Summary

Imagine a world where the Losers don’t know each other yet. Imagine a world where that all changes, because Stanley Uris doesn’t kill himself at age thirty eight, instead he tries to kill himself at age thirteen. Imagine a world where he’s sent to a place to recover, a place where children like him lurk inside the white walls. Imagine a world where everything’s different...and somehow it’s not.

Notes

See the end of the work for notes.
Stanley Uris takes a bath

Chapter Notes

Why am I writing another fic before I've even finished the other ongoing one???? I really hope you like this, I had a lotta doubts about posting it but had also had lots of encouragement from my friends Zakkie and The Bennywise gc. Love you guys.

Please leave a comment or kudos if you enjoyed it. I love hearing what you think!!!!!!!!!!!! Hopefully I can stick with this. Please don't hesitate to tell me if I'm doing anything wrong. xoxo

Everything changed when Stanley Uris took a bath three hours earlier than he usually would, around seven at night. He told his parents what he was doing and then vanished upstairs without another word. Andrea Uris was slightly concerned at this but she was distracted by the television and didn’t let it bother her any further. Donald Uris hadn’t even let the words dwell in his mind. He was busy with work and what time his son chose to take a bath wasn’t really a pressing concern.

Only apparently it was.

Stan didn’t come downstairs for a while and the concern Andrea had felt before started to grow into fear. Her son had been distant lately and his recent diagnosis with OCD certainly hadn’t done anything for his emotions. She’d thought he was coping though. Stanley was such a calm boy and he approached problems carefully with the intent to solve them before they got too big to handle.

Only this time, everything was too big for him to handle.

Andrea went upstairs to the bathroom, listening out for any sign of Stan moving about elsewhere in the house. But no...everything was strangely quiet. Stan wasn’t a loud boy by any measure but this was the sort of silence that only seemed to exist in dreams. For a brief moment, Andrea wondered if she was having one.

Only it wasn’t a dream.

She knocked lightly on the bathroom door but there was no reply.

“Stan?” She called. “Are you in there?”

Nothing.

Andrea knocked again, louder. Maybe he had his head under the water, washing those curls that were so temperamental. But there was no sound of sloshing water. In fact, Andrea still couldn’t hear anything. She pressed her ear against the door, desperate for any sign that Stan was in there.

She heard it.

Drip…

Drip…
Drip…

It was the sound of water leaking from the tap, the usually quiet noise amplified thanks to the lack of sound from everywhere else. Andrea felt the fear in her rise. She twisted the doorknob and was met with resistance. Stan had locked them out. He would never do that! Sure, he shut the door when bathing because he’d gotten to the age where he was slightly ashamed of his body, but he never locked the door. Andrea had told him how dangerous that was. If he slipped and hurt himself then it was hard for people to reach him. Stan had wanted to know why the lock was there in the first place then but Andrea hadn’t been able to answer him.

“Just never lock us out, Stanley.”

“Okay mum.”

Only he’d locked them out now.

“DON!” Andrea yelled. “Come here, right now!”

The fear in her voice must have been obvious because Donald was at her side in an instant. She felt the words die in her throat as he looked at her questioningly so she just jiggled the doorknob. Don understood immediately. He banged on the door, louder than she had.

“STAN!” He yelled. “STANLEY!”

No answer. Why wasn’t he answering?

“ANSWER ME SON!”

“Break it down.” Andrea found her voice again. Don stared at her dumbly. For a brief moment, she could hear that horrible drip, drip, drip again. “I said BREAK IT DOWN!”

He did as she’d said, leaning back and kicking out as hard as he could. The flimsy lock gave way beneath his strength and the door swung into the wall with a loud crash. Andrea pushed past her husband and finally saw her son.

He was lying in the tub, head back and eyes closed. His wet curls were stuck to his face, making him look smaller. The water was tainted red. One of Don’s razors lay on the bathroom floor, the sharp blade stained with blood.

Stanley’s blood.

Andrea’s vision blurred.

“Shit!” She faintly hear Don swear. He never swore. She’d never heard a crass word out of his mouth in her entire life.

“Just never lock us out, Stanley…”

“Okay mum…”

How long had he been lying here, bleeding out in the same quiet and calm way he’d chosen to live life. She’d been too busy watching TV, too busy being a distracted mother. Had he died as she laughed at the corny jokes of her chosen sitcom? Was her baby boy dead? She wanted to run to him.

Only she couldn’t move.
Andrea Uris, wife to Donald Uris and mother to Stanley Uris, opened her mouth and screamed.

End Traumatic Night

Stanley Uris had not bled to death while his father grumbled over work and his mother laughed at a silly joke. He’d wanted to. Had grabbed that razor and made the cuts with the intent of going to sleep and never waking up. But sometimes things go wrong...or they go right, if you were to ask Andrea and Donald.

When Stan woke up two days later they cried tears of joy to accompany his tears of disappointment. They thought he was happy too. They were happy they’d saved him, they thought he was pleased to be awake. Stan was in fact, not pleased. He’d known what he was doing. It hadn’t been a spur of the moment decision. Stan didn’t wake up and think to himself that he was actually happy to have a second chance at life. He woke up and instantly burst into tears because this wasn’t what he wanted. Why did he never get what he wanted?

He told his parents this and the smiles faded away. They tried to plead with him but he shut them down every time, and all they could do was cry. It hurt to watch, but all Stan knew these days was hurt and pain and agony. It was a familiar sort of pain, one that he had tried to stop. One that he couldn’t.

“We’ll get you help, Stanley.” Don said after he’d wiped the tears away. “We can fix this.”

“I was fixing this.” Stan said flatly.

“Stan, please...” Andrea begged him for something he couldn’t give her.

“Please.” He said right back, begging her for something that she too would never be able to gift him.

“I’ll get the doctor.” Don broke in. “Let’s hear what he has to say.”

The doctor had things to say, and lots of them. He diagnosed Stan with depression on top of his OCD, and then explained his physical injuries in such great depth that Andrea burst into tears all over again. The stark white bandages hid the angry red wounds but one day the covering wouldn’t be there anymore. The scars would always be though.

Stan didn’t listen to the doctor. He couldn’t. This wasn’t a discussion he’d been expecting to be having when he’d grabbed the razor two nights ago. He’d planned for one thing and one thing only. Now that his plan had been disrupted, he was panicking.

Don swallowed back his tears. He wanted answers. He wanted a way to fix things, a way to fix Stanley. The doctor offered one. It was a solution none of them liked, but it was one that would work, or so the doctor said.

The Children’s Psychiatric Hospital

It was simple, really. Stan would be admitted there and receive full time care until his mental state
was better and he was able to function properly in society. He would be kept under close watch at all
times to prevent any further suicide attempts and would be around children his own age who
wouldn’t judge his mental illnesses like others would. It was perhaps not the answer Andrea and
Don had been hoping for but time away from their son was better than losing him forever.

Stan tried to protest but it was no use. He was only thirteen and he had no choice but to pack his
bags and journey to what many in Derry called ‘the hospital on the hill’. It was isolated from the
town to provide safety and security for the patients, though the people of Derry would claim it was
the other way round. The children in the CPH weren’t dangerous to others, however.

They were a danger to themselves.

Stan was proof of that.

Upon arriving at the CPH he had his bags snatched away from him.

“We need to check it for any items you could use to harm yourself.” A nurse explained.

“Anything can be a weapon if you’re creative enough.” Stan said back flatly. “Might as well take
everything away.”

The nurse gave him an odd look but didn’t say anything in response. She just led him deeper and
deeper inside the hospital. It was like a maze. Stan couldn’t even remember where the exit was.
Maybe that was the whole idea, to stop him from escaping. Couldn’t run if he didn’t know where he
was running to.

They stopped at a door in a corridor with lots of other doors, and gee, weren’t doors just so
interesting. Much better than whatever was behind them. Stan knew that when the nurse led him into
the room, his final bit of freedom would be lost. He would become property of the hospital and be
forced to obey them entirely.

“This will be your room.” The nurse explained. “You’ll have a roommate but you can meet him
later.”

She was still talking but Stan couldn’t hear the rest. A roommate? Like, someone who would be in
his space constantly? Someone who would ruin his neat set up and make a mess of everything. He
couldn’t handle that. He didn’t want to handle it.

“Are you alright Stanley?” The nurse’s words broke through his panic. “You’ve gone really pale.”

“I can’t have a roommate.” Stan said in a rush. “He’ll make a mess of everything and I can’t cope
with that. Please, give me a single room.”

The nurse gave him another weird look.

“We can’t do that.” She explained. “The roommate rule is for your safety. You’re less likely to do
something dangerous if you share the space you occupy.”

“But…”

“No buts.” The nurse was polite but firm. “We’re one hundred percent dedicated to keeping you
safe, Stanley. And sometimes our idea of what constitutes safety and your idea may clash, and we
are forced to pull rank.”

“I understand.” Stan said, because he did. He just didn’t have to like it.
The nurse led him into the room and with that, Stan was no longer his own person able to make his
own choices. He was a slave to the hospital and its healing ways. Any sign of rebellion would be
taken as a sign of his illnesses and they would ‘fix’ it.

To take his mind off the fear of things being out of his control, Stan focused on the room he’d
entered. Half of it showed obvious signs of being lived in, while the other was obviously waiting for
him to occupy it. The side that his roommate occupied was actually rather clean. The bed was made,
though the wrinkles indicated that it had been lain on recently. A chest of draws situated at the end
held an array of little trinkets organised in a somewhat neat pattern. There was no sign of any
abandoned clothes and the bedside table was sparsely decorated. There were a few photos hung on
the walls of children...young teenagers really, obviously taken at the hospital. Stan drifted over to
take a closer look, wondering if his roommate was among them.

There were five photos in total. One was of a girl with fiery red hair and a chubby boy playing chess.
The girl was clearly frustrated with the game whilst the boy smiled cheerily at her. Was the boy
Stan’s roommate?

Or was it the cute boy with an odd fringe and soft eyes, carefully assembling a puzzle with help from
what looked to be a nurse or a doctor.

Perhaps it was the black boy curled up in an armchair, surrounded by piles of books with another in
his lap, eyes slightly startled but smile wide as he directed his full attention on whoever was behind
the camera.

Maybe it was the short kid who was sorting through a box of beads at some craft table, face annoyed
and yet fond all at the same time. He appeared to have a fannypack sitting beside him, which was
odd but probably not surprising in a place like this.

The last photo had all of the previously seen teenagers in it, grinning at the camera as they celebrated
a birthday, probably the black kid as he was in the middle with a party hat on and party popper
streamers draped all over him.

Which one of them was going to be his roommate?

The nurse had been talking once more but stopped when she saw Stan staring at the photos. She
joined him, peering closely at each.

“Richie’s not in them.” She said, almost to herself.

“Who?”

“Your roommate.” The nurse gestured at the photos. “He’s not in any of them.”

So it wasn’t any of those kids. It was another one, a mystery.

“Low self-esteem?” Stan asked.

The nurse sighed. “I can’t discuss confidential information with patients. Whatever you find out
about Richie has to come from him.”

“Naturally.”

Once more the nurse gave him one of her strange looks. Stan was beginning to hate him. Yes, there
were so many things wrong with him but she didn’t have to keep looking at him like he was some
sort of freak.
“You can sort all your things out when you get your suitcase back.” The nurse exited the room, Stan following close behind. “For now, let’s meet the others.”

This was the part Stan had been dreading the most. He’d never got along well with other people and he wasn’t sure he was about to start doing so now. These people were going to expect things from him, things he couldn’t give them. They’d make horrible assumptions and god knows what else.

“Everyone here is very friendly.” The nurse tried to assure him. “Except maybe Lucas but you can’t expect much from him, him being the way he is.”

Well that was rude.

Stan would probably end up hanging out with his roommate Richie and his friends, because that would be what was expected of him. He wouldn’t be happy about it, of course. He wouldn’t be enjoying anything. Stan looked into his future and he saw death. It was plain and simple. One failed attempt hadn’t changed his mind. If anything, it had made him more determined to succeed.

“Well that was rude.

Stan would probably end up hanging out with his roommate Richie and his friends, because that would be what was expected of him. He wouldn’t be happy about it, of course. He wouldn’t be enjoying anything. Stan looked into his future and he saw death. It was plain and simple. One failed attempt hadn’t changed his mind. If anything, it had made him more determined to succeed.

“Welcome to the group room.” The nurse stopped at a door and Stan nearly ran into her. “Group sessions are held here.”

Stan nodded and began to chew one of his nails nervously. He really wasn’t prepared for what he was about to face.

“No use delaying the inevitable.” The nurse pushed open the door and stepped aside to let Stan walk in. It took all his courage to take those few simple steps, and when he saw the circle of people waiting for him, he wished he hadn’t been able to muster up his bravery.

There was too many people.

There was too many people and they were all staring at him. Their eyes were like daggers and each glare sent a stab of pain and fear rushing through him. Why were they judging him? They had no right to. They were just as messed up as he was.

A man sitting amongst the circle of kids stood up and made his way across the room to Stan, hand outstretched. Stan gave it a look but made no offer to raise his own arm. The man took it in stride, smile softening.

“Hullo Stanley. My name is Robert. I’m a therapist here at the CPH. It’s nice to meet you.”

“Likewise.” Stan mumbled, not that it was. He was just being polite.

“Please, come join us.” He gestured to the circle, where a spare seat was situated next to his own. A kid with ugly coke bottle glasses sat on the other side. “Thank you, Patty.”

The nurse nodded and left, the door swinging shut behind her. Stan was happy to see her go. He was tired of her careful words and intense eyes. He let Robert lead him over to the circle and sat down in the chair, eyes instantly fixating on the floor. He didn’t want to make eye contact with anyone. He noticed that all the kids were wearing different variations of pale green clothes, probably a uniform. Soon Stan would truly join them, dressed in the same garb. For now, he stood out.

He wasn’t sure which one was better.

“Introductions.” Robert beamed. “Shall I start?”

Introductions were the worst. Everything was the worst. Stan wanted to die.
“My name is Robert. I’m thirty four. I’ve worked at the CPH for six years and I’ve been married to my wife for three. She’s pregnant at the moment. I like reading and tennis.”

It was so simple for Robert, so goddamn easy. He was happy, he was sane. He went home to a lovely wife in a perfect home every night. None of the kids had that luxury.

“We’ll start to my right.” Robert nodded at the teen sitting on the other side of him. “Leave our new friend for last.”

Stan didn’t know anyone here. There was no way they could be called friends.

The person sitting on Robert’s right was a young black boy, different to the one from the photo in Stan’s new room.

“The name’s Lucas.” He muttered. “I’m thirteen. I’ve been at the CPH for nearly a year now. I like biking.”

He was the mean one Patty had mentioned. He was top on the list of things Stan wanted to avoid at all costs.

They moved on to a few more people, obviously Lucas’s friends. There was a boy named Will, one called Dustin, another called Mike (who looked strangely like the kid sitting next to him minus the glasses) and a girl named Elle with a shaved head. Each seemed friendly enough, Stan supposed. But the group seemed to be divided, them against the people from Richie’s photos.

After Elle’s introduction was the red headed girl who’d been playing chess with the chubby boy in the photo.

“I’m Beverly. I’m thirteen. Been at the CPH for nearly two years. I like watching movies and designing clothes.” She popped a wad of bubblegum in her mouth and gave Stan a hard look, like she was daring him to speak.

“Beverly, no gum in sessions. You know the rules.” Robert’s voice was calm even though the look Beverly gave him could probably kill. She stamped over to the bin and spat out her gum, flouncing back. Stan didn’t want to get on her bad side either.

Next up was the chubby kid, eyes wide with admiration as he looked at Beverly. “My name is Ben. I’m twelve. I’ve been at the CPH for a year now. I like poetry.”

Richie (because process of elimination meant he had to be Richie), slumped in the seat next to Stan, laughed as though he was hearing new information.

“Hello.” The next person said. It was the black boy. His eyes were kind and Stan sort of felt himself relaxing. “I’m Mike.”

Another Mike. Well that wouldn’t be confusing.

“I’m thirteen. I’ve been here for just over a year. I like history and reading.”

That explained the photo of him surrounded by books. He’d seemed so comfortable amongst them, like there was nowhere else he’d rather be.

The cute boy had his turn next, brushing his hair out of his face as he spoke.

“Hi. I’m Buh-Buh-Bill. I’m thirteen. I’ve been at the huh-hospital for nearly two years. I like
writing.”

The stutter was interesting. He didn’t look like the kind of person who would. Of course, making assumptions was rude and Stan shouldn’t be so quick to make them, especially when he was so against people making them about him.

“Eddie Kaspbrak.” The tiny kid next to Bill said crisply as though they were at a job interview. The fannypack was situated neatly around his waist. “I’m thirteen. I’ve been at the CPH for just over a year and a half. I like cleaning.”

“Anything else?” Robert cut in, the question sounding more like a statement as though Eddie had no choice but to offer up something else.

“Craft.” Eddie said shortly, fiddling with the bead bracelet around his wrist.

Finally, it was Stan’s roommate Richie who got to make his introduction.

“Wassup. I’m Richie, thirteen. Been here for just about two years. I like jokes and your mum.”

Stan stared blankly at him. Eddie groaned and Ben gave a polite laugh. Across the room Mike (The Richie look alike one) snorted like this was a hilarious joke and Robert clapped his hands together for silence.

His roommate was a kid who liked ‘your mum’ jokes? Great. Just great.

“Your turn.” Robert said to Stan.

“Um…” Stan finally looked up from the floor. He kept his eyes unfocused, refusing to look at anybody. “My name’s Stan. I’m thirteen. I like…” He trailed off, shifting uncomfortably in his chair. “Bird watching I guess.”

Richie laughed again and Stan nearly shot a glare his way, restraining himself at the last moment. He didn’t want to get on anybody’s bad side. He had been viciously bullied for his entire schooling life and it was one of the reasons he’d reached for the razor in the first place. Yes, he was going to find a way to kill himself, so maybe it didn’t matter. But Stan was stuck here for now and he didn’t want to be bullied by kids like him. That was pathetic…right?

“Thank you Stan.” Robert gave Richie a mild look of warning.

Stan nodded awkwardly. He let his eyes drift back down to the floor, taking in the slippers everyone was wearing. Probably couldn’t have anything with laces, since you could hang yourself with the damn things if they were strong enough.

“Please treat Stan with the respect that you all treat each other with.” Robert said, his sentence cut off by a laugh. It was Richie, because apparently all he did was interrupt people.

“Like we actually treat each other with respect in here.” He snorted.

“Richie.” Eddie gave him a disapproving look.

“I expect you to act with decorum.” Robert’s voice was deceptively light. “Anyone who doesn’t has to face the consequences.”

“We’re all batshit insane.” Richie giggled. “Not like we can act with decorum.” He was putting on some kind of voice, a bad imitation of something Stan couldn’t place. He couldn’t believe he was
meant to room with a guy like this. The neatness of his space was deceptive. He was totally insane, just like he’d said!

“We don’t use our mental illnesses as an excuse for rude behaviour.” Robert said sternly.

“Sure boss.” Richie leant back in his chair. “Welcome to hell, Stanley.”

Stan couldn’t help it this time. He stared blankly at Richie, anger burning behind his eyes.

“He can actually look at us.” Richie crowed. “Guess he can get rid of that stick up his ass!”

“Ruh-Richie.” Bill folded his arms, looking cross. “That’s not how we wuh-wuh-welcome new people.”

“Just trying to make my new pal feel welcome.” Richie shrugged, turning back to Stan. “Whatever you do, don’t drop the soap in the showers or-”

“Beep, beep Richie.” Eddie snapped. Richie fell silently instantly, eyes clouding over as he turned away from Stan. It was such a sudden change, a literal off switch. Stan stored the phrase away in his mind for later use.

“Let’s all stay calm.” Robert jumped back in again. “We don’t need to scare Stan with hospital myths.”

“But he has to hear about the legend of Pennywise the evil clown.” Bev, who’d been fiddling with her hair, suddenly looked interested.

“No he doesn’t.” Robert sighed. “I don’t know how you guys even came up with that.”

“We could explain it.” Mike (book-a-holic one) offered, almost generously.

“I don’t know and I don’t ever plan to.” Robert corrected. “Come on, lunch time. Let’s get moving.”

Everyone begun to move, moving into little groups and chattering away like it was a normal day for them. Maybe it was. But for Stan, this was the weirdest day he’d ever lived through. It wasn’t one he’d even planned to live either. Everything was meant to be over by now.

“Stick with Richie.” Robert advised. “He has a loose tongue but he means well. He’s your roommate. He’ll look out for you.”

Stan looked up at Robert, strangely unnerved by his bright eyes. He glanced away and towards Richie and his friends. They were mucking around like they were at a school and not a hospital. He didn’t want to sit with them. He didn’t want to be an outsider amongst them.

“Coming Stan the Man?” Richie spun around, facing Stan even as he walked backwards.

Stan felt Robert give him a gentle push and he staggered forward, stumbling towards his roommate and his roommate’s friends. He remained silent as he trailed after them. He didn’t know where the dining room was and he wasn’t particularly hungry either but he had no choice but to follow. There were so many rules in a place like this. Stan felt as though there was a noose around his neck, tightening with each new rule to obey.

Each step forward was harder and harder. Stan didn’t want to keep walking. He didn’t want to do a lot of things. He had no choice but to though...no choice at all.
Stanley Uris makes some friends

Chapter Summary

The kids at the CPH are weird...but then, so is Stan.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The dining room was cheery and bright, with yellow walls and framed photos of flowers and beaches. It was probably better fit to be the dining room of a McDonalds but here it was in a psychiatric hospital. The tables (all two of them) were decked out with brightly coloured bottles of condiments and jugs of water and cordial. Stan was half surprised to find that there wasn’t vases of flowers or checkered table cloths. A window in the wall revealed a kitchen, where steaming plates of food were waiting to be handed out to the patients. It looked like there was only one choice but the slight annoyance that some might’ve felt didn’t even register in Stan.

“That’s our table.” Richie gestured at one of the two. “You can tell because of the knife indent from where Beverly stabbed the table once.”

She stabbed a table? Well maybe Stan should sit next to her then. The next thing she stabbed would hopefully be him and then everything would be over.

“We get our food first, then sit down.” Richie went on. “There’s special meals if you have any dietary requirements like Eds but the cooks should already know if you do so don’t worry about telling them.”

“I don’t have any.” Stam mumbled, before he remembered that he ate kosher food.

“Are you calling me Eds again?” Eddie cut in. “Because that’s not my fucking name.”

“Cute.” Richie beamed evilly, completely ignoring him. “Hurry up and get your special lunch before one of the cooks coughs on it.”

Eddie yelped and scurried away, clearly believing it was entirely possible that a professional cook would cough on food that was being served to people. Richie watched him go with a fond smile that seemed entirely out of character. Stan was struggling to get a good grasp of Richie’s character. He seemed all over the place and not in a cute and quirky sort of way. Sure, they were in a mental hospital but Richie’s eyes were alight with madness that the others didn’t seem to posses.

Lunch was served, sandwiches with a variety of fillings to be chosen from. Stan filled it with salad and cheese, ignoring the cold meats. He moved quickly over to the table where Richie was waiting, picking at the sandwich he’d put together. The others (being Bill, Beverly, Ben, Mike and Eddie) soon joined them with their own creations, tucking in at different paces. Stan found that he was actually starving but ate at a moderate pace as to avoid making a mess. He looked away from the others so that he couldn’t see the juices staining their fingers or the little bits of food littering the table. Those were things he couldn’t handle.

The group ate in silence, though table number two was having a quiet conversation. Stan picked up
something about Dungeons and Dragons before he lost interest in trying to eavesdrop. Stan finished the sandwich and sat back, tapping his finger against the table in timed intervals to keep himself calm. He could feel eyes on him and the tapping increased in speed.

“Tell us about yourself.” It was Richie who broke the silence. Stan had only known him for about an hour but he was already unsurprised that Richie would be the one to shatter any quiet moments.

“Please.” Ben chipped in. He had a pleasant face and something about him just screamed ‘you can trust me’. Still, Stan hesitated. He knew next to nothing about these people besides a few basic facts. They were strangers and he wanted to keep it that way.

“I don’t know you people.” He said flatly.

“That’s why you should tell us about yourself.” Mike smiled encouragingly. “So then we can.”

“I’m not going to be here very long so there’s really no point.” The finger picked up the pace once more.

“Well aren’t you just a ray of sunshine.” Beverly remarked sarcastically.

“Bev.” Bill shot her a look. Stan hated that he knew what those eyes were saying.

Be nice to the new kid. Be nice to the freak. Be nice because we have to. Don’t cause trouble because then we’ll get in trouble. Be nice to the Jewish faggot. Be nice until we don’t have to be.

Or at least that’s what he thought was being said. It wouldn’t be surprising if it was. Stanley was used to comments like that.

“Please.” Ben said again. “We can tell you stuff about us, if that makes it easier.”

“Why does this matter so much to you?” Stan asked. He was feeling flustered, trapped.

“You’re our new friend.” Bill said as though it was obvious. “You’re guh-gonna be here with us for a while. We should get to know you.”

“I’m getting out of here as soon as I can.” Stan insisted.

“This is a long term care facility.” Eddie recited almost primly. “If you’re sent here, it means you have a long path of recovery to look forward to.”

“Then I’m not meant to be here.” Stan’s breathing was picking up in pace.

“Nobody gets in here by mistake.” Richie rocked back and forth on his chair, dangerously so.

“Admit it Stanny boy. This is your home now.”

“Careful Richie. You’re gonna fall over again if you keep doing that.” Eddie said nervously.

“I’ll start.” Beverly said suddenly as though Stan had agreed to start sharing personal information. “My red hair is my natural colour.” Stan stared at her in confusion and she laughed. “We don’t expect you to start spilling your backstory, idiot. We wanna know little things. Favourite food or colour. That stuff. The kinda stuff you share when you’re making new friends.”

Stan looked down at his hands. How was he supposed to tell them that he’d never made friends before?

“Not many of us huh-here had made friends before we came here, bu-but we wuh-worked it out.”
Bill gave Stan a kind look, oblivious to the fact that Stan was mentally freaking out at the fact that he’d basically just read the suicidal boy’s mind.

“It can even be something obvious.” Mike shrugged.

“I...I...” Stan didn’t know what to say. What sort of things were there to say? He was an incredibly boring person, after all.

“Tell good ol’ Richie here what’s on your mind, darl.” Richie said in a horrible attempt to sound like a Jewish mother. Stan should have been offended but it sounded so much like his mum that he couldn’t help but giggle. Richie’s eyes lit up at the sound, like he’d just won a great victory.

“I like bird watching.” Stan repeated what he’d said earlier but no one laughed this time. “I guess I like the idea that there are things in this world that aren’t held down by gravity.”

“What about airplanes?” Richie said, probably just to be difficult.

“They’re just giant hunks of metal. Birds are alive and they’re free.” Stan tapped his finger a little slower. A flash of white peered out from his right sleeve. It was the bandage that the hospital had wrapped around the ugly gashes he’d cut into his own arm. He heard a sharp intake of breath from Bill and he looked up to see the others all staring at him. Well, to be more precise, his bandaged wrist.

Stan tugged his sleeve down quickly but the damage was done now. It wouldn’t be hard to work out what he’d done to get himself thrown into the hospital. Sure, there were others here that had probably done the same thing but for some reason, Stan felt alone in his pain.

“It’s alright.” Bill said awkwardly.

“Sorry.” Eddie chipped in.

Stan’s finger began to tap faster against the table, faster and faster. He couldn’t stop. Why did they have to see what had happened to him? He’d wanted it to stay hidden for as long as possible, maybe even forever.

“It doesn’t matter, Stan.” Beverly said kindly. “The reason you’re here doesn’t have to be a big reason. I have PTSD and anger issues. See? Easy.”

Maybe for her. It seemed to Stan that Beverly owned her mental illness, that she’d made it something that she could almost be proud of. She had no fear when it came to talking about herself. She and Stan could not be more opposite.

“All of us here understand what you’re going through.” Mike reached out as though he wanted to trap Stan’s hands against the table, but then thought better of it.

“You’re not special.” Richie said.

“What he means is, you’re no-not uh-alone.” Bill jumped in.

“He doesn’t think before he speaks.” Eddie muttered but his voice was fond and he smiled at Richie.

“Can we just forget about it.” Stan said abruptly, tugging his sleeve down even further.

“Of course.” Mike said. He begun to talk about a book he’d just read and Stan let the words wash over him, not really taking notice of what was being said, just listening to the comforting tone of the
Maybe things wouldn’t be too bad. Maybe this was the sort of place where he could be himself for just a bit longer, before he tried again.

And succeeded.

After lunch Stan had to go and meet his personal therapist that he’d have private sessions with. He was sort of glad that he hadn’t been stuck with Robert like some of the others apparently were. Seeing him too much didn’t sound like much fun to Stan. Instead, he had a lady in her mid forties, with lines around her eyes and black hair tied up in a bun.

“Callie Lapwood.” She introduced herself, shaking his hand a little too firmly and sending rivers of pain running up his arm. “You can address me however you see fit.”

“Um...Ms Lapwood?” Stan tried, grateful for the choice.

“Stanley.” She nodded. “Or do you prefer Stan?”

“Uh...either is fine.” Stan shifted in the chair. “What are we going to be doing today?”

“Just giving you a rundown of what our sessions together will entitle.” Ms Lapwood explained. “I don’t want to rush you into things. I’m going to be working out an official diagnosis as well.”

“I’ve already been diagnosed with OCD and depression.” Stan muttered.

“Of course.” Ms Lapwood said, though Stan could tell that she wasn’t going to take his words into account. “So, let’s start off slow. Stanley, you’re going to be a patient at the CPH for as long as we deem fit. When you’ve proven that you are no longer a danger to yourself, and we believe you can function properly in society, you will then be released. Understand?”

“Yeah.”

Stan didn’t plan on sticking around for long enough to be deemed a functioning member of society. As soon as he could, he was going to see through with his plan and everything would finally stop. But for now, he’d just agree with what they told him. It worked with his parents. It should work here too.

“Each of our sessions will focus on the problems you are experiencing and what we can do to fix them.” Ms Lapwood went on. “It is important that we figure out what solutions are of benefit to you and explore them deeply. Does that make sense?”

“Yes.”

“We can also just talk about whatever you want. Even in here I have a patient confidentiality. Unless I think that you are suddenly in danger, whatever you tell me never leaves this room.”

That was a relief. He didn’t want any of what he said in their few sessions somehow getting back to his parents.

“Anything else?” Stan’s eyes flickered up to the clock. Not even twenty minutes had passed but it felt like he’d been trapped in the office for hours.

“Our goal is to make your time here as comfortable and accommodating as possible. So if there is anything you are in need of, don’t hesitate to ask.”
“Of course.”

Stan couldn’t exactly vocalise what he wanted most in the world, without it instantly being seen as a danger to his life. He wanted to die, after all. It was such a simple request, and yet one that nobody could give him.

“Perhaps we could end the session with you telling me a bit of personal information.” Ms Lapwood suggested. Stan barely stopped himself from rolling his eyes. Why did everyone want to know things about him today? He wasn’t an interesting person.

“Um...I like birdwatching.” Stan fell back on his usual answer as though it were a crutch. Ms Lapwood didn’t seem like the kind of person to be happy with such a short answer, so he elaborated. “I have a bird book where I write down all the birds I’ve spotted. I like to remember them.”

“I’m afraid you won’t be able to do much of that in here.” Ms Lapwood didn’t sound the least bit sorry. “We don’t get outside much. Anything else?”

“That’s my only hobby, really.” Stan glanced at the clock again. “I read a bit, I guess.”

“I have this for you.” Ms Lapwood said suddenly, reaching into a draw in her desk and producing a simple spiral bound notebook with a pale yellow cover. “All of the patients here have one of these.” Stan took it from her. “What’s it for?”

“Documenting your thoughts. We find it helps if you have an outlet for the things you would otherwise internalise. You can choose whether you want to show me the book or not. People who have trouble verbalising their thoughts usually do, but we don’t force you to.” It was Ms Lapwood’s turn to look up at the clock. “Alright, I think we’ll call it a day. What times you have your private therapy sessions will be determined by me. Don’t worry about being in the wrong place. We’ll work things out.”

“Oh...thanks?” Stan gripped the book tightly to his chest, wishing it was his bird watching book. “Where should I go now?”

“Everyone should be in the rec room at the moment.” Ms Lapwood got up and opened the door for him. “Do you know where that is?”

“No.”

“I’m sure you’ll manage.”

Stan’s jaw dropped and then, she actually laughed.

“I’m joking. Follow me.”

The rec room turned out to be a large space filled with activities for people to do in order to cure their boredom during what was lazily called free time. A stack of board games were shoved haphazardly into a cupboard with missing doors. Stan spotted such titles as Monopoly and Cluedo. A large bookcase was jam-packed with paperback volumes just waiting to be read. Next to it was a smaller version that held DVDs. Stan itched to order the books and movies correctly, but he held himself back, continuing to look around.

A toy box was abandoned in the corner, lid shut tightly on whatever was inside. Next to it was a pristine rocking horse and a collection of hula hoops. A craft box was situated on a table, filled with
stickers and tissue paper and other decorative items. Pictures hung on the walls, probably drawn by the patients. One such drawing looked like Beverly, with bright red hair framing a soulful face. There was a television surrounded by squishy armchairs and comfy looking couches. That was where the other half of the patients sat, watching some sort of fantasy movie. They were the ones Stan knew nothing about. He was content to remain with Bill and the others, though. He didn’t want to keep making new ‘friends’.

“Over here!” Richie yelled for his attention. He and the others were at a table with a pack of cards, playing some sort of game that involved a notebook to keep score. “Stan the Man is back in the house!”

“Shut it trashmouth. We’re tryna watch a movie!” Lucas yelled over.

“Bite me!”

“Richie.” A supervising nurse said in a warning tone.

“Got it.” Richie gave a lazy salute.

In the time it had taken the exchange to happen, Stan had arrived at the table and Bill had pulled out a seat for him.

“How wuh-was the s-s-session?” Bill asked, fiddling with his cards.

“Alright.” Stan said shortly. “What are you guys playing?”

“Bastard!” Richie crowed at the same time that Ben answered “Up and down the river.”

“Let’s go with the later.” Mike fanned out his cards in front of his face, smiling around them.

“Wanna play?”

Stan had never heard of the game so he opted to just watch, giggling to himself when Beverly lunged across the table to steal Eddie’s cards because she thought he had the ace of trumps, or when Bill won all four tricks and nearly cried because he’d said that he’d get zero.

The sounds from the fantasy movie playing on the TV were faint in the background, helping to create a relaxing atmosphere. If all days were like this in the hospital, then maybe Stan could put up with it for a bit.

“And the winner is Ben.” Mike announced after the final round had been played. “By a total of eleven. And the loser is Bill.”

“Yes.” Ben cheered. “Your dessert is mine.”

“The loser has to give the winner their dessert as a prize.” Eddie explained to Stan while Ben gloated and Bill mourned.

“Why does there have to be a prize?” Stan asked. “Can’t you just play for fun?”

“A game is never fun unless you’re playing for something.” Beverly shrugged.

“The thrill of winning should be enough.” Stan argued.

“It’s never enough.” The girl said, almost sadly.

“Don’t you want to be with us, Stanley? Aren’t you happy? Haven’t we given you a good life?”
“I’m sorry mum. It’s just not enough. It’s never enough.”

Stan let the matter go, focusing instead on the argument between Eddie and Richie over what game to play next. Richie wanted to play Cheat but Eddie was insisting on Sevens. Bill stepped in to break it up and they played Go Fish instead. Stan actually knew how to play that so he joined in as well.

“We won’t play for dessert.” Beverly declared before they started. “Can’t have Stan losing his dessert on his first day. Instead...winner chooses the next game.”

It was agreed on with no one complaining at all.

Eddie won the game but before he could choose Sevens as the next game, the nurse stood up and called them all for dinner.

“Karma’s only a bitch if you are, my dear Eds.” Richie leant on Eddie’s shoulder.

“Stop fucking calling me that.” Eddie spat.

“Can you guys give it a break for one second.” Mike sighed.

“The sexual tension makes it impossible for them to stop.” Beverly giggled and sprinted up the corridor to avoid Richie.

Stan watched them go, wondering how they could act so normal in a place like the hospital. That was schoolyard behaviour, seen when the bell rung and kids were finally given the freedom they had craved throughout the lesson. This was the sort of place where you wouldn’t really see people having such a good time...right?

“Sometimes things feel normal.” Bill fell into step next to Stan. “Thuh-those are the buh-best times.”

Stan hummed thoughtfully, listening to Beverly’s laughter echo through the corridor. It sounded beautiful, he decided. A thing of beauty in a place like this.

How about that.

At dinner all of the patients were given little plastic containers will pills to take. Stan had one too, containing the usual medicine he took for his OCD. Bill had a heap of them which he swallowed quickly like he didn’t want to draw attention to himself. Beverly took hers as though she was downing shots, laughing like they were a big joke. Eddie seemed annoyed by the two small ones he had to take, though Stan wasn’t sure why. He wondered if it was appropriate to ask for the reasons behind the tablets, and decided it probably wasn’t. If the others had wanted him to know, they would’ve told him.

As they ate the carefully prepared lasagna, the other Mike appeared behind Richie, finger to his lips as he silently begged them all to stay silent. When it became clear that nobody was going to rat him out, he crept closer and jabbed his fingers into Richie’s neck, cackling loudly. Richie screamed and spun around, fork clasped in his fist as he jabbed blindly at his attacker.

Eddie collapsed in a fit of giggles which Mike (their Mike, not the other one) soon took up and then they were all laughing, except for Stan and Richie who was instead trying to tickle the nearly identical Mike into apologising.

“They look so similar.” Stan whispered to Bill when the laughter had died down. Bill laughed again, spraying food everywhere which had Stan wincing and reaching hastily for a serviette.
“They’re t-t-twins.” Bill explained, still giggling as though Stan was stupid for not working it out. “Grew up apart. They both ended up here for different reasons. Kinda suh-suh-sad when you think about it.”

“I guess.” Stan set his fork down and watched the twins shoot insults back and forth at each other. “Do they not get along?”

“I think they like to be able to be their own puh-person.” Bill gave Stan a cautious look. “Hence the different groups. They’re thick as thieves, really. They’ve juh-juh-just had a hard life.”

“Haven’t we all.” Stan closed his eyes briefly and the image of his crying father swam into clarity. He’d never seen his father cry before that night. And now he had, and it was all his fault.

Why couldn’t he have succeeded that night?

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Dinner came to a close and Stan and Richie headed back to their shared room. Bill and Eddie were roommates, as were Ben and Mike. Beverly roomed with Elle, other Mike with Will and Dustin and Lucas were the final pair. It all worked out so neatly now that Stan was there.

Or at least that’s what Richie told him.

Stan found that his suitcase had been returned to him while he’d been out and about. His shoes were missing his laces now, and a few other things were absent as well like his headphones and some toiletries. There was a few new articles of clothing as well that matched the pale green colour scheme that the other patients wore.

“Why do we even bring our own casual clothes if there’s a uniform?” Stan asked Richie as he unpacked the contents of his bag into the provided draws.

“Dunno.” Richie flopped down onto his bed and kicked his slippers off. “We can wear our own clothes on certain days. Guess that’s why.”

“ Weird.” Stan shut the draw and set his suitcase down at the end of the bed. He hadn’t really brought any personal belongings to decorate his space with, so he just set his book on birds on his bedside table and then rested the new journal on top of it. He noticed that Richie had a matching book sitting on his bedside table, in a worse condition than Stan’s.

“Where do we get changed for bed?” Stan asked. “I need to brush my teeth as well.”

“Communal bathroom.” Richie reached for a cube on his bedside table and began to fiddle with it. “They’ll come get us when it’s our turn. Gets too crowded otherwise, what with ten boys. Lucky Bev. She practically has it all to herself.”

Stan gathered up his pyjamas and remaining toiletries so that he was ready when the nurse came to fetch them. He was going to suggest that Richie do the same but before he could, there was a knock on the door and Patty entered.

“Ready boys?” She asked.

“Stan is.” Richie rolled off the bed and landed on his hands and knees, laughing a little.

“There’s a surprise.” Patty said dryly. “Hurry up or you won’t have any time to shower.”

Stan was eager to feel clean again and was slightly annoyed by how long it took for Richie to gather
his pyjamas (a large band shirt and boxers) and his toiletries. He didn’t think Patty was going to cut
down their shower time but he couldn’t be sure.

Richie finally got his shit together and they headed off to the communal boy’s bathroom which had
three showers, two toilet cubicles and a urinal. Richie dashed into one of the showers and slammed
the door shut, the water staring up almost instantly. Stan followed at a more sedate pace, locking
himself in and breathing in and out for at least a minute before he stripped and ducked under the
shower head. The bandages around his arms grew dark with the water and Stan eventually peeled
them off and hung them over one of the hooks. Now the scars were on full display to him. They
were angry, red things but he couldn’t look away.

He’d done that to himself.

“Hurry up please.” Patty called out at one stage.

Stan twisted the taps around and dried himself quickly, careful not to rub his scars too hard. He
dressed in his pyjamas (long cotton bottoms and a matching top) and shuffled out to the sinks so he
could brush his teeth and re-wrap his arms like he’d been taught to.

Before he could begin the process, Richie burst out of his shower, hair still wet and matted like a
dog, glasses dotted with drops of water. His eyes instantly flew to Stan’s arms and he froze. Stan felt
his cheeks heat up as he tried to hide them.

“Sorry.” Richie said, voice uncharacteristically soft. He folded his arms awkwardly and walked
hastily over to a sink two down from Stan’s.

When their teeth were clean, Patty led them back to their room.

“Dorm checks every two hours.” She said with the air of someone who’d said those words over and
over again. “Door will remain open tonight.”

She walked away to fetch Mike and Ben for their showers.

“We have dorm checks every two hours to make sure we haven’t tried to do anything to ourselves.”
Richie explained as he pulled his blankets back and propped his pillow up. “Mine used to be every
hour because there was only one of me but now that I have you, it’s the same as the others. The door
stays open if there are people in the room who are recently suicidal. AKA you.”

“What about you?”

FUCK!

Stan had not meant to say that. God, Richie was giving him the weirdest look right now. He
probably hated Stan for asking that. Talk about insensitive.

“Nah.” Richie said suddenly. “Not recently.”

And that was the end of that conversation. Later on, Stan would like awake and mull that answer
over in his head. So Richie had been suicidal? Was that how you got into the CMH? Being suicidal?

Richie hopped into bed, leant against his pillow and begun to write in his journal. Stan copied him,
realising that he should probably use the damn thing since Ms Lapwood had given it to him.

“What’s your therapist?” Richie asked before Stan had a chance to begin.
“Ms Lapwood.”

“Cool. I’ve got Robert.”

Stan nodded in acknowledgment and finally started to write.

*It’s my first day in here and so far, nothing has been too bad. I’m afraid that that’s going to change though. People like me don’t get to feel happy and safe. I’m sure something bad will eventually happen. I need to kill myself before that can happen.*

That was all he felt he needed to write. Putting the journal back on the bedside table, Stan lay down and closed his eyes. He could still hear Richie’s pen scratching away against paper.

He wondered what the boy’s deal was. He wondered what everyone’s deal was.

**End Day 1**

Chapter End Notes

Another chapter, woop! The third one is well on its way to being finished as well! I hope you guys like this one! Please leave a kudos or comment if you do!!!!!
Stanley Uris makes a mistake

Chapter Summary

Stan has made many mistakes in his life. He thinks this might be one of them.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Start Day 2

Stan woke up pretty early, if his internal clock was anything to go by. The rooms the kids slept in were hidden deep inside the hospital with no windows to let in the light of the sun or the glow of the moon. Still, Stan decided that he’d probably woken up around six, maybe a little later. The room was fairly dark, but the light from the outside corridor spilled in. The door was wide open, denying Richie and him any privacy. Stan had slept through the whole night, oblivious to the regular two hour check ups.

But he hadn’t slept well.

Nightmares had haunted him. All he could see was his mum crying, his dad leaving the room so that his family wouldn’t see him crumble. He could hear her screams, his yells. Whenever he tried to wake himself up, tear himself free, suddenly he was trapped in a room where Beverly’s laughter echoed through the walls and Bill tore his beloved bird book to shreds. Richie wrote hastily in his journal and held it up so Stan could see what he’d scrawled.

yfriewngfijogutbGETOUThdeifgojj

This was the sort of thing that Stan wanted to escape from.

Only the people who loved him the most, who’d said they’d do anything for him, were keeping him here.

Stan rolled over onto his back and stared up at the ceiling, trying to erase the dreams from his memory. His head hurt, it felt stuffed to the brim and impossible to clear. He could try writing in his journal, to get everything out, but it was too dark to see properly and he didn’t want to wake Richie up. Stan liked to be alone, especially when he felt this bad. He didn’t need someone trying to get in his way. He’d just have to suffer for now.

Footsteps echoed through the corridor, growing louder as someone approached his room. A shadow stretched up and outwards and the figure loomed into shape. It was Mike. Not Richie’s twin, the other one. Stan’s friend...sort of. He was walking as though in a daze, stumbling as he passed by the room. Stan watched him go, slightly confused. Was Mike...asleep?

Oh well. In a place like this, sleepwalking was probably a normal occurrence.

He heard the sounds of Mike walking away from them, further down the hall until there was no sign that he’d ever been there in the first place. Stan wasn’t sure if he should go tell a nurse that Mike was sleepwalking. The boy could hurt himself. But then again, why did Stan even care?
Because he’s different...because he cares. He’s nice.

Richie turned over in his sleep, smooshing his face into his pillow. A sliver of light from the corridor speared his face. Stan watched him breathe, face blank. Just who were these people? Why were they do desperate to care about him? He was nobody, nothing, compared to them.

They all seemed to be something.

“AHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH!”

Stan bolted upright at the sudden noise, hands instantly covering his head in a subconscious need to protect himself. He cowered there, whimpering as the scream went on and on and on. It didn’t waver, didn’t grow softer. It just kept going and going. Richie stirred, pushing himself up and glancing around blearily.

“What’s going on?” Stan said hoarsely.

Richie chuckled wearily. “Don’t worry. It’s just Elle.”

The girl with the shaved head. Stan hadn’t heard her speak at all yet bar the meager introduction she gave. Her name, age and then nothing else. Her dark eyes seemed to tell a story of horror and tragedy. He shuddered, surprised but also not surprised that she could let loose such an agonising sound. Richie flopped back down, closing his eyes and shoving his head under his pillow.

“Why are you acting like this is normal?” Stan was yet to remove his hands from his head.

“Cause it is.” Richie yawned from beneath the pillow. “If it’s not Elle, then it’s Will or Beverly or Mike. Or any of us really. Don’t tell me you’re a stranger to nightmares.”

“I’m not.” Stan’s mouth as dry. “I just…”

“Don’t ever wake up screaming, huh?”

“No.”

“Maybe one day.” Richie said flippantly like it was an achievement.

The screaming finally died out and an eerie silence followed it. Stan couldn’t even hear Richie’s breathing. Nobody had gone running to help Elle. Nobody had yelled out in shock or called for quiet. It was like nobody cared.

“Why aren’t you helping her?” Stan whispered.

“Nothing you can do when she gets like this.” Richie’s voice was as quiet as Stan’s. “Go back to sleep.”

Stan lay back down, but he didn’t do as Richie had said. Instead, he stared at the ceiling and tried his hardest not to cry.

They got woken up at seven thirty, if Patty was to be trusted. She’d come into their room to get Richie up, since Stan was already wide awake. He’d had watched her from his bed and asked what the time was.
“Seven thirty.” She’d answered. “That’s normal wake up time for every day except weekends. You get an extra hour of sleep then.”

Stan had gotten dressed and waited for Richie to do the same and then they’d headed down to the dining room for breakfast. Nobody looked like they’d slept well and conversation was stilted. Stan had hundreds of questions buzzing on his tongue but he asked none of them. He just ate his yogurt and fruit in silence. He was pretty good at reading the mood in a room. If it felt like nobody wanted to talk, then Stan certainly wasn’t going to.

As he ate, he observed the others. He noticed that Ben wasn’t eating at all, instead picking at his nails with a sort of frenzied focus that reminded Stan of some of his OCD episodes. Beverly seemed to have noticed as well, reaching out to grab one of Ben’s hands. The two shared a smile and Stan got the feeling he’d intruded on something personal. Eddie and Richie were sharing a plate of toast, giving each other looks when they thought the others wasn’t watching. Stan had seen these kind of looks on their faces yesterday as well. They seemed completely besotted with each other. Were they...dating? Should Stan care if they were?

Mike and Bill were focusing entirely on their food and not much else.

“What’s the schedule for today?” Ben broke the silence to ask an unfamiliar nurse who was supervising them.

“Group therapy, school and private sessions for some of you.” The nurse replied. “You’ll have to wait and find out who.”

“School?” Stan looked to Bill whom he’d decided was the sort of leader of the group.

“School never stuh-stops, even in a puh-puh-place like this.” Bill’s lips tweaked into a weak grin.

“Why?”

“They don’t want us to guh-go back into society only to have fuh-fuh-fallen behind in the years we’ve been in here.” Bill explained. “It’s a whole other wuh-wuh-wuh...world in here.”

“School sucks.” Richie chimed in.

“And yet you continue to get perfect grades.” Eddie sighed. “Do you know how annoying that is?”

“Really annoying.” Mike said, though his tone told the truth. He didn’t mean it.

Stan was the kind of person to get confused between friendly insults and serious verbal barbs. It probably had to do with the fact that he’d never had any friends to help him work out the difference. Maybe if he got to know these guys better he’d be able to start throwing his own little quips and laughing off the ones directed at him.

Or not, since Stan didn’t plan on sticking around.

So you keep saying...and yet you’re still here? Are you a coward? Pathetic.

There wasn’t any immediate means of ending it all in the hospital. He just had to sit tight and wait for one to come to him. For now, he would just try and fake his way through all the therapy.

“Hurry it up now.” The nurse clapped his hands together lightly. “Robert is waiting for you all.”

They cleared the plates and trooped off to the room where group therapy was held. Stan had no idea
what usually happened in group therapy since he’d only had one session that had involved introductions, but he knew he certainly wasn’t looking forward to it.

He wondered if he should ask Bill about it but couldn’t find the words to do so. He trailed after the group, head down as he conjured up all sorts of horrifying ideas of what group therapy would consist of. What if he had to tell them his deepest and darkest fears?

Yeah, no. Not happening. If there was one thing Stan hated, it was talking about himself like his own thoughts and feelings actually mattered or something.

When they reached the room, Robert was waiting for them with some sort of inflatable ball by his feet. Did group therapy involve playing ‘don’t let the balloon/ball hit the ground’ or was it there for another reason? Whatever it was, Stan didn’t want to play any part in it.

“Sit down, sit down.” Robert said as they filed in. “Wanna mix it up today? Sit next to different people?”

Nobody listened to Robert.

Stan ended up between Bill and Richie, staring across the circle at Lucas and Dustin. He accidentally locked eyes with the aggressive boy who glared at him angrily. Stan looked away quickly. Lucas didn’t look like someone he wanted to mess with. Patty had said that he didn’t get along with people and that it had to do with his mental illness.

But Robert had also said that they couldn’t use their mental illnesses as excuses for their behaviour. It was kind of confusing. Mental illnesses changed people’s behaviour and sometimes they couldn’t help it.

Or maybe he’d just wanted to get Richie to shut up. That sounded plausible.

“Alright, today is going to be another introductions day of sorts. I’m sure Stan wants to get to know you all better.”

Debatable.

“So I brought in this.” Robert picked up the ball. Stan saw that it was covered in little shapes with writing inside them. He couldn’t make out what the text was, but he was sure Robert was going to waste no time telling them.

“Not the questions ball.” Beverly groaned. Stan peered closer at the ball. They were questions? And he had to answer them?

“For those who don’t know.” Robert gave Beverly a look. “The question ball is covered in lots of little fun questions. We toss the ball around, gently of course, and the question that your right thumb lands on is the one you answer. Simple, yes?”

Unfortunately, yes.

Robert tossed the ball to Stan who fumbled with it. He found the question that his right thumb was pressed against and read it out.

“What is your favourite holiday? Uh…” Not any, really. Stan was Jewish but he didn’t exactly uphold his religion as much as his parents might’ve liked. “My birthday is always nice, I guess.”

He threw it randomly, trusting that someone would catch it.
It ended up in Elle’s hands. She stared at her question blankly, like she couldn’t read it. Then she handed it to Mike who was sitting next to her, sending a fierce glare in Robert’s direction like she was daring him to protest.

“Maybe next time.” Robert said easily.

“Who is your favourite family member?” Mike read aloud. He grinned across the circle at Richie. “My twin bro.”

“Nancy’s gonna be shattered.” Richie shot back, but he was grinning too. Mike tossed the ball to Mike, and god it was just so confusing having two Mikes.

“Favourite animal.” Mike hummed a little. “Can I say all of them?”

“Mike’s family owns a farm.” Richie whispered in Stan’s ear. “And he’s vegetarian. Total animal nerd. Wants to be a vet.”

“Cool.” Stan said, taking a closer look at the boy he’d seen sleepwalking past his room earlier that morning. Even with his dark skin you could see the bags under his eyes. But his smile was warm and his voice was kind. He didn’t seem like the kind of person who’d try to burden others with his problems. He was nice to Stan, and Stan hadn’t really ever had people his age be nice to him.

“How about top five?” Robert was trying to compromise with Mike.

“Still can’t choose.” Mike said and everyone laughed, even Stan a little. It was such a surprise to him to feel laughter bubbling up in him in a place like this. Maybe it was going to help him.

Do you want to die, or not? Make up your mind already!

Mike threw the ball to Will who clutched it tightly to his chest as he located the questions he’d have to answer, which asked him what his favourite season was.

“Summer.” Will decided. “The heat is nice...I don’t like the cold.” He shivered as though saying the word had brought upon the feeling and quickly tossed the ball over to Ben.

“Say the first word that comes into your mind. Um...baloney!”

“Say that one again, Haystack. I don’t think Australia heard you.” Richie snickered.

“I panicked, alright.” Ben blushed and bounced the ball off his palm in Dustin’s direction. Stan hadn’t really been paying much attention to the other group of the hospital but now he saw that Dustin made a lot of odd, jerky movements like he had two people inside his body fighting for the controls. He clicked his tongue as he read his question.

“Favourite food. Pizza.” He grinned, revealing a gap where his two front teeth should be and went to throw the ball. His hands jerked as he did and it fell to the floor. “Shit!”

“Language, Dustin.” Robert frowned. “We’ve been over this.”

“Sorry.” Dustin didn’t seem bothered by the scolding. He picked up the ball and threw it in Beverly’s direction. She frowned at the little shape her right thumb was pressed to.

“Best childhood memory.” Her voice was tight and Stan could feel the tension suddenly rise in the room. He begun to tap his finger in timed intervals in an attempt to calm himself down. He didn’t
know much about Beverly and yet somehow he knew this was the worst possible question she could have gotten.

Beverly dug her fingers into the ball, hands trembling with the effort. She opened her mouth but no sound came out. Eddie’s breathing picked up in pace as he reached out with a trembling hand to try and reassure her. She shrugged him off, grip tightening.

“Choose a different one.” Bill said quickly.

It was too late. Beverly dug her fingers in harder and-

BANG!

The ball popped.

Eddie screamed and toppled backwards in his chair. He hit the floor hard and begun to cry. Richie was out of his chair in second and at his side, trying to calm him. Elle was on her feet, crouched down low in front of her friends. Her teeth were bared as she growled at the popped remains of the ball like she was some sort of feral animal. Lucas had a fist raised like he was about to punch somebody. Mike had frozen in his chair. The calloused fingers he used to turn the pages of his beloved history books were twisted in his shirt.

Stan too, had frozen. In his mind, all he could see was the ball popping over and over and over again. A perfect sphere...crushed. For a second the image twisted in his mind and Beverly was holding a world in her hands. Stan’s world. She looked up and grinned at him and then squeezed. The world exploded.

Stan’s world exploded.

*Good...that’s what you want. Burn yourself to the ground. Strike a match on your bones and use your gasoline blood to set yourself alight!*

The next thing Stan knew, he was on the floor, vision blurring. He felt dizzy, sick even. He could hear the faint sounds of people talking but he couldn’t make out the exact words. He reached out with a trembling hand, searching for some way to ground himself.

His fingers closed on air at first, and then another hand slipped into his and held tight. Stan nearly pulled away but when he tried to, the grip tightened. He had no choice but to grasp onto whoever was holding him and try to piece his world back together. The dizzy feeling was starting to fade...or at least he thought it was. He tried to tell himself it wasn’t because of the person holding tightly to him.

Slowly, the sounds that had seemed so faint and jumbled came back into focus.

“Stan, can you hear me? Are you alright? Just keep breathing like that, yes, good.”

“Is he alright?”

“Stay back! Don’t crowd him.”

Stan frowned at the idea of being crowded in. Were there people in his space? That was not good. He once more tried to pull his hand free but once more he couldn’t. He blinked rapidly, trying to clear his swirling vision so he could see who had a hold on him.

“Keep breathing Stan.”
The voices were clearer now.

“I said get back!”

“Yeah…” Stan whispered to himself. “Stay back.”

“Oh good, you can hear us.”

“Mm…”

Stan looked down and saw his hand intertwined with another. He followed the arm up to a chest and then a face and saw Bill. He wore a worried expression but it cleared when his eyes met Stan’s.

“You uh-uh-alright?” Bill asked, giving Stan’s hand a gentle squeeze.

“I think so.” Stan realised he was lying down and tried to sit up. The room spun again and he nearly lost his breakfast.

“Take it easy kiddo.” That was Robert speaking now. He sounded calm enough, considering what had just happened.

Wait...what had happened?

“What happened?” Stan echoed his thoughts.

“You kind of just collapsed.” Bill finally let go of Stan’s hand and even though Stan had tried to free himself previously, he found himself wanting to chase after the warmth Bill had provided. “After the ball popped. It scuh-scuh-scared all of us but you were really fuh-freaked out.”

“I’m sorry.”

Stan looked behind Bill and saw the patients gathered in a group, held back by a couple of nurses. Beverly was the one who had spoken, eyes red with unshed tears and looking truly regretful.

“I didn’t mean to pop the ball.” She took a step forward but a nurse gently pushed her back.

“It’s okay.” Stan said awkwardly, unsure if what he was saying was the truth or a lie. Or maybe something in between. Either way, he didn’t want Beverly to be upset over something stupid that he’d done.

“I just get so angry sometimes. I can’t help it.” She pressed on. “Please don’t be mad at me.”

“I’m not.” Stan said and he knew that was the truth.

“Let’s get you out of here.” Robert crammed himself into Stan’s personal space and helped the boy to his feet. “Go join the others, Bill.”

_No! Stay!_

Too late. Bill did as he was told, slipping in between Mike and Richie. The former pulled Bill into a hug. Bill returned it gratefully. Stan suddenly wanted to be hugged so bad it hurt. He’d never been a touchy person, but now he wanted the comfort that came with being wrapped in a secure grip.

_I don’t understand…_

Robert lead Stan out of the room and down the hallway.
“Where are we going?” Stan asked.

“The infirmary.” Robert answered. “We need to check you for any head injuries. You whacked your head pretty hard when you fell over.”

Now that Robert had brought it up, Stan was aware of the throbbing pain that wracked his head and more alarmingly, his skull. He swayed on his feet and stumbled, only managing to avoid falling over thanks to Robert’s grip on him. He didn’t like the way Robert was holding onto him. There was a difference between a warm hug and an icy hold.

“Sorry.” Stan muttered, for no reason at all really.

“Don’t apologise for things you can’t help.” Robert stopped outside a door and knocked on it with his foot. It swung open and Stan was greeted with yet another stranger with slightly greying hair twisted into an elegant french braid. She met Robert halfway and helped Stan inside. The room he was taken into smelt familiar, the air tinged with the smell of antiseptic wipes and hand sanitizer.

It smelt like Stan’s bedroom at home,

“Stan, meet Margaret. She’s a doctor who treats you all for any physical injuries you may get while living here.”

“Nice to meet you m’am.” Stan mumbled politely.

“Come sit up on the bed and I’ll give ya a look over.” The woman said cheerily. “Bumped your noggin, huh?”

“Yeah.” Stan let her help him up onto the offered bed. It was only his second day in the place and he had already been injured. Why couldn’t he have knocked himself out and never woken up? Being in this place made him feel...dirty.

Like a failure.

He was stupid, ugly, horrible. He was dirty, tainted.

The words rushed through Stan’s head at an alarming pace. He couldn’t slow it down at all. And as the words picked up the pace, the self-hatred and fear for the unknown oozed into his blood and flooded his entire body.


Pathetic!

As Margaret fluttered around, Stan thought of the things he had in his room. What could he use to stop these thoughts? Nothing dangerous allowed...except...the spiral bound notebooks. The pens. He could do something with those, right? They were no razor but they’d do in a pinch. He’d probably be sent back to his room to rest once he’d been given the all clear. He’d have enough privacy to set about ending his life.

“Feeling alright?” Margaret asked.


Sure enough, Stan was instructed to go back to his room and lie down until dinner. Margaret had declared him concussion free but said she didn’t want him aggravating the injury by thinking too
hard in school or working himself up in private therapy. He’d been told a nurse would check up on him every hour or so, which Stan had decided was plenty of time to put his plan into action.

He settled himself down in the bed and flicked the lights off. He pulled the covers up to his chin and turned around so that he had his back to the door. It gave the illusion of sleep, when in fact, Stan was fiddling with the various items he’d assembled.

He had his spiral bound notebook, and Richie’s. He wasn’t going to read it of course, just grab the sharp wire from it. He had the pens as well. He could use the sharp caps and the tubing and pointed tip to hurt himself.

What a stupid place, giving them tools to hurt himself that they’d thought would be helpful for recovery. Stan was a little surprised that it hadn’t occurred to anyone else in the hospital to use the books and pens. A lot of them were suicidal, right?

Or maybe if you stayed in this place long enough, you stopped feeling so shit and you started to believe that there was a future out there for you. If Stan just did as he’d been told and took a nap, and then kept going through the motions each day, would he eventually feel the same way. That was such a terrifying thought. What if something happened to make him dirty, when he was in the kind of head space that wouldn’t let him harm himself?

Stan wanted to die clean, he didn’t want to live and risk getting dirty.

It was now or never.

Stan tugged frantically at the spiraled wire in the books, pulling on the one in his it until his fingers were slick with blood from the little cuts he’d gotten. The paper was spotted with red dots and his sheets were in a similar shape. He wiped the blood off on his shirt and moved to take Richie’s. As he fiddled with it, the book fell open, revealing one of the earlier pages, covered in messy handwriting.

It was an accident, really. And yet Stan couldn’t look away from what was written there.

*Today fucking sucked. Like, this is no hyperbole or whatever that word is that they taught us in English which means exaggerating just to be dramatic. It’s not that! This was the worst fucking day of my whole life and yet I’m still hanging around because they won’t let me kick the bucket. Fuck. Why can’t this just be over? I have to find some way to end it all. I have to! Before it’s too late! Before it hurts too much! I don’t want it to hurt. I’m scared. I’m so fucking scared.*

Stan tried to shut the book hastily but his bloody fingers slipped and he ended up on another page. He kept telling himself he didn’t mean to and that it was an accident and yet he started reading it anyway, squinting in the bad light.

*Good day. No...better day. Still sucks...but I think I’m glad I’ve stuck around.*

Stan slammed the book shut abruptly and sat there, breathing in and out to stop himself from hyperventilating. He didn’t know what to do, to say, to think. This was Richie? This was what his roommate was really like? This was the side that he didn’t want anyone to see or know about? How...horrible.

*The door stays open if there are people in the room who are recently suicidal. AKA you.*

“What about you?”

“Nah. Not recently.”
Well good for Richie. He was turning his life around, getting better. He’d kept on living when he hadn’t wanted to, and now he did. He seemed happy in the sessions. A little deranged, sure. But happy. Great. Fantastic. Wonderful.

Stan felt tears sting his eyes and he bit into his lip so hard he could taste blood.

Dirty...disgusting...pathetic.

Stan threw the covers off and stared down at himself. Bloodstained clothes, cuts littering his fingertips. Messy hair and a tear stained face. This was the kind of person you looked at and felt pity for, or even fear and disgust.

Stan felt all of that inside him, directed at himself. He was a mess.

He climbed out of the bed and stumbled towards the door.

No! NO! Don’t you want to die! Stan! Stanley! Die Stanley Uris! DIE!

Richie had gotten help. So maybe he should too.

Chapter End Notes

Back again with another chapter! Chapter 4 is done too. Fixed a few lil mistakes in the last chapters, just spelling and such so nothing big.

I really appreciate the comments you are all leaving. I read and treasure them all. I just don’t reply cause I always feel like I’m beefing up my comments or something...sorry I'm a little anxious like that. I take all of them into account though, and all the help you are giving is amazing!!!!!!

Please continue to support me if you like this chapter! (Thanks to TryingtobeHelpful for giving me the idea)
Stan stopped before things went too far. So...what now?

Patty had screamed when she’d come across Stan standing in the hallway, staring down at his bloody fingers in a sort of dazed shock.

“What did you do?” She’d screamed. “What happened?”

“I did it to myself.” Stan had replied. “And I think...I think I shouldn’t have.”

I don’t know...

Now he was back in the infirmary getting bandaged up. He’d been told nurses had been to his and Richie’s room to confiscate the books and everyone else’s as well since he’d proved that they could be used as tools for self harm.

“What about everyone’s writing?” Stan remembered asking as Patty explained what was going on. Even through his confusion, he thought it was important to know. He didn’t want to be the reason everyone lost their personal anecdotes.

“We’ll give it back to them in folders or something.”

That was the last thing Patty had said to him before she’d left to go tell Robert or something.

“Alright there, Stan?” Margaret asked as she wrapped bandaids around his fingers.

“Yeah. Fine.”

“Not really.” Stan replied, staring down at the bloody fingerprints on his patient uniform.

“We’re real proud of ya. It’s so brave of you to go get help before you went too far.” Margaret finished her work and gave his fingers a light slap as if to say ‘there, all done.’

“You shouldn’t be.” Stan said dully. The truth was, he was disgusted in himself, for more reasons than one. Part of him hated the fact that he’d hurt himself. The other part was furious that he hadn’t gone further.

Stan wasn’t sure which side to listen to.

“Aw sweetie, don’t be like that. Takes a lotta courage to stop yourself. We’re glad you did.”

“I don’t know if I am.” Stan whispered. Margaret chuckled.

“That’s why we’re here. To show ya that you can be glad.”
Stan looked away.

“Listen, your doc is coming to getcha. You need to have chat. That okay?” Margaret rattled around in one of the cupboards.

“Would it change anything if it wasn’t?”

He didn’t get an answer.

They waited in silence until Ms Lapwood arrived with a look on her face that Stan could not read for the life of him. She raised an eyebrow when he stood up to greet her.

“Two trips here in one day.” She remarked. “Are you trying to set a record, Stanley?”

“I’m sorry.” Stan whispered. The look on her face softened.

“Let’s head over to my office so we can have a much needed talk.” Ms Lapwood moved back to the door, waiting for him to join her. Stan risked a look at Margaret who nodded for him to follow. Ms Lapwood by now, was moving down the hallway away from him. He hurried to catch up, following all the way to her office and sitting down in the offered chair. She sat down behind her desk and surveyed him.

“Let’s talk.”

Stan pressed his fingertips together nervously, enjoying the slight sting of pain. He was allowed to, alright. He was in turmoil right now and it helped to ground him. He wasn’t sure what he wanted, what he wanted to do with his life.

End it, or prolong it?

He was so confused.

The tears that had been slowly building up and occasionally falling all day suddenly burst out of him all at once. He put his head in his hands and sobbed bitterly. His body shook with the effort of releasing all the stress and pain at once. He knew Ms Lapwood was probably judging him but he couldn’t dredge up the usual prickly feeling he got when he knew people were watching him. He hurt too much.

It seemed to take forever for the tears to dry up but not once did Stan’s therapist speak or interrupt him. Stan was allowed to just sit and cry as much as he wanted to. It was sort of cleansing in a way. When he finally stopped and looked up, he felt much lighter, though his thoughts were just as scattered. Ms Lapwood smiled at him over the top of the desk.

“Feel better?” She asked.

“Sort of...I dunno.” Stan rubbed at his eyes furiously.

“Crying can be a good outlet for pain. I understand that yours is too big to solve with just a few tears but I’m glad it’s helped you, at least temporarily.” Ms Lapwood handed him a box of tissues. Stan accepted them gratefully and wiped his face and hands. He felt so clogged up, even though he also felt lighter. His head ached, which was probably to do crying for roughly ten minutes as much as it had to do with collapsing and hitting the damn thing earlier.

Ms Lapwood handed over a bin as well for Stan to discard his tissues in, before he even had to ask. It was like she knew he’d already begun the internal panic of what to do with his rubbish. It was like
she could tell his fear of being dirty was amplified when he was distressed. Then again, she was a therapist. They were good at reading people. They had to be.

“Talk to me Stanley. I can’t help you if you don’t. There is a lot to know from your body language alone but it’s not enough.” Ms Lapwood pressed him.

Stan hesitated, wondering if he had the words to explain what he was feeling.

“It’s just so confusing.” He looked down at his feet, tapping the left one in a pattern he decided felt right. “I was going to try and do it again. And then I went to get help because I suddenly didn’t want to. But now I’m not so sure that I should’ve gone for help.”

“It’s alright to be confused.” Ms Lapwood said gently. “That’s why this place exists. To help you get everything under control.”

“But what if you can’t help me? Everything is so messed up.” Stan’s hands were trembling. “I’m so messed up.”

“Stanley, your mental illness does not make you a bad person.” Ms Lapwood said soothingly.

“Yes it does!” Stan burst out. “I’ve hurt so many people because of the things I’ve done. My mum and dad mostly. They’re so stressed out about me now. All they can do is cry and wonder what they did wrong. They didn’t do anything wrong! It’s all my fault. I shouldn’t make my parents cry like that. I’m a terrible son.”

“Stanley, your mental illness does not make you a bad person but it does persuade you to do things that don’t sit well with many people. But the thing is, we can help you.”

“Fix me?”

“Not fix.” Ms Lapwood said. “You’re not broken, Stanley. You’re just sick but in a different way. Depression and OCD aren’t like the common cold. We can’t completely get rid of them. But we can help them be manageable. They don’t have to control your life like they’re doing now.”

“How? I take medication for my OCD and it didn’t help.” Stan started to pick meticulously at the band aids on his fingers.

“Stanley, please, stop that.” Ms Lapwood was keeping her voice gentle but to Stan, it almost sounded like nails running up a chalkboard. She was being so soft and yet it was rubbing him the wrong way.

“Nothing has helped.” Stan muttered.

“Medication doesn’t always help. You might have had the wrong dose or type of medicine. And medication usually needs to be used alongside therapy. I read that you weren’t having frequent sessions.”

“No…”

“There are so many ways we can help you.” Ms Lapwood picked up a pen and began to write something down. “If you had killed yourself, then we would never have the chance to try them. But now we can. Stanley, you did such a good job today. Coming to us proves to us that you do want help. And we are so happy to give you that.”

“I don’t deserve it.” Stan whispered.
“Never tell yourself that Stan. If there is even the slightest chance that someone can be helped, we give them that help. You have proven that we can help you. So let us do that.”

“How?”

“By accepting what we tell you. Let us guide you and teach you. Of course, you have to put in work as well but you’re not in this alone. Not anymore.”

Stan thought back to his parents crying over him in the hospital bed. He remembered how happy they’d been when he’d woken up, and how they’d told him that as long as they were alive, they were going to keep him the same way. Then he thought of the new people he’d met yesterday, and how worried they’d been when he’d collapsed earlier. He thought of Bill’s hand holding tightly to his.

“I was never alone.” Stan smiled wistfully. “I just didn’t realise it.”

“Nightly checkups are now once every hour again.” Patty said as she led Stan back to his room after his therapy sessions with Ms Lapwood. He had a new notebook, held together like novels were and not spiral bound. Instead of a pen, he had a felt tip marker to use. Everyone was going to be given the same stationary. There was not allowed to be any way for them to harm themselves unless they got really creative.

Are you creative enough, Stan? Do you want to die? Stan?

“And we have to tell Richie what happened so that he can be aware of your actions as well.” Patty continued. “We take privacy seriously in here of course, but your life is more important. Is that alright?”

“Would it change anything if it wasn’t?”

“Yeah, that’s fine.” Stan said. From the current information he had about the boy, it seemed that Richie could understand and relate to what he was going through.

“He’ll come back here after school is over. You two can chat.”

“I have to tell him?” Stan stopped walking. Suddenly his acceptance of letting Richie what was going on seemed to drain away. “I can’t, what do I say?”

“It’s all part of your recovery process.” Patty explained. “You need to get a feel for saying these things yourself.”

“I’ve never had to before.” Stan twisted his fingers together. There was a faint buzzing in his ears.

“Richie is someone who’ll understand. He won’t judge.” Patty said. “You’ll be fine.”

“I don’t know.”

So why not kill yourself first?

“Trust us. This is a good idea. It works.” They stopped outside Stan’s room. He peered inside and saw that his bed had been made up with clean sheets. That was a relief. He hadn’t minded when he’d been in a bad state of mind, but he didn’t want to lie down in blood now.

And also, Richie was sitting on his bed.
“Shit.” Stan cursed in shock.

“Richie, you’re meant to be in school.” Patty said disapprovingly. “You know you’re not allowed to be alone in a room if we don’t know you’re there.”

“I only just got here.” Richie smiled but it felt strained. His face was white and he was fiddling with one of his many cubes that littered his space. “Wanted to have a chat to Stan the Man as soon as possible.”

Patty furrowed her eyebrows but moved on. “Checks are down to one an hour again.”

“Yup, sounds fair.” Richie popped the ‘p’ cheerily. “Don’t you worry girlie. I’ll keep good old Stan safe and sound.”

“Enough with the British accents.” Patty groaned but there was laughter in her voice. “We’ll come get you for dinner.”

Stan had missed lunch but he wasn’t hungry anyway.

“Sounds good.” Richie waved as she left, and then turned back to Stan, still standing in the doorway. “Come on, sit down. I’m not gonna bite you.”

Stan did as he’d been told, slinking over to his own bed and perching on the edge. He drew his knees up to his chest and rested his head on them.

“You could’ve sat next to me.” Richie said.

“I’m fine just here.” Stan shot back. Richie shrugged.

“Suit yourself.”

“So I have to tell you what happened today.” Stan said miserably. “So that you can help me.”

“Yeah, sounds about right.” Richie shifted around until he’d deemed his position comfortable. “Roommate duties are very serious in a place like this. They’re are super duper close. Kinda been lonely for me since I haven’t ever had one.”

“Well, you have me now.” Stan tried not to put any emotion into his voice, just stating a fact, but Richie perked up.

“Yeah!” He bounced a bit and kicked his legs a bit. “So talk to me Stan. I’m all ears.”

For once. This boy never shuts up, but you’ve made him. Wow Stan. Silencing a boy who needs to talk. Good job.

“Um…” Stan looked down at his bandaged fingers. “Maybe I should just show you.” He held out his hands for Richie to see.

“Oh.” Richie leant forward. “How’d you do that?”

“The spirals from the notebooks.” Stan almost laughed despairingly. “I was so desperate for a way to hurt myself. In fact, I was going to kill myself...and then suddenly I couldn’t.”

“That explains that folder with my old journal pages in it, plus the new notebook.” Richie said, almost to himself. “So you took mine too?”
“I’m sorry.” Stan said glumly.

“No, no, it’s fine.” Richie said hastily. “I’m not blaming you. I know what it’s like to be desperate for a way to make things stop for just a bit. I don’t mind, honestly. It’s just a cheap book. No harm done...not to me anyway.”

“Yes there was.” Stan whispered.

“What do you mean?” Richie’s voice sounded alarmed. “What happened to me?”

“I didn’t mean to.” Stan shook his head, knowing that he had to own up to his mistake. “I didn’t mean to read a few of the pages.”

Richie stiffened up instantly. “Yuh-you saw a few pages?”

“Yeah. I didn’t mean to.” Stan repeated. “And I didn’t read much, I swear. But what I did read...I think it helped me to stop myself from going any further.”

Richie adjusted his glasses on his face and pursed his lips. He drummed his fingers on his legs at a rapid pace. Stan waited anxiously for the reaction, positive that it would be a negative one.

“My writing is private.” He said finally. “I don’t like to show anyone. But...if it helped you stay alive, then I’m glad you read it.”

Stan could only stare at Richie. Was he serious?

“You don’t even know me. How can you be okay with me invading your privacy like that?”

“I mean sure, it sucks. I have a reputation to keep up. I’m trashmouth Tozier, not gloomy guts...uh...guy! But you’re alive Stan. And that’s way better than a stinking reputation.” Richie said earnestly. “Just don’t go telling anybody what you read and we’re good. I know we’ve only known each other for like two days, but we look out for each other in here, all right?”

“Yeah.” Stan said, and he meant it this time. No more wondering if things would change if he didn’t mean it. It was alright. It was!

Sure, he wasn’t alright. But he was going to get there one day.

*Are you sure about that? Stanley? Sure you want to get better? Die clean, right? RIGHT?*

Stan pushed his internal thoughts away for the moment, and focused instead on Richie.

“How did you do it?” He asked. “Stop wanting to die?”

Richie’s shoulders shot up as he retreated in on himself, clearly uncomfortable with the question. Stan had gone a step too far.

“Another time, Stan the Man.” Richie chewed his lip nervously. “When you’re in a better headspace.”

“Who are you, my therapist?”

Oops...was it too soon to start doing that thing where you threw barbs at your friends?

“Yup.” Richie beamed and Stan knew everything was alright. “Just call me Doctor Tozier.”
“Never.”

“Say it!”

Stan felt the laughter bubble up inside of him and a wide smile broke out across his face to match Richie’s. He’d made a connection. There was no doubt in his mind about it.

Richie was his friend.

The two roommates spent the rest of the time leading up to dinner talking about the photos that Richie had stuck up on his side of the room. Stan was careful not to ask why Richie wasn’t in any of them but he encouraged the bespectacled boy to tell him the story behind each once. Richie was eager enough to do so, sitting cross legged on his bed to look at them properly from such a bad angle.

He started off by explaining the camera.

“It’s just an ordinary hospital one.” He said. “But if we’re extra good, we can use it and print out the photos for decorations. Everyone has some up in their rooms which they’ll probably show you at some stage. And I’m sure you’ll be able to do the same.”

Stan looked at his blank wall and thought about how nice it would be to perfectly space out selected photos.

“Sounds good.” He agreed. “So, why those photos?”

“Ben roped Bev into playing chess even though she hates it.” Richie explained, smiling at the photo. Bev’s grumpy face backed up Richie’s claim. Chess was not a game she liked to play. “Even though we like to joke that Beverly has Ben wrapped around her finger, it’s totally the other way round as well. She can’t say no to him.”

“Are they a couple?” Stan ventured. Richie frowned and made a vague gesture with his hand.

“Romance isn’t really encouraged in here. Like, it’s not allowed at all. We can’t enter into relationships. Mostly because if there’s a sour breakup then we might take like, a hundred steps backwards in our recovery process. And also because we tend to develop codependency problems really easily.” Richie flapped his hands a little like he had pent up energy he needed to get out immediately. “But Ben and Bev are super close and no one would be surprised if they have plans to officially get together once they leave the hospital. But you didn’t hear that from me.”

Stan smiled softly. “That’s sweet.”

“Any sweeter and they’d rot my teeth.” Richie laughed. “The picture of Bill is a funny one. We got into a little fight because I said that he wasn’t smart enough to do the legendary hospital puzzle which is an ocean floor scene with three thousand pieces.”

“That’s massive.” Stan said even as his brain shouted at him to instantly go and do the puzzle. There was something so satisfying about fitting tiny pieces together to make a correct image.

“Bill said he’d do it and I told him he had to do it alone. But he got a nurse to help him and I caught him in the act.” Richie grinned triumphantly, drumming a victory rhythm on his knees. “He didn’t even notice I was there for like ten minutes. I started laughing which gave me away.”

“Did you get mad at him?” Stan asked curiously.
“Nah, I helped him finish the puzzle. That’s what friends are for.” Richie smiled fondly. “It took forever because I’m no good at sitting still and Bill doesn’t have the patience for things like that that involve a lot of trial and error. But we did it.”

“I wanna do it.” Stan couldn’t help but say it.

“Knock yourself out.” Richie smirked. “See if you can beat the individual record of six days.”

“I bet I can.” Stan couldn’t help himself.

“You have to give me dessert for how many days you take to do it if you don’t break the record.” Richie decided.

“And you have to...do a public apology for not believing me in front of everyone if I do break the record.” Stan countered. “With lots of comments about how amazing I am.”

“Done!”

“Deal.”

They shook on it and Stan felt a rush of trepidation flood him. Why was he making plans for the future? Hadn’t he wanted to...no...wait...it was all so confusing.

“What about the Mike one?” He asked, desperate to take his mind off his thoughts.

“A picture of Mike in his natural habitat, the library.” Richie adopted the kind of voice you’d hear on a nature documentary. Stan knew all about those since he watched a lot about birds over the years. “Witness this majestic creature burrow for protection from the nurses by hiding in piles of books. He knows they’ll never find him there.”

“He looks happy.” Stan observed, looking up at the soft smile on Mike’s face as he locked eyes with Richie behind the camera.

“Always is when it comes to books.” Richie was also looking up at Mike, frozen on his wall. “It lets him escape from everything. In a good way.”

“When can we visit the library?” Stan asked. He liked reading well enough and it wouldn’t be bad to have a few books to take his mind off things. Mike would probably have some good recommendations.

“During school and free time. We can go tomorrow if you like.”

“Thanks.”

The two lapsed into silence briefly as Richie stared up at the photo of Eddie and Stan debated internally over whether he should ask Richie for the story or let the boy tell it at his own pace. He knew that Eddie was special to Richie, and he suspected that he and the boy might have a similar relationship to Ben and Beverly’s. But it wasn’t Stan’s place to dig further into that. Richie would explain things in his own time, just as Stan would do with his own personal thoughts. Still...what was the deal with the beads?

In the end, it was Richie who spoke first.

“Eddie loves craft, especially beading. He’s always making us bracelets out of safe materials when he can. We all have tons.” Richie opened the draw on his bedside table and fished out a bracelet with
purple, blue and pink beads. “This one’s my favourite. He’ll make some for you, too. In fact, he’s probably making one right now.”


“Cause you’re our friend, dumbass.” Richie slipped the bracelet on and shook his wrist around, the beads clacking together. “Friends wear matching bracelets and look awesome together.”

“I’ve never had friends before.” Stan admitted. “Outside of here, no one really likes me. It’s mostly because of my religion but I also don’t really stand up for myself. I’m alone”

“False.” Richie waggled a finger at Stan. “You have us now. You don’t have to be alone anymore.”

Stan stared up at the final picture, the one of his new found friends at Mike’s birthday. Beverly, Ben, Bill, Eddie and Mike all smiling happily, Richie an invisible but noticed presence behind the camera. He could see himself fitting in amongst them, perhaps between Bill and Mike. It almost looked like there was space for him, as though they’d been subconsciously waiting for Stan to arrive and fill an unnoticed hole inside them.

“I was never alone...I just didn’t realise it.”

“Yeah.” Stan breathed. “You’re right.”

The male nurse from breakfast came to get them for dinner. Stan instantly felt the sense of dread that had slowly been fading away all afternoon come back in full force. He had to face everyone again, after everything that had happened. They were going to ask questions and he wasn’t going to know how to answer them.

The fear must have shown on his face because Richie was at his side in a second.

“It’s fine Stan. They know when to back off. We’re not going to put any pressure on you.” He said comfortably while the nurse shifted around and waited for Stan to get his shit together. “We understand, buddy.”

“Okay.” Stan gave Richie a weak smile. “Besides, I hate being out of the loop with things. Maybe it’s better if they know.”

Richie chuckled. “Maybe wait til you see them to make that choice. Don’t force yourself to do things you aren’t comfortable with. That’s what they’re always saying in here.”

“I’m not comfortable with living.” Stan tried to joke, though the truth behind the words was still there.

“Aren’t we all.” Richie joined in.

“Not appropriate.” The nurse said.

“Sorry Richard.” Richie grinned.

“Not even close to my name, Richie.” The nurse sighed.

“That’s what makes it funny.” Richie ran a hand through his hair and nodded to Stan. “Shall we?”

Stan nodded and they left their room, following the nurse whose name was not Richard to the dining room. Stan didn’t know what would await him there but he was sure he could face it...right?
“We’ve all had to go through something like this before.” Richie said as they walked. “The big entry after some shit went down. Don’t be so nervous.”

“Can’t help it.” Stan drummed his fingers against his legs. “This is only my second day here. I know you say things will be fine but I’m just not sure.”

“If you like, I’ll go ahead and tell everyone not to bring it up at all.” Richie offered. “I know you said it might be better if they know but you look like you’re about to faint.”

“Feels like it too.” Stan muttered.

“Shit really?”

“Nah.” Stan grinned to show he’d just been joking, though his head was thumping. He hadn’t eaten anything since breakfast though, which was probably why. He still wasn’t particularly hungry but he knew he had to eat to make himself feel less shitty, physically.

“Hurry it up.” The nurse called.

“Don’t worry about going ahead.” Stan continued. “I have to face it sooner or later. I think I’d rather it be sooner. I don’t think I can feel any worse than I do right now.”

“Don’t give the world an invitation to try and beat it.” Richie grumbled playfully. “Because believe me, it’ll take it.”

“Yeah?”

“Yeah.”

They arrived at the dining room and Stan just…froze.

He’d thought he could be brave but now he wanted to be anywhere else but in that room. He didn’t want to have the door open and suddenly have all eyes on him. He hated it when people stared at him. Hated it!

“You got this Stan.” Richie whispered in his ear.

“Come on.” The nurse grumbled.

“Take your time.” Richie urged.

“Dinner will get cold.” The nurse pushed the door open.

Stan nodded and stepped forward.

And he knew exactly who it was that had gotten him to make that step.

Chapter End Notes

Here is chapter 4!!!!!! I feel like I’m focusing a lot on Stan and Richie (they are my faves) but the next chapter will have more interactions with the others as the days keep going. Chapter 5 is halfway written so expect it up in the next 4-6 days.
I myself have clinical depression so a lot of what I am writing comes from personal experience. However, I can't speak for everyone. I want to make this story as realistic as possible so don't be afraid to give me hand with anything!

Please leave a comment or kudos telling me how I went. I love getting feedback about what parts you liked!!!!!! Thank you for your support! It means a lot <3
Despite Richie’s reassurances, Stan could feel the heavy dread that rested at the bottom of his stomach. When he’d entered the room, all eyes had flown to him, just like he’d thought they would. Stan had shoved his hands behind his back and stared down at his feet, waiting for everyone to look away.

Eventually they all had and Stan had been able to get his dinner and then head over to his table with Richie. Whatever conversation had been going on before the roommates entered had ended, and now everyone was staring at Stan. The teen wondered who was going to break the silence first. He didn’t think it would be Richie this time.

It was Eddie who spoke first.

“Are you okay?” He asked anxiously, twisting his fingers together.

“Mostly.” Stan answered which was the truth. For now.

“What happened?” Beverly burst out as though she’d been trying her hardest to hold it back but couldn’t anymore.

Stan reluctantly held up his bandaged fingers. “I used the spiral stuff from the notebooks. I was gonna...do much worse but something stopped me.”

Richie…

“That explains the new notebooks and the folders with our old pages.” Mike said conversationally.

“Sorry.” Stan muttered.

“It’s fine. We were due new ones anyway. Have you seen how much Ben writes? Half of it is just poetry.” Mike grinned and nudged Ben affectionately.

“Not true. It’s more than half by now.” Ben retorted. Stan felt himself relax just a smidge.

“Was it my fault?” Beverly spoke again but the frantic tone she’d had before had switched into something small and scared.

“What? No.” Stan gave her a puzzled look. “Why would it be your fault?”

“I popped the ball and you collapsed. I probably triggered your breakdown.” Beverly said miserably, picking at her food.

The only way for Stan to reply was to give away a lot of personal information that he wasn’t
comfortable sharing with anyone. So maybe he should just try and brush her worries away with empty reassurances. But...Beverly looked so sad, so angry with herself, so hopeless. It wasn’t fair for her to feel that way over something that wasn’t her fault.

“Beverly, look.” Stan said. “I’m depressed and suicidal. The whole of yesterday and today, all I could think about was trying to kill myself again and succeeding. It was my plan before you popped the ball. It’s not your fault.”

“Well, shit.” Richie said flatly.

“Thanks Stan.” Beverly cut in before the boy could keep going. “Sorry you had to reveal that. I should have trusted you.”

“I know what it’s like to doubt yourself.” Stan said shortly, hoping that the conversation about him could finally end now.

“So what made you stop?” Bill spoke for the first time the whole night, asking the one question Stan knew how to answer properly and yet didn’t want to say.

“It’s personal.” He mumbled. “Sorry.”

“It’s auh-auh-alright.” Bill said quickly. “You don’t owe us anything.”

“So about the maths homework.” Eddie said suddenly and the conversation was finally drawn away from Stan and towards something lighter.

Stan ate bits of his food and listened to Eddie complain that they must have skipped a whole topic since he didn’t understand anything in chapter five of the maths textbook. At the table over from them, Lucas and Dustin were fighting over a board game they’d apparently been playing earlier while Will tried to mediate. Stan felt himself relax even more. The attention was gone from him and was directed at other things. Good. That was how he liked it. That was how it should be.

The headache that had been plaguing Stan all day faded somewhat as he ate his dinner and took his medication. It was probably gonna hang around until the next morning but at least it no longer felt like a monkey playing the drums inside his skull. The background noise of the room wasn’t aggravating it either, which was nice.

Stan was gradually drawn back into the conversation as dinner dragged on, mostly through questions about whatever the conversation topic was at the time.

“What’s your favourite subject?” Eddie wanted to know.

“Maths.” Stan had to grin at that, since the question had come at the end of Eddie’s massive rant about how stupid maths was.

“Why does that not even surprise me.” Eddie had muttered and shoved a forkful of chicken into his mouth.

The conversation had then turned to the newest batch of movies the hospital had just brought in for them.

“Favourite actor?” Ben asked Stan when Bill and Richie had stopped arguing over whether The Dark Crystal was just plain bad or a cinematic gem held back from being the best movie ever because of producers.
“Don’t have one.” Stan replied. “I don’t watch a lot of movies.”

“Oh boy we are going to be changing that.” Richie declared. “Movie marathon!”

“We don’t have enough time to ourselves for a full on movie marathon.” Eddie snapped.

“We’ll just have to space it out over many weeks.”

“Then it’s not even a marathon!”

“I’m just trying to alliterate, Eds.”

“Don’t call me that!”

After Eddie and Richie had stopped bickering, Mike had started up a conversation about when the next casual clothes day would be.

“Why do we have uniforms most of the time but get to wear out own clothes other times?” Stan wanted to know.

“When we wear casual clothes it basically means a free day from any therapy or stuff like that. They’re like holidays.” Bev explained. “And they’re always a surprise. They never tell us beforehand.”

“My theory is they just randomly decide on the day.” Richie told Stan. “Otherwise what’s the point of hiding it?”

“Stop you from getting too worked up?” Bill remarked.

“Please, Richie’s always worked up.” Eddie patted Richie with an air of sympathy.

“Okay first of all, false.” Richie began but Eddie shushed him.

Dessert was some ice-cream which Stan passed on and then it was back to his room with Richie to get ready for bed.

The second day was about to end and yet it felt like much longer to Stan. So much had happened, seemingly too much for two days. Where would things go from here? What would he do now? Ms Lapwood would probably put him on different medication. He’d have a bunch of therapy sessions, including group ones. He’d go to school so that he could slot back into society when (if) he left the CPH. He’d do what was normal to everyone in the hospital.

And all the while, his mind would be locked in an internal fight between either getting better or trying again. It might (would probably) drive him insane and Stan wasn’t even rooting for one side to triumph over the other, but he thought he could endure it.

He hoped he could endure it.

Stan wanted to see what had changed everyone’s minds about dying. He wanted to see if his mind could be changed to. Not because he particularly wanted it to be changed, more because he was curious about if therapy would work for him. Plus, Stan wanted to get to know everyone else in the hospital. He wanted to hear their stories. He wanted to know where he fit in amongst them.

Stan wondered if Richie had had the same curiosity as him which had prompted him to want to continue living.
“You gonna shower tonight?” Richie asked as he kicked off his slippers and set his glasses down on his bedside table.

“Yes.” Stan stared at Richie, resisting the urge to straighten up his discarded footwear. “Obviously.”

Richie nodded and flopped down face first onto his bed. Stan waited a bit for any sign of movement or noise, but got none.

“Are you gonna shower too?” He asked.

“Nope.” Richie’s voice was muffled but he sounded cheerful. “I only shower every second night, maybe every third if I’m feeling lazy.”

“But then how do you stay clean?” Stan said in disbelief.

“I don’t?” Richie chuckled.

A wave of repulsion washed over Stan.

“You have to shower every night.” He said firmly. “Please.”

Richie unstuck himself from the mattress. “Please?”

“Please.” Stan repeated.

“Why?”

“I can’t explain it.” There was a tremor in Stan’s voice that left him feeling vulnerable. “Okay, well I can. It’s my OCD. I just can’t control what sets me off, I’m sorry. I just need things to be clean and in order. I need there to be things that follow a pattern, I need things to slot into place. I know I’m not explaining it very well but it’s just how I am.”

“Okay, no biggie.” Richie stood up and shoved his glasses back on. “I’ll shower every night.”

This time, it was a flood of relief that swamped Stan. “Really? You don’t mind?”

“It’s not like you can help how you feel. And I know you’d do the same for me if there was something that was setting me off.”

“Yeah.” Stan said, liking the warm feeling that Richie’s words had elicited. This is what friends did. They looked out for each other.

“Tell me if I’m doing something that doesn’t sit right with your OCD and I’ll try to fix it. Can’t promise some things but I’ll try, alright?” Richie grabbed his bag of toiletries and grinned at Stan.

“Yeah, same.” Stan clutched his own sponge bag to his chest and tried not to grin too hard. Richie on the other hand, was beaming widely.

“Having a roommate is awesome.” He declared.

“Don’t miss having your own privacy?”

“I don’t think there’s such a thing as privacy in here.” Richie remarked. “But nah, I don’t miss it. I did have a roommate when I first came here but he’s long gone, and I’ve been on my own ever since. It’s not exactly my idea of fun. I like to talk to people, and...well let’s just say I don’t like being alone.”
“Fair enough.”

Patty came and whisked them away to the bathroom to take showers and brush their teeth. Once more, Stan had to unwrap the bandages around his wrists and face what he had done to himself. There was no change from last night but Stan stared at the wounds as though he’d never seen them before. He’d carved the letter ‘t’ into both wrists with the hopes that this would end his life faster and decrease the risk of being found before he bled out. It should’ve!

But it hadn’t been enough anyway.

Did the universe want Stan to live?

No, it was just luck. Just dumb luck this he’d been found before his heart stopped beating from the lack of blood left in his body.

Good luck or bad luck?

Stop questioning yourself. You know it’s bad luck. Nobody goes that far just for attention. End it already.

“Earth to Stan. You’ve been in there forever!” Richie’s voice snapped Stan out of his thoughts. “Stop killing the earth by wasting water.”

Stan turned the taps off and stood there, shivering. “I didn’t take you for a warrior of the earth kind of guy.”

“It’s to impress the ladies.” Richie snickered. Stan laughed to himself and dried himself hastily with his towel. He dressed in his pyjamas and went to join Richie at the sinks. As Stan brushed his teeth, he found his eyes wandering over to Richie. The boy was dressed in the baggy shirt and boxer shorts that made up his pyjamas, arms exposed to the elements.

Stan could see scars littered up and down those arms, mostly aged white lines though some looked a little newer. There was lots more than Stan had, as though Richie had valued the pain more than outright death. He glanced away quickly, a little confused at how surprised he’d been to see them. He knew Richie had been suicidal, knew that he was a little too off the rails sometimes. The scars shouldn’t surprise him.

Maybe surprise wasn’t the right word. Maybe they just shocked him, because he hated the idea of Richie taking a knife or other sharp object to himself with the intent to cause serious harm.

Why? You did the exact same thing? Why is Richie any different?

And the thing was, Stan didn’t know.

Stan and Richie stayed awake for a bit after their showers, both writing in their new notebooks. Richie was writing at a million miles per hour, as fast as his mouth could run honestly, but Stan took time to make sure his words were neat and correctly spelt. It would only irk him later if he looked back and found that he’d made a sloppy mess of his thoughts.

“Richie.” Stan said after a while. He’d been thinking about their earlier conversation on roommates and how Richie didn’t like to be alone. “How come you don’t room with Mike? I mean, you’re brothers.”

Richie put down his pen and pursed his lips thoughtfully.
“Well, we didn’t arrive at the same time.” He said finally. “But it’s more because the doctors don’t think it’s a good idea. More codependency shit. They reckon it’s worse with twins. They want us to be our own person. Which sure, I’m all for that. But it would be nice to share a room with my twin. Never had the chance growing up.”

They fell silent once more after the brief conversation. Stan was curious about Mike and Richie’s past, but he knew better than to prod. Another time, perhaps.

Stan finally put down his pen, satisfied with his writing for the night.

*I nearly didn’t live to see the rest of today, but I changed my mind. I think it’s okay to have second thoughts. Maybe. I still don’t know if I made the right choice but I’ll have time to work that out. For now, I have support from everyone here at the hospital and that is enough.*

*I think.*

*All the other patients are sort of...intriguing. I want to know more about them. Maybe then I can call them all friends. Richie already is my friend but I think I’d like to make more. I want them to think of me as a friend, just as I think of them as one. It’s such a nice feeling, to be able to call someone a friend. I want to experience more of it.*

*Today was still pretty sucky, even if it did end better than it started. I got hurt, and then hurt myself. I’m a mess, honestly. Hopefully tomorrow will be better. I want to see what makes everyone want to stick around. I even think I want to experience it.*

*It’s confusing. I’m not sure what I want to get out of this place.*

*Guess I have to wait and find out.*

Stan set his book aside and snuggled down under the covers. Across the room, Richie did the same thing.

“Night Richie.” Stan whispered.

“Night, Stan the Man.” Richie called back.

Stan shut his eyes and fell.

**End Day 2**

**Start Day 3**

He woke up when Patty touched his hand gently, jerking away from the sudden touch. Unlike the day before, he’d slept right through the night and up until it was time to get up.

“Sorry. I didn’t mean to startle you.” Patty apologised. Across the room, Richie was awake and fumbling sleepily for his glasses.

“It’s fine.” Stan said and climbed out of bed, shivering a little as his body met the cold air. Patty moved back into the corridor, waiting for them to get changed into the pale green clothes. Stan found himself longing for a casual clothes day, just so he could neatly button a shirt and adjust the collar. There was comfort in what he knew, and he missed that.

“Too tired.” Richie muttered as he shuffled around.
“Didn’t sleep well?” Stan ventured.

“Nah, not really.” Richie tracked down his slippers and clumsily shoved his feet into them. “Just couldn’t get comfortable.”

Stan didn’t know what to say in return, so he just fell silent. That was how he worked. When he was caught in a situation that he couldn’t verbally address, he just stopped talking. It was easier that way.

Patty led them to the dining room, even though Stan was sure he knew the way now. It was probably protocol though. Don’t leave the kids alone because they’ll go cause some shit or something like that.

Not everyone had arrived for breakfast when Stan and Richie arrived. Elle was yawning over a plate of waffles and Beverly was sipping at her juice, but that was it. Stan could hear footsteps echoing through the corridors though, so the peace and quiet probably wasn’t going to last for much longer. The boys hastened to grab their food and sat down with Bev.

“Morning.” Bev set her juice down and grinned at them. “Sleep well?”

“Alright.” Stan said.


“Sounds about right.” Bev nodded.

At that moment, Lucas and Dustin burst into the room, both panting. A nurse appeared seconds later, dishevelled and annoyed.

“Will you stop racing each other to meals!” She cried. “It’s dangerous. You nearly ran Eddie over.”

Richie perked up at the mention of his friend’s name. He looked towards the door and sure enough, a flustered Eddie and a miserable looking Bill entered the room. Eddie scowled at Dustin and Lucas, but Bill seemed really out of it. The nurse had to lead him over to the food and then to the table.

Stan frowned. What was up with Bill? He’d seemed so...normal the other days. But not now. He gave off the vibe of being on a whole nother planet. But why?

“It’s going to be a bad day.” Eddie whispered in Richie and Stan’s ears.

Shit...fuck! Why was Stan so stupid? Of course everyone in here was going to act different. Of course they couldn’t be happy all the time. This was a mental hospital, for crying out loud. Stan had seen them all acting mostly alright for the past two days, and had been lulled into this false sense of security that somehow, everyone in his group was alright. Of course he was wrong. Why had he even thought that?

You’re too focused on yourself. You’re selfish! Worthless.

“Alright, Stan?” Richie broke his thoughts up before they could get any worse.

“Fine.” Stan forced a smile. “Still a little nervous about things, I guess. Are we doing the same stuff today as yesterday?”

“Probably.” Bev shrugged. Stan found himself thinking that she seemed a lot nicer than his first impression of her had been, scowling and breaking the rules. She was kind, caring and totally in love with her friends. It was nice.
Ben and Mike arrived, completing the group. Will and Mike were close behind them, heading over to their table. Mike paused next to Richie however, bending to whisper something in his ear. Richie laughed a bit, and ruffled Mike’s hair.

“What was that all about?” Ben asked as Richie’s twin skipped away.

“Twin stuff.” Richie said mysteriously. “Don’t you know? We’re psychically linked.”

“Seriously?” Beverly tried to look stern but her lips twitched up into a smile.

“Oh, definitely.”

A dull thud broke up the little gag as Bill thunked his head down against the table and sighed heavily. Eddie looked alarmed, fumbling in his pocket for something, but coming up empty. Mike rested a hand on Bill’s shoulder before anyone else could react.

“Do you need to go back to bed?” He asked softly.

“No.” Bill groaned. “M’fine.”

“Rough night?” Mike went on.


“Oh Bill.” Beverly looked sad all of a sudden. In fact, they all did.

Who was this ‘him’ and why was it sad that Bill had dreamt about him? It wasn’t Stan’s place to prod, much as he wanted to, so he settled for just picking at his nails and obeying the silent request for quiet. Maybe one day he’d be insync with these people, able to know when they were upset or why they wanted to be left alone.

Is that what you want? An unsure future, where you’ll probably never belong?

Watching Mike rub Bill’s back, Stan though that the answer might be yes, just for the chance that one day, he could belong.

“Sorry Stan.” Bill said suddenly.

“Huh?” Stan was once more jolted out of his thoughts. “Why?”

“Just am.” Bill tried for a smile but it fell flat. “I know you duh-duh-duh-duh-don’t understand what’s happening but thu-thu-thu-thu-thu…” He floundered, stuck on the word. “Thanks.” He spat out finally and Stan couldn’t help but give him a smile.

“It’s all good.” He said.

Is it?

Yes.

Next stop of the day was group therapy with everybody’s favourite therapist, Robert.

Not.

Okay so the guy was friendly and looked out for them, but there was something about him that just
rubbed Stan the wrong way. It was probably nothing. Stan just had this thing about things feeling wrong and not right.

“Today we’re going to be talking about healthy coping mechanisms versus unhealthy coping mechanism.” Robert said once everybody was seated. “We’ve looked at this subject briefly before but I think it’s time we revisit it in more detail, considering what’s been happening lately.”

Stan’s cheeks flamed red. He knew that comment had been directed at him. Looked like introductions and getting to know each other games were over. Now it was time for the real point of group therapy. Actual therapy.

“First of all, can someone tell me what healthy means.” Robert said. “Will? How about you?”

“Uh…” The small boy glanced nervously at Robert. “Healthy means that something is good for you.”

“Exactly.” Robert nodded. “Healthy means something is good for you. So then, Bill, unhealthy means…?”

Bill started in his chair, obviously surprised at the question being directed at him. “Something buh-buh-buh-bad for you.”

“Correct.” Robert nodded again. “Now to define coping mechanisms. Anyone want to volunteer to explain this one?”

Mike put his hand up. “It’s things that you implement to make you feel better when your mental state isn’t very good. For instance, I read.”

“Good, good.” Robert said. “Thank you for the example. As Mike has said, coping mechanisms are certain things you do that can help you feel better.”

“Think I need one of those today.” Bill muttered, quiet enough that only Stan and Mike (the people sitting next to him) could hear.

“However, even if a coping mechanism makes you feel good, it might not be healthy for you. That’s why it’s important to differentiate between the two. Healthy and unhealthy. You might be wondering why it can be so difficult to tell the two apart. Sometimes you might not realise that something is bad for you and vice versa.

“So today we’re going to be talking about our own coping mechanisms and explaining why they’re either healthy or unhealthy, and then offering up healthy alternatives if needed. Let’s start with Ben.”

Ben was sitting to the right of Mr Martin and had seemed to be expecting being chosen to go first.

“When I feel really bad I like to play chess and write poetry.” Ben’s voice was quiet but it echoed in the silence of the room.

“Anything else?” Robert pressed.

“...I don’t eat. That gives me control and makes me happy because I’m not making myself heavier.” Ben bowed his head in what seemed like shame. “I feel in charge of myself when I don’t eat. I like myself more.”

Beverly reached out and slipped her hand into Ben’s. The two stared at each other for a moment, comforted by the contact.
“What we have here is a conflict between healthy and unhealthy coping mechanisms. Ben has the right idea with his chess and poetry, but not eating is not good for you.” Robert explained. “What steps can be taken to help Ben move past this?”

“Eat healthy food?” Lucas said, only a little sarcastically.

“Well, there’s that.” Robert did not sound that appreciative. “Thank you for contributing Lucas.”

“Been a pleasure.” Lucas gave a lazy salute. Mike snorted and Elle gave him a weird look.

“Perhaps not think of it as not eating. Think of it instead as like, saving yourself for later. Then slowly work your way back up to eating.” Mike suggested. “That way it doesn’t feel so negative. It becomes less of an unhealthy coping mechanism and more of just everyday thoughts.”

“I like that.” Robert nodded his thanks. “Though we do need to look at helping Ben eat in some way.”

“He’s glad that at least one Mike is being sensible.” Richie whispered in Stan’s ear, looking over at his twin who was still laughing to himself. Stan smiled in acknowledgement.

“Lucas was on the right track with healthy food.” Beverly said. She was speaking more to Ben than she was to Robert. “I can help you with picking out what’s best.”

“Thank you.” Ben managed a smile.

Stan wasn’t sure about the whole ‘admitting to everyone stuff you’d rather keep secret’ part of the session so he really wasn’t looking forward to his turn. Maybe Robert would skip him.

“Let’s move on now. Your private therapist can go over more options with you later.” Robert said to Ben. “Beverly, you’re up next.”

“Do I really have to?” Beverly folded her arms tightly. “I can pass, right?”

“You can.” Robert agreed reluctantly. “But I do believe it is truly beneficial to talk about these things with people who understand and can offer help.”

“I really don’t want to.” Bev sounded angry now. Stan remembered her telling him casually that she had PTSD and anger issues. He remembered the ball popping in her hands, exploding under the pressure and taking Stan with it.

Don’t press her! Don’t! I’m scared!

“Perhaps just tell us some of your healthy coping mechanisms. You and Callie can talk in private later.” It appeared Robert did know when to back down.

“Talking with my friends and designing clothes help me calm down and ignore any bad thoughts.” Beverly said, relief tingling her voice.

Eddie was next in the circle, small hands wringing together nervously as he waited for Robert to prompt him to speak.

“Let’s hear it.” Robert said encouragingly.

“I like to craft, clean my room, be with my friends, look at maps...uh...yeah?” Eddie sounded like he was just throwing out random answers in the hopes that Robert would approve. Stan couldn’t blame him. He was probably going to do the same.
“Anything else?” Robert pressed, just like he’d done with Ben. Stan figured that he probably knew beforehand what everyone used to cope, and knew when something was being left off.

“I like to look up the medical illnesses I have.” Eddie said reluctantly. “The physical ones. I need to check that I don’t have cancer or other deadly diseases. It’s important. I have to do it. It’s got nothing to do with whatever mental illnesses you think I have. I wouldn’t call it a coping mechanism.”

Well, looked like Eddie was in denial. Once more, Stan couldn’t blame it. It was hard to admit those sort of things. From the sounds of it, Eddie was a bit of a hypochondriac.

“The first ones you mentioned are the healthy coping mechanisms.” Robert said as though the patients weren’t smart enough to have worked that out for themselves. “But the last one is definitely an unhealthy coping mechanism. You’ll never be able to get over you hypochondria and anxiety if you keep encouraging them.”

Eddie recoiled, looking like he was about to cry. “You can’t just say that. Stan didn’t know about me. I wanted to tell him myself. In my own time.”

An apology bubbled up on Stan’s tongue but before he could say it, Robert cut in.

“I’m trying to help you Eddie.” He said. “In the best way for you. Do you understand?”

Eddie opened his mouth but shut it abruptly, nodding instead. Stan could feel Richie shaking beside him, in anger most likely.

“I’m sorry.” Robert said, finally sensing that he’d crossed a line. “I’ll try not to do that again.” A slight pause. “Okay, how can Eddie combat his unhealthy coping mechanism?”

The reluctance all but oozed its way through the room. Nobody was willing to upset Eddie any further by stepping all over him. Robert looked disappointed but Stan didn’t exactly care. Didn’t the hospital have privacy codes. Patty had said that, and Ms Lapwood. But Robert didn’t seem to care about that.

“Nobody?” Robert looked around once more as if hoping that his sad voice would change minds. “Perhaps I can offer one then. The best thing to do Eddie, is reassure yourself that you’re fine without having to look it up. By having it written down for you, you end up obsessing over it more and trying to subconsciously match your symptoms up. If you do it yourself, there’s less chance of heading in that downward spiral. You can distract yourself with your healthy coping methods, instead of obsessing over the illnesses you might think you have.”

“Yeah, sure.” Eddie said glumly. “Can we move on now?”

“Of course.” Robert agreed.

Richie was up next. Stan was curious to see how this was going to go. Richie had come across in the past few days as someone who contradicted himself often. It would be interesting to see how he reacted to Robert’s activity, especially since Robert had just gone and upset Eddie.

It turned out Robert didn’t even have to prompt Richie. He just started talking.

“Whoo boy, where do I start?” Richie rubbed his hands together and leant forward. “Do I even have any healthy coping mechanisms. Probably not. I write in my journal but we all do that, so does it even count? Nah, don’t think so, or you all would’ve said it.”

Stan had a feeling he knew what Richie was doing, but he couldn’t exactly prove it.
“I mean, with a mind like mine, can I even tell the difference between healthy and unhealthy?” Richie snickered.

“Try to get to the point.” Robert said in a voice that Stan would later come to know as his ‘talking to a manic Richie’ voice.

“Well for starters I cut.” Richie said it flippantly but Stan nearly doubled over in pain. Richie bared his arms for everyone to see, giggling to himself. “How’s that for unhealthy.”

Stan knew now, 100%, what Richie was doing. He was taking all attention away from Eddie, making himself look like the fucked up one instead. Was Eddie that important to Richie that he’d expose things Stan considered to be some of the most personal and private things ever? Was that was love was, in any sort of form?

“Richie, please take this seriously.” Robert didn't sound too impressed. “You're discussing sensitive issues.”

“Let’s see, what else?” Richie completely ignored Robert and just kept going. “I like to tell myself a lot of self-deprecating things. And isolating myself is always fun. Nothing like telling yourself that you don't deserve happiness or friends to make yourself feel better. As you can see, I'm the life of the party. This makes for great conversation starters. Oh and what about other forms of self harm? Can't forget about those. Wouldn't be fair. I value them just as much after all. Pinching the skin, bruising myself. Good times.”

It felt to Stan that Richie was going too far now. His twin brother looked close to tears, a significant contrast to his earlier giggles. Eddie had a nearly identical look on his face. What had happened? Had Richie started and just not been able to stop?

“He wants this to be over.” Bill breathed in Stan’s ear. “For all of us.”

“What do you mean?” Stan whispered back.

“He's trying to stop the activity before anyone else gets hurt like Eddie. Only he doesn't care if he gets hurt himself. He's pretty similar to his brother when you think about it. Both of them care too much.”

Stan looked back at Richie who was chuckling madly to himself.

“Alright Richie, perhaps it’d be best if we moved on to suggesting some helpful ideas to you.” Robert broke in hastily.

“Whatever floats your boat, doc.” Richie sneered. “I’ll listen to you, but feel free not to listen to us.”

“I don’t get it.” Stan spoke again to Bill, who just looked sadly at his friend and shrugged. Looked like Bill sometimes didn’t get it either.

“It’s just the way he is.” Bill muttered eventually. “Just like we’re all the way we are. I know we’re meant to fight it and not us it as an excuse, but sometimes we just can’t help it. We can’t help the bad days.”

“Didn’t sleep well?”.

“Nah, not really. Just couldn’t get comfortable.”

…
“It’s going to be a bad day.”

Eddie had been right. It was going to be a bad day. And not just for Bill and Richie.

For all of them.

Chapter End Notes

The next chapter, a little longer than usual b/c I can. I think I'm slowly adding in more and more book elements as I read more and more of the book. I'm nearly finished now and it has been a ride.

When I first started writing this I didn't even realise I'd given Robert the therapist the same name as what Pennywise uses when he poses as human. Oops

Someone asked bout an update sechdule and I guess I don't have one? I like to have quite a bit of the next chapter written b4 I post one (which I dont for this one lol), but atm I'm posting roughly 5-6 days apart. That may change though, so I'll let you know. In the mean time, please leave comments and kudos if you enjoyed. Your support means so much to me and I couldn't keep writing without it.

(and please excuse any mistakes in grammar, I tend to always miss some things when editing)
Stanley Uris helps

Chapter Summary

All Stan's done so far is be helped. Perhaps it's time to flip that around.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Robert tried to bring the chat with Richie back under control but it seemed futile. Even though nobody bar Stan seemed surprised at Richie’s behaviour, none of them were supporting Robert by helping move things along. As much as he prompted them, none of them would offer up suggestions for Richie. Robert gave up eventually, sensing he was beaten.

“Let’s move on.” He said. “Richie, we can talk more in our session today.”

Richie’s plan to stop the whole discussion hadn’t worked. Robert had just breezed past the little breakdown as though nothing had even happened. And that meant that Stan was up next to the chopping block. And he did not like that one little bit. Surely he wasn’t expected to start chatting away like he had any idea of what to do. He was new here. He didn’t know if he should be following any unspoken rules. It’d be better for everyone if he just kept silent.

“Stan, do you feel like sharing today?” Robert asked. “I know you’re new and this is all strange to you, but it’d be great if you did.”

Stan sort of had this feeling that he didn’t really have a choice in the matter. He was speaking whether he liked it or not, apparently. He probably shouldn’t even bother trying to get out of it. But…saying all those personal things in front of so many people, most of them all but strangers. His stomach was flip flopping just thinking about it.

“Perhaps another time.” Stan’s mouth was dry and his heart was thudding painfully in his chest. “Please.”

“It really will help.” Robert urged him.

“Maybe it will. But not right now.” Stan was all but begging. He couldn’t. Didn’t Robert understand that? He just couldn’t.

“Are you sure?” Robert tried one last time,

“Completely.”

“Another time then.” Robert glanced over to Bill, still looking miserable. “Bill, you're up.”

“Can I pass too?” Bill asked. “I didn't have a good night. I don't think talking about things will help much today.”

“This is a beneficial activity.” Robert’s voice was even but Stan knew that he was annoyed. “How about a compromise. Just one of each.”
Bill looked down at his hands, pale and sweaty. He was obviously debating with himself whether to keep on fighting to not speak or give in and take the compromise. If Stan was braver person he would have stood up for Bill and told Robert to leave him alone. He was ashamed by his silence but he knew he couldn't do it. He was too scared.

Please...let him pass...I don't know what's wrong but he looks so sad

And you're not?

What does that mean?

“You can do it Bill. Don't give in to your illness.” Robert refused to let it go. Bill was yet to look up from his hands, still locked in a debate with himself.

Then, ever so carefully, Bill stood up and looked at Robert.

“I said no.”

Bill turned on his heel and left the room, shutting the door quietly behind him with a click. His footsteps could be heard briefly as he walked away from the room before they became inaudible. Silence filled the space as everyone slowly adjusted to Bill’s sudden departure. Stan looked at the empty chair where he’d been sitting moments ago, replaying the pain etched across Bill’s face as he struggled with himself.

Robert was the first one to react.

“I’m sure a nurse has gone after him.” He said in an attempt to be reassuring. “Perhaps a slight overreaction on Bill’s part but I guess he had a rough night.”

“Does this mean group is cancelled?” Richie asked hopefully.

“I think we can continue.” Robert shot down the belief without batting an eye. “Mike, it’s your turn to share with the group.”

Mike had been the only one mostly cooperating throughout the session and he did not disappoint, sharing his coping mechanisms. However, there was a tinge of worry in his voice. He kept glancing at the door, as if hoping that Bill was going to come back.

“So for Mike, reading and being with his friends is a healthy coping mechanism.” Robert analysed as though it wasn’t the most obvious conclusion to make. “But his tendency to go through old family albums when the wound is still somewhat fresh means his PT-”

“I am well aware of what my unhealthy coping mechanism is and why I shouldn’t be relying on it.” Mike cut in smoothly before Robert could slip up and reveal yet another snippet of personal information. “I’m working towards fixing that problem with my private therapist. Thank you, though.”

“Of course.” Robert blinked. “You’re...welcome?”

Mike nodded. Stan suppressed a smile.

Next in the circle was Dustin. Stan didn’t know much about the boy, just that he had odd spasms and swore a lot when he spoke. He did want to know more about him, just like he did with everyone else, but suddenly all Stan could think about was Bill. He’d been so upset, and so annoyed with himself for being so. Stan knew how horrible it was to feel so empty and hopeless, and he hated that
Bill had to feel it too.

Again...why was it any different to what he was feeling? Why did it shock him to see the patients of the hospital going through the same things he had? Why couldn’t he find an answer?

“I need to go after Bill.” Stan realised out loud, cutting off Dustin who’d been saying something to Robert about science.

“Pardon, Stanley?” Robert didn’t look all too pleased at the interruption.

“I need to go after Bill.” Stan repeated. “He was sad and he helped me before when I was panicking. I have to repay that.”

“Why?” Robert’s incredulous voice asked.

“I don’t know.” Stan was having an out of body experience. He stood up in a daze and dimly heard Richie snicker.

“This isn’t funny.” Robert stood as well. “Stan, please sit down. You don’t need to go after Bill. We provide the help in here.”

“Then why even put us all together?” Stan headed towards the door. “We’re friends and we help each other as well. Otherwise what happens when you let us out?”

“I don’t understand.” Robert was moving too but Stan was quicker.

“Then that’s too bad for you.” Stan slipped out the door and then sprinted down the corridor in the direction he was sure Bill would have headed in.

“STAN!”

Stan risked a look over his shoulder and saw Robert peering out the door, his face an interesting shade of red. He almost giggled, even though he was terrified of the consequences that were sure to come later. It felt good in the heat of the moment, but Robert looked really pissed. He wasn’t going to just let this go. Still...he needed to help Bill.

Stan was sure that Robert wasn’t going to follow him, since he still had ten kids to look after. However, he was sure to send a nurse after him instead. Stan had to find Bill quickly.

As he ran towards the bedrooms, doubts started to catch up with him. Stan almost stumbled at the sudden pressure of it all. What had made him think he could help Bill? Why had he let himself get off the chair and run away. He’d broken the precise control that had settled over the session. Things weren’t in order anymore. He’d broken the rules! He’d broken them into a million pieces! Where was the order? The sense?

No!

He couldn’t panic. Not now. That wouldn’t be fair for Bill, if Stan found him. He’d run from the group therapy session so he could comfort Bill and it wouldn’t do any good to be the one who needed comforting again. He could break down later.

“Bill?” Stan called out tentatively. “Are you here?”

He wasn’t expecting an answer but a door to his right swung open and Bill was standing there, tears streaming down his face and chest rising and falling at an alarming pace. A lump caught in Stan’s
throat at the sad sight.

“Stuh-Stuh-Stuh-Stan.” Bill stammered out. “What are you doing here?”

Stan was suddenly at a loss for words. He looked at Bill helplessly, mouth open but unable to form any sounds. For a second, he thought he was going to start panicking again, but he reeled it in.

“I wanted to help you.” He got out finally. “Like you helped me.”

“Right?” Bill rubbed at his eyes hastily. “Do you want to come in? A nurse knows I’m here so I’m not breaking any ruh-ruh-ruh-rules.”

“I couldn’t stay in that room a second longer.” Stan blurted out. “The group therapy one. It was horrible. Nobody looked comfortable to be saying those things and Robert wasn’t listening to what we wanted. And after what Richie did...I couldn’t stand it. I had to get away. And after what Robert did to you, I realised I couldn’t just leave you alone. I know it’s only my third day here and we don’t know anything about each other but here I am. Please don’t hate me.”

Bill gave Stan a look that he couldn’t read. “You’re funny Stan. I could never hate you. Now come on.”

Bill stepped back into the room and Stan followed cautiously.

He found himself in what was clearly Bill and Eddie’s shared room. It was rather neat on one side, and well lived in on the other. Bill sat down on the bed in the later side, marking it out as his own. Stan hesitated, wondering if he should sit down next to Bill or sit on Eddie’s neatly made bed.

“Sit next to me.” Bill solved the dilemma for him. “Eddie hates messy sheets.”

Stan crossed the room and sat down, looking around curiously. The room felt cosy and safe. It was full of personality, made apparent in the posters, pictures and other trinkets that Bill and Eddie had used to decorate their space. Bill had a ton of notebooks and novels stacked around, whilst Eddie had neat plastic containers that looked like they held his craft creations. As mentioned before, Eddie’s side was a lot neater. It wasn’t that Bill was messy. His side was just a little more...cluttered.

Like Richie, Bill and Eddie had stuck up numerous photos of the patients at CPH. Unlike Richie, they appeared in theirs. Stan wanted to have a closer look but now wasn’t really the time. He could do it another day, when things were better.

“How can I help?” Stan asked. Bill looked down at his hands and shook his head.

“I don’t know.”

Stan swallowed. “Should I leave?”

“No!” It burst from Bill’s lips and something wild lurked in his eyes as he spun to look at Stan. “Don’t.”

“Okay. I won’t.”

“Thank you.”

“Do you want to talk?” Stan offered.

“Not right now.” Bill whispered. “If that’s alright with you.” He reached out and took a framed photo off his bedside table, clutching it to his chest before Stan got a chance to see the image. He
nodded in reply, instead of talking, and tried not to look around the room too much. Instead, he focused on his hands, just like Bill had done in group therapy.

They sat in silence until finally, a nurse came looking for Stan. It was Patty. It seemed like she’d been assigned to watch over Stan, what with how often she showed up. The look of disapproval on her face said it all.

Stan was in trouble.

“Robert and Callie are waiting for you in her office.” She said. Stan nodded and stood up, stretching his aching muscles. Bill started in surprise as though he’d just noticed that Patty was there.

“Can’t he stay?” The boy asked, grip tightening on the photo frame.

“I’m afraid not.” It almost sounded as though Patty regretted having to get Stan.

“I’ll be back.” Stan said, almost as a suggestion that Bill could either chose to agree to or not.

“That’d be nice.” Bill smiled hopefully. “Don’t let them tell you off too much.”

“I’ll try.” Stan smiled back. “I can be a pushover with adults.”

“Never would have guessed it.” Bill laughed a little.

Stan felt a giggle bubble up in him but he held it down. Now wasn’t the time for laughing. He was about to be in deep trouble, after all. As he turned to follow Patty, Bill reached out and grabbed his hand, halting him in his track briefly.

“Be careful.” Where was the agony in Bill’s voice coming from? He sounded like Stan’s departure was going to tear him apart. “You don’t know what’s out there.”

“It’s just a meeting.” Stan said nervously.

“Come home.” Bill’s voice cracked. “Promise?”

“Yeah. Promise.” Stan didn’t know where this was coming from but somehow he knew if he didn’t promise, then Bill was going to crumble to pieces.

Bill let go and bowed his head, tears falling onto the photo frame that he held so tightly. Patty clicked her tongue impatiently and Stan tore himself away from the sad image. He was going to come back. Bill would still be here when he returned.

Right?

True to Patty's word, Robert and Ms Lapwood were waiting for Stan and Patty when they arrived at the office. Neither looked happy with Stan and Patty was dismissed quickly, before Stan even had the chance to sit down. He wanted to turn and sprint after Patty so that he could escape the anger, but fear kept him in place.

“You can sit down Stan.” Ms Lapwood spoke first. Stan did as she said, tensing up automatically when Robert leant forward. A desk separated them but every bone in Stan’s body was yelling that Robert was too close, too close, too close!

“I’m sure you know why you’re here.” Not only did Robert not look happy, he didn’t sound happy.
“I ran away from group therapy.” Stan could barely get the words out.

“Exactly.” Robert’s voice didn’t change. “You left an activity that is crucial to your recovery, even after I’d allowed you to not speak this time. I gave you an exception and you took advantage of that.”

“I know.” There was no use denying it. “I’m sorry. I wanted to help Bill.”

“There were already people helping Bill.” Robert did not sound impressed.

“I found him alone in his room.” Stan couldn’t help but fire off the words. “Nobody was around. No one was helping him.”

Ms Lapwood cut in before Robert could speak again. “Stan, we want to help you. This hospital exists for the benefit of you and your fellow patients. You have to trust us. We know what we’re doing.”

“But how am I supposed to know that?” Stan said angrily. “I’ve never been to a place like this before. Nothing makes sense to me. All I know is that the stupid activity today was upsetting everyone and I couldn’t stay in that room anymore.”

“I see.” Ms Lapwood glanced over at Robert. “Perhaps Stan and I should continue this discussion in private.”

“I still have more things to say.” Robert shut the suggestion down. He faced Stan again. “Stan, we have a duty of care but that can only go so far, if we can’t help you. Your refusal to listen suggests to us that you have no interest in getting better.”

Panic reared up wildly inside Stan. “I do.” He protested frantically. “I do. I want to...I want to see what’s out there for me. I want to find reasons to live.”

“I can’t believe you.” Robert sounded truly upset but he wasn’t fooling Stan. “So perhaps we should try another method. You know the one I’m thinking of, yes?”

“Robert.” Ms Lapwood cut in again and this time she sounded angry. “It is only Stan’s third day in here, and not even a week since the initial suicide attempt that sent him to us. He needs time to adjust to his new environment and to learn what is expected of him in here. He needs to not feel as though there is so much pressure on him to instantly show signs of recovery. Have you forgotten that we are a long term care facility? I know Stan disobeyed your instructions but there is no need to suggest any extreme methods so early into Stan’s healing process. Let him settle in.”

The panic died down. Ms Lapwood was on his side. She wasn’t going to let Robert do anything weird to him.

“Very well.” Robert forced a smile. “I agree, Callie. After all, you are his private therapist.” He glared across the desk at Stan. “But Stanley, remember. We know what’s best for you. You have to listen to us. I do not like to resort to such extreme measures, but I will if I have to. Understand?”

“Of course.” Stan looked down at his hands. They were shaking, almost violently. What had Robert wanted to do to him? What would have happened if Ms Lapwood hadn’t stepped in?

“Now, perhaps Stan and I can have a chat in private.” Ms Lapwood pressed. Robert nodded reluctantly and left.

The pressure that had been slowly pressing down on Stan during the meeting lifted as the door
swung shut behind Robert. He was still feeling pretty shit about everything but at least that had lessened. Ms Lapwood had just proven that she wasn't like Robert. She really cared for Stan. So he could trust her, yeah?

“I'm sorry about Robert.” Ms Lapwood said after a moment. “He's a little old fashioned. He does great work. It's just been an off week for him.”

“It's fine.” Stan said awkwardly. “I mean, I did run away.”

“While I'm not too happy about you running off a day after you nearly killed yourself, I do understand that things can get really heavy during group sessions. You're not the only one who's run away.”

“I went after Bill.” Stan said, even though she probably already knew that. “He helped me when I was panicking yesterday and for some reason, I wanted to do the same for him.”

“That's very admirable.” Ms Lapwood smiled kindly. “It shows that you’re a very empathetic boy, Stanley.”

“I guess.” Stan shrugged. “I've never had friends before. I'm afraid I'm going to ruin things. I think that's why I went to help. Maybe I don't want to be alone.”

“Even people with more friends than the eye can see think that they're going to ruin things one day. Nobody can truly master something as intricate as friendship. The nature of it changes so often.” Ms Lapwood said gently.

Stan didn’t want to keep talking about his insecurities, so he quickly changed the subject. “Am I allowed to ask who you're in charge of here?”

“Yes.” Ms Lapwood answered. “You are. But I can’t disclose anything else. There are three private therapists here. Me, Robert and Hayden Bentley. I don’t think you’ve met him yet.”

Stan shook his head. He hadn’t.

“I take you, Beverly, Mike Hanlon and Elle.” Ms Lapwood went on. “As you can see, I take both girls. Make of that what you will.”

“Who do Robert and Mr Bentley take?” Stan asked, still curious about who was matched up with who.

“Robert takes Richie, Mike Wheeler, Dustin and Ben. Hayden has the remaining. Will, Lucas, Bill and Eddie.”

“How do you choose who takes on who?”

“Curious about we work?” Ms Lapwood raised an eyebrow.

“I like to know how things work.” Stan said simply.

It was the truth. An undeniable, fact of life. Stan needed to know how things worked, because he needed things to make sense. Things that weren’t right were repulsive. If something was a mystery, then Stan had to solve it so his world could keep turning. Things had to slot into place otherwise everything would be thrown into chaos.

“The director of the hospital assigns you to us. We rarely have any say in it.” Ms Lapwood
“What’s the director like?” Stan asked curiously.

“I think that’s enough questions for today.” Ms Lapwood’s voice was deceptively light. “It’s lunch time.”

Stan frowned but got up and moved to the door. “Can I head there on my own or do I have to wait for a nurse.”

“You can go on your own.” Ms Lapwood waved him away. “I’ll see you around.”

“Seeya.”

Stan left the therapist’s office and headed towards the dining room. The corridors were quiet, as they usually were and he relished in the peace. Soon it would have to be broken and that saddened him. Stan liked to be alone. Not constantly, sure, but he needed personal time to break up the moments of togetherness. The rules of the hospital meant that moments of isolation were practically non-existent.

The dining room grew closer and closer. Stan hoped that Bill was also heading towards lunch. He’d said he’d come back to the boy but he also had to follow the rules, especially after the talk with Robert. Stan didn’t want to risk facing any extreme disciplinary measures just because he hadn’t gone to lunch when he should have. Maybe he could find Bill after, if he didn’t show up.

Stan arrived and peered in. Relief flooded his body as he saw Bill sitting at the table, leaning on Mike. He wanted to run to him but instead, steeled himself and walked over to get his food first. Bill looked up at the sound of his footsteps and smiled softly. Stan smiled in return and sat down opposite.

“Stan the Man!” Richie cheered. “You were so bloody awesome today!”

“Just because I walked out?” Stan picked up his fork.

“You should have seen the look on Robert’s face. He got so angry. He told some nurses to take us away so he could talk to Callie in private.” Beverly laughed.

“Did you get in trouble?” Eddie asked anxiously.

“Not really.” Stan nearly shuddered at the memory. “Robert was suggesting these extreme methods but Ms Lapwood shot him down. Said to give me a break because it’s only my third day.”


“You and me both.” Richie sighed dramatically.

“Hey Stan.” A sort of unfamiliar and yet familiar voice cut in and Stan turned awkwardly in his chair to see Richie’s twin brother standing there. He was flagged by Dustin. “Hilarious stuff today.”

“Robert was shitting himself.” Dustin added in cheerfully. “Sonofabitch got what was coming to him.”

“I guess.” Stan tugged at one of his curls anxiously.

“What did he talk to you about?” Bill asked.
“He really wanted to punish me.” Stan chewed his lip nervously. “I mean…it was scary.”

“I’m glad you stood up to him.” Mike said earnestly. “And if you ever need any help, I’m here.”

“You and your bloody martyr complex.” Richie complained.

“Not meant to insult my disorder.” Mike shot back.

Richie rolled his eyes. “You told me you don’t believe it’s even a thing.”

“Yeah but I have to annoy you somehow.” Mike grinned and the dark tone that had been tinting the conversation lifted.

“A martyr complex?” Stan whispered to Bill, hoping to not end up upsetting someone by poking his nose into a private subject. Unfortunately Mike and Richie heard anyway.

“This idiot jumped off a cliff to save someone from getting their baby teeth knocked out.” Richie tugged Mike in for a half hug, half head lock.

“It’s not like I died.” Mike giggled.

“You damn well came close.”

“You actually jumped off a cliff?” Stan almost couldn’t believe it. To save a few teeth that would soon be replaced, Mike had jumped off a cliff. He was lucky to be alive.

“Yeah.” Mike laughed again, though it sounded more self-deprecating this time. “I did. That’s actually the big thing that got me sent here.”

“The big thing?”

“Everyone has the big thing. Jumping off a cliff was mine.” Mike glanced over at Dustin for a brief moment, before looking back to Stan. “Anyway, we’ll leave you to enjoy your lunch.”

The two scurried away.

“The big thing.” Stan repeated. He brushed his fingertips against the white bandages that he still needed to wear.

“Just like Muh-muh-muh-Mike said. We all have it.” Bill said. “There’s always a reason.”

“There’s always a reason.” Stan relayed the words once more.

**And there’s always a choice**…

“Sometimes it’s not our fault.” Beverly whispered. “But we end up here anyway. Because we’re children and things are out of our control. We’re too young. Whenever we try to fight back, we’re shut down.”

Stan knew that the others knew what his big thing was. They’d all seen the bandages. They’d all heard him admit to it. And now Stan knew Mike’s. And probably Richie’s if he’d interpreted everything correctly. The others all had one, and maybe one day they would tell him what it was. If they trusted him, that was.

Was he a trustworthy person?
Eddie rested his head on Richie’s shoulder and sighed. “Maybe tomorrow will be better.”

“That’s the attitude.” Richie smiled fondly.

“What are we doing after lunch?” Stan asked. “School?”

“Yup.” Mike popped the p almost cheerfully. “And it’s due to be English today.”

“Not maths?” Stan shot a teasing look at Eddie.

“Bite me.” The boy shot back.

“I have a private therapy session.” Bill set his fork down. “Which suh-suh-suh-sucks because I like English.”

“You’ll probably have to talk about him.” Beverly said cautiously. “Are you sure you’re alright to do that?”

“I have to buh-buh-buh-buh-be.”

That was another mention of the mysterious Him that seemed to be a hard topic for Bill to approach. A person that had nearly brought him to tears earlier because Bill had dreamed about him. It was probably somebody in his life who’d died.

Stan had never had anybody in his family die at an age when he was able to remember it and truly feel the pain that came with loss. His mum’s parents had both died before he was born, in a car accident. His dad’s parents were still alive. He was an only child with no siblings to miss and though his dad had two sisters with children of their own, they had migrated to Australia when Stan was only six.

More reasons that he was lonely. He’d grown up without family members close to him in age to play with and learn from. It was impossible to make friends when you didn’t know how to. Stan wasn’t good with social cues. He’d been told he had a weird sense of humour that people didn’t get. He never had people looking to him when it was time for group projects. Nobody gave him birthday invitations or invited him over to their house. He was well and truly alone.

But perhaps you felt even more lonely when you had someone specific to miss.

Someone like the mysterious Him.

Stan knew it wasn’t his place to prod. Really he did. He’d been over this before. He didn’t want to go invading the privacy of his new-found friends and breaking any sort of trust that had built up. He’d seen just how broken up Eddie had been over Robert revealing his personal information to Stan before the boy was ready to do so.

Everyone worked differently in the hospital. Beverly seemed content to be open with some information but keep other secrets just that. Secrets. Richie overshared to the point that it became glaringly obvious that it was a coping mechanism. The others all seemed rather secretive. They wanted to be able to trust Stan before they told him everything.

Stan’s curiosity needed to take a back seat to general politeness and courtesy. Things would fall into place. It wasn’t his job to force them in.

The last remains of lunch were polished off and the plates were cleared up. Their break from the often cold reality of the hospital was over.
It was time for Stan to find out what school was like.

Chapter End Notes

Updating now because I'm off to the internet sparse Port Piree for a few days to be with my family. It's my first trip up there without my immediate family which is exciting. I'll write lots while I'm away.

Hope this is a good chapter!! Probably full of mistakes because I rushed it again. Please continue to leave kudos and comments. I am honestly always so happy to receive them. They inspire me and give me confidence to create more work.
School, as it turned out, was pretty much identical to any other educational establishment outside the hospital. The room was set out pretty much like Stan’s old classrooms, though a touch bigger despite the smaller amount of students. Posters with tips on spelling and easy maths tricks lined the walls. A whiteboard was situated at the front of the room and the desks were strategically placed to create sitting groups of four. Cupboards and shelves took up a lot of the remaining space, each labelled with a different subject.

At the front of the room stood a short lady with a trendy bob and a baggy cardigan. She nodded to each person as they entered and took their seats, but stopped Stan before he could do the same.

“Hello. My name is Mrs T.” She introduced herself, holding out a hand to shake. Stan declined, giving an awkward wave instead. She took it in stride, clasping her palms together and giving Stan a wide smile. “It’s been awhile since we had anyone new. It’s a pleasure to have you in my English class.”

“Thanks for having me.” Stan muttered, inwardly cursing his response. It wasn’t like she had a choice in the matter. He was a patient at the hospital so he was her student whether she wanted him to be or not.

“We sit in groups with those who have the same therapist.” Mrs T explained, seemingly oblivious to Stan’s problem. “So you’ll be with Bev, Elle and Mike. If you’d like to sit down now, I’ll begin the class.”

Stan moved to his desk, sitting down in the spare seat next to Beverly. She grinned at him cheerily and pushed a pen in his direction.

“I thought we couldn’t have pens anymore.” Stan said, puzzled.

“We can in school.” Beverly replied. “But they count the pens at the start and the end of the lesson to make sure that nobody’s taken one. If we used felt tip markers, then our work would look kinda stupid. It gets marked, you know. And assessed. Just like any other school.”

“Right.”

“Alright everybody, eyes up here.” Mrs T called. “Let’s begin. Today we’re going to be reading some poems and then analysing them in our table groups, referring specifically to poetic terminology such as rhythm and pace. Each group will have a different poem. Let me just hand them out now.”

Stan took the sheet of paper he was handed and scanned the passages printed there. Poetry was never something he’d felt a connection to but he knew that Ben would probably be bouncing in his seat in excitement. For some reason, that made Stan smile.
“Beautiful.” Elle whispered as she read through the poem they’d been given. It was an excerpt from a poem titled exactly that. Beautiful. Stan focused on the words, unsure if Elle had just been reading the title for them or actually stating that the poem was beautiful.

Because Stan didn’t find it beautiful at all. In fact, it made him sick to his stomach to read about the dazzling life of a gorgeous woman who the world had used and kept on using. They just kept using and using until there was nothing left of her.

_The whole world swooned…_

It was always about what others thought, what they saw, what they got out of it.

_The audience drooled…_

The image that came to Stan’s mind had shivers running down his spine.

..._she couldn’t die when she died…_

She was kept alive by sheer force of will, because she’d been loved so much and yet hadn’t found it within herself to do the same.

But nobody would miss Stan if he died. Not to such an extent anyway. He would never be kept alive through a distorted memory that people clung to. Perhaps it would be better that way though. The poem didn’t give off the impression that a life of fame and fortune was always desirable.

..._couldn’t stop saying the lines or singing the tunes…_

“It’s sad, isn’t it.” Beverly’s lips tweaked up in a funny sort of smile. “The poor woman.”

“Who do you think it was?” Stan wondered.

“Marilyn Monroe.” Mike answered. “Without a doubt.”

“Pretty.” Elle tapped her finger against the page.

“Yeah, she was.” Beverly said absently. “Very pretty. And very sad.”

“So we just have to analyse this?” Stan asked, desperate to move on. This poem was giving him an overwhelming sense of nostalgia and loss, as though somehow his life had moved on years and years without his knowledge.

“What sort of questions should we be asking.” Mike hummed thoughtfully. “That’s the first part of any analysis. Working out the questions. Then we can move onto picking out the techniques.”

“Who was she.” Stan had noticed that Elle only ever spoke softly, like she was afraid to raise her voice.

“We already worked that out. Marilyn Monroe.” Beverly said, not unkindly.

“More than that.” Elle said a little impatiently. “Who was she?”

“Lost.” Stan murmured. Elle’s eyes cleared.

“Yes. Like that.”

“She was famous.” Mike joined in. “Very famous. You’d be hard pressed to find somebody who
didn’t know her name. Even after all this time.”

Stan found himself looking round at the table Bill should have been sitting at, only he was at therapy, unable to add his voice to the discussion. Stan couldn’t tear his eyes away. All he could see was the space that Bill should’ve been occupying, but wasn’t. Did Bill have a space in his life that should have somewhere there? Would he one day leave an empty place in Stan’s life? Would Bill die, but keep on living, kept alive by his friends?

It was suspected that Marilyn Monroe had committed suicide. People said that she’d been unable to manage the fame. She’d quite possible woken up one day with a very clear thought in her head, to end it all. Just like Stan had.

“She was beautiful.” Beverly pointed to the title of the poem, managing to draw Stan’s attention back to their work. “Everybody said so.”

“She was a sex-icon.” Mike said, a tad awkwardly. “For Hollywood.”

“White dress.” Elle named the iconic outfit from the well-known photo.

“Popular. People looked up to her. Not really a role model. But people wanted to be her.” Mike mused.

“She was anxious.” Stan’s voice trembled. “And scared. And confused.”

“And you can tell how?” Beverly questioned.

“Because I feel that way. Because at the end of the day, she couldn’t bear to live. And sometimes, neither can I.”

Silence.

Awkward, long, drawn out silence.

“I want a different poem.” Elle muttered.

“Yeah.” Stan rested his head in his hands. “Me too.”

...she couldn’t die when she died...

...die when she died...

...she died...

That was just it. At the end of it all, she was dead.

Everybody was always dead at the end of it all.

Because it was the end.

Nothing goes on after that.

________________________________________________________________________

Stan dreamt of rain that night.

He dreamt of thunderstorms, with crackling lightning and booming thunder and needle sharp raindrops slamming into the ground.
He dreamt of a little boy splashing through puddles and kicking up water in dazzling arcs. He dreamt of laughter and joy and childlike innocence.

He dreamt of an older boy smiling, singing, humming, loving.

He dreamt of a connection that couldn’t be broken, shouldn’t be broken.

And then he dreamt of pain and agony and death. He dreamt of blood and bone and the smell of fear in the air.

He heard the laughter turn to screams.

He saw the smile morph into a twisted mouth.

He heard the singing fade.

The loving was tainted.

He dreamt of darkness, where there should have been light.

The connection was broken.

Stan woke up screaming.

“Stan! Stan can you hear me? Wake up! Please! Just stop screaming! Stop! Wake up!”

Stan choked on his scream and it broke off harshly. He curled in on himself, coughing into his chest as he struggled to get air into his lungs. In the background, Richie babbled away, voice thick with fear. A sliver of light spilt in from the corridor and lit everything, dim though it was.

“I’m awake.” Stan rasped. “I’m okay.”

“You were screaming. It was horrible.” Richie whispered.

“Sorry.” Stan untucked himself and struggled to sit up. “What’s the time?”

“Not even midnight.” Richie rubbed at his face. “Maybe half past eleven?”

“Sorry.” Stan repeated. “I didn’t mean to wake you. I was having…”

“A nightmare?”

“Yeah.”

“Can I ask what it was about?” Richie asked awkwardly, lanky limbs folding in on himself as he tried to protect himself from the cold.

“There were these two boys.” Stan gasped. “And then they both died. Or maybe just one. Yeah. I think only one died. But it felt like the other almost did die because of that. He was in pain. So much pain. And for some reason I was to.”

“Two boys?” Richie sounded scared. But why did he? He wasn't the one who'd had the nightmare. He shouldn’t appear to be so rattled.

Maybe...even though he wasn’t the one to have nightmare, it was still scaring Richie. Maybe for some reason, Richie understood what the nightmare meant. Maybe he’d interpreted it somehow. Was
there anything in there that Richie could relate to? Anything at all?

“I think they were brothers.” Stan realised out loud.

Mike…

Maybe Richie was scared of losing Mike. Or Mike losing him.

Stan was an only child. He’d grown up alone without a sibling to rely upon, to share secrets with and to look out for. Richie apparently had grown up without Mike, but now they were together again. If Stan had a long lost sibling, he’d be terrified of losing them all over again. So Richie probably was terrified of waking up one morning to find Mike gone.

“I'm sorry.” Stan felt the need to apologise. “I didn't mean to upset you.”

“You didn't.” Richie said quickly. “It's just...your dream. It reminded me of something. That's all.”

“Sorry.” Stan said again. He knew that it wouldn’t do any good to ask Richie just what the dream had reminded him of. He had his theories anyway, so he kept his mouth shut.

That’s all he ever seemed to be doing in the hospital when it came to his friends. Keeping his mouth shut. Stan tried not to let it bother him.

“Not your fault.” Richie shrugged. “It was your nightmare and it upset you, and I let it get to me. That’s not fair. I’m the one who should be sorry.”

Stan had noticed in the three days that he’d been at the hospital, that Richie seemed all the more vulnerable at night. During the day he kept up this sort of image. He teased the staff and made inappropriate comments that had the other patients groaning and rolling their eyes, even as they tried to stop their laughter. He told bad jokes that still had people in stitches and always tried to lighten the mood when it was down. Even when he was revealing dark secrets, he would laugh as though they were hilarious. He radiated confidence and carelessness. But when it got dark and silence filled the halls…

Well it seemed like that was a different story.

“I’m going to try and get some more sleep.” Stan said and lay back down, suppressing a shudder of disgust when he came into contact with the sweaty sheets. It was a horrible feeling to return to, but it was his own fault that they were like that. He had no right to complain.

You reap what you sow.

And you reap more than what you set out to sow. You reap yourself as well. Fear the reaper Stan…

What?

“Me too.” Richie yawned loudly as he spoke, startling Stan who’d started to lose himself to his thoughts.

The two settled down into a semi-comfortable silence as they both tried to drop back off to sleep again. Stan tried to think about anything else except the nightmare but it didn’t help. He’d heard it been said before. Nothing cemented a memory more firmly in the mind than the desire to forget it. He was doomed to spend the rest of the night reliving the painful moments of two brothers who’d met a tragic end.
He closed his eyes and saw yellow and heard rain and smelt blood.

**End Day 3**

**Start Day 4**

Stan couldn’t actually say he woke up in the morning, since he hadn’t really gone back to sleep. He’d tossed and turned all night, haunted by the troubling dream that had not only upset him but Richie as well. Stan had had nightmares before. He was no stranger to them. And usually, he was able to push them aside moments after they’d passed. Why was this one different? Was it because of his different environment?

That had to be it. He was in a new place with strange people and he was stressed. It was natural for things to be a little out of whack.

“You up?” Richie asked from beneath a pile of blankets.

“Unfortunately.” Stan groaned. He was so damned tired.

“A nurse will be round to get us soon. Might as well get dressed now.” Richie emerged from his nest, hair even messier than usual and squinting in an attempt to see Stan properly.

Stan nodded in agreement and they scurried around, gathering up their hospital uniform from wherever they’d left it the night before. Stan had folded his neatly and left it to rest on his chest of drawers. Richie meanwhile, had kicked his under his bedside table, out of sight and out of mind.

Almost seconds after they’d dressed properly, Patty came around. She blinked in surprise when she saw them up and ready for the day, but made no comment on it. She just gestured for them to follow her to breakfast and they obliged.

As they walked, Richie struck up a conversation.

“Hey. I know you’re the kind of person who wouldn’t go around sharing much, but can you not mention your dream to the others? Especially Bill.”

“Huh? Why?” Stan frowned. Sure, he hadn’t been heading to breakfast with the intent of dumping his troubles on his new friends, but he probably would have explained the nightmare (vaguely) if someone had asked how he’d slept.

“Just...trust me.” Richie rubbed at his arm uncomfortably.

“Okay.”

They spent the rest of the walk in silence.

*Especially Bill…*

*Dreamt about him…*

*Him…*

Two brothers...one alive, one dead.

Bill?

“Pay attention curls.” Richie grabbed Stan and yanked him back harshly, seconds before he could
run into the door frame of the dining room.

“Speak for yourself, curls.” Stan shot back.

“Your curls make my curls look like the straightest hair in existence.” Richie grinned. “Anyway, aren’t you going to thank me? I just saved you from breaking your nose.”

“You saved me from nothing but a tiny bruise.” Stan marched into the dining room, Richie laughing to himself as he followed behind.

Everybody else was already settled down at the tables eating their breakfast. Stan and Richie hastened to get their food and sit down to join in the conversation.

“So then Eddie legit threw his mattress off the bed because he couldn’t find his lucky bed socks.” Bill was saying as Eddie’s face turned a horrible scarlett.

“Aw, did my little Eds lose the socks I got him.” Richie cooed as he sat down.

“You didn’t get me those. I bought them myself on one of our day trips.” Eddie snapped.

“Yeah, but I picked them out.”

“Shut up.”

“Did you find the socks?” Stan asked, because he hated it when people didn’t know where things were. He’d spent so many school days fixated on going home because he wasn’t sure where he’d left something.

“They were in his drawer where they always are them.” Bill chipped in. Everybody laughed and settled back down to eat their food.

As Stan ate his muesli, he snuck secretive glances at Bill across the table. He seemed cheerier today, but Stan knew all too well how easily that sort of thing could be faked. He also knew the sort of pressure that people put on themselves to try and act like things were fine so that everyone else around them wouldn’t be worried. He himself didn’t expect Bill to be one hundred percent fine and dandy all the time. Surely nobody else did either.

But...it also seemed like in this sort of hospital, most of the pressure put on the patients probably came from themselves.

“We don’t have group therapy today.” Mike said suddenly. “Rodger told me and Ben.”

“How’s good ol’ Roger going?” Richie grinned.

“Probably happier now that he doesn’t have to lead you around constantly.” Mike shot back, smiling just as widely.

“What are we doing instead?” Eddie wanted to know.

“Physical exercise.” Ben sounded happy.

“ Wouldn’t that count as part of school?” Stan asked.

“Sometimes. Sometimes not. We need quite a bit of it since we don’t really get out and about. They squeeze in it whenever they possibly can. Plus, we’ve had a bad few days in group therapy. They probably wanna give us a break and PE is a good way to do that.”
“What kind of stuff do we have to do?”

“Games mostly. Because they’re fun.” Beverly said cheerily. “Dodgeball is my favourite. Lots of excusable violence.”

“She’s mostly joking.” Ben offered.

“Sometimes we have more structured classes, though. Like we get taught how to play actual sports now and again.” Bill said. “Do you play any?”

“I’m okay at baseball.” Stan said. “That’s what teachers would tell me, anyway.”

“An all rounder or do you have a specific position that you kick ass in?” Richie seemed eager to delve deeper into Stan’s non-existent sports career.

“Pretty good baseman I guess. Cause I’m fast.” Stan rubbed his arm awkwardly. “I didn’t play much, really. You had to be invited to play outside of school and nobody ever really invited me. Because of...well because of a lot of things.”

“That sucks.” Beverly raised an eyebrow. “You got us now, though. We know what it’s like to be excluded because we don’t act like other kids or we don’t fit into their neat little boxes of proper society. But in here, it’s different. In here, they’d be the freaks.”

“Can we not call people freaks.” Eddie pleaded. “It’s mean.”

“They were mean to us first.” Beverly pointed out.

“Two wrongs don’t make a right.” Eddie huffed.

“The whole don’t be mean to someone if they were mean to you because that’s just stooping to their level is such bullshit.” Beverly slammed an open palm down on the table. “It’s just a way for bullies to get away with whatever they want to.”

“Yeah but…” Eddie trailed off and Richie wrapped an arm around him comfortingly.

“Let’s go.” A nurse called from the door. “Quick march. Come on!”

“What are we, cadets?” Mike said jokingly as they all got up.

“Always wanted to join the army.” Richie mused.

“Really?”

“Nope!”

“Richie doesn’t know how to follow rules. They’d kick him out before he even got a chance to register.” Eddie teased.

“None of us should ever join the army.” Bill said quietly. “Because there’s nothing worse than leaving and never coming home.”

_Blood and death and yellow…_

“Hurry up.” The nurse called. “You’re wasting valuable time.”

“Like sports could ever be valuable.” Stan heard Dustin mutter from behind them, followed by a few
curse words which had Will looking rather spooked.

The gym was located in a part of the hospital that Stan hadn’t been too. He was still learning the layout of the place but he felt comfortable enough with the paths he knew. Now he was in a totally unknown section with closed doors that had no markings on them to give away what lurked behind them. The gym was at the end of the corridor, and it was labelled. Waiting outside was a tallish woman with pale brown hair and a bored look on her face.

“Who’s she?” Stan asked Richie.

“Mitty. She’s the PE teacher.” Richie explained.

“Her name’s Mitty?”

“Either that or a nickname.”

“What’s she like?” Stan asked anxiously. He hated meeting new people. There were too many variables, too many ways a situation could go wrong, too many things out of his control.

When he’d first met the other patients and the staff, he’d been too stuck in his head to feel afraid. He’d been anxious, yes, and incredibly nervous. But the usual fear hadn’t been present because it had been fixated on other things. However, now his head felt clearer and the panic was hitting him in waves.

“She’s great.” It was Ben who answered. “Listens to what we want to do. Doesn’t press things. Tells great jokes. Her girlfriend’s great too. She drops by sometimes and they play volleyball with us since they used to play professionally.”

The information was sort of helping to settle Stan’s fear. The patients seemed to like Mitty and her unnamed girlfriend. Nobody was rolling their eyes at Ben’s commentary or verbally disagreeing. Maybe things would be fine.

Still...things could also go wrong alarmingly fast. You could wake up one morning in your own bed and finish the day in a hospital. It was just a fact of life.

“We’re gonna do some games today.” Mitty said once everyone had filed into the gym. Stan was too busy looking around to pay much attention to what she was saying.

The gym was an average size, smaller than the one at Stan’s school but still impressive considering its location. Coloured lines on the shiny floor helped dictate different boundaries for different sports. The air smelt stale and dry, like all gyms did. Huge heaters were stuck to the wall, and an air conditioner lurked above a small roller door. Stan assumed that behind the door was all the sports equipment.

Mitty had approached while Stan was distracted by the gym. He nearly jumped out of his skin when she cleared her throat.

“Welcome to the gym. I’m Mitty. You must be Stanley.”

“Nice to meet you.” Stan said, mouth dry. The bored look on Mitty’s face softened slightly.

“We’re just going to be playing some games today, to get you into the swing of things. Don’t want to scare you off.”

That was sort of a funny thing to say, since if Stan was scared off, it wasn’t like he could stay away.
Choice was non-existent in the hospital, bar the meager free time they got. Even then though, the activities were limited by rules and regulations.

Mitty sent Lucas and Dustin over to open the roller door and bring out a wheelie bin filled with soft foam balls. It looked like they were going to be playing dodgeball like Beverly had hoped. If that was true, then Stan planned to hang around in the background and avoid getting hit, or even getting actively involved at all. Sure, sports could be fun but dodgeball was so violent. What if he hit someone too hard? What if someone got hurt?

“Is it dodgeball?” Beverly bounced on the balls of her feet as Mitty thanked Lucas and Dustin for their help.

“For now. We might switch to a different game later.” Mitty opened the bin and pulled out a red ball. For a moment, Stan’s vision swam and the ball was suddenly a balloon. He shuddered and everything cleared again.

“You alright?” Bill asked, looking concerned.

“Fine. Just tired.” Stan brushed him off. “Um...how violent do your dodgeball games get?”

“Not that violent. Sure we throw hard, but we’re skinny kids. We can’t do much damage with foam.” Bill laughed a little.

“But it can hurt, right?” Stan pressed.

The laughter fell from Bill and he looked more serious. “We could ask everyone not to aim for you. It won’t be fun if you sit out but if you don’t want to get hurt, we can help with that.”

“I’d feel stupid.” Stan sighed.

“Feeling stupid is better than getting hurt.” Bill urged. There was something in his voice, something Stan couldn’t decipher.

“It’ll be fine.” Stan decided “I’m fast. I can dodge.”

“If you’re sure...” Bill sounded very reluctant now.

Stan stood up straighter and smiled. “I’m sure.”

Bill smiled back, soft and shy, and then they turned to face Mitty. So maybe Stan wanted to get better. Maybe he didn’t. But he had to try.

Only he could work this out for himself.

Chapter End Notes

This is a long time coming, I am so, so sorry. Things were busy at home and then I got sick and then there's writer's block. But I'm back and hopefully updating more regularly. I cannot thank you all enough for your lovely comments, they mean so, so much!

The poem the kids analyse is written in 2003 I think but I'm going for a timeless feel so I hope this doesn't upset anyone.
As for the comment about tagging, I understand your frustration but I don't want to falsely advertise anything. I tag what's in the fic and there is friendship and romantic relationships in my fic. Both are important types of relationships so I don't want to leave one un-tagged. I'm sorry if this is annoying.

Please leave a kudos or comment if you liked!!!!!!!! They're really inspiring and help me work faster <3
Stanley Uris struggles

Chapter Summary

There's too many problems and Stan's just one kid.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Dodgeball turned out to be insanely fun, if Stan was being honest. Sure, sometimes Lucas threw the ball so hard that Stan could almost hear the wind whistling behind it as it slammed into the target with an alarming slap. And sure, Beverly wasn’t afraid to aim high (like for the head) if the mood hit her. And yes, it was insanely easy to trip over Eddie when he crouched down on the floor, but Stan found himself getting into it all the same. He hadn’t expected to be so taken in with the game. The violence had worried him, but the good nature of his fellow patients had lessened his fears.

Mitty made no move to swap to another game so they all played dodgeball up until it was time for lunch. In that time, Stan’s team of himself, Eddie, Richie, Mike Hanlon, Elle and Will won two out of the five games. Dustin crowed all the way to the dining room about his team’s overall victory but Stan didn’t feel bitter about it. Winning was fun, and Dustin meant no harm. He was just a cheery kid who wanted to boast about a fun game.

Lunch went quickly, the conversation moving from topic to topic as everybody chipped in. Just as Stan was getting ready to head off to school with the others, Patty arrived at the dining room and took him aside.

“You have a private therapy lesson now.” She said. “Come on.”

“Can we switch. I wanna miss maths.” Eddie complained, overhearing.

“I’m missing maths?” Stan sighed. Just his luck.

“There’ll be other math lessons.” Patty said, the intention behind her words perfectly clear.

Time to go.

Stan’s shoulders slumped as he followed Patty through the corridors to where Ms Lapwood would be waiting. Two meetings in two days. What was there to talk about?

“Um...why are you always leading me around?” Stan asked as they walked, mostly just to break the awkward silence that had settled over them. Most of the time Stan liked it when things were quiet. But he couldn’t stand it when things were stiff and awkward. Sometimes his annoyance of that overruled his desire for peace.

“Sometimes nurses get assigned to certain people.” Patty said quietly. “But you already suspected that, didn’t you?”

Stan started, shocked at the bold words. Yes, Patty had always been a little...off might’ve been the right word -rude as it was- but she’d never tried to dig this deeply into Stan. He nodded hesitantly, confirming what she’d asked.
“You’re observant.” Patty hummed. “But sometimes, in places like this, it’s better not to be.”

“What’s that supposed to mean.” Stan said sharply.

Patty didn’t reply. Instead, she stopped outside Ms Lapwood’s door and knocked. Stan’s therapist called out for him to come in, and so he did, glancing behind him at Patty as he did.

“Everything alright?” Ms Lapwood asked as she gestured for him to shut the door.

“Uh...yeah.” Stan sat down in his usual seat. “Just tired.” It was the same old excuse, as always. It worked for most people. He got the feeling it wouldn’t on Ms Lapwood.

“Did something disturb your sleep?” Ms Lapwood asked, producing a pen and uncapping it.

Stan knew by now that it was just best to spill everything that was on his mind. Or at least, most things. He wasn’t going to tell Ms Lapwood about Patty. It was probably nothing but Stan didn’t want to get the nurse in trouble. Not until he’d worked out if there was any reason for him to be worried, or if Patty was just having an off day. The nightmare though. He’d have to share that.

“I had a nightmare.” He sighed. “And usually I can move past them. But not this time. I think it’s just because of the new environment.”

“Most likely.” Ms Lapwood agreed. “Would you like to tell me about this nightmare?”

“It was weird.” Stan mused, almost to himself. “Richie woke me up, and I told him about it. And it really spooked him as well. He said it reminded him of something.”

“What happened in your nightmare?” Ms Lapwood asked again.

“There were these boys.” Stan whispered. “Brothers. And they were so happy together. And then one of them died. And everything went to shit. Oh! Sorry. I didn’t mean to swear.”

“It’s alright. I’ve hear way worse.” Ms Lapwood assured him. “Now. Was what all there was to the dream?”

“Pretty much.” Stan shrugged. “I just remember how painful and lonely it felt, for the brother who lived. Then Richie woke me up. Because I was screaming.”

“Have you ever woken up screaming from a nightmare before?” Ms Lapwood questioned.

“This is the first time.” Stan said. Briefly, he remembered when he’d been woken up by Elle screaming, and how Richie said that soon that would be him.

He hadn’t expected it to be this soon though.

“Did you get back to sleep after the nightmare?”

“No.” Stan admitted. “I dozed a bit, but barely even that.”

“So you really are tired.” There was a hint of a smile in Ms Lapwood’s voice.

“Yes.” Stan almost groaned. He was so damn tired.

“A sudden escalation from not screaming at all to screaming is strange.” Ms Lapwood mused, ignoring Stan’s childish tone.
“Really?”

“Usually there’s a build up. Have you been tossing and turning in your sleep recently? Making smaller noises, whimpers and such?”

“I don’t know.” Stan frowned. “You might have to ask Richie.”

“I think I will.”

Stan hadn’t expected her to agree. He wasn’t used to having good ideas. Not that his suggestion was a good idea in the first place. It wasn’t even an idea. It was more of an avoidance tactic. He’d just wanted to stop thinking about his ever changing sleep habits and how they reflected his mental state. But Ms Lapwood had agreed and now she was going to ask Richie about Stan. What had Richie noticed? What was he going to say?

“Is there anything else you can tell me?” Ms Lapwood continued.

“Just that it was a horrible feeling.” Stan wrung his hands together. “And I never want to feel it again.”

The look Ms Lapwood gave him confirmed his worst fears. He was going to feel it again. For now, there was no escaping it.

Stan left his therapy session and bumped into Will, coming from his own. Both boys yelped in shock and jumped away from each other, neither expecting the sudden contact. Stan tried to cover up his embarrassing moment whilst Will seemed to fully embrace it, face incredibly pale as he backed away from the taller patient.

“Sorry.” Stan rubbed the back of his neck. “I didn’t see you there.” He did a double take, noticing the tear tracks running down Will’s cheeks. “Are you alright?”

“Fine.” Will mumbled, rubbing at his face in an attempt to hide his frazzled state. “It’s always like this after therapy.”

Stan could relate. He’d already cried in one of his sessions and he’d nearly done it today as well, after Ms Lapwood had given him a letter his parents had sent. He’d read it in front of her, too nervous to wait, and the tears had nearly come. They missed him so much. Just as much as he missed them. They didn’t like how empty the house was. They kept forgetting that he wasn’t with them. But they were going to be patient, they’d written. They wanted him to get better. They wanted him to be happy.

And Stan couldn’t give them that yet.

“What can I help?” Stan asked as Will’s desperate attempts to wipe his tears away failed.

“It’s alright.” Will said even as he shook. “Nobody can really help. Not at the moment.” His eyes and mouth widened as he registered what he’d said. “I didn’t mean to say that. Just ignore it.”

“Why?” Stan frowned.

“Because we don’t really know each other yet…” Will trailed off. “Mike seems to like you but that’s mostly because you’re Richie’s roommate and Mike likes people who make Richie happy, which you do.”
Stan found himself blushing at the indirect compliment, even as he felt a little pang deep inside him at the rejection. Yes, he was a realist. Heck, he could be down right pessimistic when the mood hit. But Stan had experienced friendship since coming to the hospital, and it hurt twice as much to be pushed away by someone in the same boat as him. Logically, Stan knew that sometimes you couldn’t help people. Not always.

But you could always try.

“We could become friends, though?” He offered. He wasn’t used to being the more socially adept person in any conversation so it was weird for him to try and prompt such things.

“It’s us against you.” Will said abruptly, covering his mouth as if he could cram the words back inside him. It seemed to Stan as though sometimes Will was painfully honest, blurted out what he was thinking even as he regretted it. “I didn’t mean it like that. What I mean is that there’s two groups in the hospital and we’re not in the same one.”

“You mean that it’s always separate like this?” Stan frowned.

Will shuffled his feet around and looked at the floor. “Pretty much. The nurses and doctors try and mix us up all the time. They want us to all get along and be friends but there’s comfort in what you know.”

“Yeah.” Stan agreed.

“I have to go.” Will’s eyes darted around now, as though he thought someone was going to sneak up on him. “If that’s okay.”

Stan held back any sort of protest. He wasn’t Will’s keeper. Sure, he wanted to keep pressing the issue but Will seemed really jumpy now. Stan knew he was desperate for the conversation to end so that he could leave.

The funny thing was, Stan wasn’t. And wasn’t that odd. Because Stan usually tried his hardest to avoid any sort of interaction with people he didn’t know. Yet here he was, trying to initiate a friendship with timid Will who always looked cold and clung to Mike as though the boy was his only lifeline amidst an ocean of chaos.

“See you round?” Stan said instead of continuing on.

“Yeah.” Will said gratefully before turning and sprinting away. Stan watched him go, wondering why he wasn’t feeling an ounce of resentment inside him. Was that what understanding was?

Will’s footsteps faded and Stan was left alone. He was meant to be heading back to the little school, since his therapy session had been kind of short this time and there was still lesson time left. Will was probably heading elsewhere, given his hasty exit in the opposite direction. Stan allowed himself a brief moment of curiosity before beginning his walk to the classroom. Maybe he’d get to do a bit of maths after all.

Stan was lucky enough to squeeze in about twenty minutes of maths. Will had said during their conversation that there was comfort in what you knew. And if there was one thing that Stan knew well, it was maths. He liked how sensible it was. Maths had strict rules that couldn’t be broken, unlike the English language. You didn’t have to put your own spin on anything or try and interrupt something with thousands of ways to do just that. You could take different paths but you always got the same answer. There was order.
There was nothing to not like about maths.

The other people at his table didn’t seem to agree with Stan’s thoughts. Mike doodled in the margins of his worksheet, ignoring the problems he was meant to be answering. He’d already proven that he was more of a literature guy. Beverly was writing in random numbers in with a bored look plastered over her face as she perfected the illusion of doing work. Elle wasn’t even pretending to be doing maths. She was instead staring at a random spot on the wall. When the teacher announced the end of the lesson, there was a large sigh of relief that filled the classroom.

Richie was at Stan’s side in an instant, slinging an arm over his shoulder even as he called Eddie over.

“How was the therapy?” The bespectacled boy asked.

“Fine.” Stan shrugged.

“As fine as therapy can be.” Mike suggested.

“Yeah, that.”

“We’ll have group therapy tomorrow.” Beverly groaned. “And then we can all be ‘fine’ together.”

_There’s comfort in what you know…_

“Maybe they’ll let a different therapist take the session.” Eddie said hopefully. “Since Robert keeps mucking stuff up.”

“There’s always a chance.” Bill snuck up behind them, Ben next to him.

Stan looked around the room and saw that the two groups had naturally fallen together. There was never any attempts made to mingle unless the staff were forcing them to.

“Off to dinner.” The teacher didn’t even look up from the work he was marking.

The patients left.

Meals always seemed to sneak up on Stan. Sometimes it felt like no time had passed before they were back in the dining hall. Then again, sometimes it felt like the time in between dragged out. There was no middle ground. Time worked differently in the hospital.

As it was dinner time, there were pills to take. Stan quickly washed his down with the provided cordial before watching the others as they took theirs. Eddie once more seemed upset at the small amount he had, and only took them after a stern look from one of the nurses. Beverly and Richie linked arms and downed theirs like shots, laughing all the while. Bill raised an eyebrow at the display before swallowing his calmly, as did Mike and Ben. Stan smiled to himself and then tucked into the vegetarian lasagne that had been prepared.

“How come you don’t sit with Mike at meals?” He said after a few bites, addressing Richie who was cleaning his steamed up glasses.

“But I do.” Richie joked, nudging their Mike affectionately who smiled good-naturedly.

“You know what I mean.” Stan pointed a fork at his friend. “Don’t you want to spend time with him?”

“I guess.” Richie sounded casual but his fingers had stilled around his glasses. “But I want to spend
“Time with you guys too.”

“How come you guys don’t mix at all?” Stan opened the conversation up to everyone.

“That’s just not how it works.” Ben said uncomfortably. He wasn’t eating at all.

“Why not?” Stan pressed.

“Just cause.” Eddie mumbled.

“Was there a fight?”

“Nothing like that.” Mike set his cutlery down and fixed Stan with a calming look. “Our groups just don’t always get along. Richie and Lucas always rile each other up. Beverly and Dustin fight a lot. Elle doesn’t like Bill for some reason. Things like that. It’s easier to stick to our groups than get the staff angry when we start fighting.”

“You don’t want to work it out?” Stan asked, still puzzled.

“Why? It’s fine with just us.” Beverly laughed a little. “I’m not losing any sleep over it.”

Neither was Stan. But that wasn’t the point. Still, he had the feeling that he was venturing into dangerous waters. So he fell silent and returned to his food. Everyone seemed relieved and Bill started talking about something else instead.

Stan kept glancing back over at the other group of friends as dinner continued. They seemed happy enough that it was just the five of them. Not once did they look over at Stan’s table. Not even Mike. There was a huge ocean between them and Stan didn’t know how to swim it.

The nightly routine came and went and then Stan was in bed, afraid to go to sleep. Richie was still awake, writing in his journal. After a few moments of deliberation, Stan fished his own book out to do the same.

I’m afraid to go to sleep. What if I have another nightmare? I just want to be able to sleep. I’m so tired. We barely even do anything in this hospital and yet I’m so drained at the end of each day. It’s more like emotionally draining I guess. Still...I just want a bit of peace and quiet. There’s too many things to focus on in here. I don’t know what to address first.

I kind of want everyone to be friends. And I don’t know why. I finally have six people who accept me and want to be with me and I have my sights set on five more. Is that even fair? I don’t know how friendship works. But...

Stan put his pen down and groaned. Everything was so confusing. He was just one kid. How was he supposed to know what to do?

“Everything alright?” Richie peered at him over the top of his journal.

“Probably not.” Stan muttered.

“Ain’t that the truth.” Richie laughed. “Wanna share?”

“Nope.”

“Cool.”
Richie went back to writing and Stan went back to mentally struggling with his problems. There were a lot of them and he just didn’t know where to begin. The scratching of Richie’s pen kept distracting him. If there was nothing to do while he was awake, then the best thing to do was go to sleep.

But...he was still scared.

In fact, Stan was terrified.

It was one thing to write it down, another thing to think it. But to actually feel it...Stan was getting scared just thinking about being scared. How pathetic was that?

“Can I turn the light off?” Richie asked. His journal was sitting on his bedside table with his glasses resting on top of it. He was ready for bed.

Stan let out a sigh. He had to do it sometime, since he was too tired to stay awake.

“Sure.” He said and lay down, squeezing his eyes shut and fighting down the wave of panic that rose in him. There was a soft click and when Stan opened his eyes a crack, the room was as dark as it could be. Richie had turned over in bed, back to Stan. He was practically buried under the covers, brown curls sticking up here and there. Stan could hear his breathing, evening out as time went by. Looked like Richie was having no troubles going to sleep at all.

Too bad Stan couldn’t say the same thing.

He tried to count sheep but that cliche didn’t work, so then he started playing tetris in his head. That didn’t work either so he eventually gave up and just tried to empty his brain of everything.

The thing was, the more he tried, the less it worked. He was swamped with things he didn’t want to think about. His mind was a mess of all the problems he couldn’t even begin to solve. Why wasn’t everything as simple as maths?

Stan ended up mentally reciting all the times tables he could think of until eventually everything faded away.

And that was when the nightmare came.

Stan didn’t think it was a nightmare. Not at at first. Nothing was happening that had fear gripping him even as he was forced to watch.

There were two boys again.

Only they were identical this time. And then sometimes there was one and then there was two again and sometimes neither of them were there. It was an endless cycle as they flickered in and out.

They smiled and they laughed and they cried and they screamed. They split up and they re-joined and they ran through endless fields in an endless race where neither would be the winner.

But then they both turned to look at Stan.

Stan had thought he was an invisible observer the whole time but now their eyes bored into him and he couldn’t pull himself free from their gaze.

They opened their mouths to speak but Stan couldn’t hear what they were saying. There was fear in their eyes and though their mouths moved, Stan didn’t know what they were trying to tell him. He
started towards them but they never got closer, even as he started to run.

Then one took out a gun and the other took out a knife. Stan was yelling in the dream now. He was trying to get them to stop. But they didn’t listen. One pointed the gun at the other’s forehead. The other pressed his knife against his brother’s neck. And at the same time, they killed each other.

Stan woke to the sound of screaming.

Only it wasn’t his this time.

Stan struggled in his twisted up sheets in an attempt to see if Richie was the one causing all the noise. He wasn’t.

Richie was sitting up in bed, tears shimmering in his eyes as he stared at the door. His hands were clenched tightly in his bed sheets, knuckles white. His hair stuck up in every direction. If Stan had to guess, he probably hadn’t been awake very long. The scream broke off abruptly and Richie winced.

“Who was that?” Stan asked, words choked out as he struggled to catch his breath after his nightmare.

“Eddie.” Richie said softly. His fingers didn’t release from the sheets.

“Shit.” Stan said, just as quiet as Richie. “Do you...do you want to go to him?”

Richie shook his head. “Not allowed to.”

“But-”

“Give it a rest.” Richie snapped. His face crumpled just as quickly as it had fired up. “Sorry Stan.”

“It’s okay.” Stan muttered.

They fell silent for a moment. As silent as the hospital around them, now that Eddie had stopped screaming. Stan was waiting for Richie to explain, and eventually he did.

“It’s the codependency stuff.” Richie said stiffly. “We can’t be each other’s support systems. Not as this age, when anything can set us off and we haven’t got enough healthy coping mechanisms in place. Plus I’m just a messed up kid, like him. What can I do?”

“But you’re his friend.” Stan protested.

“Yeah, but I’m not a doctor.” Richie ran his fingers through his hair. “I can’t offer the support he’s meant to get.”

“Right.” Stan finally freed himself from his sheets and hugged his knees to his chest.

“I’ll see him in the morning.” Richie said, almost to himself.

“Of course you will.” Stan said. “Just like you do every morning.”

Only morning came and so did breakfast and Eddie wasn’t there.

The look on Richie’s face was heartbreaking.

Stan turned away.
Sorry again, for such a long wait, and for the slightly shorter chapter. It just demanded to be cut off there. I had some very bad writer's block. I wasn't even writing anything at all, but once I felt good again, I went straight to this.

OH! And someone pointed out about Bill's stutter. I totally forgot about it. Sorry!!!!!!!!!!

Honestly, the comments you leave me are really what help me to keep writing. They're so inspiring and really mean a lot. You guys are the best!!!!!!!
“Where is he?!?” Richie marched right up to a nurse and yelled in her face. “What’s going on?!?”

“He’s having a therapy session.” The nurse stammered out, clearly knowing who Richie was referring to.

“Bullshit.” Richie snapped. “You never interrupt meals for therapy if you can help it. You’re always telling us we need a good breakfast. Try again.”

“He is having one.” The nurse said, a little firmer this time. “Because…” She trailed off, pressing her lips shut.

“Because what?” Richie stepped even closer.

“Richie.” Bill marched over. “Leave her alone. She’s telling the truth.”

“But she’s not telling the whole truth!” Richie yelled in Bill’s face. Stan watched the boy recoil, fear flashing across his face. He watched Mike and Ben approach, leading Bill out of Richie’s reach before he could lash out. Bill couldn’t take his eyes off his friend. Neither could Stan.

Richie was scaring him.

Richie was scaring everyone.

“I can’t tell you what’s going on.” The nurse said crisply. “Calm yourself down Richard.”

“Or what?” Richie laughed. “You’ll shove a needle in my arm? Like you always do when I’m too much to handle.”

“Richie stop it.” Bill said, weaker this time.


“Richie.” It was Stan who was pleading this time. “Richie they won’t tell you anything if you keep acting like this.”

“They never tell me anything!” Richie screamed.

Beverly spun round to Bill. “We need to get Mike.”

The other group hadn’t come into the dining room yet, except for Elle who’d arrived with Beverly. Before Bill could run off to get said twin, the girl with the shaved head stepped in.
“I’ll get him.” She said softly.

Stan watched her run out the room. Then he turned to Bill.

“What should we do?”

“I can help.” Bill wrung his hands. “I know wuh-wuh-wuh-what happened to Eddie. I can tell him. I can calm him down.”

“You are not going anywhere near him.” A voice said in Stan’s ear. Both boys spun and saw Robert standing there.

“We have to help him.” Stan protested.

“The doctors will. I’m his therapist. I’ll take care of this. You all need to leave.” The last part was directed at Mike, Ben and Bev as well.

“He’s our friend. And he’s worried about our other friend. Who, by the way, I want to know about too.” Beverly tossed her head back. “We’re not leaving.”

“Beverly Marsh, do not attempt to challenge me right now. Not during all this.”

Stan dragged his attention away from the warring Robert and Beverly, and back to Richie who by now, was yelling at another nurse for information. The first nurse had scurried away and out the door.

“Just go tell him.” Stan begged Bill. “While Robert’s distracted with Beverly.”

“It’s bad Stan.” Bill looked down. “What happened to Eddie. What he did. But...yeah, you’re right. He needs to know. Or he might get physical and that’s not good for anyone.”

Stan watched with bated breath as Bill approached again, a lot more carefully this time. Richie spun at the sound of his footsteps.

“Back off Bill. Stay out of my way. I need to know what happened.” Richie spat.

“And I can tell you.” Bill said quietly. “But you have to calm down.”

“I can’t Bill. I can’t! If Eddie’s hurt then...I don’t know what I’ll do.” Richie had his hands in his hair, tugging tightly.

“Richie, last night Eddie nearly overdosed on medication. He’d been snatching pills whenever he could and saving as many of his as he could. I found him before he could but I haven’t seen him since. The nurses took him away.” Bill said gently. Stan stiffened, hands reaching up to smother his gasp.

“He tried to kill himself?” Richie’s voice had dropped.

“I don’t think he meant to. I think he thought it’d cure him for good.” Bill reached out for Richie but the boy pulled back.

“He could’ve died.” Richie doubled over. “No...no, no, no, no, no-”

“Get away from him!” Robert yelled, finally spotting what Stan and Bill were doing.

“He needed to know.” Bill growled.
“Get over here now.” Robert demanded.

“I can’t leave him.” Bill was nearly in tears, much like Richie was by now.

Stan was stuck in his spot, feet all but glued to the ground. Robert was calling for him. He was the man with the power. He’d already threatened Stan once. If he didn’t go, then things could go really wrong.

But Richie was his friend. Stan longed to go to him, to comfort him, to say he knew how he felt. But if he did move, then Robert would spring into action and punish him.

So Stan remained rooted in place.

He wanted to reach out to Richie, to justify why he was staying. To be a good friend. To help him. But he couldn’t. He and Richie were friends, but Eddie was even more than that to Richie. And now he was suffering and so Richie was too.

For the first time, Stan could see just how dangerous codependency was.

And yet he still didn’t think Richie should be left in the dark when it came to Eddie.

There was a pounding of footsteps suddenly and then Mike skidded into the room, face flushed red. He was breathing hard but he didn’t even hesitate to run past Robert to get to his twin brother. Robert reached for him but Mike was too fast. He was on the other side of the room, quick as a wink. He pulled Richie into a tight hug and held him there as Richie cried into his shoulder. Together they rocked back and forth. Richie’s loud sobs were heartbreaking and Mike was crying silently as he hugged his brother.


“I did.” Elle said quietly. The rest of her group had arrived too by now. All the patients were there, looking on as the twins embraced.

“You shouldn’t have.” Robert was suddenly just as quiet. He rubbed at his eyes, defeated. “Please, you shouldn’t be here.”

“They’re our friends.” Bill’s voice rose.

*Our…*

Together, the patients of the CPH stood and stared at Robert.

“I’m trying to help you.” Robert’s voice was tired, weary.

“I know.” Bill stood at the front of the group, uniting them. “Buh-buh-but we can help each other too. Support systems are healthy.”

“Not if you can’t live without them.” Robert argued.

“So don’t take us away from them.” Beverly snapped. “You won’t let us get close to each other, but it’s already too late. We are close! We’re friends and friends help each other.”

“Friends grow up and leave each other.” Robert sighed.

“Not us.” Ben said quietly.
“Why should you be any different?” There was strength in Robert’s voice now.

“I don’t know.” Mike spoke from where he sat with Richie. “But you put us together in an environment where we either fall apart or stick together. And we’ve stuck together.”

A thrill ran through Stan. He felt for a moment as though everything and everyone was connected. His fears concerning the two separate groups flooded away as he stood with them all, uniting against Robert to convince him to stop pulling them apart and keeping them in the dark.

“You encourage us to be friends. But then you don’t like it when we help each other.” Mike Hanlon spoke now. “You want us to be associates, not friends. We’re kids, living under similar circumstances. The first steps to friendship are already there. Why are you so insistent on stopping us from being together?”

“Because you’ll go home!” Robert yelled.

“Unprofessional much.” Lucas muttered.

“You’ll go home and you’ll never see each other again and then everything will fall apart. I’ve seen it happen over and over again. Kids become friends in places like this and then they go home and they’re alone again and they hate it and everything comes rushing back. You can’t become codependent! It’ll ruin your lives.”

“There’s a difference between supporting friends and being codependent.” Dustin scoffed.

“It’s a thin line.” Robert snapped.

“And we can’t see that line?” Stan heard himself say. “You give us too little credit.”

“My job is to help you. Why are you so set on not trusting me?” Robert’s harsh eyes met Stan’s and he shivered again. This time it was out of fear. Robert had power in the hospital. He could do whatever he wanted to Stan. He’d already made it perfectly clear that sooner or later, Stan’s misheaving would get him in deep trouble.

“Give us a reason to trust you and then I will.” Beverly folded her arms. “But until then, I’ll stay the fuck away from you.”

“Language.” Robert said but his heart wasn’t in it. He’d turned his attention back to the twins. Richie had buried his head in Mike’s chest and he hadn’t come up yet. Mike was staring back at Robert, mouth pressed into a firm line and eyes cold.

“He’s my brother. I was kept from him for almost ten years. You’re not going to keep him from me now.”

“Siblings is different.”

“Family can be chosen.” Elle’s quiet voice had a weight to it, even amongst the louder and angrier voices.

“Forget it.” Robert hissed. “I’ll just start treating you like adults. You’ll have to face serious consequences for this. Don’t complain when you do.”

He marched out of the room and left the kids alone.

Everybody was silent. Nobody moved. They just stood there, shocked into a quiet stupor that
nobody was brave enough to break. They’d crossed a line this time in standing up to Robert. Somehow Stan didn’t think that Ms Lapwood or the other therapist could stop him from punishing them all for their behaviour. And yet, as Stan looked at all the kids, standing together he realised…

He sort of didn’t care.

They stayed in the dining room until Ms Lapwood came for them. Richie had fallen asleep in Mike’s arms and had to be shaken awake when the therapist entered the room. The kids had mostly been silent during their alone time, waiting for their fate.

“Robert is in quite the mood.” Ms Lapwood said, one eyebrow raised slightly as she looked at the patients. “He wants to act swiftly in terms of our punishments for your behaviour.”

“I don’t think we deserve any sort of punishment.” Lucas scowled from the corner he’d slunk into and refused to come out of. “You should fire Robert. He’s a dick.”

“Maybe so.” Ms Lapwood’s lips tweaked slightly. Dustin laughed loudly. Stan on the other hand, couldn’t believe what he was hearing. So the staff didn’t like Robert either? He’d sort of been getting the vibe but to hear it confirmed so callously was shocking.

“What do you think should happen to us?” Will asked shyly.

“If it were up to me, I’d start with an apology.” Ms Lapwood said quietly. “However I’m only responsible for four of you and even then, Robert holds most of the power. This is his father’s hospital.”

“You’re kidding.” Beverly had been lying across three chairs but she sat up abruptly. “No wonder most of the decisions here suck. They’re his!”

“Robert wants what is best for you. His ideas are just very old fashioned.” Ms Lapwood explained.

“That’s not an excuse.” Elle muttered.

“No, I suppose it’s not.” The therapist hummed.

“Since it’s not up to you, what will happen to us?” Mike Wheeler held Richie close, as if scared Ms Lapwood was suddenly going to steal his brother away.

“I’m not entirely sure.” Ms Lapwood avoided making eye contact. “Robert might send some of you to different hospitals. Others might have to undergo more…severe forms of treatment that he so far hasn’t resorted to. Things like that.”

“He’s not separating us.” Ben stamped a foot down. “He can’t do that!”

“He can and he will.”

“Why are you even here?” Stan once more spoke without meaning to. “Why tell us all this?”

“Because it’s not fair for Robert to want so much from you, when he gives so little. Much of your treatment isn’t as it should be. He pushes too hard for results that you can’t give. You’re traumatised kids. There are better ways to handle this.” Ms Lapwood pulled out a chair and sat down. “Robert is used to dealing with adult patients. He didn’t always work at this hospital so coming here was very much a shock. He hasn’t adjusted to working with such young people. Deep down, I don’t even think he likes children very much.”
“So the question is still the same.” Mike Hanlon said sternly. “Why are you here? Why tell us all this? What are you going to do?”

“Nothing.” Ms Lapwood bowed her head. “Yet. I’m working on something. Many of us are. You just have to trust us. Keep your heads down. Stop challenging Robert.”

“Are you saying we’re in danger?” Bill asked sharply.

“Perhaps.” Ms Lapwood stood again. “I have to go now. Robert’s probably worked out what he’s going to do. I’ll try to keep him from going too far but it might not be possible.”

“So we’re just meant to pretend that everything’s fine?!” Richie pulled himself from Mike arms. “News flash lady, nothing is ever fine in my fucking life. But at least I thought I was safe here. You think we’re in danger and your advice is to just act normal?! Why not call our parents? Our guardians? Tell somebody about what the fuck is going on here! Get us out!”

“We have no proof that Robert is breaking ethical conduct.”

“We’re the proof!” Beverly screamed.

“Children are not considered to be proof all too often. I’m sorry.” Ms Lapwood truly did sound sorry.

“Tell me about it.” Beverly snapped. “I know all too fucking well what children are in the eyes of authority. You know what he did to me. I’ve told everyone. EVERYONE! And has he been punished? No! He’s still around, waiting for me to get out.” She broke off with a sob, wrapping her arms around her. Ben ran to her and pulled her into a hug. She struggled briefly, her cries going louder. “He’s waiting for me Ben! Nobody believes me!” He shushed her gently, whispering reassurances.

“You have to keep us safe.” Dustin’s hands were shaking frantically. “That’s your job, isn’t it? Why the fuck aren’t you keeping us safe?”

“I’m trying.”

“It’s not good enough.” Stan whispered but nobody heard him over the sound of Richie yelling something else. His vision was blurring around the edges. He’d come to the hospital to recover and scary as that was, he was trying. He was trying to get a handle on his OCD and his depression and whatever else he had. But now there was this and he couldn’t deal with it. Everything was out of control. It was spiralling, just like it had been on the night Stan picked up his father’s razor and made a choice.

“Call the fucking police! Or I’ll do it!”

“I want to go home.” Stanley pressed his hands over his ears.

“I am still the adult here! Do not raise your voice at me. I’m doing my best!”

“Your best isn’t good enough! You can’t just try when it comes to people like us. You have to fix things because we can’t!”

“I want to go home.” Stan said louder. It was still swallowed up though.

“Yelling isn’t going to help you.”
“And you ah-ah-ah-ah-are?!

“You’re telling us that Robert is going to come back here and do shitty things to us because he hates kids. And your only solution is to just put our heads down and take it? That’s what I’ve been doing my whole life! Putting my head down and fucking taking it!” Someone (Richie? Not Richie, he was too loud, too angry) yelled. “That’s what we’ve all been doing. “So I don’t want to hear it from you. You’re meant to be different. You’re meant to be understanding. You’re meant to help!”

“I am helping, Richard Tozier!”

“How are we meant to trust you if your idea of helping is to shut us up?”

“That’s not what I said.”

“Then what did you say?!”

“I...I...”

“I WANT TO GO HOME!" Stan screamed. He collapsed onto his knees. All attention was on him now. “We’re not safe here. I’m not safe here. I want to go home. I want my mum and dad. I wish I’d never come here. I wish I’d never tried to kill myself. Look where it’s got me. I want to go home. I want to go home. I want to be safe. I want things to make sense again.”

“Stan…” Will breathed.

“I don’t want this. Everyone’s mad. Everyone’s loud. This isn’t right. This isn’t the way the world works. What are you doing? What are we doing? I’m scared! I’m so scared.”

Bill was the one who moved. He was at Stan’s side in a second, like Stan had been for him.


Georgie...

“I’m going to keep you all safe,” Bill looked up at the patients. He held their gazes and then looked beyond them, to Ms Lapwood. “You say you wuh-wuh-wuh-want what’s best for us. And I buh-buh-buh-buh-buh-buh-buh-fuck! I buh-believe that! But I don’t believe Robert is trying to help. He wants to hurt and harm us. So we’re leaving. Now!”

“You can’t.” Ms Lapwood stared in shock as Bill gathered the kids up. He had to support Stan who by now, was barely hanging on to reality. “Where will you go?”

“Anywhere but here.” Bill didn’t look at her.

“Robert will catch you.”

“Not anymore. I wuh-wuh-wuh-won’t let him touch us anymore.”

“We’ll go to my place.” Will spoke suddenly. “My mum, my brother...they’ll help us. They know a man. A police chief. He’ll believe us.”

“Sounds good.” Dustin beamed.

“We need Eddie.” Richie was struggling in Mike’s arms. “I need to go get him.”
“I’m here.” A soft and trembling voice spoke from the door. Everyone spun to see the small boy who’d started this all standing there, Patty behind him.

“You can leave.” The nurse who’d been at Stan’s side through everything said. “I won’t stop you. But I can’t help you either.”

“Sounds about right.” Lucas scowled.

“Eddie!” Richie ran to his best friend, scooping him up and holding him close. They were both crying at the sight of the other. “Eddie I was so scared. I’m so sorry I yelled and got angry and caused all this! But I was so scared. But you’re here! You’re here!”

“I have no idea what’s going on.” Eddie laughed weakly. “But you’re here, so everything must be okay.”

“You saps.” Mike Wheeler laughed but he sounded suspiciously choked up.

“Like you’re not the same, Mr Cares Too Much.” Richie giggled through his tears.

“He’s right.” Elle said, a teasing note in his voice. She smiled fondly at Mike.

“Caring is good.” Bill said firmly. His hand found Stan’s and he squeezed.

Nobody could argue with that.

Meanwhile though, Patty and Ms Lapwood were arguing.

“I’m not letting them go. It’s too dangerous out there. They’re kids! Damaged kids! We’re here to help them. Not send them off into the world before we’ve done our job.” Ms Lapwood was saying.

“We haven’t been able to help anyone for a long time.” Patty shot back. “Not since Robert’s been here. Or even really when his father was alive. He was a monster. He just wanted to see what playing around with mentally ill children would do.”

“He had the best intentions.”

“Like that makes it better.” Patty threw her hands in the air. Ms Lapwood opened her mouth to say more but Patty turned away from her and stared at the group of tired, scared patients. This was the woman who’d helped Stan, even as she remained brisk and professional. Now she was letting all that go to help them get away from Robert and his messed up ways. “You get out of here, right now. I said I can’t help you. Mostly. I can give you this.” She handed Bill her keycard. “This will open the doors. But that’s all I can do.”

“Why?” Dustin blurted out.

“That’s all I can do to help you leave. I can do something about everybody else though. I’ll stall Robert. So go!”

“Patty!”

“No.” Patty spun back around to Ms Lapwood. “We took an oath. Are you going to ignore it, just like Robert?”

“I…” Ms Lapwood looked at the ground. “No.”

Patty sighed with relief. Through his fear and confusion, Stan found the courage to speak.
“Thank you.” He said to her. She turned, half startled and then everything about her softened as she stared at Stan. The first real smile he’d seen from her spread across her face.

“You can do this.” She mouthed. And then she left. Ms Lapwood shot a look at the kids but she followed.

“Alright.” Bill adjusted Stan’s grip on his shoulders. “We’re getting out of here. Will, you said we could go to yuh-yuh-your house. Are you sure?”

“Positive.” Will looked terrified. He was shaking but his voice was strong. Lucas wrapped an arm around him briefly, and then pulled away.

“Beverly, you take the card.” Bill handed it to the fiery girl. She’d recovered from her brief breakdown and seemed happy to have something to do.

“Let’s go.” She gripped it tightly.

“We can do this.” Eddie hadn’t budged from Richie’s side.

“We have to.” Mike Hanlon moved to the door. Stan watched his back and felt safe behind it. He would lead the way. Beverly would be at his side, and Ben at hers. And so on, so on. They were doing this together. It was terrifying and illegal and dangerous but they were doing it together.

Stan had only been at the hospital for roughly a week and he was so desperate to feel fresh air on his face. He couldn’t imagine how the others must have felt, having been there even longer than him. They were all so brave. He was still scared though, about leaving the hospital. Maybe things weren’t as bad as they were making it out to be. Maybe if they just told the staff how they felt, things could be better. Stan wanted to get better. His parents had seen the hospital as something good, and now he was letting them down by leaving. What if it wasn’t the right thing to do?

But then he remembered Robert’s threats about taking further, more extreme steps to cure Stan, and how Ms Lapwood had fought so hard to have him temporarily change his mind, because apparently these further steps were so bad, so horrible, so painful. He thought about Robert forcing Bill and Beverly to the point of breakdowns and them punishing them for it. He remembered how all of this had started, because Eddie had been kept from Richie who just wanted to help. He thought about the things he didn’t know about, but had to have happened. Lucas was so closed off and untrusting. The staff had probably seen to that. Dustin crushed his impulses and Stan had noticed how much it bubbled away inside him. So many of them had been there for two years and yet not once had anyone pointed out improvements. They were stuck in a cruel place where nothing changed, just that the staff got crueler and crueler.

They didn’t want to leave, Stan realised as Bill dragged him along. They didn’t want to think that this place was doing more bad than it did good. They wanted to feel safe, to get help. But they couldn’t do it anymore. And so they ran.

They ran, with Beverly flashing Patty’s card at every locked door and Bill supporting Stan who could barely stay awake. They ran as Dustin forced himself to stay quiet for the good of everyone else, and as Lucas put all his trust in them, even though he didn’t like it. They ran as fast as they could, with Mike hanging at the back to make sure nobody fell behind, because he was too kind like that. Elle and Will tried to run with him but he forced them to stay ahead. Ben meanwhile, was at Beverly’s side, just as Richie was at Eddie’s. Mike Hanlon stayed with the other Mike. They would protect the group as they made this crazy bid for freedom.

Destination, Will’s house.
Future unclear.

Risk. Terrible.

Reward. Worth it.

Chapter End Notes

can you tell I have no idea what I'm doing with this story. help. Seriously, suggestions are so welcome

sorry for any mistakes, i wrote this really fast b/c i felt bad about not updating.

Your comments are what keeps this story going. Seriously, I read all of them and just about cry. They are so good and I can't thank you enough. And your kudos mean so much as well, seeing this much support. I love you guys.

Also, my tumblr is ToshiTophChan if you ever want to stop by and chat! I'm also interested in doing some one-shots for this story, prequels and such or lil character studies that explore the characters who don't get to shine as much so you can request those there in my ask box!
They can't all run

It was sort of a long process, getting through the hospital. Stan spent most of it hanging off of Bill’s shoulder, terrified out of his mind that they were going to be caught. A few times heads poked out of doors, saw the group of patients, and then ducked back out of sight. Dimly, Stan remembered Ms Lapwood during their earlier conversation.

“I’m working on something. Many of us are. You just have to trust us…”

Were these people affiliated with Ms Lapwood? Had Patty told them to back off? Or were these people dashing to a phone to call Robert and tell them that the patients were trying to escape.

No! Not trying! They were escaping. They had a plan! They had a destination. Beverly had the keycard that would open any door. They had Bill to lead them, the Mikes to defend them. They had each other.

But deep down, Stan was sure that it wasn’t going to be enough.

So many things could go wrong. And with their track record so far, it was only a matter of time before these many, many things started up into action. Stan could barely run. Richie and Eddie weren’t really in a better state. The huge fight they’d had, had worn them all out mentally, and that in turn, had worn them out physically. They were just kids, up against adults who had everything going for them. Height, weight, ability…the list was endless. In every single category, the patients lost.

“I’m sure we’re nearly there.” Beverly broke the somewhat silence that had built up, bar the slaps of their feet against the ground and the gasps of air they’d been taking. “We’ve gone through a hundred doors.”

“More like ten.” Bill whispered into Stan’s ear. Laughter bubbled up in Stan but it was too small to cause anything but a small exhale of amusement.

“Anyone following us?” Lucas asked the Mikes.

“Doesn’t sound like it.” Mike Wheeler puffed. His attention however, Stanley noticed, was solely on Richie and not anything else.

“What he said.” Mike Hanlon chipped in which helped to reassure Stan. He trusted Mike Hanlon, saw him as a protective figure not only for his physical strength but the book smart brain he possessed. Mike was smart. He’d keep them together.

“How far is your house?” Elle asked quietly to Will who was jogging along next to her. Stan had picked up on her tendency to speak in short simple sentences.
“Well it’s sort of out of town. But if we can make it into the woods, they won’t have a chance of finding us. I know it like the back of my hand and our house is just on the outskirts of it.” Will explained breathlessly. “That’s why it’s a good hiding place. It’s out of the way of everything.”

“But far away from here.” Bill stated. Will nodded sadly.

“We need to get out of here fast.” He summarised.

“Buh-buh-buh-but once we’re out of here, we need to be slow and careful.” Bill added.

“If we even get out of here.” Stan muttered. He was almost shocked that he’d even said it. Sure, he’d been thinking it. But he hadn’t meant to say it aloud. He wanted everyone else to have hope, even if he didn’t.

“Stan, don’t think like that. We’re going to get out of here.” Mike Hanlon said sternly.

“We have to.” Ben clenched his fists.

“We’re close to the exit, I’m sure of it.” Bill assured them. “We’re going to get out of here.”

“It shouldn’t be this easy.” Eddie mumbled into Richie.

“And the years leading up to this were?” Richie said back. “Who fucking cares if this part is easy. It never was before. Victory is quick. The fight for it isn’t.”

“Since when did you get so poetic?” Eddie giggled.

“Think it might’ve been when I met you.” Richie laughed louder.

“Gross.” Lucas snapped.

“Is this really the time?” Elle whispered to Mike Wheeler who just smiled, watching his twin fondly.

“Hang on, guys.” Mike Hanlon said suddenly. Everyone skidded to a stop, turning to look at him. He must have felt the pressure of all the eyes on him, because he paused and licked his lips anxiously before talking. “What about our stuff? We can’t just leave it. Our photos. Our books. Our things. Don’t tell me you’re comfortable with leaving them behind.”

“But we have to escape. Those things don’t matter.” Lucas shot back.

“They do to me.” Mike bit his lip. “I brought everyone I owned with me. Leaving that behind is leaving my entire life. Everything I was before here.”

Stan thought of what he’d packed. Not much, really. And nothing that personal bar his bird watching book. He would be fine with leaving it at the hospital if it meant he could escape Robert’s clutches. He’d never stopped to think that other people might be thinking differently.

At his side, Bill slumped suddenly. Stan jolted in alarm and suddenly he was the one supporting Bill instead.

“Georgie.” Bill moaned. “He’s back there. All my photos of him. The pictures he drew me. I can’t leave him.”

Georgie?

Was this Georgie the one that Bill had lost? Obviously he was incredibly important to Bill, enough to
make him lose his strength.

“Mike’s right.” Will wrapped his arms around himself. “We can’t leave our stuff. Not if we never plan on coming back. And even if we do, Robert might destroy it. I...I wouldn’t put it past him.”

“I say we leave.” Lucas insisted. “It’s just stuff.”

“Maybe to you.” Mike Hanlon’s voice was low. “But not to me.”

“So we what...just give up? Apologise and let them punish us however they see fit?” Beverly wrapped her arms around her, much like Will. “We can’t! They’ll hurt us!”

“I know that.” Mike sounded just as anguished as Beverly did. “But...all my memories of my family are there. Photos of my mum and dad. I’m not leaving them behind. Not again!”

There was a beat.

“You’ve left them behind before?” Stan was the one who broke the silence, tentative.

Mike bowed his head, fists clenched. For a moment, Stan thought his question was going to go unanswered. Then, he spoke.

“There was a fire. I got out. They didn’t.”

Stan felt an ache spread through him at the words. How horrible that must have been, to suck in clean air after choking and sobbing through smoke, only to turn and realise that your freedom might as well not matter, because you were on your own.

“It’s not unhealthy to want to keep them near me.” Mike insisted. “No matter what Robert always said. If we’re leaving, I’m taking them.”

“I agree.” Bill pushed himself away from Stan. “I can’t leave my huh-buh-brother. It doesn’t matter if they’re just photos. They’re all I have huh-luh-luh-left of him.”

“So this all falls apart because your being sentimental?” Lucas exclaimed incredulously.

Mike Hanlon looked at him with dark, sad eyes.

“Yes.”

And Lucas visibly slumped. His taught, tense body deflated and he stood across from Mike, head bowed.

“Alright. I understand.”

“You do?” Mike looked at him with hope this time.

Lucas looked up to meet his eyes. “Just because I’m an aggressive asshole most of the time doesn’t mean I don’t care about people.”

“So we’re staying?” Elle looked terrified.

“Maybe we could split up?” Will suggested tentatively.

“No.” Stan surprised himself by speaking so strongly. “I don’t think that’s a good idea.”
“If we split up, we may never see each other again.” Beverly agreed. At her side, Ben nodded.

“Someone needs to escape though.” Dustin stamped his foot on the ground. “If we all just stay here, then what’s the point? You guys already fucking said it. They’ll hurt us. Hell, they might even kill us!”

“They wouldn’t do that.” Eddie went pale. “Would they?”

“It’s Robert.” Bill shrugged.

It was a chilling reminder of who they were up against.

“It’s Will’s mum who can help us. It should be Will who escapes.” Mike Wheeler declared abruptly.

“What?” Will squeaked.

Yeah, what?

“One or two of us leaves.” Mike paced back and forth, detailing his plan. “And do what we planned to do right now. Find Will’s mum and get her cop friend to help. The rest of us stay here and wait it out. Whoever left will get the authorities to come here and close this place down. Then we’ll all be free.”

“What about sticking together and…” Beverly trailed off.

One by one, the friends were all coming to the realisation that the only way to win this, was to do exactly as Mike had suggested and split up.

“They might not believe a kid like me.” Will might have realised the plan was their only choice, but it didn’t mean he had to like it.

“It’ll be your mum.” Lucas snorted. “If you can’t convince her, then what the fuck are you even doing.”

“Doesn’t mean she can convince authorities.” Will pointed out.

“And her cop friend.” Mike reminded his roommate gently.

Will actually smiled at this. “Yeah....yeah, okay. Mum’s friend is tough. I think it'll work. He’ll listen”

Stan felt his heart jumpstart back into action. This plan they had now was, in all honesty, terrifying. There were so many unknown areas in it, so many places where things could go wrong. But, he also knew it was better than just running off together and leaving everything behind. If they could do this in a safe, legal way, then that was the way they should do it.

The rest of them would just have to wait out whatever punishment Robert had in stall for them.

“Who goes with Will?” Bill’s voice jolted Stanley from his thoughts and back into the present, panicked moment. “Mike?”

“I won’t leave Richie.” The boy clutched his twin brother.

“And vice versa.” Richie’s eyes flashed behind his glasses. Stubborn as the day Stan had met him, that seemingly long, long week ago.
“I don’t think someone like me will be a sympathetic character to the cops.” Lucas said bitterly.

“Fuck the police.” Beverly offered half heartedly.

“I already said I can’t leave my family behind.” Mike Hanlon shook his head.

“Me neither.” Bill agreed with his friend once more.

“I’ll go.” Elle stepped forward. “I’ll look after Will. We can make it. Together.”

“Elle.” Mike Wheeler shook his head, seemingly at a loss for words.

Mike was close to a lot of people in the hospital given his caring nature, and as such, Stan hadn’t had the time to figure out what his relationship with Elle was like. They were part of the same group but they hadn’t ever interacted in a way that had drew Stan’s attention to them. Watching them now though, it was obvious that there was something between them. Be that romantic or platonic, the two were very, very close.

“I’ll come back.” Elle gave Mike the tenderest of smiles. “Promise.”

“Okay.” Mike laughed bitterly. “Promise.”

The word seemingly held a lot of weight to them.

For a long time, nobody moved. Mike and Elle continued to stare at each other, while everyone around them remained frozen as well.

“Go now.” It was Richie who pulled himself free from the spell first. “Quickly, before they catch us.”

Beverly handed the keycard over to Elle who clutched it tightly. The two sole girls of the hospital shared a look for a moment, before Elle spun on her heels and tugged at the sleeve of Will’s shirt.

“Let’s go.” She said.

“Yeah.” Will looked pale and small and scared and yet he forced a smile for them all anyway. “Let’s go.”

They ran off together and were soon lost from sight.

They never looked back.

“So…” Dustin couldn’t stay quiet for long. “What do we do?”

“We wait.” Stan found himself answering. “Robert will find us soon.”

“And then…?”

“We face him.” Bill reached out a hand and somehow, Stan found it with his own. The contact that might’ve once sent him reeling now grounded him in the sea of chaos he’d found himself in.

“Together.”

When Robert stumbled upon them ten minutes later, he had a group of other doctors and nurses and support staff gathered behind them. Amongst the group was Ms Lapwood. When she saw them
there, waiting for Robert like prisoners waited for execution, she sighed, and looked away.

Stan was glad she had.

He couldn’t live with himself right now, not after everything she’d done for them that they’d proceeded to just throw away.

Patty wasn’t there.

Stan tried not to think about it.

“You’re all in big trouble.” Robert towered over them.

“Yeah.” Richie scoffed. “Figured.”

Stan bowed his head and let an orderly tug him to his feet. What he was doing was right. While they let Robert fixate on them, Elle and Will were escaping.

But the hands on him were as cold as ice and the blood in his veins ran at an even harsher chill.

They were in big trouble, and nothing good was going to come out of it.

For a solid hour, the remaining patients of the Children’s Psychiatric Hospital had to sit in uncomfortable chairs and listen to Robert rant and rave at them. His staff made a silent wall behind him, adding to the already intimidating presence of Robert himself.

“Never in all my years of working as a doctor has something this disgraceful happened.” He snapped at one point.

Richie leaned over to whisper in Stan’s ear. “Bet that’s a lie.”

Stan stiffened a laugh. He didn’t want to risk angering Robert further and have the doctor target him personally. Bill and Richie had already had their turn in the spotlight and it looked like Beverly was going to be next, if Stan was following Robert’s speech correctly.

It was almost funny, how rehearsed it felt. Did Robert have carefully prepared speeches for times like these? Did he stand in front of the mirror at night while his pregnant wife slept and slowly recite all the things he could say to torment his patients.

How diabolical.

“You must face your punishment.” Robert paced back and forth. “People like you cannot act as if you’re above simple law and order.”

People like you? What the hell was that supposed to mean? Robert had finally showed his real, true colours and Stan had never seen an uglier shade.

“As I speak, my trusted staff are tracking down Elle and William. Rest assured they’ll be back with us shortly.”

Stan stiffened at the thought of them being brought back, and all of this having been for nothing, but Richie lent over to whisper again. “Will and Elle are really good at hiding. Don’t worry about them.”

The first part was reassuring, but Stan wasn’t going to follow through on the second part anytime soon. Richie was probably being a hypocrite and doing the same. In a time like this, it was
impossible not to worry.

Robert continued his strangely fluid speech until Stan was nearly asleep in his chair. He knew it wasn’t anywhere near bed time but the whole stream of events had left him tired. Plus, Robert was really, really boring.

Maybe he should have paid more attention considering Robert was talking about what he was going to be doing to punish them, but it was as if most of his words never reached Stan’s ears properly. He only picked up odd bits of the speech here and there, like Robert was talking to him through a thick wall of glass.

“...behaviour like this can not go unchecked…”

“...if you had any issues, there were better ways to solve them…”

“...who was the mastermind behind this?”

Those words managed to reach Stan and he jolted in shock. Robert wanting to know who the mastermind was meant he probably had a special punishment intended for them. But this had been everyone’s idea. No one could be the mastermind in what had been a group effort.

Robert would find someone to pin the total blame on though, Stan supposed. He would paint that person as someone bad, someone to be feared. He’d try and turn the rest of the patients against the ‘mastermind’ so that there was no chance their escape plan would happen again.

The real question was, would it work.

Stan wanted to think that it wouldn’t. But he couldn’t been entirely sure. At the end of the day, he’d only been in the hospital for barely a week. Things had been going way too fast and sure as he was of his place in the group, he couldn’t be sure of the people in the group.

Yes. They’re all traitors. Sell one of them out and save yourself!

Stan pushed the negative thoughts away. There was no point in growing suspicious and turning against each other, because that was what Robert wanted.

“I’m waiting.” Robert tapped a foot impatiently as he waited for someone to come forward. STan found himself tapping his finger in time with Robert’s taps.

“There was no mastermind.” Richie shrugged lazily.

“We both know that is a lie.” Robert said coldly.

“This wasn’t a planned thing.” Ben’s voice was soft and gentle. It was probably an attempt to calm Robert, coming from one of the more agreeable patients. “It was spur of the moment. There was no mastermind because there wasn’t time for there to be one.”

“There is always a leader.” Robert ignored Ben. “All I’m asking is the very simple question of who it was.”

“We just wanted to go outside.” Beverly spoke next, coming to the defense of her friend.

Stan glanced over at Bill as Beverly spoke. His friend was pale but his expression remained blank. Arguably, Bill could be considered the ‘mastermind’ the most out of any of them. By the look of him, Bill knew this and he accepted it. He was ready to take the fall for them if he needed to.
Stan was not going to let that happen.

“We did a stupid thing and it got out of hand.” Beverly was saying as Stan tuned back into the conversation. The words were nice and all, but Beverly’s fiery tone made it obvious that she didn’t mean them, and Robert knew it.

“If you’re going to be uncooperative, you’ll be sent to your rooms for the rest of the day.” He hissed. “Very scary.” Richie mocked him under his breath.

“You’ll all remain there until someone tells me who was behind this.”

“We’ll be there forever.” Beverly muttered. “Since no one was behind it.”

Stan got to his feet as the staff gathered toward them to lead them back to their rooms. Being split up from everyone else was the most painful thing about this, but at least he would have Richie. Beverly and Mike would have no one. They’d probably get a nurse sitting with them instead.

“Bill…” Stan whispered as a nurse stood over his friend.

“It’s alright, Stan.” Bill gave him a smile. “We’ll guh-guh-guh-guh-get through this.”

It was easy for him to say. None of them had any idea how this was going to end.

“Thanks.” Stan said anyway, because it was too soon to give up on Will and Elle and the plan.

He and Richie were led away towards their room. Their new nurse was someone Stan didn’t recognise. How many people worked here? Why did they need so many people when there were so few kids?

Why had this only just occurred to Stan?

Maybe Richie was right. Maybe this had happened before and Robert knew to be extra cautious. Or maybe he liked to intimidate his patients by showing them the full force of his power. He was certainly sadistic enough for that to be a possibility.

The nurse got them situated in their room and then left. Stan heard a lock slide into place and jumped to his feet.

“They locked us in!” His heart picked up its pace.

“Just never lock us out, Stanley.”

“Aren’t they worried we’ll do something?” He spun to ask Richie.

Richie shrugged. “Probably be easier to explain why one of us tried to kill ourselves then explain why we escaped.”

“That’s horrible.” Stanley breathed.

“I think we’ve sort of worked out that’s exactly what Robert is.” Richie flopped back onto his bed. “If he finds out who led this…”

“No one did.” Stan sat back down and clenched his fingers in and out, trying to calm himself down.

“Robert will pin it on someone anyway.” Richie sighed. “And it’ll be me?”
"What?"

"What?"

"This all started with me." Richie’s tone was deceptively light. "I lost the plot. I blew up. Robert knows that. He’s waiting to see if we’ll come forward willingly. And if we don’t, then he’ll make a big deal of how me masterfully figured out it was me."

"It was all of us." Stan said stubbornly.

"That doesn’t matter to Robert."

"It should." Stan insisted, even as he knew that Richie was right.

Richie was right and Stan hated it.

"How can this place still be running?" He changed the subject. "If you’re right and things like this have happened before, how can Robert still get to keep this place open?"

"We’re mentally insane kids." Richie drawled. "No one listens to us. Do you know what Robert could do to us? What he’s always wanted to do to us?"

"No…"

"Electric shock therapy." Richie sat up and fixed Stan with a serious look. It was one of the only times Richie had ever looked so somber.

"What’s that?"

"It’s simple, really." Richie spoke flatly, but his bed rattled beneath him as his body shook violently. He was scared.

And so Stan was too.

"They strap us in. They make sure there’s no way we can escape. And then they shock us. They think it’ll help rearrange our brain. But really, it just makes it worse. They might do it gently at first, but the more we struggle, the more it’ll increase. It’ll increase until suddenly, we just break."

"How do you know this?" Stan couldn’t help but ask. "Have they…"

"No." Richie said shortly. "But my old roommate...Edward Corcoran. They did it to him. That’s how I know. That, and Robert likes to threaten me with it when I’m not behaving like he wants me to."

"He threatens you with it? Then he knows it’s bad! He knows and he still does it." Stan cried.

"Of course he does." Richie said miserably. "It gives him power over us. It makes us afraid of him. He likes that."

"He’s a monster." Stan said fiercely.

"Yeah." Richie agreed. "But we can wait him out. Will and Elle will find Will’s mum. They’ll get us out of here. They may have already found her. We can do this, Stan the man."

Stan leant against the wall and linked his fingers together nervously. "I hope you’re right."
Even without a clock to tell them the time, or windows to show them the sun travelling, Stan and Richie were acutely aware of the day dragging by. They spoke occasionally, but not often. It felt as though there was nothing to say, so what was the point. Richie turned to his journal at one stage, but when Stan tried to do the same, no words came to him. He doodled a bit instead, writing out his times tables and attempting to draw birds from memory.

Nobody brought them food but Stan’s stomach didn’t feel as if it could manage anything to eat at the moment. He was too scared.

When the lock finally clicked back open and a nurse opened the door, Stan was nearly asleep out of boredom.

“Follow me.” The nurse said, waiting patiently for Stan to rouse himself and Richie to find his glasses. When they were ready, he led them back into the halls and towards the room where they held group therapy. The other patients were already waiting for them, sitting in chairs in a circle with Robert standing in the middle.

A flash of fear hit Stan stronger than anything had today.

“Stan, Richie, please sit down.” Robert beckoned them over.

There was nothing else to do except obey him.

Stan and Richie sat.

Across the circle, Bill’s eyes met Stan’s. It looked like he was trying to convey something to Stan, only Stan couldn’t work out what it was.

“I have excellent news I’m sure you’ll all be glad to hear.” Robert began, casually stepping in front of Bill so the connection was broken.

Stan’s mind began to race with all the possibilities, conjuring up all the worst case scenarios he could possibly think of.

*They found Will and Elle.*

*They found Will and Elle before they could get help.*

*He’s going to seperate us.*

*He’s going to give us all electric shock therapy.*

*He’s going to break us all.*

“Everyone, please give a warm welcome to our new member of this hospital.”

Oh. Oh no. That was bad, that was so, so bad.

A girl walked into the room, a nurse right behind her.

The girl had long red hair that hung limply around her face. Her lips were twisted in an angry scowl and she kept her eyes firmly locked on the ground.

“Everyone, I’d like you to meet Maxine Mayfield.”
You asked for her, and here she is!

But um, yeah, anyway...new chapter. Long time no see. That year kinda went really fast. I kept getting into new fandoms I just had to write for. Going from IT to Ducktales is a bit of a jump, ngl.

This chapter sat half finished for the entire year before I pulled it out, dusted it off and finished it. I realised I have made a spur of the minute writing choice and was stuck on where to take it. I think what I decided to do eventually was much better and I felt way more inspired to start writing again.

To any of my readers still out there, thank you for your patience. To any new readers, welcome to the show.

Thank you as always to my amazing fans who support this story. I wouldn't be updating it if it wasn't for you.

Please comment and leave kudos if you liked this!!!!!!!

Why am I writing another fic before I've even finished the other ongoing one????? I really hope you like this, I had a lotta doubts about posting it but had also had lots of encouragement from my friends Zakkie and The Bennywise gc. Love you guys.

Please leave a comment or kudos if you enjoyed it. I love hearing what you think!!!!!!!!!!! Hopefully I can stick with this. Please don't hesitate to tell me if I'm doing anything wrong.

xoxo

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