on pointe
by tossertozier (rednosedhair)

Summary

eddie was a freshman at boston university of the arts, majoring in dance with a concentration in ballet. he went to sleep early, woke up earlier & took nothing for granted.

he fucking hated his dorm neighbors, loud, obnoxious idiots who got drunk all the time. they didn't even know where the library on campus was. he didn't have any idea how the three of them, especially the one with curly hair, even GOT into that school.

“piano prodigy,” the tall one explained “got magic fingers”

eddie nearly punched him

& he didn't believe him, nobody on their floor believed richie tozier could have been a prodigy of anything, especially when he slept through midterms & mixed up the dates for finals. when eddie heard the gossip he was relieved, he was overjoyed. he thought they’d kick him out & he would finally get some goddamned peace and quiet on his floor - and more time to rehearse.

until, first day of class in january when his teacher walked in with an overzealous expression “class, we have a student who will be joining us this semester for an extra credit opportunity. please welcome your new rehearsal pianist, richie tozier.”

oh.

oh no.

Notes
catch me, making up a university, because i couldn't find one to suit my needs LMAO. WELCOME ALL TO THIS MESS!!!

See the end of the work for more notes.
“Hey,” Eddie Kaspbrak’s roommate, Ben, spoke loudly to him, over the pounding music next door, “I think there’s a party going on.” The music had easily been going for an hour.

Eddie gave him the flattest look he could muster. He was sitting on the floor on his yoga mat. He was trying to get his calves to calm the hell down. It had been an incredibly long day in the studio after an impossibly long week. Eddie was, naively, looking forward to going to bed early.

Naive being the operable word, because he was next-door neighbors with Richie Tozier. Also, Bill Denbrough and Mike Hanlon. But the biggest problem was Tozier, a loud-mouthed wanna-be radio star with a penchant for playing loud music incredibly late at night.

“How do you think that’s where Stan is?” Ben asked quietly, moving from his desk to his bed. Mind you, he didn’t have to go far. Their triple dorm room was maybe the size of Eddie’s bicep. Stan’s corner was impeccably neat, and very rarely occupied. Ben’s was in the corner, so Stan didn’t have to look at it. Ben tried, but he always had these post-cards and notes pinned up on the walls with the odd picture, and his bed never managed to stay made. Eddie considered his corner to be somewhere in the middle of the scale of neat-ness. He had a dance bag that was always a disaster, but his blue bed-spread stayed made.

“Doubt it,” Eddie finished rubbing the cooling lotion into his calves. He cracked his knuckles. “He hates Tozier as much as I do.”

“I don’t think that’s possible.” Ben joked. He was tapping his fingers nervously to the beat of the song, loud and raucous, some underground shit that was noisy to make noise. “If you want,” he watched Eddie begin his nightly cool-down stretches, “I could, like, ask them to turn it down-”

“Ben, if you want to go then go.” He turned his body out, keeping his hips square, taking a deep breath. “I could care less.” He didn’t appreciate Ben’s effort at nobility in not leaving by himself. But Eddie, truly, did not care. If everyone else in that school wanted to waste their time getting wasted, so be it. If they could have just done it quieter... That’s all Eddie wanted.

“You should come with me!”

“That,” Eddie almost fell on to his mat, “is not happening.” He glanced up at Ben’s pitiful face and sighed. “I have dance tomorrow.”

“You don’t have dance, you practice by yourself at 8 in the morning. No one makes you do that.”

Eddie Kaspbrak had been accepted into the Boston University of the Arts, and he wasn’t there to waste his fucking time. He woke up at five a.m. daily, party next door or not. He made straight A’s. He would be the first sophomore to land a principal role, so help him God. He didn’t care what anyone had to say about it. Ben, who really just hated the alarms, or the roommates next door, who Eddie had fought with nightly over noise for the first six weeks of school. Their RA was, apparently, absolutely useless and believed in cultivating a relaxed culture and self-care. Which was bullshit. Eddie didn’t need to relax, he needed to rehearse. In the morning. Which was why music was a fucking problem.

Eddie sat up with a huffy little breath. The music, if it was even possible, got louder. “That’s it.” He announced, standing up. Ben sighed, because Eddie always said he was not going over there, and always did anyway.
“Are you gonna change?” Ben asked, “should I put on shoes?”

“Yes, you should put on shoes.” Eddie shuddered at the thought of walking on dorm floors barefoot. “Why would I change?” Eddie asked, stretching in his place. He squinted when his hair fell into his eye. It was annoying, he needed to get it cut, but barbers weren’t open by the time he left the studio in the night most of the time.

“I don’t know.” Ben shrugged, putting on his converse without unlacing the laces. Eddie had no idea how he managed that one. “I think your...leggings are fine, and all but-”

Eddie was wearing what he wore to class. Tights, athletic pants, and a white t-shirt. It was the uniform for technical ballet classes. He still had his dance belt on, because he just preferred to whip everything off when he showered before bed. It was a perfectly acceptable outfit. He raised his eyebrows.

"You know what, forget I said anything," Ben stood up, kicking Eddie's street shoes, a nice pair of boat shoes, in his direction, "let's just go."

The party, like a gaping, infectious wound, had spread, and multiple doors in their hall were open. People were spilling out in between them. Eddie grabbed Ben’s wrist for support, and ignored his chuckle of amusement. There were rooms with snacks and rooms with booze and every room had a plethora of people. The music, though, the music was only coming from one room. Eddie shut his eyes, swallowed his pride, and took a deep breath. He had fought Tozier before, and he could, and would, do it again. He marched in with a brave face. On the inside of the triple next door, right by the closet, was, surprisingly, Stan.

Stan was wearing a fucking sweater vest to a college dorm party. He was surrounded by one or two people, Eddie didn’t know them. He dragged Ben up to them, trying to play it cool. He didn’t want to be the freak of their floor, but he did want to freak out, because why the fuck was their RA letting this happen? Eddie learned that he wasn't within a solid forty five seconds of being there. It had gotten out that the RA forgot to file for absence that night, and just left anyway, because it was his girlfriend’s sorority whatever and he enjoyed his life without being mince meat.

“Do you want a drink?” Stan asked, standing up from the door. His shirt was un-tucked a little bit in the front. Eddie tucked it back in. Stan grinned at him gratefully, fondly.

The girl next to him, dark hair that faded into blue and purple lipstick, added in helpfully “I can get you one next doo-”

“No thanks,” Eddie finished, not trying to interrupt her but succeeding anyway. Ben nodded at her and thanked her, and followed her out of the room. Stan squinted at Eddie.

“So...” Eddie tried to be relaxed, act cool, and leaned his hand on the wall. “Music’s...” he tried to frame his comment in a neutral way, “pretty loud, huh?”

Stan snorted, taking a sip of his drink. “Do you want me to ask them to turn it down?” He asked him with an amused smirk, staring over the rim of his cup.

“You?!” Eddie nearly did a double take. If Eddie thought he bickered with their neighbors, Stan had started an all-out war. Especially with Tozier. And Tozier always controlled the music at those things. Always.

Stan raised an eyebrow.
“You’ll ask-” and Eddie did it, finally spared a look in his direction. He was tall and obnoxious and his clothes were even moreso. Currently, he was wearing jeans with the ankles rolled up so you could see banana socks, and filthy sneakers. He had on too many layers for a room that warm, a plaid shirt over a shirt that said “WHO THE FUCK IS JESUS” which Eddie might have laughed at if it were anyone else. His dark hair was too long, it hung over his face as he hunched over a computer on what could only be his bed with Beverly Marsh. She, as far as Eddie could tell, was not wearing pants. They were smoking something, and laughing loudly.

“Richie?” Stan asked. He then shrugged. Eddie assumed his face must have been entirely baffled, because Stan responded to it next. “Eddie, I’m literally one of his favorite people.” Eddie thought he knew some things to be true. You separate lights from darks. You put ketchup on the side of fries, not on top. The sun rises in the east. Stan hated Richie. He felt like someone broke into his home at midnight, told him the sky wasn’t blue, that his perception of blue wasn’t something anyone else shared, then took a piss in his flower pot.

“You fight constantly,” was Eddie’s only counter argument.

“Oh, well, yeah, he’s the worst person in the world.” Stan downed the rest of his drink, sharing a knowing look with the guy next to him. “I’d still, like, kill someone for him.” He threw his cup behind Eddie into the garbage bin. A clean shot. “Wanna come ask?”

“I’ll stay here.” Eddie squeaked out.

Stan laughed again, “okay.” He shrugged, he had done that a lot. Eddie wondered if his shoulders were feeling okay, “you do that.”

Eddie did the best he could possibly achieve at looking like a person who was interested in the conversation he was having and not one less than ten feet away. He tried to make eye-contact, and only let his eyes flick over to that bed occasionally. He asked him about his major, which was writing, and also boring. When his eyes flicked over again, he realized he was getting watched by Tozier. His face was remarkably similar to that of a lion that sees a sheep. Except, a lion was far too cool an animal to describe Tozier. Maybe, like, an otter that saw a ...whatever otters eat. Otters dieting habits aside, Eddie practically jumped back into his conversation with Todd...Tim, or something like that. It was rather embarrassing, because they had been introduced like fifteen times, but he had been dreadfully uninteresting just about every time they had spoken. Eddie almost regretted not accepting a cup of something, because maybe it would spice up the story Ted was telling him about a movie no one had seen but him, probably. But that would have thrown him 240 calories over for the day, approximately, something Eddie just did not have left in his day.

“SO-” A hand slammed into the wall by his head and Eddie couldn’t help it, it was loud and it scared him so he jumped. “HEARD,” he looked up to see Richie, grinning at Tom, winking at him, before turning his attention back down to Eddie “THERE WAS SOME CRITICISMS,” had Richie heard of an inside voice “OF THE MUSIC?”

“You’re being very loud.” Eddie replied plainly, not at all enjoying the feeling of being boxed in by the gangly limb.

“Huh,” Richie’s eyes sparkled, like he had given him bait, but he had no idea what he said that deserved that look “that is exactly what your mother was saying to me last night when-”

“Richie.” Beverly’s head popped up from under his arm. She was a tall girl, taller than Eddie, but still had to make do sometimes when joining the conversations with the giraffe. “That is en-”

“Oh,” Eddie blinked with surprise, resenting Beverly’s need to rescue him, “that was you?”
Richie’s gross, in Eddie’s opinion, smile grew. The sweat on his face was causing some hair to stick to it. It wasn’t even that hot in the dorms in November. It was just the amount of people cramming into the rooms. “I was wondering why she looked so disappointed this morning.”

Richie blinked, and then laughed loudly, and made grabby-hands for Eddie’s waist. He backed himself further into the wall, but there was nowhere really to run from the gangly monster.

“He gets off a good one-” Eddie had no fucking idea what that was meant to be “the ballerino: 1.” He seemed to settle for grabbing on to Stan’s waist, who had joined them at some point in time during that horrific exchange.

“You gonna turn it down?” Eddie quirked an eyebrow.

“How can I, when you just turn me-”

Beverly slammed a hand over Richie’s mouth, offering Eddie a sweet smile and a soft “yes.” She was wearing a men’s shirt as a dress, belted at the waist, and ripped leggings under it. Eddie imagined the girl could wear just about anything and look charming, so long as she was smiling.

Eddie realized the shifting of positions gave him an easy out for the door. He would have thanked them, if it were necessary, but all he was asking was that they literally stop breaking rules so aggressively, so he skipped it. “Later, degenerates.” He told them, offering a two-fingered salute to Beverly, and Stan, whom he needed to have a long conversation with the next day. When he caught Richie’s eye, he turned his fingers into one, a single, middle finger raised high in the air.

He turned around during Richie’s laugh. He watched his feet hit the textured carpet as he booked it out of there. He pretended to not hear Richie drunkenly announce “god, he’s cute,” to the room.

And he definitely didn’t smile about it, as soon as he shut his door.

Because the fact of the matter was: Richie Tozier was a fucking disaster. He took more shots than classes he attended. He greeted people in the morning high, like, everyday. He almost got fired from the radio station after being there two weeks. And the most recent rumor was that he slept through three of his midterms.

*Three*.

Eddie could only assume, as he heard the music lower and he, finally, changed out of his dance wear, that Richie got in the way every untalented kid got into their school.

Money.

And that, over everything else, was something Eddie never, ever wanted to be around.
There actually wasn’t music pounding next door that November night, but Eddie was still irritated. It was 10:30, and if it were up to Eddie, he’d be asleep. Because it was, quite frankly, up to the idiots next door, he wasn’t. And because it was a half hour till the start of “quiet hours” there was nothing he could do about it.

His roommates weren’t around, but they could easily have been next door. It sounded like the entire dorm was next door. Eddie had no idea what they were doing, but there was loud talking and laughing and someone shouted every few moments. Eddie had been trying to sleep for a half hour when he gave up, pacing anxiously around his room. He did some turns, because he had to fill his time with something, when the dorm door slammed open.

He jumped, startled, and all but dove into his bed. He wasn't actually wearing anything actually indecent, but he was just wearing small spandex shorts and a large t-shirt.

Stan all but fell into their room with a laugh, Mike Hanlon, one of their darling next-door neighbors, was hot on his heels. Stan dropped his bag on his desk chair. He jumped when he saw Eddie.

“Whoa, Eddie.” Stan pressed a hand to his heart. “You scared me. I didn’t know you were in here.”

“When isn’t he?” Mike asked with a snort. Stan gave him a warning look, but he continued. “You need to get out!” Mike encouraged, not sounding unkind, but perhaps over-enthusiastic, “stretch those legs!”

“Trust me.” Stan placed his things into neat categories on his desk, “those legs are stretched just about as much as they can be.” Eddie laughed, knowing Stan meant his physical legs. Eddie wanted to ask what was going on next door, but was at serious risk at sounding interested in joining. Or worse, jealous.

“We’re playing Trains next door,” Mike answered before he asked, and leaned up against the foot of Eddie’s bed. “You should come!”

Eddie had no idea what Trains was, but it sounded like some sort of hazing college nightmare.

“I’m good.” Eddie grabbed the book by his bed, for his history class, and tried to look remotely interested in it. “You guys have fun though.”

“But.” Mike began to protest, but Stan cut him off.

“See you tomorrow, Eddie.” Stan never pushed him. It was a quality he liked about Stan, he had a clear cut understanding of boundaries. Mike offered him a small, dejected wave. He followed Stan out of the door of their dorm. And left it open.

Eddie stared at it, cursing out the door in his mind. He could have cursed out Mike, but he seemed like too nice a guy to do that to. So he cursed out the door instead.

Finally, he tossed back his covers and stomped over the door grumpily. A shout came from next door. Eddie, with an exasperated huff, leaned out of the door quickly, snapping his face to the side.
to maybe get an idea of whatever hell game *Trains* was.

And he nearly face-butt Bill Denbrough in the process.


Eddie couldn’t help it. He stood to his full height, which wasn’t much, and he flushed. Bill was tall, much taller than Eddie but maybe not quite as tall as Richie. He had broad shoulders and a sharp jawline. He had soft, understanding eyes and a kind smile. He was, admitted in a private piece of Eddie’s brain, his favorite of the guys from next door. While the green eyes and the big smile was part undoubtedly of that, Eddie would like to think it was because Bill never teased him. He never pushed him or was ever unkind. He was also the only person who could convince Richie to stop doing something he had decided to do, as far as Eddie could tell.

“M’ sorry,” Eddie laughed, and pushed his face into his hand to cover the redness.

“Hey, it’s okay.” When he looked up, Bill was looking at Eddie’s legs. Eddie felt a little more embarrassed, his shorts were short. “What are you looking for?

“I- uh,” *Nothing* was the answer, he was being nosy. Bill seemed to pick up on that, because he smiled and covered.

“We’re playing a game next door,” Bill told him, leaning on the wall. “You should come play a round.”

“Well, I don’t” he didn’t know if he could bare Stan’s knowing look when he walked in after Bill.

“One round will last like,” Bill checked the time on his phone, “fifteen minutes tops. And quiet hours aren’t for another twenty.” Eddie felt a little bit ashamed that he had gotten such a rep for going to sleep at the exact start of quiet hours, when no one else did. But if he had to pick a reputation, he supposed he would choose one for being responsible.

*Trains* was actually called *Ticket to Ride* and it was Mike’s. It was also pretty fun, and Eddie stayed longer than he planned on, playing three rounds. Mike was a bit of a board game aficionado apparently, because he had an enormous stack of them. There were 12 people crammed into the triple, but eight of them were watching the Office with rapt attention. One of the desks, and Eddie could only assume it was Richie’s, was entirely taken up by a television and a stereo system. The entire room was a mess. Eddie honestly wondered how Stan could even stand to be in there.

Eddie leaned up against the foot of a bed, watching the screen himself. He had never seen more than a few clips of the show. His schedule didn’t really allow for binge-watching anything.

“So, which one’s Jim?” He asked Bill. Bill’s jaw dropped.

“No,” He shook his head, “you’ve *never* seen the Office?”

Eddie giggled when he shook his head. Mostly at Bill’s genuinely shocked face.

“What do you watch, then?”

*Mariinsky Archivo IEM P.I. Tchaikovsky Spyashaya krasavitsa* on a continuous loop, Eddie thought to himself.
“I don’t watch a lot of anything,” he answered with a shrug.

“The one that looks like a muppet is Jim.” Mike added into their conversation from his spot on his bed. He had his phone in his lap and a bag of chips by his side. Stan had his legs stretched across Mike’s and some other girl. Stan lounged back across the majority of the bed, and he snorted loudly at Mike’s comment.

“Jim Halpert,” a girl Eddie didn’t know looked nearly violent, “does NOT look like a muppet.”

College students, Eddie noticed, had this inane ability to argue about just about anything as if it were the end of the fucking world. He thought to himself that he should really be getting to bed. It was over 20 minutes past when he said he would leave. He stretched his hands out, and yawned, rolling his neck.

Stan caught his eye, “just about done, Grandma?”

Eddie opened his mouth to answer, when the door to the dorm slammed open so hard that jackets on the hooks on the back of the door fell off. Draped over some girl with caramel skin and pink streaks in her hair, strut in Richie Tozier. The room made some sort of greeting noise that was begrudgingly enthusiastic. Richie bowed, nearly sending the girl crashing to the floor. Eddie stood up quickly “yep!” he told Stan quickly. Stan laughed, shaking his head at Eddie. The girl, taking big hopping steps, crashed into Richie’s bed. Eddie tried his hardest to be completely invisible. In his bright green spandex dance shorts.

“Hey, Rich-” Bill greeted, “how was your day?”

“This pigeon,” Richie jabbed his thumb to point at himself, “got ran over and dumped in the garbage, but he’s not giving up!” Bill laughed, and so did a few others who were still bothering to pay attention. Richie walked over to the messy bed. It looked disgusting. Eddie cringed that that girl just got in it. He could see the crumbs from there. Richie threw his bag down. A mess spilled out of it. None of it looked like school work.

Eddie awkwardly shifted, unsure how to make his exit. He must have done so with more flair than he intended, because Bill looked up at him.

“Going to bed?” Bill asked softly, grabbing his ankle.

“Of course he is,” Richie told Bill with irritation, digging through his bag. He was looking for something. “He stood up the moment I walked in the door.”

Eddie felt his face blush. Mike laughed on the bed. It would have been awkward enough to leave before that, but now it felt incredibly uncomfortable. But Eddie was also, he noticed, reading into the entire thing a lot. The rest of the room already went back to watching the Office. “Yes, I saw that.” Richie told Eddie mercilessly, finally glancing up from his bag to catch his eye, “hi, lovebug.” He winked.

YOU’RE A FUCKING BUG, was what Eddie’s mind screamed at him to respond. He caught that before it flew out of his mouth, which he was incredibly grateful for, because it made 0 fucking sense.

Richie pulled what looked like a small DJ mixer out of his bag. Or a synthesizer. Eddie had a feeling he couldn’t tell the difference between the two if it would save his life. It looked heavy, and Richie started carrying it over to his desk.

“What are you going to do with that?” Eddie asked. He felt nervous. He sounded hostile, and he
knew it. It was already past quiet hours.

“This is the plate I always eat my sushi off of,” Richie replied sarcastically. “I plug it in so it heats it up nicely,” he connected it to the laptop that was sitting open on the desk.

“You heat up sushi?” Stan asked from the bed.

“Yeah, well…” Richie was clearly fumbling for a comeback. “Fuck you, Uris.” Stan laughed loudly.

“Are you gonna play music?” Eddie huffed, crossing his arms. Richie’s face dropped all amusement it had glazed over the top of it.

“Probably,” Richie hummed. “It’s the weekend.”

“It’s a Thursday.”

“It’s practically the weekend.”

“It’s already,” Eddie checked the time on his phone for an exact number, “11:27, which is nearly half an hour after quiet ho-”

“You know what, Twinkle Toes,” Richie interrupted aggressively. He was still leaned over, but he slammed a hand into the desk. Things on it jumped, old c.d.s and a few records shifting to the side. Richie’s mouth was set into a hard line when he looked up. He squinted at Eddie. “I know how to tell time, thanks.”

“You could have fooled me.” Eddie replied coolly, staring back harshly. His fists were balled up. Tozier could get him worked up like no one he ever met before. Richie looked from his fists to his face, down to his nearly bare thighs. Eddie felt even more indignant.

“You’re really fucking cute-” Richie looked more irritated than Eddie had ever seen him when he spit that out. It was the first time he had seen anyone look irritated while calling him cute. “But you can be so goddamn annoying sometimes.”

“DON’T” Eddie accidentally yelled, “call me cute.”

“YEA?” Richie’s yell hardly sounded like an accident. “What would you prefer:” he held out his hands with exasperation, “whiny?” he counted off on a finger, “big fucking cry baby?”

“Enough, Richie.” Bill said calmly from the floor. He pushed up on a hand, standing to his feet on what looked to be tired legs. Eddie didn’t know why everyone was making themselves so miserable, being so tired all the time. “We’ll keep it down, Eddie.” He told him, speaking for the entire room. Including Richie, who nodded, looking thoroughly pissed off, as he turned back to his equipment.

“Thanks, Bill,” Eddie told him awkwardly. Then, with all of the grace of an elephant on ecstasy, he fled the room.

It was mid-December, and the most important day of Eddie’s semester. He had woken up at 3:30 in the morning to take a quick shower. His auditioning process, that would make or break his entire spring semester, would begin at 7:30 a.m. He intended to be full warmed up by warm ups.

The only problem was he was standing outside of his dorm door. He was absolutely horrified. He
had left it locked, and not brought a key to the shower. He had also not brought his cell-phone, because there was little a cell-phone could do to benefit someone showering.

“No,” he muttered into the wood of his door, “no no no no no” he jostled the door handle as if that would make a difference. Like the handle was playing a practical joke on him and would comically announce it was kidding and unlock with a laugh. Eddie let his head thump into the door.

He banged on the door. His roommates were alive, it was more than likely. Unless something drastic happened in the last half an hour. But they weren’t responding.

He begrudgingly changed back into the clothes he wore to bed - ew. A pair of short blue athletic shorts and a large black hoodie, because his dorm wasn’t beautifully insulated. He could bang on the door of his RA at seven a.m. Until then, he could go outside and find a blue box to call campus security. It was winter, he was wearing shorts, and that would be a process he’d have to pay money for. It was also just humiliating. He sat down with a huff on the floor of the hallway. He’d stretch out, call his RA at seven, and have enough time to change to make it to auditions.

He tried to work out some of the swollenness in his calves and feet with Arnica gel. All of his products were in his little shower caddy. Thank God, or he might have just started crying. He shuffled his sweatshirt over his hands, because the hallway was cold. He moved into stretching. By the time he was properly placing himself in a full side split, he had company in the hallway.

“Holy shit,” Eddie’s heart sank when he heard the familiar voice. “Is it my birthday?” Eddie internally screamed at his face to not blush, You Son of a Bitch. Face, Eddie was fucking Serious. Don’t You Dare.

“I’m not in the fucking mood, Tozier.” Eddie dropped his foot from it’s bend, and stretched forward. He barely spared him a look before tucking his face back down, elongating his stretch. Richie was probably just going to bed, rolling in from a long night out. He reeked of weed and a disappointing sexual encounter. He was wearing converse spattered in god knew what, and his dark jeans were covered in weird patches. It had everything from obscure bands to one of a character named Arnold from a show Eddie wasn’t allow to watch as a kid.

“You never are,” Richie snorted, leaning up against the wall, “that’s why I have to call your mother so ofte-”

“BEEP BEEP,” Eddie was exhausted and had no comeback so he just shouted that instead, “HONK.” He then made a noise sounding vaguely reminiscent of a siren. It also sort of sounded like a cat that was stuck in a tuba.

“Did you just...beep me?” Eddie didn’t even bother to look up, bending forward at the waist. He kept his hips square, and inhaled.

“I would do anything to get you to fucking stop.” He spoke as he exhaled. He changed the direction of his split so it was centered. Once he was fully in a front split, he noticed Richie’s silence. He looked up, and by the look on Richie’s face, he had a lot of ideas about what anything could be. Eddie regretted ever saying it.

Richie coughed into his hand, rubbing them together. He had just come in from outside, and it was December in Massachusetts. “Not that this isn’t the highlight of my day, and trust me it is-”

“It’s four in the morning.” Eddie interrupted “your day has been four hours long.” He continued his stretch in front of himself. He rolled his shoulders as he laid his elbows down to the ground.
“You have no idea the amount of shit I can get into in four hours.”

“I have my suspicions.” Eddie countered coldly. He was beyond irritated, because he couldn’t even finish the stretch properly in the space the hallway allowed for. Richie was quiet for a moment. Eddie wondered if it bothered Eddie that he was being watched. It probably didn’t. People didn’t dance to not get attention for it.

“Why are you hanging out in the hallway at 4 a.m.?” Richie asked finally. Eddie was willing to do a lot of things. Admitting to Richie that he let himself get locked out of his room on one of the most important days of the year to him was not one of them.

“I could ask you the same thing.” Eddie replied sharply. He sat in his stretch, ignoring the horrendous itchy carpeting on his thighs, and enjoyed the small burn of his muscles. They were particularly aching yesterday. He imagined he wouldn’t be fully recovered until well into Christmas vacation. Richie leaned against the wall, sinking down to sit. He sat against the wall Eddie was facing, but far enough to his side that he wasn’t in Eddie’s direct view. Eddie didn’t bother to look up.

"Well," Richie started, "my friend called, Bev, you know her? Sweet girl, that Beverly Marsh, but she doesn't live on campus. Her stripper roommate got really high, and I mean the good shit, and brought home a raccoon thinking it was a stray dog. The raccoon, as far as I could tell, was a fucking raccoon, so it loved the shit out of their garbage. By the time I got there, there was garbage literally everywhere. And that roommate of hers has some nasty ass habits. So, I cleaned up trash, got in a pretty elongated and epic battle with a raccoon, we put on Danger Zone, it was awesome. And then I smoked all of Bev's weed because she fucking owed me. And now I'm here, frankly, because there is a boy doing that," he paused, probably gesturing to Eddie's legs, "in front of my-"

“See,” Eddie interrupted "here’s the linguistic thing, Tozier.” Eddie alternated the direction of his split to be back on the side, so he could look at Richie, if they were gonna be so goddamned chatty anyway. “I said could .” He stretched forward into his split again, “could is an auxiliary verb, often used to express possibility.” He heard the sounds of Richie standing back up, his hand on the wall to prop himself up. Eddie kept talking “me informing you I very well could ask you a question is neither a. Me asking you a question nor b. An invitation for you to tell me about your weird personal life.” When his rambling statement finally sentence, a thick sort of silence filled the air between them. Eddie was very aware he wasn’t responding, but nor was he leaving. Eddie felt so uncomfortable that he opened his mouth again.

“I hear your silence, and I’m going to take that as: you don’t know what linguistic means. Let me explain:"

“What are you doing in the hallway, Kaspbrak?” Richie sounded irritated. Eddie looked up, and lied through his teeth.

“I like it out here. It’s. Uh. Nice.”

Richie spared a glance for down the hall, where there was an obvious vomit stain on the floor.

“I think better out here.”

Richie raised his eyebrows.

“I like..." Eddie was running out of logical reasons, "vaguely rectangular elongated spaces?”

“So, you’re locked out of your room?” Richie assumed with a smirk. Eddie huffed, thoroughly
giving up on his facade, his stretching, and probably life in general. He sat criss-cross on the floor and stared up at Richie, feeling annoyingly small. He grew annoyed with the smirk quickly, and looked away. He looked down at his feet, fiddling with his completely horrendous toenails. They could write horror movies just about his toenails.

"Yes."

"You could have said that," Richie rolled his eyes. Eddie could hear it. "I can fix that."

By the time Eddie was ready to look at the smug face again, Richie was gone. He wasn't aware he hadn't looked for that long. Or maybe Richie was fast. Or maybe Richie didn't intend to help him at all and went to sleep in his bed. All of those options seemed equally plausible to Eddie. Eddie assumed, at most, Richie was going to go get his phone to call Stan or the RA or something. Or he might have just disappeared. Fully possible.

Eddie's dorm door swung open, and almost smacked Eddie in the face. He jumped backwards. His back nearly slammed into the wall behind him. On the other side of his door was a sleepy, shirtless Stan Uris. Just behind him, with a shit-eating grin on his face, was Richie Tozier.

"You're insane." Stan told him flatly, as he moved behind him, and attempted to shove him out of their door. Eddie scrambled to his feet, feeling a rush of gratitude he'd never admit to. Eddie must have looked baffled, because that's how he felt. "He scaled the side of our building." He told Eddie. Stan looked incredibly annoyed, but not at all surprised.

"Y'all have a ledge and all kinds of vines, and you always leave your window open." Richie explained with a shrug. Eddie knew his jaw had dropped. Richie Tozier was, he was more sure than ever before, certifiably insane. He was all sorts of horrified that Richie just knew that. They lived on the second floor. "Later, Juliet." He pressed a noisy kiss into Stan's cheek. Stan shoved him further into the hallway. Eddie scrambled into room in the absence Richie created.

"You're-" the door shut behind Eddie on Richie's words, "welcome." He heard Richie tell the door. He was sure the door thanked him properly in response. Eddie grabbed his room key from his desk and kissed it.

"Richie!" Eddie heard the voice of the RA through the door, "it is quiet hours."

Eddie heard Stan laugh into his pillows.

Eddie heard the rumors the next day. He was coming down from the high of a phenomenal audition, when he heard two girls in their little quad talking about it. That Richie mixed up the dates of finals, thought they didn't begin for another week. Eddie could only assume that meant Richie failed out. He, when his mom came to pick him up for the holidays, was ecstatic. He remained that way the entirety of Christmas break.

He was even more so delighted when he got the email. He'd be a featured soloist in the Spring recital, as a sophomore. And now, he might finally get the sleep to perform well.

Because Richie Tozier was out of his hair for good...

Wasn't he?
hi!!! im really excited about the support for this honestly the comments on the last chapter made my whole life and i just wanted to update!!! thank you if you commented!!!
okay idk what is Up with me and irregular chapter lengths but i wanted 2 be done the prologue SO sorry this is so long!! thank you for reading, and please let me know what you think i love any and all feedback i squeal everytime i get an email i really do. when its just groupon i am v disappointed afkljds
also if you want to talk about mike hanlon and board games or what tf a synthesizer is my ask box / message is always open on tumblr mine is tossertozier!
Eddie practically bopped through the hallways when he returned to his dorm. He walked in to Stan already sitting at his desk, Ben on his own bed. Eddie threw his arms over Stan’s shoulders, giving him a tight squeeze.

“Guys,” he wheezed out in a delighted little laugh, “it’s gonna be such a good semester.”

“Yeah?” Ben asked. He looked up, grin already spreading on his face. Happiness was incredibly infectious to Ben, he couldn’t help but join in.

“Yeah.” Eddie nodded. He took off his coat and threw his bag on the floor by his bed.

“I take it auditions went well?” Stan asked, swiveling around in his chair.

“About as well as they could have gone,” Eddie replied, flushed with pride but trying to remain humble.

“That’s great, Eddie.”

What was also great is that, unlike move in day in the fall, when he passed by the room next door it was blessedly silent. Eddie almost couldn't wait to go to sleep that night. He didn't bring a lot home, but he unpacked it quickly, feeling joyful and excited as he listened to Ben prattle on about some sort of architecture something. He was going to live his best life, that semester.

“Congrats, Eddie.” A girl Eddie didn’t know was talking to him. He didn’t know what to do with that. He felt very bad that she knew his name and he didn’t know hers. He blinked with surprise she was even in the room. He thought he was in the right class, male ballet, and judging by the men in the room, he could only assume he was right.

“Oh, thanks!” He replied with a nice smile. Abi? Abigail, maybe? He was sitting on the floor, stretching out his feet before the beginning of class with a theraband.

“Are you taking pas de deux this semester?” She asked. She seemed content to flop down next to him, mimicking his movements. He gave her a once over glance. She might work. He had been the smallest worried about pas de deux - or the mandatory partnering ballet class. He was missing the arm strength really necessary, but his core was strong. Most of the girls in the program were tall, at least his height, if not taller. Abigail, or Eddie was assuming that was her name, seemed like she might actually be a little bit shorter than him. She was slender and not overtly muscular. Although their partners would be assigned by professor, who they were seen with definitely impacted the decision.

“Yeah, I am.” Eddie nodded encouragingly. “Are you?”

“Mm-hmm.” She nodded. Her feet were long. She stretched out each toe gently. Her feet, like Eddie’s, were hideous. They looked like gnarled tree trunks. “I heard that we’re just ultimately going to do the recital combination in class.”

“Really?” Eddie asked. That would be a relief. Either way he’d be learning a dance he wouldn’t
perform, but it’d still be less stressful.

“If we partnered,” Abi tried to seem completely unaffected regardless, “I might get paired with an upperclassman for performance.”

Eddie snorted. Being paired with an upperclassman ultimately meant you got a better placement for routine on the stage. If they did the performance combination for classwork, he wouldn’t do it on stage, because he was a featured soloist in the number immediately after. He realized that he would very quickly become a very popular dance partner.

If those kids from middle school could see him now, he thought to himself with amusement.

Ultimately, his heart was light as he stretched. He realized they had built a small cornucopia around them of other classmates. They gossiped about the upcoming semester. Eddie had little time for that, really working to make sure his hamstrings were prepared for class. He was happy though. This was the life he thought he would have at that school, the life he worked for last semester.

With fifteen minutes until class started, one teacher, Madame Bernard, took the center of the floor, by the barred mirrors. She was a stern looking, slender woman with slicked back hair akin to her students. She almost always wore a wrap dress in a neutral color. Today it was black.

“Students,” she addressed the room. The girls around Eddie checked their phones feverishly. They had plenty of time to make it to their classroom. Bernard waved them off. She was never particularly unpleasant, but she looked pleased in a way Eddie hadn’t seen before “We have a student who will be joining us this semester for an extra credit opportunity. While he will mostly be present for recital rehearsals, he will join us for a few classes to understand the flow of rehearsal. Please welcome your new rehearsal pianist, Richie Tozier.” Eddie’s heart dropped to the floor. A few of the girls giggled while the room politely clapped.

Sitting at the piano, looking irritated, and irritatingly handsome, was Richie Tozier. He had dressed down from his usual wardrobe. He still looked like a duck out of water in the room of slick outfits. He wore ripped black jeans and a plain long-sleeved gray shirt with a pocket on the chest. His glasses were on the edge of his nose, and he did a salute to the room with two fingers.

“Play something!!” A girl in the back shouted. She was quickly shushed and smacked by giggling friends. Eddie contemplated ways he could die in the next five minutes.

Richie raised an eyebrow, turning to the piano. He cracked his fingers, shook them out. He played a single, beautiful and complex chord. Then he turned his face out to the group and said “no.”

Bernard, a woman Eddie didn’t know was capable of joy or smiling, laughed. She fucking laughed. Eddie blithely wondered if pointe shoe ribbons would be long enough to strangle him.

“Mr. Tozier will play plenty of music for you in the future,” Bernard reminded the girls good-naturedly. “Okay, I never said to stop warming yourselves,” and she was back. “Class begins in ten minutes, promptly.”

Eddie rolled onto his stomach, feeling agony in the pit of it. This was supposed to be his semester. His semester. He laid down flat. He grabbed his foot, stretching it to bring up to touch the top of his head. In his mind, he told himself on a continuous loop that Tozier would be at the piano and he’d be on the floor and they’d never see each other.

When he opened his mind, a familiar pair of black boots were in front of his face.
He jolted, dropping his foot. It smacked painfully into the ground.

“Richie,” he flopped irritably on the floor. He got more irritated when he heard Richie laughing above him. “For fuck’s sake-” He scrambled up to sit on his knees in front of him. He looked up when Richie laughed again.

“Whoa, Eds, baby.” He pat Eddie’s head patronizingly, and Eddie’s heart lurched into his throat when he realized how suggestive the position was. “Not here, in front of everybody.”

“Richie, I swear to fucking God-” Eddie stood up furiously. He almost slipped on the floor in his fury to stand up. He had to catch Richie’s shirt to keep himself up-right. Richie’s hands caught his waist.

Eddie’s threat died on his tongue, and he looked up into Richie’s smirking face. “This is going to be more fun than I thought it would be.”

“Oh fuck, off-” he dropped Richie’s shirt, and batted at his hands on his waist. “Off, off. OFF.” He squirmed away.

“We should head over,” a girl behind Eddie mentioned, “it’s five minutes till.” Eddie heard the shuffling of girls behind him. He hoped they hadn’t seen that little display. Richie had managed to return his hands to himself, but he was still looking down at Eddie. He shoved his hands in his pockets. He chewed gum in a more lavish way than Eddie had seen anyone chew gum before. He chewed gum like a threat of some kind.

“Are you coming, Richie?” A blonde girl grabbed his wrist. Eddie should have assumed he’d be playing in the girl’s classroom. It was much bigger. Which. Good. Because now he didn’t have to deal with fucked up orchestrations, as he was sure Richie could not play piano that well.

Richie’s eyes dropped from Eddie’s eyes to his mouth.

“I’m plannin’ on it.” He answered, not even looking at her, in an almost grunt. Eddie’s fists curled. “Ha!” Richie barked out a laugh, grabbing Eddie’s shoulder. He rubbed it furiously, “it’s a right laugh, it is!” He used a terrible, god awful, English accent. Richie ruffled Eddie’s hair. He balked, and tried to throw him off, “watchin’ ya chum turn into a tah-mah-toe, right before ye vary eyes!”

Eddie pushed him away, and he only laughed harder. He looped around, throwing a chummy arm over the blonde girl that grabbed him in the first place. She, Eddie could see in the mirror, looked much more pleased about it than he had.

“Later,” Richie blew a kiss over his shoulder, “Eddie darling.” Eddie spared the room a glance for teachers, before flipping him off. Richie laughed again as he exited.

A small hand was on Eddie’s shoulder, and he looked down and saw Abigail. She had her baby hairs sorted out, hairsprayed back into the tight, brown bun. “Is that your boyfriend?” Abi asked in a giggled whisper.

Eddie thought, well, he had a good life. It wasn’t so bad to die at 20.

As soon as class let out, he stormed into the other rehearsal room. There were four or so girls leaned against Richie’s piano. He didn’t look incredibly enthusiastic about it. “Tozier.” Eddie said loudly as soon as his feet touched the dance floor. The girls looked up, confused. They were clearly questioning whether they should stay or go. Eddie couldn’t give a damn either way. He dropped his bag with a thump by the piano bench.
Two of the girls gave a tentative “bye, Richie.” One of them strayed from the pack, awkwardly playing with her cell-phone. It was clear she had every intention of getting his number. A girl with curly black hair grabbed her wrist, rolled her eyes, and pulled her out of the room. “What are you doing here?” Eddie spit out. And by here, Eddie meant in his classroom and on campus in general.

“Trust me, Eddie Spaghetti, I’m as thrilled as you are.” Richie slumped against the piano, looking miserable.

“This isn’t fucking funny, Tozier.” Eddie replied indignantly, planting his hands on the piano.

“You really think I’m here to mess with you?” Richie raised an eyebrow from his spot on the piano. He must have had a worse class time than Eddie was expecting. The man looked down-right irritable. “Newsflash, cupcake: I’d rather acquaint my dick with a hornets nest than have to sit in this stuffy-ass room for the majority of the semester.” He replied sternly, raking a hand through his curls.

“Then WHY do it?” Eddie replied, flustered that Richie had caught his thoughts, that he was there to annoy him. Eddie supposed that was sort-of childish, considering they spent most of the last hour apart.

“They were going to kick me out of fucking school!”

GOOD, Eddie thought furiously, YOU DESERVED IT.

Richie shut the piano with annoyance, procuring a small set of keys from his pocket. He locked it quickly. “This was the only way they offered to make up credit enough to stay,” he flipped the keys around a finger, looking up at Eddie. “So: no. I’m not spending literally 20 hours of my week with the sole purpose of messing with you. It's merely a pass-time. Your ass is fantastic, but the world doesn’t revolve around it.” Richie shoved up from the piano. Eddie had caught him in a terrible mood. He grabbed his coat from the floor. He threw it over his shoulder. He, too, Eddie's surprise, picked up Eddie's dance bag. He threw it on to his other shoulder. Without a word, he started crossing the room.

"Kaspbrak,” Richie turned around with an irritated stare, "let's go." Eddie opened his mouth to protest, because something about it was off. Something about Richie standing there with his bag on his shoulder and a demanding tone in his voice as if leaving places together was something they did. It was off. "I have to lock the fucking door behind you.” Richie countered before Eddie could even figure out the words to voice that.

"Oh." Eddie turned to face him fully.

There was some kind of bible quote he read in Sunday school, Eddie thought. About peace, or something. When peace is achieved, enemies become friends. The lion lays down with the lamb. Something something bear and fish. Eddie couldn't keep it out of his head as he crossed the room to Richie. He reached for his own bag. Their fingers brushed as he handed it over.

And the little child shall reach his hand into the hornet's nest.

Eddie had no idea what the fuck the bible was talking about anyway, as they split ways outside of the classroom door.

His hand was staying as far away from hornets as possible.
narrator voice: but it isn't. really.

thank u!!! if you left comments on previous chapters ugh i know i say this all the time but it means. so much to me. it really does!! & it really helps me write faster i used to be an update once a month kind of guy. thank you.

my tumblr is tossertozier if u want to come hang out with me!
“Nooo-” Eddie groaned into his own pillow. He realized it was incredibly dramatic. He had a right to the drama. He checked his phone for the time. It was past midnight, and he got woken up from music next door. They were only four days into the semester.

He had rehearsal tomorrow too, the first official recital rehearsal of the semester. His calves were aching and so were his biceps. Pas de deux royally kicked his ass, lifting girls that were the size of actual pixie sticks was incredibly difficult. He picked up one of his shoes, and threw it at the wall. It landed with a soft “thump.” Not anything loud enough to alert the neighbors. He knew it wasn’t the shoe’s fault, but he flipped it off anyway.

The tensions built up so badly in Eddie’s shoulders, but he was too tired to start any fights. He grabbed the pair of earplugs he bought at CVS the other day and shoved them in. They were really uncomfortable to sleep in, and he could still hear the noise, but it was better than nothing. He grabbed his pillow, shoved it over his head, and tried to go back to sleep.

Rehearsal started promptly at 8 a.m. on Fridays during Spring semester and the entire dance program was involved in some way or another. Eddie didn’t even mind not having a ton of sleep, because he was buzzing with nervous, excited energy. Especially when he was placed in the second row for warm-ups. As a sophomore. Most of the boys his age were another three or four rows back.

Richie came in ten minutes late for rehearsal, but Eddie didn’t know if they told him they could do that. He just did so loudly, even without making noise. His glasses were pushed up on to his head and he rubbed at his eyes. He looked utterly wrecked.

Served him right, in Eddie’s opinion.

But really, that was fantastic. Having a rehearsal with an exhausted student pianist who probably couldn’t even play well in the first place was obviously Eddie’s ideal for the day.

In class, they’d always start at the barre for warm-ups. For rehearsal, they almost always started on the floor, and it was expected you’d be a certain degree of warmed by the time you got there. Bernard leaned over the piano at Richie, leafing through the sheet music that had been placed there. He was wearing a red hawaiian shirt over a grey henley. He rolled up the sleeves and nodded. He settled his glasses back on his nose.

Master Laurent took the center of the floor. He was their primary male instructor, and really a dance captain. He was a strong, sturdy looking dark-skinned man who always wore the sternest expression in class and smiled widely and warmly outside of it. Eddie looked away from Richie, because warm ups began. It was a more complex combination than he was expecting. Eddie would be surprised if there weren’t something akin to it in the actual recital. He nervously ran over moves in his mind as they were demonstrated. He remembered his home town ballet teacher telling him constantly ‘remember Eddie, if you can say them, you can do them.’ He really wanted to turn around to see what the row behind him looked like. He prayed that he wasn’t an outlier in his row, that he wasn’t behind or off-beat as he attempted to keep up with Laurent.
Eddie felt like he had a tenuous grasp on the steps and that plane of existence when Laurent turned around and said quietly “with music, now.”

He could almost hear Richie crack his knuckles from where he was standing. A light melody began and Eddie nearly missed the “5-6-7-8,” count in because it was so different. He was so used to taking class working off a track and he very rarely thought of the music itself. Eddie was a dancer who focused on the counts.

‘Relevé on seven, down, prepare. Attitude, five- fuck, knees. Out.’ Eddie focused on the combination. He eventually felt a little more competent, and a lot more relaxed. He caught Laurent’s eye and Laurent shrugged his shoulders. Eddie relaxed them. Laurent gave him a thumbs up.

Eddie loved to dance. It was both calming and invigorating. Highly technical and beautifully artistic. A burning fire in the middle of a cold sea. And Eddie was impressed. Richie had played well, as far as he could detect. The melody was smooth and clean with small flairs on the edges. It was easy to dance to. As they cleared to the side to prepare a cross-the-floor combination, Eddie nearly bounced on the balls of his feet.

Laurent had a line of seniors in the center to learn the short combination. It was barely 32 counts. Eddie watched them carefully, doing the moves in small, minimal ways to himself. He tried to burn it into his memory before it was his turn.

“Music, please.” A new piece of music played. It was more energetic and bouncy. Eddie hated to admit that he was glad they had a pianist. Eddie looked to Richie, expecting him to see him concentrating hard.

Richie looked apathetic at best. In fact, he was having a bit of a conversation as he played with Bernard. He looked exhausted. He wasn’t even looking at the sheet music. Richie had big hands, they covered a lot of the keys easily and delicately played the hoppy tune. It looked like he had never done something simpler, as if knowing how to play decently complicated musical pieces were something easy enough for a child to handle. Eddie felt something, and he had no idea what, burned in his chest.

Eddie moved up to his position to cross the floor. He was in the front of the two lines. He watched the other group finish the combination. He turned out in fifth position, watching Laurent for the nod to begin the combination.

“Three, four, glissade, six- shift.” Eddie thought determinedly as they began their cross, “Eight, one, pas de chat, step point, shift- no. Wait, fuck- ” He couldn’t believe it. He stumbled out of his leap and was a step behind, struggling to even figure out where to return to. He was already beginning to panic. It was only a solid four further counts into the combination when the music fumbled and then stopped.

“Sorry, guys.” Richie shoved his glasses up on his nose, “I fucked that one up.”

“Language, Tozier.” Laurent chided with eyebrows that blatantly told the room he didn’t care. “No matter, return, boys, and do it again.”

Eddie couldn’t help but stare in disbelief at Richie as he returned to his spot. He knew for a fact Richie did that on purpose. He had been playing the tune as if it were child’s play not a moment before. He didn’t have the time to dwell on it the way his heart was SCREAMING at him to, because Laurent was already beginning to count them in.

Eddie took a deep breath, re-grounded himself, and began the combination again.
At ten a.m. they had a ten minute break. Or, Eddie did. The girls did a cross the floor combination that the boys couldn’t do. Eddie power-walked across campus to the coffee shop in the J.W., the center of student life on campus. He called Stan as he did so.

“Hey, Stan,”


“Are you just waking up?” Eddie tried to not sound frankly appalled. He heaved an audible sigh of relief when the warmth of J.W.’s central heating washed over him. He didn’t have time to put on his full coat, so he just wore his hoodie over his dance tights. He was getting some serious looks but couldn’t bring himself to care. “It’s ten a.m.”

“Eddie, I love you,” Stan yawned loudly, “but I don’t understand how you’ve managed to be in college a semester and not yet realized that that’s how it works.”

The line was short, thank God. Eddie all but ran to it, hopping across the floor. “I have a question.”

“Alright.”

Eddie wasn’t one for coffee himself. If it wasn’t bitter, it was expensive and sugary and he couldn’t have that in his calorie count for the day. He preferred to get his energy from natural sources, a balanced diet, invigorating walks, cold showers when he just needed to wake the fuck up. “What does Richie take in his coffee?”

“You’re...I’m sorry, what?”

Eddie thought back to the conversation he had with Stan when he found out he and Richie were friends. It felt good to give Stan a little shock.

“I’m already in line, but what would he want?”

“This is a Bev question.”

“What?” French-braid girl in front of him was putting in her order, and Eddie was getting stressed.

“I don’t know.” Stan sighed loudly, and Eddie heard the crinkle of him falling back into his pillows. “Uh-” Eddie observed the french-braid of the girl in front of him. Either she was a terrible braider and should get a friend to do it for her, or it was braided last night and she hadn’t gone home yet. Both seemed equally plausible. “Okay. When we’re at the diner he asks for chocolate syrup to put in his coffee.”

“That’s disgusting.”

“That’s Richie.”

“Okay, it’s my turn I gotta go love you bye-” Eddie hung up quickly. Eddie had no idea when he and Stan became friends that frequently told each other about their love, but he could accept it because damn food service lines could be stressful. “Hi, I’ll have a coffee with the chocolate, in the size big and please, I ask you, make it delicious.” He rambled to the girl behind the counter. She raised an eyebrow at the request, then did a once-over. Once she, very apparently, observed he didn’t know fuck all about coffee, she sighed, and began marking up a cup.
When Eddie all but ran into the studio, he had kicked off his boots he had put over his ballet shoes in the hall instead of the dressing room. He dropped the coffee on the piano as carefully as he could while being moments away from running, and incidentally, dropped his hoodie on Richie’s lap.

He didn’t even stop to look at Richie’s expression when he turned the cup around to see a sloppy “THANKS” written on the little brown cardboard sweater Eddie had put on the cup so it wasn’t too hot to hold. He was sure there was a word for what that thing was, but he didn’t know it.

It wasn’t long after that when he was sectioned off and led to another room to work on an actual combination with a group of boys. Eddie was not disappointed. Eddie did find himself thinking that he hoped Richie didn’t take a measly coffee as a peace treaty, or a sign that his behavior was acceptable. Because it wasn’t.

When they broke for lunch Eddie returned to the other room. No, he was not looking for Richie. He was looking for his boots in the hallway, and he couldn’t remember if he took them off in the studio. He walked through the door that led from studio to studio. He scoped out the room. For his shoes, obviously, not the tall dumb-ass with big hands.

He stepped in. Richie was still at the piano. There were two girls there. Was there a time where there weren’t girls there? Eddie didn’t see his shoes. He lingered by the door. Not because he was waiting for Richie to notice he came in. Because he was thoroughly checking the room for his shoes.

But they really weren’t in there and they were only given a half hour for lunch. Eddie decided logically, that instead of using the door back to the other studio to exit, he’d use the door that led to the hallway. The one that happened to pass by the piano. Because it was probably the fastest route.

“There’s my angel!” He heard Richie’s voice call and he pretended to ignore him and kept going. Maybe he was walking slower, though. He had to preserve his energy. To dance. “Oh, no-” Richie’s piano bench scraped against the floor as he stood. “You are a life-saver, Eds, literally saved my life.” Eddie felt Richie’s arms wrap around him from behind. He tried to wiggle away. “I’d be a dead man without that coffee,” Richie told him, “let me love on you,” he struggled away as Richie made loud, obnoxious kissing noises towards his cheek.

“Don’t kiss me if you enjoy living,” he warned cautiously. He wriggled the two of them far enough over so they reached the bars running around the borders of the classroom. Richie's hands were unrelenting. Eddie fought as hard as he could afford to. It might have looked a little weak, but he couldn't use his full strength, because he couldn't possibly hurt himself. He had to dance.

“Trade my life for a kiss? How Shakespearian of you.”

“You wouldn’t know Shakespeare,” Eddie grabbed Richie’s hands and pried them off his mid-section. “If he came here personally and bit you in the ass.” Richie laughed and relented, letting himself be pulled off. Eddie realized the girls hadn’t fucked off, but followed them across the room with little giggles. Great, he thought sarcastically, that’s what made Richie’s bullshit better, an audience.

“SO,” Richie leaned against the bars and smirked. “Did you hear me play?”

“I heard you fuck up.”

Richie smirked down at him, knowing that Eddie’s bitter little comment couldn’t have actually
been serious. If anything, it confirmed that Richie fumbled the music on purpose for Eddie to cover his mistake.

“Do you know,” Eddie fidgeted, wanting to ask a question without actually having to say the worst to ask it. “What you’re playing this afternoon?” what Eddie really wanted to know was if Richie was going to be rehearsing with the soloists that afternoon or not. Because having a live pianist was very convenient, of course.

“Hey, Eddie.” Abigail’s voice interrupted from the doorway, “are these yours? I think they are. They were just sitting in the hall.” She crossed over to Eddie. Oh, yeah, he had taken them off in the hall. Now, he remembered, he frantically told himself he didn’t remember before and that’s why he came into the studio in the first place.

“Yeah, sorry. Thanks.” He smiled at her.

“Holy shit these are small,” Richie snatched the boots from Abi. “Oh my god-”

“Give them here, Richie.” Eddie fussed, reaching for them irritably.

“I think these would comfortably fit on my hands.” And because he was disgusting cretin with no boundaries, he shoved one of the boots on to his hand. Eddie did have small feet, and he ordered most of his shoes online, but there was nothing particularly funny about it. “These are,” Richie flipped the shoe over on his hand with a snort. “A size six? Jesus, Eds-”

Abi frowned in consideration, “I think we could share shoes.”

Eddie was getting pissed. He didn’t think Richie was necessarily trying to, but he was emasculating him in front of several girls, including his pas de deux partner for the time being.

“I think my hands are the size of your feet,” Richie looked devilish. He looked at Eddie with an almost mischievous glint in his eyes. “C’mere,” He dropped the boot to the floor, and reached for Eddie.

“No, they’re not, Richie- DON’T” Eddie backed up into the bars. It was futile. They were right next to the bars and there was nowhere to run. Eddie squirmed when Richie wrapped one arm around his middle and grabbed his calf with the other.

“Hold still, Eddie, Christ-”

“STOP, they’re not the SAME, STOP-”

Richie was not about to be bested. He stood up, but on the way, he grabbed Eddie by the waist and threw him over his shoulder. Eddie knew he was light, he knew exactly what he weighed. That was part of being a dancer. But he felt thoroughly humiliated by the entire thing. He knew his face must have been very red. Partially because he was so mad. Partially because some piece of him in the back of his brain was screaming at him because he found Richie picking him up very, very hot.

“Grab his foot... Briana?” He struggled fiercely against Richie, but not incredibly so. Because Eddie was not about to crack his head open after getting dropped on the dance floor. “Stop kicking, calm down.”

“You seriously don’t know my name?” The one girl sounded pissed. “We’ve hung out twice this week, Richie!” Eddie stopped kicking, because that sounded like it would distract Richie for a moment.
“I hang out with a lot of people,” Richie didn’t seem that concerned about it. What Eddie was concerned with was because he stopped wiggling. Richie stopped struggling to keep up with him. Richie had one arm holding Eddie’s knees. Richie’s other hand landed on his upper thighs, dangerously, and seriously, dangerous close to Eddie’s ass. “Bertha?” Richie guessed, and his thumb shifted to just brushing the bottom of Eddie’s ass. It was intentional, Eddie knew it was.

“That’s insulting.”

“What?” Richie sounded incredulous “that’s a name.”

“CAN I BE PUT DOWN, PLEASE?” Eddie asked loudly.

“Nah,” Richie rubbed his hand on his thigh and Eddie was going to kill that son of a bitch. “We’re good,” he pat his leg and the tips of his hand actually curled around his thigh, slipping between the two and Eddie opened his mouth to yell when someone else did for him.

“Tozier!” Richie turned around as Bernard’s sharp, amused voice came from across the room. “Do Not break my dancers!”

“Can we make it,” Richie joked as he set Eddie back to solid ground “a break it, you buy it, kind of deal?” Eddie imagined that if he had been red before he must have been something comparable to a fire engine in that moment.

“BEEP BEEP, RICHIE.” He yelled, looking flustered as he looked back and forth between Richie and his teacher whom he very much respected. She just gave him an odd look, because it was an odd thing to say, and reminded them they only had 20 more minutes for lunch.

“You are the wo-” Eddie spun on him furiously, hitting his chest repeatedly, “the most, and the rud- the fucking RUD-” Whenever Eddie was just starting to think of Richie as half-decent, he did something to make himself intolerable again.

“You gonna get there sometime this century, Shortstack?”

“Die, Tozier.”

Chapter End Notes

alternatively titled : eddie is a liar man
hey y'all!!
ohh my god ur comments were making me fucking laugh!! i was reading them last night and giggling so hard i decided to finish this chapter and just post it up for yall bc i was so ~tickled~ and writing this is so ? fun ! and also giving me dance class war flashbacks ngl . that spongebob jungle meme where the world is spinning was literally eddie when he forgot the combination and literally me in 95% of my classes.
u can send me memes on my tumblr tossertozier im always hanging out over there posting headcanons having a laugh

uh if you're reading this thank you, and if you left a comment on this like ... thank you so much!! genuinely. really really. hearing your guys' thoughts and what u liked or what ur thinking honestly makes my whole day. & it really encourages me to write.
Eddie was sitting with Ben on his dorm bed. They had two sets of notes spread out across the bed, Eddie’s from class, and Ben’s from three semesters ago. This class was royally kicking Eddie’s ass. He thought there was no logistical reason a dance major needed to take Biology 101 anyway. His high school credits should have sufficed. That was why he had put it off for so long, so the school would hopefully change it’s mind. So selfishly, it didn’t. Their door flung open. “Stan,” a familiar voice whined, “Why am I like this?”

“It can’t be that bad,” Stan waved a small hello at them as he addressed Richie. “Let me see it.” Richie was focused on what looked like two papers stapled together, somewhat crumpled in his hand. He gave it to Stan. “Fuck, Rich. You spent three hours on this?”

“Four,” Mike Hanlon was a step behind them. He leaned on the door frame. He waved politely to Ben and Eddie.

“Born in the Austrian town of Braunau on April 20, 1889, Adolf was the fourth child of Alois Schickelgruber and Klara Hitler,” Stan read out. Eddie frowned. It didn’t sound that bad to him. “Yadda yadda...a sufferer of child abuse. Which might be evidence that someone has already tried to go back and time and kill Hitler but wasn’t successful-” Stan looked up and gave Richie a flat look, “what the fuck, Rich?”


“Oh, that?” Stan huffed, tossing the paper back at Richie. “I haven’t started it.” He put his book bag on his desk and began to neatly empty it. “I was gonna do it tonight.”

“Isn’t this,” Mike plucked the paper out of Richie’s hands, “due tomorrow?”

“Yep,” Stan nodded, “we’re trash.”

“We’re the worst.” Richie agreed.

“So, now he admits it,” Eddie huffed on his bed, pretending he was still reading about endoplasmic reticulum. Ben knocked his shoulder with Eddie’s.

“Eddie,” Richie chastised. He was sitting in Stan’s chair backwards, with his arms wrapped around the back. He looked tired, but pink and amused. His hair was tousled back more than normally, like he had been fussing with it, and his glasses were slightly lopsided. His tongue stuck out a little bit, “you’ve got to stop flirting with me like this.”

There was a little zap in Eddie’s chest, right below his ribs. He still kind of hated Richie, but was having a harder time every day to convince himself that he didn’t enjoy having him around. He paused a little longer than normal, formulating his snappy come-back in his head. “I don’t normally flirt with people who don’t even say hello to me when they come into my room,” was what fell out of his mouth. Stan raised an eyebrow at him. WHAT THE FUCK WAS THAT, EDDIE . His mind screamed at him.

Richie’s eyes lit up. He looked tickled, like Eddie’s words reached out and poked at his ribs.
“It was very sweet of you to make an exception for me.”

“I called you trash,” Eddie squinted at him, “don’t look so tickled about it.”

“I’m sorry, did you say you want to be tickled?” Richie was standing up, crossing the room with a lecherous look. Ben warily stood up off Eddie’s bed, crossing to his own. Hanscom, you WITHERING COWARD, Eddie thought. He backed up on his bed. “That can be arranged.”

“Richie,” Eddie warned, pressing his back against the wall, wondering when it became Richie and not Tozier, “don’t.”

“Don’t what?” Richie paused at the edge of his bed. He leaned down, planting his hands on the mattress. He was wearing a soft looking long sleeved navy shirt with the sleeves rolled up. Eddie chastised his inner monologue for noticing it looked soft.

“Tickle me.”

“Tickle you?” Richie grinned so hard his face nearly split in half. “Gladly.” Richied lunged for Eddie, who had nowhere to run. He already had his back plastered into the cold, painted a dingy white, brick wall of his dorm. He wheezed as Richie mercilessly ravaged his ribs with pointy-ass fingers, Christ. Eddie couldn’t stop the laughter, wrenching his eyes shut, because he wasn’t going to give Tozier the satisfaction of his look while he did so. He bucked, disparaging when that only enabled Richie to hook a leg over both of his, both effectively tugging him down to lay on his back, and pinning him into his mattress. Eddie wormed his wrists free, grabbing at Richie’s ribs. It didn’t phase him, and in fact it brought inspiration to his attacks. He moved with more fervor, dancing the fingers on one hand up, past Eddie’s chest and under his neck. “Richie!” Eddie gasped between giggles, “STOP.” Eddie had no idea how Richie had some sort of spidey-sense that told him that Eddie’s neck was most vulnerable, but he cursed whatever very strange radioactive spider gave him that ability.

“I can’t,” Richie replied non-chalantly, as if this were an activity he indulged in bi-weekly, “it’s too fucking cute.”

Eddie, spurred on by hate, or that was what he had to call the heat pooling in his belly, right? or or maybe it was the laughter or maybe Eddie had just straight-up gone insane or maybe it was a mix between all of those things, reached up with both hands and tugged on Richie’s hair, crying out “s-stop,” as he did so.

Richie did, but didn’t move. He dropped his hand from Eddie’s waist and his neck. He pressed them right into the mattress where they fell, shifting so his body weight was supported by his hands.

When Eddie blinked his eyes open, his hands were still tangled in Richie’s hair. Richie had his tongue sticking out slightly, his glasses almost slipping off his nose. He looked like he was studying Eddie’s face closely enough to make a map out of it, the mountain of nose and the valley between his lips. Eddie swore, still would, that he didn’t mean to tug Richie’s hair again. He was simply untangling his hands from it.

Richie raised an eyebrow, “we’re gonna play like that, Kaspbrak?”

EDDIE, the sane piece of his consciousness clapped like a rainstorm over whatever hell demon had taken over for the last five minutes. WHAT thunder THE FUCK lightning ARE YOU DOING. WHY IS YOUR HEART RACING, he looked between Richie’s eyes, more visible than normal because his glasses were so far down on his nose. Cold wind raced through Eddie’s mind. STOP
THIS BULLSHIT. Richie had more freckles than he thought he did. CRASH. And finally, the rain came down hard. He dropped his hands from Richie’s hair fully, clasping them on his own chest.

Eddie blinked. “You should get Ben to look at your essay.” He told Richie plainly, as if they weren’t nearly laying down on a dorm bed. “I can help, too. I took that class last semester. But he’s way better at essays than I am.”

Richie, ever un-fazed, frowned with consideration. He didn’t move away from Eddie, but he turned his face to the side. “Yea, Haystack?” He asked. Eddie didn’t see Ben’s reaction. He could only see the pale columns of Richie’s neck. EDDIE his mind yelled, ENOUGH WITH THAT. “Do I have to tickle you into helping me, too?”

“Please,” Eddie heard Ben say weakly, “do not.”

“UP, EDDIE-” he was being yelled at. Eddie did not do well with being yelled at. His knees buckled painfully as he hit the floor. He kept going. “LIFT,” the yardstick cracked against the floor as Eddie painfully leapt. He was startled by the noise, and his ankle twisted as he hit the floor. He yelped, and the accompaniment faltered. The yardstick, which had been brought out to correct the straightness of Eddie’s extend, was thrown to the floor with an exasperated shout. Richie stopped playing, and Eddie let himself fall down to the floor.

Tuesday nights were rehearsals for soloists, and it was Eddie’s first. Laurent was pushing him harder than he had been pushed by anyone, maybe, including his mother. His breath felt like it was getting ripped out of his lungs, and he thought for a moment, that maybe he was asthmatic. His wrists painfully pressed into the floor but he didn’t dare look up. He didn’t know which was worse, the frustrated pacing of Laurent, or the holes Richie’s eyes were burning into the side of his face.

“You know what,” Laurent put his hands out, soothing himself. “Let’s take five. Change shoes, I want lyricals on you. You’re not feeling the floor, Eddie.”

Trust me, Eddie thought to himself, rubbing his thumb across his aching arches, he was feeling the fucking floor.

He almost wished he was still picking fights with Richie left and right. They had spent all of that Sunday night together with friends. Almost as if they were friends. Having a normal conversation, while Richie and Stan slapped together something that could masquerade itself as a paper on Hitler. Eddie stayed up with Richie longer than anyone else, past quiet hours, nearly till midnight, revising it once more. Richie watched him meticulously flick through the papers, checking grammar and making little notes. It was nice, almost.

Eddie would have traded all of the hair on his body and maybe several toes to be able to sit on the ground for a few more moments, but Satan didn’t appear and offer him the opportunity. He retreated to the dressing room. He knew Richie watched him as he left with concern. He prayed Richie didn’t follow him. If he tried to talk to him at the moment, it’d take them right out of banter and straight back to I’ll-rip-your-eyes-out. He swore as he traded out his ballet shoes for the humiliatingly named footundeez, which were just a covering for the ball of his foot and nothing else.

He returned to a solemn Laurent and a Richie who didn’t seem to be doing anything but having his hands on the keys. He wasn’t even on his phone. He just stared straight down at them. His hair covered his face. Eddie didn’t know what he was thinking.

“Again,” Laurent said.
“PUSH, EDDIE. POWER. LIFT. UP. HIGHER. NO. UP.” Were all things that Eddie wouldn’t mind never hearing again. His toes were actually going to bruise. He had painful days in the studio, in fact more often than not it was painful. But he let his toe drag down on a fouette turn and he hissed loudly as he rolled out of it, determined to keep dancing.

“Stop,” Laurent’s voice came softer. Eddie listened. Richie kept playing for a moment. Laurent tapped on the piano. Richie looked up, startled. It seemed as if he was in his own little world until that moment. “Did you just catch your toe?”

Eddie had gotten a blister on a toe the other day, it popped quickly. The excess skin had caught on the floor and ripped a little bit, bleeding minimally. Say no, Eddie’s mind told him.

“Yeah.”

Laurent sighed. “We’re done for tonight, gentleman.” Laurent started giving Eddie pointed notes, counting off on fingers. Eddie curled his fists together and tried to keep up, tried to nod thoughtfully. He could feel his feet pulsing and his toe screaming but what weighed into him the most heavily was Laurent’s lack of praise. His sense of disappointment. Tears pricked at his eyes. Don’t cry don’t cry don’t cry don’t cry don’t cry, he thought angrily.

“See you next week, Eddie.” And it was done, it was over, and he could cry somewhere else. He dashed into the dressing room furiously, feeling his ankles scream at him as he went. He all but threw himself onto the cold, unforgiving bench, and wiped at his face furiously. Get a thicker skin, he told himself. Man up. He practically ripped the shoes off his feet, ignoring the blood on his toe. He threw them into his bag, and rubbed at his eye again.

“Hey,” Richie’s soft voice greeted him from the entry way.

Eddie wanted to be ready to fight or be snippy or even, god help him, flirty, but he just wasn’t and he said a small “hi,” in return.

Eddie’s mind ran over all the possibilities of Richie’s next move. He found himself on his guard almost always around Richie. He waited for Richie to say something that sounded like pity for him or a comment about Laurent being too harsh or a joke. All of it sounded terrible. He just wanted him to go the fuck away, because none of it was anything Eddie wanted to hear.

What Richie said was “you’re a phenomenal dancer.” And he sat next to him on the bench.

Eddie’s mouth opened to respond but he moreso squeaked than said anything because it hit him in the chest and he really wanted to cry again because that was all he needed to hear.

“I’ve been watching these rehearsals for, like, three weeks now. And, like.” Richie rubbed at his nose with his hand. “You’re gonna be amazing, Eddie.”

Eddie needed to be doing something suddenly so he grabbed his dance bag and, even though his feet were basically personified and begging him not to, he slipped on socks so he could put his day shoes back on. He didn’t know how to respond to sincere praise. He didn’t get a lot of it. “You are amazing, Eddie.”

Eddie stopped, dropping his foot back to the ground and shoving his hand back on his face because he couldn’t stop the barrage of tears beating through his eyelids. After a long moment of silence, he snuffled, “thanks” into his hand. Richie didn’t say anything in response. Eddie could practically hear the ticking of a clock correlated with the throbbing in his ankles. He rubbed his hand over his face, asking Richie timidly “can you grab my sneakers for me?”
“Course,” a rough, british accent came at him, and Eddie hid his smile in his hand “me ol’ mate.” Richie sprung up. There were only one pair of shoes in the cubbies on the wall, so Richie was probably able to make his assumptions.

Eddie dropped his hand, sniffing loudly and forcing all of the tears, snot and feelings back inside his wrecked little body. He rolled his feet, pointing his toes, as Richie held the shoes in front of him. He winced. “Thanks.”

“Ow,” and apparently they were still on the british thing, “bloody bad do ye feet hurt?”

“I feel like my toes were individually ripped off while my ankles went through a meat pulverizer.” Eddie replied flatly.

Richie laughed. He leaned down and Eddie winced, thinking he was going to try and put Eddie’s shoes on for him. That would have just been fucking humiliating. Instead, he zipped up Eddie’s dance bag. He took the lace of a shoe and the lace of another and tied them securely around the strap.

“What are you-”

Richie twisted around so his back was facing Eddie, pulling the strap of his bag with one hand. “Hop on, then.” In the twinkling British accent.

“Are you insane?”

“I owe ya one,” Richie responded, sounding like Richie. “I was so fucked on that history paper before…” you was the word he didn’t finish with.

Eddie shuffled nervously. He knew he should, quote, walk it off, unquote. But he could do a series of much gentler cool-down exercises in his dorm room… And it was shallow, but it was Boston in February and fucking freezing out. He imagined it’d be warmer on Richie. He always thought he danced better without the shock of the cold. Plus, it wasn’t icy for the first time in months, so there wasn’t worry of Richie slipping...

“…grab my coat.” Eddie told him finally, trying to sound coarse and irritated and not at all pleased because he wasn’t.

They crossed campus in relative silence. Relative, because Eddie at one point in time wrapped his hands in Richie’s scarf, and Richie laughed. Eddie smacked him. Richie laughed harder.

Eddie dread approaching the dorm, knowing he’d have to hop down as soon as they got to the door so someone could get out a key card. But some sort of very fucked up angel was apparently watching over Eddie, because someone came out right as they approached it.

“Cheers, man.” Richie told them as he stepped through, and Eddie wondered when the british thing would be over.

“Richie!!” Shrill voices called out from a place Eddie couldn’t see in the lounge because of Richie’s ridiculous hair. It was far enough, really. It was only a short flight up to his dorm, or he could just take the elevator. Eddie knew he didn’t weigh much, but after trekking across campus, he was sure Richie’s arms must have been hurting a little bit. He tapped his hands, still wrapped in Richie’s scarf, on his chest. He indicated that it was okay for him to get put down.

“Ladies,” Richie turned, with Eddie on his back, and greeted his friends. “Single gentleman.” He
crossed to them, keeping his hold tight on Eddie’s thighs. “Both in the room, and in relationship status.” Eddie ducked his face down so he didn’t have to look at them. Clinging to the back of Richie Tozier was not something he needed a reputation for.

“Whatcha doin’ Rich?” The guy sneered. He sounded kind of nasty. Richie must have struck a nerve, probably because he mentioned it in front of all those girls. “That your new girlfriend?” His laugh was gross, and no one laughed with him, “I know you can’t pull pussy to save your life, but that’s a little low.” He was drunk, Eddie realized. Eddie frequently forgot that for other college students, getting drunk on a Tuesday was just a Tuesday.

“Who, this?” Richie raised an eyebrow. He tried to twist so Eddie was visible. Eddie clenched his thighs into Richie so he wouldn’t be moved. Richie dropped a hand from one side. “Ow, fuck,” he said, referencing Eddie’s death grip on his midsection with his legs. He grabbed one thigh with both hands and tugged, so Eddie twisted on his body. He was on Richie’s hip then, like some sort of over-sized koala baby, or something. “Eddie Kaspbrak. Not a girl, mind you, and he could literally kick your teeth in at this very moment, trust me.” The guy had the sides of his head shaved, a farmer’s tan, and looked bitter. Richie wasn’t wrong. He looked like he barely knew how to spell gym, let alone been in one. Eddie was thankful for the defensiveness, less so thankful for the embarrassing pose Richie was holding him in. Richie must have noticed because he glanced at Eddie, and then to the floor. Asking if he’d prefer to be on it. Eddie nodded, rolling his feet as he was set down.

“Yeah,” Eddie stretched up, rolling his shoulders back, “and I don’t know what the fuck you’re on about, talking about Richie and pussy,” he scoffed, rolling his eyes “I’m his next door neighbor, I hear everything.” Eddie crossed his arms, cocking an eyebrow, “unless every girl in his room just happens to have a habit of breathily agreeing with everything he says.”

The girls giggled into their hands. Richie barked out a laugh. Eddie was thankful Ben made him get a Twitter, because that’s where he heard that come-back. Eddie was bored of the entire thing then, reminded why he didn’t often interact with his peers. He turned and left, padding softly towards the elevator, wincing as his ankles cracked unnaturally as he stepped gently across the floor. Richie caught up with him just as the doors were opening.

“I have your bag,” Richie reminded him, stepping in behind him.

“Oh,” the doors shut. The guy, pissed and looking like a mushroom that got hit by a car, watched them the entire time. “Thank you.” And that was for the bag, the defense, the ride, the compliment, everything. That was the only thank you he was getting. It sounded like a good thank you, though. It sounded like a you’ve been so good to me.

Which Eddie’s ass was not saying.

Richie shrugged it off.

When the door opened, Eddie was hit with the overwhelming scent of weed. He stepped out of the elevator and turned back to Richie. “So, are we done now?” Eddie asked, bouncing a little as the feeling returned to his heels, “With this,” he gestured between the two of them, referencing the nice, light, almost mushy energy between them.

“If you want to be.” Richie shrugged, smiling grandly as he stepped out of the elevator.

“Good.” Eddie turned to march down the hall. When he looked back, Richie was still watching him. “I hate you,” he reminded him. It had none of the vitriol, or anger it used to.
Richie could only smile harder “I know.”

Chapter End Notes

ahfjsk;d hi guys!! what the heck!!! you're all so nice!!! the comments on the last one literally had me squeealing and i was reading through them tonight and like immediately got out my laptop to try and update for you guys !! like actually thank u from the bottom of my heart it is so encouraging and it makes me want to write so much?? sorry this is longer than it was meant to be... i just had like, a fire struck in me, idk. ok im rambling but like, if you leave comments, actually : thank you so much.

as always, my tumblr is tossertozier if you wnat to hang out or message or send me hcs even about this fic and like footundeez like tbh i love that shit. thanks all~~ !
A week and a half later, Eddie felt like a goddamned idiot as he fidgeted in the hallway. Okay, no one was necessarily out and about to see him, but he still felt as if he was being watched. Or like he was doing something in plain view. He didn’t know exactly what it was. He just felt scrutinized.

Of course, that scrutinization might as well have come from himself. He was, after all, leaning on Richie Tozier’s door, waiting for him so they could walk to the studio together.

And he was mad at him, too, but he owed him a muffin. So, Eddie was getting his muffin from that son of a bitch.

That specific son of a bitch played music until four a.m. the night prior and Eddie nearly screamed. He didn’t go over there, though. He stopped doing that. Because now he and the guys from next door were sort of friends, and getting meals together and Eddie had even studied for his test with Mike and Ben. And every time he went over there, he got trapped into some lengthy conversation about some dumb bullshit. He had ended up staying past quiet hours talking, playing games, watching something or other, several times. And it was nice, having sort-of friends, but it was also exhausting. One time it ended with him getting challenged to a game of UNO, which Richie bet a muffin over. Eddie won the round. Richie had already eaten the muffin. And so, they made an agreement that Richie would cash in on his muffin promise that morning before rehearsal.

Eddie was considering knocking again, and also considering just leaving because muffins weren’t even the best baked good and he could use the carbs elsewhere, when the door cracked open.

“Good morning,” Richie practically crooned as he leaned out of his own doorway, pulling the last bit of his glove over his wrist.

“Hi,” Richie had on a green shirt, and Eddie became distinctly aware he had all of these flecks of green in his eyes. He chastised himself, keep your eyes on the muffin prize, he told himself. That’s the only reason he was there, of course.

“I’d love to wake up to this every morning—” Richie smirked, and his eyes dashed down Eddie and back up. Eddie was not wearing anything particularly interesting. A navy turtleneck, because he could hear his mother screaming about his neck all the way from Maine, under his black coat and dance pants. For one dastardly moment it seemed as if Richie was going to pinch Eddie’s cheek. Eddie all but jumped out of the way.

“We’re going to be late.” Eddie replied grumpily, mostly so he didn’t have to respond to the compliment. He turned on heel and started marching down the hallway. He did an excellent job of pretending like someone who didn’t particularly care if Richie caught up or not for someone who waited outside his door for five minutes.

“It’s 7:15.” Richie reminded him, jogging to catch up. “Plenty of time for your muffin, muffin.” Eddie smacked his stomach, but with a dry grin on his face that couldn’t be helped. “God,” Richie yawned, “if we’re gonna have to get up so early for these things you might as well just stay over.” He wrapped an arm over Eddie’s shoulders.

“Why?” Eddie started hopping down the stairs, effectively dislodging Richie from his shoulders.
“So I can stay up all night in your room instead of mine?” He looped around the stairwell effectively, hardly waiting for Richie at all.

“Well,” Richie sat on the railing and slid down the rest of the way. “I was also thinking we wouldn’t do a whole lot of sleeping either but-” He was quieted by a harsh look from Eddie. Eddie still held open the door to the stairwell for him, but with sharp little knives in the corners of his eyes. “Are you mad about the music thing?”

He was, honestly. Richie could have been the hottest person in the world and personally delivered him several baskets of muffins every morning and the music at 3 a.m. would still piss him off. Especially because Richie looked just about as exhausted as Eddie felt. The entire no-sleep-free-for-all couldn’t be good for either of them, heck, anyone on their floor, really.

“It’s very loud,” Eddie settled for saying. There was frost on the sidewalk in Boston. It crunched under his boots. He huddled a little closer into his coat. At least there was no new snow. They already had a solid six inches on the ground.

“It’s meant to be,” Richie sidled up next to him. “It’s *music*. We dance to it. It’s what we millennials call: fun.”

“It’s what we normal people call: obnoxious.” Eddie retorted. The wind whipped into his cheeks.

The campus was truly dead before 8 a.m. on a Friday morning. They walked down a path that was outlined with barren trees to the

“You should have more fun, Eddie.” Richie took a few running steps and slid across some ice on the pavement. “This is college.” Eddie could literally snap an ankle doing that and ruin his entire semester if not his career, but sure, why not have *fun*?

“I have plenty of fun,” Eddie defended weakly. And he was well aware it was college, dipshit.

“Oh, yeah?” Richie was walking backwards, looking smug. “Tell me about this ‘fun’ as you call it.” Eddie floundered for a response. He couldn’t think of anything that Richie wouldn’t immediately make fun of. Richie spun on his toes in the ice, laughing to himself as he did. “Oh, I can show you the WORLD,” Eddie felt himself moving before he even thought it through. He scoped up a frosty ball of snow quickly, shaping it with his fingers. “There’s so much fun to be had out here, Eds-”

Eddie’s aim wasn’t as good as he wanted it to be, but his snowball nabbed Richie in the shoulder. Richie turned back, looking a delighted mixture of cold, astonished and amused.

“That was pretty fun,” Eddie told him with a grin. Richie’s eyebrows arched, and he lurched down for snow of his own. Eddie laughed, running past Richie on the snow, towards the J.W. “And DON’T call me Eds!” He shouted back at Richie, ducking from an assault.

“This’ll be a first,” Richie commented lightly as he pulled his wallet out of his pocket.

“What, buying a muffin?” Eddie asked, wiggling his toes in his boots. The J.W., or their tiny cafe that didn’t require a full meal swipe, was warm. Richie managed to not hit Eddie with a snowball on their run there. Eddie felt mildly grateful for that, because if he had started the day even the least big soggy, there would have been problems. Nothing good came from soggy days.

“No,” Richie snorted, “first time I’ll be on time for one of these dance things.”

Eddie rolled his eyes, stepping up as it was his turn to order. He went with cinnamon raisin, and
Richie paid dutifully for it, telling the clerk “just his, thanks.” Eddie stepped to the side politely as Richie flipped his wallet closed, unsure how to respond to Richie’s tardiness. What did he want, a medal? **Congrats: You Were On-Time Once in Your Fucking Life because Your Neurotic Neighbor Made You Buy Him a Breakfast Pastry?** He opened his mouth to say that, because he thought it was kind of funny, but Richie was already talking.

“I don’t know about this, Eds,” Richie told him as he, too, stepped to the side to make room for the next customer. Behind the counter a girl with dreadlocks and sharp winged eyeliner handed Richie the muffin. He offered it down to Eddie, who picked it up quickly. “your goody-two-shoes-ness. It’s rubbing off on me.”

Eddie crammed nearly as much muffin as would fit into his mouth. “Ain’t *muffin* you can do about it,” he told Richie, mouth still half on the muffin. He smiled at himself, enjoying his own pun. He stepped away from the J.W. He was only a few footfalls away before he realized Richie was no longer at his side. He turned back to the guy with raised eyebrows. “Comin’?” He asked through a mouthful of muffin so it sounded more like “Couhmey?”

Richie blinked, shaking his head. He nodded, following Eddie. “I’m sorry,” he told Eddie when he caught up, “that was just the cutest fucking thing I’ve ever seen, I needed a moment.”

Eddie swallowed, “you should have seen your own face.” His inner monologue by that point in time had basically given up on yelling at him, and was merely wallowing in a puddle. *Why, Eddie Kaspbrak*, it moaned at him, *why are you like this?*

Richie turned to him with a wide-eyed gaze and a big grin. Eddie side-stepped before the grabby hands even started. He kept walking, artfully dancing around Richie’s grabs for him.

“**EDDIE-**” Richie enthused in a high pitched voice.

“**Stop.**”

“**YOU DO LOVE ME,**”

“**Don’t touch me.**”

It continued that way on the long walk to the studios. Eddie hated a lot of things about Richie, but probably hated most of all that he laughed so hard in his presence. His throat was getting rubbed raw from the cold winter air, and his fingers were tingling around the last bits of his muffin. He hardly cared, as Richie grandly held open the door to the studio.

“**Man,**” Richie brushed by him as Eddie made for the dressing rooms, “lunch can’t come quick enough.” He let his fingers drag by Eddie’s elbow intentionally.

It wasn’t exactly a plan but it sounded like one anyway and Eddie hid his smile in his dumb fucking turtleneck as he ducked into the changing rooms.

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Eddie had a successful rehearsal in the studio despite the sleep deprivation. He hoped Richie could say the same, he didn’t see him all morning. They were holed away in two different studios. Eddie was feeling quite chuffed by the time lunch rolled around. He stayed back a moment, demonstrating a quick pique turn that led into their more complex combination to a fellow student. His name was Chris, and although he towered over Eddie in height and weight, he seemed to have gotten lost somewhere midway through rehearsal and never caught up. His mousy brown hair was flocked with sweat, and Eddie felt bad for him.
But, really, Eddie was happy to regardless. Eddie loved that piece of the combination, and he could practice the opening turn endlessly. It was one of those pieces that felt right underneath his feet, with organic movements and he felt his core perfectly aligned to the floor.

He had realized, after spending five minutes out of a half hour lunch, that he had forgotten he made quasi-plans with Richie. He shrugged it off, saying “together?” quickly to Chris. He was sure Richie was probably kidding anyway. He’d probably pass by the room down the hall on his way out and see Richie covered with girls at the piano, as usual.

“You’re not shifting your weight on the right beat,” he corrected idly to Chris. “If you switch on five and not four then you’re not prepared-”

Chris nodded, listening, but looking overwhelmed. His eyes drifted past Eddie’s shoulder and caught on to something. Eddie turned over his shoulder to see Richie, bag over his shoulder, leaning against the wall.

“Oh,” he squawked a little. It was an unpleasant sound, Eddie was rather perturbed to discover his throat could make that noise at all. “I’m sorry, I thought you-”

“It’s fine,” Richie waved him off, pulling out his phone. “I’ll wait.”

“Oh no,” Chris got the vibe he was intruding and Eddie got the vibe of something and he had no idea what but it was frankly terrifying and he got the urge to hit it with a massive stick, “I’m good. I’ll just keep at it. Thanks, Eddie.”

“Oh, um. Sure! Anytime.” He turned awkwardly away. He felt like it was an awkwardly long stretch to Richie on the other side of the studio and he felt Chris’ eyes on his shoulders as he went.

“Fine,” he greeted Richie, wishing he had something to fumble with in his hands. “I thought you were kidding.” He hadn’t actually intended on sharing that with Richie, but it spilled out of his mouth. It wasn’t a problem Eddie ate lunch alone most of the time. He enjoyed the solitude… for the most part.

Richie frowned at that implication, that Eddie would think anyone who was offering to hang out with him must have been making a joke out of it in some kind of way. Eddie realized how insecure he must have sounded, and so he made it a point to walk past Richie before they had a Talk about it. Eddie was about all Talked out. Richie kept up with him, learning Eddie was prone to just start walking away. He’d need to do something more surprising next. Skipping, maybe.

“No, you misunderstood, Eds, see the joke comes later when you find out this was all just an elaborate ruse to fuck your mothe-” Eddie shoved him.

They ended up sitting with a few people in the small break area for lunch. They seemed to know who Richie was. Eddie wondered how that was possible, Richie knowing more people from the dance program than he, a dancer, did. He tried not to think too much of it. After lunch, it was a big rehearsal for the second act of Sleeping Beauty, which was their spring recital showcase. Eddie dreaded this piece. It was the piece he’d have to do with a partner. It was also a long complex piece of the show that required blocking and then re-blocking when they got on stage and it always took forever and wasn’t terribly interesting. After ten minutes of an argument about where to place one dancer, Eddie caught Richie’s eye and pulled a sour face. Richie laughed under his breath. Eddie grabbed one of the flowered props from the girl next to him, doing a mocking rendition of what was going on on the floor for Richie. Richie clapped silently, nodding with approval. It was funny, until they called for music, and Richie actually had a job to do.
Which he did.

Sort of.

Richie, Eddie realized, was putting on a bit of a show. It was already a complex piece of music. He was adding little trills, making little faces at Eddie as he did so. Eddie laughed under his hand as he added one for the dramatic fan-kick of their principal dancer. A deep chord where it didn’t belong when a girl fell out of her turn. Eddie wrinkled his nose at Richie, sending him his best “you’re mean” face. Richie had his tongue out in response, but looked quickly back to the sheet music. Eddie glanced up into the mirror to see his own face. His face was not saying “you’re mean” and was more saying “I’m a chipmunk who’s highly amused.” He tried to straighten that shit out, and flatten back into a normal expression.

Richie had to focus on some of the more complex pieces of the ballet, and it was nice to see him have to work for something for once, Eddie thought. His brow narrowed when he did so, his wrists tensed. His style became more rigid, more precise and his posture was straighter. He had a little bit of hair falling into his eyes. Eddie wondered if it was bothering him, but the music was moving too quickly for him to be able to move it. Eddie idly thought about brushing it out of his face.

“1-2-, KASPRAK!” The dancers kept moving, Richie kept playing, and Eddie had missed an entrance amongst the rest of the guys. He got very hot, feeling something nervous wiggle in his stomach at his mistake. Laurent looked pissed as he fumbled in, joining the rest of the dancers. It only took him a moment, and he only missed a few counts. But he felt guilt crash into his shoulders as Laurent watched him, specifically. He corrected his feet and took a deep breath.

“Eddie,” Laurent spoke to him softly and it almost made it worse. He had casually pulled him aside after class. Eddie wanted to tell him not to bother, that whatever disappointed sentiment he could possibly share, he had already screamed at himself a hundred times over. “This is a tough industry for guys like you.”

Short ones? Eddie thought bitterly. Short ones who fucking suck at pas de deux?

“You can do it but… keep your focus,” Laurent finished quietly. “That’s all I’m saying.”

Keep your focus and don’t miss your intro music because you’re staring at the fucking pianist, Kaspbrak, he thought. It was humiliating, and god knew by his luck, they saw all the other things that he was doing while fucking around with Richie and didn’t get called out for.

He nodded and stammered a thank you to Laurent as he headed towards the exit of the studio. The actual - and he wasn't lying to himself that time - last person he wanted to see was waiting on the other side of the door. Well, less so waiting, moreso, talking to a modest crowd of people. A girl was leaned up on Richie's forearm. Eddie told himself that it didn't bother him, or if it did it couldn't. Without a word, he fled to the dressing room.

When he emerged, it seemed like the crowd had sustained itself, if not thickened. Eddie caught Richie's eye the second he stepped out of the door. Richie offered him a little wave, but made no effort to step through the people or pull him in. It made Eddie angrier, even though he knew he hadn't a single right to that. He stayed there longer than strictly necessary, fussily buttoning up his coat. He pretended he didn't send a glare in Richie's direction as he fiddled with the hem of his jacket. He waited for him to say something. He didn't. It wasn't like he was Eddie's boyfriend, hell, they were hardly friends.

He still detested being ignored.
Even if he wasn't being deliberately ignored, and Richie was just talking with other people.

*Fuck*, Eddie thought to himself, *you're being a giant baby. Who the fuck is this?*

Hating himself for it, he spared one last look for Richie before turning down the hall. He told himself he would have left even if he hadn't caught Richie's eye. Even if it hadn't been apparent he'd like to be followed.

Richie followed him, calling after "hey, Shortstack!" He didn't know what exactly he was looking to get from staring Richie down. He really didn't. But the absolutely last thing he wanted to hear was a crack on his height. Eddie tried to make it to the clearing of the lobby before he said what he'd have to say. He didn't want to say in front of all of those people. "You know I'm not a roadrunner, goddamn, those tiny legs are fast."

"Richie, stop." Eddie replied shortly as Richie caught up. They just barely cleared it into the empty lobby before Eddie hit the wall. The metaphorical wall of done-ness.

"But I promised you I could go all night long," he drawled out, jabbing a shoulder into Eddie's. He missed out on the seriousness of Eddie's tone. Edude didn't know how Richie did it. He made the flirtation so casual and it made Eddie's head spin but it also pissed him off. How many other people was he dropping lines at left and right? Had Eddie seriously missed an entrance, and disappointed his teacher, for this?

"I'm serious," Eddie looked at him, and stopped walking. He took a deliberate step backwards. "Stop."

Eddie hated how much seeing Richie’s smile fall crashed into his chest, “is this still about the music thing?” Richie tried to step forward, but Eddie edged away again. “Look, Eds- I didn’t know it upset you that much.”

“You did know, Richie, and don’t call me that and besides, none of that is the point-”

“Are we fighting again, is that what we’re doing?” Richie laughed. He looked like a man who had tripped and then tried to remain cool. He fumbled back into joking normalcy, shoving his hands into his pockets. “I’ll play the scene you want me to, but ya’ gotta give me some heads up, Kasprak.” He shrugged as if he could care less about the entire thing. That feeling curled around Eddie’s throat, sinking it’s nails into his esophagus.

“We’re not playing anything,” he spit out. “We never were.”

“Okay,” Richie took his own affronted step backwards, pointing out Eddie’s lie as if it were written in red ink across them, “*that’s* bullshit. You can’t tell me that you haven’-”

“Okay, well, FINE, FINE." Eddie couldn’t necessarily make what Richie was saying untrue, but he could manage to talk louder than him. He exerted that power. "It honestly doesn't matter. Whatever it is or isn't, or wasn't, Jesus, or-" Eddie put his throbbing temples into his hands. “I don’t know, Richie! But it’s enough, okay?!"

"What is?" Richie sounded exasperated.

"This!" And that was It, Eddie was officially worked Up and he was going to start pacing, so he might as well have paced then "no more muffins, or nicknames. No more flirting by pretending to fight and then actually getting mad and actually fighting. Not just the," *friendship*, he thought, "new stuff. All of it. We shouldn't do...whatever this is, anymore."
"I-"

"It's all fucking ridiculous. And a waste of my time." Eddie rambled, not even bothering to look up at Richie. "And yours, too. I have ballet to focus on. That's my thing. Maybe you could make yours not failing out of this goddamned school."

'Because I like you and your stupid face and I hope it does okay and, goddamnit, does that make me angry and so if you stay in your corner and I stay in mine maybe everything will work out better for the both of us. I hate your dumb jokes and that I laugh and that you play music so late at night anyway and I still look forward to seeing you in the morning anyway. I hate every single one of those girls that hangs off you and I hate that you let them. I hate when you make the entire flirty thing between us feel like a goddamned joke but I hate it more when it feels like it isn't one.'

Eddie Kaspbrak said none of that. Eddie Kaspbrak turned on heel, without looking Richie Tozier in the face, and rushed out of the building.

Chapter End Notes

eddie is stressT. lettuce all pray for some naps for eddie. my son is fun and loves pun i s2g he just needs a nap.

thank u ??? for ur comments if u leave them... honestly i m hollering i love them and i laughed s o hard?? im like! tryna write for y'all!!! bc you're so encouraging and lovely and literally... r i p i could never write this fast without the encouragement, or i havent in the past. thank you all so much.
abused toothbrushes

Eddie was happy, he told himself when his alarm started screeching at six a.m.
Eddie was happy, he told himself when he ate plain salad for the third time that week for lunch.
Eddie was happy, he told himself when he walked straight past the open door of the dorm next
door, past the chatting peers and the board games on the floor, to go to sleep by himself in his
room.

“You’re not connected with the piece, Eddie.” Laurent told him at his solo rehearsal, “so you’re
not hitting your marks. You need to know the music, it’ll help you extend. It’ll help you reach
higher in your leaps. Again.”

Eddie was happy, he told himself when he silently brushed passed Richie at the end of rehearsal.
They hadn’t said a word to each other since the previous Friday. He felt Richie’s eyes burning into
his back.

He wasn’t necessarily expecting to find Ben sitting in their dorm room that Wednesday night, but
he found himself mildly disappointed anyway. The worst part about the entire thing was when he
stumbled into the quasi-friendship with the guys next door, he dragged Ben in with him. He
couldn’t very well drag Ben back out.

He knew he should do a quick cool down after class and review his recital combinations, but he
was exhausted. And still upset. Pas de deux was so damn hard, and he ached all the time after that
class. He flopped onto his bed with a despairing moan. He kicked off his shoes, curling into his
comforter. He scrolled through Instagram for far too long, before he knew it, the dorm door was
opening.

“Hey, Eddie,” Ben greeted, followed by Stan and Mike.

“Helogurf” Eddie mumbled coherently into his pillow. Ben laughed lightly, swinging his heavy
black backpack off his shoulders. He quickly started climbing his make-shift ladder to get into his
bed.

“What are you doing?” Stan drawled, sounding oddly dead-pan. He could hear the judgement in
Stan’s voice. Eddie chose to embrace his newfound life as a worm in dirt, and burrowed further into
his comforter. He scrolled through Instagram for far too long, before he knew it, the dorm door was
opening.

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his comforter.

“I’m thriving, can’t you tell?” Eddie mumbled into his blankets and his cellphone. Stan laughed,
sitting on the edge of Eddie’s bed.

“Guys ,” they heard a call from the hallway. Eddie peaked his head out of the blanket. Bill came
pounding into their room as if it was also his, not that Eddie particularly minded. He let his head
fall back down, not minding the blanket came over his head. “I’m gonna kill him, he’s being so f-
fucking-” Eddie’s curiosity was piqued. He popped his head back out of the blanket to join the
conversation. “Oh!” Bill blinked. “Hey, Eddie.” He clearly floundered for something to change the
subject to, “you look like a burrito.”

“I feel like a burrito.” Eddie replied. Mike grabbed Eddie’s desk chair, spinning it around to sit in
it. Ben was in his bed, which was lofted high above Eddie’s.
“Are you coming out tonight?” Bill asked. He crossed to Ben’s bed, the only one still standing. Ben’s bed was lofted high enough that his desk and dresser could fit under it, a sacrifice made so they could have more space in the dorm. He sat down in Ben’s desk chair, careful not to disturb the crazy contents of his desk.

“Out?” Eddie raised his eyebrows. “You guys are going out?” O U T it sounded so adult. Like they were going to a speaky-easy to drink gimlets and dance up on gigolos.

“By ‘out’” Stan shot Bill a look, “he means ‘to the other side of campus.’ Someone in Prosser is throwing a party.”

“Oh.” He highly doubted the 20-something in Prosser, another dorm on campus, would have gimlets.

“You should go,” Bill smiled, leaning forward in the chair. “It’ll be fun.”

Eddie looked to Stan, and raised his eyebrows. His eyebrows eloquently asked Stan will Richie be there?

Stan nodded.

“I’m good,” Eddie shuffled further into his blanket so he didn’t have to look at Bill’s sad face. “Thanks though.”

“If you’re trying to avoid Richie—” Bill started, scooting his chair over. Stan made an annoyed noise, giving him a warning look, as it was clear no one wanted to talk about this.

“Bill—” Stan sighed, telling him off with his eyes.

“What?” Bill replied to Stan, ultimately ignoring him and looking back to Eddie, “I’m just saying, it’s gonna be in a suite, you can avoid him so easily.”

“Can I ask what happened? What’d that asshole do?” Mike asked, not unkindly, but curiously. He leaned forward. “Do y’all know?” He looked in between Ben and Stan, “because I’m starting to feel left out here.” Eddie laughed into his comforter at Mike’s assumption it was Richie’s fault automatically.

“He didn’t do anything,” Eddie replied casually. “We just don’t get along, that’s all.”

“Uh,” Mike looked highly skeptical. “Okay.”

“We could all go to dinner!” Bill enthused, standing up from his chair. “We could talk it out, all six of us!”

“Probably seven,” Ben corrected, tapping on his phone, “Bev’s on her way to campus.”

“Even better!” Bill knocked on the frame of Ben’s bed, “she’s great with this kind of thing,” he assured Eddie.

“There’s nothing to talk out,” Eddie insisted. Bill looked crest-fallen. “Really.” He picked up his own phone under his blanket cocoon. “Everything is okay. We just don’t like to hang out, much.” Eddie opened an app, so it looked like he had something to be doing on his phone. It was the Stocks app. Eddie could pretend he had stocks.

Stan rolled his eyes. Eddie hated how easily Stan could tell he was lying. He stood up, offering a
hand up to Bill, who didn’t need it, he was sitting in a chair, but accepted it anyway. “Let’s go, fellas.” Ben was already climbing out of his bed.

“Want your coat, Stan?” Mike stood, grabbing Stan’s coat from the wardrobe by his bed. Stan grinned at him, dropping Bill’s hand after patting it sympathetically.

“Well,” Bill scuffed his feet, still looking at Eddie. “If you change your mind…” GOD he was cute, Eddie thought to himself.

“He has my number,” Stan reminded him from his spot by the door. Ben rolled his eyes, grabbing Bill by the neck, and hauling him towards the door.

“Bye, Eddie!” Mike waved cheerfully. Eddie waved back.

“That was never gonna work, Bill.” Ben told him quietly as they exited the dorm, Stan grabbing something from the drawer of his desk.

“I’m desperate. You don’t understand. I’m literally gonna kill Ric-” the door shut behind them.

Eddie’s first class on Thursdays wasn’t until ten a.m. Normally he woke up early anyway, did some stretching, and studying. When he woke up that Thursday to his regular alarm, he just groaned and shut it off. He woke up hours later, sun illuminating his room brightly. It was 9:13. He knew he didn’t have time to shower but his teeth felt slime-y. He quickly went down to the restroom. It was somewhat busy in there, it being the time everyone generally woke up during weekdays. Eddie was used to an entirely abandoned bathroom. He waited with his toothbrush and toothpaste patiently to use a sink.

Midway into brushing, the door swung open. Richie was on the other side, yawning into his hand. He caught Eddie’s eye.

Eddie looked back to his own reflection, brushing his teeth with more vigor than anyone ever did naturally.

He waited for the greeting, the flirting, the anything. It was the first time they had made eye contact since last Friday. Richie did none of that. “Hey, man,” he greeted one of the guys at the sink next to him.

“Morning, Rich.” He replied, wiping his mouth with a paper towel.

Eddie’s eyes flickered back to Richie. He had a towel over his shoulder. He dropped it on a bench and stretched up high, palms towards the ceilings. Eddie did not look at the trail of hair, exposed from his shirt riding up high, leading from his belly button into his sweatpants. And he didn’t think about touching either.

He had a feeling Richie’s eyes were on him. He didn’t look up at his face, just turned quickly back to the sink and spit. He flipped on the faucet again, wetting his toothbrush, and resumed brushing. He felt like his toothbrush was probably screaming he was brushing so hard. If his toothbrush could file a domestic abuse claim, it probably would have.

It was hotter in the bathroom than normal, because several of the showers were being used and the steam rose when there weren’t open windows.

“How’d you do on the sosh test?” The guy asked Richie, wiping his hands off with a paper towel and throwing it in the trash. Eddie stared into the sink, at the little silver drain. He didn’t want to
ask was sosh was because he didn’t care.

“I feel pretty good about it,” Richie replied. “I don’t like, need an A, I’m doing good in that class, but I think it went well.” Eddie snorted into the sink before he could stop himself. The idea of Richie doing particularly well in any class had just come to be a bit laughable to him. His eyes widened in horror at how rude that was, and again without thinking, he looked up. He looked up just in time to see Richie give the guy a ‘don’t even ask’ look. Richie was no longer wearing a shirt.

Eddie spit into the sink again.

“See you in class?”

“We’ll talk to you later.” The guy left, and there were a lot of people still in the bathroom, but only them by the sinks and the cubbies where people had a habit of leaving the little toiletry caddies. Eddie didn’t look up, but he waited for it. The accusation, the words, the something. He could see, out of the corner of his eye, Richie coming towards him. He leaned down to splash some cool water into his face. He might have arched his back, ass out farther than it was before. It wasn’t intentional, of course. His lower back muscles were just sore.

Richie, Eddie could see in the mirror, didn’t look. His eyes were fixed on the cubbies on Eddie’s other side. He’d probably pass by, brush Eddie’s waist further down than normally socially acceptable. Maybe say something.

He didn’t do that either. He scooted unnaturally around Eddie so they didn’t have to touch, didn’t say anything at all, and got what he needed from a black caddy. Richie, entirely respectful of Eddie’s wishes that were expressed last Friday, turned back towards the showers without a word.

Eddie, knowing it was his fault and desperately wishing he had someone else to blame, pressed his hot face into the cool porcelain of the sink, and stifled a groan.

Eddie didn’t know how Tozier had managed it. He really didn’t. He had managed to become more infuriatingly distracting when they weren’t speaking than he was when they did. Eddie couldn’t stop thinking about last night. More specifically, how he got in bed and dreaded the start of the music that never came. He woke up peacefully at six. Still no music. Eddie couldn’t stop thinking about it.

Eddie stretched out as far away from the piano as possible that Friday morning. He was distracting all the way across the room. Richie was sitting at the piano, texting someone. But then a few people, two girls and a boy, sat on the ground next to him to stretch out. He was grinning down at one of them, a blonde girl. He winked. She laughed loudly.

Eddie looked away.

Stop that, Richie, he scolded him in his head. He realized he couldn’t storm over there and start a fight. He had nothing to fight about. Richie had done nothing but exactly what Eddie asked. Eddie didn’t even know what he wanted him to do. He just wanted him to...be somewhere else.

He looked up again when the piano was played. Richie was playing the opening to the A Thousand Miles song. People were laughing, because two dancers were doing this very strange dance while a girl sang “making my way downtown, walking fast...” the dancers contorted their bodies oddly together, “look at that, walking faster...” the singer changed the lyrics, and Richie smashed into the next piece of the song as half the room laughed.
HOW DARE THEY BE SO HAPPY, Eddie thought furiously. He mentally flicked himself in the ear, so he’d fucking relax.

Richie played the song till completion, and nearly the entire room was singing along to the awful lyrics. Eddie pressed his face into his knee, but there was nowhere to escape the terrible music of dancers singing off-key. They weren’t theatre majors for a fucking reason.

“*And I need you, and I miss you, and now I wonder...*” Eddie shifted the direction of his split, and thought to himself, idly, that this song was longer than he remembered it being. He looked out at the room. Most people were still stretching as they sang, but some of them were dancing oddly along to the music. The girl who was the first to sing was sitting on the piano, herself, in a dramatic, comedic way.

“*And you know I’d walk a thousand miles if I could just see you ,*” Richie didn’t look like he was singing, necessarily. Maybe mouthing the words, looking amused. But Eddie didn’t particularly care about that, because when he finally let himself look at Richie, Richie’s eyes were already on him.

“*Tonig-*” The room began to softly began to finish the song, but Richie smashed in another chord furiously. He looked down to the piano, as he played another song over the soft voices, and opened his mouth and all but screamed “*SOMEBODY ONCE TOLD ME THE WORLD WAS GONNA ROLL ME-*”

The girl on the piano almost fell off in her laughter. Some people groaned, some people laughed, and some people instantly started singing.

Bernard walked into the room and winced. A guy put his hand on Richie’s shoulders and the music abruptly stopped.

“Ugh,” she wrinkled her nose, “students, it’s official: if any of you ask to change to majoring in voice, under no circumstances will I authorize it.”

The room laughed, and Eddie gaped, because he still found the idea that she had any sense of humor astounding.

The morning dragged. The entire group stayed together to review blocking and Eddie did a lot of review of his shoes because he, under no circumstances, wanted to look at Richie. Something in him ached, because that rehearsal felt so much longer than the one they had just like it, because he had had Richie. Richie Richie Richie Richie Richie, Jesus Christ, he was so pissed off with his own mind. He felt like his brain was being possessed by a thirteen year old girl who had never seen a man before. He let himself look to the piano a few times. Girls kept wandering up to it. Richie didn’t really pay them a ton of mind, because he had to play, and Bernard shooed them off for the most part before they got very close. Eddie knew he had no right to be irritated by it. He had no right to miss Richie, he told himself as they got closer and closer to lunch. But he did. And he didn’t want to be by himself for the break half hour… he had seen the other side of it and he got too used to it.

And that’s how he found himself wheeling towards the piano at the start of break, before he could even talk himself out of it. He stared at his feet as he went, and heard the scrape of Richie’s piano bench as he stood. When he bothered to look up, he realized he put their bodies much closer together than he intended.

They were face to face, then. *Talk, Eddie,* he told himself furiously. *Tell him you’re sorry, or don’t*
want to eat lunch alone again, or that you're distracted as fuck and it's entirely his fault because he was sitting there, doing nothing. No. Don't start a fight. Tell him something nice. Anything nice.

“That's a pretty dumb looking shirt.”

Goddamnit, Eddie.

Richie raised his eyebrows. To be fair, it was a dumb looking shirt. It was covered in outlined-sketches of dinosaurs. "I thought we weren’t speaking.” Richie replied evenly.

“We’re not.”

“Oh?” Richie almost out-right laughed. “What are we doing? If it's singing, this is a terrible song.”

Eddie stifled down the laugh. It bubbled up a little anyway in his chest. He huffed it out, staring at his feet for a moment. He had no response. Eddie groped around in the back of his mind for a come-back. He came up impossibly short. "You can't sing," he looked up and replied flatly, thinking of that morning.

Richie laughed, "can you?" He asked like a genuine question. Eddie settled back on his heels a little bit, not looking up because Richie's hair was looking tousled and Eddie wanted to touch it really badly which was stupid.

"Not really," he admitted with a shrug, scuffing his feet into the ground.

"That's okay," Richie replied. He sounded sincere, until he leaned into Eddie's space, "I can think of a lot of sweeter sounds that little mouth could be makin'" he practically purred. It would have sounded downright pornographic without the undercurrent of amusement that always accompanied Richie's flirtations. Eddie squeaked anyway, stepping back and away from Richie.

"Richie..." he warned with his mouth, sounding tired. Tired because he didn't want to be warning Richie. He wanted to be eating lunch with him. Or kissing him, maybe. OR DEFINITELY NOT DOING THAT, he scolded his own mind. Or...maybe he was just tired of scolding himself instead of just letting himself want what he wanted.

"Yeah, yeah." Richie sighed, stepping back himself. "I know. Beep beep," he mimicked honking a horn as he said it, a weird mixture of sadness and what Eddie could only called endearment. Like he still thought Eddie was cute for saying that first time, and maybe he was sad he did. But things remained lighter between them, even with the new space. He wanted to tell Richie that maybe they could talk, or eat lunch, or something... maybe. Richie shoved his hands into his pockets as he stepped back. He pressed his mouth together, looking Eddie up and down once more. "See you around?" He asked and it sounded like a genuine question. It felt like Richie was raising a white flag, surrendering, kind of.

You can see might right now, Eddie thought to himself, but he nodded instead. "Yeah."

They didn't sign a literal peace treaty, but it felt like they did, as Richie turned and walked out of the studio.

That lasted about four hours and Eddie hated Richie Tozier again.

Rehearsal had just ended, and there was a modest crowd around the piano as he explained idly how the basics of playing piano worked. That wasn't really the problem, Eddie thought while he stood by the bars, pretending to be continuing a cool-down stretch, but really just watching the
proceedings. He inched closer until he was pretty much right next to the piano, because he was irritated. Richie had let one of the girls sit on his lap, innocently enough, on the edges of his knees. She had her hands over his as he played a jaunty, basic tune. A slightly more enhanced version of Twinkle Twinkle Little Star. It pissed Eddie off and it pissed him off more that he was pissed and it just tumbled into a washing machine cycle of annoyance. She was laughing loudly as he explained what he was doing, even though it wouldn't help her at all actually play the piano.

“You next?” Richie asked him with a half-smile, reading Eddie’s thoughts as if they were written across his forehead. Eddie flushed, realizing he had become incredibly unsubtle with his staring.

“I beg your pardon?” Eddie demanded, knowing he sounded stupid. He felt stupid, getting caught.

“You’re staring, darling.” Richie replied coolly. The girl tentatively removed her hands from his. Eddie wished she’d remove herself from his lap, too.

“I’m sorry,” Eddie blinked, feeling all of the petty that built up in his system over the last week bubble up to the surface, “I was under the impression we were getting some kind of free show.” He waved a hand at them, as if they were doing something ostentatiously sexual and not playing a children’s tune on the piano.

“Oh, it is,” Richie leered over the piano, leaning forward. “It just relies on audience participation.”

“I only participate ,” Eddie sneered, squinting at Richie as he planted his hands on the piano, “with people who are only interested in me , thanks.” He ripped his hands off the piano, then. He heard the girl make an odd little noise as the bench scraped against the floor, and he heard Richie counter with “oh, that is so fucking unfair, Eddie.”

Eddie hauled his ass into the dressing room, but he heard people’s little gasps and the stomping of Richie’s boots behind him, and he knew he was being followed. “HEY,” there he was, “KASPBRAK. SLOW THE FUCK DOWN.” When he tore open the dressing room door, there were two guys sitting on a bench, talking casually. He ignored them as he stormed in. He let the door swing shut behind him, and grabbed his shoes from the cubbies. He threw himself onto a bench and ripped off his dance shoes.

“ALRIGHT,” The door swung open, and the guys jumped with surprise. “What the actual FUCK-” Richie paused at the sight of the guys. They stood, evidently giving up on the room in it’s entirety. They patted his shoulder as they left and the door swung shut. “Seriously, Eddie. I don’t fucking get it, what do you want-” Richie was about to ask him Question and they were Questions he knew the answers to. He just hated them.

“You guys didn’t play music last night,” Eddie diverted the subject, speaking over Richie, sounding annoyed. He threw the shoes into his bag.

“What the fuck does that have to do with-”

“Too busy fucking that girl?” Eddie asked hotly, knowing he sounded delirious and stupid. He shoved his boots on his feet, not even looking up at Richie. He hoped Richie would take the bait, tell him he was. “Or was it a different one? You have so many, it’s hard to keep track.” Anything that would tell him Richie didn’t play music for his own, selfish reason, and not because it upset Eddie.

“Am I seriously getting yelled at now for not playing music?” Richie looked absolutely incredulous. Eddie spun around on the bench, standing on the other side. There was little room to run in the small room. Richie didn’t relent, following Eddie around the back of the bench when
Eddie grabbed his sweatshirt out of his locker. “What the fuck do you want from me, Eddie? Play music, I’m in trouble, don’t play music, I’m in trouble. Flirt with you, you get mad, flirt with other people, you get mad.” Eddie didn’t know what he wanted except perhaps Richie on another planet or him to turn into a giant lizard that wouldn't look so hot when he was flustered and irritated. “You are the most hot and cold person I’ve ever met.” Richie shut his locker, forcing Eddie's eyes up to his own. "And you know what really pisses me the fuck off? That I’m still trying. I'm still trying, when you’ve made it blatantly obvious that anything and everything I do will infuriate you. It’s so fucking annoying." Eddie had never seen a person look so sincere while calling him annoying. Richie's rampage subsided for a moment as their eyes met. Richie looked soft, almost, and his next sentence sounded entirely honest and sincere "I'm just trying to make you happy, Eddie.”

The words pooled into his chest, rushing into where he only supposed his heart could be, and it was beating thunderously, and before he knew what he was doing, before he could scream at himself in his mind and monitor his every movement, Eddie snaked his body up, grabbing Richie by the back of the neck because he was still too damn tall, and pressed his mouth to his. It was more light than he intended. It was a brush of lips, a mere peck. Richie froze, going ice-statue still under Eddie’s touch.

Eddie, as one would politely put it, freaked the fuck out. “Oh my god,” he all but jumped back and away from Richie. Richie was staring, wide-eyed, down at him. “I am so sorry,” Eddie scrambled backwards. His knees hit the back of the bench and he fell on top of it. He stumbled to his feet on the other side “I don’t even know, I don’t know what I was doing, I am so sorry~” Richie was staring the last time Eddie looked. He shoved half of his sweatshirt on. His hands shook when he picked up his dance bag. He was such an idiot. Who goes from yelling at someone to kissing them in a matter of seconds? God, what if Richie wasn’t even queer and he had just read the entire thing wrong? He was so angry at himself, so fucking stupid, as he stormed towards the door, that he barely heard Richie’s sneakers squeaking against the linoleum floors. He had a hand on the handle of the door, barely opened, when his dance bag was ripped out of his hand. Seemingly, in one fluid motion, Richie's hand slammed the door shut by Eddie's head, and grabbed Eddie's wrist, spinning him around more quickly than Eddie thought he had ever spun on his own in class.

Before Eddie could even process the moment, let alone say anything, Richie Tozier's lips crashed into his.

Chapter End Notes

kiss when??? kiss now!!!
& it's not just gonna happen like that

Richard's tongue was apparently making an earnest attempt to acquaint itself with Eddie's tonsils and his knees were buckling and his was furious that he found it so hot. It was deafening and suffocating and Eddie needed more of it. Had the circumstances been any different, had Richie not been pressing him into the door and holding him close with his free hand, curled over, almost curled into Eddie, Eddie is sure he would have found what was going on in their mouths absolutely disgusting. Seriously.

But anytime Richie even remotely shifted backwards, Eddie's mouth chased his. He put a slick kiss on Richie's mouth, before, by some unknown force within Eddie that hadn't previously made itself present, biting his lower lip, dragging Richie's mouth back to his. Richie groaned from somewhere deep in his chest. Eddie had his hands cupping his face, unsure where else to put them, as their tongues slipped together and Eddie actually shivered. Richie's hand wormed in between Eddie and the door. He grabbed Eddie by something skirting the line between his back and his ass, and pulled him flush against himself. Eddie remembered where he was, his college's dressing room, who he was with, Richie Tozier, and who he was in general, Eddie Kaspbrak. A boy who doesn't make out with boys in locker rooms, for Christ's sake.

He shoved Richie backwards with his hands on his chest. He pushed with a little more fervor than he intended, or maybe he was getting stronger from pas de deux, and Richie stumbled back a few steps.

Eddie overdramatically wiped his mouth off with the back of his hand, wincing at the sheer amount of spit collected on his lips. "God," he whined, wiping his hand off on his pants. "You're so obnoxious."

Richie gave him a flat look. His mouth was kissed red, shining with spit. His glasses hung low on his nose. His jaw was tightened with irritation and there was obvious tension built up in his shoulders. He looked tall. "You're fucking annoying." Richie cut back, taking one dangerous step towards Eddie.
Evidently, it was enough for Eddie’s body or whatever demon took over his brain, because Eddie was flinging his arms over Richie’s shoulders, and their bodies crashed together as he kissed him again.

It was too feverish, then. Richie had his hands on his back. Eddie looped his arms around his neck. Too frantic to be any good, and yet Eddie realized with horror, it was sending shocks through his body that went straight to his dick. His hands grabbed at Richie’s shirt on his back. *I want this off,* his mind screamed at him. *NO,* the only sensible organ Eddie had left, maybe his liver or something was making an appearance, *NO YOU DON’T WANT THAT.*

*OFF OFF OFF OFF OFF OFF OFF OFF OFF OFF OFF OFF OFF OFF* his brain screamed and he tugged at the shirt again. Richie separated their lips, only for a second. He slipped his hands up Eddie’s back till he reached his shoulders, then tucked his hands under his hoodie. Eddie dropped his arms from Richie’s neck and the hoodie fell to the floor. Richie bit his lip, clearly deciding his next move and it was so fucking cute that Eddie looped his fingers through Richie’s belt loops and tugged him towards himself, parting his mouth to be kissed. Richie didn’t duck down to kiss him though, and Eddie couldn’t particularly reach. His lips landed right under Richie’s jaw. He could work with that, he thought, as he clumsily tried to figure out how neck kissing worked, exactly. He kissed along Richie’s jaw, the tips of his toes aching from having to stand on them, until he got to right under Richie’s ear. Experimentally, he let his teeth graze on the patch of skin.

“God,” Richie muttered under his breath. Eddie’s heart was literally trying to escape his chest, or he was pretty sure it was, because it was so rapidly thrusting itself against his ribcage. It worsened when something about Eddie’s attempted neck kissing sparked Richie once again. His hands wrapped around Eddie’s ribs and holy fuck, he got lifted. Richie all but threw him backwards into the lockers. His mouth was clearly intending to kiss Eddie, but a piece of a lock jammed into Eddie’s spine, and he cried out.

“Ahh!” He threw his head back, feeling it thud painfully against the locker. Richie didn’t really move, though. He moved his assault to Eddie’s neck, too. There was no kissing. Richie immediately started almost licking, sucking at his skin, and Eddie gasped. He realized he was definitely hard, he was almost painfully throbbing in his dance pants. His legs twitched, awkwardly hung in the air, and he looped his arms around Richie’s neck once again, helping him hold himself up. Richie dropped his hands from his ribs as Eddie wiggled so the lock wasn’t attempting to make a nest for itself in his spine anymore. Richie hiked Eddie’s thighs up, over his hips, as he continued to suck on Eddie’s neck.

Eddie gasped, because the movement of the entire thing had their cocks brush together for just a moment. They were both still wearing pants but Eddie felt it, could tell Richie was hard too. He wiggled down so they’d brush again. Eddie needed friction, friction of some kind. Richie stopped sucking his neck as if it were dirt in an old couch and he was a very stubborn vacuum cleaner, pressing his forehead into the side of Eddie’s head, breathing heavily. Eddie, not knowing who he was anymore, grinded his hips down towards Richie’s dick. It was clumsy and ungraceful which was entirely unfair, because Eddie was supposed to be a dancer, goddammit. Richie’s hands climbed up his thighs, Eddie and the wall doing most of the holding up, and pressed his thumbs into his hip bones.

Eddie tried to find a rhythm of grinding them together, but Richie was wearing thick denim and Eddie was wearing three layers that his cock was trapped under. It was so hot and tight he thought he might die there. No one wanted to die in a locker room. Eddie tightened his legs around his waist, holding himself up more effectively. Richie’s hands wrapped around his hips, changing their position. He moved Eddie up so when he pushed his hips forward, their cocks were flush, and Eddie gasped as Richie pulled back and repeated the movement.
He was getting this horridly vivid mental image of Richie fucking him that was doing insane things to his dick. Richie began to kiss his neck again, small, delicate kisses on skin that was aching a little bit and Eddie was getting overwhelmed. He clutched Richie closer to him, turning his face to the side to block Richie from his neck, so he’d kiss his mouth.

Richie kissed his cheek, then right at the corner of his mouth, before arching his hips upwards and rubbing in a sinfully good way. Eddie arched back, almost writhing out of his arms. His head hid the locker with another painful thump.

“You know I-” Eddie could hear the smile in his voice, the smile on his jaw.

“Shut up shut up shut up shut up,” he murmured quickly, wiggling back down to reconnect their mouths. Richie laughed into their kiss, one of his hands dipping down to the back of Eddie’s thigh to rearrange their position. Eddie grew annoyed at the giggling, it punctuated every slick movement of their mouths.

He dug his hands into Richie’s hair, and tugged sharply. Richie gasped, and his hips bucked forward, throwing Eddie’s ass back into the lockers.

“Ach!” Eddie cried out again, but this one much more pained because ow, that actually hurt, “fuck.”

“Oh, god.” Richie’s hands froze where they were, he stopped his movements. Eddie’s eyes popped open. Richie, flushed and starting to sweat, stared down at him with concern. “I’m sorry.”

They realized, all in one moment, that they were behaving like teenagers that just learned about genitals in general. Richie stepped back from the locker, and let Eddie slipped out of his hands. Eddie stumbled to the floor. They stared at each other, blinking. Now that the energy in the room had snapped it really snapped and they were just staring at each other. His cock hurt. He was worried his heart hurt. He knew his head hurt.

Richie’s hands twitched towards him, and Eddie’s fight or flight kicked in except it was apparently hump or flight and he wasn’t doing that again in the dressing room, for fuck’s sake. He shoved past Richie, ignoring his call of “hey, wait!” and stormed out of the room. He made it part way down the hall, now abandoned, Christ, how long had they been kissing? Before realizing he didn’t have his bag...or coat.

He groaned, wanting to bash his head into the wall if it weren’t for the spectacular headache he was already sporting. He threw open the door to the dressing room again to see Richie still standing there. He had Eddie’s coat over his arm, his bag in his hand. He looked vulnerable and confused and lost, like Eddie had found him in the middle of the forest and not in a building in their school.

“Hey, you forgot your-” Eddie ripped them out of his hands fussily. He barely had time to process the look that was probably on his own face, let alone deal with Richie. He tucked the bag and his coat into his chest and turned on heel instantly.

He took only two steps back towards the door. He hated it. He hated everything in that room. He regretted every decision he ever made that landed him there in that room with Richie, and he turned back again. He needed to get that stupid look off of his face. He threw himself up into Richie, a reasonable amount of distance between them because of Eddie clutching his bag and coat, and kissed him just once more. It was chaste, sweet and gentle. Eddie was then far more concerned about the twinkling feeling in his chest, the way the soles of his feet felt like and like he could very easily bounce into the clouds, than he was about his crotch. Goddamnit, this bouncy, joyous feeling he got from barely brushing Richie’s mouth with his own was probably going to be a
fucking problem.

Richie’s hand came up and brushed the back of his waist, and Eddie stumbled backwards, falling out of their kiss and off of his tippy toes.

“No, no no no no-no-” He warned, sticking a wary hand out towards Richie as he tumbled backwards. He fumbled his other hand behind himself for the door handle, whipping around and throwing it open as soon as he reached it.

Very elegantly, as soon as he crossed through the door with his bag and coat in check, he started to run.

And that time, when he started running, he didn’t stop till he made it back to his dorm.

It was eleven a.m. on a Saturday and Eddie was still in his dorm room. He had already reached a level of insanity he hadn’t intended to breach until well into retirement. It was was worsening with the continuing clink on the glass.

Eddie could ignore it, he told himself. Eddie would ignore it. And he was not waiting around in his dorm because he was inwardly debating on opening his window for that lunatic. He genuinely liked staring blankly at his computer screen.

Clink.

And there was a lot to be done around the dorm. He put a pair of socks in his laundry hamper.

Clink.

The phone rang three times before it picked up.

“Hello?”

“Hey, Dad.” Eddie greeted gently.

Clink.

“Eddie!” His Dad sounded excited. It had been too long since he last called. Eddie knew that.

“Hold on, your mom’s here. Let me put it on speaker.”

“It’s the orange button, Frank!” His mom’s muffled voice came through.

“I’m pushing the orange button, hello- Eddie? Are we on speaker?”

“Not yet.”

“The other orange one, oh for God’s sakes, Frank, you’re color blind. Here.” The faint buzzing stopped, and the sound became clearer. Eddie inspected his ceiling. It was dirtier than he had noticed. He didn’t know how ceilings got dirty. “Hi, darling!”

“Hey, Ma.” He greeted with a soft voice. The clinking had stopped for the moment. “How are you two?”

“We’re good!” Both of his parents had things to tell him that weren’t at all interesting. His father
launched into a story of buying a new television, which managed to turn itself into a week long endeavor. His mother started drama in her group of friends that pretended to craft together but really just drank wine and watched Days of Our Lives. Eddie knew he had to get his capacity for drama somewhere.

“How are you?” His dad asked. “How is rehearsal going?”

“Well!” Eddie lied. He really didn’t have much else he wanted to share.

“And your academics?” His mom asked.

“Pretty good,” he replied honestly. He sat up, standing quickly. He began to pitter around the dorm. He didn’t really have any business, but tended to wander when he was on the phone. He fiddled with a lego Star Wars ship on Ben’s desk, kicked a stray shoe under his bed. “I hate my math class, but it’s my last one.”

“Do you need a tutor?” His mom asked. Eddie snorted. She was always a bit of a helicopter parent, and one hell of a dance mom.

“I’m good, I think. Stan’s decent at math, if I ever need help. So is Ben.”

“How are your friends, still getting along?”

“Yeah,” Eddie shrugged even though his parents couldn’t see it. “Everything here is pretty uneventful—something sounded like it crashed into his window and he jumped violently and yelled out. He dropped his phone and skid across the floor.

Eddie flipped around, fists out, ready to fight anything that came through the window.

It wasn’t so much what was coming through the window but what was staring at him from the other side. Eddie groaned and picked up his phone. His parents were calling out for him with concern.

“I’m sorry,” Eddie told them quickly, fussily walking over to his window. “Something’s come up. I’ll call you right back.”

“Eddie, are you—” he winced as he hung up on his parents, but dealing with the nuisance would take him two minutes tops.

“You are,” Eddie opened his window as he spoke “certifiably insane.” He told Richie Tozier, who was hanging on to his window pane. He had been throwing rocks at the window since 10:30 a.m.

“Aren’t you going to let me in?”

“There’s a better chance of me shaving all of my hair off and sharpie-ing the lyrics to ‘It’s a Small World’ on my scalp, than there is of me letting you through this window.”

“If you did that, I’d get it tattooed.”

“I don’t doubt that.” Even though it was absolutely mad. Richie looked mad. Eddie only realized then that it was snowing out. There was snow sitting in the ends of Richie’s hair, the parts that were free from his cap, curling up under his ears. His nose was bright red under his glasses. He had this big smile on, and a bigger, obnoxiously multi-colored scarf. Eddie fought very hard, and lost, to not find it all charming.
Eddie sighed and relented, pushing the bottom of his window up “Richie, I-”

“FEW TIMES I’VE BEEN AROUND THAT TRACK.” His phone burst out from its spot on his window sill. It was so loud in the soft moment that Eddie jumped backwards. Evidently, so did Richie, because he was gone from Eddie’s window.

“Richie!” He called out with concern. He leaned out of the window painfully, staring down at the idiot in a bush. “Are you alright?”

“If I say no, will you come play doctor?” Richie replied from the ground loudly enough Eddie could hear him. It was a relatively short fall, especially if it was into a snowy bush. Richie still sounded like he was in relative pain and was trying to hide it, but not anything hospital worthy.

“Only if I get to declare the time of death.” Eddie responded loudly.

Richie laughed, his weird, barking-sort of thing, and then broke off into a wheeze and an “ow, fuck.”

Eddie rolled his eyes, pressing Reject on his parent’s call back. He knew he had to think of an excuse and fast, for when he called them back. Hollaback Girl stopped playing loudly from his phone’s speakers.

“Was that your ringtone?”

“...It wasn’t not my ringtone.”

“Goddammit.” Richie swore into the bush, as if the bush could not only understand but sympathize. It was convincing enough that Eddie was mildly concerned the bush might actually be sentient.

“What?” Eddie asked, not understanding Richie’s swear. Richie stumbled to his feet. He was covered in snow. He wiped off his face with a gloved hand, wincing as he did so. Eddie winced too, from his spot inside. He was getting cold just having the window open.

“I just thought to myself ‘that bit of information was worth falling out of a window for,’ which, like, Jesus.” Richie’s face was so genuinely concerned for his own priorities that Eddie laughed. He straight of giggled into his hand and stared down at the boy in the snow.

“You’re smiling.” Richie commented, smiling at the smile.

“I am.”

“Does that mean you’ll kiss me?”

“Not at all.”

“I feel very conned by Romeo and Juliet at this moment.” Richie seemed bitter. He also looked cold, and Eddie wanted this conversation to end, so Richie would go inside and put on clothes that weren’t covered in snow. Simultaneously, he never wanted this conversation to end. Because...of reasons. “How about a phone number?” Richie tried again.

“I like Hollaback Girl, I don’t want to hear it on a continuous loop,” Richie was opening his mouth again and Eddie did not want hear the dick pic joke he was sure was waiting on his tongue, “Richie. Look.” He sighed, leaning out of the window further, on the very edges of his toes. “I’m sorry. I am. I didn’t mean to...well,” he didn’t know exactly what he didn’t mean to do. It probably
wasn’t kiss Richie, or have it off with him in a locker room. It probably also wasn’t running away. It was a perfectly reasonable thing to do after that situation occurs. “I just. I need. Time?” Very eloquent, he mentally rolled his eyes at himself, beautiful sentiment. Should be a psalm. "Talk to me tomorrow?"

“Tomorrow?” Richie checked his back pocket for his phone, blissfully uncovered in snow. “approximately 12 hours and eight minutes away?”

Eddie checked the time on his own phone. It was almost noon. “I was thinking more like 20 hours and eight minutes aw-” he was hit sharply in the face with freeze. His face was already freezing, but this was achingly cold, and it stung. He spluttered, spitting out what he was quickly realizing was snow.

Richie was cackling on the ground below him. “THAT WAS FOR THE OTHER DAY!” He shouted, referencing the time over a week ago where Eddie hit him in the shoulder with a snowball. “You deserved it,” he spoke almost to himself. He looked up and saw Eddie fuming, becoming red with rage, he was sure, and blanched. “SEE YOU AT MIDNIGHT!”

“I WILL KILL YOU,” Eddie leaned out of his window and screamed at the man’s retreating back.

“I DESERVE IT!!” He shouted back.

Chapter End Notes

so, there's a scene that i just couldn't get the time to finish for this chapter that's missing. what do y'all think. should i posted it sooner rather than later and just have that one scene be an odd shortie chapter, or should i wait a little longer and shuffle things around and put in some more content? lemme know your thoughts
It was midnight and a half and Eddie was staring at his ceiling. He had seen no sign of the terror from next door. He must have been joking when he said he’d come back exactly 12 hours and eight minutes later. He didn’t know why he thought Richie would be counting. Eddie sure wasn’t. He had just worn his watch that day because he hadn’t worn it in a while, that was all.

It was Saturday night after all, and it wasn’t like Eddie was his boyfriend, or had any intention to be. But, if they wanted to make out or...do other things, maybe Eddie wouldn’t be opposed to it. He resigned to go to sleep, play hard to get, and see Richie when he saw him.

It was 1:42 a.m. and Eddie was furious.

The boys next door weren’t even being particularly loud but Richie was undoubtedly in there. Existing. How dare he. How dare he when he could have been existing in there, in Eddie’s dorm, perhaps, even, in Eddie’s bed.

Around the one a.m. mark Ben had fumbled into bed. He ignored Eddie in the dark, likely out of courtesy and the assumption he was already asleep. A fair assumption if the rest of the semester was anything to go by. Likely because the rest of the semester Eddie wasn’t terrorized every waking moment by Richie goddamned Tozier.

It was 2:02 a.m. and it was enough. Stan hadn’t come back yet from the other dorm. Or, that’s where Eddie hoped he was. He was going to walk next door, ask Stan where he put the soap he borrowed from Eddie, take a cold shower, and then go the hell to sleep.

He rolled out of bed, tugging a hoodie over his head. He thought for a moment about changing into a pair of shorts instead of the massive, oversized sweatpants he was wearing. He then remembered that he had no one to impress in the dorm next door, and therefore didn’t. He didn’t even put on shoes, he just padded in his socks into the hallway.

The door was cracked, but not wide open, but there was the unmistakable clamor of chatter from within and all the lights were on.

He knocked gently, just in case it was a closed session, and heard Bill’s gentle voice call “c-come in!” from the other side. He pushed it open carefully, half relieved, half disappointed when he saw Stan sitting on the bed nearest to the door, so he wouldn’t have to go further into the room.

“Hey, Stan.”

“Hey,” Stan blinked. “You’re up late.”

“Yes, I, uhm-” he swallowed, nodding politely at Bill who waved. “Couldn’t sleep. Do you happen to know where,” he licked his lips, wanting to smack himself for sounding so nervous, “the soap I lent you is?”

“Yes, Eddie. It’s on my desk, next to the cup of pens.”

“Eddie,” Richie sat up excitedly, throwing himself into Eddie’s view. He must have heard the
name and bothered to look up. He glanced at his phone on his bed and then back to Eddie. His
smile made an honest attempt at severing his face in half. “It’s tomorrow.”

Eddie took a deep breath. There were a lot of reactions swirling around in his mind. ‘Shut the fuck
up, Richie,’ with an eye roll or maybe just a scoff and turn away or saying ‘I came here for soap,
not you,’ but there was an excited sparkle in Richie’s eye and Eddie felt his the last of his resolve
crumble. And for the first time, he just didn’t feel like scrambling around to put it back up.

“It’s tomorrow,” Eddie agreed with a soft smile.

If his eyes were sparkling before, they turned into full-out fireworks as he hopped out of his bed
and towards Eddie. Eddie made the mistake of glancing around the room. Bill was watching the
entire thing with an overjoyed smile and Beverly Marsh was there and enjoying an amused look
with Mike. Stan was watching Eddie with eyebrows raised.

Eddie bit his lip and ignored all of them as Richie crowded up towards him. Eddie was glad he left
the door open so he could just stumble backwards through the entryway. It saved him the
embarrassment of Richie doing whatever he was about to do in front of his friends.

Richie’s thought process couldn’t have been far off from his, because he shut the door behind
himself with a call of “no one cares about your soap, Stanley,” and Eddie realized he must have
missed something getting so lost in the pounding of his own heart.

Richie leaned back against the door as soon as it shut, a resounding thump almost making Eddie
jump. Richie reached down to tangle their fingers together, and Eddie took another shuddering
breath.

“So,” Richie commented lightly, tugging Eddie into him. “We’re gonna talk?”

“Uh,” Eddie couldn’t think of much beyond Richie’s fingers dwarfing his own. Richie ran one of
his thumbs down Eddie’s soothingly, “yeah.” He glanced up at Richie. He looked sleepy, like he
was getting close to being asleep. He was wearing a pair of gym shorts and no shoes or socks, with
a large long-sleeve t-shirt on his top. His eyes were blinking slowly, dark lashes nearly brushing his
cheek, and his mouth hung open just a little bit.

Eddie couldn’t help it. He leaned up and he kissed him, gentle brushing together of mouths. He felt
Richie smile into Eddie’s mouth, and kissed him again. Richie untangled their fingers and brought
his arms around Eddie’s back, holding him tightly to him. Eddie let his arms loop around Richie’s
neck. They kissed slowly, sweetly. Like something out of a book. A kiss that didn’t belong in a
smelly dorm hallway at 2:12 a.m. But that’s where that kiss was - and that’s where it belonged,
Eddie supposed.

Richie tasted like chocolate and something else - something vaguely earthy and entirely
unplaceable for Eddie. Eddie would put his bets that it was illegal, whatever it was. Maybe that’s
what weed tasted like.

“You came to see me,” Richie said giddily into Eddie’s mouth. His one hand crawled up Eddie’s
back and cradled the back of his head, the top of his neck. Eddie shivered at the size of it, feeling
like his hand was nearly the size of his head.

“I came to get soap,” Eddie lied flatly, not even really believing himself. He kissed Richie again.
When Richie giggled a little bit, huffing out a laugh into Eddie’s mouth, Eddie laughed too. He felt
like small fairies or mice or something with very tiny feet were tap-dancing on his chest. Like,
hoppy compressions that made it difficult to breathe. “I was going to take a shower.” He leaned
back a little.

Richie’s fingers threaded throw the small hairs on the back of Eddie’s head. His eyebrows raised. “Well, we can still do that.”

Eddie sat back on his heels, feeling flushed and amused. The hallways were some of the warmest places in the building during winter, that’s where a lot of heat came out. “You’re a little high, aren’t you?”

Richie wrinkled his nose, laugh still on his mouth, “maybe a tad.”

Eddie sighed, feeling the fog clear just a little bit. It really was absurdity. They had the entire semester. There was no reason they had to talk about this at that moment exactly. There was no reason Eddie needed to let his entire sleep schedule get fucked over it. Eddie grabbed at Richie’s face, letting his other hand fall to his chest. “So, we’ll talk about this in the morning?” He brushed his thumb along Richie’s jaw.

“Nooo–” Richie whined, and Eddie chuckled as he leaned up on his tippy toes to press a kiss into Richie’s cheek.

“I need to take a shower,” he told him plainly. “You need to get some sleep. We’ll talk.” He poked the tip of Richie’s nose. “Tomorrow.”

He turned without another word back to his own room. “Stop being so cute if you’re going to keep rejecting me,” Richie told his back irritably.

Eddie whipped off his own sweatshirt in his dorm room to keep himself from giggling too much. He wanted to smack himself, get it together, Kaspbrak, he thought hastily. He picked up the soap and a towel from his closet, and walked across the hall to the bathroom.

In hindsight, Eddie really didn’t deserve to be surprised the way he was when he saw Richie sitting in there waiting.

“Richie,” he warned flatly, giving him a harsh look. Richie smiled kindly in response. Eddie rolled his eyes and brushed past him, directly into one of the shower stalls, soap in hand. He hung his towel on a hook as he passed. He set the soap on the bench of his stall, and was not at all surprised when Richie stepped in behind him. Richie shut the curtain behind them.

“I’m sorry,” Richie could not look less sorry, “I wasn’t done talking.” He reached for Eddie. Eddie stepped back.

“Fine,” he responded plainly. “Then I’m gonna talk.” He sighed. He didn’t know what to do with his hands, so he fiddled with them in front of him. “I’m gonna be honest here, Richie.” Eddie said plainly. “The idea of us being a Couple with a capital C sort of makes me want to throw myself into the sun.” Richie laughed, grabbing for Eddie’s waist. Eddie stumbled away, “I’m serious.” He gesticulated more wildly than he ever did as he spoke, “I don’t want the boyfriend thing. The holding hands thing or the dates thing.”

Richie persisted, getting a firm grip on Eddie’s waist. Eddie gave up the struggle, and let Richie hold him. It was more intimate than Eddie was used to, what with the being shirtless piece of it. Richie, unfortunately, definitely noticed. He raked his eyes down Eddie’s body, down the modest set of abs and hips that were more noticable than usual because of the low-hanging sweatshirts.
“What?” Eddie asked irritably, trying to interrupt the stare.

“I’m sorry,” Richie cracked a smile, “you’ve just never been more attractive to me than you are at this moment.”

Eddie grabbed Richie's collar because a smile was forced on to his face against his will and it felt entirely unfair. He dragged Richie's mouth down to his own, only giggling a little bit into their kiss that time.

"So," Richie broke their kiss with solid popping sound, "this," he glanced down to Eddie's mouth then back up, "is okay?"

Eddie licked his lips, wincing at the spit collected on them. "Yeah," he nodded feverishly. "I don't want to do the dating thing, maybe, but the kissing..." he blinked, feeling bashful and hating himself for it, "maybe...some other stuff..." what was he, in the 8th grade? "Would be okay." Richie's hands skated down Eddie's stomach to hold his hips like he had some very definite plans about other stuff. It set Eddie's stomach into tumbles, and he kissed Richie again before he could think about it too hard. Richie licked into his mouth, searingly hot and painfully slowly, like he had all the time in the world. He was glad that he didn't have to feel bad about not necessarily wanting to run for the Boyfriend of the Year award. If neither he nor Tozier wanted anything but maybe the sex, Eddie let himself say in his mind, then it could hardly be the cliche 'he only wants in your pants' argument, right? Not when there was mutual pants wanting?

“So,” Richie drawled out slowly, pressing his forehead against Eddie's. His hands were on Eddie’s hips, his thumbs were rubbing small circles into his stomach. “Now will you suck my dick?” Eddie knew he shouldn't have been shocked by that question, but he was anyway- or at least that it came up now, so damn quickly. Then again, some people sucked the dicks of people they only knew for twenty five minutes, so.

“Ugh, God, Richie.” Eddie recoiled, turning away from him completely. “Gross.” Richie’s hands only left him for a short moment. He returned his hands to Eddie’s hips almost instantaneously. His hands on his hips yanked him back into him.

“Come on,” he practically whined directly into Eddie’s ear, “let me give those pretty lips something to pout about.” Even when talking dirty, there was still a twist of amusement on Richie’s words, as if he could never fully take anything seriously.

It didn’t particularly matter, because the words sent a ripple through Eddie’s stomach like a rollercoaster just dropped. He planted his hands on the tiles in front of him. “Richie,” he warned, feeling his knees be a little weaker than they were the moment before, “don’t say things like that.” He told him, with no intention of moving out of his hands.

“Why,” Richie’s fingertips danced through the lines of his abs. He thought Richie would touch them like that when he looked like that. He was breathing into Eddie’s ear, and Eddie could feel his own temperature rising with the hot breath on his lobe, “does it make you want to get on your knees?” Eddie rolled his hips back into Richie involuntarily. Eddie could very graphically feel the grinding of Richie’s erection through his sweatpants. “We’re in public,” he told him. He pushed his hands off the tile and let his back fall into Richie’s chest. He wasn’t exactly grinding back against him, but that was exactly what he was doing. “And I’m wound up enough as it is.”

Richie’s hand brushed one of his nipples, and Eddie’s breath caught in his throat. He heard a small
huff, a whisper of a laugh, from Richie’s chest. He left his hand where it was, rubbing Eddie’s nipple in a small circle.

“When was the last time you got off, baby?” Richie’s other hand was dancing dangerously close to the waistband of Eddie’s sweatpants. Eddie furiously tried to remind himself that the last people who got caught having relations in their floor bathroom got written up and paid a huge fine. It was difficult, with the intoxicating rhythm of their hips and Richie’s hand on his chest. It was practically impossible with the intrancing brush of Richie’s finger tips under his waistband.

“When was Christmas break?” Eddie asked, his voice more breathless and high than he ever wanted to hear it be. He tilted his head to the side, letting it fall back on Richie’s chest. He knew he opened his neck up to be kissed. Richie did, a soft, brush of the lips giving way to a more languid suck of the skin. “Fuck.” He rewarded the lips on his neck with a more insistent roll of his hips, grinding back into Richie. Richie’s hands dropped down to Eddie’s lower belly, hands splayed there, holding him close.

“You don’t jerk off here?” Richie mumbled into his neck, pressing hot little kisses up to his ear.

“I have two roommates,” Eddie replied flatly. Something about thinking about his two roommates, his two probably very asleep roommates, was desperately unsexy. He wiggled out of Richie’s grip and turned around, looking cross.

“...and?” Richie raised his eyebrows, looking confused. Eddie was going to comment on that there was no safe time to just jerk it in his room when there were two other people that lived there, but he got distracted by the sizable tent in Richie’s shorts. Richie nearly laughed, “you so want to,” he teased, probably referring to the dick sucking thing. But he didn’t come any closer to Eddie.

Eddie, feeling irritated at the attempt at teasing him and somewhat determined to throw Richie off his game, stepped forward. He reached a careful hand out, and with a single finger, lazily drew a line up Richie’s cock through his shorts. Richie took it as the invitation it probably was, stepping forward, swooping into Eddie’s space. He put his hands on Eddie’s lower back, fingers fanning once again into his waist band. “I’ll teach you.” Richie spoke into his ear again, before kissing under it.

Eddie rubbed the length of it with his palm through the shorts, trying to calm his thundering heart beat because Jesus CHRIST he was touching a guys DICK and HOLY SHIT he should NOT be thinking about JESUS’S NAME right now. “Yeah?” Eddie’s mouth fumbled around the words like he was reading a script someone else wrote for him. Maybe a script in a bad porn he had watched with headphones, shaking in his bedroom at home. “Do I start with my tongue, or?” He had no idea what he was doing. He had fully lost control of the situation as Richie kissed his cheek, and then his mouth. Eddie continued to rub his hand along the length of Richie’s dick with a clumsy rhythm. He let himself be kissed and hoped Richie couldn’t tell his hands were shaking.

“Come on, baby,” Richie’s hands dipped further into Eddie’s pants, “I’ll suck you off, show you how it’s done, and then you can let me fuck that pretty little mouth of your-” the door to the bathroom swung open. Richie fell back from Eddie.

“I’m so done with these goddamn kids,” Richie’s eyes went wide at the sound of their RA’s voice, and before Eddie knew what was happening, Richie’s hands on his ass tightened and he lifted...
Eddie into his arms. Eddie flailed a little bit, making a choked noise. He grabbed around Richie’s shoulders and held tight. Eddie checked frantically that the curtain behind them was still tugged shut, thank God it was. You’d still be able to see Richie’s legs under the curtain, but it was fine, because he wore shorts. He looped his ankles around Richie’s back. Richie spun them around, and with a wince, Eddie saw what he was reaching for.

“No,” he mouthed at Richie, nose wrinkling, “please don’t.”

“I’m so sorry,” Richie mouthed back, and then water was pouring over them from the shower.

Eddie imagined that if someone explained this concept to him in theory, it would be wildly sexy. Getting held under warm water by a boy he was desperately attracted to. It was terrible. He realized with a crash about thirty seconds after the water started pouring how exhausted he was. His sweatpants were heavy and clinging to his legs.

“Seriously. Why can’t we go one weekend without someone choking on their own vomit?” Their RA bitched on the phone, running water in the sink and taking a gratuitous amount of paper towels. “I’ve had to haul someone to the ER every weekend since we came back, and it’s so obnoxious-” it went on for what seemed like ages. Eddie could have screamed a thank you in relief when he left the bathrooms.

“I’m sorry, Eddie.” Richie apologized sincerely after a few seconds of their RA vacating. He dropped Eddie from his hold and shook out his arms, turning off the water. “If I got written up again I’d have to go to the Student Review board.” He whipped his own sopping shirt off over his head. Eddie ran his eyes along the length of Richie’s upper body. He knew he and Bill went to the gym on occasion - but he was still a little surprised at the build of lean muscle. Richie noticed his look. “I don’t suppose you still want to-”

“Absolutely not.” Eddie replied flatly, eyes snapping back up to meet Richie’s blue ones. They were barely visible beneath his glasses, speckled from the water. Richie's hair was wet and hanging in his face and yet still somehow not unattractive.

“That’s fair,” Richie snorted. Eddie looked back to his torso for a moment. Richie laughed. “Last chance,” he offered, opening the curtain so Eddie could walk by. Eddie did, rolling his eyes and groaning.

“Go get someone else to suck your dick. I can think of people who would.” Eddie shoved him as he passed with a laugh.

“You wouldn’t care?” Richie asked him honestly. Eddie realized that this was this talk they kept talking about and not having. Richie took off his glasses. Richie shook his hair out, resembling a dog a little bit. Eddie winced.

“No?” Eddie replied after a moment. “At least, I don’t think so? If we’re not dating then I don’t see why… not?” He swallowed. “I don’t think our…thing has to keep you from…other…things?” He didn’t know how to say what he wanted to be saying. He also didn’t know how to put the fact that he didn’t know when he and Richie were going to have sex - and he was terrified of tying Richie into a sexless relationship.

“Yeah,” Richie swallowed, nodding. His eyes looked clouded in thought, as if he were running the entire concept over in his mind the way Eddie was.

“Just, uh,” and Eddie had no idea if he put himself at all in the position to be making demands, “no one more than once?” He added on tentatively.
“Of course,” Richie stepped forward, into Eddie’s space once more. He wrapped his arms around Eddie one more time. “And, uh,” Richie licked his lips as he thought his wording over. It may have been the first time Eddie noticed Richie thinking about how to say anything, “no kissing.” He didn’t phrase his like a question the way Eddie had. He stared down at Eddie’s mouth as he did so.

“I mean,” Eddie bit his lip, “it’s not like I’m planning on-” he certainly wasn’t planning on seeing anyone else.

“I’m serious,” Richie repeated solemnly, “no kissing.”

“Okay,” Eddie nodded. Richie never put his glasses back on. Eddie’s eyes met his more thoroughly than they ever had, holding in an intense gaze. “No kissing.” He agreed.

Richie kissed him then, and it tasted like weed and a promise.

“Richie,” he spoke, separating them a bit, “I’m freezing.”

Richie laughed. “Yeah, okay.” He stepped back.

“Ugh,” Eddie whined hoarsely, “these are my only sweatpants, too.” Richie wrung out his shirt, and a waterfall fell out of it.

“I’ll be up for a little while, I’ll just put everything in a dryer right now.” Richie tried to console him. Eddie opened his mouth to comment on how, uh, Richie shouldn’t be awake that late, but Richie kept talking. “You can borrow a pair of mine tonight.”

Eddie retreated to his dorm, standing awkwardly by the inside of his door, waiting for Richie to return with the promised pants. He was holding his wet sweats and briefs in his hands to trade for the dry sweatpants. He held his towel self-consciously around his waist, even though he was wearing a new pair of briefs already. Richie didn't need to knock, Eddie heard his soft steps. Eddie opened the door, almost wincing at the bright light, and Richie was standing on the other side.

"Here," Richie said lamely, offering a pair up as Eddie shut his door behind him.

"Uh, thanks." Eddie didn't know what to do with his hands, because he had one hand holding the towel and the other holding the clothes. Richie also had both of his hands occupied. He sighed, thoroughly giving up because god knew if his own libidio was anything to judge by, Richie would have all that information and more within a few days. He dropped the towel to the floor, opening his hand for the sweatpants. Richie's eyes skirted down his body. Eddie snapped tiredly.

Richie handed over the sweatpants with a grin, never really tearing his eyes away from Eddie's thighs. He practically threw his wet clothes at Richie, opening the pants that would literally drag on the floor, so far as Eddie could tell. He stepped into them, and they barely managed to stay on his hips at all.

With a wet flop sound, Richie threw the wet things to the floor "ugh, Richie-" Eddie whined, thinking about the dirt they'd pick up on the ground.

"One more," Richie insisted, hauling Eddie into his arms. Eddie obliged with a small little smile that he only let himself have because Richie couldn't see him. He kissed him soundly, thoroughly, like he was a cartographer intending on making a map of Richie's mouth, arms wrapped around his neck. He kissed him longer than he intended to, melting into Richie's touch and becoming firmly okay with the brush of his tongue against his own. They kissed until Eddie didn't notice the scrape of the shitty dorm carpet against his feet, until he could have picked the fabric of Richie's shirt out of a thousand shirts, until Eddie couldn't taste the weed anymore and was pretty sure the only thing
he could taste was Richie.

They actually kissed until they heard a tumbling fall and a soft "ow." It was followed by a sharp "goddamnit, guys, leave them alone," which sounded a lot like Mike.

Richie only pulled back enough to say to Eddie "I am going to kill them."

"You are going to kiss me," Eddie commanded gently in response.

Richie listened.

Three days later, and Eddie was all but bouncing into his pas de deux class. And it was *pas de deux*.

“You look chipper,” Abigail commented, looking excited for her friend. She sat up from her stretches on the floor. “What’s going on?”

He was chipper, even though it was an annoyingly early class at 9 a.m. and he hadn’t gotten a lot of sleep the last few nights. Eddie almost couldn’t believe how wrong he had gotten the entire college thing. College with Richie was still college. It was still classes and endless stretching and annoying papers and salad lunches. It was just kissing in between classes and talking while he stretched and writing an annoying paper with Richie on his bed doing an annoying problem set and salad lunches with a whole bunch of other people there, too. He felt like bouncing on his toes as he began his barre stretch.

“I just had a good morning, that’s all.” He commented with a shrug. He had had his most successful solo rehearsal to date the night before. He had gone to sleep late, barely able to shove Richie out of his room, but dorm beds were hardly big enough for two men to share. Not that Eddie didn’t have every intention of sharing his. Because he did. In fact, it was almost constantly on his mind.

“It won’t be for lon-“

“Oh, shut it, Victoria, honestly. Let him have this.” Two girls joined their conversation. The first was short with ginger hair tied into an almost angry looking bun at the back of her head. The second was a taller girl, with dark skin and tight black curls.

“Let me have what?” Eddie asked, turning slightly to include him. He supposed he was just becoming the type of person people talked to when they didn’t have an express reason to.

“Mandy told me yesterday,” Victoria leaned in with a gossipy smile. The other girl rolled her eyes, “that Tozier said that yesterday was his last 2 p.m. Tuesday ballet class. So, I thought that he was just giving up on the entire program, but then Cody said that he thought Richie was going to be switching in to do the pas de deux classes instead.”

“Which makes no sense,” the girl butted in, “because why would he trade a later class for an earlier one? It’s so out of character.”

Eddie could barely listen, he had his eyes so firmly on the door. He checked the clock. If Richie was coming, he’d have about two minutes to make his appearance. Eddie maybe changed his stretch, one that elongated his legs, and he waited. Richie, right as rain, walked through the door, wearing his ripped jeans and a green shirt. He grinned at Eddie. Eddie grinned back.

“I can think of a reason.” Abigail said to the girls.
ahhh i'm not happy with the like. pace. of this chapter at all everything got a lil thrown off by last chap & it was so dang long i cut out a scene that i wasn't happy with at the end. i'll probably go back and re-edit the last two chapters together into something i enjoy more after i get a little further in. i just didn't want to edit the chapters now and have people be like ? what ? in case they missed something. anyway...thank u if u leave comments. u really mean the world to me. starting with this chapter i'm gonna try!! my absolute hardest to respond to everyone bc i want you to know how much your feedback makes my day bc it really really does. it's been a hard winter for me so far and your comments are always little spots of sunshine. as always, i'm hanging out at my tumblr account tossertozier if you ever want to swing by.

side note: two really lovely people made mood boards for this fic 
KilleroxQueer: https://killerxqueer.tumblr.com/post/167528702657/on-pointe-by-tossertozier-you-gonna-turn-it
RichieRecordz: https://richierecordz.tumblr.com/post/168311724903/on-point-by-tossertozier-youre-being-very
and they are ... beautiful i stared at them both for SIX YEARS (the gifs how even...yowza) pls go show them some love if u are a board-y kind of person. and if you decide you'd like to make something for this fic, either art or a board or a playlist or anything, know that that is so appreciated and so welcomed and to tag me!!! and maybe message me bc sometimes my notifs get away from me. i'd love love love to see them it makes me so :))))

thanks y'all! xx, j.
Eddie sincerely thought that this math class might have him tearing his hair out pretty soon. He stared at the numbers as if math normally worked by the numbers getting up and doing an explanatory musical number as to how they were supposed to work. He groaned softly to himself, grabbing his phone from the bed. He never thought of his phone as anything more than necessary until he made friends his age who weren’t obsessed with dance. Phones were also conversational tools, a way to show you’re not entirely interested in what you’re doing, something to fiddle with when you don’t know what else to do.

He was sitting cross-legged on Mike Hanlon’s mustard colored sheets, oddly enough. Richie’s bed was covered in laundry from the fight Richie and Bill had earlier that Saturday afternoon about who’s laundry was who’s that never settled. They merely split ways and the laundry stayed. Bill was sitting on his own bed with Beverly Marsh, her ankles crossed in his lap. Bill was braiding small bits of her hair as she told an elongated story. Eddie had no idea if the two of them were dating, the energy they gave off always varied.

Richie was sitting at his computer, typing but mostly complaining that he had to type up procedure for lab. Eddie wanted his attention but wouldn’t be caught dead asking for it. He considered lobbing some rolled up paper balls at his head, but nixed that idea due to not being seven years old.

Instead, he chose to fiddle with his phone, and stare at the back of his head with irritation every few seconds.

You know, because Eddie was mature.

Someone knocked on their door. Bill hollered for them to come in. Eddie looked up, and saw the door was open anyway.

Eddie had no idea who the blonde kid that walked in was but everyone else seemed to, as Eddie offered him a smile that felt like a grimace on his face.

He eavesdropped a little bit on his conversation with Richie, but moreso was fascinated by Richie’s hands.

Richie had been given a lab in his chem class and he had to take the information that was printed in the hand out and type it into his lab report. Richie had been doing so begrudgingly for the last ten minutes. What astounded Eddie, is Richie was able to seemingly have this conversation with blonde-man-whatever, and glance down at this paper every moment or so, and keep typing? Despite having a, very assuredly, different conversation in person?

Eddie was baffled.

Eddie kept finding out, little by little, that Richie Tozier was one hell of a lot smarter than he let on.

Richie said “yeah, sure, man.” And stood.

He just got distracted real easily.

“Bill, Bev, you mind helping real quick?” The two on the bed stood. Eddie wondered what the
favor was, he hadn’t been listening. They made to follow the guy out. “Be right back,” his thumb brushed Eddie’s cheek on the way out.

Eddie padded over to the computer, and sure enough, Richie had been able to type out the words flawlessly. Eddie was tempted to whistle, if he could, which he couldn’t. Eddie was tempted to try and whistle.

Eddie frowned, sitting down at the desk. Richie had been piddling around in other tabs, not really doing his assignment. This was why it took him so fucking long to do homework. If he didn’t fuck around so much, he’d have more time to be touching Ed- ...practicing piano.

Eddie rolled his eyes and minimized the tabs. He bit his lip, reading the next few sentences of the lab.

Really all it was at the moment was copying it down. He cracked one if his knuckles, and started to type.

By the time Richie came back nearly ten minutes later, Eddie was practically finished typing. He even began to type out the questions that Richie would have to answer.

“Hey,” he heard Richie say by the door, and he barely even looked up. He was hoping he’d finish by the time he got back. “Hey,” Richie said with a warning voice, “are you fucking with that?” Eddie laughed to himself. He was going to start writing some bullshit answers if he finished typing up the questions.

Richie grabbed the back of the chair behind Eddie’s shoulder, and leaned in to read what was on the screen. “Did you...type up the procedure and questions for me?”

Eddie nodded without saying anything, continuing to type as he glanced down and checked the wording of the question.

He could practically hear Richie’s grin next to his face, and before he knew it, Richie worked his hands under his knees and hoisted him up just enough, so Richie could sit back on his seat with Eddie plopped back on his lap.

“Thank you,” he kissed right under Eddie’s jaw gently. “You know that would have taken me at least another two hours.”

Eddie nodded - because, yeah. He did know that. He only had five or so questions left, and didn’t want to break his focus. Richie must have noticed that, because he picked up his phone from his desk and start responding to texts, arms wrapped around Eddie’s waist, hands in his lap.

And whatever that moment was, it was peaceful. It was good.

“Nice shorts, Kaspbrak, where’s the rest of them?”

“I don’t know, Tozier, I borrowed them from your sister.”

Richie raised an eyebrow from the piano. Eddie spun around in fake-fury, wheeling himself towards the bar, and Abigail, because he was really coming to enjoy her company. He liked all of the quiet moments in the dorm and he was really starting to love the hot kisses in between sheets but God, Eddie lived for the fighting in dance class. He didn’t even know how the decision got
unanimously made, but their little tryst was a secret from the dance program. For no reason. It didn’t need to be one. It was just fun that it was. They started arguing by the end of that pas de deux class last week, and Richie told him later with his hand very much down Eddie’s pants, that switching in was “totally worth it.”

“Another fight with Richie?” Abigail asked.

Eddie shrugged, knowing she suspected something, but also thinking if she found out she could keep it to herself. “Just another day in my life.”

In truth, he had worn the shorts because Richie would be in class that day and Eddie knew he had a test later and could use a little bit of a wake-up. Not that he could keep them on long, he had to be in uniform for class. Also, it wasn’t like Eddie was trying to give the poor man a seizure.

But he could stretch in them a little.

“How was your weekend?” He put one hand on the bar, and grabbed his foot with the other. He had already stretched before class. He found that pas de deux days practically required a warm-up run, lift and stretch session. He went for showy, knowing Richie’s eyes were on him. He brought his foot to touch the back of his head, letting his other foot go up on releve.

“It was okay,” Abi commented lightly. “I went to this party, and it was pretty fun.”

“The one at Delta Gamma?” Eddie asked lightly, leaning into his stretch a little farther. He smirked when he heard the buzz of his cell-phone.

“Yeah!” Abigail replied. “How’d you know about it?”

Eddie almost laughed at the horror on Abi’s face when she realized what she said. “Oh, Eddie, I’m sorry.” He snickered inwardly as he reached down to pick up his phone. “I know parties just normally aren’t your thing.

richie 8:52 a.m.
stop.

Eddie, very subtly in his own opinion, turned back to look at the piano but made it look like a stretch. “I know,” he told Abi, as he caught Richie’s eye. He turned away as soon as he did. “I just heard about it,” from Richie, but she couldn’t know that. He dropped his phone again, and grabbed his other foot.

His phone started buzzing instantaneously.

“You should have come!” Abi enthused and Eddie straight-up snorted. It hurt his nostrils a little bit. Not something he wanted to make a habit of. “Oh, Eddie, come on.” He brought his toes to the crown of his head again, graceful arch stretching his back and his hamstrings. “They’re fun, sometimes!”

“Because everything about Eddie Kaspbrak screams Sorority Party!” Eddie joked, pointing his toes.

“It could!” Abi encouraged. Eddie laughed again, dropping his foot from the stretch shorter than the other because it was his left leg and not because he was curious to see the texts from Richie.

“I have to go change, now.” All he had to do was ditch the shorts and put on the stretch pants mandatory for class but if he was late to class because he was showing off his ass in shorts he’d kill
Richie then himself. It’d all be very Romeo and Juliet.

He unlocked his phone as he went, dance bag over his shoulder, not even bothering to look up at Richie as he read his texts.

richie 8:52 a.m.
i don’t even know what the fuck that stretch is
it looks incredibly painful
and yet
it has me ready to bend you over those bars you seem so fond of

eddie 8:54 a.m.
does it now?

richie 8:54 a.m.
i’m following you to that dressing room

eddie 8:54 a.m.
you will not

richie 8:54 a.m.
why are you actively trying to kill me

eddie 8:54 a.m.
bc
i hate you?
<3

Eddie kicked Richie out of his room to sleep at 9 p.m. Eddie got woken up accidentally by Stan at 10 p.m. flicking the lights on. It wasn’t Stan’s fault, he just wanted to catch some sleep before recital rehearsal the next day. He was just having a very hard time falling back asleep. He left the door half open, but the lights off as he tossed and turned. After what seemed like hours, Richie and a very female voice were headed down the hall. Very high-pitched female, Eddie wrinkled his nose. Hardly seemed like Richie’s type.


“Yeah, just one sec.” Richie took a step in Eddie’s door and his heart skipped a beat. He grabbed his handle, and shut the door quietly, only letting the handle un-turn after it shut. Eddie smiled at the door fondly. He heard Richie’s door shut next, but couldn’t hear anything beyond that.

Eddie bit his lip, and slipped out of bed. His heart was pounding, but not in a bad way. He was almost excited by the entire thing, feeling weirdly giddy. He eyed Ben’s bed, knowing it was the closest wall to wall placement to Richie’s. He looked at the door, figured ben wouldn’t mind if he borrowed it for some...eavesdropping? He supposed?

He slipped into it quietly.

Dear God, this pick was loud. So loud, that Eddie could hear Richie frantically shushing her.

“People are sleeping,” he heard him say almost irritatedly through the wall. Translation: Eddie is
sleeping, or so Richie thought.

Eddie huffed a laugh into his hand. He didn’t believe that he was sitting up in his roommate’s bed, ear pressed against a wall to listen to his not-boyfriend fuck someone else, and he was laughing about it.

Eddie, honestly, had no idea what he was doing. It got boring after about two minutes. He wondered why he weren’t more bothered. Probably because he could go over there and interrupt it at that very moment and Richie would let him. He imagined it with a little grin. Him kicking the girl out of the room. Opening his arms... Eddie slipped out of his bed and re-opened his door. If the girl left and Eddie was still awake, maybe he’d go over there.

Almost as soon as the girl passed by his door, Eddie stuck his head out of the door. Richie’s door was still cracked open. Eddie crept into the hallway, despite the fact the doors were literally three feet apart and it was completely deserted. He slipped into Richie’s room in a manner he felt was discreet.

“How was she?” He asked callously, amused.

“Ah!” Richie jumped two feet in the air and did some frankly fantastic renditions of karate moves. Moves that would have been karate if you considered karate done by sentient spaghetti noodles valid. Eddie burst out laughing.

“Eddie, Jesus,” Richie pressed a hand to his chest, steadying himself on Mike’s bed frame. “You almost gave me a heart-attack. He wrinkled his nose, looking in between Eddie and his bed. “You heard?”

He gave him a look as if everyone on their half of the Hudson heard. Eddie didn’t need to tell him he had listened. “Oh, fuck, Richie-” he imitated her high, breathless voice poorly. He gasped. “Fuck my pussy, baby.” Eddie held back a shiver at the p-word. He still fucking hated that word.

“Give me about ten minutes, then sure.”

“Oh, god, gross.” Eddie sounded horrified. He rolled his eyes but let Richie grab at his waist anyway. “Aren’t you going to shower, or something?”

“No,” Richie laughed. Eddie wrinkled his nose. “What?” He planted Eddie’s hands on his arms, which were free from sweat. “She wasn’t that good. And she took fucking forever to leave, oh my god.” He ducked down to kiss Eddie.

Eddie squirmed out of his grip with a laugh. “I’m not gonna kiss you, girl-breath!” He joked, wrinkling his nose up.

“I didn’t kiss her,” Richie reminded him of their agreement seriously. He kissed Eddie’s cheek, right by the corner of his mouth.

“Oh, yea-” Richie captured the rest of Eddie’s words, not that he really had any planned, with his mouth. It was a light brush of his lips on Eddie’s but enough of a reminder. “That awful stench is just your breath, I forgot.” Eddie joked, and Richie groaned, falling back on his bed dramatically.

“You wound me, peanut.”

Eddie ignored the delighted swirl of his insides at that horrendous nickname and sat on the edge of Richie’s bed, in between his feet.
“What are you doing up, though? You said you were going to sleep hours ago.”


“Do you wanna,” Richie licked his lips, “sleep here tonight?”

The honest answer was no. They hadn’t slept together once since the entire thing started, because they had no reason to. Twin beds, no matter how XL they may be, barely seemed to fit one Richie, let alone the two of them. But the guys had their heating turned all the way down low and the windows were drafty and cold in the crisp deep winter air. And Eddie couldn’t find it within himself to turn down Richie’s sparkling, wide-eyed, almost nervous looking stare.

Eddie saved himself by not answering at all, because he could always withdraw later if he didn’t make promises. He let Richie tug him down to the bed. Richie tucked himself up against the wall, laying on his back with his arm nearly pressed into the wall. Eddie laid down on his stomach, curling one hand over Richie’s shoulder, and pressing his cheek into his pillow. Richie reached over him and shut off his desk lamp, brushing his fingers on Eddie’s waist as he did so. He pulled off his glasses and tucked them on the box for the mini fridge they had that he evidently used as a nightstand.

Eddie merely responded by pressing light, little kisses into his shoulder. “We have to be up so early tomorrow,” Richie whined into Eddie’s neck, setting a quick alarm on his phone. He clearly set multiple alarms.

“Wow, if I knew there’d be all this whining I would have brought cheese.” Eddie murmured into Richie’s pillow. Richie flicked at his elbow. Eddie laughed.

“You should have been asleep hours ago.” Richie said with a yawn, returning to his spot. He wormed his arm under Eddie’s torso, wrapping it around him and pulling Eddie more thoroughly into his chest.

“Yeah,” Eddie replied softly. Richie already looked like he was dozing off, thoroughly exhausted. “I should have.”

And he should have been. He should be now. He shouldn’t be sitting up, staring at Richie’s jawline dusted with little hairs or thinking about his mouth on Eddie’s. He shouldn’t be thinking about his long, nimble fingers on the piano, and definitely not about them on Eddie’s body. He shouldn’t be blinking in the dark light of the dorm room, not even stirring when Mike and Bill walked in in tandem and practically fell into bed, because he was too busy watching how the pale yellow light of the hallway washed over Richie’s nose, illuminating the soft freckles there. He shouldn't be remembering those cheese-y cutesy tweets, now finding them ever-so-slightly relatable. He shouldn’t be thinking about how he can’t fall asleep, because he was too excited to wake up and see Richie again.

He really shouldn’t be.

But he was.

“Are you still awake?” Richie mumbled, and Eddie’s heart rate picked up. He wondered how long Richie had been awake. He had to have fallen asleep at some point in time.

“Yea.”

“Go to sleep.” He mumbled, tapping his thumb on Eddie’s waist.
“But I like you,” Eddie replied simply.

Richie hid his smile in Eddie’s hair. He kissed the top of his head, pressing his lips hard, as if he could leave a mark there if he tried hard enough. “Sleep,” he told him firmly, rolling over. He pulled his arm out from Eddie’s waist to tuck it behind the pillow behind the both of their head’s, and let his body blanket Eddie’s, his torso thrown over Eddie, one leg pushed in between his. His face was in Eddie’s hair again, breathing even, soft.

And Eddie tried to listen, he really did.

Chapter End Notes

god... i love y'all im so encouraged by your nice comments you have no idea so i wanted to get this out here. thank u so much, i love hearing from y'all you have no idea..

as always i'm hanging out on my tumble tossertozier. i'm really giddy about my christmas project and sure to be gabbing a lot about it over there so if u might be ~interested~ head on over!! (...additional shout out to richierecordz for the moodboard they made for that. what a wonderful account.) anyway, see y'all soon, thnaks for reading!! <333
Eddie was trying to keep up that day in pas de deux, but it felt like his lungs were about a mile and a half behind the rest of his body. It was one of those days where Richie’s presence instead of being something fun to fuck around with during down times, was more stressful than anything else. The last thing Eddie wanted to seem to Richie was weak.

Abigail apparently noticed his discomfort. She let them stick to the back corner of the class. Normally, she’d rather be caught in a lightning storm in a very Gaga-esque, Eddie could imagine, chain mesh wedding dress, than dance in the back.

“Are you surviving?” She asked after a particularly arduous lift followed by a turn combination that almost made his neck hurt with the whipping of his head to keep his spot.

“Define ‘survive’,” he muttered through gritted teeth. She merely hummed her amusement, and rolled her own shoulders back. As soon as their Professor thanked and dismissed them, Eddie collapsed on the floor with a groan.

“Drama queen,” she kicked him with a snort.

“Ow,” he complained. He shut his eyes and wiggled away. “Do you not remember there’s fucking steel in there?”

“Trust me,” she assured him, “if you wore them, you’d know there’s no way to forget.” He groaned again. When he opened his eyes there was a hand in front of his face. He accepted it with a grumble. He realized it was a much bigger hand than Abi’s, and oddly familiar.

“Need a lift, sweetheart?” Richie’s smiling face was practically preening down at him. Eddie spitefully dropped his hand. It was short sighted. His back crashed painfully into the floor.

“You couldn’t lift a chihuahua with an eating disorder, Tozier,” he snapped back.

“Testy little peanut today, aren’t we?” Richie smirked. “Do you even lif-”

“Ugh,” Abi interrupted. Eddie looked up. She was still lingering by them. She was stretching her feet out with her hands on the bar. “That joke even annoys me, Richie.” She ran her eyes over him skeptically, “do you even lift, bro?”

“Would you like a demonstration?” He asked her, grabbing at her waist and lifting her crudely. She hollered and laughed. She struggled in his arms to be put down. Eddie sat up and watched with a smirk. “Come on, show me that move from earlier,” he raised her up, and a jolt went down Eddie’s spine. Kidding or not, Richie didn’t have the training to be raising a girl above his head.

“Put her down before you kill her,” Eddie commanded steelily, “you fucking…” he waved his hand
around, trying to figure out an insulting adjective to call him, “stringbean.”

Richie's eyes shone with amusement at Eddie's comment. Maybe it was the nickname. He clearly wanted to make some kind of comment about lifting Eddie, but he was thinking it over. He held Abi almost like a football. She was an incredibly petite girl. Had to be, to be Eddie's height in pointe shoes. "I'd like to think of myself as a slightly harder vegetable," he commented lightly, like there wasn't a struggling girl under his arm. "Asparagus, maybe."

"Asparagus?" Eddie wrinkled his nose.

"Yeah, you ever seen Veggie Tales? I'm the asparagus." He reasoned, still idly twirling around with Abigail.

"There's no way you're the asparagus. You're the fucking cucumber." Eddie had seen a few episodes in slightly horrifying members of bible study at his church while his mom gossiped about random teenage girls from the congregation, drama monger she was. The cucumber was loud and obnoxious and overall, very Richie. He sang bad songs and demanded 90% of the attention. And was ... an undercover superhero for some reason. That show was weirder than Eddie realized, now that he thought about it.

"Does that make you the tomato?" Richie asked.

"Is... now the only time you two could discuss this?" Abi asked, pointe shoes barely brushing the floor when she extended her legs down.

"I'm sorry," Richie sounded insincere, "did you wanna dance some more?"

"Absolutely not," she replied quickly. "Ugh," she rolled her eyes, a few baby hairs from her bun flopping into brown eyes, "I sound like Eddie." She sounded distasteful of that.

Eddie was mock-horrified, "HEY!" He protested, stamping a foot into the ground and crossing his arms. He realized he looked like a toddler with an attitude issue, but that's the shape his soul was taking at the moment.

"Oh, right, sorry," Abigail responded as Richie set her down, "I sound like the tomato from Veggie Tales." Eddie lunged at her while Richie and Abigail laughed loudly. Richie grabbed him around the middle before Eddie could fully reach her and retaliate.

"Hey, now," Richie wrapped a firm around him. Eddie squawked like an undiscovered flightless bird the size of a moose, and tried to wiggle free, "didn't we just agree that murder is bad," he grabbed Eddie's face with his other hand, "puddin'?" His thumb swiped over his mouth, lingering on his bottom lip. It was much less I'm a guy who likes to irritate Eddie, and more I'm a guy who's had his dick in Eddie's mouth than they usually were in the dance studios. Eddie spared a glance for the room nervously. It was long since abandoned. He looked up at Abi, who was watching them with an amused skeptical look. Eddie bit Richie's thumb.

"Ow, ow ow," Richie jumped back. He wrenched his thumb out of Eddie's mouth. “Made your point, fucking Gollum," he wiped his hand off on his jeans, still looking amused. He seemed to realize his own error though, and relented his general attack. He stepped back. He picked up his bag from the floor. “See you at the dorm?” Richie asked him, waving to Abi.

“See you NEVER,” Eddie insisted testily. Richie laughed as he exited the room. Abi was watching Eddie skeptically. With another glance around to ensure the coast was clear, Eddie sighed and turned to Abi, “don’t tell anybody, but we’re hooking up.”
“Gee, Eddie,” she replied with a flat face, “you don’t say?”

“Stringbean?” Richie asked with amusement later in Eddie’s dorm. He sat on the edge of his bed while Eddie changed after class. Eddie eyed him warily, reconsidering his plan to put on spandex shorts.

“Like you’re any better,” he replied hotly, sliding the shorts up his legs anyway. He turned, and saw Richie’s eyes very much glued to his legs. “‘Peanut,’” he quoted Richie’s current favorite nickname for Eddie, while shoving him back on to the bed. He let his own knee rest between his legs. He pushed up on his hands, which he had on either side of Richie’s head, leering over him.

Richie laughed, “Peanut and Stringbean. Together,” he grabbed at Eddie’s hips, “we make the world’s grossest snack.” He nipped playfully at Eddie’s bottom lip, craning his neck to reach.

“And couple,” Stan interjected from his spot at his desk.

“We’re not a couple,” they corrected in tandem. Stan did not look up from his computer. Eddie blinked, surprised at the unison they managed, and looked back down at Richie.

“Ow, fuck.” Eddie flopped down, half on top of Richie, half on the remaining piece of his bed. “Pas de Deux sucks.”

“Yeah,” Richie laughed, “tell me about it.”

Eddie smacked his stomach. “I was serious, today.” He frowned up at him, digging his chin into Richie’s shoulder. “You could hurt yourself, or her.” Richie did not seem terribly interested in taking his advice, not looking back at Eddie, just drumming a hand on his stomach and then reaching for his phone.

“I’ve lifted my fair share of women.” Richie replied casually. Eddie felt his temper flare, and less-so for the women thing and more-so for the disrespecting his dance knowledge thing. When Richie unlocked his phone, Eddie flicked it out of his hand and on to his stomach, because that was the mature response when your whatever was irritating you. “Would you like a demonstration?” He asked, smirking at the miffed man who was still laying on him, irritated or not.

“’m not a woman,” he complained, face pressed into Richie’s shoulder.

“Of course not, I was going to use the real lady of the dorm, ay Uris, come he-” by the time Richie stood, Stan had already calmly closed his computer and walked out of their door, reclosing it with a small click.

Eddie sat up on his bed, cross legged, and unzipped his neglected backpack on the floor. He had homework to be doing anyway. He hoisted a math text book out of his bag, ignoring his shoulder muscles who were calling for him to end it all now. He wrinkled his nose, making a small, incredibly attractive, “eugh” sound. He held it with one hand, digging around in his bag with the other for his notebook. The book was lifted out of his hand.

"Richie-“ he protested weakly, sounding like a protagonist from a really bad teen drama he watched when he was 11 and pretending he was watching because the girls were 'pretty' and not because the boys were shirtless half the time.

"You in pain, baby?” Richie had on what Eddie lovingly though of as his sex voice. It was half phone sex operator, half pilot on an international flight. Eddie had flown internationally, but he'd heard cabin announcements in movies. He could make his assumptions. Richie held the book in
one hand, and dug the other one in between Eddie's shoulders. His thumb made a tantalizing little circle in between his shoulder blades. Eddie rolled his shoulders back. "You're fucking tense," Richie dropped the voice a little bit and frowned with concern.

"Pas de deux is hard," Eddie replied with a shrug. Richie dropped the book. It thudded into the ground with a resounding thunk. Eddie looked up at him. Richie tucked his hand under Eddie's shirt, and tugged it over his head.

"Lay back." He told him, grabbing at the lotion Eddie kept on his bedside table. It was a muscle relaxant.

"Wow," Eddie blinked. He thought about arguing, but he wasn't sure if he wanted to yet, "foreplay really is dead."

"On your tummy," Richie told him, ignoring his sassy comment. Eddie decided to just indulge him and comply. He couldn't keep his mind from reeling, so his mouth kept talking, even if he didn't necessarily want it to.

"Tummy, ugh," he whined, shoving his face into his pillow. "That word is such a fucking mood killer. What a weird word, tummy."

"You know," Richie's knee was digging in by Eddie's thighs. His cool, cold hands, dampened with lotion, spread over Eddie's shoulders. He shivered, "before I met you, I was known for not being able to stop talking."

"What are you trying to say-"

"Shhh," Richie hummed, sound deep in his chest. His thumbs dug into Eddie's sore muscles. Eddie stifled a groan. He kind of hated that Richie could tell he rambled when he was a little uncomfortable. He also hated that he did it in the first place. He listened to Richie, shoving his face into the pillow, arms wrapped around it. "Remember what I told you," He ran his knuckles down the notches of his spine. "About magic fingers?"

Eddie groaned into his pillow, and not in a sexy way, more like Bigfoot who is irritated with his mother in law than anything else, "don't remind me."

Richie didn't laugh audibly, but dug in his hands a little tighter. Eddie shuddered. It felt really, really good. Richie's hands could reach places Eddie's couldn't even begin to touch, but his fingers were also deft and strong, covering a large surface area of Eddie's small frame. "Sorry," he dug his thumb into a sweet spot, working at the tenseness there. "I'm afraid that's not possible." Eddie wanted to complain again about Richie being an arrogant prick, but he was too distracted by the loosening of his muscles. He let himself melt a little bit into his mattress, Richie hovering over him. He didn't know how long it was going on for, but he almost felt himself get... a little too relaxed. He shuffled uncomfortably, trying to discretely adjust the position of his dick against his mattress, and tried to think of something distinctly unsexy. Like. gravy. Or. sand.

"You're so sweet when you're not tense," Richie's low voice surprised him. Not even sand could save him now. Eddie knew his face was flushing, but he had to turn his head to the side to rake in a breath. His heart was pounding, and Richie's hands skirted lower on his back until he was rubbing small circles into the dimples at the base of his spine. "Yeah?" He asked Eddie, his pinky fingers just brushing under the waistband of Eddie's shorts

Eddie made a choked sound. Somehow choking was encouragement, because Richie's hands slipped down farther. They spanned the entirety of his ass, if not moreso, Eddie noticed with a
shiver. He bit into his pillow tersely. Richie seemed to notice, making soft shushing noises as he
grabbed Eddie's ass in two hands, massaging it the way he did his back. His thumbs slipped under
the hem of Eddie's shorts.

"It's not good for you to be so tense, peanut," Richie chastised softly. Eddie tried to relaxing, but he
was fisting at his pillow by his mouth. Eddie wanted to clap back, but he always had less to say
when he was turned on, especially when he had been effectively rubbed into pudding by Richie.
"It's not good for pretty little dancers," Eddie really, really wanted to be indignant at his almost
patronizing word choice. But his dick highly disagreed, and apparently he had the level of control
over it of that of a 14 year old who has recently gained access to their own computer. He
involuntarily pushed up into his grasp a little more. Richie just grabbed him more firmly.

"I could fuck it right out of you," his thumbs were still tucked into the hem of his shorts, rubbing a
small, digging circle into his ass. Eddie swallowed thickly, unsure when he started producing so
much saliva. They hadn't gone there, not yet anyway. It was on Eddie's mind already. He was
almost shocked with himself at how badly he wanted it. Richie's hands slipped out of his shorts and
he almost complained about it. He pressed one hand down on the center of Eddie's back, almost
holding him still, and then slipped one hand, fingers pressed together in an almost fan like fashion,
in Eddie's crack over his shorts. Eddie tried to keep this shake from running down his spine, but he
thought Richie must have felt it anyway. "Yeah?" Richie ran his thumb down the line he created,
passing over Eddie's asshole, which he never thought would be particularly sensitive but there's
always things to be learned, "you'd be so sweet for me?"

"Richie, I-

"Not right now," Richie's hands, blessedly, left him alone, skating back up to safer areas on his
back. He dug in his thumbs once again, right into the nape of his neck. Eddie almost sighed. He
didn't know if it was in relief or disappointment. He realized Richie had leaned down, hair falling
on to Eddie's breath hot on his neck, "but think about it," he pressed a kiss into the nape of Eddie's
neck.

“Richie,” Eddie warned, glad Richie was laying on his chest, in between his legs, so he couldn’t
see the fond smile on his face, “you’re not supposed to be sleeping,” he pressed a kiss into the side
of his head, into the ruffled black waves.

Richie yawned more loudly than strictly necessary, “M’ sorry.” He replied. His hands grabbed at
Eddie’s wrist. Eddie dropped one of his hands from the book he was holding on Richie’s chest.
Richie absentmindedly played with his fingers as Eddie continued to read out the lines of the play.
Richie had been assigned to read The Merchant of Venice for English Literature and it wasn’t
going well.

Richie’s head tipped back on his chest, looking up at Eddie. “Do it with the voices?” He asked,
sounding as childish as he looked.

Eddie rolled his eyes dramatically, but still adjusted his pitch to be high and breathy as he read
Jessica’s next line in scene 5, “‘In such a night Did Thisbe fearfully o'ertripp the dew And saw the
lion's shadow ere himself And ran dismayed away.’” He paused, licking his lips and clearing his
throat. For Lorenzo’s line in response, he spoke in an unnaturally deep, masculine tone, that had
Richie’s chest pulsing with amusement “In such a night Stood Dido with a willow in her hand
Upon the wild sea banks, and waft her love To come again to Carthage.” And then it was back to
Jessica, and back to the breathy, light, voice. “‘In such a night,’” he simpered, “‘Medea gathered
the enchanted herbs, That did renew old Æson.’”
He swallowed, words chalking up in his throat, before beginning Lorenzo’s next section of dialogue. “In such a night,” Richie spoke with him, then. It wasn’t necessarily Richie’s regular speaking voice. It was deeper, and thick. A far better imitation of a leading male lover than Eddie’s. Eddie dropped off, and let Richie keep reading. “Did Jessica steal from the wealthy Jew, And with an unthrift love did run from Venice As far as Belmont.” Eddie almost laughed. Shakespeare could be funny if you could understand him.

When Richie waited after Lorenzo’s line, Eddie filled in with Jessica’s next line, but speaking, again, in his regular voice. “In such a night, Did young Lorenzo,” he dug his chin into Richie’s head, “swear he loved her well, Stealing her soul with many vows of faith, And ne’er a true one.” He read almost cheekily to Richie, amused at the entire thing.

Richie snatched the book out of his hand, He turned over, using his free hand to balance himself, so he could lean over Eddie’s face as he read “In such a night, Did pretty Jessica,” Richie buckled his elbow and leaned down. He kissed Eddie’s cheek, “like a little shrew ,” he acted out his line as he read it, acting very dramatically, “ Slander her love,” he acted very wounded, but then smiled, as he finished “and he forgave it her.” He tossed the book to the floor, and leaned down to kiss Eddie.

Eddie hated his traitorous heart, because he was supposed to be used to the kissing. He was supposed to have adjusted to the little nips of his lower lip until he opened his mouth wide enough for Richie to be satisfied. His heart still insisted on pounding in chest when Richie slid his hand up his shirt, fingertips pressing into his ribs.

“Eddie, Ri-” Bill’s voice paused at the start of the dorm. Richie pressed his hand further into Eddie to keep him laying down, “...what are you guys doing?”

“Reading.” Richie murmured into Eddie’s mouth, even though their kiss was weird and disjointed then. He apathetically pointed at the book on the floor “can’t you tell?”

“Sit up for like a sec,” Ben’s voice insisted. Eddie pushed Richie off of him, who went with a plaintive whine, but was still half draped over Eddie, nuzzling his neck. It was almost a warning to the guys, like ‘I went, but I’m not doing this long.’ Eddie couldn’t necessarily disagree. “What are you guys doing next Thursday night?”

“Sleeping.”

“What I always do.” That was a vague answer for Richie, but Eddie was pretty sure a truthful one would just terrify him, so vague might have been for the better.

“Okay, well.” Bill interrupted with an annoyed face. “Think about coming to this party with us. It’s for charity, and stuff.”

“Get drunk for a cause?” Eddie guessed. Richie snorted into his shoulder, before biting it playfully. “We’ll see, Billy.” Eddie replied, knowing full well he had almost no intention of going to that party.

"It's better, Eddie," Laurent assured him. His face didn't seem that warm or reassuring, though. Eddie didn't understand why this solo wasn't coming easily to him. Or, if it was, why Laurent's expectations were so high. He supposed he was grateful for that in some kind of way, but disappointed face after disappointed face during rehearsals was getting to him. Richie sat waiting by the piano. Eddie wished he had just left. "Reserve some studio time, drill those leaps. We'd stay later, but I have an 8 o'clock class to teach," Laurent turned back to look at the clock. He seemed
surprised to see Richie sitting by the piano. "Mr. Tozier, you're free to go." He told him absently.

"I'll stay," Richie replied too quickly. Eddie couldn't see Laurent's face, but the back of his head looked highly skeptical. "If Eddie wants to keep practicing."

Laurent looked back to Eddie. Eddie nodded quickly, trying to seem irritated at Richie's presence. Laurent must have bought it, because he nodded slowly. "Alright, gentleman," He grabbed his own bag from the floor, "don't kill each other."

"Not on school property," Richie replied evenly. Laurent laughed. Eddie still found that annoying, that Richie was just so damn charming. Laurent left the door open. Surprisingly, without a word, Richie played the introductory chord to Eddie's piece. Eddie was honestly shocked, but he set himself in prep anyway. They ran through the entire minute and a half piece without another word twice, and then the music stopped abruptly. "Okay, he's probably gone." Richie said with a laugh. He mischievously, like he had a grand scheme that Eddie being bad at his solo was just a part of, dug into his bag.

"Why did I know you had an ulterior motive?"

"Because you know me?" Richie joked back, and then caught Eddie's eye. He grinned, "or you're starting to," he added earnestly, "at least."

He dug a small speaker out of his bag, and set it on the piano. With another wary look behind him, he shucked off his shoes under the bench. He crossed the floor to Eddie, wearing grey sweatpants and a plain maroon sweater, but his socks were covered in what looked like dominoes and naked women. "Dominoes" Eddie mused quietly.

"What?" Richie questioned, laugh on his mouth.

"Your socks," Eddie pointed lamely at them, "dominoes." Richie laughed and tugged Eddie into him, as if Eddie making a pun out of Richie's socks were the most attractive thing a person could do. "Okay," Richie pressed a hand into Eddie's lower back, adjusting his posture. "You stand," he maneuvered Eddie's hands around his shoulders, taking one in his own, "like that."

"Rich," Eddie furrowed his eyebrows, "what the fuck are we doing?"

"A demonstration," Richie grinned down at him. "Like I keep offering." He dropped Eddie's hand to grab his phone out of his pocket. With a few taps of his thumb, a bopping, vaguely rock n' roll 1950's beat was coming from his speaker. He picked Eddie's hand up again. "Are you gonna be able to follow?"

"Are you asking if I can keep up with you?" Eddie replied incredulously, almost offended.

"No," Richie tugged him in a little closer, "I'm asking if you are capable of following." He rocked them in a specific step on the beat. After a moment, he popped his foot behind in a ball change. Eddie joined him the next time he did it. Richie grinned, and spun Eddie out.

"Is this..." Eddie dropped Richie's hand, watching him bop by himself. It wasn't uncoordinated. It was loose and jazzy, kicking feet and snapping fingers, but contained. In control. "lindy hop?" He asked as incredulously as he did before.

"You wanted to know about my experience lifting women," Richie grabbed his hand, dragging him back in to dance with him. Eddie tried to follow Richie, letting him spin him in one direction. Richie kicked. When he spun him in the other direction, Eddie joined him. "Here is your demonstration. Bev used to drag me to swing clubs in high school. She has a thing for vintage shit."
They continued to dance, Eddie trying to follow Richie. "It's highly intuitive," Richie told him smugly, watching Eddie try and formalize the loose dance style, "you don't get to plan or think," he spun Eddie again. Eddie laughed, "you just get to dance." Eddie copied his kicking pattern, jaunty little low kicks by their feet. It felt ridiculous to do in his very fancy ballet attire, swinging jazz beat behind him. It was almost more breath-taking than he thought it would be, hopping around, dancing with Richie. But it was light. Eddie didn't find himself wondering about his turn out, or the length of his lines. He just tried to mimic the steps Richie was putting in front of him, learn as he danced. No preparation, no choreography. But following Richie was easier than he wanted it to be. Richie spun them again, this dance style was very spinny, Eddie noticed, but there was no where to spot. You just spin, and let your head spin with you. "Oh yeah," Richie slid Eddie next to him. He proceeded to do a jaunty Charleston. Eddie waited till he finished the 8 count, and joined him again. "We're gonna be good at this," he nodded.

Eddie couldn't disagree.

Chapter End Notes

i Return.
Eddie scoffed when he saw him in the hallway, "cool clown shoes, Bozo."

Richie looked down at his bowler shoes, and back to Eddie. "Well," he winked, "you know what they say about big feet." He almost sneered, in a way Eddie definitely shouldn't find attractive, "what size are those, Twinkle Toes?" He pointed at Eddie's feet, as if he didn't distinctly know they answer to that. Eddie continued to walk by, acting entirely unbothered by the entire situation.

"Big enough for this," he delivered a swift, well-timed kick to the back of Richie's knee. Not at all hard, but enough. His legs buckled under him, and he fell to the ground. People around him gasped, and some even hollered a little bit. Not Richie. Richie laughed as he went down.

Eddie allowed himself a self satisfied smirk as he stepped into the studio.

"You should really be nicer to Richie," Victoria, a girl from the dance programme he had only chat with a handful of times instructed him. Abigail choked next to him. He tired earnestly to ignore the both of them. "We wouldn’t want him to think he’s not welcomed in the dance studio.”

Eddie clicked open his text from Richie while looking up at the girl for the sake of politeness.

richie 1:17 p.m.
i sat there and watched u go.
promise me you’ll take a pic in those shorts.

“That’s exactly the impression I think I’d like him to get,” Eddie replied, not unkindly in Victoria’s direction. She certainly didn’t need to know that he had walked to class well over ten minutes before it started so he could see Richie in the hall after he got out of his last class.

eddie 1:17 p.m.
what’d you do to deserve that?

A girl he had come to know as Annique snorted from her stretch on the floor. Her long dark limbs were splayed out as she flexed her feet. “What’d he do to you, anyway?” She asked in a similar tone to Eddie’s. Not unkind, but curious.

richie 1:18 p.m.
what do u want me to do?

“Nothing,” Eddie lied, “I just think he’s annoying, really.” Abigail, true to her word that she’d keep it a secret, didn’t let her more than likely amusement show on her face. She rolled her shoulders with a neutral expression. “We just don’t get along,” he continued to lie.

eddie 1:18 p.m.
depends on what kind of picture we’re talking, here.

“You should really lighten up,” Victoria continued. Annique looked annoyed at her friend. Eddie shared it with her. “Go to a party, or get laid or something,” she said in a tone where she could later argue that she thought he wouldn’t hear it, but she intended him to hear it as she walked away.

“I’m sorry,” Annique apologized for her, making no move to follow her. “Her crush on Tozier is just fucking annoying at this point.”

“She has a crush on Rich?” He asked curiously. “Ie?” He added, after a moment too long because there’s no way he’d casually call him Rich, fucking moron.

“Yeah.”

**richie 1:19 p.m.**

*i was thinking on your hands and knees.*

*stick that pretty ass out for me.*

*but i’d also accept one like this.*

Attached was a horribly awkward meme of a dorky kid with one of his feet propped uncomfortably high on a bathroom counter, sunglasses skewed on his face, shirt tucked into basketball shorts, weird expression on his face.

“I have no idea why,” Eddie insulted Richie honestly.

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Eddie didn’t consider himself to be one for peer-pressure. And yet, he found himself annoyed at Victoria’s comments. They reminded him - shudder - of Richie, in a way. Eddie, believe it or not, was capable of being reckless and young and having sex and parties and all of those things. He just chose not to, due to not being an *idiot*. His apparent reputation of someone who was simply incapable of those things was mildly infuriating.

“I want to have sex,” he announced loudly in Richie’s dorm. Eddie didn’t really think that one through at all. He was just barely standing in side of the door before blurting that one out. Thank God or Oprah or whomever, because it was just Richie, sitting on his bed with one earphone in. He laughed loudly enough for at least six people though. He ripped his earphones out, and shifted slightly, so the foot under him was resting just in front of him.

“Hello to you, too.”

Eddie respectfully ignored him, “I want to have sex and then go to that party and maybe fucking piece my belly button or some shit, I don’t know.” Richie only laughed harder. “Stop fucking laughing at me, asshole!!” Eddie insisted, searching around his immediate vicinity for something to throw at him. He settled on a sock. It did not hit Richie, it landed in the middle of the floor. Richie had tears in his eyes. “Stop laughing!! This is not something we laugh about!!” Eddie fumed, checking that he shut the door behind him. He did. He turned back around, feeling awkward and more unsexy than before.

“It’s not?” Richie questioned, sounding cocky enough for Eddie to want to kick him in the shins. “What do I do about it, then?”

“You sex me!!” Even Eddie could admit that that sounded fucking ridiculous. It was sharp and indignant, not the sultry suggestive something he had planned in his head. He didn’t even know what he was planning to say, but it certainly wasn’t that.
Richie, for a moment, looked like he was trying very hard to take Eddie’s words seriously. It lasted all of four seconds, before he collapsed in laughter again. “Fucking, Christ, Eds-” He shoved his glasses up on his head, rubbing the heel of his palm into his eyes.

“FINE!” Eddie didn’t realize he was doing shouting until the shouting came forth, “I’ll go find someone else to-” he pretended like he was going to turn and walk away. He really wasn’t, but that’s for him and God and maybe Oprah if she didn’t already, to know.

Richie was gently booing him. “Calm the fuck down, peanut.” Eddie stared at him, knowing he was red faced and indignant. Richie shuffled back on his bed, opening his legs and arms for Eddie. It was a very inviting looking space. He was wearing a green long sleeve t-shirt with a pocket with an image of a cat giving you the middle finger on it. “C’merex.”

Eddie didn’t have a reason why not, but he felt like crossing to Richie instead of him coming over to him was losing something somehow. He stood where he was and crossed his arms. “Why should I?”

“Because naughty standing boys,” he said in the weirdest voice Eddie had ever heard coming from a human, or any other species, for that matter, mouth. “Get eaten by dorm chair goblins.”

Eddie just stared at him. “That’s like. The opposite of a reason. That was fucking weird. Who the fuck gets into bed with someone who says shit like that?”

“You.” Richie answered plainly. “Also, Jesus, your mouth has gotten foul. Where’d you learn all that?”

“I guess you’re rubbing off on me.”

“I’m trying to, for fuck’s sakes, Kaspbrak, will you get your ass over here?” Only because Eddie was genuinely fearful that the chair goblin impression would return, he trumped over to Richie’s bed. Over the loose t-shirts and empty video game boxes and one very sad looking abandoned take-out bag from Taco Bell. He must have been staring at it with pity, what a life to have lived, because Richie grabbed his wrists, pulling him in to himself. “I will sex you,” Richie told him seriously, voice mixing amusement and seriousness infuriatingly well. “I will sex you very much.”

“Oh, fuck you.” Eddie squirmed backwards, seriously considering going to find someone else. Although, no he actually wasn’t. But he could tell himself he was. He let Richie tug him into his chest, laugh still on his annoying face. Eddie attempted to kiss it off, flattening himself onto Richie. Richie hummed like an enormous happy cat, running his hands up his body to grip at Eddie’s sides. Eddie’s heart hammered in his chest, and Richie’s glasses poked at his face. He settled on top of him anyway, shimmying into place. He rolled his hips into Richie, running a hand in-between his shirt and his skin.

“Now?!” He caught Eddie’s wrist before he snaked under his shirt.

“No, Richie,” he deadpanned, “on Arbor day.”

Richie nodded solemnly. “Mother Gaia loves a good dickin’. ” He squeezed Eddie’s thigh with a laugh Eddie didn’t share with him. Richie sighed again, serious expression falling over his face. He looked up at Eddie honestly. “I’m not, uh,” he swallowed “prepared to do that now. Unless,” Richie skeptically squinted, “...you are?”

“...are you seriously telling me you need to get your emotions into place before we fuck?”

Richie blinked at him incredulously, before his face settled into a particularly flat expression “no.”
He waited for Eddie’s reaction, clearly. Eddie didn’t know what his reaction was supposed to be, so he just made an irritated *then what?* look. “Fucking, stripper on a pogo stick,” Richie swore under his breath, or Eddie could only call that bizarre statement a swear in Richie World, rubbing his thumb over his eyebrow with annoyance. He groaned dramatically. Eddie sat back on his heels, seriously lost.

He sighed, frowning and sitting up a little bit. Like he had something bad to tell Eddie, like he didn’t know how to word something. Maybe he had some sort of...particularly nasty STD that ate condoms alive. Eddie felt something twist uncomfortably in his stomach.

“You see, Eddie:” he sat up, patting a hand on Eddie’s stomach. “When one male stingray loves another male stingray very much-”

“You know, I didn’t actually come here for an episode of Animal Planet.”

“Really? That’s why I normally go most places.

“Is it because you belong in zoo?”

“It’s your mother who has crabs.” Eddie ran out of comebacks so he settled for grabbing Richie’s pillow from behind his head and attempting to suffocate him. He sat on his stomach triumphantly, but Richie’s laugh from under the pillow was sort of ruining it. “Already getting kinky?” Richie’s muddled voice asked from under the pillow.

Eddie picked up the pillow just to thwack him over the face with it.

“OW, FUCK, CHRIST.” Richie ripped the pillow out of his hands, tossing it across the room. He was red faced, glasses slightly skewed and hair very mussed, falling oddly around his face. Eddie snickered as Richie set his hair so it wasn’t in his mouth. Richie rolled his eyes at him, landing his hands on his hips soon after. “You’re such an annoying little fuck,” he squeezed them “how you manage to be so cute is beyond me.”

Eddie’s past and probable future self were beyond appalled that he was willingly sitting on someone who just called him fucking annoying, but he was still sort of pent up from earlier and Richie’s jaw was doing this tantalizing thing with the built up irritation that made Eddie want to lick it. He pressed his hands forward on Richie’s chest, scooting his ass back towards his general crotch region, “I’m gonna pretend I didn’t hear any part of that except fuck,” he drawled in what he desperately hoped was a sexy voice. It must have been, because Richie went a bit pink-faced and squinty, and his fingertips pressed in harder.

“Maybe we could…” he said, looking beyond Eddie as if he was thinking, “if we just…” he squinted as if he was reading a teleprompter behind Eddie. He was almost tempted to look, “nah, that’d still be fucking gross.”

“Excuse me?” Eddie drawled dangerously.

Richie sighed and grabbed Eddie’s hand off of his chest. “I really didn’t want to be the one to break this to you, but,” he kissed Eddie’s palm sweetly, and then almost whispered into it “there’s no such thing as spontaneous anal.”

“Are you calling me dirty?” Eddie ripped his hand out of his grip, sitting forward on his stomach. “Fuck you!” There were goldfish crackers ground into the carpet next to a hoodie Eddie was confident Richie hadn’t washed since returning to school, “I showered after class!”

Richie pushed his elbows back to sit up, almost dislodging Eddie from him fully, but Eddie slid
down to sit in his lap. He was hard, Eddie noticed, even if he thought Eddie was ‘fucking gross.’
“You are the cleanest person I know,” Richie attempted to placate him, rubbing his big ol’ gross, fucking hot hands down Eddie’s side. It didn’t work. “Peanut,” Richie added as an almost afterthought, pressing a kiss into his hairline. Eddie felt his shoulders relax against his will, but don’t worry, he fucking hated himself for it. “Except Stan.” Richie corrected.

“Stan is very clean,” Eddie nodded, “is this your way of telling me you want to fuck Stan?”

“If I wanted to be fucking Sta- wait. This isn’t what we’re talking about. Fuck, how do you always do this?” Eddie opened his mouth to retort, but Richie shifted his weight on his lap a little bit before adjusting his glasses on his face while continuing to talk, “no. Anyway. If anyone is going to be fucking anyone in this room, we should really get a little…” Richie clearly had no idea how to phrase it, “extra clean. It’s douching. It’s called douching. Jesus, I don’t know why I fucking drew this out.”

Eddie felt like some sort of idiot toddler, all toddlers were kind of idiots, but like an exceptionally stupid one. The whole lap thing probably wasn’t helping. He didn’t even have a snappy reply.

“…oh?”

“Don’t worry,” Richie’s hand was sliding suspiciously close to Eddie’s pants, “we’ll take a super sexy trip to CVS, clean…” he paused, trying to catch Eddie’s eye while Eddie stared firmly at the corner of his ear. If he wanted Eddie to admit that he thought it would be better if Richie fucked him, he could catch him in the next lifetime, because that was not going to happen. “You?” Richie guessed. Eddie nodded curtly, staring at the ear with newfound determination. “Clean you out in that very inclusive private bathroom on the third floor, and then…we’ll pick up where we just paused.” Richie kissed his jaw. “You don’t, like. Have to. If you don’t want to. But there probably would be a little bit of shit on the cond-”

“Shut up, shut the fuck up,” Eddie stood up, shivering at the mere thought. “Get up,” Eddie kicked him, “and don’t give me that mental image ever again.”

The trip to CVS and the events thereafter were not sexy. They were the least sexy thing Eddie thought he had ever partaken in and he had played the role of hay in a nativity pageant once. Cleaning out his ass was the most ridiculously unsexy thing that he legitimately considered asking Richie to watch porn before the next event took place. God- he was even thinking about it in an entirely unsexy way, as if sex were just a really fucked up series of Olympic events. But if he had done that he would have had to learn about, what he could only imagine was, Richie’s weird taste in porn.

And like, Eddie understood that virginity was a lie sold by lingerie companies, hotels on prom night, and the Catholic Church in general, but he felt somewhat deceived. Richie’s fingers in his ass felt...almost exactly as he maybe would have expected if he hadn’t idealized it so much. His hands were still quaking where he was lightly grabbing at his sheets, but he thought that might be the nerves and not the insistent in and out of one of Richie’s fingers in his hole. Lube was colder than he expected. Eddie squinted at the ceiling “is this supposed to be fun?”

Richie snorted, “you know,” he commented plainly from his own position down by Eddie’s legs, “I’m having a real blast.” He replied sarcastically. Eddie didn’t even want to think about shoving his fingers up Richie’s ass, so he would take his word for it.

Eddie felt another finger prod at his entrance and he clenched down involuntarily. “Ah, ah ah–” Richie chided gently, rubbing what he probably assumed was a soothing hand on Eddie’s stomach, “let me in, little guy.”
“I’m sorry, are you talking to my asshole, and if you are, did you just call him little guy?”

“Would you like a different nickname?” Richie withdrew his finger, and was just massaging the outer rim with both of his fingers in a small little circle,

“How’s Raymond?”

“We are not calling my asshole Raymond.” Richie’s hand grabbed Eddie’s dick and he didn’t say it aloud, but he could have called it anything he wanted to and Eddie would have accepted it. His hand was slicker than it was with lube shining on a few of the fingers, and Eddie keened softly. “Mhmm,” Richie was watching him and Richie had had his hand on his dick before but somehow it all seemed more intimate. Eddie’s insides were more determined to squirm than ever. Eddie felt the two fingers return to his entrance and he bucked up slightly, avoidantly. The hand on him stopped.

“Eddie,” Richie spoke sternly. “I don’t know how you expect me to fuck you if you won’t let me fuck you.”

Eddie sat up and glared at him. Sorry if his fingers thus far felt like alarmingly large worms that were attempting to make a home up his ass? The strangest part of it all was Richie seemed nervous too. Eddie couldn’t help but feel at fault for that, and he didn’t know how.

Richie seemed uninterested in talking -or bickering -with him, and lowered his head to his dick before Eddie could even begin to figure out the end of his sentence. He pressed a hot tongue to the head of his dick, mouth engulfing him easily.

“Ew,” Eddie winced as he watched him do it, “all that lube has got to taste gro-” Richie’s tongue dove into his slit and the words died out in the wet, tight heat. Richie had blown him exactly twice before, with Eddie only trying to return the favor - poorly, once. But never quite like that. It was a determined, feverish suck that led Eddie’s hips to buck unfortunately. In between embarrassing whimpers, he looked down to Richie. He seemed determined. As determined as one ever seems with a dick in their mouth.

“Y-you’re” Eddie’s spit was catching in throat - fucking ew - and he could barely spit out the words, “you’re trying to finish me, aren’t you?”

Richie didn’t respond except for a hum around Eddie’s dick which was doing little for the problem. “I don’t want to cum yet,” His tongue pressed into the really sensitive ring under the head and Eddie bit down hard enough on his lip to draw blood. “Stop!” Eddie insisted, yanking harshly at Richie’s hair. He pulled him off his dick with a solid popping sound. “What the fuck, Rich?” Richie sighed, his chin digging into Eddie’s thigh as he looked up at him. He did not look terribly interested in having sex. Eddie’s mind did as it normally did, slammed on the gas and sped to the distant and worst possible conclusion. "You don’t like me, that’s it, isn’t it-"

“Eddie-”

“This is one of those things where you got dared to make someone love you or some shit and then when we go to the dance you’re gonna pour pig’s blood all over me.” When he looked down at Richie, his face was resting on his thigh. He was blinking dumbfoundedly at him. “Or it’s a bet,” Eddie continued insistently. “But you find the idea of sleeping with me horrifying.”

Richie looked up insistentely. “You’re insane.”

“Certifiably,” Eddie agreed. “Are we skipping to the pig’s blood, is that what we’re doing?”
“Eddie, there is no pig’s blood.”

“Sheeps?”

“No.”

“...Meerkat?”

“No animal blood of any kind.” Richie’s hand returned to Eddie’s dick, an odd schlick-ing noise as he jerked it. The insecurity was still creeping through his chest. “You’re shaking,” Richie noted, with a significant glance down to Eddie’s hands, “and you’re rambling.” He pressed a kiss into Eddie’s hip, “which, as a verified interpreter of Kaspbrak Native Language-”

“How do you always have to-”

“You’re very nervous.” He didn’t slow his tortuous pull on Eddie’s cock. “And I don’t want to shove my dick into a bundle of nerves.” He told him with a shrug. “We don’t have to do this now,” he insisted before Eddie could speak over him, “we can give it a go later, you can fuck me, I don’t care, and for today, we’ll just-” he sped up his hand on Eddie’s dick.

“And you’ll go find someone else to fuck?” Eddie asked, pushing up on his elbows. Richie frowned at the vulgar exclamation. But it didn’t make it any less true. “I’m ready, Rich. Shaking,” he held up a hand, “and nervous as fuck, but ready.” Richie, almost challengingly, returned two of his fingers to Eddie. He felt them press in, hot and sturdy, as Richie continued to jack his dick. He held his ground, keeping his eyes on Richie. Richie seemed to accept it, leaning up to kiss him quietly, before continuing to piston his fingers in and out.

It was quieter then, as Eddie tried to focus on the heat enveloping his dick and relaxing his lower muscles and not of much else. Richie added a third, oddly quiet. He had imagined Richie as more talkative. Just, maybe not to Raymon- his asshole, he corrected his own thoughts. Richie's thumb rubbed at the head of his cock for a moment, and Eddie whimpered softly. Richie withdrew his fingers.

"What are you doing?" Eddie looked up, opening his eyes for the first time in a while. Richie was shifting in between his legs, cock red and hard and much more daunting than it had ever looked, lined up against Eddie. He had both of Eddie's thighs in his hands.

"I'm moving you," He bucked Eddie's legs up a little higher. He complied wordlessly, face still crumpled with confusion. "I can't reach the spot the way we were."

"The-" Eddie swallowed, again, excess saliva, not in his favor. He shivered to think it came from looking at Richie's dick, hard in between his legs. Richie could never know that. Or about the want, the weird burning desire plaguing his chest. "Just...just fuck me."

"You sure?"

"Yeah," Eddie screwed his eyes shut again, grabbing his own legs. Richie's hands dropped down to Eddie's hips, but then disappeared. He heard the tell-tale crinkle of a condom. His breathing was quickening as he felt would could only be the smooth, rubbery, yet slightly spongy head of Richie's dick against his hole. He thought, with a bit of horror, that it wouldn't fit. Like trying to shove a triangle shaped block into a circular hole. Richie's hands spread him further, and Eddie's spin trembled. He forcibly relaxed himself, but Eddie couldn't help but let out a small hiss as Richie pressed in.

"I'm sorry-" Richie apologized, "I'll-"
"No, please," the stretch was jarringly unfamiliar, but the way a new school was on the first day. Something he could be prepared to get to know. "Keep going." Richie gripped Eddie's dick, thumb running up the vein as he squeezed the base. Eddie hiccuped as the dick in him slid up against the spot Richie was referring too. He clenched down on Richie's dick, feeling Richie simultaneously rub his thumb under the head of Eddie's dick. He reminded himself to relax, and he did in his lower- holy fuck.

He felt it rip out of his abdomen before he was even given a fair warning about it, and it was so quick that he felt the wetness dripping on to his abs before he could even begin to be mortified it was happening.

"Did you just-" Richie began. Eddie was gaping, pink faced and horrified.

"I am so sorry."

"Ach-" Eddie's ass bared down as Richie pulled out, "...can you-

Eddie was still blinking in shock, "I'm can't, I'm-" It was like being in a hot tub, and then running to jump into a pool while your skin is still warm. Cool and familiar, shocking to the system.

"It's, uch- Uh, it's fine." Eddie's breath was still fighting it's way back into his lungs. "Don't uh, fuck- worry." Eddie realized Richie was very blatantly jacking himself off, in a very rushed way, next to him at that moment. He didn't bother to look over, keeping his eyes firmly on the ceiling. His face was burning from heat. He could not believe he just did that. Or that any of that just happened. That was going down in the record's book as the heteronormative definition of his first time. Raymond and pig's blood and premature ejaculation and all. He couldn't get over the horror of it and didn't know how long it was until Richie came with a grunt, probably into his own hand or a tissue or something, and slid down to lie beside Eddie.

"That was..." Eddie began.

"Terrible." Richie finished for him plainly. It buckled off into an easy laugh. Eddie looked over at him. Richie's eyes were crinkled with amusement, laughter forcing it's way out of his chest. "Just god awful." Richie's laugh cracked at Eddie's tight chest like an ice pick, and he laughed too. For the first time since the whole thing started, easy warmth returned to flood his chest. He laughed with Richie, even as Richie's fingers came to tug through his hair almost painfully. Richie with those giant hands and the terrifyingly messy dorm room and the banana socks and tangled hair. The laugh getting ripped out of him was much more pleasant than the orgasm. And somehow, butterflies in his stomach, light headed and dizzy, it was all the more terrifying.

He stared dumb-founded up at Richie, before asking honestly “HOW” he shook his head, "do I still like you so much?"

Richie smirked down at him, fingers still running through his hair. "Didn't we say something about insane?"

A soft smile fell on Eddie's mouth. "Certifiably." He agreed. Richie kissed him gently. Next time, Eddie thought to himself, next time there’d be more kissing. He couldn't believe he just endured that and was already planning a next time.

“Did you still want to go to that party?” Richie asked, as if he was skeptical about Eddie’s potential answer.

He sighed as he sat up, staring at the wall. So much had just happened and he felt like there were
six thousand thoughts swirling around in his head, but he didn't particularly care to attend to them. He looked back to Richie and shrugged.

“Fuck it,” he looked up at him. "why not.” He agreed.

Chapter End Notes

consistent chapter lengths?? i literally don't know her!!!
Evidently, there were a lot of reasons why not and Eddie had blatantly ignored all of them. The music was so loud he worried the noise could actually bang his ear drums into his brain. He had no idea if the bucket he threw a five into was actually going to benefit the charity the entire thing was for or if it was going to buy some random frat guy some future vodka. He didn’t know anybody, at least that he had seen yet, and seemingly everyone knew Richie. He clung to his arm nervously, like he might disappear into the crowd if he didn’t dig his fingernails into his forearm.

“This is insane,” Richie muttered into his ear, wrapping an arm over Eddie. The next few words were Eddie’s best assumption. Richie very well could have been telling him the lyrics to a song from an 80’s rock opera and Eddie would be none the wiser. “I don’t know if there will be dance people here or not. This is way busier than I thought it would be.”

Eddie just blanched and held on tighter, deciding he didn’t give two flying fucks who saw him do so.

“A drink?” Richie asked his hair. His hair couldn’t answer, so Eddie nodded profusely, assuming he was making the best guess for the better of both of them.

They fought their way through a crowd. Eddie thought of his bed forlornly as they made their way into a kitchen and Richie dodged a few conversations even he didn’t seem particularly interested in having. When Richie handed him a cup, uncharacteristically, he was sure, he swallowed it without question as to its contents. It was sweeter than he thought it would be, but still burned at his throat a bit. The kitchen was a small reprieve from the noise, and Richie turned to him and smiled. Eddie tried to hand the cup back to him as a signal of another, but Richie just set it back on the counter.

“My friends are upstairs,” he pressed a hand on his chest, “but do you want to dance?”

“Oh,” Eddie looked out into the living room, the bodies shoved together. “I can’t dance.”

Richie looked like Eddie just told him his favorite pastime was swallowing tadpoles, “bullshit, you can’t dance.” He mocked.

Eddie blinked.

“I’m serious,” Eddie insisted, leaning into his space a little more, “I’m a shit,” he waved a hand towards the crowd, “casual dancer. I need choreography. I never know what to do.”

He squinted out at the crowd while Richie responded. He didn’t actually hear what he said, it was too loud or maybe Richie was too far away. He didn’t recognize anyone, not that came as a particular shock. Everyone in the program had rehearsal the next morning at 9, as they always did. Until he recognized one girl from the dance programme, Annique, who was dancing in the middle of a group of girls, far more advanced than her companions. Eddie squeaked and spun, tucking his
face into Richie’s shoulders. He just didn’t want to be the sort associated with these kinds of parties. “Can we go upstairs?”

They found themselves upstairs in a decidedly hipster bedroom for a frat. Richie was sitting at a computer, an enormous Mac. He was explaining a mix or something to someone, who looked enthralled with his every word. Eddie didn’t know what to do but to stand beside him, feeling awkward, and definitely like coming there was a mistake. He felt like he and Richie were from fundamentally different worlds. He didn’t confidently know if they could mix. He didn’t know when he started thinking they’d need to.

“But I don’t understand,” the guy who probably owned the room was saying. His hair was long enough to be put in a bun, long blonde and wavy. He was wearing too many shirts, it looked ridiculous. On his bed were several other people, passing around what Eddie could only assume was weed. They didn’t offer any when they walked in. Eddie wondered if it was a part of social code he missed, that he had to ask to be in on the weed thing. Not that he particularly wanted to be. “If you’ve got the subwoofer set to…” he clicked on another menu. “Wait. Now I’m just confused.”

“Well, Trapp,” he told him, looking up with his chin in his palm. “I can do many things, but I can’t grow a brain for you.”

“He couldn’t grow one of his own,” Eddie added cheekily.

Richie spun and grinned up at him, tongue between his teeth. “At least I grew to an adult height,” he countered, grabbing at Eddie’s hips. Eddie struggled back, not very hard, akin to a kitten fighting a feather, before letting Richie tug him into his lap.

Richie spun them in the general direction of his friends, pressing a hard kiss into his cheek. Eddie shoved his face away with a laugh.

“Hey, pass me that,” Richie rolled the both of them up to the edge of the bed. The weird thing about Richie’s friends, or high people in general, Eddie didn’t know, was their general acceptance of the bizarre. They had never met him, certainly not in the lap of their friend, but did not even begin to question his presence.

Richie took a slow drag of the blunt, foot thumping up against the dirty black comforter, before sliding the chair back across the floor to hand the blunt to Trapp, who accepted.

“You skipped your,” a girl who Eddie somewhat remembered, or at least had seen before, pointed at him. She had deeper tan skin and faded pink hair, black at the roots.

“Munchkin.” She finished at the same time another girl giggled “boytoy.”

Richie’s eyes lit up at the sound of the first nickname. “Munchkin,” he repeated, delighted, “I love that.”

“Oh my god,” Eddie groaned, moving to stand to hold his hand out to Trapp, “give me that,” he said, as if Richie’s very presence required an influence of some kind.

“Whoa,” Richie drawled out, kicking on the desk to scoot them further away. “Nope, not tonight.”

“Why-” Eddie started as a few of his friends laughed. “Let him have some fun, Rich, loosen the leash a little bit.”

Eddie ignored them when Richie grabbed his chin. “You just poured like three shots down your
throat, whether you know it or not,” he kissed him chastely, “we’ll save crossfading for another night, okay…” he grinned, mumbling into his lips a little bit before kissing him again, “Munchkin?”

“Oh, fuck you.” Eddie stood up. Pinkie-Pie, as Eddie was calling her in his head because he had no idea what her name was, shuffled over and patted a space on the bed next to her. He sat there gratefully.

“Stole ya’ man again, Tozier,” she taunted, snapping her fingers for Trapp to hand her the blunt.

“Amazed it took that long,” the girl who called Eddie a boytoy, which he didn’t appreciate mind you, was flopped on her back at the edge of the bed. She had short black hair that was very straight spilling off the edge.

“Amazed it happened at all,” the most silent member of the room spoke. He wasn’t tall by any stretch, but he was taller than Eddie, sitting cramped in between Pinkie-Pie and New Age Goth. He was wheedy and thin, with more bracelets on his arm than could ever be necessary. Maybe it was the alcohol talking, but Eddie could have sworn he looked like a broom.

“Me stealing his man?” Pinkie Pie asked, smoke filtering out of her mouth.

“Him getting his man,” he clarified, grabbing his phone.

Pinkie Pie took another drag, “I mean we all were.” Eddie raised his eyebrows at Richie, surprised that they even knew who he was. “I thought Twinkle Toes wouldn’t fuck him if he was the last man on Earth.” Eddie was amused they were exposing Richie for trying to get in Eddie’s pants, like it weren’t obvious enough as it was. Richie looked less nervous at Eddie’s amused expression.

“I thought Denbrough was going to will it into existence himself,” Trapp added from his spot, which was sitting on a dresser. “Where is he?”

“My charms going underestimated yet again,” Richie winked at Eddie. “He’s on his way up.”

Eddie realized the alcohol must have hit him at some point in time and he hadn’t even noticed, because he spoke “I’m getting paid to be here,” about a beat too late. Apparently it made it all the more funny, because the room crackled into laughter.

By the time Bill made it up there, the room had switched positions. Eddie somehow ended up sitting on the floor, leaning against Richie’s chest. He was holding a cup of something that the girls got from downstairs. It was fruity. He hardly minded it. He didn’t want to think about the calorie intake it was probably causing, somewhere in the hundreds, he was sure, so he just didn’t. This, Eddie was pretty sure, was not what parties were supposed to be. They were hanging out in the room, just more drunk and with music playing loudly downstairs.

Bill walked in pursued by a few people Eddie didn’t know, shocker. The room didn’t appear to be as enthusiastic to see them as they were Bill.

“Trashmouth!” One enthused, reaching down to clap hands with Richie. “What the fuck is up, man?” He was obnoxious, and not even Richie’s speed of obnoxious. Just loud and frat-ty. The exact person Eddie was expecting the frat party to be filled with.

“Hey, dude.” Richie greeted, the most unenthusiastic Eddie had seen him greet someone as. “Not a lot, thanks.”

“Dude, fuck,” the second guy said, sitting on the bed, nearly on top of New Age Goth. She shifted,
looking annoyed. Eddie couldn’t blame her. “Did you catch the game last week?”

“...no?” Richie sounded baffled.

“Are you gonna catch it before the playoffs?”

“...no.” Richie replied, sounding less confused but equally as firm. “No, I cannot express to you how little a fuck I give about sports.” Bill and Pinkie Pie laughed out loud. Scruffy Broom boy just raised his cup in solidarity. Eddie himself thought it was arguably the most attractive thing he had ever heard him say. He craned his neck so he could look back at him.

“God,” Eddie looked up, heart swelling and full, “I’m gonna marry you.”

Richie blinked with surprise, which Sober Eddie would probably rationally agree with him that the comment was sort of out of nowhere. But Drunk Eddie just smacked him on the arm. “That’s the part where you’re supposed to say ‘me too.’” There was something off in the grammar of that, but vodka evidently didn’t give a fuck.

“Oh,” Richie jostled them forward, bright smiling brighter, “yeah, same!!”

Eddie laughed louder than he could remember every laughing, grabbing Richie’s shirt where his hands were, “That’s gonna be our vows, ‘oh yeah, ditto, bro.’” When he finished laughing, wrenching his eyes open, Richie was just staring down at him.

Richie’s eyes were more half-lidded than usual, watching him with something Eddie could only call hunger. It spent a spark through Eddie’s stomach. There was something addicting in that - in being wanted. “You know,” Eddie slid back towards him, “we could...try again?” he whispered into Richie’s mouth. It had been a few hours. He had had a few shots.

“Try what?”

“Richie.”

“Oh, shit. You want to?” Richie could sometimes have the sex appeal of park bench covered in salad dressing, but he somehow always recovered, because upon Eddie’s nod, he just stood up without a word, said a small later to the room. And then picked Eddie up. Eddie kicked violently and somehow still missed his gut and made several highly unmasculine noises as Richie hefted him out of the room. Bill waved at him. Eddie wanted both of them dead.

Of course, his dick found something in Richie picking him up all too appealing but Jesus, the smirking faces of the people in that room were just fucking annoying. Mind your businesses, for fuck's sake. He wanted to tell them all to shut up and they didn’t even say anything.

Richie set him down just outside the bedroom, before the stairs. Thank God, because dying wasn’t necessarily on the agenda for that night.

Eddie huffed and looked up at him honestly. “It’s really humiliating when you do that, Rich.” He got it. He was short. He worked pretty hard at keeping himself the exact right amount of lithe. He didn’t need Richie giving a live demonstration of it every couple of minutes, even if it was privately hot in the comfort of their own dorm.

“It is?”

“Yeah.”
“I’m sorry.”

“It’s okay.” He told him honestly, patting down on his black t-shirt. ‘Anyone Can Be a Father’ the t-shirt said in all too astute, plain lettering, ‘It Takes Someone Special to be a Ferret Daddy.’ Eddie stared at it, almost more horrified about his lack of horror, and couldn’t believe what came out of his mouth next. “I still want you to fuck me.”

“Oh, thank fuck,” Richie swept him up with one grateful arm, spinning them in the opposite direction of the stairs in his relief.

Eddie fought to keep a neutral, flat expression, and warned: “Richie.”

Richie dropped him quickly. “Sorry.”

Eddie highly doubted alcohol made him all that more brave. It did make him more careless. As in working definition of careless: as in, literally without care. He was no longer hyper-fixated on all of the little sounds that maybe didn’t belong but insisted on existing and the exact position of his arm and exactly how hard he should be at the moment. They were sloppy, loose kisses and discarding clothes all over the floor of his dorm room, laughing at the noise lube made and breaking two condoms before they got one on Richie. He somehow ended up half on top of Richie, wanting to take agency around how exactly this dick got in and out of his ass. Unfortunately, it was almost like exercise and he wasn’t finding himself particularly brilliant at creating a rhythm that made sense. He couldn’t even touch his own cock, too busy propping himself up above Richie.

He made a small, discontented noise. He rolled his hips forward on to Richie’ grinding his cock into his stomach. Richie laughed, humming under his breath a little. He pinched Eddie’s chin between his finger and his thumb, bringing him down lower to kiss him.

Eddie’s arm buckled, and he collapsed, sending an elbow into Richie’s ribcage.

“Oof-”

“Ow, fuck-”

“Fuck, I’m sorry.” He got his elbow off Richie as quickly as possible. dropping his hand by his chest. Eddie wasn’t even sure if he was hard anymore. He was very hot. Physically. But maybe mentally. Richie caught his lips again, sliding his tongue in his mouth in maybe the most filthy was Richie ever had. Or maybe Richie was tipsy too. The whole dick-in-ass thing was starting to get better, to make more sense, anyway. It stung. It stung much more than it did earlier, maybe it was lack of lube? Eddie didn’t voice a concern. Richie took his hips in big hands, guiding him down, maneuvering Eddie to a better angle. He used Eddie's legs to shift him. Eddie shivered, feeling silly and yet sexy somehow at the same time.

He broke their kiss with a giggle, lowering himself deliberately to lay moreso on Richie, Richie beginning to meet Eddie with his hips.

“What?” Richie muttered into the side of his head. He kissed it delicately.

Eddie huffed into his shoulder. “it-” he snorted, “it’s nothing.”

Eddie began to move his hips in the tiniest circular motion he could manage, anything for a bit of friction on his dick. Richie’s hands gripped him tighter, somehow teasing him with his cock, only sliding in about half way, and out again. Missing the spot Eddie wanted him to be hitting.
“Unf-” Eddie complained, trying to buck down a little farther, “hey-” he whined, biting his shoulder in protest. The further Richie pulled out, the more it stung when he pushed back in, his asshole having fully contracted.

“What’s so funny?” Richie asked the side of his head. Eddie laughed again as he sat up enough to look down at Richie. Something, it might have been the alcohol, Eddie had no idea, twisted the knot of giggles in his stomach into something heavy. Something sultry - something that felt dark and unfamiliar and intoxicating, as he looked down at Richie in the dark dorm room, barely lit up by the light seeping under the door from the hall. He could just barely make out the lines of Richie’s glasses.

“With you holding me like- ahh,” Eddie hissed as Richie brought his dick up by pushing his hips up, sweeping in and out quicker than Eddie would have liked, “fuck.” He let his head hang low, shiver running up his spine. “I feel like,” he leaned down further, heat coiling, heavy and thick in his abdomen, “like a sex-toy or something.” He backed up under Richie’s grip again. Richie’s nails dug into his hips, and he jerked him forward. Richie rocked Eddie forward, rubbing Eddie’s dick on his own abdomen.

“And you like that?” Richie asked, voice sounding low and gritty and vaguely pornographic. Eddie was not going to answer. Eddie made a small squeaking noise, feeling his dick nearly jump, and bit down on his lip hard. He grinded into Richie’s stomach. “Yeah?” Richie prompted again. He held Eddie still, hoisting him away from his stomach for a moment. Eddie’s fingers curled into the sheets by Richie. He thought his lip might bleed if he bit it any harder, grinding at nothing in the air. He nodded, making some sort of throat-y, displeased noise. Richie’s hand relented on one side, lining his cock back up to Eddie’s hole, “you like being a little fuck- fuck,” he shuddered out a breath, and Eddie panted out, as Richie bottomed out once again. “Fucktoy?”

The word would probably make sober Eddie recoil and swear a life of celibacy in some mountains he sure existed somewhere but drunk Eddie’s thighs were quivering. There was something inherently dirty about it, the sort of something that made it all the more delicious. “Yes,” he agreed shamelessly, bouncing a little bit, as much as he could manage, “fuck, Rich- please.”

Richie, without warning, wrapped an arm around Eddie and flipped them callously. Eddie squawked oddly as he flipped over, shoving his face in Richie’s pillow, almost groaning at the strong waft of Richie’s cologne he got and something that was probably Richie’s sweat but he couldn’t so much care. Richie ran his fingers through his hair, almost aggressively forcing Eddie to turn his face to the side. His fingers continued to dwarf Eddie’s head as he nearly laid directly on top of Eddie. “Baby,” he mumbled into his cheek, kissing it lightly once, and then again, his dick already beginning to push back into Eddie, “I’ll show you fucktoy.”

Eddie woke up in a bright room. He groaned, feeling his back ache just a little, and his ass was stinging. He laughed, muffled and quiet, realizing he was flopped half on top of Richie. Richie was still shirtless. He pressed a few kisses, chaste and sweet, under Richie’s collarbone. Richie shifted in sleep a little, but Eddie snuffled, snuggling his head back on Richie’s chest.

Richie’s hand was in his hair then, scraping it back away from his face. “Morning.” He murmured.

Eddie’s skin jumped, and his heart stopped. He sat up, all at once, hands crushing Richie’s stomach, who complained and groaned. It was bright in the dorm, even though the sun rose on the side opposite of their windows. “Richie. What time is it?” Rehearsal. Laurent. EDDIE WAS DEAD.

“...11 a.m.”
Eddie could not recall a time he had moved that fast before. He picked up the black t-shirt he had worn the night before off the floor and shoved it over his head. He put on a pair of Richie’s basketball shorts from the floor next to it. It was a far cry from his normal rehearsal outfits, but there was no formal uniform for rehearsal. He'd grab his dance bag next door and change during a break.

“Eddie,” he vaguely registered Richie calling after him. “Hold up, slow down.” He had no time to chat. His keys were laying down next to his wallet and his phone on the dresser. He shoved on his shoes from the spot they resided in, nearby on the floor. Mike and Bill were already gone for the morning. He ran next door, grabbing his bag.

When he leaned down to pick it up, he realized the distinct sting. Specifically, coming from his ass. Jesus fucking Christ, it hurt. What happened the prior night, it was fuzzy, but it was good. Really just… good. But ow. OW, Eddie jolted back up, and considering skipping rehearsal altogether and maybe faking his own death. He shoved that notion away. He grabbed his bag, and all but ran towards the exit of the dorm. He ignored the pain and fast walked the considerable distance across campus. At one point in time, he was vaguely make out Richie hollering behind him. Or he thought so. He wasn’t going to turn around and find out.

He practically threw himself into the studio, which, curse Eddie’s luck, they were back to blocking, so it was full of the entire program. He almost slid on the floor in his outside shoes. He stopped, knowing his face was bright red, either from the near run or the embarassment as the program stared at him.

Laurent sighed deeply, just gesturing him towards the group he was in, without a word. Like a disappointed dad. Eddie took a few tenative steps forward. After the run, the pain felt so much more jarring trying to take calm steps. He walked oddly, ankle almost buckling.

“Eddie,” Laurent spoke crisply, “are you oka-”

“JESUS FUCK, KASPBRAK-” only one person could be that loud, all the way down the hall, definitly near the entrance of the building. Eddie winced, eyes shut in shame. Richie hollered more after him, but it was all unintelligible.

When he opened his eyes, Laurent’s eyes were on his shirt. They moved slowly, almost painfully slowly, from his shirt, to his face, to Richie, who crashed into the room behind him. There were titters of giggles and whispers through out the room.

Eddie, feeling like a slow moving character for dramatic suspense in a horror movie, moved to look in the long, arching mirror, at himself. All he saw was the words “Ferret Daddy,” written across his stomach before he clamped his eyes back shut, trying to ignore the growing laughs. Eddie was honestly so mortified that he didn't know what to do. He didn't know how he felt other than like crying.

Laurent sighed audibly, “take your places, gentleman.” Richie, apparently, seeing no point in the facade anymore, gently stepped forward to take Eddie’s dance bag off his shoulder so he could set it by the piano. Eddie followed him, to at least grab his shoes. One of Laurent’s dance captains started re-addressing his line like nothing had happened, speaking crisply over the laughs and muttered words.

“Eddie?” Laurent told him as soon as he got shoes on, which he did, wincing all the way. “Just mark it. Don’t dance.”

“I-” he wanted to argue, but one cold look from Laurent shut him down. “Yes, Sir.” He thought
about Laurent's warning, about focus, about Eddie being a giant goddamned idiot.

This was never happening again. He and Richie just couldn't do this anymore.
The break came too soon. Eddie didn’t want to talk to Abi, talk to Victoria or anyone else from the program, or even Richie. Eddie just wanted to sit down on a mat and stretch out his tired muscles.

And that’s what he did.

Richie caught his eye and nodded at him, indicating the spot on the ground where he left his bag. Eddie nodded back, and Richie left him alone and it made him all the more grateful for Richie and all the more dreading of after rehearsal.

Rehearsal was long, feeling Richie’s eyes on the back of his head. Even then, across the room at the piano, he was completely distracting. Eddie didn’t even know how to say it. Hey, we should stop because I like you too much. Maybe for a few weeks? Just until recital ends? You can move into my house with my crazy dance mom this summer, it’ll be a blast! We could maybe actually… date then? Maybe?

Oh, my god, that was never going to work.

After rehearsal, mostly for not knowing what to say, he didn’t say anything. He just plopped down with his annoying, still chafed ass, on Richie’s piano bench. He pulled off his dance shoes.

“Hey,” Richie greeted him, voice uncharacteristically sweet and somehow managing to tear Eddie’s lungs right into his throat. Richie put a gentle hand low on Eddie’s back and kissed his temple. A few people walked by watching them carefully. Eddie wondered if they had Netflix or something, there had to be some other more entertaining show to watch out there. He thought about saying that, but knew it would help. Ultimately, Eddie ignored them. He grabbed his shoes from his bag, tucked neatly in to the top. “I’m sorry.”

“Please,” Eddie didn’t look up at him. “don’t be,” he replied earnestly. He didn’t want Richie to feel guilty or apologetic when he didn’t do anything wrong. If he wanted to apologize for being late to rehearsal himself, that was up to him. But Eddie knew he was responsible for his own actions, and couldn’t pin the entire thing on Richie.

“Okay,” Richie agreed. Eddie stuffed his dance shoes back into his bag, so, so thankful that tomorrow was Saturday. His sleep schedule was already crying, but he just wanted to go back to the dorm and go to sleep. “Can I?” He asked, pointing towards Eddie’s bag. And Eddie was honest to God almost ready to cry. He wanted to hit Richie for being so nice to him, for feeling bad when he was trying not to feel bad but he was only trying not to feel bad because Eddie told him to.

It wasn’t until they were out of the building that they spoke again. “So,” Richie had his hands shoved into his pockets. Eddie was freezing. Eddie didn’t wear a coat. “I’m guessing the engagements off?”

“The … what?”

Richie laughed but it was throaty and off, “it was… nevermind. I’m guessing we’re…” he frowned at Eddie’s bare arms in his shirt. “Done here?”

Eddie sighed, and wrapped his arms around himself, “Richie, I’m sorry.”

“Hey,” Richie shrugged, smiling awkwardly, “what did you say about apologies? Not a big deal.” And that… wasn’t what Eddie wanted to hear but. They never were in an exclusive relationship.
So. He brought it on himself. The whole thing.

They walked in silence until they got to the dorms.

“Alright, golden, stay ponyboy.” Richie told him, handing his bag back. Eddie, for the first time all day, laughed to himself. “I wanna say something dramatic about your stuff,” Richie continued to joke, soft, fond smile down at Eddie, “but I’m not even sure if we’re properly breaking up. Or. If we even had something to break up.”

“Yeah, uh,” Eddie adjusted the bag on his shoulder. “Me either.” Richie’s eyes were too soft, too crinkled on the edges. Eddie reached up and adjusted Richie’s shirt. “Well, clean your sheets. Finish your essay due on Monday tonight, so you won’t be stressed about it.” Richie was laughing, but Eddie needed to keep talking, so he did. “uh. Eat a vegetable. Once a week. For me. Throw out your socks and buy new ones, they’re unsalvageable.” Don’t forget about me completely, he threw in in his mind.

“Okay, daddy.” Richie joked, covering Eddie’s hands with him, large and maybe not as soft as Eddie wanted it to be, and nothing about Richie was quite how Eddie ever wanted it to be, and yet Eddie really, really did not want him to pull away from him.

But he did.

Richie stepped towards the stairs and Eddie, like a goddamned cliche, stood there and watched. “And Rich?”

“Yeah?”

Eddie smiled. “Try and keep the music down.”

Richie laughed, and crossed an x over his heart with his pointer finger, “I’ll try.”

“So, are you guys, like, lovers?” Victoria asked him as if they spoke about things like that. He was stretching out with Abigail in pas de deux. Richie was sitting on the other side of the room, playing for a couple re-running a variation. Abigail’s feet were pressed to his, their hands clasped in the middle. He tugged her over to his side, so she could stretch her back.

“Is it 1879?” He asked Victoria, having absolutely 0 time to be polite to the annoying squawking girl. “What the fuck does that even mean? No, probably.” Eddie almost wanted to be petty and tell her that it wouldn’t matter what they were because she and Richie weren’t anything because the girl had tight braids in at the root of her hair before tucking them into the regulation, uniform bun and they were both extra and ugly, all at the same time. “We’re not an anything.”

Abigail raised her eyebrows at him. “Not anymore,” he mouthed at her seriously. She frowned, but she nodded.

“But, were you, like, together?” Victoria persisted. Eddie was ready to flip her over the ballet bars. “Are you friends now?”

“I mean…” he shrugged, letting himself be tugged towards Abi, relishing in her eye-roll. “What do you want?” He asked finally, craning his neck to look at her. “I highly doubt it has to do with me, so it probably has to do with Rich, and he’s literally right there. You could ask him yourself.”

“God, you don’t have to be an ass about it.”
“They don’t call him Eddie Ass-brak for nothing,” Annique added in. It was amazing how much Eddie liked her, considering his disdain for her best friend. She joked from her own stretch, her partner holding her low on her waist as she stretched in a back-bend. Eddie must have looked appalled - because seriously, what the fuck, and she laughed. “It’s a compliment,” she winked.

“It’s better than Eddie Throw-That-Ass-Back,” Abigail reassured him in the least reassuring way possible.

Eddie blanched, “please tell me you have not actually heard people say that.” Eddie didn’t want to scrub the mouth out of everyone in the dance department, but serious times called for serious measures.

The girls looked at each other and winced and he dropped Abi’s hands and groaned, letting his back hit the floor. He’d move to Russia. It’d be fine. He could learn to love stroganoff and he wouldn’t mind snow shoes. He’d last four days in their ballet circuit, but whatever. He could return harder, maybe with a bottle of rum. He didn’t know why he was fantasizing about the name of his sled dog in the middle of ballet class, laying on the ground. He supposed he just reached that point. He remembered the first few days of class, when laying like that would likely land him with Richie’s non-regulation boots by his face and his smirk above him. When he looked up, he still saw Victoria, and he was in hell. If he squinted, he could say the bar vaguely resembled a very elongated, strange, demon. he

“I was just wondering-” Jesus, was she still talking, “if you thought Richie might be interested in playing a piece for me.”

“A piece?” He asked, back still flat on the ground, “for what?”

“Standing O’,” She replied haughtily. Or maybe she replied normally, and Eddie just hated her. Any man’s guess.

“Girl,” Annique had since abandoned her partner, and had one hand on the barre, the other on her foot as she stretched her scorpion, “what the fuck are you gonna do for Standing O?”

“Am I missing something?” He leaned up just enough to ask Abigail, “what is this?”

“It’s the only student-regulated dance event of the semester, Eddie,” Abi told him incredulously, surprised he hadn’t heard of it. A thing that just students did? A thing to have fun with peers? Shocking he didn’t know about it - he thought sarcastically. “Where a panel of seniors going into company pick the routines that get in?”

“And they’re mostly-” Annique jut in, edge of sass in her voice, bringing her foot up to rest on the bar, “routines that don’t get recitals. Hip-hop,” she elaborated. “that kind of stuff,” she winked at him.


Victoria didn’t dignify him with an answer, “can you ask him?”

Eddie snorted, “as previously mentioned: he’s literally right there. Ask him yourself.”

She huffed, making eyes with Annique, eyes that Annique ignored because she was laughing. She turned and called after her partner. Poor bastard. Eddie squinted at Abi, “was I rude?”

“You? Rude!?” She replied too sarcastically.
He glowered at her.

“Vicky means well,” Annique reassured him. “She works hard. She just doesn’t always express herself effectively.”

“Gee,” Abi had apparently bought herself a ticket to sarcasm town and had no intention of getting off her train, “wonder who that reminds me of?”

Eddie sat up, offended, and the girls looked at each other and laughed. “Do not compare- hey! Stop laughing!”

“I’m sorry,” Abi said through the giggles, blonde baby hairs beginning to whisp around her face, “the fact that you don’t even see it makes it even funnier.”

UGH.

Eddie texted Richie, just to warn him that Vickie is a nightmare to work with. He didn’t hear back and he promised himself it didn’t bother him.

The door to his dorm was thrown open, and slammed with a heavy thud. Eddie jumped. He knocked his text book out of his hand, and it clattered to the floor. Stan, clearly angry, threw his bag down on his chair, not bothering to neatly unpack it as he always did.

“Stan?” Eddie asked, shifting to the edge of his bed. “Are you alright?”

“Don’t.” Stan warned. He grabbed his caddy and his towel. He ripped off his shoes and socks. He slipped into flip-flops and disappeared, slamming the door behind him again. It was an odd time to be taking a shower, at just past 4:30 on a Thursday.

Eddie stared at Stan’s key on his desk.

He supposed he’d be waiting around until he came back.

Eddie sighed, stood up, and made sure the door was unlocked. It was. He sat back down on his bed, distracted from his work, but forcing himself to do it anyway.

Stan re-opened the door much more quietly a half hour later. “Hey,” Stan greeted softly, wrapped in a towel, clothes folded neatly over his arm. “I’m sorry about that.” He apologized, tossing his clothes - his dirty, yet folded clothes, into a hamper.

“It’s okay,” Eddie averted his eyes while Stan changed. “Are you alright?”

“Yeah,” Stan replied solidly. He threw on, as far as Eddie knew, his most un-neat clothes. It was a pair of black fitted sweat-pant-jogger styled things, and a long grey henley. His damp hair dripped onto his shirt. Eddie realized that earlier was the first time he had seen Stan angry - or showing, generally, any strong emotion.

“Do you want to talk about it?” Eddie asked, knowing Stan didn’t because Stan quite obviously dealt with those things himself, but hoping Stan got the idea that Eddie wanted to talk about it. Because. He was nosey, frankly. He just liked to be on the "in" now, like an unofficial gossip columnist at the world's most uninteresting newspaper. He didn't know when he started caring, but he did now.

“Not particularly.” Stan replied honestly.
Eddie slumped back. He didn’t want to study anymore. He picked up his notes anyway, grabbing his dejected looking textbook from the floor. He was slightly worried from himself, that he found the crumpled pages of the discarded book so relatable.

Stan sighed and crossed the room. He sat on the edge of Eddie’s bed. “I got in a fight with my friend,” he told him, for Eddie’s sake, and they both knew it. “He’s been a real asshole all week.”

“Oh,” Eddie replied, setting his book down. Stan adjusted it’s position on the bed. “I’m sorry.”

“It’s not your-” he began, before looking up at Eddie. He had little patches of acne showing through under his jaw. “Well. Nevermind.” He patted the bed. “What are you doing tonight?”

This, Eddie thought, followed by: don’t tell him that, that sounds fucking sad.

“This,” Eddie said.

Goddamnit.

Stan’s mouth was tight-lipped and empathetic when he smiled. “Do you have a test tomorrow?”

“No,” Eddie shrugged, “I have re-

“Rehearsal,” Stan said with him, nodding. “Yeah, uh, I got it.” He stood up from the bed, wincing at his uncovered feet on their dorm floor. He crossed the room, and pulled socks from his drawer.

“Do you wanna hang out? We could go off campus. Get dinner, or something. I don’t know.”

Eddie liked Stan, a lot actually. It was strange that they were roommates, ones that got along, and they had never hung out on their own. Eddie had a moment immediately after in which he came to understand that that wasn’t a Stan singular case: before Richie, he didn’t hang out with anyone, alone or otherwise. He wanted to bang his head into the wall for letting that name flash into his brain again. But the wall would not look cute with an Eddie’s head shaped dent in it.

“Uh, yeah.” He agreed, sitting forward, trying really hard not to sound too eager. “Sure. I just have to be in kind of early. I want to be in be-

“Bed by ten,” Stan finished with him again, with that same weary smile. “Yeah, uh,” he nearly laughed, “I heard.”
“I hate this,” Eddie told Abi honestly. He had asked her to lunch on a whim, no it was not because he hated that he was alone again - except that was exactly why.

“Hate what?” She asked, looking up from her text book. They were studying and eating in the main Cafe. They were dancers, they had to use their time wisely.

“I feel like everyone is looking at me,” Eddie confided, feeling small. He sat in towards Abi, and the group of older dancers watching him had the decency to look away finally.

“Hm,” she mused, looking up at them, too. “That’s probably because they’re looking at you.”

“Abigail!” He muttered at her, face going pink, trying to hide in a salad. A bad food for hiding, honestly. If he wanted to hide he should have gotten...mashed potatoes. Maybe something heinous from Taco Bell he could never fit in his daily calorie count.

“What?” She shoved a spoonful of yogurt in her mouth, “they are.” She shrugged, like it didn’t fucking matter and Eddie wanted to shove her spoon down her throat. “C’mon Eddie, you had such a stick up your ass and then you got a literal stick up your as-” he was reaching for her spoon with a murderous look, and she snatched it up quickly, like she could tell his plans. “From Richie Tozier, no less, when it was seemingly your only hobby to loudly proclaim your hatred of him,” she ate another spoonful of yogurt, like she was tempting him, “it’s hot goss.” She added grossly through her yogurt.

“I hate you.”

“Eat your salad, Kaspbrak.”

Eddie did, hating salad, too. Salad did a decent job at pretending to be a fun food to eat with the right stuff on it, but at the end of the day: it was leaves. Sad, lying leaves.

“Was it at least good?” She asked finally, shutting her text-book like she had accomplished her goal. He looked up from his own notes, mental monologue about salad interrupted.

“Wassit?”

“The sex. Was it good?”

His nose wrinkled, “why do you care?”

“I dunno,” she shrugged. “Always wondered if it was.” It wasn't like he considered Abi to be an ambiguous sexless being, but the statement surprised him.

“Sex with Richie??”

“That’s,” her eyebrows raised at him at his tone, “hypocritical.” Eddie thought he was honestly some sort of anomaly. That he found Richie and his dumb t-shirts hot. The idea there were more of them out there was astonishing - and honestly frightening for the future of humans. Abi’s eyes caught his, “everyone’s thought about it.”

Eddie looked around, scandalized, like he had just joined a Thought About Fucking Richie Tozier support group with everyone in their cafeteria, “everyone?!”
Abi was laughing at him, “he’s just one of those guys.” Abi had a beat up jansport sitting in the chair next to her. It was beat up the way a backpack gets from actual use, not from doing molly at a single music festival. “I mean we can make our assumptions from the way you were walking…”

“Shut up, shut up, shut up-” Eddie groaned, shoving his face into his hands. He scratched at his eyebrows. He made a gross groaning noise into his hands. By the time he was apparently ready to face the world again, Abi had opened another binder and was writing neatly in it. Eddie slumped, stabbing at his lying leaves with his chin in his hand. He wondered what Richie was doing for lunch. Probably sleeping. Eddie thought of him after just waking up, tender and pliant, soft and warm…’

“You miss him bad, huh?” Abi surmised, watching him. Eddie wasn’t aware he was being watched.

“No.”

“You’re sad.”

“I’m not sad.”

“That’s a very sad face.”

“This,” he pointed at his face. “Is a very neutral face. The neutral-est face to ever neutral.”

“Is it?”

“Yes. They’re soon going to give me a Guinness World Record.”

“Are they?”

“For Neutral Face-ing.”

“He’s done with rehearsal now, did you know that?” Abi commented lightly, breaking their banter pattern. She unpeeled a clementine, frowning at the juice on her hands. She wiped it on her backpack. Eddie had no idea why it was charming, it was weird. And her backpack would definitely smell like clementines. And probably foot sweat, because: dancer. “Last one was his ...last one,” she frowned at her own wording, popping a clementine in her mouth. “The official pianist will be there on Friday.”

Eddie tried really hard to keep the frown back, but it appeared on his face like… rain on his wedding day. Oh, dear God, that song was going to be stuck in his head for the rest of the day.

“Yeah,” Abi snorted, “submit that face as your neutral face, it’ll go real well.”

Eddie wished he had mashed potatoes.

”Eddie?” A girl Eddie had spoken to multiple times was talking to him. She was standing next to Annique by the bars that morning for pas de deux. Eddie looked away from the piano, which he was looking at because he had a great admiration for pianos. Fine wood work. Excellent...edges.

“Can you help me stretch?”

“Uh,” he frowned, but stepped towards her with a meek smile at Annique. “Sure!”

“It’s just I’m trying to get my legs behind my head and I-” Annique snorted loudly and smacked the girl lovingly. Except Annique had a good four inches on her, and smacked her tit. They looked
at each other, already giggling, and started to laugh loudly. Eddie stood there, more awkwardly than he had ever done, and he had asked a girl to a 7th grade dance before, unsure of what to do.

“That’s not funny,” he said finally, frowning. Annique stopped laughing at his frown, looking sympathetic.

“Hey,” the girl looked uncomfortable too, “I’m just kidding with you,” she came down from her laugh unsteadily. Her hair was purple on the ends. He wondered if she’d have to dye it before recital. “Lots of people would pay to get fucked up like- well, actually, some people do pay-” she rambled. Eddie, unsure of what to do, simply turned away, took a few steps down, and restarted his stretch. He spared another look for the piano, and saw Richie’s eyes on him. He looked away quickly, and lifted his leg for an extension stretch.

“Hey,” Annique appeared from behind him, standing across from him at the bar. She, with a soft smile, mimicked his stretched. “She was just kidding, Eddie.”

“I know,” he replied crossly, “I just didn’t think it was funny.”

He dropped his leg, and wondered if Richie was still watching him.

She followed him, even as he sat down, deciding not to repeat the stretch on his left leg. “Eddie,” she shifted towards him discreetly, leaning in, “everyone has sex, you know that, right?”

“Well, of course I know that-”

“So why are you making this such a big deal? It’s funny. It happens.”

He looked up and met her clear brown eyes, large and sincere, and he sighed. She was beautiful, really, all dark glowing skin and short, immaculate curls. But really what made her stand out was the eyes, always interested, always meaningful. She made him want to tell the truth.

“It’s just really, really, not what I want to be known for.”

“It’s not all you’re known for, Eddie.” She told him. Eddie wondered if everything that came out of her mouth sounded so sincere. Maybe she was just an incredibly convincing liar, “people are just trying to joke with you.” Eddie looked up to the piano bench. Richie was ignoring a few of the people standing there talking, scrolling through his phone. “We’re all one department. We’re all,” she waved around at the dancers in the room, a lot of whom, like the girl earlier, Eddie hadn’t really learned the name of, “supposed to be here for each other. Friends,” she insisted, grabbing his hands where they were supporting his stretch. He relented a little bit, and let her. “Friends joke. It’s okay, Eddie, no one cares.”

But Eddie cared.

"Do you guys think I can do my history project tomorrow night?” Stan asked them on Wednesday night in their dorm. Eddie was stretching on the floor, and reading his copy of the Theses.

“The one that’s due Friday?” Ben clarified. He was working on a project himself, small model in front of him, his handy hot glue gun plugged in.

“Yeah.”

“No,” Ben answered, hot gluing a flag to a pole. Stan frowned.
“Okay, just clarifying: I’m not asking if you think I should, I’m asking if you think it’s poss-”

There was a crash in the hallway, the slamming of the door next to theirs, and next came Bill’s hoarse voice, “CAN YOU STOP BEING SO F-F-FUCKING DRAMATIC, RI-RICH-” Eddie looked up from the Theses. Stan looked pale as he looked at their own shut door, astonished they could hear Bill through it. Eddie and Stan met eyes, and then they were both standing, walking into the hall quickly.

Eddie was wearing just black shorts that were shorter than shorts generally had the right to be, so he picked up a big zip-up on his way out.

By the time they made it next door, Bill had the door flung open. Their room generally looked like an alien with a vague understanding of what college students do had set up a dorm room, not just the usual clutter, but strange clutter, a discarded set of roller skates and bottle rockets in one corner, beer bottles filled with strange foam in the other. It looked like that alien’s dorm got fucked up by a Doberman that day. There was shit all over the floor, and an empty duffle bag on a bed. Richie’s bed, to be exact. Eddie’s heart was in his throat.

“F-F-F-FUCK OFF, BILLY,” Richie yelled back mockingly, grabbing discarded shirts from the ground. He shoved them in his bag with a lack of care. “You’re not my fucking dad.” Eddie hung back as Stan stepped into the room, standing self-consciously just outside of the door frame, sweater falling off his shoulder. He rested one of his bare feet on top of the other, and bit his lip.

“What the fuck are you doing, Rich?” Stan wasted no time in charging into the room. “Are we- you didn’t? Richie Tozier, you can’t be fucking serious.”

“Don’t, Stanley.” Richie warned gravely, looking around the room with despair, like he didn’t know what he was doing. Eddie didn’t either. He started in on his desk, then, taking what was his in one hand and sending everything else flying to the floor.

“Richie, WHAT THE FUCK-” Stan sounded furious, “you PROMISE-”

“Yeah, well, I’m fucking unreliable, Stanny,” Richie dumped what he had collected into his bag. “It’s like. A major piece of my personality.”

“Richie, it was almost DONE, all you had to do was SEND I-”

“SHE WOULDN’T HAVE ACCEPTED IT ANYWAY, SO WHAT WAS THE FUCKING POIN-”

“YOU COULD STILL T-T-TRY,,” Bill interjected furiously, picking up shit that Richie had just sent flying to the floor, “this is INSANE, Rich!”

“Eddie?” Mike’s voice came from down the hall. Eddie turned, and Mike Hanlon, wearing an earthy green sweater was halfway down the hall, power-walking towards his dorm, tartan bag over his shoulder. “What’s going on?”

“Mike, I don’t know,” Eddie told him, feeling distraught himself. He stepped away from the door to meet Mike halfway, cringing at the dorm carpet under his feet. “I heard yelling and came over. I don’t know what’s going on, though. I think Richie’s packing?” He finished confusedly, darting another look over his shoulder.

Mike’s face ran cold, “oh, shit.” He looked as worried as Eddie felt. “He wants to drop out again.”

“Again? Drop out? What?!” Eddie grabbed Mike’s sweater as he tried to pass him. Mike shook
him off with more struggle than Mike was probably anticipating.

“Eddie, he was barely hanging on to this school. We got in a fight last week because Richie didn’t turn in an essay and he wanted to fucking drop out instead of asking for an extension. Sounds like,” Richie and Stan were still yelling in their dorm, “he never turned it in.”

“But he…” Eddie grabbed at the hem of his sweater.

“I’m sorry, I gotta—” Mike pointed over his shoulder. Eddie nodded, and Mike took off as quickly as he came down the hall. Eddie fiddled with the hem of his sweater. Richie had been doing so well. Eddie thought he knew about that essay, the one he told him to do on Friday when they had…

Eddie stepped cautiously towards the dorm. If someone was going to kill someone, he wanted to at least pay witness to it.

“Mike,” Richie was pleading with him when Eddie poked his head around the corner, “don’t fucking preach at me, okay?” He spoke much gentler to Mike than he had to either of his other friends. “It’s fucking over.”

“But it’s not, Richie. Log in to your email,” Mike was walking over to his computer, still sitting on his desk, “I will email her myself—”

“STOP!” Richie yelled so loudly, snatching his computer up so quickly Mike jumped. “EVERYONE FUCKING STOP, OKAY, GOD FUCKING DAMNIT—”

Eddie stepped fully around the corner, still just outside of the door to the dorm. “Oh,” Richie’s tone turned nasty as his eyes, thin and furious behind his glasses, landed on Eddie. “You are the last fucking person I want to see right now, cupcake.”

Eddie almost looked behind him, head barely twisting to the side, before he looked up at Richie again. “W-what did I do?”

“NOTHING,” Richie yelled hoarsely, throwing the stuff in his hand on his bed. Eddie had never seen him so angry, “YOU DIDN’T FUCKING- FUCK.” His sweatshirt ripped out of his hand and clattered against his wall.

“THEN WHY ARE YOU YELLING AT ME?” Eddie yelled back, riled up and stepping towards the door. Richie looked up at him, the sweatshirt thing seeming to get out some energy, and he looked down to Eddie with a calmer, but still enraged face.

“Do me a favor,” he stepped towards the door. Stan was at his shoulders, looking ready to interfere, “get the fuck out of my face, Kaspbrak,” Richie’s hand, as big as it ever was, curled menacingly around the edge of the door “and mind your goddamned business.”

Eddie had so much he was ready to yell - that it was his goddamned business, that Richie was his goddamned business, that he realized that Richie was really after a tight ass and a pair of abs in their relationship but he didn’t have to be such a motherfucking asshole about it and disrespect him in front of their friends. He didn’t want to yell about the fact that Richie was acting like they weren’t even friends, weren’t ever friends - and maybe they weren’t - he didn’t even know what he wanted to do about that.

But Richie sent the door flying shut, where it landed in front of Eddie’s nose with a SLAM!

Eddie kicked the door, and it landed with a satisfying thud, and an unsatisfying sore toe he’d pay
deeply for the next day
In the end, it was Ben who got Richie off his warpath. He left the room almost as soon as Eddie threw himself into it, and went to interfere next door. Which made Eddie nearly seethingly angry - that he’d talk to Ben, fucking Ben, who he was only friends with because of Eddie, before talking to Eddie.

He shoved all of his rage into dance - which was surprisingly the least sociopathic thing he could think to do about it. When he gripped Abi’s ribs so tightly he thought later she might bruise from it, she gave him an odd look or two but didn’t complain. His hands were sturdier than they ever had been.

He and Richie met eyes at the end of that class. Richie was standing by the piano, bag over his shoulder, talking to Eddie’s professor. Eddie had been abandoned by Abigail, and stood alone on the floor. Eddie, kicking himself for weakness, hating himself for liking him still, was ready to walk towards him, and not the door.

Richie turned around and left.

And, yeah, it pissed Eddie off, but his point was made, loud and clear. Them? Not friends. Richie and Eddie? Not a thing. Got it. It made him angry, hands twitching and throat tightening, but fury Eddie could deal with. Rage was easy.

When it started to hurt, Eddie didn’t know what to do.

It was a Saturday afternoon, and Eddie was walking down the hall to his dorm. He was listening to music, texting his mom about where she and his dad were gonna stay when they came up for recital previews. It was a decent day outside as April finally began to give way to Spring, relenting the snow and wind a little bit. And Richie was leaned back against his door, hands tenuously wrapped around the wrists of a girl with short brown hair, and they were kissing.

And it just. It hurt. It wasn’t a dramatic, crying showdown with thrown necklaces and half-hearted pushes. It was Eddie putting his face down, and silently opening his dorm door. It was being pretty sure that Richie didn’t even see him. It was trying so hard not to think of that night months ago where they kissed like that, against the same door, and really trying not to think that Richie didn’t see him as any different than the girl he was kissing then. It was Eddie flopping on to his bed and curling up, hugging sheets to his chest and staring across the room at nothing. It was a tiny, stabbing pain right in the center of his chest, like a rather insistent woodpecker was trying to work its way into his heart.

“You know,” Ben told him later that same night, “Richie isn’t dropping out.”

“Good,” Eddie replied noncommittally. He let another episode of The Great British Bake-Off queue on his computer, but pretended like he was studying something intensely. It was always better to look like you have Important things to be doing, not that watching overly polite british people bake was not of the utmost importance. “That’s good for him.”

“Well,” Ben turned the chair of his desk around to face Eddie. Eddie subtly adjusted his computer screen so Ben couldn’t see it, unwilling to give up the facade. “He told me he-”

“I’m sorry Ben,” Eddie picked up his phone from his bed. He clicked open his Messages tab, ready to hit himself when he realized it was still on Richie’s page, which he hadn’t deleted, and had made
a very sad habit of scrolling through at times. They were mostly vague sexts. Eddie was such an
idiot. He was an idiot for getting himself into the entire thing, for thinking his first relationship
with anyone could be no-strings-attached. It still wasn’t Richie’s fault, and Eddie thought that
maybe that was what hurt the most about it. Not having anyone to blame but himself. “I don’t want
to talk about Richie,” he lied, closing the tab and dropping his phone back to his bed. At least the
texts weren’t quite as sad as the folder of memes he had ominously titled “rxmkzjz” in his photos
that he thought Richie would think were funny.

“I thought you might want to know about where he’s at—” Ben tried to tell him. Eddie wanted to
snark back that Richie didn’t want Eddie to know where he was at, quite the opposite, he wanted
Eddie to mind his fucking business. “We talked about you, you know. And I think you need the
closure, too. He thinks that you—”

“I think,” Eddie interrupted, unable to listen to Ben’s good-natured but ultimately painful to listen
to monologue, “we all know exactly what Richie Tozier thinks of me.” Something something
annoying, something something abs, something something ass, he was sure. Ben was looking
sadly at him. “I know, I know, Ben. I started it, et cetera. It just hurts, and I really, really don’t
want to talk about it. The second,” he picked up a pair of headphones from the floor and plugged
them into his computer, “I am ready for that closure, you will be my main man,” he told him with a
weak smile. “But for now, I just don’t want to talk about it.” Ben nodded, and Eddie slipped his
headphones in and hit play.

The introduction was just ever so slightly too soft for Eddie to block out whatever Ben said
completely, and it sounded vaguely like: “you people all have the emotional intelligence of
squashes.”

Eddie ignored him, and tried to not let the accents remind him of Richie.

And when it still hurt a week later, when he sees Richie in pas de deux, it’s nothing short of
irritating. If he were laughing and having fun, it would be easier to hate him. Richie seemed to just
enter the dance classes, play, and leave. He wasn’t chatting up anyone or ostentatiously playing pop
songs.

“Richie’s pretty glum lately,” Abigail commented to him. He gave her a flat look, telling her really,
really not to push it with them. She immediately backed off, stepping back from the bar to finish
her cool down.

“He’s not getting laid anymore,” Annique joked almost forecefully on his other side, jabbing her
shoulder into Eddie’s with a laugh.

Eddie did laugh, “trust me:” he smiled at her, in an earnest effort to joke back, “he still is.” He tried
not to sound too bitter at the thought of the girl in the hallway. A girl on Annique’s other side
laughed too, and he felt pleased with himself.

“Oh, would you shut the hell up, Eddie?” Victoria seethed from Abigail’s side, turning on him
aptly. Eddie blinked down at her sudden rage. “You clearly at least kind of liked him at some point
if you guys hooked up, so why don’t you shut up about him?!?” Victoria’s hair was more frazzled
that day than Eddie had ever seen it look, ginger locks falling to frame her face more attractively than
her usual hairstyle. Her mouth was pinched in an angry little line. Her shoulders were tight and
tense ‘you’re so sweet when you’re not tense ,’ he heard Richie’s voice in the back of his mind.
And for the first time, Eddie saw himself in her.

“Richie Tozier,” he stared her down coldly. “is a tempermental, horny, manchild that believes
apathy is the only way to protect himself from failure. He has the attention span of a goldfish with a brain tumor. He gets consistently rewarded for his insatiable need for attention, and the people around him don’t realize that they’re enabling him to get destroyed later by his own laziness. And you,” Eddie told her, and his voice said it for him ‘as much as I obviously do not like you,’ “can do better.”

“I thought,” he heard a familiar voice behind him, and his blood ran cold, “you only talked this sweet in the sheets, darling?” Richie asked, but with none of the flirtatious amusement that he would have said it before. It was cool and malicious, but worst of all: it was calculated, like he had been listening, which he obviously had been, and planning a response. Eddie spun around slowly, prolonging the inevitable. Richie clapped slowly as he did so. It echoed in the dance studio. “Not bad,” Riche continued to clap as Eddie faced him. Eddie opened his mouth, but Richie left him no opportunity to speak, “for a stuck up, self-aggrandizing, bossy elf who’s been out of the workshop a bit too long chasing his own delusions of grandeur. I’d maybe expect more if it didn’t come from you, who cares more about executing an 8 count than being able to hold a decent conversation. I’d maybe expect you to know how to play dirtier, but you wanted me to teach you that, didn’t you? It must be rough to be such a chaste ballerina who would probably just love to be a good little cocksucker but can’t quite bring his pristine, pure mouth to choke on dick the way he really wants to. And I’d love to keep going, but this,” he patted Eddie’s cheek condescendingly, “has been enough of a waste of time as it is.” And with that, he turned, bag over his shoulder, hands in his pockets, and walked out of the dance studio.

At 11:04 on a Thursday night, when Eddie had to be up by 6 a.m. for an 8 a.m. rehearsal, there was loud music playing next door. Eddie stood up, traded pj pants for spandex shorts and put on his big sweatshirt, and walked next door before Ben could deter him. He was almost blinded by his anger, he didn’t stop for a moment to think it through. He just went next, and pushed the cracked door open.

Richie was standing, laughing, in the middle of the room, probably concocting some grand plan with Bill, who was on his own bed. Richie’s eyes caught his, and his mouth immediately fell into a hard line.

“Look who it is!” The girl Eddie could only refer to as Pinkie Pie, he had never learned her name, sat up on Richie’s bed. She was only wearing a big t-shirt and panties with sparkly planets on them. “It’s Munchkin!” She had a blunt in her hand and a giggle in her smile.

“Turn off,” Eddie seethed, eyes back on Richie and burning into him, “this goddamned music, or I’ll skip our RA and go directly to fucking CAMPO.”

Richie had been smoking too, the red in his eyes made it obvious. “You’re gonna fuck CAMPO too?” He cooed at him patronizingly, not taking him seriously at all. He pressed a hand over his heart and smiled at Eddie, “do you want me to call them ahead of time to tell them how you like it? Yanow, make sure to yank your hair and smack you around a little bit?”

“Richie,” Bill sat up on his bed. Eddie only realized then that Beverly was sitting on it with him, “that’s-”

But Eddie was not going to let Bill fight this one for him, “fucking hilarious, Richie, because I’m the one who’s fucked half of the campus community.” He looked to Pinkie Pie, “I’m thinking about starting a support group, are you interested?”

“HEY,” Richie flung out an arm in her direction, like he could block her from view, and not just put a skinny arm in between her and Eddie, “don’t FUCKING bring her into this, she didn’t DO
ANYTH-

“I DIDN’T WANT TO BRING ANYONE INTO THIS, JUST TURN YOUR FUCKING-”

“You two,” a furious voice ripped in from the doorway. Eddie froze. Eddie couldn’t be entirely sure, but he was pretty sure he knew exactly who’s angry voice interrupted them. “Enough.”

He turned quickly, and right as turning at a red light, was standing there in all his 5’ 11”, college t-shirt, sweatpant, short mussed blonde hair glory, was their RA, Randy. “Come with me.”

“Randy-” Richie sounded nervous, and he pushed past Eddie to stand in front of him, “man, I’m sorry - I just,”

“Why do I need to go anywhere?” Eddie demanded, “I didn’t break any rule-”

“Kaspbrak,” Randy interrupted him. “If you don’t think the sound of your screaming was louder than this music,” he said with a significant look towards Bill, who was turning the music off with a grimace, “we need to take you to the nurse for a hearing evaluation. You are so loud I think they could hear you in Buckley,” he named the furthest dorm on campus, “if not New Hampshire.”

Eddie opened his mouth, but Bill shook his head at him. He snapped it shut. “I’m not writing you up,” he told them, seemingly mostly to Richie, who’s shoulders visibly relaxed, “yet. But I need you both to come with me.”

They were led to the dorm directly across the bathroom. All in all, Randy’s room was spacious and generally clean. Randy waved a hand for them to step inside in front of him. Eddie followed nervously.

“I have had a very long day, on top of several very long weeks,” he blinked at them. “And frankly, I don’t have time, or want, to deal with this shit. I have a paper due tomorrow at 2.” He stared them down, “Here’s what’s gonna happen: I’m gonna go back to the lounge, and try and write a conclusion statement that won’t make my professor want to fling himself out of a moving train.

You two are going to stay here, and figure out some sort of solution to whatever this problem is that makes the both of you scream at each other. I will come back in,” he checked his phone, “a half hour, and we will have a five minute discussion about what happened and what you’re going to do to fix it, so I can type that shit up in two minutes so it’s documented. And if you don’t do this, I will file a formal report, which will go into the college’s system, and send one of you to a disciplinary hearing.”

“You can’t do that!!” Eddie protested, all but stomping his foot. “My mother will drive up here and strangle me in dance tights if she gets a lette-”

“Well, then:” Randy looked in between them. “You two better work this shit out.” And with a terrifying calmness, he shut the door. Eddie heard the click of the lock. He knew they could very well unlock it themselves, but he swallowed gravely anyway. The dorm room was large for a single, and the desk was well decorated for a guy living by himself, organized and together. There were shoes in a pile in the corner, and curtains, not just the ones left up by the school, but honest to god cloth curtains, hanging on the windows. Eddie took it upon himself to observe everything in the room, so he didn’t have to look at Richie.

“Are you really going to make me promise to not play music?” Richie asked him with an apathetic voice, sitting on Randy's bed. He looked up at Eddie honestly. “Is that what it's going to take?”

“Maybe I should move dorms,” Eddie tried to compromise reasonably. He fiddled with the end of his black zip up.
Richie rolled his eyes, “that's fucking ridiculous. Are you gonna be a dick about the music, or what?”

“I don't think that's ‘fucking ridiculous,’” Eddie frowned at him. He knew, somewhere in the back of his mind, that it kind of was and he was being dramatic to see Richie’s reaction, but he used a voice as if he were being very reasonable, “I'm not sleeping well in my room,” he pointed out, “you can't stand the sight of me.”

“I can't- what? Eddie, are you fucking serious?” Richie groaned and rubbed a large hand across his face. “You're so goddamned dramatic.”

“Me? Dramatic? I'm not the one who ransacked a dorm room over a dumb paper, Richie.”

“Yeah, yeah. I’m nothing but a fucking degenerate. You made your point, Kaspbrak. We all get it.”

“Okay, well.” Eddie took a step back, and crossed his arms. “When have I ever said that?”

“You called me a degenerate the first time we ever really spoke.”

“I'm more talking about the ‘nothing but’ part of it,” Eddie continued to pace around the dorm. There was an inordinate number of hoodies hanging up. He wasn’t sure if Randy owned a coat. “You have to know that’s not all I think of you.”

Richie scoffed at him, honest to God, old time sit-commy scoffed at him. “Come on, Eddie. Don’t lie to me.”

“I'm not even a good liar.” Eddie continued. “I have to say what I’m thinking. Nearly at all times. It’s very fucking annoying, as you might have witnessed.” For the first time in Eddie’s presence in a very long time, Richie’s face cracked, and he choked on a smile. Eddie felt his own twitch up on his face “if anyone has been lying between the two of us, it’s you.”

“I haven't lied to you,” Richie said sincerely, and he looked up at Eddie for the first time, making eye contact.

Eddie deflated, his shoulder dropping low, defeat kicking him in the back of the neck, “so what is it, then?” He asked earnestly, quietly. “And if it’s just that you think I’m terrible and don’t want to be around me,” his voice added wetly, “that’s fine.” He prayed Richie didn’t notice that voice crack. “I guess I deserve that.” DON’T CRY DON’T CRY DON’T CRY, “Just let me switch dorms. I need the end of this semester to go well, Richie. I really do.”

“It’s not that, Eddie.” Richie replied, back to looking at his own knees. Eddie wanted to demand what it was, but he just stood there instead, and waited for Richie to talk. “You just. The whole thing,” Richie seemed to try, he really did, but he made an aggravated sound and stared angrily at the door. Eddie sat down on Randy’s bed, too, a good three feet away from Richie, but turned into him. “It made me feel like shit, okay?” And it had seemingly taken a lot out of Richie to even say that much, so Eddie sat there for a minute and waited for him elaborate. When he didn’t, he just kept staring at the door, Eddie spoke up.

“What did?” He asked with an intentionally soft voice, “I told you not to feel bad about rehearsal, because it was my fault, too, and you said it yourself: we didn’t even really break up.”

“I know.” He patted the space in between them, like a sign that he really did know that. “And I don’t think it was that. I think it was just the whole… situation.”

Eddie wrapped his arms around his midsection, suddenly self conscious and unsure of why. He sat
forward, toward Richie’s still hand, a bit. “…yeah?” He asked, and his voice sounded small and wet.

Richie finally looked over at him, and his face visibly softened. His jawline lost tightness, and he stopped squinting, “ hey ,” he sighed, sounding gentle and sympathetic, flipping his hand around so his palm was facing up. Eddie didn’t know if that was an invitation to hold hands, or what. That’d be fucking weird. If they just. Held hands at that moment. But Eddie kept thinking about it. “You know I said you didn’t do anything, either.”

“You didn’t say that,” Eddie corrected in a soft voice, “you yelled it.” Some hair fell into his eye, and he could have sworn Richie flinched towards brushing it out of his face. Instead, he just turned, so he was facing Eddie the way he was him, and returned his hand to his lap. Eddie moved his hair himself.

“I shouldn’t have,” he told him, “I was just already stressed and seeing you, uh…” he fussed with his own hands. “It drudge up some stuff and… anyway” he shook his head.

“Hey, no,” Eddie kicked him softly, just flicked his toes at his knee. It was the only thing he could reach between them without moving “tell me.” He told him firmly.

Richie grinned at him, grabbing his ankle in his hand, calluses running over his ankles, “bossy,” he snarked back with a grin, scratching some fingernails over his arches. Eddie wanted to see red at the reminder of that tiff yesterday, but, similar to what he said to Richie, he was struggling to find any of Richie’s rant entirely untrue, even if they were cruel about it.

“Hey,” Eddie wiggled, but didn’t try and dislodge his foot from Richie’s grasp, “don’t think you’ll distract me, you won’t.” Richie hummed, but dug his fingers into the ball of his sock-covered foot with a cheeky smile. Richie being able to switch modes like this was almost astonishing, and definitely terrifying. “Richie.” Eddie told him fussily, “what made you feel like shit? Tell me.”

“Well,” he was still smiling, and rubbing a small circle into the hollow of his ankle, but he started to talk, “when we were…however you want to put it, I don’t know. When we were us, you~” he said teasingly, still watching his foot not his face, “Eddie Kaspbrak, were nothing but good things for me. I was sleeping more, eating better, on time to things, and you being so insistent about scheduling had me getting better grades because I actually, you know, would turn stuff in.” He spoke softly, fiddling around with the features of Eddie’s foot like a baby discovering a new toy.

“Meanwhile, I made you get in trouble in class, I made you want to go to a bad party. I made you late. I,” he froze, like the last one was the hardest, “I hurt you, as unintentional as it was, the first time you had sex. Really had sex,” he countered what Eddie was already thinking. “I know that I’m a fuck up in general. I get it. But it just. Sucked. And I felt really bad about it.”

“Well, first of all:” Eddie scooted towards Richie on Randy’s dark green school themed sheets. It looked like Randy lived in the University store. Eddie wondered if he knew there was, in fact, life outside of B.U. Arts. “you didn’t make me do any of those things.” He swung his other foot up, and settled it in Richie’s lap, too. Richie smiled down at them. “I’m serious. Sure, there was influence. But you know:” and he was confident Richie did, “there’s a difference between correlation and causation.” Richie snorted, patting a hand on Eddie’s ankles. “I made those decisions, Rich. You can’t blame yourself for them.”

“...yeah.”

“And that you think you weren’t good for me at all is just factually incorrect,” he told him smartly. Richie looked up at him with a flat look. Eddie flicked his toes at him again. “I’m serious!” He
insisted. “I knew, like, 9 names of people on this campus before you. Having friends is valuable. It’s important. I still wouldn’t describe myself as easy-going,” Richie snorted, “but I’m getting there? And I’m starting to understand that being fun to be around can be just as important as your leaps. No one wants to work with people who are a nightmare to be around. They just don’t.” Richie still was looking at Eddie's feet, but with a gentle smile.

“Yeah.”

“So,” Eddie told him firmly, “you, Richie Tozier,” he poked him insistently with his toes until he looked up at Eddie. Making firm eye contact, he said “were good things for me, too. Even if you don’t believe me. And I…” Richie was still watching him. He faltered in his confidence a little bit, and sat back, because he knew his next sentiment wasn’t shared, “I’ve missed you. I’ve missed just hanging out with you. A lot.”

He drew his feet out of Richie’s lap, and back to himself. He sat cross legged on the bed, leaving his hands on his knees.

“I’ve missed you, too.”

Eddie snorted, “now that’s a lie.”

“What?” Richie turned to him, with a smile stretching out his face, laughing goofily.

“Oh, come on, Richie. You think I’m annoying and self-aggrandizing and something about an elf I didn’t really catch-” Richie laughed loudly, and Eddie's features cracked a smile, himself.

“You are,” Richie nodded at him, “you are all of those things.” He laughed, looking a little manic. Eddie laughed too, “I still like you.”

“God, why?”

“I’ve been asking myself that for months.” He broke their sweet moment with a loud laugh, and Eddie kicked him, which only caused him to laugh harder.

“You’re such an asshole.”

“Yeah,” Richie agreed with a sigh. Eddie laughed again. It was ripped out of him, sudden and loud, scratching at his throat. And then they were just laughing together, until there were tears in their eyes, for god knew how long. When the laugh left, the mood it brought stayed, light and bouncy between them, warm air on a cold, rainy day. Richie sighed again, and pushed up from the bed, standing and stretching.

“So,” Eddie scooted to the edge of the bed, holding out his hand for Richie to shake, “friends?”

“Friends?” Richie raised eyebrows at Eddie, an amused quirk in his mouth, but took his hand anyway, swiping a thumb over the back of his palm.

“Friends.” Eddie insisted, shaking their hands while Richie continued to giggle at him. Their hands were still clasped between them. Eddie dropped his, dragging his fingers along Richie's as he brought his hand back to himself, lingering more than necessary. Richie was watching him oddly. "So, uh," Eddie wiped off his own nervous sweat on his hoodie, feeling something prickle at the back of his neck by being watched so intensely by Richie. "What the fuck are we gonna tell Randy?"

And they laughed again.
“Where are my shoes?” Richie asked the room, scanning around their piles of garbage.

Mike glanced at the floor quickly, but turned back to the game after. “This is why you should have more than one pair of shoes, dude.”

“That’s Denbrough,” Richie countered sharply, pointing at Bill next to Mike. “I have two, thank you very much.”

“Y’all are gross.” Mike insisted. Neither denied it, Bill continuing to play and Richie beginning to kick up piles of clothes from the floor.

“They’re in my room, Rich.” Stan told him from Bill’s bed, where he was sitting with Beverly. He had her hand in his lap, carefully painting her nail on her ring finger with some sort of design, reading glasses nearly falling off his nose. “I was hoping if you couldn’t find them you’d clean. I realized that was dumb, and I don’t want to see what’s under anymore of those piles.”

Eddie looked down by Richie’s feet. There was an empty Starbucks cup, three socks, none of which matched, and a water gun filled with a mysterious liquid leaking on to the socks.

“Is that piss?” Stan asked plainly.

“That’s Bill’s.” Richie pointed at the gun defensively.

Beverly laughed loudly from the bed. “That doesn’t answer if it is or isn’t piss.” Eddie busied himself with his computer, clicking through the little online pre-test quickly. He didn’t even want to know if there was a water gun filled with piss on their floor.

“Toss me a key then, love” he said in his posh British accent to Stanley.

“Busy.” Stan replied, tongue poking out as he squinted at Bev’s fingernail.

Bev smugly stuck her tongue out at him. Ben still hadn’t looked up from his spot at Bill’s desk, plugging away at some assignment or another. Ben got himself in too deep with co-curriculars, and ended up on the school Student Government somehow. Eddie wasn’t even aware they had one. Because Ben wasn’t offering his key up anytime soon, Eddie fished his key out of his pocket. He flung it at Richie’s face. He missed, and it hit his shoulder. Good enough.

“So sweet to me,” Richie commented sarcastically with an exaggerated wink in his direction, “thanks bab-” he dropped off the pet name oddly before it finished. He picked up the key from the floor. Richie flushed at nothing, and Eddie wished he had more things to throw at him. “Be right back, guys.”

“I’m sorry,” his swift exit was interrupted by Mike Hanlon with an incredulous smile. He was leaned back on his bed, hands tucked behind his head. Bill had apparently lost their round of gaming, and was managing his loss by looking through Instagram. “Did you just say ‘bab’? What is a bab?”

“No,” Richie replied, shaking his head as he stepped over stuff towards the door, “what I actually
said was ‘fuck you, Mike, bye.’ He shut the door on Mike’s loud laugh.

All at once, the seemingly busy room dropped everything they were doing, and turned on Eddie. Eddie felt like he had a nightmare like this, but it involved less trash and more lyrca. Maybe a timestep or two. He just loudly groaned in lieu of a response.

"Guys," he sighed laying back on the bed, “I don't know what to fucking say.”

“It’s pretty easy, as far as I can tell: are you, or are you not bab?” Stan asked clearly.

Bev sat up, and nearly ruffled her hand through her hair. Stan smacked it. “Leave him alone. He was once bab and now he is not, correct?”

“I, uhm-”

“Well,” Bill interjected, “that’s banking on the assumption that one can ever make a true return from being bab.”

“That’s kind of archaic, Bill,” Mike’s face scrunched up. “Bab is not a stagnant state.”

“I think bab is a bit like matter itself,” Ben commented from the desk, having returned his attention at least partially to his schoolwork, “it just happens. It can’t be willfully created or destroyed, it can only change forms.”

“Which raises the question:” Bev commented lightly, finger pointing in the air, “do platonic babs exist?”

“Oh absolutely-” Mike said at the same time Stan countered:

“Impossible.”

That began a melt down of the room of four different conversations all surrounding the concept of bab and Eddie was about to lose his fucking mind, even moreso than he already had. And that was saying something.

“Guys.” No one heard him. “GUYS!”

He received a room of blank stares.

“Listening to this any day would give me palpitations but listening to this while I’m trying to do statistics is going to kill me. You’ll all have to plan a funeral. I literally thought for a moment there that I was having a stroke.”

Richie was squinting at him from the door. “Isn’t stats… easy?” He had evidently returned with his shoes and a bag of jerky. Eddie knew that jerky didn’t come from his room, but didn’t question it’s appearance either.

“Isn’t stats, like,” Eddie mocked in a bad impression of Richie “easy?”

Eddie truthfully, hadn’t been looking much at the little module on his computer screen, but he’d have said anything to stop the bab talk. Richie sat next to him, and Eddie gave him a small rundown of the program, of what was supposed to correlate to which box. Which: never seemed to work for him, and made him feel like a giant idiot. What somehow made him feel worse, is Richie, who had never taken a stat class, was able to fairly easily explain to him the inputs for the problem in front of him. It was mildly infuriating, but they were whipping through his problem set. And
imitating various characters from Sesame Street as they did so. Because life was fairly rarely dull with Richie. Eddie, for the record, thought he was better at Ernie than Richie. Just saying.

“How’s your History class going?” He asked Richie gently, yawning as he stretched his arms behind his head.

Richie sighed first. Then he blinked, and answered “fine.” Which Eddie was fairly certain meant the opposite of fine but he had since learned that he wouldn’t be able to just call that out with Richie without him getting pissed or Eddie looking smother-y so he settled for staring at him. Retrospect, wasn’t the best solution.

“Guys,” Bill stood up and clapped his hands together. “It’s been great. We’ve had such a fun Tuesday. The Lord’s Day.”

“No it isn’t-” Mike began to interrupt, but waved him off.

“Every day is God’s day in a holy man’s dorm-”

Stan snorted and stood up, offering a hand down to Bev. She half clamored on to his back. He laughed, and let her. “We know when Bill suddenly has a religious reformation it means we need to get out of their room.”

Eddie wrinkled his nose and looked at Richie, who was already picking up his laptop with a half laugh. Eddie tilted his head at him - a sign in two languages, human and dog, that he was confused. Because he was. “Bill,” Richie whispered to him conspiratorially, “has a girl coming over.”

Mike gasped and clasped his hands over Ben’s ears, “RICHIE!” He admonished, “Not in front of the kids!!”

Ben laughed, and maybe a little oddly, pat his hands on Mike’s.

Richie picked up his own backpack from the floor and slung it over his shoulder. “Whatever you say, Daddy~” he winked at Mike. Mike lifted one hand from Ben’s ears and flipped him off.

They shuffled out of the room, and Stan was unlocking their dorm next door.

“So…” Eddie mentioned lightly to Bev, “you and Bill aren’t…?”

Bev blinked at him, and then laughed out loud. Loudly, sharp punctuation of air that made it seem like her chest would ache with them. Richie snorted too, but kept his laughs small, handing Eddie his computer. “You don’t know what can of worms you’re opening, Eds.”

Eddie didn’t know he was about to get into a thing, “tell me when I’m older?” He asked Bev as they walked into his room. He sat on his bed. She sat in his desk chair. She winked at him and nodded. Ben began to put his notebook and computer back on his desk. Mike sat on Stan’s bed, and Stan meticulously hung up his jacket.

“Well, guys,” Richie shut the door behind him and rested his hands on his hips. He scanned the room, and Eddie could assume he was doing so like a large bird examining trees for their resting space. His eyes lingered on the space on Eddie’s bed. There wasn’t much of it. Eddie thought to himself that a few weeks ago he would have thrown himself on to the bed anyway, even if it meant he mostly laid on Eddie. Eddie drew his feet in, subconsciously offering the space anyway. Richie took it. He dropped his backpack on the edge. Then he leaned back, lounging against the wall.

“What did I take?”
“I’m sorry, what?” Ben asked, perched in his bed with his sketches on his lap.

Richie shrugged. “What did I take?” He asked plainly. Eddie felt his face scrunch up with confusion. He had no idea what that was supposed to mean.

Stan seemed to get it before the rest of them, or at least Eddie, who was still squinting with confusion at Richie. He turned around from his desk with a tired, flat look. “Richie, I know I say this fairly often but I just wanted to reiterate quickly that you are, in fact, the worst person I’ve ever fucking met.” He stood up and squinted at his desk, “if you took my rope I’ll use it to hang you from the flagpole.”

Richie snorted. ‘No, but good guess. I shoulda’ taken it. You still gotta teach me how you use it for that kinky shit-”

“IT’S NOT FOR KINKY SHIT!” Stan yelled back, “YOU GODDAMNED PSYCHOPATH.” He opened his desk drawers, “WHAT is it? All of my pen caps, what?”

“Who says it’s anything of yours?” Richie asked with a significant look towards Ben. Ben’s eyebrows unfurrowed, and Eddie simultaneously understood.

Richie took something from their dorm earlier. He wasn’t going to give it back until they figured out what it was. The really annoying thing is it could be a graphing calculator. Or a chewing gum wrapper. It was going to drive Ben crazy, and it already had Stan there. Mike helped Stan look, and he and Ben kept guessing at Richie. Richie stood to enjoy the madness more thoroughly, watching Stan mutter to himself as he counted toiletries. Eddie sat up, praying he didn’t take one of Eddie’s dance shoes or a lotion, ready to yell. He was looking at the back of his head when he thought of it. Not to react by yelling. As fun as yelling was, and could be. He slithered down to the end of the bed while Ben annoyedly checked their closet for his jacket. Richie’s backpack was sitting there, dirty as it always looked.

He knew what he wanted right away. He got out Richie’s old-ass I-Pod. Yes, an I-Pod, with 64 gigabytes of pure Richie, the music he had been listening to since Middle school. Bev, from her spot at Eddie’s desk, seemed to get the plan. She held her hands out for it. Trusting Bev’s ability to catch more than his ability to throw, he tossed it to her. She caught it, winked at him, and slid it into her boot.

Richie turned to look at Eddie with a smug look, and then laughed with sympathy when he saw the open backpack on his lap.

“Is it my hair dryer?”

“No.”

“Stan, why the hell do you own a hairdryer?”

“CURLS ARE HARD TO MAINTAIN, OKAY-”

“Oh, Eds-” Richie’s eyes were still on him. He pulled the backpack from his lap, looking annoyingly arrogant. Eddie smiled plainly up at him. “You can’t beat me at my own game. I only own, like, six things.”

He examined the open pocket, and then raised his eyebrows at Eddie, looking at him over the top of his glasses. He held out his hand expectantly, “my I-Pod, please.”

“It’s not my DS is it?”
“Ben, you’re holding your DS, man.”

“I- … yeah.”

“Oh,” Eddie blinked at him innocently, “but that’s not the question.”

Richie’s eyebrows stayed raised, “and the question is?”

Eddie let his smile become devilish as he leaned forward, “where did I put it?”

If an eye for an eye won't work, maybe because someone has better eyesight or something, try eye for an ear.

Richie took Ben's protractor.

After learning it was stuffed down Richie's pants, Ben wasn't sure he wanted it back.

“Hey, Mom!”

“Eddie,” her voice was hesitant, “you sound… happy.”

“…why did that sound so suspicious?” Eddie nearly laughed out loud, dropping his jacket and bag in the locker room. “Is my happiness suspicious to you?”

“I- no! I just. How’s dance?”

Eddie did laugh, then. “I can’t talk long because I’m walking into rehearsal for the soloists.” He told her honestly, tucking the phone into his shoulder so he could take off his boots.

“Oh, Eddie,” her voice was laced with pride. “I’m so excited for you. That’s so awesome-” she said that practically every time he mentioned it, he nearly rolled his eyes, “I can’t wait to see it during Parent’s Weekend ~” she practically sang into the phone.

“Oh, right. You’re coming up for that?”

“Down, Eddie. Boston is down. And of course I am, what kind of mother would I be if I didn’t see my own son during his designated time to see his mothe-”

“Alright, alright. I got it. Sheesh,” he joked, struggling to slide his shoe on. “Okay, ma, but I gotta go. Dance.”

“Always is,” she replied fondly. “Your father says hi.”

“Tell him I miss him.”

“How rude of you to say you miss your father and not your loving mother who has called you on this here telephone to discuss your life and everythi-”

“Ma. MA. I love and miss you, too, but I’m hanging up on you-”

“And to think, I was going to bring you new shoes and candy and now you are getting dirt, young man, plain ol’ dirt-”

“Ma,” Eddie rolled his eyes “I love you. I’ll talk later, byeee~.” He hung up laughing, and she was
still talking. He’d get yelled at later, he could handle it.

The laugh stayed with him, though, throughout his rehearsal with Laurent and the new pianist. They played the piece in its entirety, which Richie had never done. The music was too complex for him to learn all of the pieces and all their intricacies. Eddie thought the joy was helpful, like it was adding tiny trampolines of endorphins under his feet and he was getting higher. He couldn’t just be imagining it. After one of his leaps, a specifically difficult revoltade, Laurent whistled. He beamed, and as soon as the dance concluded, and he took his humble little sweep-bow, he full out laughed and did the leap again, giggling as his body acclimated to the height and the stretch.

Laurent was laughing too, and did a very small clap for Eddie, a modest little sound that had Eddie’s already high spirits soaring.

“I’m, like, praying—” Eddie said giddily, continuing his high with a small set of pique turns, “that I get applause mid-routine for that one. I’d die. It’s, like, my dream.” Eddie remembered when he first saw the step. He thought it might be biologically impossible for him. Getting over his fear of it was the most difficult part. It was amazing what he could tackle unafraid.

“Oh, no,” Laurent shook his head, tapping on the piano with his fingers, clearly thinking of his notes for Eddie, “or I wouldn’t want it.”

“What?” Eddie asked incredulously, finally spinning to sit on the floor, “How could you not, what?!”

Laurent shrugged. “Applause is like an ‘aha!’ moment for the audience. Where they understand. They get what you’re doing, and furthermore, impressed by it. I don’t want that. I want to have them here,” he held out his hand, “from the moment I step out on stage. I want them to not have time to clap, too in the moment. For them to understand from the first chord to the last. Anyway, so: on that first developpe, you sickled your foot on the way down— you have to: ”

Eddie didn’t know why it seemed like anytime he knew anything, something happened to make him feel like he knew absolutely nothing.

Eddie knocked on Richie’s door that Wednesday morning, “proctology?” Richie called out, clearly near the door.

“That only works when we’re on the phone dumbass.”

“So, did you want to move your colonoscopy? I’ve got your mother scheduled in for most of next week, but if you’re lucky—” by the time Richie answered the door, Eddie was already six feet away. “Hey, come back here, Eddie Spaghetti.”

“Sorry,” Eddie called back, looking down at his phone, “you said you’re booked, so I gotta find a new guy.”

Richie laughed and did a half-jog to catch up. He wrapped an arm around him when he got there, shoving his shoulder into Eddie’s. Except, he majorly miscalculated for height, and his shoulder mostly ended up acquainting itself with Eddie’s ear. Eddie tripped on his own feet. Richie laugh continued. He smelled good. He didn’t know how anyone who lived in a dorm like Richie’s could have any business smelling good, yet he managed it.

“Just the picture of grace over here,” Eddie laughed at himself. Richie snorted.

“You know,” Richie opened the door to the stairs for them, which Eddie nodded at him graciously
for, “you’re pretty fucking funny when you can take a joke.”

“Am I?” Eddie asked suspiciously. “This feels like a set-up.”

“Not a set-up.” Richie shrugged. He had a serious expression on his face. His jaw wasn’t tight, but was missing the easy-going smile that usually accompanied it. Eddie didn’t think about licking it. That’d be weird. “It’s good to take a joke. If we don’t laugh at ourselves, someone else will.” He replied easily. Richie maintained such casuality with certain remarks that left Eddie with a road raging mind. Richie shoved his hands in his pockets. Eddie would miss looking at them. Which.

**ACH. NO, EDDIE.**

Again, Eddie got that ‘he doesn’t know anything’ feeling.

Pas de deux brought them a new routine, the one they’d perform for their final grade. Which was evidently bringing stress to the room, as couples rehearsed their cross-the-floor patterns quietly to themselves as others had the floor. The room was tense. Eddie didn’t so much mind. If he was going to be internally freaking out about everything all the time, he didn’t mind if his peers wanted to join him.

Abi did seem to be feeling the pressure, her mouth pressed into a particular flat line as they arranged their lift.

“No, here,” Eddie gently pressed his fingers into the base of Abi’s spine. She frowned at him, and tilted her hips. “Watch your turn out, aren’t you a dancer?”

“Oh, fuck.” She dropped her leg. “This is dumb,” she whined. “Let’s change our majors to hip hop.”

“We’d suck at hip hop,” he told her flatly. “Do it again, come here.” They were a few feet away from the piano, from Richie who played the continuous loop of song. Annique stood a few feet away with her partner Todd, also struggling to get the combination.

“No~” Abigail groaned, leaning against the bars. “Annique, do you wanna run away with me?”

Annique immediately dropped off pointe, “oh hell yes, let’s go. Fuck this.” She dramatically spun Abi into her arms, who fell into them with a graceful swoop. “Is Eddie not satisfying you, baby?” She joked, prodding at the girl with a laugh.

“Oh, I’m sure Eddie is plenty satisfying~” Abi joked with a wink towards Eddie.

Eddie squinted at her and crossed his arms crossly. Annique raised her eyes behind Eddie’s head, and Eddie turned, and realized she was directing the look towards Richie.

Richie clicked his tongue, hummed with a smirk, but said nothing.

**Take a joke, Eddie**., he told himself firmly.

“Yeah,” he replied to Annique with a shrug, grabbing his foot to practice a stretch, bracing himself on the barre, “you can ask your dad about it.” Abigail snorted so loudly Annique basically dropped her to the floor. Todd laughed loudly, clapping at the comeback. Eddie, with a smug grin, turned to look at Richie. Richie winked at him. Eddie tried his hardest to ignore the swelling in his heart, but let his smile grow on his face.

“You stay away from Sean, Eddie.” Annique warned in a not-serious tone over Todd and Abi’s laughter. Her smile was toying at her mouth.
Eddie smirked at her, “tell Sean to stay away from me.”

Richie laughed then, loudly, nearly disrupting the music. Annique and Eddie slapped hands over their mouths and giggled, shying away from the disapproving looks of their professor. The couple ahead of Eddie and Abi took the floor. Todd helped her to her feet, and Eddie was struck with an idea. A brilliant, beautiful, completely stupid idea.

“Hey,” he turned to Annique and muttered, “will you help me with something?”

“What did yo-”

“I’m going without you~” Abi sing-songed as she prepared herself to cross the floor. Eddie scrambled to his position, but the twinkle in Annique’s eye when he looked back at her told him that their conversation wouldn’t be dropped.

Chapter End Notes

honestly was having a terrible week and i got online one night and some ppl had contributed to the link on my tumblr. and i~ cried?? which. is lame. but i did. and i was really determined to update this. i tried so fucking hard to do it earlier to make it more of a direct gift but i am a flop a little bit but i'm a trying flop!! but if you're those people...thank u. like really really. for the donation and the motivation. idk when i would have updated this without yall. so much love to u.

and thanks to everyone who comments & sends asks on tumblr and all that good stuff i love y'all too ur also very motivational thank u.
“IT’S SUPPOSED TO BE WARM OUTSIDE,” Eddie yelled upon entering the dorm that day. “I’M JUST REMINDING ALL OF YOU AND GOD.” He angrily stepped out of his boots and kicked them into their wooden wardrobe. They clunked against it.

“It’s...April.” Stan looked at his calendar suspiciously. “We live in Massachusetts. Didn’t you grow up here?” Stan replied, rolling his shoulders back but continuing to type on his laptop. Eddie wanted to slam his arrogant hands into the keys. Eddie didn’t know how one could type arrogantly but Stan was managing it.

“APRIL SHOWERS,” Eddie continued to yell because if you were louder you were more correct, “MAY FLOWERS. NOT APRIL SNOWSTORMS AND WIND THAT MIGHT BLOW YOUR TINY BODY STRAIGHT INTO THE STRATOSPHERE.”

“Your experiences,” Ben commented from his bed, “are not universal.”

“It’s so cold,” Eddie whined as he flopped into bed, immediately throwing his comforter over his body, “I just want to snuggle someone warm. Maybe suck a dick.” He added, somehow still nervous at the casual omission of sexuality.

“Once again,” Stan looked over at him from his computer, “not at all relatable.” He opened his drawer and grabbed a sticky note from within. “Want me to text Richie for you?”

“Shut the fuck up,” Eddie grumbled, flipping him off for good measure. “I could get other dicks than Richie’s.”

“You could,” Ben agreed from his bed perch, where he was sketching on large graphing paper. “And if that is something you want to do we fully support you in flexing your sexua-”

“Ben, I appreciate you, but please shut the fuck up.”

“Oh, thank God.”

Eddie snorted, rolling over to pull off his coat. He threw it to the ground while extracting his phone from his pocket. He considered mentioning that Richie’s dick was too big and awkward to suck. Yet. He figured neither Stan nor Ben would appreciate that information or mental image. Eddie let himself have it for a moment - oh god, dick, not now, he thought with annoyance, rolling over onto his stomach.

He texted Richie a meme of a dog. Not because he was interested in sucking his dick at that exact moment, but because he was thinking of him. And his dick. Ugh-

richie 2:15 p.m.
i’ve seen that.

eddie 2:16 p.m.
okay sorry Master of Memes
jesus
just tryna make u laugh.

richie 2:18 p.m.
Lol!! Thank you, Eds!!
I appreciate so much that you saw something funny and thought of me!

**eddie 2:20 p.m.**

Alright asshole
next time i’ll make sure to spend 25 hours a day on the computer so i know exactly what memes to cater to your amusement.

**richie 2:22 p.m.**

Please do.

Eddie frowned at his phone. Yes, he was used to Richie being generally an asshole. It was a piece of him that he had begun to accept. But he wasn’t used to him being an asshole directed towards him when he didn’t deserve it.

**eddie 2:24 p.m.**

Alright just call me ur slave boy

**richie 2:25 p.m.**

Oh yeah?

FUCK. REROUTE. HOW DID HE FORGET HE WAS TEXTING RICHIE 9 OUT OF 10 TIMES HE TEXTED RICHIE?

He could have just turned his phone off and did something more reasonable with his time. Like homework. Or learning to play flute. Or, at that point, playing Ultimate Frisbee with the elderly would have been slightly more reasonable. He didn’t want to care. But he kind of did anyway. Oh well.

**eddie 2:26 p.m.**

What’s up anyway

**richie 2:26 p.m.**

Lmao wdym?

Eddie practically rolled his eyes. Or he did. He couldn’t really tell. He considered borrowing Ben’s line, telling Rich he had the emotional intelligence of a squash. But instead he persisted with the nice route - because he could be nice. Kind of.

**eddie 2:27 p.m.**

You’re not normally this mean to me unless i’ve done something.

**richie 2:27 p.m.**

I’m not being mean?

Lol.

**eddie 2:28 p.m.**

Lol does not erase the meanness

You’re being extra sassy

**richie 2:29 p.m.**

I’m not sassy

That’s you bb
eddie 2:30 p.m.
no comment.
you gonna tell me or what, tozier?

richie 2:31 p.m.
damn, we pulling out the last names?

Eddie, irritated, didn't even have a response. He put his phone down for a bit. He was surprised when a few moments later, his phone buzzed again.

richie 2:36 p.m.
just stressed.

Eddie swallowed thickly. He didn’t exactly expect Richie Walls Tozier to respond with anything vaguely resembling transparency. He also didn’t plan a response to an honest answer in his mind.

eddie 3:35 p.m.
where are you?

richie 3:36 p.m.
in my dorm lol

Eddie typed out a “is it okay if I come over” and “do you want to-” text several times before he stood up and slid on some shoes and wished Stan and Ben well before walking next door. The door was slightly opened, as it always seemed to be, and Eddie slipped deftly inside.

“Hey,” he said. Richie was sitting at his computer with his hand in his hair.

Richie blinked, looking surprised. “Is this my mail-order stress relief?”

“Is that what they’re calling it these days?” Eddie joked back.

A moment of silence passed after that that Eddie could neither truly call comfortable or awkward. They were mostly just looking at each other, Eddie wondering if that joke was a little too much for their friendship state, wondering if Richie was thinking the same thing, wondering if he’d ever know what Richie was thinking ever.

“How was your day?” Eddie asked kindly, eyes shifting over to Richie’s bed. He didn’t know why he was suddenly so hesitant to go sit on it. Ever the more frustrating, Richie seemed perfectly capable of reading his mind, and gave him a short nod. He turned back to his computer.

“Okay.”

Eddie thought, as he sat on Richie’s bed and watched the back of his head, that that meant it wasn’t okay, but he didn’t know how to call him out on that.

“I almost kicked myself in the face today.” Eddie commented lightly, picking at his fingernails. Richie snorted. Eddie smiled gently at the back of his head.

“Was it an accident?”

“No, Rich, I’ve decided to self harm in the least convenient way I could possibly think of.” Richie finally turned around in his desk chair to look at him, his hair a little bit matted by his eyes, but he was smiling.
“See what I said,” he raised his eyebrows at him, gesturing blithely to his general figure, “sassy.”

Eddie waved a hand back “condescending,” he replied sharply.

Richie blinked in surprise again, looking like he was going to reply. But his whirlwind mind must have thought it over because he shut his mouth with a shrug. Eddie smiled. Richie looked like he wanted to roll across the room in his chair, but the wheels got caught on a plastic bag. He stood and walked like a normal person instead, flopping on his bed, letting his head rest on Eddie’s knee. Eddie gently began to work through some of the tangles in his mop with his fingers. “Whatcha wanna do?” Richie asked, purring like an enormous dirty cat.

“What do you mean what do I wanna do?” Eddie asked curiously, tugging out a knot softly. “You’re gonna work on whatever has you stressed.” He said, objectively mentioning their texts from earlier. He didn’t want to come over to boss Richie around, he just wanted to see what was up.

Richie wrinkled his nose, “why would we wanna do that?”

Eddie smiled down at him, “you don’t, I think that’s the problem here.”

Richie made to move to get up. Eddie pushed him back down forcefully. “Ow, fuck.” Richie wheezed, staring grumpily up at him. “Gonna have your wicked way with me?”

“Tell me what’s stressing you.”

Richie rolled his eyes, irritated. “You’re gonna be annoying about it.”

“Well.” Eddie would have loved to argue with him. “I’m annoying about everything.”

Richie frowned, “no, you’re not.” Eddie felt uncomfortable with his stare, so he plucked his glasses off his face to clean them with the hem of his shirt. When he looked back, Richie was still watching him. “I just procrastinated on a paper.”

Again ?? Eddie’s mind burned to ask, but he remembered exactly what Richie had just said about being annoying. Eddie clicked his tongue, “what do you have so far?”

“Not even an outline.” Richie replied. For a moment, his happy-never-give-a-fuck slipped, and Eddie saw a flash of concern flicker over his face. It was gone in an instant, the smug smile returning with a shrug.

“How much is the minimum?”

“Six to eight pages.”

“Due?”

“Tomorrow.” He tilted his head to the side, “scratch behind my ear?” Eddie obliged, gently scraping his fingers against his scalp while Richie smiled happily with his shut eyes. Eddie frowned at his face, thinking that Richie was too smart for this.

“Stop disapproving of me,” Richie murmured into his knee.

“I’m not.”

“It’s radiating off of you, I can feel it. Like acid mist. Or. A tanning bed.”

Eddie chose to just ignore all of that. “What’s it about?”
“I dunno. I’ll figure it out later, it’s fine.”

“What’s the prompt?”

“Eddie.”

“Richie.”

Richie rolled his eyes, but began to prattle off about the assignment. It was weird to sit and listen to, because all it took to get him rolling and rambling was gentle prodding. Eddie was asking about his opinion on the theories of international relations, and how he would apply realism to the examination his class was taking on the Battle of Stalingrad, and Eddie could have sworn that Richie had spoken a six page essay out loud.

It was a weird moment in time, because neither of them inched towards their phone, just talking softly back and forth for a half an hour with Eddie’s hands in his hair. Eddie kept his glasses, slipped them on top of his own head, and hummed softly in response to Richie’s continued discussion of morality in politics. Richie was smart. There was no argument of it. But Richie had the discipline of a 4th grader hyped up on pixie sticks.

When Richie was finally winding down, Eddie prodded him gently, “get a notebook,” he told him.

“Wassit?”

“Get a notebook so you can write down some of the stuff you just told me.”

“I’ll just get on my computer.” Richie sat up, shaking his hair out a little bit. He reached for his glasses. Eddie sat back, holding a hand out to stop him.

“I’m sorry, why do you not know what notebooks are?” Eddie joked with a goofy laugh. “Start in a notebook.” Richie grumbled at him, but did as he was told, rummaging around in the piles around the bed for a notebook.

He got one out that had “MATH” plainly written on the front and mis-matched, unorganized notes for about a quarter of the pages. Eddie clicked his tongue but didn’t say anything, flipping until he got to a free page.

Richie had a yellow pencil in his mouth, chewing at the end. “Get a pen,” he told him. He cracked his own knuckles, reveling in the satisfying little pops. Richie rolled his eyes but complied. “My Dad taught me,” Eddie told him, waving him over to sit closer, “when I was a kid, to use pens.”

“Why?”

“Because just because a thought isn’t conducive to what you’re doing at the moment,” he said, jotting down the basics of what he remembered from the prompt at the top of the page, “it doesn’t mean you didn’t have it, and it doesn’t mean it’s not valuable. Erasing the lines on a page is silly, because you need to remember how you got there.” Eddie wrote neatly under his own handwriting i really hate eddie kaspbrak right now. “If you don’t need a sentence or a line in your final product,” he told him, gesturing to his own little sentence, “cross it out, with one line.” he neatly crossed it out with a single, straight cross of his pen. “But you can still read it, and remember it later. You never know what old thoughts might help you come up with.”

When he looked up, Richie’s eyes were on his face. He had a slow, sly smile. He scribbled right below Eddie’s crossed out line i really appreciate eddie kaspbrak right now . But he didn’t cross his out as he took the notebook from Eddie’s lap and began to scribble down his thoughts from
their prior conversation.

Eddie couldn’t stop thinking of rehearsal that Thursday. They only had two more, both enormous with the full cast and orchestra, before their parents arrived that weekend. His solo, as Laurent put it, was fine. Fine. And fine might have been an okay word a hundred years ago, like when it was associated with fine china or dining or some shit, but fine wasn’t cutting it for him now, here. He didn’t know what else Laurent wanted from him, what else there was to give to it, but he never once felt like he fully understood it the way he was supposed to.

He was distant from everyone else at the table in the dining hall, but he couldn’t stop the nervous hum of anticipation that was making his body rumble. He had his chin in his palm, pushing around the leaves on his place.

“Aight, Christ,” Richie’s hand reached across the table at him, thumb pulling at his chin. His lower lip popped out of the warpath of his teeth with a small, slick sound. Richie sat back down. “You’re gonna make that thing fall off.” Eddie found himself somewhat flushed, that he had been gnawing on his lip, and that Richie was paying that close of attention to him.

“Whatcha’ thinking about, Eddie?” Bev asked kindly, looking up from her phone.

“Just,” his eye caught Richie’s. Richie was looking smug. “Stressed.” He smiled at him, understanding his little pride parade. He looked down at his salad, “I think I’m gonna head back to the dorm before class. I’ve got an hour.”

“I’ll come.” Richie stood. Eddie nodded, picking up his tray and Richie’s to dump, his coat tossed over his arm.

“We’re all shocked,” Mike replied into his own plate of pasta. Bev smacked the back of his head. Eddie tried not to laugh. He waited for Richie to sling his bag over his shoulder, and he caught up to him with a grin.

“Stress, huh?” Richie asked, hands shoved into his pockets. “I thought through the power of notebooks, you were permanently exempt.”

Eddie shoved him with his shoulder, “shut the fuck up, Rich.” Richie laughed loudly. He was wearing a pair of sweatpants and a big denim jacket with a wooly inside. It wasn’t a cohesive outfit, but somehow Eddie thought Richie made it work well enough for him. “If you just procrastinated a little bit less...got a planner,”

“I’m stopping you right there.” Richie told him as he opened a door, gesturing for Eddie to walk through. Eddie rolled his eyes, but did so, “you and I both know I will never be a man with a planner. Notebooks, I’m becoming flexible to. Planners are out.”

Eddie mimicked his grand gesture of opening the door, ushering Richie through. Richie bowed at him, “my good Lord.”

“Shut up.” Richie laughed, but walked through the door anyway.

“Sorry, Eds,” he looped an arm over Eddie’s shoulder obnoxiously, tugging him into him snugly. “There are somethings you can’t change no matter how bad you want to.”

Eddie looked up at him, the patch of hair he missed shaving that morning and the faded acne scars under his chin. The grease stain by the collar of his shirt. “No, I don’t.” He replied sincerely. He supposed he’d just take Richie Tozier how he came.
Richie’s breath buckled a little bit, but he kept walking, kept his chin up. Just as Eddie turned his eyes back to the path ahead of them, Richie ducked down and pressed a hard kiss into his cheekbone, by his eye.

And of course, it wasn’t really friendly. Eddie knew that. But he also knew his own resolve was buckling. And he didn’t care.

“Remember when school was easy,” he joked, "all you had to do was show up and you'd get A's?" Richie sighed with nostalgia. "The good ol’ days of High School."

"No," Eddie replied. "I was never smart like that."

Richie had no response to that. Eddie didn't even know how Richie thought that was how everyone else was. He was probably just used to things being easy, why he struggled so hard in college. Not that he wasn't smart enough to make the transition, he was obviously...intelligent. Brilliantly so, it seemed sometimes.

But Eddie couldn't just say that to him. He doesn't think he'd believe him, even if he tried.

"It’s dance,” he said so he’d have something to say. “I’m stressed about dance.”

And Richie removed his hand from his shoulder, because it wasn’t truly comfortable to walk that way, but Eddie would miss the heavy weight on his shoulder. Eddie explained, as best he could in layman’s terms, his anxiety. He didn’t call it that, but he knew that’s what it was really. He just thought like it wasn’t enough. Like he hadn’t ever quite managed to be enough, as they walked in the crisp April air back to the dorms.

Richie stared at the ground as he talked, but nodded often, showing he was listening. That Eddie had his attention. It was nice to just ramble and rant to a listening ear, even if they couldn’t do anything about it. Eddie didn’t know how he lasted before, just bottling it up inside.

“Hm,” Richie hummed, opening the door for Eddie. “Well, I’ve got an idea. Think you can get studio time?”

“Uh,” Eddie blinked. He didn’t know why, but that wasn’t something he called as a possible outcome. “Before Saturday? Probably only early morning tomorrow.”

Richie shrugged, “that’s fine.”

“Is it?”

“I’ll be there if you will be.”

Eddie stared at him hesitantly. He didn’t know what to expect, if he could expect anything at all. Richie didn’t look like he was about to make a joke at Eddie’s expense or anything. He just stood there and waited for his response. “Come on, Eds,” he jostled awkwardly, “don’t you trust me?” He joked at his own expense, like he was planning on Eddie flatly shutting him down like he normally did when Richie said shit like that.

“I do.” He replied instead. “I’ll text the studio receptionist and see. It’d be like, 7, are you sure?”

“Yeah,” Richie shrugged, with a truly unreadable expression. “That’s fine.”

“Okay.”
“Okay.”

“I’ll text you if anything changes.”

“Okay.”

“Can we stop saying okay now?”

“No-kay.”

Eddie woke up with the smallest, tiniest of shrieks that morning. A teensy-weensie blood curdling scream. There were FEET in his FACE, it was naturally the stuff of nightmares.

The body across from him, namely that of Bill Denbrough, convulsed, and fell out of his bed in shock. Eddie clamped a hand over his mouth to keep the laugh in as the memories of the night before came flooding back. A very disoriented Bill thrashed around on the floor for a second.

“W-what the f-f-fuck?!” Bill asked the floor, like it, too, was very confused as to why it had a Bill Denbrough on it.

Mike had apparently sex-iled the entire room next door for most of the night. Richie had gone to Bev’s apartment with Stan and Ben. Bill had a late class on Thursday, so he missed that boat. Stan wasn’t sure if he was going to stay over at Bev’s with Ben, and told Bill that he’d text him and let him know, because if he was gonna sleep at Bev’s, Bill could have his bed. But he and Eddie had stayed up watching Person of Interest on Eddie’s computer and fell asleep before they got a response. And that’s what they all, including the floor, missed on Glee apparently, because Bill sat up with a relieved sigh as he accepted his surroundings.

“I am so, so sorry-” he offered a hand down to Bill. He scoped out the empty beds, and realized Ben and Stan must have not returned from Bev’s. Bill accepted his hand with a grunt, and crashed back into Eddie’s bed with an exhausted laugh.

“N-no, no it’s okay.” Bill replied. “You just scared the sh-shit out of me, but it’s f-fine.” He laid there, half flopped on the floor, half on Eddie. Eddie laughed quietly, patting his head consolingly. “Fuck, I’m tired.”

The door flung open, Mike and Richie looking concerned on the other side. “Who the hell is getting murdered-” Richie’s smile betrayed any notion that they had been truly concerned. Mike mostly looked miffed at being awake. Richie’s eyes fell on Bill and Eddie, and the smile slipped off his face. Eddie sat up with concern, like he had been caught. But he hadn’t been. There was nothing wrong with any of it.

“I fell asleep over here,” Bill said into Eddie’s stomach, still not moving. Eddie smiled sheepishly at Mike.

“He scared me this morning, I guess I wasn’t anticipating waking up to-” Eddie let the sentence fall off, inwardly wincing that he had just revealed he and Bill shared a Twin XL in a room of 3 beds. “Sorry, Mike.”

Mike sighed, “it’s okay, Eddie. No big deal. Denny,” he stared at Bill, “do you need me to carry you back to bed?” He asked him jokingly.
“I’m a big boy, Mama,” Bill rolled dramatically to the floor, “I can do it.” He said, letting the act fall and shoving himself to his feet. “Thanks again, Ed.” He waved sleepily at him. Eddie felt his heart run cold. It wasn’t Eds, but it felt oddly close.

“No problem-” Eddie was replying quietly, but Bill kept talking.

“You alright, Rich?” Bill stopped and asked, clapping him on the shoulder. Richie shook him off, with a bright false smile on his face.

“Course I am, Billy,” he enthused, slapping his cheek jovially, like they did in old time-y movies, but maybe a little harder than he intended.

“Ow,” Bill struggled away, into Mike grumpily, “you big fuck.”

“We still on in ten?” Richie asked Eddie. Only then Eddie realized Richie was actually fully dressed, wearing jeans and a thick sweater, and his boots.

“Fuck, is it that late?” Eddie sat up quickly and stretched, feeling his tank top twisted oddly around him. “Yeah, of course.”

“Cool, can you meet me over there?” Richie asked like he couldn’t wait to be out of his dorm room, “I wanna set up anyway.”

“Oka-” but Richie had closed his door before he finished his answer.

Eddie was too fucking tired for this shit. He would have loved to sit there and over analyzed every inch of that last interaction, but he sleepily shoved on his rehearsal clothes and his jacket and ran a comb through his hair and that was enough effort for the amount of tired he was. His mind was reeling as he walked across campus alone, thinking about Richie and if he’d say anything and what he thought and what Richie would say if he did say anything, but it was all a jumbled heap of exhausted incoherence.

Eddie shoved open the door, and Richie’s laptop was sitting on top of the piano.

“Hey,” he spoke quietly, and Richie grinned up at him, excited, like none of what just happened happened. Or maybe it didn’t. Maybe Richie really didn’t care. Eddie didn’t know anymore.

“Hey!” Richie waved him over. Eddie kicked off his boots and dug his shoes out of his bag.

“So what’s the big plan, here?” Eddie asked, sitting on the ground by the bench. He tried not to think of the weird vantage point it gave him, how much it reminded him of other things. He put his shoes on. He thought he should really stretch first, but he was the one that woke up late, not Richie.

“You’re going to do your routine exactly as you do it. All I want you to do is take, like 30 seconds before, and think of what’s going on in the plot right before you dance.”

“That’s...it?” Eddie asked skeptically, slipping on his other shoe.

“Hey,” Richie chided, looking down at him with that same grin, “you trust me, remember?”

“Don’t make me regret telling you that,” Eddie warned, but crossed to his typical opening place anyway. He really wanted to ask, the question burned in his throat, to say something about what just happened. But Richie seemed so keen to ignore it. OR did he just not care? Eddie wasn’t sure
what would drive him crazier.

Richie, as if he had read his mind, called out “think of the plot!”

At that point in time, the Sleeping Beauty was woken up, and they were gathering to be married. The company danced, and then he would dance, and the a few more pas de deuxs, ending in the prince and the princess. The piece was about joy. About the spark of love, as much as it could be about anything.

And as soon as Eddie had that thought, Richie was playing his opening music. Eddie flitted in as he always did, nothing about this feeling particularly different than it had before. Even if he wanted it to feel different. The music Richie was playing on the piano was simpler than what the pianist played for him now. Was that what Richie was getting at here? Simple?

And then as he grand plied in prep for his first leap, he realized that there was the trickle of pop...coming from the speaker. Eddie almost stopped, faltered in his steps, a moment behind the music when he did leap. “EXACTLY HOW YOU DO IT!” Richie called over the building music. As Eddie came down, crossing into his turn combination, he recognized the on-beat, well combined music of Taylor Swift singing “it’s a love story baby just saaay, yes~” and he giggled. He couldn’t help the laugh in his chest. It was burning at his chest, along with his lungs because he was trying to breathe and dance at the same time and laughter wasn’t helping, as his legs were burning for dancing without stretching. It flipped from pop song to pop song from “every time i try to say it words get oh so complicated-” to “tell me, did you sail across the sun?” to “IT’S RAINING MEN,“ at which he was mid-leap and he still bust out laughing mid air, ending in a shoddy leap and he didn’t even care. The songs were built into his routine, flourishing as he did and relaxing as he did and when the 2 minute section, came to a close with a soft sigh of “buttercup, don’t break my heart,” he was still full out laughing. He collapsed into the floor, never, in his entire life, getting a rush from dancing quite like that.

“Again!!” Richie shouted at him from the piano, “again!!” Like an overgrown, excited sunflower shining down at him.

Eddie was too busy laughing to respond. He rolled over, staring up at the harsh fluorescent lighting, began flexing his feet to begin his stretch routine.

“Yes! Again!” Richie was insisting, his own voice giddy with laughter.

“Jesus, Rich, let me stretch out a little bit,” Eddie sat up, grabbing his toe for a stretch, “before you kill me.” Richie laughed, and played music for him as he did so. Not the same track, just beginning with River Deep, Mountain High, and filtering in other pop songs. He sometimes played along a little bit on the piano. Eddie’s heart as he sat on the floor and stretched, was racing, and he didn’t think it was from the dancing anymore.

Ah, fuck.

“Again?” Eddie asked, finally ready, almost hopping into his place he was so excited to hear the track Richie made again.

Richie had his tongue between his teeth and an absurdly wide smile as he begun to play the track again the way he had before.

Eddie didn’t really know if he was dancing any better than he had before. He couldn’t pay too much attention to his lines and his exact scientific measurements of height for his leaps and his turns. But he had fun. Delirious, brain-spinning fun, as he and Richie laughed and played around
and in Richie’s case, sang, while he danced. They went three or four times in a row without stopping, Eddie laughing and not caring as much about his exact counts and positioning. He was enjoying the music, feeling it, as someone maybe more pretentious than him would say, and letting his body move with it. Like jumping into the ocean and swimming with the tide, rather than hoping the tide would just follow your lead.

“Fuck, Richie,” he couldn’t breathe at all as the fourth time came to a close, hands on his knees, “I love y-” oh fucking fuck no, “yit.”

Richie was still grinning at him, breathless and red-faced and giddy. “I’m glad.” Eddie managed to cross to the piano bench before he laid down on the floor next to it, smiling up at him.

“Tchaikovsky can learn a thing or two,” Eddie told him, flicking his knee. Richie’s smile was stretched impossibly wider. He shook his head in lieu of responding, which meant, as far as Eddie could tell, that he enjoyed the compliment. “I have to go stretch and get ready.”

Richie nodded. “I want to go back to bed.”

“Are you gonna come tomorrow?” Eddie asked. Richie frowned in consideration, offering his hand down to Eddie.

“Do you want me to come?”

“I mean. You don’t have to.” Richie tugged him to his feet, and then there they were. Toe to toe. “But the dance department…you know, they like you a lot and stuff…”

“The dance department does, huh?” Richie asked with a smirk, stepping back and away from Eddie. He shut his laptop, and picked up his backpack.

“It’s like, the last ‘performance,’” he put it in air-quotes, “before the semester ends. So I thought you might. I can get you a seat. But you don’t have to, I mean obviously.” Richie didn’t seem to be responding, and Eddie didn’t want to keep rambling, so he rerouted to a new conversation, “can you send me that track?”

“Of course.” Richie smiled at him again, that same smile where nothing was wrong was written across his face but Eddie was getting a turning feeling otherwise. “I will when I get back to the dorm?”

“Okay.”

Richie winked, sliding his backpack over his shoulder. He was walking out of the room, and Eddie felt like the conversation wasn’t complete. “Rich?” He called out, taking a cautious step forward just before Richie got through the door.

“Yeah?” He turned back, looking him over curiously.

“Thank you.” He said, hoping Richie knew what for. “For everything.” He added, because he knew that Richie might not.

“It was nothing.” He replied with a shrug, because of course he did. Eddie kicked his feet on the ground, unsure of what to say because Richie was still looking at him. “Did you kiss him?” He asked casually, almost quickly, like he hadn’t be planning on saying anything.

Eddie’s throat ran dry. “What?” He squeaked, even though a response of no i didn’t nothing happened so you do think something happened do you care something might have happened do you
care about me well apparently you care about me but do you care about the possibility of us please richie say anything say something what is going on.

“Ach-” Richie seemed to have gotten thrown out of that all at once, and he stepped backwards, holding up his hand and shaking it as if that would make them both instantaneously forget about it, “I know, that’s none of my business.” His half smile was back. “Later, Eds.”

what the fuck.
“THROW IT OUT, IT’S TOO LATE NOW,“ 

“THAT’S MY COMFORTER.“ 

“GREAT, AND NOW IT’S TRASH, CONGRATULATIONS.”

Stan was sitting on Mike’s bed holding a cup from their campus coffee shop looking smug. Eddie hesitated by their door. He rolled his thumbs into his sweater, and watched the chaos garbage tornado continue. Richie stuffed Bill’s duvet into a bag with a shrug, stained with god knew what, and Bill only looked mildly offended. Mike seemed to settled that it was out of his sight, and picked up a bag from the floor.

“What the fuc-“ Mike stopped looking in the black, nameless bag, and looked ready to vomit all over the floor, “this one makes me so mad, I can’t talk about it.” He thrust the bag into the hands of Richie, who looked down curiously.

“What is-“ he looked up and caught Bill’s eye. They seemed to simultaneously remember the event that acquired them such a bag and his face split into a devilish grin. “That was a fun weekend,” he told him.

“Aw,” Bill cooed at the memory, pressing a hand over his heart. “It was.”

“CLEAN,” Mike yelled at them, throwing a very oddly stained pillow at Bill’s face, “YOU MOTHERFUCKING DICK BAGS.”

It was parent’s weekend, and Eddie could only assume Mike’s parents would be arriving soon. His mom and dad were getting there in a half hour. He was going to show her around campus and they were gonna get food in the dining hall before he had to go change for the final dress rehearsal before recital. The room next door was in a state similar to the one it always was, an absolute ridiculous ruckus. Mike looked frazzled, a garbage bag in each hand. Eddie rolled his eyes and stepped forward, offering a hand out to Mike to take a bag from him. Mike sighed heavily, smiling gratefully at Eddie.

Eddie wrinkled his nose at the floor momentarily, before just picking up some trash and shoving it into the bag.

“You look…” Mike started, squinting at him like he wasn’t sure what to call it. Eddie self-consciously touched his skin, and made and eugh sound at the slimey feeling. He forgot he had already done his stage makeup for later that day.

“Pretty,” Bill finished for Mike politely. He had his hand in a can of pringles that he could have easily bought that morning or at the beginning of the semester. Mike, with a solid face of irritation, snatched it out of his hand and threw it into his open bag. Then kicked him, for good measure.

Before Eddie could respond, big hands were on his face. He jumped, and at the same time, Richie moved his face to look at him. He felt like he was lucky his head was still on his neck, and he made a neutral grumbling noise of annoyance, wrapping his hands around Richie’s. He tried to pry them off… but not very hard.

“Hmmph,” Richie noted eloquently. He squinted at him, tilting his head around in the light. Eddie knew the glitter on his cheeks was probably sparkling. He let Abi convince him it was a solid idea.
Now it just seemed stupid.

“It’s just my stage make-up,” he said, words a bit squished because of Richie’s hold on his cheeks. He tried to read Richie’s expression, but it just seemed vaguely displeased to him. He was wearing a worn emerald green Henley, and Eddie could see fleckes of green at the corners of his eyes. He needed a haircut, hair falling over his forehead. “I’m gonna take it off in a few hours.” He said, like it mattered what Richie thought of his face.

“No,” Richie shook his head, and what he really said was, no it’s not that, his tone still lightly inquisitive. He frowned with consideration, tilting his head like a big old puppy dog. “I’m just thinking about this would look like,” he smoothed some of the neutral colored lipstick on Eddie’s bottom lip with his thumb, “smeared all over my cock.”

Eddie blinked incredulously. That was incredibly out of left field. Richie almost seemed surprised himself, but he covered it with a loud laugh. He cracked through the awkward energy in the dorm.

“Jesus fucking Christ, Rich.” Mike commented. He had a fatherly face on, neither surprise or anger, but forlorn disappointment.

“No,” Stan corrected, taking another sip, “he’s not trying to fuck Jesus, he’s trying to fuck Eddie.” Richie flopped on to the bed, and partially Stan, pestering him about being jealous, trying to press loud kisses into his cheek. Stan was calling him a creative collection of insults, Eddie could swear he heard a ‘get the fuck off of me you nest headed dwemer.’

Eddie opened his mouth and shut it. That was exactly the mental image he really wanted before he gave a tour of the campus to his parents, fucking hell.

“WILL YOU CLEAN THIS GODDAMNED DORM,” Mike hit Richie with his trashbag. Bill had abandoned ship. He was trying on shirts in the corner, tossing the ones he didn’t want into a pile on his bed. Eddie winced.

Eddie sympathetically picked up a deflated football. "Do you want this Mike?" He looked around for a clean surface area. "Where do you want me to put it?"

"Why would I want that, Eddie?" Mike asked tiredly. Eddie flipped it over. There was a large gash in it, causing the deflation. Eddie tossed it into the bag without a word. Richie snorted from the bed, but stood up. And then fell, on his face. They all paid it a moment of attention, but deemed it unimportant, and turned back to their conversation at hand.

"I don't know," Eddie tried to defend himself. "Could be decor or something."

"Decor?" Mike's face twitched in disgust. "Who the hell-"

"I'm fine, by the way-" Richie added from the floor.

"Ah, fuck it." Stan said loudly, finally standing. He ripped Mike's trash bag from his hands. He shoved the sleeves of his collared blue shirt up past his elbows."That was fun while it lasted," he mourned, "but I can't watch this anymore. Here's what we're gonna do:

So far, showing his parents around was just giving him war flashbacks to touring colleges the first time. His mom practically holding some poor tour guide at gun point until he could tell her what cleaners were used on the dance floors, and the impact they’d have on his shoes, his dad being
absurdly optimistic about very basic things “look, Eddie! They have four types of juices. Is that pomegranate? The last one only had apple and orange. Pretty cool.”

“And this,” he gestured ahead of them to the racks of lycra and tulle that held their costumes, “is where we’ll get ready in a little bit.” The once barren hall by the small warm up studio was practically lined with the racks, costumes labeled and bags with performance shoes. Headpieces were tucked into little velvet bags hanging from hangers.

“How many fittings did they do for your costume?” His mother asked, hesitant to compliment, but he could tell by the considerate frown on her face she was impressed.

“Two.”

“Hm.” But it was the good, approving hm. The sort of ‘hm’ that was the overall best-case scenario.

His father, a full-bodied man with half a head filled with grey hair and an overly generous mustache, glasses sitting on the tip of his nose, smiled. He was wearing a sweater vest that was either from 1987 or 1932 and it was impossible to guess which. He, inappropriately, picked up a costume, holding it up to the light. “Jesus, these girls must be tiny.” He inspected the costume’s stretch, which wasn’t much.

“Dad,” Eddie chastised, grabbing the hanger from him.

“Oh. Sorry.” He smiled down at his son, clearly out of his element, but happy and proud. “Look,” he reminded himself in the childish way he might have told Eddie when they visited a museum when he was young, “don’t touch.” Eddie smiled to himself, and hung the costume back up, hoping it did in fact belong to Cathy H. and he didn’t just seriously throw off someone’s quick change.

A group of girls he knew as seniors, one of them already with an offer to a company after graduation, emerged from the study, giggling and walking. His mother looked at him expectantly as they passed, but Eddie did nothing but look away. Hey, he had made friends. They just weren’t them.

“Are any of your friends around, Eddie?” His dad asked as his mother continued to wait for him to ostentatiously greet the girls. Be outgoing, Eddie, she used to tell him all the time, all the time: it’s the connections that get you work, not the audition.

“Uh.” He swallowed. He rubbed his forehead nervously. “Not really in this building right now. But they’re around. Do you guys want to get br…runch? Now?” He was hesitant to call a meal at eleven a.m. brunch yet. He wasn’t sure if he had yet ascended to that level of gay. “They’ve still got the pomegranate juice.”

His mother adjusted her very classy and maybe slightly stuffy cardigan, likely from Loft, and she said “are we going to visit your dorm?” She was obvious ready to investigate for any signs of distraction. Vodka. Drugs. Stripper poles. Eddie was treated to a hilarious image of Stan sourly spinning around a pole in their dorm and he stifled a laugh.

“Sure!” Eddie didn’t want to sound at all hesitant. He didn’t doubt his mother would pull out a very Nancy Drew-esque magnifying glass and start investigating his floor for any traces of crack. She would.

His dorm really did not look at all different than it did on move-in day. His mother looked miffed at his messy dance bag by the foot of his bed but such things couldn’t be helped, except by dedication to change and genuine discipline in every day routine, and Eddie wasn’t going to do
either of those things.

“You never hung anything up,” his dad noted the empty space above his bed. He wasn’t wrong. He didn’t. He didn’t know what to put there. “Do you normally hang out in here?”

“Uh,” he wrinkled his nose. He didn’t know whether knowing he hung out next door mostly would delight or horrify his parents. “Not that often,” he answered instead. “There’s lots of space on campus. It’s not too bad out. I thought we might eat outside.” He detoured, partially because he didn’t want to hang out in his dorm with his parents any longer, equally because he wanted grilled chicken and there wasn’t gonna be any magically materializing in his dorm any time soon.

His mom accepted the state of his dorm with a curt nod, commenting about ironing linens as they walked towards his door. Eddie opened the door for his mother, who stepped through and collided with someone, interrupting her thoughts on cottons with a shrill “argh~” and they replied with a low, smooth, definitely southern “whoa there, pardner.”

Eddie’s hip collided with the knob and he winced as he looked up at the scene ahead of him, his mother catching her breath from the fright, and none other than Richie Tozier straightening her up.

“No, Dad,” he said, both hands on her elbows, phone caught between his ear and his jerked up shoulder. “Yes, I’m aware you’re not a hors- SPAGHETTI,” He noticed Eddie with a bright grin. “No. I know you’re not a pasta dish. Okay. Old man, give me a few, I’ll call ya’ back. Yeah, I called you old, what are you going to do about it?” He winked at Eddie. His mother looked back and forth between Eddie and Richie with rightful confusion.

Richie smoothly let his phone slide down into his hand, grinning at the family in front of him. It was neither his leer at Eddie, nor his bright enthusiasm towards friends. It was… frankly, it was nothing short of charming. “My, my. Am I lucky enough to stumble upon a court with a Mr. and Mrs. Eddie Spaghetti?” He tugged Eddie into his chest in a friendly way, rubbing his knuckles on his head. His mother looked concerned. His dad looked excited.

Eddie grumbled, wrestling away. “Eugh, Richie. Parents. Parents, Rich.” He kicked the back of Richie’s leg, hoping that was the sign language sign for behave. Richie’s reassuring pat on his shoulder made him think it just might be.

“Hello,” his dad held out a happy hand, “Frank, how are ya?”

“Doing fine, swell Saturday. All that jazz,” he did jazz hands, eyes sparkling, towards his mother. Trying to win her over clearly. Eddie wasn’t sure if he was aware of the brick wall that was his mother.

“And what is it you do here?” She asked plainly, with a neutral expression.

“Oh. Piano man.” He answered calmly, shoving his hands back into his pockets. “Music studies, department. Major, as of recent,” he laughed nervously, “undecided.” His mother squinted suspiciously.

“Richie,” Eddie jumped in, patting the hand on his shoulder, surprised that this was even happening, completely unprepared for the situation, “played for the dance rehearsals, and in some of my classes. He’s really incredible…” with his hands Eddie almost added, before deciding he didn’t want to die of blushing that day. Richie was trying to humbly shush him, but his mother had different plans. “And we’ve become friends this semester.”

“So, you actually have talent?” His mom asked, peering around the corner.
He had no answer to that, and Eddie couldn’t blame him, when his dad rounded the corner, peering nosily into his room. Curse them and their ever-open door. Eddie inwardly groaned as his dad asked “is that your set-up?” Eddie practically gulped as he looked around the corner. His mouth almost fell open. Their dorm looked like a dorm. Maybe one that had 20-something guys, but no longer looked like a dump outside of a nuclear powerplant. The only truly bizarre thing about it was there was a flag for what Eddie thought was Trinidad spread out on Bill’s bed instead of a comforter. A keyboard, one Eddie had never seen in his life, was set up, hooked up to the computer on Richie’s desk. It even looked vacuumed.

God bless Mike Hanlon.

“Yep,” Richie grinned again, seemingly recovering his cool, and he sat at his piano. He cracked his knuckles, and rolled his shoulders back. Eddie rolled his eyes at the pianist over-dramatics, but even he couldn’t help the little grin that came to his face when he started to play Eddie’s solo, the more complex version of it, the only piece for rehearsal he had really begun to fully learn rather than following the melody well enough.

“Gonna dance, Eddie?” He asked, deftly pushing his glasses up on an off beat.

Eddie rolled his eyes for the drama of it all, and clicked off the piano, “Okay, show-off.” He joked good-naturedly. Richie pinched his hip, spare fingers barely brushing against his bare skin under his shirt. He almost shivered. He was nearly concerned at how affected he could be by the nimblest of touches.

“What are your plans for the summer, Richie?” His mother asked calmly, with less guard and more interest, arms finally unfolded. “Are you free now, do you want to join us for lunch?”

“Well, I-“ he looked, once again, taken aback. Eddie understood. She could be unpredictable. Eddie himself hadn’t really seen that coming.

“Mom, it’s Saturday, I’m sure Richie has plans.” He patted his shoulder, hoping it communicated his thanks for tolerating this at all. “And we should go now, because I should be getting ready in about an hour. He grazed his fingers through the back of Richie’s scalp, noticing it was delightedly combed. His dad seemed to notice, eyes furrowed at his hand, but he said nothing. His mother looked ready to object, but his dad distracted her with talk of lettuce quality in the cafeteria, and they stepped out of the dorm. Eddie paused and turned back, “I’ll see you?”

Richie, with his very irritating poker face, nodded. “Yeah.”

Eddie thought he had spent a lot of time hearing about Richie Tozier that semester. But damn, could Sonia Kaspbrak give everyone on their campus a run for their money. He’s very tall, Eddie, and he’s got strong shoulders, does he work out? Have you ever gone with him? He has clear musicality and that’s not a skill one can acquire. Are you interested in him, Eddie? (He might not be gay, Sonia.) I think I can tell when a boy is gay by now, Frank. He’s very nice. He’s handsome, too. But not worryingly so. I think he likes you. Where do his parents live, is he going home for the summer? I think Janice would give him a job at the studio. He could even just come visit, he could stay in your room. You have space. We have the air mattress from when Auntie Vera’s condo flooded, do you remember?

MOM. MOM. Eddie tried to interject tried to communicate without explicitly mentioning anal that things were much more complicated than she perceived. However, knowing his mother, she’d take that as her cue to un-complicate it.

Although he had missed his parents, because he had, he was glad to slip away after lunch. He was
extra laborious with his stretches, all the way down to the muscles in his fingers, trying not to worry himself too deeply. He put in his earphones, listening to Richie’s track with a wry little grin. Talk about things his mother could never know about, or she might actually attempt to kidnap the poor guy. He got into his costume and stared at himself. He was undoubtedly physically stronger, his shoulders larger and his chest more defined. He wasn’t even sure he could count the non-physical changes from the last year.

Abigail had been placed with an upperclassmen for the second act pas de deux, and she looked bouncily nervous as she stood backstage, clearly running over the dance in her head. Eddie waved at her in the dark, stuffy space, lit only by the blue work lights.

did you make it to the milky way,

and see the lights are faded?

The song played in the back of his mind as the dance before his began. How fucking annoying. Anytime he tried to think of anything else it wormed it’s way in. I should buy socks – and see the lights are faded, that heaven is overrated. I wonder what’s in vinaigrettes in general – tell me, did you fall for a shooting star? He shook his head. It was going to give him a headache.

But no matter how he tried, it didn’t really leave him, not even as he danced. He tried his hardest not to attribute the success of his dance, the roaring applause or the slap on the shoulder he got from Laurent backstage, to it. But he’d be lying if he said it had nothing to do with it.

Ballet is meticulous, technical and focused. It’s precise. And Eddie loves all of those things about it.

But few things can’t be improved with a little bit of Build Me Up Buttercup.

His mother was hugging him aggressively in the crowds of dancers and parents in the lobby. Eddie was maybe a little more surprised than he should be, but she was not only pleased, she was excited. She was rambling about lessons and privates for the summer. His dad patted his back with pride. He had somehow having collected other dad friends, and Eddie got compliments from them, too. Eddie was beaming, flushed with pride, muscles aching in the most rewarding way possible, even though actual recital wouldn’t begin until after finals the following week.

He saw, just a smidgen above the crowd, surrounded by a few prospective freshman if their over-enthusiastic school merch was anything to go by, Richie. Their eyes caught. Richie smiled at him, straightened. Eddie couldn’t grin harder, but he nodded, and very subtly turned his parents attention away, so they wouldn’t harass him again. His chest was fluttering, seemingly his entire lungs, with glittering, boisterous emotion that Richie even came.

If there were Olympics in small talk his dad would be a medalist. It dragged. Talking with some of the other dancers his age and their parents was fine, really. But he wanted off of his feet. Finally, the conversation turned to a wine bar a few blocks away from campus. “You should go,” he nudged his parents. “Mingle.” He jostled his mother, who looked like she would argue that mingling doesn’t deserve it’s status as a word let alone an action people partake in.

“Oh, yes,” a woman with a ballet dancer drawn on to her shirt enthused. She smiled exuberantly, “definitely join us. Would you like to come, Eddie?”

“Would love to,” Eddie was distracted from this woman, difficult because she was wearing glitter on her eyelids, by a burning feeling he was being watched. “But I’m not 21. But by all means,” he all but pushed his parents towards the other adults. Be free, baby birds, he thought, “please, enjoy
yourselves.” He chanced a look behind himself. Richie was there, at the edge of the now-thinning out room, watching him. He’d go see him in a minute. “I need to cool down and do some homework anyway.”

“Do you have plans for dinner?” His mom began to ramble about logistics and Eddie was ready to groan. He promised he’d text her, yes, right away, and they, albeit a little reluctantly, followed the other parents towards cars. He turned back and Richie was still there. Eddie beamed. He wondered if he could do that jumping hug thing, he was still so happy. But when he stepped in Richie’s direction, he turned and walked away. He went back towards the studios.

Eddie stopped, staring at the empty space. He was… confused. He was wondering if there would come to be a time where he wouldn’t spend most of his time confused about something or other. Maybe he hadn’t seen Eddie. Maybe he wished he didn’t. Maybe Eddie should try and stop guessing because if he knew literally anything it was that he knew absolutely nothing.

Richie was in the studio with the piano in it, sitting at the bench on his phone. His hair fell over his glasses, he hunched over himself. Eddie knocked on the wall. Richie jumped, looking cutely lost.

“Oh, hey.” Richie smiled gently at him. “Congrats.”

“Did ya’ see me?” Eddie asked impishly. He stepped into the studio, oddly nervous.

“Couldn’t miss you.” Richie replied. His voice was distant. Even though his glasses magnified his eyes, he was a master at hiding things in them.

“You’re one to talk,” Eddie tried to joke. He didn’t know why he was nervous. He twisted his fingers in his shirt. He gestured behind himself with his thumb “Everyone certainly saw you out there.” He pointed in the vague direction of the lobby.

“Oh, I’m fully aware you saw me,” Richie replied irritably. He actually walked past Eddie, and if Eddie didn’t care, he would have let that slide. But he did care. He cared too much.

“…excuse me?”

“Look,” Richie sighed. When he turned back, his eyes were open in a way they hadn’t been before. Vulnerable. Like he was ready to be hurt, like he already had been. “I get it, Eds. And we don’t have to talk about it.”

“I’m not saying this to be cute or play dumb or literally anything,” Eddie replied honestly, trying to open his hands up so he seemed open. “I have no fucking clue what we’re talking about.”

“I know we’re friends and that’s good, and-“ Richie hesitated. He looked deeply uncomfortable at the prospect of sharing any genuine emotion. “that I wouldn’t really fit in with your life. With the ballet,” he shook his hand behind them, “and the parents.”

Eddie didn’t even have a real reaction he was so confused.

“What the hell are you talking about?”

“I mean, like…” Eddie had heard once that toddlers are so fucking terrible to be around because they’ve formed complex thought already, their minds racing ahead of them, before they have the adequate language to express themselves. He was amazed at the comparisons he could draw
between Richie Tozier and a toddler.

“My parents loved you,” Eddie tried to connect dots feebly, “I was keeping them away from you because they were ready to pressure you to move in with us.”

Richie’s mouth hung a little bit open. “…I’m sorry, what?”

“You were funny,” Eddie replied hotly. He was more snappy than necessary for someone who was giving compliments, “and nice and clearly intelligent. What the fuck, Richie, why wouldn’t they love you?”

“But I—” Richie looked like he couldn’t put the math together for that to make any sort of sense. Eddie wondered what the narrative of the day was from his perspective. “I thought, because you were. I just—”

“Of course they loved you, Richie.” Eddie spoke over him, loud voice winning out, irritated hands on his hips. “Everyone loves you.”

Richie opened his mouth for a bit too long before the words followed. “Everyone?”

“I mean,” Eddie replied irritatedly, “you’re Richie Tozier.” He said like that explained it because it did.

Richie, apparently, knew that. It wasn’t what he wanted Eddie to say. He stood back from him, and it seemed like... That was it. There was the moment Eddie was supposed to say something and he hadn’t.

“You’re great.” Eddie tried.

It still wasn’t it.

“Okay.”

“I won’t argue with you about this again.”

Richie snorted. “Fine.”

“Fine.”

And then they were tensely staring at each other. The energy was awkward, the room was hot. Eddie didn’t know how to end this conversation, or relationship or whatever. He moved first. He took a shakey step towards the piano, drifting their uncomfortably. Like he was loitering, like he didn’t know what he was doing. Because he didn’t.

He sat on the bench. Clunkily, in the best offering of a peace treaty he had, he played the only song he knew at all on the piano.

The lower part of Heart and Soul.

Dun-duh-dun dun Dun-duh-Dun dun Dun-duh-dun dun Dun-duh-dun dun

Richie stared at him flatly. Eddie meekly smiled back. Richie rolled his eyes before crossing to the piano, and with a still clearly irritated expression, he reached over Eddie’s shoulder, and plunked out the higher melody.

Plink Plink Plink, p-puh-Plink Plink Plink
Eddie squinted at the keys, trusting his muscle memory and trying to keep the tune going. They made it through the melody twice, barely scraping their way through it. The tension melted between them, Eddie laughing muffledly as they picked out the child’s tune clumsily. The next time he looked up, Richie was smiling to himself as he played.

Eddie realized he didn’t know the next part without looking back down.

He couldn’t tear his eyes away though, transfixed with the jaunty little smile on Richie’s mouth.

And instead of continuing the song, he snaked up and kissed it off.

It was almost a gross parody of their first kiss, Eddie smacking his mouth on to Richie’s, hands cupping the side of his face. But Richie’s met his that time, pressing back lightly. They separated with a solid chmunk-sound. Richie’s eyes looked in between Eddie’s. Eddie’s spine objected greatly to the position he cranked it into, but he didn’t move away.

Richie swooped back down, hand wrapping around the back of his head. His fingernails scraped against the back of Eddie’s neck as their mouths met with a different kind of harmony. Richie’s tongue licked in between his lips, barely flicking against his own, and Eddie stood, twisting his body so they could be at least facing each other. He ran his hands up Richie’s arms, twisting his own, and Eddie stood, twisting his body so they could be at least facing each other. He ran his hands up Richie’s arms, leaving them on his shoulders. He nipped at Richie’s lip, tugging him back towards him. He stumbled over his feet, back pressing against the side of the piano. Richie propped himself up with a knee on the bench, not sacrificing any inch of space between himself and Eddie.

Richie dragged his tongue just along the roof of his mouth before their mouths separated with a slick sound. Eddie wasn’t ready to face those eyes searching his again, and so he kept his shut, taking a deep breath and exhaling with louder-than-intentioned sigh.

He dropped his forehead, feeling it knock against Richie’s.

“Fuck,” he sighed.

This just wasn’t part of the plan. But he couldn't lie about it anymore, not with it smacking him in the face, or, rather, holding him with it's large piano hands and gentle touch.

Richie’s hands tightened on him, his pointed finger pushing into the space under his ear, and he thought the fuck was mutual.
“Alright, Eddie,” Annique muttered to him. “You ready for this?”

“Not in the slightest,” he replied quietly, as he got up and followed her. And, gee, he thought, as he carefully toed over the crowds of curious stares from students sitting on the floor, what a motto for the semester.

He huffed out a nervous breath as he stood on what could be called the stage but it wasn’t created by a rise in the floor. It was created by a lack of students. Although Standing O was the only entirely student-run recital of sorts, to Eddie it almost seemed most prestigious. All of the students thus far were cheering their way through routines, laughing and chanting “yaaaaas~” and taking Instagram videos. He initially wanted to scoff and call the entire thing a popularity contest. But he kind of figured that those teen movies he saw in middle school lied to him about popularity only mattering in high school. It seemed more and more apparent to him that life was a bit of a popularity contest.

And, speaking of popular, out of the mess of the students on the floor, standing by the door, was Richie. He was leaning against it, arms folded, soft smile on his face. He looked a little confused, as his text to Eddie would indicate, because he got there in time to see the last two numbers. He didn’t know what Eddie would be doing in such a show-case, primarily that of hip-hop, neither, apparently, did the rest of the students.

Neither, really, did Eddie, but one joke to Annique went and made itself an actual reality, and there he was, readying himself in between the two ladies, Annique and her friend Amber, in fifth position.

The beginning was actually Amber’s idea, and designed to confuse. The music began, by one of the three giggling seniors on the floor who had already seen the routine, when they auditioned a week prior. They danced through a small ballet combination, more the girls dancing around Eddie than anything else, as he was a strong arm, or shoulder, to lean on. He felt his face burning under the scrutiny of his peers - because they truly had no idea what the fuck they were watching or how it got in.

And then the beat dropped.

“I’ been here all night ~” step, pivot turn, BREATHE, drop. Snap.

“I’ been here all day~ ” up, YOU’RE NOT GONNA DIE, EDDIE, BREATHE, Snap. Snap. Hip. Jesus.

“And boi~ ” FACE YOURSELF IN THE MIRROR AND REALIZE THIS IS WHAT YOUR LIFE IS AND HAS COME TO, WATCH YOURSELF DO IT BECAUSE YOU HAVE TO, “you got me walkin’~” that hip thing looked good, though, “ you got me walkin’ side to side~ ”

The entire room seemingly at once had realized what they done. Both the first person to laugh, boldly, and from the back of the room, was Richie.

Eddie, for all he tried, still wasn’t great at the routine. His hips, and lines, especially compared to the pieces at the beginning, paled in comparison to his peers. Hip hop was as much of a difficult art
form as ballet, and it wasn’t to be mastered in two weeks. But the room burst into applause and
hollers so loud he could barely hear Ariana Grande singing about getting fucked an inch within her
life. He just started to laugh, and hoped the silliness would nullify his shortcomings.

Hip. Hip. Drop, roll. Snap right, left, gha gha gha, up. SNAP.

Eddie wished it was a blur to him, but it was a painfully slow burn of facing his classmates down,
trying to fake the confidence he didn’t really have, hips shimmying, face laughing. Richie, literally
losing it in the corner. More snapping than necessary. But, really, truly, just a whole lot of fun.

“This the new style, with the fresh type of flow ~” Foot, foot, hip pop, 4-5-6. Rock, rock.


“Come true, yo, get you this type of blow ~” head rolls, knees. Pop. Hold.

Pray your mother never finds out.

Eddie was almost too distracted laughing, hugging the shit out of Annique when the room burst
into applause, to see Richie. But Richie was fighting his way through the sea of students, a vans-
wearing Moses, parting the ocean. Without a single word, clap, or any sort of signal, he walked
straight up to Eddie.

“Richie-” he laughed, “what-”

But Richie didn’t answer, and instead, pick him up by the waist, and with a bit more struggle than
he had before, threw him over his shoulder.

After already publicly embarrassing himself, he almost reacted with his initial defense mechanism,
and kneed Richie in the stomach. The room only seemed to laugh harder as Richie made his way
back through the crowd of students. Eddie tilted his head up, looking at Annique in her pink tie up
top and shorts, laughing. He could only laugh at himself too. Abi waved at him from the floor. And
instead of freaking out, instead of yelling and fighting, he did what his heart was doing. He raised
his body just enough to face the students still laughing and clapping, and raised his hand in a power
fist. Like the end of the Breakfast Club.

The room roared.

Richie set him down two steps away from the door, hands teasingly sliding up his body as Eddie
slid down. “Oh my god,” Richie, Eddie hadn’t realized in the ruckus of the studio, was actually
still kind of laughing. “You absolute legend.” And before Eddie could even really look up, or
respond, or do anything, Richie was leaning down to kiss him. His hands were low on his waist,
drawing him in close. Eddie let it happen, pressing in for just a second, before pulling back with a
solid smack. Richie didn’t let him get far, sending his heart into flurries, craning his neck down to
press his forehead to Eddie’s, “can we, please, please, go have sex now?” He muttered, fingers
digging into his back.

“You know I’m not letting you anywhere near my ass, right?”

“You should know that I do.”

And Eddie flushed, because he knew that he did. The last time they had sex, it had been in Eddie’s
room, and almost achingly slow.
Eddie found himself incredibly nervous about topping so to speak. When he had watched porn, the muscular guys with large bodies timed their thrusts well with their big ol’ dicks. Often times holding down the smaller guy. Eddie didn’t know how he’d feel trying to overpower anyone, but especially Richie, being so much taller and larger than him, he was certain he’d feel like a chihuahua humping a doberman.

Plus, he had read article after BuzzFeed article about how size really doesn’t matter, guys, but he wasn’t thoroughly convinced. He didn’t really think almost 4 inches, barely going on 5 hard, yes he remembered shamefully stealing a ruler from his mother as a late teen and then throwing it away, was going to impress anyone.

But Richie had perched over him, feet on either side. He dragged himself up and down Eddie’s cock, so painfully slowly, rubbing straight into that little sponge-y bit of his inner walls that Eddie was certain he’d never be able to find going at it from behind. He held Eddie’s face with his hands, thumbs stroking his cheeks as Eddie choked on air, pressing little kisses into his cheeks. He held Eddie’s face like it was precious. Something to be cherished. Something he did cherish. Eddie tried to keep a steady hand on Richie’s cock, bobbing between them, rhythm made with each other in loving time. They left the lights on, flourescents harsh on their skin, leaving any imperfections bared for the other.

And it wasn’t really about anyone over-powering anybody or who was on top and who was fucking who. It was about an enhanced feeling of togetherness, of intimacy and vulnerability that Eddie hadn’t experienced thus far. Even with himself. He hadn’t really taken the time to get to know his body the way Richie seemed to be, silent for the first time in their relationship except for soft grunts and the occasional moan. He didn’t know any other way to describe it, other than sounding like a flowery romance novel moms have hidden away with a bottle of wine and chocolate. Richie squeezed around him, walls tightening as he got closer, ridges unlike anything Eddie had ever felt before. Eddie came with a cry.

He shivered just remembering it, getting a little hard in his tight shorts.

“Yeah-” he grabbed Richie’s hand, ignored his smug face, and tugged him down the hall. “Let’s go.”

“Eds,” Eddie was faintly aware he was getting jostled and fully aware he didn’t care for that one bit.

“Mnglark-” was his beautiful song of protest. He huffed on the skin under his mouth, thinking it was a collar bone or a rib. He shoved his face into it, feeling his body heavy with sleep, his eyes completely protesting the mere idea of light.

“Babe,” Richie’s lips brushed against his forehead. “Some of us have to go to their finals.” Eddie had his last dance final the day before, and so he was scot free. Richie tried to roll him off of his body. Eddie went further lax, weighing himself down harder. “Babe.”

“Don’t go,” Eddie murmured into his body, gripping him with whatever he could get his hands on. “Stay here, I’ll give you a final.” He tried to sound seductive but he really didn’t know what that meant.

“That is…” Richie chuckled, “the last thing I’d expect to hear from my boyfriend’s mouth.” Eddie’s head jolted up, eyes blinking in the light at that. He kind of figured that’s where they were at, but neither of them had necessarily said it yet. Richie’s face was large, warm and lovely in the soft light of the dorm, the sun forcing them to greet the day because the three of them never bought
curtains, of course they didn’t. Eddie didn’t even know what to say for that, so he launched himself forward and connected their mouths, running his tongue along Richie’s bottom lip. Richie’s tongue flicked against his with a delighted little shiver.

“Oh,” Bill’s voice threw in from across the room, “how the turn tables.” But Eddie wasn’t really paying attention, because Richie nipped at his bottom lip.

“I have something to show you,” Richie muttered practically in his mouth and Eddie became very acutely turned on to the last time Richie brushed his teeth which wasn’t within the last few hours, so Eddie slid back, flopping on his back on the bed. Richie gracelessly tumbled out of his bed and on to his feet.

“Do you?” He asked, eyes squinting and flinching in the light.

“Gross, man.” Mike told him from the door, bag on his shoulders. Eddie laughed. Mike was wearing some deep-set exhaustion, and was holding what seemed to be a very long paper. “Later, guys.”

“I’ll come with.” Bill commented, grabbing his bag from the floor.

“Bill, buddy,” Richie stopped from where he was standing. “You’re wearing one shoe.”

“I’ll find another, it’s fine.” And the door shut behind him.

Richie blinked at the door, then Eddie. He grabbed his glasses from the crate he used as a nightstand. “I’d say I don’t understand him, but I definitely do.”

“Scarier all the more.” Eddie laughed, sitting up and stretching in Richie’s bedsheets, which they had mutually agreed he’d just toss when he left campus in another two days. Eddie would be there for another three weeks for recital. It was okay, they’d be reuniting at Eddie’s home the week after, his mother opening their doors with open arms and an invitation to get a grand piano which was just -. She was who she was. And Eddie was nervous, but tingling with excitement, to watch Richie experience all Maine had to offer. Which wasn't much. But he'd be there. So. They also had vague plans for Eddie to meet Richie’s parents in August, that being contingent on his mother letting him skip a week of dance. It was a hard tentative. “What are you showing me?” He eyed Richie’s sweat pants.

“My eyes are up here, thanks.” Richie joked, grinning. He pulled a scantron out of his bag. “I was so nervous I asked to pick it up yesterday.”

CALC - 100% was written across the top of it. Richie watched Eddie look at it, hands clasped in front of him, looking like a nervous school child. His eyes were wide behind his glasses, his smile tight.

“Richie,” Eddie exhaled happily, almost sighing his name. “Baby, that’s so awesome.” Richie’s face split into a happy grin, and he collapsed on top of him. Eddie couldn’t breathe in the slightest, but that was funny. He’d take that for Richie.

“It wasn’t stressful at all too,” he kissed Eddie’s face like Eddie had done anything to help. Eddie didn’t know calculus from a cullander. “I just… got it. It was fucking awesome. Once I was into it, I just, like, was you know?”

“It’s challenging, but you like challenges.” Eddie grinned into Richie’s heavy shoulder.

“Yeah,” Richie leaned back, head haloed in the light from the window, dark hair flecked with soft
brown. “I do.”

“Well, maybe,” he pushed some hair behind his ear, scratching his fingers on the scalp there. Richie hummed softly, shutting his eyes and pushing his head into it. “You should take some more. I never really got why you’re studying something you know how to do.”

“You know how to dance,” Richie reminded him thoughtfully, but not fully rejecting his comment.

“Trust me, there is so much shit I don’t know about dance,” Eddie replied seriously, letting Richie flop on to his chest, wrapping his arms behind his head. “Amongst other things.”

And it was true. There was a lot Eddie didn’t know. Like how to do a presage lift without Abi smashing her face into the floor. Or how televisions worked. Or everything about Richie. Or what their life would even be like next semester. But he did know with the warm sun on his face, and Richie’s pressing his body into the shitty dorm bed, quite full-heartedly, that he was happy.

It wasn't something he had placed a ton of value in, he realized. He had been so busy chasing his own personal success, he hadn't given his happiness much of a thought. He didn't even know when he had begun to consider the two synonymous. And he still might, a little bit, already thinking about the warm up he'd go through after Richie left for class. But any day with an eight hour dance rehearsal, could certainly spare itself fifteen minutes of laying with Richie. And maybe even, just sometimes, some sex - and after quiet hours, too. Because Eddie Kaspbrak had become pretty sure that being unhappy was the biggest waste of time possible.

Chapter End Notes

& that's all he wrote, folks.

thanks for reading! if you're sad, don't be too worried. i've been commissioned to write a little more of this universe, which should be up probably on Sunday. so :) there's that to look forward to. you can catch up with me about all this and anything else about these characters be :) my kids, on my tumblr, tossertozier. thanks for reading y'all! i've truly enjoyed the journey and sharing it with all of you.

End Notes

*drew monson voice* please leave me a comment im very looneeeelyyy

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