly flirting with a cute, dark haired boy who had to be Elmer. Specs and Romeo appeared to be newsboys from the early 20th century, both sporting vests and the trademark hats, and Finch was wearing a Star Trek uniform.

Spot was laughing at Mush and Blink, who had just come in their rugby gear, but Jack heard the laughter cut off with a sort of strangled noise, and Jack looked at him with mild alarm. Spot’s face was bright red, and Jack followed his gaze before bursting out laughing. Race had just walked in, wearing a tiger onesie with a nose and whiskers drawn on his face, laughing at a joke someone had told him. Jack elbowed Spot. “Smitten,” he muttered, but then -

Then Crutchie walked in, and Jack realized what their costume was. Crutchie was wearing a black and red striped shirt, his blonde hair gelled a little to be spikier than usual. “Oh my god,” Jack breathed, every gear in his brain short-circuiting, “they’re Calvin and Hobbes.” Spot gulped weakly.

“Uh-huh,” he affirmed, sounding as weak as Jack felt, the two of them too captivated to make fun of each other for how gone they were on Race and Crutchie.

Jack shook his head to snap himself out of his stupor as Crutchie spotted them and waved, coming across the room. “Hey, Jack!” he greeted him cheerfully. “I like your costume,” he complimented him, reaching a finger up to playfully trace the single curl Jack had hanging over his forehead.

:Thanks!” Jack gestured to Crutchie, and then to Race. “I like yours too. You and Race really went for it.” Crutchie giggled.

“Thanks,” he laughed. “Race and I always used to coordinate when we were little, so we decided to reinstate tradition.” He looked over to where Spot and Race were now sitting together, shoulders brushing as they joked and observed the other party guests. “Man, they’re idiots. Spot walked in and I’m pretty sure Race forgot what breathing was.”

I know the feeling, Jack almost said. “Yeah, Spot too. I don’t know how they don’t see it.” Crutchie shrugged.

“Oh, well. Something’s bound to happen sooner or later.” He turned back and met Jack’s eyes. “Need a drink? I hear there’s a cocktail station in the kitchen.”
Jack nodded eagerly. “Lead the way.”

Later in the evening, when everyone was there (and had a considerable amount of alcohol in their systems), Kath announced that true to Friday night tradition, they were all going to “calm down and watch a movie before something breaks.” Jack settled on the floor between Spot and Crutchie, nursing a beer as Kath queued up The Breakfast Club, bemoaning the fact that Jack and a few other people in the room had never seen it. Jack absorbed it as it started, laughing quietly at the jokes, watching with interest as Brian and Bender argued about trivial matters and Allison made fun of all of them from the back of the library.

And then, as the characters were all eating their lunches, Bender’s pantomime of a perfect household turned into a mimed punch, a caricature of his father, and Jack inhaled sharply. He felt like he couldn’t breathe all of a sudden. Not right now, this cannot happen right now, it’s been so long since you’ve felt like this, keep it together Jack, keep it together --

“Alright, what about your family?” Andrew challenged Bender on screen. Jack shut his eyes as the two boys stood facing each other, but he could still hear the dialogue.

“Stupid, worthless, no good, God damned, freeload, son of a bitch, retarded, bigmouth, know it all, asshole, jerk!” Bender yelled on screen, and Jack shrank into himself, trying to ignore the memories forcing their way to the front of his mind --

-- he was five years old, head hanging low as his dad screamed at him for spilling a glass of water on the couch. home from the first day of school, hoping his dad would get home late so jack would have time to do his worksheet before the fighting started. just shy of his sixth birthday, looking anywhere but at the fresh bruises on his mother’s face, small hands squeezed into fists as his dad yelled that really, he should be grateful. really, he didn’t deserve any presents. really, they didn’t appreciate everything he did for their family.

“Fuck you!” Bender screamed on screen. The living room was dead silent. “No, Dad, what about you - fuck you!” Jack took a shaky breath in, but he could already feel his heart rate racing, feel the sweat springing up on his brow --

-- six and a half years old, his mother gone, leaving jack to bear the brunt of his father’s fury, to be told it was his fault she had left. four in the morning before every school day, using the foundation he’d found in his mother’s old makeup bag to cover up the bruises on his face. seven years old, another birthday and christmas gone by with no presents, only the smell of alcohol on his father’s breath and the knowledge to just lay low, never complain, because that only made it worse --
Bender mimed his father hitting him on screen, and Jack stood up fast. The room was too hot, it was too crowded, he needed to get out get out get out. “I’ll be right back,” he said quietly, hoping his voice didn’t sound as shaky as it felt, and left quickly for the door to the fire escape down the hall, the roaring in his ears not able to block out the yelling from the TV.

Outside, the October air bit through Jack’s thin button-down shirt, but he barely noticed as he slid down the wall of the building, trying to calm the shaking in his hands. He hadn’t had a panic attack in ages - hell, he hadn’t thought about his dad in ages. He tried to remember what he’d learned to regulate his breathing, but he kept getting the numbers mixed up in his head, which only made things worse. Breathe in for five, out for seven - or is it the other way round? Fuck, you can’t even remember that, can you? Just like dad always said, fucking useless, not worth shit--

“Jack?” Jack didn’t register the voice until whoever was speaking was right in front of him, and he flinched, shrinking in on himself, his eyes squeezed shut. “Jack - shit. Jack. Hey,” the voice said, softer now, more gentle, and Jack recognized it as Crutchie’s. “Jack, I need you to breathe with me, okay? Calm down with me?” Jack felt Crutchie take both of his hands, squeezing them gently. “In for five seconds, out for seven,” Crutchie whispered, and Jack nodded jerkily, taking in a shuddery breath.

“That’s it,” he heard Crutchie murmur appraisingly. “In and out. Five and seven. I’ll do it with you. In,” he squeezed gently again, both of them breathing in, “and out.” They sat there on the fire escape for God knows how long, and Jack gradually felt his heart rate slow down enough for him to feel functional again. He dropped his forehead to rest on his arms, sniffling a little, feeling the tear tracks still fresh on his face.

“I’m sorry,” he whispered, and Crutchie stiffened.

“Jack. Hey. Can you look at me?” Reluctantly, Jack raised his head to meet Crutchie’s eyes, ready for the rejection, the judgement, but all he found was concern and a fiery sort of determination. “Jack, listen to me. You ain’t got nothin’ to be sorry for,” Crutchie told him, his mouth set in a firm line. “Okay? Nothing.”

Despite his efforts to control it, Jack felt his lower lip tremble, and he leaned forward, wrapping his arms around Crutchie like a lifeline and burrowing his face in his shoulder, shaking. He let out a choked noise, stifling a sob, and felt Crutchie’s arms come up to rub his back.

“It’s okay to cry,” Crutchie whispered softly. “It’s okay. It’s just you and me.”

And Jack let himself cry. He scooted closer and hugged tighter and sobbed for what felt like hours,
letting out every emotion he’d bottled up, every attack he’d tried to suppress, every memory he was
bitter or angry about. He cried, and cried, and cried, and Crutchie stayed, rubbing his back and
whispering things to reassure him. *It's okay. You're okay. You're enough.*

After a while, the tears subsided, and Jack loosened his grip, pulling back from the hug. He stared
at the metal floor of the fire escape, unable to meet Crutchie’s eyes. “Thank you,” he whispered.
“No one - no one’s ever there for these. I’ve never had someone there to help me.” Crutchie
scooted over to sit beside him against the wall, their shoulders pressed together.

“Well,” he replied, “I’d like to help whenever I can.” He paused. “Do you want to talk about it, or
do you just want to let it be?”

Jack shook his head. “No, I should...I should get it out.” He took a deep breath in, and felt Crutchie
lean his head on his shoulder reassuringly. “It’s just -- just. My dad - he treated me real bad when I
was a kid. Drinking all the time, yelling, screaming. Throwing things, when he was angry enough.
Hit my mom a bunch. Scared the shit out of me, you know? I was a kid. Barely three or four, when
it all started.”

He squeezed his eyes shut before continuing. “And then, when I was six and a half, my mom
couldn’t take it anymore. She just -- she just left. Ran away, got a restraining order, *died* -
whatever, I never found out, and I don’t want to know. But she left me - she left me with *him*.” His
voice broke a little, and he felt Crutchie reach down and grab his hand, squeezing tightly enough
that it hurt. Jack didn’t care. “And suddenly, I was the one getting hit, I was the one taking all the
yelling, and he drank more often and came home later--”

Jack cut himself off, forcing himself to take a few deep breaths. “And then, one day, my teacher
saw one of the bruises, and she called the cops.” He looked up at the sky, at the stars. “My old
man’s in jail now, and the teacher adopted me. And all things considered, I got pretty lucky.” He
looked at Crutchie, who was watching him with tears in his eyes. “But every so often something
comes along and triggers those memories, and I’m never ready for it.”

Crutchie sighed. “I - I wish I had something to say that’s better than ‘I’m sorry’,” he admitted. “I
don’t know. God knows I’ve had my fair share of panic attacks - changing your name and
pronouns is bad enough for some people without having a bad leg to go with it.” he laughed
bitterly. “But Jack - you’re *more* than how he treated you. He and your mom - they might have
brought you into this world, but they sure as hell ain’t your family.” He squeezed Jack’s hand.
“Your family is right here. ‘Kay?”

Jack swore his breath was stolen from him in that moment. *What would I do without you, Charlie
Morris? How did I make it this long without you?* He settled for leaning his head on Crutchie’s
shoulder.
“Thank you,” he whispered, simply, hoping it could convey all the feelings he couldn’t find the words for, and as the party continued the two of them sat on the fire escape, hands clasped tightly, and gazed up at the stars.

Chapter End Notes

wow i actually did research for this chapter are you proud of me

i looked up the script to the breakfast club and like,,,,, scrolled through it until i found this scene

poor jack :( 

i know this chapter was heavy, sorry, our bois have a lot of feelings

also catch that albert/elmer fluff in there wow they're all so stupid

the lesbians are very exasperated

on a cheerful note: didja catch some of my very clever costume references?? (thanks to SoManyGuiltyPleasures for mentioning it in the comments!) for those of you who don't know: Andrew Keenan Bolger and his fiance were Calvin and Hobbes for Halloween this year, and Jeremy Jordan is on the CW show Supergirl

lmao i crack myself up

anyway

next chapter will likely be kind of short, but we're getting into the longer stuff here as we move on!! spring show is starting up at my school, so i probably won't update as regularly as i like; please bear with me

also: keep your eyes open for interludes from the perspectives of other characters!! coming up first: SPOT CONLON, MY SWEET BOY

finally, please leave kudos and comments if you're enjoying the story!

Tumblr: stevetrevvors
how to have a heart-to-heart (spot's interlude)

Chapter Summary

Halloween party: the quiet aftermath.

Chapter Notes

yay!!! I TOLD YOU WE'D HAVE INTERLUDES. I'm really excited about this one, I love my boy Spot
guess who wrote this instead of doing her gov report
thats right
its me
lmao

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Spot looked up with mild concern as Jack stood up abruptly in the middle of the movie. "I'll be right back," his roommate said quietly, hurrying out of the TV room towards the hallway, and if Spot didn't know Jack as well as he did, he wouldn't have noticed the slight quaking in his voice. Shit. He was having a panic attack. Spot met Crutchie's eyes across the spot Jack had formerly occupied, and knew he'd noticed too.

"I'll go see what's wrong," Crutchie whispered so only Spot could hear, before he could say anything. Spot opened his mouth to protest, but Crutchie shook his head. "It's alright. You stay. I've seen this movie plenty of times anyway." He stood carefully, grabbing his crutches, and left the room, following the route Jack had presumably taken to the fire escape.

Race, who had been fully absorbed in the dramatic scene taking place onscreen, looked at Spot curiously. “What was that all about?” he asked quietly. Spot shook his head.

“Nothing important,” he answered. His curiosity perhaps deterred by the alcohol in his system, Race accepted Spot’s answer, shrugging nonchalantly and moving closer to Spot so he could rest his head on his shoulder.

Spot sighed a little, allowing himself to melt into the touch a little and cuddle closer to Race, their
legs already tangled together. No one was watching them, ready with a teasing glance or remark; everyone was focused on the movie. Race made a sleepy noise, nuzzling a little into Spot’s shirt, and Spot just about melted into the floor right then and there.

It hurt. *God,* it hurt so bad, the way Spot was head over fucking heels in love with his best friend. It hurt every time Race ruffled his hair; every time they sat together at breakfast or dinner, talking about nothing and everything until all the other patrons were gone and they got kicked out; every time they curled up together for movie nights, limbs intertwined and languid, so close that sometimes Spot couldn’t tell if the heartbeat he was feeling was Race’s or his own. It hurt, because Spot had been best friends with Race since they were freshmen in high school and in love with him since they were sophomores, and he knew that to Race it was all platonic. But they’d always been a tactile pair, and if it hurt now to have his feelings unrequited, Spot couldn’t possibly conceive living in a world where he wasn’t friends with Race. So he took what he could get, and he pushed down the feelings like he always had, and probably always would.

By the time the movie transitioned to the next scene, Race had fallen fast asleep, and Spot carefully adjusted himself so his friend would be more comfortable, shifting his arm so it was around Race’s middle. Race sighed quietly in his sleep, his head shifting so it was more on Spot’s chest than his shoulder, and Spot breathed in the scent of shampoo from Race’s blond curls, the ache in his chest so sharp he was surprised there wasn’t a physical wound there.

Spot felt himself dozing off as well, his cheek coming to rest on the top of Race’s head, and before he knew it the movie was over, and everyone was standing up, getting ready to leave. Jack and Crutchie must have come in towards the end of the movie, but they were sitting over towards the kitchen, talking quietly, heads close together. Albert and Elmer were squeezed next to each other on the couch, not talking but both smiling, their faces pink. As Spot watched, Elmer looked down, hesitating for a moment before taking Albert’s hand and lacing their fingers together. Albert’s eyes widened with surprise, looking down at their joined hands with disbelief before blushing furiously, attempting (and failing) to hide his wide smile behind his hand. Spot rolled his eyes, a small smile creeping onto his face. *Good.* At least some other people were starting to figure their shit out.

Beside him, Race stirred, yawning widely, and Spot snickered, ruffling his hair gently. “Morning, sleeping beauty,” he teased him, earning himself a half-hearted shove from Race, who was still waking up.

“Aw, Spot,” he drawled, “you think I’m pretty?” Spot flushed. *He’s tired and drunk, Spot. Tired and drunk.*

“Yeah, sure, Race,” he replied with a hint of sarcasm in his voice as he stood, “real pretty.” He reached down to hoist Race up, laughing as his friend stumbled a little, leaning on Spot for balance. Together as a single, slightly unsteady unit, they made their way carefully over to where Jack and Crutchie were getting ready to leave. Crutchie grinned at the sight of Race, still
disoriented with sleep, as Spot passed him over.

“Whoa, easy there, tiger,” Crutchie joked, laughing as Race leaned on him a little, poking his painted nose into Crutchie’s fluffy hair.


“I know, pal,” he responded easily, as if he were a parent talking to a small child. “We’re going home now. Say bye to Spot.” Race looked up, blinking slowly, and smiled at Spot.


“Love you too, Race. Get some sleep.” Race’s expression turned mock-serious all of a sudden, and he poked one finger at Race’s chest.


“Okay. Pancakes it is.” With that, Crutchie hoisted himself up, squeezing Jack’s arm in a silent goodbye, and he and Race made their way towards the exit and the elevator. Spot looked at Jack, who was staring off into the middle distance, quiet. He tapped him gently on the shoulder.

“Ready to go home?” he asked gently. His roommate nodded.

“Yeah,” he responded. “Let’s go.”

They made their way downstairs to the apartment in silence, the only sounds in the hallway the jangling of Spot’s keys as he unlocked the front door. They made their way inside, toeing off their shoes and shedding costume layers. Spot turned to Jack.

“Want to shower first?” he offered. Jack shook his head.
“Nah,” he said, “I’m gonna take a bit of a long one. You go first.” Spot hesitated only briefly before nodding.

“Okay,” he said. “I’ll be fast.” Jack nodded, wandering down the hall towards his room. Spot watched him go, a little concerned, before shaking his head and going to shower. They’d talk later if Jack wanted to.

Sure enough, later that evening, as Spot sat cross legged in bed in his pajamas, scrolling through an article on his phone, he heard the quiet padding of socked feet on his floor and looked up to see Jack walking in, pulling a sweatshirt on over his head. He met Spot’s eyes, asking for silent permission, and Spot nodded, patting the space on the bed beside him. Jack clambered up, wrapping his arms around his knees and tucking his chin on top of them. Spot put his phone away to indicate that he was listening, but didn’t say anything.

Jack spoke after a few seconds. “I had a panic attack,” he admitted, his voice barely above a whisper. “During the movie.” Spot nodded.

“I know. I noticed. Crutchie offered to go help you,” he replied. “I’m sorry I didn’t do more to help you.” Jack shook his head.

“Don’t be,” he said. “Crutchie did good, helping me calm down.” He took a deep breath, and Spot scooted closer, raising his arm in offering. They weren’t normally an overly touchy pair of friends, but Jack accepted the offered hug, leaning his head on Spot’s shoulder.

“I hadn’t had one in so long,” he said. “I really thought I was doing better. But all it took was that stupid movie and suddenly I was five fucking years old again.” Spot sighed.

“Jackie,” he said, “having one attack doesn’t mean you weren’t doing better. It’s not something you can control. And it sucks, but it’s life, and it’s not your fault.” He looked down at Jack. “Okay?”

Jack nodded. “Okay.” They sat in silence together, not needing to say anything.

“I’m glad Crutchie was able to help you,” Spot said to Jack. “He’s a good guy. Really seems to get you.” Jack nodded, but didn’t say anything.
“I think I’m in love with him,” he whispered suddenly, so softly that Spot almost didn’t hear him. “God, Spot, I really am, and it scares me so fucking much, you know? I’ve never felt this way about anyone.” He sighed. “And everyone says that he feels the same way, and God, I want to see it so badly, I do.” He sniffled a little. “But I can’t.” He turned his head so he was looking up at Spot. “Do you know how horrible that feels? To love someone so much and know that nothing will ever happen?”

Spot thought about Race, about their casual touches and the closeness of their friendship; he thought about the only secret he’d ever kept from Race, and the love he’d harbored for his best friend since they were fifteen years old.

“Yeah,” he said quietly. “Yeah, I know.”

Jack didn’t say anything else; neither of them needed to. They just sat together until they fell asleep, knowing that everything else might not feel like it was going to be alright, but at least they had each other.

Chapter End Notes

leave kudos and comments if you enjoyed!! next chapter will be happier, i promise.

Okay, I'm going to be a downer and be serious for a little moment here.

I'm sure you've all heard a ton about this net neutrality issue and you're sick of hearing me and others talk about it. But the reality is: the potential repeal of net neutrality poses a serious threat to the internet as we know it, particularly AO3 and Tumblr. The reality is: if net neutrality goes away, I don't know if or when I'll be able to go back on these sites again.

I'm trying to churn out as much of this fic as possible, and even if I don't have access to posting on AO3, I'll continue to write it so that eventually I can come back and continue. But I promise I'd never willingly abandon this project; I love it and you guys, my lovely readers, too much to do that.

Please, if you care about this fic and all writers and online friends you have: please fight for net neutrality. It's so important.

Anyway. Thanks for reading that.

tumblr: stevetrevvors
how to find a best friend

Chapter Summary

It's the holidays, Thanksgiving is around the corner, and Jack and Crutchie are closer than ever.

Chapter Notes

my dudes, homeslices, dearest darling readers, lights of my life

are you ready

for the SAPPIEST FUCKING THING IVE EVER WRITTEN IN MY GODDAMN LIFE

that's right, kids: as a reward for putting up with two chapters of angst, you all get the Fluffiest Cheesiest Shit I Have Ever Written in my God Damn Life

(oh don't get excited: the slow burn still continues. i'm having a fantastic time torturing all of you.)

also, you might have noticed some changes: crutchie uses two forearm crutches, not just one! i read this very enlightening post highlighting something that should have been pretty obvious to me, which is that in the 21st century, crutchie def wouldn't have just used one crutch. so i've edited every chapter to fix it! hopefully that's my only glaring mistake, but i'm obviously not perfect.

anyway enough from me

enjoy

See the end of the chapter for more notes

After that night at Kath and Sarah’s party, Crutchie figured it was safe to say that things had changed significantly between him and Jack. It wasn’t in a bad way; in fact, they were closer than before. But the fact hadn’t changed that Crutchie’s heart rate still sped up just a little whenever Jack smiled, or their shoulders brushed together. It was driving him crazy, because the reality was: pining sucked. But Jack was already probably one of the closest friends Crutchie had ever had, and they’d only known each other two months. There was no way in hell he was throwing something like that away because he couldn’t get a grip on his feelings.

They started spending more and more time together; Race hung out with Spot a lot anyway, so either he and Jack would “swap” apartments and hang out with their respective friends, or they’d all do something together. Jack and Crutchie studied together for their English tests, their Art History
lecture quizzes, even classes they didn’t have together. They crowded next to each other on the
couch at movie nights, legs tangled and voices low as they joked about the characters and threw
popcorn at Spot and Race. Jack met Crutchie at the bookstore, and Crutchie would wave to Jack
while he gave campus tours, and even if they didn’t have any class together that day, they’d meet
up for lunch or dinner and talk about their day until their food was either eaten or forgotten. It was
different than any friendship Crutchie had ever had; sure, he texted and hung out the others in their
group, but never this often, and sure, he was close with Race, but he lived with the guy. Jack was
something else. Something special.

They had a few classes together, and some that were in the same building, so often Crutchie would
meet Jack in the mornings, sometimes after an early shift at the bookstore, and they’d walk
together. Sometimes they were chattier, but other days they just walked in comfortable silence. It
never felt awkward or forced; they were perfectly content to just enjoy each other’s company, cups
of hot coffee from Crutchie’s latest experiments in barista-ing clutched in their hands, only the
click of the crutches and the songbirds on campus providing background noise.

It was on one of those quieter mornings when Jack looked over at Crutchie as if he wanted to say
something, then turned away. Crutchie noticed, furrowing his brow. “Jack? What is it?”

Jack shook his head, looking slightly embarrassed. “Nah, nothing. You’ll think it’s stupid.”

Crutchie frowned, moving so they were walking a little closer together. “Of course not! And
anyway,” he added, “now I’m curious.” He grinned at the small, bashful smile that crept onto
Jack’s face. “Come on,” Crutchie drawled playfully, nudging Jack with his shoulder, “spit it out.”

“Okay, okay!” Jack held up his hands in mock surrender. “Nothing bad. It’s just….” He trailed off,
then met Crutchie’s eyes. “I just realized that, y’know, you’re probably my best friend. And I just,”
he scratched the back of his neck awkwardly, “wanted to tell you, I guess.”

Crutchie’s heart skipped a little beat. He stopped walking. “Your - really? ” he asked, his voice
gone a little quiet. “Me?”

Jack nodded, that same shy smile still on his face. “Yeah, you.” Crutchie blinked, because that
couldn’t be right. There were so many other people who deserved that title more than he did.

“I love Davey, sure, but he and Sarah are really best friends. They’re twins; it kinda comes with the package.” He adjusted the strap of his bag. “And Spot, sure, we’re roomies, but he and Race have been attached at the hip for years.” Blushing a little, Jack shrugged again, meeting Crutchie’s gaze. “So, yeah. You’re my best friend.”

Crutchie felt a wide smile growing on his face, and he leaned forward, minding his crutches as he wrapped his arms around Jack’s middle in a tight hug. “You’re my best friend too,” he mumbled into Jack’s shoulder, almost sure he imagined the way Jack’s breath hitched ever so slightly when he admitted it. “And I ain’t just saying that because you said it first,” he added, “I mean it.” Jack laughed, squeezing once tightly around Crutchie’s shoulders before pulling away so they could keep walking.

“I haven’t had a best friend in a long time,” Crutchie observed, and Jack looked at him curiously.

“Really?” he asked. “I find that very hard to believe.” Crutchie laughed a little.

“Flattering,” he said, “but it’s the truth.” He suddenly felt an unexpected wash of shame and looked down, unable to meet Jack’s eyes. “Not many people want to be associated with someone who’s kind of a target for bullies.” He attempted a laugh again, but it came out hollow and bitter.

It was silent for only a moment before Crutchie felt Jack reach over and wrap an arm around his shoulders. “Well,” Jack said, “I think that’s bullshit. Screw them.” He nudged Crutchie, forcing him to meet his eyes. “They lost their chance, and now I get to be your best friend, and that’s pretty fucking awesome.” Jack offered a small smile, and something swelled in Crutchie’s chest so much he almost thought he might burst. He leaned into Jack’s side as they walked together.

“You’re the best,” he said, and Jack grinned.

“Aw, I think that’s my line,” he teased, and Crutchie rolled his eyes, suppressing a smile.

“You’re a sap,” he muttered.

“You know you love it,” Jack responded, and Crutchie shook his head. I really, really do. “Now come on,” Jack continued, “we’ll be late for class at this rate.” They walked the rest of the way to the lecture hall without saying anything, but Jack’s arm stayed draped over Crutchie’s shoulders all the way there.
About midway through the month of November, a thought suddenly occurred to Crutchie as he was sitting on the couch doing his psych homework. Grabbing his phone, he opened up his text messages.

[Crutchie has sent a message to “NEIGHBOR SQUAD”]

[Crutchie] hello, greetings, salutations

[Crutchie] so is anyone here actually going home for thanksgiving?

[Race] no

[Crutchie] i know dumbass, i live with you. Anyone ELSE.

[Race] its fine i know you don’t love me

[Spot] race shut the heck ur mouth ur so sensitive. And no, i’m staying here for the break

[Spot] jack’s taking a test rn but i know for a fact he’s not going home either, his mom’s out of town rn

[Kath] sarah and i are staying here

[Sarah] yepperoni

[Davey] never use that word again

[Davey] and the fact that sarah’s staying should indicate that i am too
Albert] i’ll be here

[Crutchie] awesome!! So race and i will be hosting friendsgiving then

[Race] we’ll be doing what now

“Crutchie, you little fucker!” he heard Race holler from his bedroom. Crutchie only grinned.

[Spot] RACE DOES THIS MEAN YOU’LL MAKE YOUR MOMS PASTA

[Race] ….i suppose it does

[Race] crutchie you owe me big time for this

[Crutchie] :)))))))

[Jack] sorry im L8

[Jack] friendsgiving sounds like a good time

[Jack] i will bring brownies

[Crutchie] sounds good. Also, albo, i’m adding elmer to this since he lives one building over and he’s basically part of the squad now

[Albert] you’re doing what

[Crutchie has added Elmer to “NEIGHBOR SQUAD”]
[Elmer] oh

[Elmer] hello everyone

[Albert] hi elmer!!

[Crutchie] elmer, race and i are hosting friendsgiving at our apartment

[Crutchie] you are more than welcome to partake in food and good wholesome fun

[Jack] ASDFGH I JUST SPIT OUT MY DRINK

[Crutchie] :)

[Elmer] sounds awesome!

Crutchie furrowed his brow as a new message popped up on his screen.

[Albert has messaged Crutchie privately]

[Albert] crutchie whyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyy

[Albert] how did you have his number anyway???

[Crutchie] we’re in the same psychology class

[Crutchie] i’m sorry was that out of line? I thought things were going well between you guys!!
[Crutchie] i saw you holding hands at the halloween party, right??

[Albert] i mean

[Albert] yeah but

[Albert] we haven’t really talked about it since then. That was the most that happened that night, and he’s kind of just been acting like nothing happened

[Albert] i dont know. Im scared i fucked things up

[Crutchie] aw albie

[Crutchie] i thought you told davey and i he initiated the hand holding though??

[Albert] HE DID THAT’S PART OF WHY IM CONFUSED

[Crutchie] understandable

[Crutchie] that means that its not you who fucked anything up then

[Crutchie] you’ll b okay at friendsgiving right

[Albert] yeah yeah we’re still friends

[Albert] but

[Albert] well
Crutchie sighed, shutting off his phone and turning back to his homework as Race ambled into the room, eating out of a bowl of granola. “What’s up?” he asked, noting Crutchie’s furrowed brow. Crutchie shook his head.

“Nothin’ serious. Just a little drama. But everything’s fine. Really,” he added, at Race’s dubious expression. He sighed. “Albie’s worried he messed something up with Elmer, that’s all. They just need to talk about it.”

Race considered it for a moment, then shrugged, coming over to plop down on the couch next to Crutchie. He leaned over his shoulder, peering at the textbook Crutchie was reading. “Blegh. Psych,” he muttered, earning himself a halfhearted smack on the face.

“You almost took this class, don’t give me that bullshit,” Crutchie muttered, and Race snorted.

“Yeah, and boy, am I glad I didn’t,” he responded. Crutchie picked up one of his crutches and smacked Race repeatedly in the shins, eliciting a series of yelps.

“Ow! Stop, stop, okay? I’m sorry!” Race yiped, scrambling away as Crutchie laughed from the couch. At that moment, Jack walked through the open front door, freezing at the sight before him.

“Uh,” he asked, “is it a bad time? I can come back.” Crutchie laughed.

“Nah, you’re fine, this guy’s just being an asshole. Come on,” he said, waving Jack over to the couch. “You brought your stuff to study, right?”

Jack held up his Spanish textbook and notes with mock excitement. Race rolled his eyes.

“Man, I don’t even get why you’re taking that class,” he complained. “I mean, you’re fluent. You’re half-Mexican.” Jack shrugged, vaulting over the back of the couch and grinning as his heavy landing launched Crutchie into the air with a squeal.
“For your information,” he told Race as Crutchie landed in an ungraceful pile of limbs, fixing his beanie, “it’s a Spanish literature class. And it’s fascinating; the prof really knows what she’s doing.” Race hummed interestedly, wandering into the kitchen to find more granola.

“You know, Race,” Crutchie mused absently as he went back to poring over his psych notes, “you could really benefit from a few Spanish classes.” Jack snorted.

“Yeah, maybe then he’d understand half the shit Spot says about him,” he muttered, loud enough that Race could hear, and the two of them dissolved into laughter as Race complained loudly from the kitchen.

“Hey, no fair,” he hollered at the sight of Jack and Crutchie collapsed on top of each other with giggles. “It’s not my fault my parents are the most Italian people to walk the planet.” Jack looked at him curiously.

“Both of your parents? Race,” he snorted, “your last name is Higgins.” He ducked to avoid the chunk of granola Race threw at his head.

“His dad’s dad is Irish,” Crutchie explained. “So really, Race is only three-quarters Italian.” Race pointed at him threateningly.

“And if you tell anyone else,” he said, “I’ll bust your ass.” Jack snorted.

“And Crutchie,” Race continued, “how do you understand what Spot’s saying and I don’t?” He sounded very put out. Crutchie shrugged.

“I took, what, nine years of spanish from elementary to high school?” he replied. “That shit comes in handy.” Race rolled his eyes.

“Yeah, whatever,” he mocked, turning to go back to his room. “Have fun ‘studying’,” he added, doing air quotes, and yelped as Jack threw the piece of granola and hit him in the back of the neck. Crutchie clapped his hands and rubbed them together.

“Shall we get to work?” he asked, and Jack grinned, flipping open his book.
One thing Crutchie was sure of was that studying in high school had never been this much fun.

Chapter End Notes

*screams very loudly*

believe me, i think this slow burn is hurting me as much as it's hurting you

oooOOOOOH trouble in paradise for albie and elmer?? ;)))

don't worry; i think my next character interlude will be from albert's POV! stay tuned within the next few chapters to keep an eye out for that. (i'm home all day tomorrow from school because of a minor surgery im having, so i'm gonna spin together as much of this fic as i possibly can for you guys!)

ALSO YES IVE OFFICIALLY ADDED MY MEXICAN JACK/PUERTO RICAN SPOT HEADCANONS TO THIS FIC. (mentioned, sure, but. baby steps, kids.) they're on my tumblr somewhere if you wanna check them out!! im terrible with links so honestly just dig through the newsies tag until you find them

leave kudos and comments if you're enjoying the story! jack and crutchie and all your favorite boys will get there, i promise. we're making headway. (and believe me, no one is more exasperated than kath and sarah are.)

tumblr: stevetrevvors (feel free to send me prompts there!)
Thanksgiving rolled around before they knew it, and that Thursday morning found Jack in the kitchen, sleeves rolled up to his elbows and music playing on his phone on the kitchen shelf as he whipped up a batch of brownies. He was capable of baking other things, sure; hell, he had a pie crust chilling in the fridge for cranberry apple pie. But he knew brownies were Crutchie’s favorite, and when that boy wanted something - well, Jack just could never find it in himself to say no. The song changed to something upbeat and poppy, and Jack vaguely recognized it from the radio, humming along as he hopped around the kitchen, the bowl tucked in the crook of his elbow as he whisked the batter.

Spot entered the apartment laden with grocery bags, a chunky knit scarf tucked around his neck. It was going to be a cold winter; Spot’s cheeks and the tip of his nose were pink from a combination of the November chill and the exertion of walking all the way up the stairs. Jack rolled his eyes, setting down the brownie batter to go help his roommate unload food.

“You know you can take the elevator, right?” he pointed out, picking up a gallon of milk and taking it over to the fridge. “That’s, like, twenty-odd pounds of groceries. You didn’t have to take the stairs.” Spot shrugged, unwinding the scarf from around his neck and shrugging off his jacket.

“I always feel bad. I mean, what if Crutchie or someone else who actually needs it has to wait?” He picked up a few blocks of cheese and set them aside on the counter. “I’m capable of walking up a
few flights of stairs.” Jack smiled, scrubbing Spot’s hair playfully as he retrieved a tin of breadcrumbs from one of the bags.

“Yeah, yeah, we get it,” he teased, “you’re such a martyr.” Spot stuck out his tongue, pulling out the different ingredients he needed for the cheddar biscuits he’d promised to make.

“We’re gonna have a weird variety of food,” Spot noted, looking from the biscuit ingredients to Jack’s brownie mix, now being poured carefully into a pan. “Nothing everyone is bringing coordinates at all. I mean, we don’t even have a turkey.”

Jack shrugged. “It’s all good food, isn’t it? Turkeys are too much work, anyway,” he reasoned. “And besides, you’ve had Race’s mom’s pasta. You know that shit’s to die for.” Spot nodded.

“Trust me, I know,” he replied. “Been worshipping it since ninth grade.” He smiled softly, as if recalling a fond memory. “Actually, around the time I became friends with Race was when his mom taught him how to make it.” He laughed. “It was really funny.” Jack snorted, imagining a teenage Race covered in flour from head to toe.

“Man,” Spot asked, “what’s this garbage music you’re listening to?” He ignored Jack’s protests and reached over to change the station, the two of them soon hollering to the song at the top of their lungs.

They arrived at Crutchie and Race’s apartment a little early with the intention of helping get ready. Jack knocked loudly over the sound of music blasting from the apartment, grinning at Spot when he heard Race scream from behind the door. “Crutchie, get the goddamn door, I’m covered in flour.” They heard the music lower, and the familiar click of crutches on the floor became audible as the door swung open.

Crutchie smiled brightly at the sight of them. He was obviously still getting ready; his hair was still a little mussed, presumably from sleeping, and he had on a plaid shirt unbuttoned over a white t-shirt. He beckoned with one of his crutches, jokingly tapping Jack lightly behind the knees. “Come on in!” Jack walked in and set the brownies down on the table, noting Crutchie’s delighted grin at the sight of them, and then laughed as he walked into the kitchen to find Race standing before a huge pot of pasta, quite literally covered in flour from head to foot.
Spot walked in behind him and gave an exasperated groan at the sight of his best friend. “Race. How close are you to being done?” Race shrugged.

“I mean, it’s done, I just have to put it in a bowl, but--” Spot didn’t let him finish, walking forward and taking him gingerly by the elbow, careful to not get any flour on himself.

“Come on, then. You have to shower and get ready. Come on,” he continued at Race’s protest, “it’ll be fast. I’ll find clothes for you. Jack, you and Crutchie can handle the kitchen, right?” Jack looked at Crutchie, who nodded in affirmation, and then turned back to Spot.

“Yeah, we’ll be fine.” Spot nodded his thanks before practically dragging Race out of the kitchen. Crutchie moved over to the counter to a pan of stuffing ready to go in the oven.

Come on, Jack,” he chided, “there’s work to be done.” Jack rolled up the sleeves of his sweater and clapped his hands once, rubbing them together.

“Tell me what to do, pal,” he replied cheerfully, and together they got to work finishing up the food.

Another hour passed, Race emerging clean and neatly dressed with Spot following close behind, and they carefully set up a makeshift dining room with card tables and chairs, moving the couch aside to create space in the living room. Sunny afternoon light filtered in through the windows, lighting up the apartment as the four of them joked and worked, ensuring everything was perfect. By two o’clock, everything seemed to be ready, and Jack texted the group to let them know they were free to head over any time.

Davey arrived on the heels of Kath and Sarah, announcing to everyone that Albert was waiting for Elmer downstairs and eliciting a chorus of awwws. Albert soon arrived with Elmer, looking happy but slightly nervous, watching as Elmer happily socialized with the group, carrying a dish of cranberry sauce. Jack met Albert’s eyes and smiled reassuringly, earning back a small smile in return, and decided it was a small victory. They sat down around the makeshift table, everyone ready to dig into the food when Crutchie, seated next to Jack, held up his hand for silence.

“I think,” he announced, “since it’s Thanksgiving, and not just a food holiday, that we should all go around and say something we’re thankful for.” He smiled bashfully, turning pink as Race called him a sap, pulling him into a one-armed hug. Sarah grinned.
“I like that idea a lot,” she said. “Here. I’ll start.” She smiled gratefully as everyone quieted a little. “I’m thankful for all of you,” she said, “and for the friends I’ve made this year, and my family,” she continued, Davey rolling his eyes and reaching over to squeeze his twin’s hand quickly. “But I’m especially thankful for Kath,” Sarah finished, shooting a happy look at her girlfriend, who blushed, kissing her on the cheek. They continued in largely the same fashion around the table, sounding a bit like a broken record, but no one seemed to mind.

Davey was thankful for his family and a group of friends that accepted him for who he was; Spot, for his friends, his roommate, and for Race, who had “put up with my bullshit for six and a half years”; Albert for their friend group, and his roommate Davey, and that Elmer was there with them. And so on, and so forth, until things reached Jack’s side of the table.

Race was thankful for all of them, and for Spot, “and for Crutchie,” he added with a smile. Crutchie had the audacity to look surprised.

“Me?” he asked, sounding confused, and Race quirked an eyebrow.

“Of course,” he replied. “You were my first best friend, and you’re basically the greatest roommate ever.” He cleared his throat. “I’m glad we reconnected. I missed you, pal.” Crutchie smiled, the whole table awwing again as he punched Race in the arm playfully, accepting his roommate’s one-armed hug. He settled back in his seat, taking a deep breath.

“Whew,” he said. “Well. I’m very thankful I met up with Race again, because he’s a great friend and a great roomie.” He smiled at all of them. “I’m thankful he introduced me to all of you, because…” he sighed. “This is the first real group of friends I’ve really ever had, and I couldn’t have asked for a better group of people to be my neighbors and my friends.” Crutchie thought for a moment, then added one more thing.

“And I’m thankful for Jack,” he said, and Jack couldn’t help but gasp a little, turning to face his best friend.

“Really?” he said. Crutchie nodded, his face shining.

“Yeah,” he replied, “really. You reached out to me on that first day, and you made me feel welcomed right away, and,” he shrugged, “well, you’re my best friend, basically.” His voice got quiet. “I’m really happy you’re in my life.”
Jack suddenly found it difficult to swallow around the lump in his throat. Crutchie was pink in the face, but he was glowing, and all Jack could think was, I really want to kiss you right now.

He didn’t. He couldn’t. Not there, not then. Maybe not ever. Now wasn’t the time for thinking about unrequited love or any of the things that made Jack sad; now, he just settled for hugging Crutchie tightly, burying his nose in his sweater, inhaling the now-familiar scent of his best friend and thinking instead of everything that made him really, really ridiculously happy. They sat like that for a few seconds; Jack knew they were at the dinner table still, and that everyone was probably watching. He couldn’t bring himself to care.

After another moment, he pulled back and sat straight in his chair, exhaling the breath he hadn’t realized he was holding. “Well,” he said with a laugh, “I don’t know how to follow that up. I’m just real thankful for all of you, and my family, and Crutchie,” he finished, flashing a smile at the guy in question seated next to him. “And,” he added, “for all this food! Let’s get to eating, shall we?”

Everyone murmured in agreement, and chatter began at the table once again as dishes of food were passed from person to person and generous portions were heaped onto plates. Race’s pasta was fantastic, as it was every time Jack had eaten it (and everyone at the table agreed.) Sarah and Davey squabbled like typical siblings over the cheddar biscuits, Albert and Elmer split a slice of pie, Kath and Race argued about the merits of having ham or turkey on Thanksgiving, and Crutchie ate way too many brownies for a person of his size. More than once, Jack found himself staring around the table at his friends, a funny sort of warmth blooming in his chest. Crutchie had been right, that night on the fire escape. His family was right there with him.

Chapter End Notes

"Just KISS ALREADY" --everyone at the dinner table, jack, crutchie, the author, God Himself

muaaaahahahahahahahahaha

next chapter will be albert's POV!!!!!!!!!!!!!!! more fluff ensues. ;)))))

kudos/comments make the author happy, and when the author is happy, her characters don't suffer

(that's a joke lmao i love writing angst get ready to suffer)

tumblr: stevetrevvors
After they’d all had their fill of main courses, Jack stood and announced that he thought it was well past time for dessert. Everyone nodded heartily in agreement, and soon the entree dishes were cleared, replaced with several pies, another dish of cranberry sauce, and a plate of brownies that Crutchie attacked with an enthusiasm Albert associated with someone who hadn’t eaten in weeks. He surveyed the table, finding that despite the multitude of offerings, he was really full from dinner. A cranberry apple pie (which was also a contribution of Jack’s) caught his eye, and he turned to Elmer, who was sitting next to him.

“Do you want to split a piece of that?” he asked, pointing to the pie. “I’m not all that hungry,” he explained. Elmer grinned brightly.

“Sure!” he replied, the dimple in his cheek making Albert a little weak in the knees despite the fact that he was seated. Blinking to snap himself out of it, he grabbed a dessert plate and scooped a slightly-larger-than-average slice of pie so the two of them would have enough and set it on the table between them with a grin.
“Dig in,” he said. “Jack makes the best desserts.” He looked over at the man in question, who was completely oblivious to everything going on around him, listening to Crutchie describe something animatedly with the biggest heart eyes Albert had ever seen. He snorted a little, turning back to face Elmer and poking off a piece of pie with his fork. “Jesus, those two just need to get it together and date already,” he joked.

Albert didn’t miss the way Elmer’s face fell a little. “Oh. Yeah, haha, they do,” he said, putting a smile on his face, but it was obvious the laugh had been forced. Albert’s heart sank. What was he doing wrong? He didn’t let it show, just changed the subject to something else and subtly let Elmer have more pie than him. After dessert, they migrated to the living room floor, sitting and talking about nothing. Elmer didn’t reach for his hand this time, and Albert pretended like it didn’t hurt.

When everything seemed to be wrapping up, they all stood and began gathering their things. Race waved off everyone who tried to take their dishes, saying he’d wash them and get them back to everyone clean and with leftovers packed. Albert grabbed his hat from by the door, tucking it over his ears, then turned as Elmer wandered towards the door, finished saying goodbye to everyone. He steeled his insides, speaking before Elmer could say something like bye.

“Can I walk you home?” Albert asked him. He continued hurriedly, as Elmer looked a little startled, “It’s dark out, you know?” Elmer paused, looking… nervous? He nodded.

“Yeah, sure,” he answered. He smiled a little gratefully. “Thank you.”

They waved to everyone once more - Spot and Jack were staying a little late to help with cleanup, so they hollered from the kitchen - before making their way downstairs and out of the apartment complex. Elmer’s building was only two blocks away, but they walked quickly - it was cold out, a winter chill settling over the city. Neither of them spoke; in fact, Elmer seemed to want to look anywhere other than at Albert. The sinking in his gut got worse and worse. He felt horrible. What had he done? Had it been something he’d done at the Halloween party? Something he’d said? Albert looked down at his feet, scuffling a little on the sidewalk. He hated it, knowing he could have screwed up not only his shot at a relationship with Elmer, but even the friendship they’d established.

They reached Elmer’s building, and he turned, shuffling awkwardly. “Well, um. Thanks for walking me,” he said. He turned to go, and Albert had a sudden moment of panic. He reached out and grabbed Elmer’s wrist carefully, stopping him.

“Elm. Wait,” Albert said, his voice quiet and pleading, and Elmer turned around slowly to look at him, looking nervous. “Is everything okay? With us?” Albert asked, trying to keep his voice from wavering. “It’s just - well, after the Halloween party you seemed kind of distant, and I’m just worried I did something wrong or said something to upset you, because if I did, I want to know so I...
can apologize. And try to fix it,” he finished.

Elmer looked paralyzed, his eyes glistening like he was about to cry, and Albert’s heart dropped to the pit of his stomach. *Fuck.* He’d just made it worse, hadn’t he? “No,” he breathed, “oh, god, Albie, no, you didn’t do anything wrong! I’m just -- just -- I mean -- *fuck.*” He sniffled, wiping his eyes roughly on his sleeve. “I don’t even know how to start.”

Albert’s hand instinctively dropped from Elmer’s wrist to his hand, lacing their fingers together and squeezing reassuringly. “It’s okay. Take your time,” he said, and Elmer smiled gratefully, looking down at his shoes.

“I -- um.” He started again. “I’m gray-ace. Asexual, I mean. Yeah. I’m still kinda figuring out, you know, what exactly it means for me,” he removed his hand from Albert’s to move his hands as he spoke, “but I know as of right now I don’t want. Um. Sex, in a relationship.” Elmer swallowed. “I might want it in a few months, or a few years, or I might never want it at all. I don’t know.” He ran a hand through his hair. “But I guess I freaked out after the party, because I’ve been in a lot of relationships where guys get mad when they find out I don’t want to have sex, or they get impatient, or--” He cut off, inhaling shakily. “And you,” he said, gesturing to Albert, “you deserve someone better than that, someone who can actually, like, fulfill your needs in a relationship, and I know that’s not me and I didn’t want to lead you on or anything or--” Elmer was crying a little now, his voice wavering enough that he stopped talking, shrinking in a little on himself.

Albert stared, his heart breaking for Elmer. *That* was what he’d been worried about? That he’d be rejected? He reached forward slowly, giving Elmer time to react, before taking both of Elmer’s hands in both of his own and lacing their fingers together once more. “Hey,” he said softly. “Elmer. Can you look at me?”

Elmer met his gaze, his eyes full of anxiety, and Albert felt his own throat close up a little. “Elmer,” he said gently, “I don’t *care* about any of that. Sex, any of it. It doesn’t matter, okay?” He squeezed Elmer’s hands. “I really, really like you, Elmer,” he admitted. “And you feeling happy, and comfortable, and safe? That is so much more important than sex. Whatever pace you want to take it at.” He looked down at his feet, suddenly embarrassed. “I mean, if you even wanna date me at all. It’s totally fine either way, I mean, you’re free to do whatever you want, I’m--”

“Albie!” Albert looked up in surprise to find Elmer looking at him, eyes shining with what looked like happier tears, cheeks glowing. “You really mean all that?” Elmer asked quietly, as if he couldn’t believe it. “About us?”

Albert felt his throat go dry. *Us.* He nodded. “Course I did, Elm,” he answered. “All of it.”

Elmer’s smile got impossibly wider before he tugged Albert in slowly by their joined hands, his
eyes fluttering closed as he gently pressed their lips together in a sweet kiss. It was chaste and innocent, not lasting more than a few seconds, but Albert was still breathless when he pulled away. 

Yeah, he thought, if that’s all we do for the rest of my life, that’s fine with me. Elmer squeezed his hands, giggling. “Your cheeks are the color of your hair,” he teased quietly, and Albert let out a pshaw, bumping their foreheads together.

“I should go,” Elmer admitted reluctantly. “My sister is visiting tomorrow, and I need to get up early to clean before she arrives.” He met Albert’s eyes hopefully. “But I’ll call you? Tomorrow?”

Albert nodded. “Yeah, tomorrow.” He allowed their hands to drop, but not before leaning in and pressing a kiss to Elmer’s cheek. “Bye, Elm.” Elmer blushed a deeper pink, if possible, and Albert would have thought it was funny if he didn’t know he looked the exact same way.

Stuffing his hands in his coat pockets, his lips still tingling, he smiled like an idiot the whole way home.

Chapter End Notes

i love these bois

next chapter will be back to your regularly scheduled jackcrutchie suffering

tumblr: stevetrevvors
how to kick off the holiday break

Chapter Summary

The first snowfall of the year.

Chapter Notes

i ahve nothing to say im posting these as fast as i can write them
i hate slow burn as much as you do lmao
also AYYYY BOIS WE BROKE 20K
that's a new record for me!! this fic is such a big project for me and i love it a lot more than i thought i would. thanks to everyone who reads!!

The first true snowfall of the year arrived in mid December, coating the city and the campus in a blanket of undisturbed white. All of the weather channells were calling it the first big snowstorm to hit New York in a while, predicting the snow would last at least through a few days before Christmas. Their professors had taken one look at the forecast and promptly decided to cancell classes right up to the break - it wasn’t like they were going to get much in anyway. Crutchie received the news at work from one very delighted Jack Kelly, who sprinted up to the coffee counter where Crutchie was preparing drinks, his dark hair scattered with fluffy white snowflakes.

“Are you serious?” Crutchie practically hollered when he heard the news, almost splashing his co worker with gingerbread latte. Jack nodded with a grin.

“I’m ready to do absolutely nothing over the next few weeks,” he said. “When do you get off shift? I want to watch a movie. Or more than one.” Crutchie fit the lid onto the latte he’d finished, handing it to its owner with a smile.

“I’m off in about a half an hour,” he said, “and then I don’t have anything to do. I’m off shift until next week.” Jack smiled excitedly.

“Great!” He plopped down on a stool by the coffee bar. “Mind if I keep you company?” Crutchie smiled, grabbing another cup and starting the next order.
“I’d like nothing better,” he replied.

They chatted as Crutchie worked until the clock hit five, when Smalls arrived to replace him on shift. “You ready for the greatest break ever, Crutch?” she asked with a grin, tying her apron around her waist as Crutchie grabbed his hat and prepared to leave. “This place is gonna be dead. We won’t have to do anything.” Crutchie rolled his eyes.

“I kinda like when it’s busy,” he responded. “Gives me something to do with my hands, you know?” Smalls snorted.

“Well then, if you want to take any of my shifts I’m happy to give them to you.” Crutchie scoffed.

“Not on your life, ma’am,” he joked, weaving his way out from behind the counter where Jack was waiting. “See ya, Smalls.” He zipped up his coat as they approached the doors. Jack stopped him right as they were about to go outside.

“Hold on,” he said, before taking Crutchie’s scarf and readjusting it around his neck, tucking in the ends carefully. “Wouldn’t want you to be cold out there,” he said with a small smile, his face so close that Crutchie could breathe in his scent. He felt himself blush.

“Thanks,” he said bashfully, before pausing. “Hold on, mister hypocrite, you don’t have a hat or a scarf or anything!” Jack spluttered defensively, holding up his hands to shield himself. Crutchie tutted. “Now, that’s unacceptable,” he said, pulling the hat off his own head and reaching up to put it on Jack’s head, tugging it down over his ears. “There,” he said, satisfied, reaching up to brush a few stray hands of hair out of Jack’s face. Jack smiled fondly at him, cheeks pink, and he looked so cute wearing Crutchie’s favorite beanie that he felt a little breathless. Damnit damnit damnit.

“Well,” Jack said, offering an elbow playfully, “movies await. Shall we?” Crutchie laughed, sticking his arm through Jack’s and grabbing his crutch, and together they marched out into the cold, heading back towards the apartment.

Spot and Race were in the kitchen when they got to Crutchie’s apartment, sitting on stools in the kitchen with mugs of hot chocolate (presumably spiked, but to be honest, it sounded pretty appealing to Crutchie.) Race waved. “Heya, Crutch! How was work?” Crutchie shrugged, carefully undoing his scarf.

“Goddamn, those are good,” he sighed wistfully. “We’ll have to come in sometime when you’re on shift.” Crutchie smiled, making his way over to the kitchen and pouring himself a glass of water.

“I’d like that,” he said. “Jack and I were gonna watch a few movies, you in?” Race nodded.

“Sure, I’m down,” he said. “Spot?’ Spot picked up his mug and took a deep sip, raising his eyebrows.

“As long as one of them is something festive,” he decided, and all of them murmured assent, moving into the living room and settling onto the couch with blankets, queuing up Netflix. “Saca tus codos de mi cara, magnífico hijo de puta,” Spot muttered as Race attempted to sort out all his limbs. Jack and Crutchie choked on their hot chocolates, collapsing into laughter, and Race narrowed his eyes.

“What?” he asked. He turned to Spot, who apparently had thought no one had heard him and was beet red. “What did you say?” he asked, and Spot shook his head.

“Nothing important,” he muttered, and Race rolled his eyes as Jack and Crutchie composed themselves and settled down. It was a little chilly in the apartment, and Crutchiechalked this up as an excuse for why he allowed himself to burrow a little into Jack’s side under the blankets as the movie started, the living room lights down low. The snow falling outside was fluffy and picturesque, and Crutchie was warm and comfortable, full of hot chocolate and surrounded by his best friends and warm blankets. They all chatted throughout the first movie, but as Race queued up the next one, Crutchie could feel himself drifting off, feeling safe and happy after a long day. Sighing, he let his head settle on Jack’s shoulder and dozed off, the movie fading into background noise as he fell asleep, but not before feeling Jack’s arm cautiously encircle his shoulders.

The next thing Crutchie knew, he was blinking awake to white light streaming through the windows. Huh. He must have not woken up after the movie ended, because the first thing he noticed was that he was still on the couch.

The second thing he noticed was that he was leaning on something warm, solid, and definitely not a couch. Oh, brother.

He looked up to find himself staring straight at Jack, still lying on the couch, fast asleep. Their
limbs were tangled together, Crutchie’s head on Jack’s chest, his breath puffing softly in Crutchie’s hair. Crutchie froze. Oh, fuck. He carefully extracted himself, sitting up and exhaling deeply, running a hand through his hair. Jack, thankfully, remained asleep, shivering a little as he adjusted to the temperature of the apartment without Crutchie on top of him. Crutchie found his crutches and stood up, freezing in place when he heard a snort from behind him in the kitchen. He turned slowly to see Race and Spot, sitting at the counter with mugs in their hands and matching shit-eating grins on their faces.

“Sleep well, Crutch?” Spot asked, and Crutchie shushed him, storming quietly over to the kitchen.


“No, stupid, Spot left and came back. Unlike one,” he raised his eyebrows over Crutchie’s shoulder and raised his voice, “Mister Jack Kelly, who needs to wake his ass up.”

Jack groaned from the couch, rubbing a hand over his face and rolling onto the floor with an undignified thump. “Wha-- where?” he muttered, his voice muffled from the carpet, and Crutchie couldn’t help but giggle. Spot rolled his eyes, going to help his roommate up.

“You and Crutchie fell asleep during the second movie last night,” he explained, as they wandered back to the kitchen area. Jack met Crutchie’s eyes and blushed.

“Oh,” he muttered. “Sorry about that,” he said to Crutchie, who laughed softly.

“Don’t be,” he replied. “I fell asleep first, anyway.” He patted Jack on the shoulder sympathetically, sliding him a mug and a croissant from the cafe downstairs. “You still make a good pillow.” Jack turned flaming red. Race thunked his head on the counter with an exasperated groan.

Most of them were going home to see their families for Christmas, and those that weren’t were tagging along with someone else. Everyone in their crew hailed from within the area, but not everyone’s families lived in the city, including Race and Crutchie. Race’s family was abroad in Italy for the holiday, so he flew out a few days before the break started to meet them. Crutchie was just taking the late train to New Jersey, and Jack insisted on coming with him to the station to see him off and help him with his bags. All too soon, they were at the platform, and Crutchie’s train was pulling up. He turned to face Jack.
“I’ll see you in a week and a half for New Year’s, right?” he confirmed, and Jack nodded.

“Wouldn’t miss it,” he replied. He leaned in and wrapped Crutchie in a tight hug. “Bye, pal. Gonna miss you,” he said, and his voice was muffled but he almost sounded like he was going to cry. Crutchie pulled back with alarm to find that Jack’s eyes were indeed red and a little watery.

“Oh, no, Jack!” he cried with concern, reaching up to wipe a tear away. “You don’t need to cry, silly, it’s only a week!” Jack nodded.

“I know, I know,” he sighed. “But it’s the longest I’ll have gone without seeing you since we met and…” He trailed off, looking embarrassed. “Sorry, that sounds dumb, I know, but--”

He cut off as Crutchie yanked him down and hugged him again, burying his face in Jack’s shoulder as he felt himself choking up a little. He let him go after a brief moment, sniffling. “I gotta get on this train.” I really don’t want to leave. “Say hi to your family for me.” What I wouldn’t give to be spending the holidays with you. “Take care of yourself, okay?” Can’t you see I love you so much it hurts?

Jack nodded. “I will. See you soon.” He added as Crutchie got on the train, “Text me when you get there safe, okay?” Crutchie nodded, waving once more before the doors closed and he had to make his way to his seat. As the train pulled off, he turned, craning his neck and finding Jack on the platform, watching him stand there until he was out of sight.

True to his word, he texted Jack the moment he got off the train. Even though it was late, he got a response within seconds.

~

Crutchie loved his family, but the holidays passed slower than a crawling snail. At this point, everything in his childhood home that used to feel familiar now felt antiquated, a remnant of a past life, and he found himself thinking longingly of his apartment and his friends more often than not. More than once during Christmas dinner, one of his parents or cousins would have to snap him out of a daydream he’d drifted off into in the middle of the meal. His mother sat down with him later that night, as they exchanged gifts by the tree.

“Yeah, Mom, I’m fine,” he answered. “I just miss…” He trailed off. *Home*, he’d almost said. *I miss home.* When had his apartment started becoming more like home than the house he grew up in? “Campus,” he finished. “I miss my friends.” His mom smiled, then gave him a sneaky, suspicious look.

“Charlie Morris,” she chided, “you haven’t gone and found yourself a boyfriend and not told us, now, have you?” Crutchie blushed, waving her off.

“No, Ma! ‘Course not,” he laughed. She raised an eyebrow at him.

“But there’s someone,” she prodded, “isn’t there?” Crutchie gave up on trying to hide anything.


“Everything will work out the way it’s meant to,” she said simply, after a moment, and left it at that. Crutchie only hoped she was right.

Chapter End Notes

THERES A LIGHT AT THE END OF THE TUNNEL. THEY WILL KISS SOON I PROMISE.

translation of spot’s spanish: "get your elbows out of my face, you gorgeous son of a bitch." (I LOVE SPOT OK JESUS)

anyway

kudos/comments are nice

tumblr: stevetrevvors
Before he knew it, December 31 arrived, and Jack was packing up his things in the overnight bag he’d taken to Medda’s, preparing to go back to campus. She raised an eyebrow at him from her place on the couch. “You seem pretty eager to get back, Jack Kelly,” she noted. “Am I already that boring to you, mister college man?” Jack blushed.

“Naw, Miss Medda, ‘course not,” he assured her with a grin. “I’m pickin’ up Crutchie at the train station later.” Medda hummed interestedly, turning so she could see Jack better.

“Oh, so this is the boy you’re so infatuated with,” she said, laughing when Jack spluttered indignantly in protest. “Really, Jack, just ask that young man on a date already so you can bring him home and I can meet the boy who’s making my son so happy.” Jack groaned, hiding his face in his hands.


“He just doesn’t feel the same, you know? And god, he’s my best friend, and I wouldn’t give that up for anything. But it hurts, you know? To be around him, and know nothing will ever happen.” Medda smacked him lightly upside the head. “Ow!” he hissed, springing away.
“Now, Jack,” she admonished him, “of course nothing will ever happen if you have that kind of attitude about it.” He groaned, trying to tell her that that wasn’t the point, when his phone dinged with Crutchie’s ringtone.

[Crutchie] on the train! Thirty minutes ;)

Jack grinned. “I gotta go, Miss Medda.” She smiled knowingly, wrapping him in a tight hug.

“Take care of yourself, kid, okay?” she warned him, and he nodded, shouldering his bag and practically dashing out the door.

After dumping his bag in the empty apartment (Spot wouldn’t be home until later that afternoon), Jack hurriedly made his way to the train station, finding his way down to the platform and watching as the trains came and went, practically bouncing on his toes. He didn’t know why he was so excited; Crutchie had been right, it really wasn’t that long. But he wouldn’t deny the way something in his chest rocketed like a firework the moment he saw that head of fluffy blond hair emerge onto the platform, finally.

Crutchie met his gaze and broke out into a giant smile, hurrying across the platform as fast as he could and practically dumping his crutches on the ground, tackling Jack in a giant hug and wrapping his arms around his shoulders. Jack let out a little oof noise, staggering back a step or two before wrapping his arms around Crutchie’s middle and hugging tight, breathing in the scent of coffee grounds and pine sap and citrus shampoo and something very distinctly Crutchie, and something inside of him seemed to relax, like everything was alright again. Like something had been missing.

“Hi,” Crutchie mumbled into Jack’s shoulder, and Jack laughed, pulling back from the hug after another moment to look his best friend in the face.

“Hey yourself,” he said fondly. “Ready for this new year’s party tonight?” Crutchie grinned.

“You betcha I am,” he said cheerfully, looking concernedly down at where he’d discarded his crutches on the ground. Jack hurried to pick them up before he had to bend down, offering them to Crutchie with a smile. He took them gratefully, and Jack picked up the overnight bag he’d dropped, shouldering it with ease.

“Ready to head out?” he asked, and Crutchie nodded smartly.
“Lead the way, sir,” he joked, and together they made their way out to the sidewalk, catching a cab back to the apartment building.

~

The New Year’s party was everything Jack expected it to be, which was loud, chaotic, and absolutely characteristic of their group of friends. Everyone who’d been at the Halloween party was there, so Davey and Albert’s apartment was full of people, drinking, singing, and chatting away the minutes until midnight, when they could ring in the New Year.

Elmer was sitting draped over Albert’s lap in the big armchair, giggling uncontrollably at a joke someone had just told him and desperately trying to hide his red face in his boyfriend’s shoulder. Davey was arguing with Specs and Romeo about something insignificant - it was all good-natured, Jack knew, but drunk Davey was easily frustrated about small things. Blink and Mush were talking with Spot and Race by the kitchen, Spot leaning heavily on Race’s shoulder. Everyone else was scattered around the TV, watching the scene unfold only a few blocks away in Times Square as the ball prepared to drop. It was 11:45 PM. No one had drunk a lot yet; that sort of fun was saved for after midnight. But they were all having a good time, and they were happy.

Jack realized suddenly that he didn’t see Crutchie anywhere. *Huh.* Abandoning his drink on the counter, he wandered out of the living room, searching the small apartment for his best friend. He stopped when he found a familiar figure sitting out on the fire escape, looking up at the sky. He smiled, opening the door and stepping carefully outside.

“Everything okay?” he asked, wandering unsteadily over and plopping down beside Crutchie. His friend looked over, smiling when he saw Jack.

“Yeah,” he answered. “Just a little loud in there, that’s all. Needed a little space.” Jack nodded in understanding, leaning his head on Crutchie’s shoulder and shifting a little closer in the cold night air. They sat for a few moments in comfortable silence before Jack noticed Crutchie whispering something under his breath.

“Whatcha talkin’ about there, pal?” he asked. Crutchie pointed up.

“Naming the constellations,” he said, and Jack hummed interestedly, looking up at the sky. With all the light pollution coming from the city, he could barely see the stars, but he could pick up a few.
“You like astronomy?” he asked. Crutchie nodded.

“When I was little,” he explained, “there were a lot of times when I felt pretty small. Times I felt like I’d never make a difference, like I didn’t matter, like the world would be better off without me.” He sighed. “So I started looking up at the stars. They remind me that everyone’s pretty small, I guess. We’re all just pieces in a big universe, and I can make as much of a difference as anyone else.” He smiled. “I’m here for a reason, you know?” Jack nodded.

“I..” he started. The beer had made his brain a little fuzzy, but he knew what he wanted to say. “You matter to me,” he finally said. “I’m really glad you’re here.” Crutchie sighed, and it sounded a little shaky.

“Thanks,” he whispered. “I’m pretty glad I’m here too.” Jack studied the stars again.

“Name some constellations for me?” he asked, and Crutchie nodded, pointing carefully.

“Well, see that star there?” he asked. Jack found it. “That’s Sirius. It’s at it’s brightest, highest point every New Year’s Eve.” He pointed again. “There, you can sort of see the big dipper. And there’s the little one, a little ways over.” He pointed out as many as they could see, as the party continued inside, everyone cheerfully passing out champagne and getting ready to ring in the new year.

They heard the counting begin to echo from Times Square in the distance. Ten seconds. Jack looked at his friend’s face, illuminated by the glow of the city, and thought, do you know? Do you know I love you so much it hurts to look at you? Do you know I’d do anything to make you happy, and that these past four months have been the best ones of my life?

“Three...two...one…” Light and noise erupted everywhere around them as the ball dropped and the new year was upon them. Jack laughed as commotion erupted inside, pressing a playful kiss to the side of Crutchie’s head and ruffling his hair.

“Happy New Year, pal,” he said affectionately. Crutchie smiled.

“Happy New Year, Jack.”
im weeping this fic is taking so much out of me it's become a 20k word monster

(i love it so much. its my baby.)

next chapter: race's interlude. ;)))

kudos/comments make me ridiculously, over-the-top happy

tumblr: stevetrevvors
how to count down to midnight (race's interlude)

Chapter Summary

It's new year's eve, and Race kind of just wants next year to be different.

Chapter Notes

here it is kiddos
i have nothing to say
enjoy

See the end of the chapter for more notes

At 9:30 PM, Race grabbed Spot and they challenged Albert and Elmer to a game of cards. Albert resisted at first, claiming it was obvious who had the advantage, but Elmer shushed him with a wicked grin.

“We can take 'em, right babe?” he asked, swinging his legs casually over Albert’s lap and beginning to deal out cards. Albert turned flaming red; it had been a month and change since he and Elmer had officially started dating, and he still wasn’t used to the pet names. Race snorted into the beer he was nursing. He didn’t plan on drinking a ton until after they rang in the new year, but he figured one drink was enough to sustain a good time until they got there.

Spot bit his lip in concentration, inspecting his cards. He hadn’t had anything to drink yet; Race was one of the few who knew that Spot was secretly the lightweight out of the group, and he didn’t like people knowing. He’d become an expert at nursing one drink and making it look like several, so people thought he was good at holding his alcohol when it was truly the opposite. Race thought it was hilarious. He watched as Spot deliberated over his cards before selecting one and slapping it down, grinning challengingly at Albert. It was those grins that made Race feel a little weak in the knees, in the moments where he had to make sure he didn’t let his guard down and reveal his feelings. Spot didn’t know anything; he couldn’t. It would just ruin everything they had going between them.

At 10:27 PM, while Spot was fiddling with the television because someone had bumped into it and changed the setting by accident, Katherine and Sarah cornered Race by the kitchen. “Come on, Race,” Kath said, exasperatedly. “We’re tired of watching you pine.”
Race feigned confusion. “What are you talking about?” he asked. Sarah was having none of it, smacking him on the arm.

“Spot,” she said, jerking her head in the direction of his best friend, who was still attempting to fix the TV. “Do something, Race. We’re all tired of watching you both pine longingly for each other. God knows you must be.” Race shook his head, laughing bitterly.

“No,” he said. “No way. I’m not ruining a perfectly good friendship because of some stupid feelings I might have.” Kath sighed.

“Race, you don’t get it. He feels the same way,” she said. And god, it hurt more than Race thought it should, hearing her say that and knowing it wasn’t true. He looked over at Spot, laughing at something Mush had said as he fiddled with the remote, and he felt his heart twist. God, he wanted it so bad. But he couldn’t have it.

“Race,” Sarah said, “it’s a new year. A fresh start. Don’t let this next year be exactly the same as the last one. Give yourself that, at least.” Race shook his head, turning to go somewhere else.

“Sorry to disappoint,” he snapped, “but I’d rather give myself a best friend than risk losing everything.”

At 11:45, Spot wandered over to the counter where Race was talking with Mush and Blink, sighing and leaning on his shoulder. Race turned to look at him. “Holding up okay?” he asked, and Spot nodded.

“Yeah,” he said. “I don’t know. New Year always gets me a little melancholy. Don’t really know why.” Race hummed sympathetically.

“Well, you get to wake up tomorrow and realize that despite all the philosophical bullshit, the world will remain exactly the same,” he sighed. Spot groaned.

“That’s part of what I don’t like about it!” he complained. “Everyone bullshits about how they’re gonna make a change, and then nothing happens. But that’s just because no one actually believes there’s a change.” He huffed. “Maybe I want something to happen. Maybe I just wanna believe it’ll all be a little different tomorrow.” The clock chimed on the TV, and everyone cheered.
“Ten more minutes,” Race said, and Blink nodded, swirling his beer.

“Ten more minutes to a fresh start,” he mused. He reached over and whapped Spot lightly on the arm. “Cheer up, Spot! Change will come if you decide it will.”

Mush nodded. “Yeah, come on, Spot! Do something dramatic! Go on an adventure. Make a change.” He waved his hands dramatically in the air. “Find love.” Spot stiffened all of a sudden, moving abruptly away from Race.

“I’m gonna go watch the countdown,” he said, moving quickly away into the TV area. Race watched him go before groaning, letting his head fall down on the counter. Mush sighed impatiently.

“Race,” he said after a moment, “there are less than five minutes left in the new year. You are in love. Do you want something to change?”


Blink reached over and lifted his chin off the counter. “Then change something,” he said quietly, staring Race straight in the eyes.

Somewhere inside of Race, something snapped into place.

He was sick of pining. He was sick of every touch he shared with Spot never feeling like enough. He was sick of watching his other friends find love and be happy and feeling like he’d never have it. He was sick of not knowing. He stood up abruptly, putting his drink down.


“Hell yeah you do,” he affirmed, and Race hurried away from the counter, searching for his best friend.

Thirty seconds.
Race searched the living room, not finding Spot anywhere. He wasn’t on the fire escape (Jack and Crutchie were, but Race wasn’t about to disturb them.) He wasn’t down the hall in his room; there was no one in the bathroom.

Twenty seconds.

Race leaned against the wall to breathe. Was he really doing this? Was he really going to risk everything he’d been so careful to preserve about their friendship since they were fifteen years old?

Ten.

His eyes found Spot, leaning against the wall in the corner of the TV room, and maybe it was the exhilaration of the moment or the half a beer in his system, but all of Race’s doubts flew out the window like smoke.

Nine.

He pushed past couples preparing for the new year, people counting down, everyone with little plastic flutes of champagne in their hands.

Eight.

Race thought about everything he loved about Spot, everything he wished they could have, and decided that if he could have all that, it would be worth the terrifying risk.

Seven.

Kath offered him champagne. He ignored her, pushing past her, racing the clock even though he knew in the back of his mind it didn’t matter. All he knew was he had to get to Spot.

Six.
He stopped in front of Spot, who’d been staring off into the distance. “Hey,” Spot greeted him with a small smile, and though it wasn’t any expression Race hadn’t seen on his face before, he felt himself fall a little more in love right then and there.

He wasn’t going to do this.

Was he?

“Race?” Spot asked him, looking concerned. “Is everything okay?”

No time like the present.

Race seized Spot’s face in both hands and kissed him fiercely, pouring into it every emotion and pang of longing he’d suppressed over the past seven years of friendship. His mind went blank; all he knew was the roaring in his ears and Spot’s lips on his, the calamity of the room fading to background noise. He pulled back after a moment, breathing heavily, his hands still loosely cupping Spot’s face as he searched Spot’s shocked, dazed expression. His heart pounded with fear and anticipation.

“Was that…” he asked, unable to complete his question.
Spot broke out into the softest, happiest smile Race had ever seen on his face. “Perfect,” he whispered, fistig his hands in Race’s shirt and tugging him in for another kiss. This one was slower, deeper, both of them taking their time, kissing like they needed it to breathe until they actually had to break away for air. Spot wrapped his arms lazily around Race’s neck, his eyes shining as he pressed a sweet kiss to the underside of Race’s jaw.

Race laughed with relief, letting his head drop and burying his face in Spot’s hair. “You don’t hate me,” he whispered in disbelief, wrapping his arms around Spot’s waist, and Spot shook his head.

“I don’t think I ever could,” he whispered back, and Race couldn’t help but lean in and kiss him again. All around them people cheered and sang and rang in the new year, but they held each other in the corner, completely and blissfully oblivious.

Chapter End Notes

long story short: race and spot were supposed to originally get together WAY later in the fic

but ya girl got impatient

you're welcome

tumblr (NEW): hispanicjackkelly
how to watch a meteor shower

Chapter Summary

A chilly January night, an impromptu rooftop dance, and a whole lot of falling stars.

Chapter Notes

y'all
i just
i've given up on notes. enjoy.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Crutchie walked into the kitchen on January 1 to find Race sitting at the counter, staring off into the middle distance with a dreamy smile on his face. Laughing, Crutchie circled around him, waving a hand in front of his face to snap him out of it. “Race?” he asked. “You in there?” Race giggled.

“Yeah,” he sighed, and Crutchie narrowed his eyes. He sat down opposite Race.

“Okay,” he said, “something’s up. Out with it, Mister.”

Race blushed, looking down at his hands with a grin before quietly admitting, “I kissed Spot.” Crutchie let out a yell, nearly falling out of his chair.

“Race!” he cried. “Fucking finally! And?” he prompted. Race stared blankly, and Crutchie huffed. “Come on, Race, you have to give me details. When, how, what happened?”

Race grinned. “Well, last night at, like, 11:40? Spot and I were talking with Mush and Blink about new years, and how nothing ever really changes, right? And Spot left to go somewhere else, and I kind of just realized,” his voice got soft, “that I really, really didn’t want to spend a whole ‘nother year the same way I spent this one, just staring at Spot and wondering if anything was ever going to happen.” He laughed quietly. “So I found him at midnight, and I kissed him.”
Crutchie grinned. “It’s about fucking time,” he sighed. “The rest of us were sick of watching you guys beat yourselves up over it.” Race smiled softly.

“So he really liked me? Like, before then? For a while?” he asked uncertainly. Crutchie nodded.

“So much, Race,” he confirmed. “He was head over heels long before you let yourself see it.” Race dropped his head onto his arms on the counter, his face glowing. Crutchie stood, leaving his crutches by the counter and hopping over to the stove. “Well,” he announced, “new year means celebratory waffles, I suppose, right?” Race groaned.

“God, you’re the best,” he sighed, and Crutchie smiled fondly, pulling out the ingredients.

“Yeah, yeah, you big sap.”

~

Classes started a few days after the new year, and their professors went heavy on their post-holiday workload. Crutchie found himself swamped with assignments and papers, and it was almost a week before anyone had free time in the evenings again. About a week into the new semester, he got a text from Jack.

[Jack] crutchie!! Guess what

[Jack] so you like astronomy and stuff

[Jack] weeeelllll there’s a METEOR SHOWER TONIGHT and we should go up to the roof and watch it

[Crutchie] truly a man after my own heart

[Crutchie] what should i bring
Crutchie grinned at his use of emoticons, a habit Jack admitted he picked up from Crutchie. Settling back down in his armchair in the library, he pulled up a website on his computer and read up on the meteor shower. He was pleasantly surprised and extremely happy that Jack had thought of him when he’d heard about the meteor shower. He let himself smile stupidly for a few more seconds before getting back to work, determined to finish everything he had to do well before 11:30.

When he walked into the apartment around eleven, Crutchie was unsurprised to find Spot and Race dozing on the couch cuddled closer than was seemingly possible. Race poked his head up as Crutchie plopped his bag down and wandered around the living room, gathering blankets. “Whatcha doin’, Crutch?” he asked sleepily.

“Going up to the roof,” Crutchie answered. “Jack and I are gonna watch the meteor shower.”

“Ooooh,” Spot drawled from somewhere underneath Race, “got a date, Crutch?” Crutchie stuck out his tongue, though he knew Spot most likely couldn’t see him.

“Not a date,” he answered easily, and Race snorted.

“Uh huh,” he muttered, and Spot smacked him.

“Babe,” he whined, “don’t get into it with him right now. They’ll figure it out eventually.”

Race hummed in agreement. “True,” he mused. “We managed to, after all.” Spot smiled, leaning up to kiss him, and Crutchie pretended to gag loudly from the other side of the room. Race flipped him off without breaking the kiss, and Crutchie snorted, gathering up his things and pulling on a heavier sweatshirt before heading out the door.

“Play nice, kids!” he hollered inside before going over to the elevator and taking it up to the roof.
Outside, the air was chilly, and Crutchie shivered, looking around before spotting Jack. He was sitting on the edge of two lawn chairs pushed together, wrapped in a blanket with the hood of his sweatshirt poking out. He turned when he heard the door open, and his smile was brilliant even in the nighttime.

“Hey, Crutchie!” he called, waving, and stood to make his way over. “Come on over. The shower isn’t technically scheduled to start until midnight, but that’s usually a rough estimate, so I figured we should get out here early to catch the beginning.” Crutchie grinned.

“Ah, curses, I’ve fallen into your plans! You just want me to get sick because of the cold and my frail immune system!” he joked. Jack laughed.

“Aw, don’t worry, Crutch,” he said, “I’ll protect you.” He wrapped both arms around Crutchie from behind, squeezing playfully, and Crutchie laughed, trying to deny the way he leaned into the touch just a little. *It’s cold, and Jack’s warm, and that’s it.*

They sat together on the lawn chairs, Jack’s phone quietly playing music as they looked up at the stars in anticipation. All of a sudden, the song changed to something slow and rhythmic, and Jack perked up. “Oh, I love this song!” he said, swaying to the opening notes. All of a sudden, something seemed to occur to him, and before Crutchie could ask what it was, Jack stood and offered a hand.

“Dance with me?” he asked, and Crutchie laughed bitterly.

“Jack, I don’t know if you’ve noticed,” he said, gesturing to his crutches, “but due to my limited mobility, I can’t exactly waltz.” Jack made a little *phsaw* noise.

“Limited mobility, my ass,” he said. “Come on, I’ll show you how it’s done. Here,” he motioned, hoisting Crutchie up to balance on his good foot. “Now, stand on my feet.”

Crutchie looked at him incredulously. “You can’t be serious.” Jack smiled encouragingly.

“Do you trust me?” he asked. *Completely,* Crutchie thought. *Totally, dangerously.* He sighed, carefully shifting until his good foot was on top of Jack’s and his bad leg was supported on the other one, his hands balanced carefully on Jack’s shoulders. “There,” Jack nodded, sending Crutchie into heart palpitations as he wrapped a strong arm securely around his waist. “Now,” Jack said, meeting Crutchie’s eyes reassuringly and grabbing his hand, holding it carefully raised, “we
can dance. Here.”

Crutchie laughed as Jack carefully began to spin in slow circles, his feet shifting slowly as they both carefully learned to maintain their balance. He swayed a little, tightening his grip on Jack’s shoulder, and slowly they settled into a rhythm with the music, moving back and forth on the rooftop under the starry sky, laughing as they struggled to stay upright. A wind blew across the roof, and Crutchie shivered, instinctively moving a little closer to Jack as they spun slowly. Jack laughed quietly, carefully securing his arm tighter around Crutchie’s waist and spinning them around with more confidence.

“Think I can dip you?” he asked with a playful sparkle in his eye, and Crutchie gasped.

“Oh, don’t you dare, Jack Kelly,” he hissed, and Jack grinned mischievously before bending, letting both of their bodies tip towards the ground. Crutchie shrieked with delight, grabbing around Jack’s neck so he wouldn’t fall, both of them giggling like kids. Jack pulled him upright with a flourish, spinning them around quickly. They paused, their chests pressed flush together, both of Jack’s arms around Crutchie’s torso to keep him upright, and Crutchie felt his breath hitch, meeting Jack’s eyes. Their noses brushed once, accidentally, and Crutchie couldn’t help but gasp a little at the sudden unexpected contact, heat flooding his face until he no longer felt the cold. They stopped, swaying in place together, neither able to break gaze with the other, their faces mere inches apart.

All of a sudden, Crutchie decided he was tired of waiting and worrying.

He closed the short distance between them, pressing their lips together, and he swore the stars paused, the world stopped spinning just for a moment, watching the two of them there together on the rooftop. Jack’s lips were soft and pliant, and warmth radiated throughout Crutchie’s entire body from that spot, sending tingling to the tips of his toes. He only allowed himself a moment more of bliss before pulling away, suddenly aware of Jack’s unresponsiveness. Does he hate it? Does he hate you? Oh, god, he hates you now, you can’t even look-- Crutchie opened his eyes (he didn’t even remember closing them.)

Jack’s face was glowing, even in the darkness. He stared at Crutchie, mouth parted slightly, eyes full of wonder and such pure adoration Crutchie almost wilted right there on the spot. “You…” he whispered, seemingly unable to finish the statement. “Me?” he asked with disbelief, his voice quiet.

Jack let out a shuddery breath, nudging Crutchie’s nose aside with his own and kissing him again. Crutchie sighed into Jack’s mouth, one hand winding loosely in his hair while the other went to cradle his face, tilting his chin to deepen the kiss. Jack wound his arms tighter around Crutchie’s waist, bringing their bodies impossibly closer, and nipped experimentally at his bottom lip, eliciting from Crutchie a noise he hadn’t known he could make.

The kiss grew deeper, hungrier as both of them let out six months worth of pent up frustration and longing. Crutchie opened his mouth against Jack’s, earning a gasp, pouring in everything he had in him until he didn’t know anything except Jack’s mouth on his, Jack’s arms around his waist, his hands in Jack’s hair, trading small noises and desperate kisses like the world was ending around them.

Eventually, Crutchie’s lungs were screaming for oxygen, and he broke off the kiss with a ragged gasp, taking in Jack’s flushed face and pupils blown wide. He laughed, breathing heavily, burying his face in Jack’s shoulder. Jack hummed, turning and nosing at the bare neck exposed above the hood of Crutchie’s sweatshirt and pressing a soft kiss there, and the act was so gentle that it made Crutchie a little weak in the knees.

His own leg was starting to wobble a bit from standing on it so long, and he sighed, looking up at Jack. “Can we sit down?” he asked. “My leg’s starting to hurt a little bit.” Jack nodded, brow furrowing in mild concern.

“Yeah, of course,” he said, and they managed to detach somewhat from each other. Jack helping Crutchie back over to the chairs. Crutchie started feeling the cold again, but only for a moment as Jack settled next to him and wrapped an arm around his shoulders. Feeling more confident now, Crutchie shifted closer into Jack’s side, putting both feet in his lap and burrowing into the space underneath his chin. Jack laughed softly, bringing his other arm to enclose them and kissing the top of his head.

“...What do you want this to be?” Crutchie asked hesitantly after a moment. “Between us?” Jack looked down at him.

“I…” he started. “I won’t force you into anything you’re not comfortable with,” he said finally, and Crutchie felt something warm bloom inside his chest at how good Jack was, how caring. “But if I’m being honest? God, Crutchie,” he breathed, “I want everything.”

Crutchie smiled. “Oh, good,” he whispered, “I was hoping you’d say something like that.” He kissed Jack again, languid and sweet, and this time there was no rush. Jack held Crutchie carefully, like he was something precious, and they kissed like they had all the time in the world.
They looked up at the sky right as the first meteor streaked across the inky black, visible even above all the lights of the city. Crutchie gasped. “Got anything you want to wish for?” he asked Jack, watching as more and more falling stars streaked across the sky. Jack looked down and laced their fingers together, squeezing tight.

“No,” he said simply. “I’ve got everything I need.” Crutchie smiled happily, hiding his blush in Jack’s shirt.

“Sap,” he mumbled, and Jack laughed quietly, pressing a kiss into his hair again.

“It was almost one in the morning by the time they left the roof, one of Jack’s hands on the small of Crutchie’s back (he’d never loathed the crutches more than he did when he realized it meant they couldn’t hold hands while they walked.) Jack walked him down to his apartment on the fourth floor, and they stopped, leaning in the doorway. Crutchie groaned.

“I cannot believe I have to get up early and go suffer through Lit tomorrow,” he complained. Jack laughed.

“You’ll be fine. I’ll buy you coffee?” he offered. “Walk you to class?” Crutchie grinned stupidly.

“We’re in the same class, moron. You walk me every time,” he chided. Jack flashed him a smart grin.


“Kiss me goodnight?” Crutchie asked shyly, and Jack’s smile was brighter than the sun. He leaned in and kissed Crutchie sweetly, a hand cradling his jaw, before pulling away.

“Night, Crutchie,” he said, and Crutchie blushed, fumbling behind him with the doorknob as he pressed a quick kiss to Jack’s cheek.

“Night, Jack,” he replied, before turning and making his way into the apartment.
Race looked up from where he was sitting at the counter, studying something; Spot was long gone. “Jesus, Crutch, it’s late - wait. ” It was his turn to narrow his eyes at Crutchie’s face, which was probably suspiciously red. “You’re blushing. Hold on.” Race’s eyes lit up with excitedly. “Did you -- did you and Jack --”

Crutchie let out a small giggle and flopped face down onto the couch. Race honest-to-God screeched, leaping up from his chair and diving over the back of the couch. “Crutchie, no way! Oh, come on, get up! Details!” Crutchie rolled over, his head in Race’s lap, describing the whole evening. All in all, he and Race were up until almost two in the morning, whispering and giggling about their boyfriends ( could he call Jack his boyfriend now?) like kids at a sleepover.

No matter how tired he was the next day, the sight of Jack greeting him at the door with his favorite coffee and a good morning kiss made Crutchie feel like he could run a marathon.

Chapter End Notes

SIXTEEN. CHAPTERS.

ALMOST. 27K. WORDS.

THEY'RE TOGETHER. ARE Y'ALL HAPPY

(i sure am. that slow burn was hurting me too.)

y'all know how excited i was to post this chapter? i haven't even written the next one yet. i'm breaking my own rule smh

do i care? of course not

is this fic over? oohhhhh not by a long shot i have TONS more i want to explore with jack and crutchie. but in the event that i lose access to AO3, i wanted to leave you guys at a somewhat acceptable stopping point. (for all of our sanity, mine included.)

this fic so far has been a wild ride, and is by far the longest single, cohesive story i’ve ever written. i’m so proud of what it’s become and i’m so happy all of you lovely readers are sharing this journey with me.

now, onward!

tumblr: hispanicjackkelly
“So, do you want to go... like, on a date?”

The question came as they were sitting on the couch in Jack’s apartment, doing their homework for Lit over lunch after their afternoon classes had been cancelled. Crutchie looked up from his book in surprise. Jack tried not to look nervous. “I mean, if you don’t it’s fine, but I mean--”

“Jack,” Crutchie laughed, “I’ve spent the last week and a half making out with you at basically every available opportunity. Did you really think I was going to reject you?”

Jack scratched the back of his neck awkwardly. “...No?” he responded. Crutchie snorted, leaning over and kissing him on the cheek.

“You’re a dork,” he said fondly, and Jack blushed.

“Study,” he emphasized, poking at Crutchie’s book, and Crutchie looked down at the novel with disdain before tossing it onto the coffee table and clambering over Jack, pushing him down on the couch.

“Nah,” he decided, “I’ve got more important things do to.” Jack grinned, shoving his own book to the floor and meeting Crutchie halfway. They’d barely been kissing for a few seconds when Spot walked in, nearly dropping his phone in surprise.
“Jesus, give a guy some warning if you’re gonna make out on his couch!” he yelled, scaring them both apart. Crutchie ran a hand through his hair, his ears turning bright red. Jack rolled his eyes.

“It’s *my* couch, asshole,” he complained. “I bought it.” Spot stuck out his tongue.

“Yes, but it’s also in a public area of the apartment, and I pay half the rent,” he countered, “so kindly fuck off.” He waved off Crutchie with one hand. “Not you, Crutch. You’re an angel and Jack is obviously a horrible influence on you.”

Crutchie grinned brightly, and Jack felt like pinching himself for what had to be the thousandth time that week, because he *still* couldn’t believe it; that everything had happened that night, that *Crutchie had kissed him first.* “Jack?” Jack snapped out of his thoughts at the sound of Crutchie’s voice. He found his boyfriend staring at him, looking half amused and half concerned.

“Yeah?” he asked, already feeling his face burning. Spot jutted in.

“You had this really dopey smile on your face,” he explained, and Jack made a *pshaw* noise, leaning over to pull Crutchie into his lap.

“Shut up, Conlon,” he shot back, “it’s not like you don’t look at Race that way every time he’s in the same room as you.” Spot grumbled something unintelligible, wandering out of the living room. Jack hooked his chin over Crutchie’s shoulder, pressing a small kiss to the corner of his jaw.

“So,” he ventured, “are you free on Saturday afternoon?” Crutchie smiled.

“I’ll be ready,” he responded easily, settling back into Jack’s chest and reaching for the TV remote.

~

On Saturday, Jack threw a scarf haphazardly around his neck and trotted down the steps to 4B. He knocked quickly, and the door swung open almost instantly to reveal Crutchie standing there, bundled up in several layers of winter clothing. He looked at the way Jack’s scarf was hanging around his neck and tutted.
“Jack, that is not going to keep you warm,” he chided, letting go of his crutches and letting them hang from his elbows as he reached forward to adjust it. Jack laughed.

“Hello to you too,” he responded, and Crutchie rolled his eyes, using the ends of the scarf to tug Jack down and kiss him. Race walked by and pretended to gag. Breaking the kiss off, Crutchie flipped his roommate off without looking and finished tucking the ends of Jack’s scarf into his coat.

“That is sickeningly adorable,” Race commented from the couch, and Crutchie turned to stick out his tongue.

“Zip it, you fucking hypocrite,” he muttered, and Jack snorted.

“You ready?” he asked, and Crutchie nodded, grabbing both of his crutches.

“Absolutely,” he responded. “Lead the way.”

On the elevator ride down, Jack looked down and hesitated for a moment before reaching and hooking their pinkies together. Crutchie looked down then up at Jack, surprised. Jack blushed, suddenly embarrassed.

“I don’t know,” he stammered, “I figured since we can’t hold hands all the time this was an okay, substitute, but if you think it’s dumb we don’t have to--” Crutchie kissed him on the cheek, effectively shutting him up.

“No, it’s sweet,” he reassured Jack. “I like it. I was just surprised.” Jack grinned bashfully, looking down at their linked fingers and feeling the now familiar butterflies explode in his chest.

They found seats on the surprisingly empty Subway train, and Crutchie dropped one of his crutches into his lap, grabbing Jack’s hand. “So,” he prodded, “you gonna tell me where we’re going, Mr. Kelly?” Jack grinned, shaking his head.

“Nowhere special,” he admitted, “but I still want it to be a surprise.” Crutchie hummed in mock disappointment. They chatted the rest of the way, playing idly with their intertwined fingers until
they reached their stop. “*Hemos llegado,*” Jack noted. “This is our stop.” Crutchie stood with practiced ease, using his crutches for balance as the train slowed to a stop and hooking his pinky with Jack’s as they stepped off onto the platform, using it to navigate their way through the crowd. Emerging onto 5th Avenue, Jack checked to make sure Crutchie wasn’t struggling to keep up as he led him around the block to their destination.

Crutchie gasped. “Oh, I’ve never been here before!”

They stood in front of the Museum of Modern Art. Jack looked nervously at Crutchie. “Is this an okay idea?” he asked. “I wasn’t sure what to do that wasn’t conventional, so this was the best I could think of.” Crutchie smiled.

“No, I love it! And I know you love art,” he added, “so it’ll be fun to explore with you.” Jack grinned, pulling out his wallet and leading the two of them inside.

Once they’d paid and were inside the museum (Crutchie tried to pay for his own admission, but Jack stopped him before he could pull out his wallet), they wandered the exhibits, gazing at the different works of art. The museum was blissfully empty for a Saturday afternoon in January, and they took full advantage of it, making meaningless conversation as they explored the galleries. Every so often Jack would get excited and ramble about the art, but Crutchie never looked bored or disinterested; he listened attentively, absorbing everything Jack had to say.

They made it to *The Starry Night,* sitting on a bench in the gallery facing the painting, and Jack was halfway through a tangent about Van Gogh’s style when he noticed Crutchie looking at him curiously. “What is it?” he asked. Crutchie shook his head with a smile.

“Nothing,” he answered. “I just like you a lot, ‘s all.” Jack blushed furiously, and Crutchie leaned in, kissing him sweetly. Jack hummed, bringing a hand up to cradle his jaw and tugging him closer. No one entered the gallery, and Jack would’ve been content to sit there for the rest of eternity kissing Crutchie when all of a sudden he pulled away abruptly.

Jack opened his eyes, confused. “What--” Crutchie was turned away from him, hiding his face. Jack furrowed his brow, concerned. “Crutchie, are you oka--*Charlie,*” he said softly, his chest tightening. “Are you crying?”

Crutchie turned back towards him, looking at the floor. His eyes were sparkling with tears. Jack frowned. “Did I do something wrong?” he asked quietly, and Crutchie shook his head.
“No, no, it’s nothing. It’s dumb,” he sniffled, and hearing him upset just about shattered Jack’s heart. He reached forward, lacing their fingers together.

“Charlie,” he emphasized, using his name again, “it’s not.” Crutchie just shrugged, still not meeting Jack’s eyes.

“I just--” he started. “You’re so good. You’re so patient with me, and you listen, and I just feel like I’m not doing enough. I know this thing,” he spat, gesturing at his leg, “slows me down, and god knows it’s ugly, and I just don’t get why you waste your time with me.” He scrubbed at his eyes furiously. “You could do so much better than me. I’m just messed up, and you’re perfect, and…” he trailed off. Jack gaped, almost not believing what he was hearing.

“Okay,” he said softly, tracing his thumb over the back of Crutchie’s hand, “first of all, I am not perfect. No one is. So get that idea out of your head.” He reached over with his other hand, nudging Crutchie’s chin up until their eyes met. “Second? I’m not tolerating you, or whatever you think. You’re not an inconvenience, or a bother.” He squeezed his hand. “I’m with you because I like you a whole lot, and that means every part of you. Even the ones you don’t like as much,” he finished.

Crutchie stared. “You mean it?” he asked, his voice barely above a whisper. Jack nodded.

“Of course I do,” he answered. “Every word.”

Crutchie inhaled shakily before yanking Jack into a fierce kiss, winding a hand into his hair. Jack sighed, kissing back and trying to pour into it every ounce of love he felt for this stupid, gorgeous boy. They broke apart, resting their foreheads together and breathing in sync. “You ready to head home?” Jack asked, and Crutchie nodded.

“Yeah,” he responded, “I’m ready.”

Outside, it was getting dark out, and a light snow had begun to fall. Jack reached over and adjusted Crutchie’s hat so it was tucked securely over his ears. “Wasn’t gonna keep you warm that way,” he joked, and Crutchie laughed, his cheeks pink from the cold. Snow was settling on his shoulders and eyelashes, and he looked so gorgeous surrounded by the falling flakes that Jack felt his breath stolen from him.

They held hands on the Subway on the way home, not saying anything, just enjoying each other’s company. Jack had never felt happier.
fun fact: this was originally supposed to be the scene where they kissed for the first time but i changed it early on

LET CRUTCHIE SAY FUCK 2K18

also shoutout to the commenter who gave me the idea for jack and crutchie linking their pinkies, i died of adorableness and also i love you

wow i love mild angst

tumblr: hispanicjackkelly
how to make a bad day better

Chapter Summary

Jack has a shitty day.

Chapter Notes

wow have more meaningless fluff
also just warning you guys: my outline for this fic literally tripled in length yesterday
so get ready for one hell of a ride
am i sorry? no
muahahaha

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Crutchie hadn’t heard from Jack all day.

Sure, he and Jack led separate lives, but it was unusual for them to not text back and forth throughout the day. Crutchie was at work stocking shelves, but he kept checking his phone with concern. He’d texted Jack earlier that morning, but hadn’t gotten a response.

“Everything okay, Crutchie?” Henry asked, walking by with a stack of sweatshirts. “You look like you’re waiting to hear from someone.” Crutchie nodded.

“Yeah, it’s probably nothing. My boyfriend’s been kind of radio-silent all day, which isn’t normal.” Henry frowned.

“That blows,” he said. “Hope everything’s okay.” Crutchie smiled weakly, checking his phone yet again as he stacked his last shirt. A text popped in, finally.

[Jack] hi
[Jack] sorry

[Crutchie] hi!! Everything okay?

[Crutchie] you’ve been quiet all day, i was worried

[Jack] bad day

Crutchie frowned, his heart sinking. Jack was an optimist and a complete social butterfly; when he had bad days, they were bad. Especially if he was talking this little.

[Crutchie] oh no jack sweetheart

[Crutchie] i’m off in five minutes. Want me to come over?

[Jack] yeah

Crutchie tucked his phone in his pocket and waved down his manager. “I’ve got a bit of a minor emergency,” he fudged, wringing his hands. “Can I clock out five minutes early?” She nodded.

“Yeah, sure, no problem.” Crutchie nodded his thanks and grabbed his things, hurrying back to the apartment building and taking the elevator up to the fourth floor, dropping his things off and changing out of his work clothes before heading upstairs. He knocked on Jack’s apartment door, only to receive a text in response.

[Jack] unlocked

Crutchie cautiously opened the door, stepping inside. “Jack?” he called out quietly. When he received no response, he made his way into the living room, where he came upon Jack curled up on the couch, covered in blankets and facing the wall. “Oh, Jack,” he murmured with concern, putting his crutches down and lowering himself to the floor by the couch.
“Hi,” Jack mumbled quietly. Crutchie hummed soothingly, finding Jack’s hand under the blankets and rubbing slow circles on the back with his thumb.

“You want to talk about it?” he asked quietly. Jack shrugged.

“Bad grade on a test,” he said quietly. “And I had a panic attack. During class.” He inhaled shakily. “And after that I just couldn’t concentrate on anything. And now there’s movie night tonight, and I can’t deal with that many people.”

Crutchie shrugged. “Alright. So we won’t go.” Jack met his eyes for the first time.

“You sure?” he asked. Crutchie nodded, squeezing his hand.

“Of course I am,” he answered. He dropped Jack’s hand to pull out his phone and text Spot.

[Crutchie] jack had a shitty day so we’re skipping movie night

[Crutchie] i’m staying with him in case he needs me. our apartment’s free for you and race if you want

[Spot] alright. I’ll tell the others

[Spot] he gonna be okay?

[Crutchie] yeah, i think so.


“I mean, we can put on a movie,” he said quietly. “I just didn’t want to be around so many people.” Crutchie nodded.
“That sounds good. Have you eaten today?” he asked.


“Okay. Let me know if you want something,” he said. “Want me to sit up there with you?”

Jack nodded, shifting and sitting up so Crutchie could hoist himself up on the couch before leaning back, settling his head in the space between Crutchie’s neck and shoulder. It wasn’t how they usually sat, but Crutchie adjusted quickly, shifting so they were more comfortable and pressing a kiss to the top of Jack’s head. He reached for the remote. “What do you feel like watching?” he asked. Jack shrugged.

“Let’s watch that British drama show you like,” he suggested, his voice a little muffled by Crutchie’s sweatshirt. “The Crown?” Crutchie nodded, queuing it up.

They didn’t talk as they watched, Crutchie tracing meaningless shapes on Jack’s back with his hand to calm him down. It had been mostly dark out when Crutchie had gotten off of work, and now the room was cast in shadows, the only light coming from the city outside and from the glow of the TV. After two episodes, Jack shifted a little, pressing a kiss to the underside of Crutchie’s jaw.

“Thank you,” he whispered quietly. “For being here. With me.” Crutchie tightened his arms around Jack and pressed his nose into his hair.

“Always,” he replied, and Jack sighed, settling back down and burrowing deeper into Crutchie’s side. They didn’t say anything else; the unspoken understanding was enough.

After another episode, Jack’s breathing had evened out, and it was obvious he’d fallen asleep. Crutchie looked down at him. The worry lines in his face were gone, replaced with a calm peacefulness Crutchie rarely saw on his face. His eyelashes fluttered, his mouth slightly open, and Crutchie ran a soft hand through his hair. Still asleep, Jack made a soft noise, tightening his hold on Crutchie’s hand, and something in Crutchie’s chest just about burst.

*I think I love him.*
The thought didn’t scare Crutchie like he thought it would. He was just surprised, full of an awe that he was here at all. That this was all real. Turning off the TV, Crutchie carefully adjusted the two of them so they were both lying down, kissing the top of Jack’s head one more time before letting himself drift off to sleep, Jack warm and secure in his arms.

The next day, he woke up alone on the couch, a blanket tucked carefully around him. He sat up blearily, blinking the sleep out of his eyes. Jack stood in the kitchen, freshly showered and wearing clean pajamas. He gave Crutchie a soft smile, walking over with two mugs of coffee and setting them down. “Morning,” he greeted him softly. Crutchie smiled, sitting all the way up and kissing him gently.

“You feeling better?” he asked. Jack nodded gratefully.

“Yeah, loads. I just needed some time, I think,” he mused. He reached down and squeezed Crutchie’s hand. “Thank you again. For being patient with me. I know it wasn’t the most exciting way to spend your Friday evening.” Crutchie tsked, squeezing his hand.

“I don’t need exciting,” he chided Jack. “Just you.” Jack blushed, leaning his head on Crutchie’s shoulder.

“...Sap,” he mumbled after a moment, and Crutchie laughed, knowing that everything was okay. I love you, he almost said, but held it in. It was too soon for that. For now, they just drank their coffee as sunlight streamed into the living room, enjoying the company and the secure knowledge that when things got bad, they had each other.

Chapter End Notes

fun fact of the day: this was one of the first scenes i envisioned for this story, way back when this was literally just a figment of my imagination

oh, to be young and free of the burdening responsibilities of a multi-chapter fanfiction

this is literally going to become a fucking novel i hope y'all are ready

this chapter was nice to write!! i feel like in a lot of fanfic crutchie is always the "victim" in the scenario and jack is always the comforter, so i wanted to switch it up

#FEELINGS

tumblr: hispanicjackkelly
how to survive tech week

Chapter Summary

Jack tries to help Crutchie through tech week as best he can, and even tries to surprise him a little.

Chapter Notes

*kicks down door* i'm bACK BITCHES

dthis chapter is sweet, i love it a lot

and as a theater kid //wow// i feel this in my soul

i know ur struggle crutchie, it's roUGH

i'll try to keep updates more regular from now on!! writers block is a bitch kids

When Jack heard the scream come from the living room in Crutchie’s unmistakable voice, a thousand worst-case scenarios flashed through his head. *His leg is in serious pain. He’s fallen over and hurt something. There’s a robber in the living room. He’s been bitten by a spider.* Leaping off of his bed, Jack sprinted down the hall into the living room, expecting to find his boyfriend seriously injured or dead, but instead coming face to face with Crutchie sitting completely unharmed on the couch, looking at his computer with horror. Jack let out a shuddery sigh of relief, walking over. “Jesus, you scared me for a second. Everything okay?” Crutchie didn’t respond, seemingly paralyzed, and Jack furrowed his brow with concern. “Hey, Crutchie,” he prodded in a softer voice, putting a hand on his shoulder. “What’s wrong?”

Crutchie’s voice was small and shaky, and Jack noticed for the first time just how dark the circles under his eyes had become. “I accidentally closed Word,” he whispered, “and deleted my entire research paper. Which I’ve been working on for two weeks. And is due tomorrow.” It was tech week, Jack remembered, and Crutchie was the stage manager, meaning he was at rehearsals every night of the week in addition to going to work and taking classes. His heart broke a little, seeing just how exhausted Crutchie was. Carefully, Jack sat down and took the computer from his boyfriend’s hands.

“Okay. That’s an easy fix. Spot taught me how to recover documents like this a few years back.” With a few clicks, Jack had pulled up the document once again, all the information intact. “There.” Crutchie sighed, slumping into Jack’s side with relief.
“You’re amazing,” he mumbled, and Jack laughed quietly.

“How much more work do you have to do on this?” he asked, and Crutchie shook his head.

“None,” he said. “I just have to submit it.” Jack nodded with approval, sliding the computer back into Crutchie’s lap and watching over his shoulder as he submitted the document online. Shutting the laptop with an air of finality, Crutchie promptly plopped it onto the coffee table and slumped back onto Jack’s shoulder, closing his eyes.

“Crutchie, sweetheart,” Jack ventured slowly, “I know you’re tired, but you can’t sleep like this.” Crutchie only groaned, turning his face further into Jack’s shoulder.

“Home’s...too far,” he managed, already half-asleep. Snorting quietly, Jack rubbed his shoulder soothingly.

“You wanna stay here tonight?” he asked. Crutchie nodded into Jack’s shoulder. Carefully, so as not to disturb him, Jack took both of the crutches and propped them carefully up against the arm of the couch so no one would trip over them, before standing up. Crutchie blinked blearily at the sudden absence of his headrest only for a second before Jack hooked an arm under his knees, scooping his boyfriend up bridal-style and cradling him carefully. Crutchie sighed contentedly, pushing his face into the warm space under Jack’s chin and resting his head there. Jack noted that Crutchie was already wearing sweats and a t-shirt. That was good; those could be pajamas, and Crutchie wouldn’t have to wake up to change.

Carefully, Jack carried Crutchie down the hall to his room, setting him down gently on the bed. Somewhere in between the stages of dozing off and being fully asleep, Crutchie made a soft noise at being put down, and Jack practically melted, hurrying to change out of his jeans and climb into bed. Typing out a quick message on his phone, he shut it off and curled around Crutchie, draping an arm over his waist and nosing at the back of his neck. Crutchie was already asleep, dead to the world, but he unconsciously shifted closer, fitting to the shape of Jack’s body perfectly, like they belonged together. A perfect pair.

“I love you,” Jack whispered when he was sure his boyfriend was asleep, so softly he doubted Crutchie would have even heard it if he was awake. Now wasn’t the time for confessions. It was too early; they were still new to each other in this way, still figuring it out. Jack knew anyway. He’d known for a while, how much he loved Charlie Morris.
He kept it to himself for now.


The next morning, Jack stirred before Crutchie did, cold late February sunlight streaming into the room. His boyfriend had shifted during the night, turning inward so that he and Jack were facing each other. His hands were loosely fisted in Jack’s shirt, the freckles dusted across his face standing out and his breath coming in soft puffs. As Jack watched, a sunbeam caught the tips of Crutchie’s hair, causing it to glow golden, and every gear in Jack’s brain short-circuited for a second. *I’m dating a literal, honest-to-god angel*, he thought, reaching down between their bodies to take one of Crutchie’s hands and lace their fingers together. He peered over at the clock on his nightstand; it was eleven o’clock. *Good.*

Crutchie stirred, blinking awake, green eyes meeting Jack’s brown ones. “Hey,” he whispered, and Jack smiled, kissing him on the nose.

“Morning,” he greeted him and Crutchie smiled, before noticing how bright the room was.

“Wait.” He furrowed his brow. “What time is it?” He turned over, looking at the clock. “Shit! Jack, I gotta go, I’m way late for work—” Jack stopped him with a *shush*, pulling him back into bed and wrapping both arms around his waist.

“I texted Smalls. She took your shift,” he reassured Crutchie. “You needed the sleep. You’re exhausted.” Crutchie relaxed in his arms, letting out a long breath.

“Have I ever told you how awesome you are?” he said, and Jack grinned into the back of his neck.

“I’ll never get tired of hearing it from you, babe,” he responded easily, and Crutchie huffed out a laugh, snuggling back into Jack’s chest.

“I don’t suppose you’ve made breakfast too?” he joked, and Jack laughed.

“No, but there are leftover croissants from the bakery run I made yesterday,” he replied, “and I can go get bagels from downstairs.” Crutchie flipped around, his eyes warm and full of mirth and love, and kissed Jack slow and sweet, curling his hands again into the front of Jack’s shirt.
“I don’t deserve you,” he whispered when they broke apart, and Jack *tsked*, silencing him with another kiss.

“None of that,” he protested. “You deserve everything.” Crutchie blushed, biting down on his lip as a smile spread wider on his face, and Jack almost said it right there. *I love you.* No, he told himself, not now. They’d barely been dating two months. Instead, he kicked the blankets back and sat up, offering Crutchie a hand. “Come on, Mr. Stage Manager. Breakfast awaits us.”

~

The theater wasn’t hard to find, despite the fact that Jack had never really been to that part of the arts center, and so on Thursday after his pottery class finished up he grabbed two sandwiches and a smoothie from the deli on the bottom floor and made his way to the auditorium, where he knew Crutchie had already been in rehearsals since three o’clock that afternoon.

He slipped in quietly and sat in the back row, careful not to disrupt the scene on stage. They were touching up the blocking for one of the musical numbers, and even from the back Jack could peek up and see Crutchie’s blond head in the booth up top, calling cues and nodding his head in time to the music. Once the actors dispersed for a fifteen minute break, Jack sprinted up the stairs to the booth and came up behind Crutchie, setting the food down in front of him and kissing his cheek.

Crutchie turned, brightening when he saw Jack. “Hey!” he greeted him enthusiastically, kissing him. “*Fuck,* you’re the best,” he said, taking a sip of the smoothie and sighing. “I just have no time to leave and grab dinner.” Jack shrugged, surveying the impressive view of the auditorium from the booth.

“No trouble. Gotta make sure you’re taking care of yourself,” he reasoned. Someone walked into the booth and sat down behind the board, and Crutchie waved.

“Jack, you know Specs,” he said, and Jack looked up, meeting the familiar face and grinning.

“Hey, dude!” he greeted him, and Specs smiled, waving.

“You coming to the show?” he asked, and Jack nodded.
“Wouldn’t miss it,” he responded easily, and Crutchie nodded around a huge bite of sandwich.

“Damn right you won’t,” he muttered. “Opening night, right?” Jack nodded. Crutchie swallowed his food and frowned. “Are you sure you can’t make it to closing? I can get you in for free, you know.”

Jack struggled not to grin, thinking about the fact that he and the rest of their friends had had front row tickets to closing night reserved for almost a month now, unbeknownst to Crutchie. “I really wish I could, bud. Mom wants to have dinner that night, and the reservation can’t be revoked at this point. Restaurant rules.” A stupid lie, but it would have to do. Crutchie sighed disappointedly.

“Alright. I get it.” Jack kissed the top of his head.

“Keep working hard, pal. I gotta go, but I’ll see you tomorrow night after the show.” Crutchie smiled, kissing him again quickly before he left the booth. “See you, Specs,” Jack called before making his way out of the theater.

~

Opening night was a hit, and everything about the show went off without a hitch. Jack stood and applauded through the entire curtain call, turning and waving to the booth at the end. He met Crutchie in the lobby, waving when he saw his boyfriend emerge into the crowd.

“Hey, great job! You did amaz-- mmph.” Crutchie cut him off mid-sentence, wrapping his arms around Jack’s neck and kissing him deeply. Jack heard all their friends hollering and whistling behind them, but he couldn’t really bring himself to care.

“What was that for?” he asked breathlessly when they broke apart. Crutchie shrugged, grinning.

“I don’t know,” he responded. “I’m just happy you’re here.” Jack grinned.

“The show was really good,” he said, and Crutchie smiled.

“Yeah, they really are a fantastic bunch,” he said, referring to his actors. “They--” He paused.
“They want me to take the final bow with them, on closing night. It’s a big honor.” Jack lit up.

“Crutch, that’s fantastic! You deserve it,” he exclaimed, pulling his boyfriend in for a hug. Crutchie sighed, tucking his face into Jack’s chest.

“Wish you could be there,” he mumbled, and Jack sighed.

“I know,” he replied. “I’m sorry.” He winked at Davey over Crutchie’s head, causing him to snort with suppressed laughter. Jack grinned. He couldn’t wait for next weekend.

~

On closing night, Jack waited until he was sure Crutchie had left for the theater before telling everyone to get ready. He dressed up a little nicer than he had for opening night, combing his hair neatly and putting on a tie. He texted Race.

[Jack Kelly] everyone ready?

[Race Higgins] yeah we’re in the lobby

[Race Higgins] hurry up, lover boy, we don’t wanna be late for my roommate’s final bow

[Jack Kelly] uh huh

They made it to the theater on time, and Jack poked his head inside, spotting Crutchie quickly and ducking back out into the lobby. He shot a text to Specs.

[Jack] keep crutchie from seeing us will ya?

[Jack] we need to make it to our seats
They filed in quickly, sitting in their seats in the front row. Jack was sandwiched between Kath and Elmer, grinning. Kath laughed.

“He’s going to kill you after this,” she murmured, leaning over to him. Jack smiled.

“Oh, I hope not,” he replied. They all settled down as the auditorium darkened and the show began.

Two hours later, the show had been just as good as the first time, if not better. The ensemble ran out for their bows, and as the leads waved to the audience, Jack stood with the rest of their friends, catching the eye of the lead actor and winking. The lead - Skittery, Specs had called him? - grinned back. He knew the plan.

“Everyone,” he said into the mic on his face, which was still on, “please welcome our hardworking stage manager to the stage for his bow!” Crutchie emerged from the wings, grinning bashfully, and as he walked to the front of the stage he noticed all of his friends sitting in the front row, and locked eyes with Jack right in the middle.

His mouth dropped open.

Jack whooped, clapping harder and smiling bigger than he thought was possible, his heart swelling with pride. He felt himself choking up a little, especially as Crutchie started to cry, taking his final bow and lining up with the rest of the cast. His eyes never left Jack’s.

Out in the lobby, their group caused quite a scene waiting for Crutchie. Spot and Race were arguing animatedly about the ending of the show (Spot loved it, while Race thought it was too vague and wanted more closure.) Albert was dozing off, his head leaning on Elmer’s shoulder as his boyfriend talked with Kath and Sarah. Davey came and stood beside Jack, who was watching the stage door intently, waiting for Crutchie to emerge.

“You love him, don’t you?” Davey asked, but it wasn’t really a question. Jack turned and met his friend’s eyes, which were soft and knowing.

“Yeah,” Jack admitted softly. “I know it’s too soon. But I really, really do.” Davey shrugged,
“I don’t know about that whole ‘too soon’ thing,” he said simply. “I think when you know, you know.” He laughed quietly. “Like when I met you. You came up to me on the third day and said, ‘Davey, I think we’re gonna be friends until we’re old.’ And who was I to disagree? You certainly didn’t hold back.” He looked at Jack curiously. “Why are you holding back now?”

Jack frowned. “I wasn’t worried about losing you,” he said. “I knew.” He looked down briefly at his feet. “I can’t lose Crutchie. I can’t risk scaring him off, or being too forward.” He smiled. “He’s too good for me. I can’t blow this.” Davey sighed, briefly squeezing Jack’s arm.

“I think you’re pretty safe,” he said knowingly, then perked up. “I think he’s coming.”

Crutchie walked into the room and locked eyes with Jack, and everything else seemed to fall away. He was still crying, and Jack felt himself welling up again, walking towards Crutchie and then, unable to help himself, breaking into a run. Crutchie dropped both of his crutches on the ground as Jack reached him, wrapping his arms around Jack’s neck as Jack picked up up around the waist and spun them both, kissing him hard. He set him down after a moment, at which point Crutchie promptly buried his face in Jack’s chest, his shoulders shaking.

“You,” he said, his voice shaky and muffled by Jack’s shirt, “are the fucking worst. I hate you. I hate you forever.” Jack laughed, wrapping his arms around Crutchie and kissing the top of his head.

“No, you don’t,” he said easily, and Crutchie sighed, lifting his head to look at Jack.

“No,” he agreed, “I don’t.” Jack kissed him again, cupping his face in both hands and using his thumbs to wipe away the stray tears on Crutchie’s face.

“I’m so fucking proud of you,” he whispered like it was a confession, their foreheads pressed together. “You worked so hard on this. You deserve everything.” Crutchie sniffled again.

“Thank you,” he whispered back. “Thank you for carrying me through this whole goddamn week. I’m so fucking happy you’re in my life.” At that, Jack couldn’t help it anymore; he started to cry, and Crutchie started crying harder, and there they stood, two boys holding each other and crying in the middle of the theater lobby.
A gentle hand on his shoulder alerted Jack to Davey’s presence. “You wanna get going so we can go out and celebrate?” Davey asked gently. He smiled warmly at Crutchie. “Great job, Crutch. The show was fantastic.” Crutchie smiled, wiping the tears from his face and bending down to grab his crutches.

“Thanks, Davey,” he said gratefully. He looked at Jack. “Ready to go?”

Jack grinned easily, linking their pinkies together. *I love you.* “Lead the way.”

Chapter End Notes

hope you enjoyed!! this was one of my favorite chapters to write so far

disclaimer: i haven't seen the newsies '92 movie and have no fucking idea who skittery is, i just needed a name

sorry

not

my campaign to #letcrutchie sayfuck2k18 continues and thrives. please join me

next chapter: oooh perhaps a KATH INTERLUDE? ;)

kudos and comments make me so so happy guys you have no fucking idea

tumblr: hispanicjackkelly
how to not screw up date night (kath's interlude)

Chapter Summary

Kath and Sarah, date night and breakfast, and a discussion about their neighbors.

Chapter Notes

catching up on all the writing i didn't do over this break
(i'll also have time to get some done during exams! yay!)
have a kath interlude! i've never written from her POV, this was so delightful
enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Katherine Plumber-Pulitzer was exhausted.

Debate team had run long, and some idiot from the school they were scrimmage-debating with was absolutely convinced that global warming was a hoax, so Davey and Katherine had spent extra time crushing him in a debate. Which had been fun and all, but now she was tired, and it was date night. She felt bad, because she knew Sarah had been planning to cook dinner for the both of them, but Kath was just too physically and mentally exhausted to do anything. Saying goodbye to Davey as he continued up the stairs, looking as tired as she felt, Kath unlocked the apartment door and dragged herself inside.

She stumbled into the living room and flopped facedown on the couch, groaning loudly. “Kath?” she heard her girlfriend call from somewhere in the apartment, but she didn’t respond, too tired to move. Soft padding footsteps indicated Sarah’s entrance to the living room, and after a moment Kath felt the couch dip as Sarah sat down, pulling Kath’s head into her lap. “Hey, babe,” she said by way of greeting, running nimble fingers through Kath’s hair where her ponytail had fallen out.


“Good,” she hummed. “I only had one class today.” She smiled. “And it’s date night!” Kath groaned apologetically.
“Saz,” she sighed, “I love you, and I love date night, but I’m so tired and—” Sarah cut her off with a gentle shhh.

“I know,” she said patiently. “Which is why I have Chinese delivery on the way and NCIS queued up on Netflix.” Kath gasped, looking up at her girlfriend hopefully.

“Are you serious?” she asked, and Sarah grinned.

“I figured you’d be tired,” she explained, “and therefore regular date night wouldn’t be too much fun.” She patted Kath’s cheek affectionately. “We can do breakfast tomorrow or something; we both have Optical Science tomorrow in the afternoon, but that’s our only class, right?”

Kath nodded. “Yeah. God, I still don’t know why we chose optical science as our elective,” she mused, rolling over and off the couch to go change out of her debate clothes. Sarah made an offended noise.

“I think it’s interesting!” she declared. Kath snorted, quickly stripping out of her polo and khakis and changing into pajamas. By the time she emerged from their room, Sarah had sprinted down to the lobby to get the food, arriving back triumphantly with her arms full of white takeout boxes. Clapping playfully, Kath leapt onto the couch, settling down into the cushions and queuing up Netflix on the television. Sarah sat next to her, kissing her cheek, and Kath smiled happily.

“Love you, Saz,” she sighed, leaning into her girlfriend’s side. Sarah hummed.

“Love you too,” she responded.

~

The next morning, after Kath was considerably more well-rested, they walked down the block to the diner for a late breakfast, chatting animatedly and huddling into their scarves and coats as a freezing New York wind whipped down the block. It may have been the beginning of March, but the city seemed to refuse to let go of the idea that it was winter; hell, they were supposed to get snow within the next few days. They entered the warm diner with relief, stripping off their layers and settling into a booth, perusing the familiar menus. Suddenly, Sarah flicked Kath on the arm, her eyes dancing with mirth.
“Look,” she whispered conspiratorially, leaning closer across the table, “behind you. Jack and Crutchie. They’re on a date.” Kath turned carefully, not wanting to look suspicious, and sure enough, there they were: Jack and Crutchie, cuddling in a corner booth as they studied the menu together, oblivious to the others in the restaurant. They obviously hadn’t seen the girls come in.

Kath smiled. “Cute,” she murmured, turning back to face Sarah. “I’m so glad they finally got it together,” she huffed. “I wasn’t sure how much longer I was going to be able to handle the two of them pining hopelessly over each other.” Sarah rolled her eyes in agreement.

“You got that right,” she affirmed, risking another glance at the happy couple behind them. “It’s really good for the both of them. They’re a good pair.” Kath nodded.

“It’s so interesting,” she mused, “seeing Jack, and how he acts around Crutchie. It’s so different from the way he’s been in any other relationship since I’ve met him.” Sarah nodded, pausing as they placed their orders before turning back to Kath.

“Oh, for sure,” she agreed. “You know I knew Jack in high school; hell, I’ve known Jack since we were all in the third grade. He and Davey were practically inseparable.” Kath nodded as Sarah continued. “And he’s always been such a flirt, you know? Even when he dated other people - and he was never in a long-term relationship - he was always jokingly flirting with other people, the whole deal.” Sarah shook her head with a small smile. “Not anymore,” she said. “He’s only got eyes for Crutchie. Has since they met.” Kath grinned.

“Did I ever tell you we almost dated?” she asked. “Me and Jack.” Sarah’s eyes bugged, and she let out a startled giggle.

“Really?” she asked, incredulous, and Kath nodded, laughing.

“Yeah,” she responded. “Freshman year, when we were still new friends. I knew I was pan, but wasn’t sure what my preferences were, and I knew Jack liked me. So we kissed once, maybe twice?” She shrugged. “It ended pretty amicably, because we both figured out pretty quickly we were better as friends.” She snorted. “I still can’t believe it, thinking back. How much different would our lives be?” Sarah’s expression warmed, and she reached across the table to grab Kath’s hand.

“Regardless, I’m glad it didn’t work out,” she said. They both looked at Jack and Crutchie again, completely absorbed in each other. “For everyone’s sake,” Sarah added, and Kath nodded in agreement.
Their food arrived at that point, and they eagerly dug in to eggs and fruit and toast, indulging in hot drinks and ignoring the chilly weather outside; they had plenty of time before their next class to linger, and both of them intended to do just that. Almost thirty minutes went by before Kath felt a tap on her shoulder and turned to see Crutchie leaning against the wall of the booth, Jack still at the table waiting for their waiter to take the check. Kath grinned brightly. “Hey, Crutchie!” she greeted him, pulling him into a quick hug. He gave her a playfully suspicious look, quirking an eyebrow. “I cannot believe,” he accused her, “that you and Sarah have been here this whole time and not even thought to say hi to us!” Jack joined them at this point, tutting with mock shame as he wrapped a casual arm around Crutchie’s waist. Sarah snorted. “Well, we’re on a date,” she explained, “and so were you guys. You looked like you were having a nice time, and we didn’t want to disturb you.” Kath nodded. “Yeah, I mean, you guys didn’t even notice us come in,” she added. “Too busy making heart eyes at each other.” Jack blushed, looking at Crutchie fondly, and there it was again. The old Jack Kelly never looked like that at anyone. Crutchie just shrugged, smiling happily. “That’s fair,” he admitted. “Are you guys hosting movie night this week, or is it me and Race? I can’t remember.” “It’s you and Race,” Sarah answered. “Davey and Albert had it last week, so you guys are next.” Crutchie nodded. “Cool. I’ll have to remember to buy snacks,” he noted. He elbowed Jack gently. “And you, mister, have to make brownies again. It’s been too long.” Jack bowed. “Your wish is my command,” he declared, and Crutchie laughed, kissing his cheek. He turned back to the girls. “Well, enjoy your date, ladies,” he said. “I’m sure we’ll see you sooner rather than later.” Sarah squeezed his hand, and they both waved to Jack before the pair exited the diner. Kath noticed their pinkies linked and awwed. “Have you noticed they’ve started linking fingers when they walk?” she asked Sarah. “Since they can’t hold hands, because of his crutches.” Sarah’s mouth dropped open.
“That is so cute,” she cooed. She picked up her fork and snatched a bite of Kath’s home fries, ignoring her protests.

“You have your own food!” Kath exclaimed, outraged, before promptly stealing a slice of Sarah’s apples. Sarah gasped.

“You can not steal a whole slice,” she hissed, “that is not fair.” Kath only shrugged innocently, the fruit long gone.

They squabbled and chatted for another hour as outside, a quiet snow began to fall.

Chapter End Notes

sorry that evolved into a chapter about jack and crutchie oops
i mean they are the main focus of the fic
oh well
i'll write more newsbians eventually
next chapter will be back to your regularly scheduled programming
please comment if you liked it!! comments mean the WORLD to authors, you have no idea. even if it's small.
tumblr: hispanicjackkelly
how to host movie night four ways

Chapter Summary

Four movie nights at four apartments.

Chapter Notes

GUESS WHO'S BACK FROM HER RIDICULOUS HIATUS

I'm so sorry for neglecting this fic I really am I have no excuse other than I wasn't feeling the inspiration.

But I'm back !!! Back on my BULLSHIT I love these boys and I love this story

In other news, I just broke 100 pages in Google Docs so there's no going back now

jesus crust I need help

but I'm back and happy to have an update for you guys! more fluff, but it's enjoyable to write, so I'm not sorry

See the end of the chapter for more notes

At Race and Crutchie’s apartment, movie nights had been described aptly by Davey as “organized chaos.”

They were the best type of roommates, Crutchie liked to think, because they were just similar enough to get along like a house on fire and just different enough to run a functioning household. Crutchie was organized, and good at remembering things like paying bills and talking to the landlord; Race was better at smaller things, like cooking meals that weren’t ramen (Crutchie was slowly detaching himself from his takeout obsession) and doing laundry. They were a good team, Crutchie thought fondly as they cleaned up the living room before everyone arrived. Race caught his eye and grinned, shimmerying a little to the music as he fluffed one of the couch pillows. Crutchie smiled.

“You excited to see Spot again?” he asked. Spot had been away on a research trip for two weeks up in Maine, and while it wasn’t far, Crutchie could tell it had been hard on the both of them. Race attempted to look nonchalant, but couldn’t hide his happy smile.

“Yeah,” he admitted. “I’ve missed him. It’s been weird, not seeing him for this long.” Crutchie nodded.
“Yeah, that makes sense,” he responded, before a knock sounded at the door. He winked at Race. “Wonder who it is?”

Race shrugged. “Probably Kath and Sarah, dude, they’re always early.” Crutchie launched himself across to the door and yanked it open to reveal not Kath and Sarah, but Jack and Spot, the former with a tupperware of brownies and the latter bouncing on his toes like a kid on Christmas. Grinning, Crutchie stepped aside and let Spot walk in. Race, who hadn’t even been paying attention, looked up and let out a startled yell of delight. “Spot!”

Crutchie and Jack laughed as Race leaped over the back of the couch and tackled Spot in a hug, burying his face in his shoulder. Spot giggled a little, wrapping strong arms around Race and tucking his nose into Race’s shoulder. All of a sudden, he let out a small sniffle, and Jack laughed startledly.

“Spot,” he asked almost incredulously, “are you crying?” Sure enough, Spot’s shoulders were shaking almost imperceptibly, and his eyes were red.

“No,” he snapped, “shut up.” Race pulled back, framing Spot’s face in both hands and taking in his tear-streaked cheeks.

“Aw, Spot,” he exclaimed, his own voice breaking a little before he kissed Spot deeply. Jack rolled his eyes good-naturedly, walking towards Crutchie.

“I’ll let them have a few minutes,” he murmured, pecking Crutchie on the lips in greeting. “Hi. I brought brownies,” he said, holding up the pan. Crutchie grinned maniacally, clapping his hands a little.

“Everyone else should be here soon,” he said, right as Davey, Albert, and Elmer walked through the door to Spot and Race still kissing in front of them.

“Aw, guys, come on, gross!”

Once everyone arrived, they swarmed into the kitchen, where Race had skipped a class that afternoon to make pasta. They squished together onto couches and chairs and pillows on the floor with heaping bowls of buttery noodles laden with sauce and cheese and dipping chunks of garlicky bread, chatting animatedly. Albert clapped his hands twice, everyone quieting down to listen.
“Hosts, what’s our movie tonight?” he asked expectantly, and Crutchie yelped, setting his pasta down on the coffee table and hurrying to stand. He snatched the movie up gleefully from where he’d set it aside earlier.

“We,” he announced, “are watching *Begin Again.*” Most people, as Crutchie had expected, had never heard of it, but Elmer gasped.

“I *love* that movie,” he sighed, and Crutchie’s eyes widened.

“You’ve seen it?” he asked, incredulous, and Elmer nodded, his eyes shining.

“This is one of my favorite movies *ever.* I used one of the songs as my go-to audition song back when I did more theater.” Crutchie grinned widely, popping the movie into the DVD player before sitting on the couch next to Elmer, both of them raving about the movie over their bowls of pasta.

Albert leaned over from where he was sitting on Elmer’s other side and whisper-shouted to Jack, “I think our boyfriends might be leaving us for each other.” Jack grinned, putting a hand to his chest like he was wounded and stretching the other one delicately out to Albert.

“I suppose we’ll just have to comfort each other,” he sighed dramatically, and Albert nodded solemnly, taking his hand. The four of them lasted around five seconds before dissolving into laughter, and Crutchie stretched up to press a kiss to the corner of Jack’s mouth.

“Sorry, pal,” he said, “you’re stuck with me.” Jack rolled his eyes, draping an arm over Crutchie’s shoulders.

“Somehow I can live with that,” he answered.

Around halfway through the movie, when one of the songs came on, Jack perked up. “Oh, I’ve heard this before,” he murmured. “On the radio. I didn’t know it was from this.” Crutchie nodded, never taking his eyes off the screen. Only when he heard soft singing from beside him did he whip his head around to stare incredulously at Jack, who blushed. “What?” he asked defensively, and Crutchie just stared.
“You can sing,” he murmured in awe, and Jack shrugged.

“Most people can,” he defended himself. Crutchie shook his head.

“But you’re good,” he continued, and Jack blushed a deeper shade of pink.

“I’m not that good,” he protested, but Sarah helpfully butted in from the floor.

“He used to play piano,” she piped up, and Davey nodded.

“And guitar,” he mentioned, and Jack glared daggers at both of them. Crutchie’s grin widened.

“Jack, you should audition for something,” came Race’s offhand comment from where he sat on the armchair, Spot almost fully on top of him in his lap. Crutchie clapped gleefully. Jack looked ready to commit mass homicide.

“I’m glad you all think this is funny,” he hissed, and Crutchie patted his arm sympathetically as everyone calmed down and payed attention to the movie again.

“Don’t feel pressured to do anything,” he assured Jack, serious now. “But sing for me sometime?”

Jack smiled at him bashfully. “Anything for you.”

~

Sarah and Kath’s movie nights were simply organized. There was a good variety of wine and beer, there were chips and salsa and snacks set up when they arrived, everything looked genuinely clean instead of “I-shoved-everything-into-my-bedroom-closet” clean, and they’d had the movie picked out well in advance. It was neat; it was orderly; and Kath and Sarah looked way too suspicious, Crutchie thought as they stood up to announce the movie.

“We,” Sarah said, looking far too satisfied with herself, “are watching…” she drummed on the coffee table as Kath whipped the remote out from behind her back and turned the TV on to the title
Ouija, it read. Crutchie, Race, and Elmer whooped with delight. Davey let out a weak noise of terror. Albert sank slowly into the couch. Jack swallowed audibly. Spot’s face was unmoving, but his knuckles were white. Sarah cackled with delight, high-fiving Kath as the both of them piled onto the couch with everyone else. Jack stuck himself between Davey and Crutchie, narrowing his eyes at Crutchie, who grinned cheekily.

“You scared, Jackie-boy?” Race called from the other end of the couch, Spot already burrowed into his side like a cat.

“No,” Jack snapped. “Why would I be scared? That’s stupid.”

“Ah,” Kath sighed, “the fragility of the male ego never fails to amaze me.” Crutchie patted Jack sympathetically on the arm.

“Don’t worry, babe,” he reassured him, “I’ll protect you from the scary board game.” Davey, despite his white face, managed a laugh.


“I’m not ashamed to admit it,” he said nonchalantly. “I’m fucking terrified right now.” Jack fumed, burrowing back further into the couch cushions and leaning into Davey’s side as the movie started. Shrugging, Crutchie leaned over to Elmer, who already had Albert’s face hidden in his shoulder, as the movie started.

“So” he whispered, “which one of these fucking idiots do you think dies first?” Elmer laughed.

“Definitely her,” he said, pointing to one of the female main characters. “But her friend’s gonna be the one to make the first really stupid decision.”

They all managed to be relatively quiet until the first jump scare, which elicited such a high-pitched shriek from Jack that at first Crutchie wasn’t sure it had even come from him. He turned to find Jack and Davey practically on top of each other, white-faced with terror. Spot had curled up into such a small ball Crutchie almost couldn’t see him anymore, and Albert was shaking like a leaf. In the middle of it all, Race, Elmer, Crutchie, and the girls were cackling loudly, watching the
events transpire on screen.

“Oh my god,” Crutchie wheezed, “that was disgusting.” Sarah snorted.

“I totally called that,” she muttered. Elmer and Race, who had actually betted on who would die first, exchanged dollar bills, giggling quietly at the overdramatic gore. Jack groaned, hiding his face in Davey’s shoulder and scrabbling around on the couch for Crutchie’s hand.


“What?” he asked, a smile spreading across his face. Sarah smirked.

“I used to force them to watch scary movies with me all the time,” she said. “And by the end, Jack and Davey would always be, like, on top of each other in terror.” She grinned. “It was fucking adorable. I have pictures somewhere.” Crutchie practically collapsed on top of Race laughing, Jack groaning as Davey blushed beet red.

“Sarah,” Jack muttered, his voice now muffled by Davey’s shoulder, “you really have got to stop feeding Crutchie embarrassing information about me.” Crutchie rolled his eyes affectionately, leaning over and nudging Jack’s face away from Davey’s shoulder so he could kiss him on the cheek.

“It’s cute,” he reassured him. “I don’t think any less of you for it.” Jack smiled, a real, genuine smile, and the moment lasted exactly two more seconds before someone else died on screen and Jack and Davey both let out inhumane shrieks of terror. Behind Crutchie, Albert cursed loudly, hiding his face in Elmer’s shoulder, and Spot somehow burrowed even further underneath Race, squeezing him like a lifeline.

Crutchie just snorted, squeezing Jack’s hand and reaching for another handful of popcorn.

~

Jack and Spot’s movie nights were, well, they were something.
When they walked in, Spot burst into the living room, carrying a basket of laundry and looking distressed.

“Oh, thank God,” he huffed. “Jack!” he hollered. “Race ‘n Crutchie are here!”

Jack wandered out of the kitchen holding a batter-covered spatula, his hair sticking up in all directions. “Jesus,” Crutchie muttered, walking over and smoothing down his hair hurriedly, brushing what looked like flour off of Jack’s forehead. Jack smiled.

“Hey there,” he grinned, and Crutchie rolled his eyes.

“You’re a human disaster,” he admonished Jack, snatching the spatula away and walking into the kitchen. “Are the brownies in the oven?”

Jack nodded. “Yeah.” Crutchie promptly dumped the empty mixing bowl in the sink and started rinsing it.
“Good. Go brush your hair. You’re a hot mess.” Jack sidled up behind him, wrapping both arms around his waist and humming.

“A hot mess, huh?” He grinned into Crutchie’s shoulder, earning himself a kick in the shins.

“Go get yourself cleaned up. I hate you.” Jack snorted, but obliged, leaving the kitchen to make himself more presentable.

Around thirty minutes later, the kitchen and Jack were both considerably cleaner, and Spot and Race had somehow managed to make the living room look presentable. Crutchie swung back and forth absently on his crutches, scanning the DVD cases stacked on a small shelf as Race scrolled through Netflix. Jack came in carrying a large plate of brownies, and Crutchie launched himself forward, grinning as Jack playfully held the plate out of reach.

“Nuh-uh,” Jack admonished him. “Not until everyone else gets here.” Crutchie groaned, headbutting Jack half heartedly on the chest as he turned to Race. “You can stop scrolling, Racer,” Jack added, “we’ve already got a movie picked.” Race hummed in acknowledgement, tossing down the remote and making grabby hands at Spot as he wandered out of the kitchen. Jack put down the plate of brownies on the table as Spot draped himself across Race. Crutchie leaned over and wrapped both arms around Jack’s waist, burying his face in his chest and closing his eyes, and they stood for a few minutes relaxing until the first knock at the door indicated the arrival of everyone else.

Once they’d all wandered in and settled in the living room (and Crutchie had finally grabbed a brownie,) Jack wandered in with a DVD case and cleared his throat. “We,” he announced, “are watching Tangled.” Crutchie and Race gasped in unison. Albert furrowed his brow.

“All the Disney movies you could have picked, and you chose Tangled?” he asked, and Jack narrowed his eyes.

“It’s Jack’s favorite movie,” Spot interjected, “and I think everyone here has seen it and liked it, so I’d be careful what you say about it, Albie.” Jack smirked.

“Spot loves it too, he just won’t admit it,” he added, and Spot made an offended noise.

“I tolerate it,” he corrected Jack, “because you like it so much.” Race shook his head.
“Stop lying, Spot,” he said with a grin. “Last time we watched it, it made him cry.”

“And the time before that,” Jack added helpfully. Spot was bright red and looked ready to murder the both of them, so Crutchie quickly clapped his hands together.

“Shall we get started?” he asked, and everyone nodded in agreement. Jack put in the movie and came to sit on the couch, pulling Crutchie into his lap and pressing a kiss to his hair as it started.

They were around a third of the way in when Kath seemed to come to a realization. “Guys,” she said, “Jack and Crutchie are definitely Flynn and Rapunzel.” Everyone laughed, and Crutchie simply nodded with satisfaction.

“I think you’re cute enough to be Flynn,” he noted to Jack, patting him on the cheek affectionately as Jack spluttered indignantly. “And I’m definitely Rapunzel,” he added to everyone. “I’d definitely end up saving Jack’s ass and inheriting the ruling rights to an entire kingdom.” Elmer snorted, and Jack just sighed, hooking his chin over Crutchie’s shoulder.

“Yeah,” he admitted, “you probably would.” Davey piped up.

“Guys,” he said, “this means Race is the tiny chameleon, right?”

The room escalated into an uproar of debates as Race protested, Spot laughing so hard he almost couldn’t breathe. Crutchie had to pause the movie for a few minutes while they collected themselves before settling back into Jack’s chest, grinning as Jack pressed a kiss to his cheek.

“My dashing hero,” Jack whispered to him, and Crutchie beamed.

They were all silent, captivated watching as Rapunzel cradled Flynn in her arms. “You were my new dream,” he whispered on screen as he lay dying, and then Crutchie’s attention was pulled from the screen by a small choked noise. Beside him on the couch, Spot was curled into Race’s shoulder as he watched, face red and shoulders shaking almost imperceptibly.

“Spot,” he said softly in disbelief, “are you crying?”
“No,” Spot snapped, but his voice was thick with tears. Race just smiled, pulling him closer and rubbing his back soothingly. Crutchie turned his attention back to both the movie and to Jack, who wasn’t even trying to hide his tears. He allowed himself to gaze at Jack fondly, grazing a thumb over the tears on his cheeks, and he almost slipped up and said it out loud right there. *I love you.* He bit down on his lip and shifted in Jack’s lap so he could rest his head on his shoulder, focusing on the movie. *Not yet, Charlie. Not yet.*

~

Movie nights at Davey and Albert’s were somewhat normal, as far as *normal* with their group of friends went. *Normal* meant ordering eight large pizzas, arriving dressed in their pajamas, and having a semi-marathon of *Star Wars* movies.

They’d all had long days, and everyone agreed this needed to be a more relaxed movie night. By the time everyone was settled and had eaten their fill of pizza, they were onto *The Empire Strikes Back* and things had become relaxed. Sarah and Kath were lying on the floor under a blanket, fully invested in the movie. Race and Spot took over one armchair, tangling together like they always did and trading soft kisses, completely absorbed in each other; in the other chair, Elmer was practically draped across Albert, fast asleep as Albert ran a hand through his hair and absently watched the movie. On the couch, Jack had draped his legs over Davey and put his head in Crutchie’s lap, dozing on and off during *A New Hope*. He’d since fallen asleep; Crutchie played with his hair, watching with mild interest as Han and Leia argued on screen.

When he was awake, Jack was a constant flurry of movements, eyes bright and full of mirth, always doing *something*. Asleep, it was a different story; all of the worry lines vanished from his face, and he looked peaceful, like he didn’t have a care in the world. Crutchie knew all about Jack’s past, and the abusive environment he’d come from that fostered panic attacks and trust issues. *I hope he feels safe with me,* Crutchie thought, reaching down and taking one of Jack’s hands, running his thumb over the back.

As if he could read Crutchie’s thoughts, Davey made eye contact with him and smiled gently. “He’s different around you, you know,” Davey whispered, careful not to wake anyone who was asleep or talk over the movie. Crutchie furrowed his brow.

“Is that a good thing?” he asked, confused. Davey nodded, looking at Jack fondly and running a hand through his hair. Jack hummed but didn’t stir, curling closer and letting out a little sigh.

“Yeah,” he answered. “You bring out something special in him. He’s real open. Not the way he is around strangers or even some of our friends.” Davey shrugged, meeting Crutchie’s eyes. “It’s like he feels safe enough to be his full self around you. He trusts you a lot.” Crutchie turned red, looking down at Jack fondly and running a hand through his hair. Jack hummed but didn’t stir, curling closer and letting out a little sigh.
“I just don’t want to take anyone’s place,” he admitted. “It’s so obvious how important you are to Jack - I mean, you’re his best friend.” He met Davey’s eyes. “And believe me, I’m so glad he likes me. I l--” Crutchie cut himself off. “I like him so much. But I don’t want to feel like I’m replacing your role as his best friend or getting in the way of that.” Davey smiled.

“Of course you’re not,” he reassured Crutchie kindly. He sighed. “Look, I’ve known I was ace since middle school, and aro since high school. And Jack - he’s a hopeless romantic. I’ve always known he was going to meet someone and want to be with them, and it’d be different from what we had.” Davey smiled. “I’m glad it’s you.” Crutchie smiled back.

“Really?” he asked, and Davey nodded.

“Yeah,” he replied. “You’re a good egg. You and Jack both.” He looked at Jack’s legs splayed in his lap, patting his knee affectionately. “You compliment each other.”


“You love him.” It wasn’t a question. Crutchie briefly considered lying, but one look at Davey’s sure, honest expression and he knew it’d be futile. He knew the truth already.

“Yeah,” Crutchie admitted quietly, looking down at Jack. “Yeah, I really do.” He took one of Jack’s hands between his own, holding it carefully. “It feels too early to say it. I don’t want to ruin anything,” he confessed. Davey shrugged.

“Tell him,” he simply responded. “I promise nothing bad will come of it.”

Crutchie nodded, focusing back on the movie as best he could. “Thank you,” he whispered to Davey, who smiled.

“Of course.”

Chapter End Notes
Well, things will. Go places from here.

Let's just say I hope you enjoyed the honeymoon phase because things from here will start to get just a tad wild.

Sorry not sorry. :)))

Kudos and comments if you're happy I'm back/enraged I have been absent! Thank you guys for sticking with the story.

tumblr: hispanicjackkelly

End Notes

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